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Social Movement Organization and Robust Action: Creating a Pre-movement in a Movement-Inhibiting Environment

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Abstract

Social movements are extra-institutional forces that stimulate institutional and social change. Research has emphasized political opportunities, consciousness and organizational readiness as critical conditions for movements. In this thesis, I argue that such a conceptualization couches agency under structure, and does not explain how activists may create movement potentiality when none of the aforementioned conditions exist. This omission is significant because many movements can be traced to a pre-movement period when one (or a few) activist group(s) operated in movement-inhibiting environments to create conditions that enable future movements. In particular, the current literature lacks insights regarding the following question: How does a social movement organization (SMO) create a pre-movement, and avoid elite repression in a movement-inhibiting context? I use extensive primary archival data, complemented by interviews, to address this question. Specifically, I study how an American non-governmental organization, the Ford Foundation (FF), through its grant-making activities in China from 1975 to 2008, mobilized a diverse range of actors to seed the human rights movement in an authoritarian environment. I identify two strategic processes by FF: 1) a brokering process, in which FF transferred human rights-related meanings and knowledge from Western contexts to China, and 2) a scaffolding process, in which FF developed concept-espousing Chinese actors and linked them into networks. The first process generated movement consciousness, while the second process created movement-relevant actors and networks. Importantly, I find that FF was able to enact these two pre-movement processes without elite repression through “robust action” — namely, by developing double-sided actors who addressed elites’ needs of resolving institutional contradictions during China’s economic reform, but who also possessed human rights consciousness. This thesis contributes to social movement research by identifying SMO strategic processes in the pre-movement period and explaining how SMOs can respond to movement-inhibiting contexts with robust action.
Keywords

Human rights, pre-movements, social movement organization, institutional change, institutional contradictions, robust action
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Chapter 1 INTRODUCTION

“The overall goal of the new governance portfolio is the strengthening of more effective and accountable institutions of governance that promote social equity. A number of assumptions are implicit in the proposed initiatives: that a strong state is critical for reducing inequality and promoting social justice…A strong state needs to be balanced by a stronger civil society, with clear mechanisms through which citizens can hold the government accountable for its performance, as well as play a stronger advocacy role.” (Ford Foundation Memo, Governance, Cook, 2002)

This opening quote from the Ford Foundation (hereafter FF) suggests that its Beijing Office wanted to promote grassroots rights (through a strong civil society) vis-à-vis the authoritarian China state. FF, an American foundation with ten international offices, is a prominent advocate of human rights in the world. It creates change by supporting visionary leaders and “strong institutions” on the front line of social movements (FF website). The foundation’s work in China presents a puzzling question: because the one-party Chinese government is known for repressing citizen initiatives aimed at creating divergent institutions, how does an activist organization like FF mobilize the citizens of China to pursue such risky actions?

Social movements are important drivers of institutional change. For instance, they have helped to eliminate slavery, and establish civil as well as equal rights between men and woman (King & Pearce, 2010; King & Haveman, 2008; Liu, 2006; McAdam, 1999; McCammon et al., 2008; Snow, Vliegenthart, & Corrigall-Brown, 2007). Increasingly, movements are also influencing non-state actors, especially corporations, pressuring them to adopt pro-social change (Harrison & Scorse, 2010; Hoffman, 1997; Soule, 2009), or to refrain from selling harmful or controversial products (Maguire & Hardy, 2009; Weber, Thomas, & Rao, 2009). Activist organizations like FF are important players in such processes. In organization theory (specifically, institutional theory) and political sociology (social movement theory), activist groups have been conceptualized as institutional entrepreneurs or social movement organizations (SMOs), respectively. But both perspectives have mostly studied activist organizations in more open contexts (typically, in Western democratic countries) where activist organizations can engage in
political activities or movement-like mobilization without suffering inhibiting repression from powerful incumbent actors (Amenta, Caren, Olasky, & Stobaugh, 2009; Andrews & Caren, 2010; Clemens, 1997; den Hond & de Bakker, 2007; Elsbach & Sutton, 1992; Kriesi, Koopmans, Duyvendak, & Giugni, 1995; Maguire & Hardy, 2005).

In contexts like China, it is harder for grassroots actors to dissent and receive political concessions from incumbent elites. Nonetheless, it is important to understand how large, rigid social and political structures can be revised when powerful incumbents are unwilling to do so and have the power to repress the efforts by other actors. Because extant research on social and institutional change emphasizes more open contexts where dissidents are allowed to engage in legitimate political struggles, we know relatively little about how these are carried out in contexts where bottom-up initiatives tend to be deemed illegitimate and pre-empted by incumbents.

One reason of extant research’s focus on more open contexts is related to a key assumption. Theorists in both institutional theory and social movement argue that certain conducive conditions are necessary for divergent change to take place. For instance, extant research suggests that institutional entrepreneurship is more likely to occur in contexts with a low degree of institutionalization and/or with a high degree of institutional plurality (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005). In contexts with such characteristics, meanings and patterns of actions are less taken-for-granted, power structures are less rigid, and plural meanings and patterns serve as cultural toolkits (Swidler, 1986) for activist organizations to frame their change activities as legitimate and appealing. On the other hand, social movement scholars argue that movement emergence depends on favorable political opportunities; it also depends on how well the grieving and dissenting grassroots constituency is already organized in movement-relevant networks, and how conscious it is in terms of its rights and interests (McAdam, 1999; McAdam, McCarthy, & Zald, 1996). In authoritarian countries, these conducive conditions for bottom-up social change are missing; as a result scholars have largely assumed that these contexts are unlikely to harbor such change (Tilly, 2006; Dorado, 2005).
In this thesis, I argue that this assumption has restricted our understanding of organizational agency. First, it underestimates the resilience of activist organizations — many of them do operate in contexts that appear to inhibit divergent social change (Tilly, 2006). Second, even in more open contexts, major events evolve through a process of incubation that starts long before the triggering event; in the incubation phase the challenging actor(s) are vulnerable to incumbent’s repression. To generate a more complete understanding of how change unfolds, it is important to also capture and analyze pre-events that foreshadow and signal a major disruption (Roux-Dufort, 2007; Turner, 1976). It is easier to capture processes and phenomena that are “transparently observable” (Eisenhardt, 1989: 537), but “the less conspicuous in organizations …. usually go undetected” (Strike & Rerup, 2016:45). Although pre-events are harder to trace and observe, they may also reward us with important insights into how major change events emerge over time (Rerup, 2009; Vaughan, 1996; Weick, 2010).

To study activists’ initial efforts in building potentiality for large-scale change, I conducted research on how one such organization creates a pre-movement, that is, the incubation phase before a possible social movement. A pre-movement unfolds in movement-inhibiting contexts where the aforementioned conducive conditions for mass mobilization or large-scale change have not yet developed. In these contexts, ruling elites monopolize the political process to block other actors from making claims through institutional channels (e.g., political participation and legal actions) and they use repression to block other actors’ extra-institutional claims-making (e.g., protests, rallies, and strikes). A movement-inhibiting context features the opposite characteristics of the aforementioned movement- or change-conducive conditions. First, it is highly institutionalized with little institutional plurality, thus offering limited political opportunity for claims-making for divergent change. Second, grassroots, being politically excluded and repressed, tend to be poorly organized, possess low consciousness of their repression and of their power in contesting ruling elites.

A pre-movement is the effort by one or a few activist groups to develop movement-conducive conditions, or “movement potentiality”. In both institutional theory and social movement research, scholars recognize the salience of activists’ strategies in impacting
social change (Andrews, 2001; Andrews & Caren, 2010; Ansell, 1997; Gamson, 1990; Gerhards & Rucht, 1992; Lawrence, 1999; Maguire, Hardy, & Lawrence, 2004; Munir & Phillips, 2005; Reay, Golden-Biddle, & Germann, 2006; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Specifically, Fligstein (1997, 2001) emphasizes that strategic actors are always important for social outcomes; their social skills, defined as the ability to engage others in collective action, is vital for any efforts to revise the social structure. In a similar way, Ganz (2000:1011) argues for more research on SMO strategic capacity, saying that “environmental changes may generate opportunities for social movements to emerge, but the outcomes and legacies of such movements have far more to do with strategies actors devise to turn these opportunities to their purposes — thus reshaping their environment”.

Social skills or SMO strategic capacity are likely to be even more critical in pre-movements, because such movements take place in sensitive and risky political environments; inapt strategies may easily induce elites’ repression, or may fail to mobilize other actors who are less ready for the kind of change the activist organization is promoting.

Extant research has explained how activists strategize in more open contexts. For example, Maguire et al. (2004) find that actors representing the AIDS community engaged in explicit theorization to advocate for radical change in AIDS treatment practices in Canada. They also organized a national alliance to participate in the political bargaining with major corporations. Similarly, Creed, Scully, and Austin (2002) described how proponents of gay, lesbian, bisexual and transgender (GLBT) rights developed “legitimating accounts” – arguments intended to create meanings and identities around a new practice – and used them to argue for a new law. Even when elites excluded other actors in decision-making and rejected their claims, non-elite actors still leveraged the independent court and the media to create political pressures on elites (Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010). SMOs were documented to have used disruptive protests to coerce movement targets for practice adoption, and they also used evidence-based tactics such as providing information, evidence and victim testimonials to support their claims (Briscoe, Gupta, & Anner, 2015). Some SMOs have strategically used “illegitimate” actions to acquire media attention and earn endorsement of grassroots constituencies; these actions included occupying the offices of elites, shouting down elites at
conferences, and defacing property with red paint (symbolizing the blood of AIDS casualties), among others (Elsbach & Sutton, 1992). SMOs also used documentary films or other cultural artifacts to incite public debate and influence mobilization (Vasi, Walker, Johnson, & Tan, 2015). However, in movement-inhibiting contexts, most of these institutional (political participation, court actions) or extra-institutional channels (protests, occupying property, disrupting elites on public occasions) for divergent claims-making were unavailable to non-elite actors, either because of an authoritarian institutional design or due to elites’ repression. Therefore, these insights about SMO strategies by extant research do not explain how activists strategize to create pre-movements in movement–inhibiting contexts.

In light of the importance of activists’ strategies in pre-movements and our inadequate understanding of such strategies, I focus my study on the strategic process of one activist organization – The Ford Foundation – in creating a pre-movement in a movement-inhibiting context. I pose two research questions: 1) How does an activist organization in movement-inhibiting contexts create a pre-movement to generate movement potentiality? 2) How does the activist organization bypass the repression of ruling elites?

To address these questions, I conducted a longitudinal in-depth case study of the grant-making strategies of FF from 1975 to 2008. During this historical period, China was a movement-inhibiting context; the ruling elites, the Chinese Communist Party, monopolized the political process and repressed extra-institutional claims-making. FF entered China to advocate for human rights. For as long as two decades (from the 1970s to the late 1990s), FF was the only non-bilateral or multilateral (such as the United Nations) donor based in China working on rights-related issues; as a result FF was uniquely flexible in selecting and developing Chinese actors without having to go through the Chinese government. Since 2000, a small number of foreign NGOs were also able to directly work in rights-related issues; meanwhile Chinese NGOs emerged to join these issues. These NGOs benefited from the lines of work that FF had opened and the actors FF had developed. Meanwhile, FF continued to push for new lines of work and, with annual spending of US$15-20 million (since 2000), it was the biggest foreign NGO in China dealing with issues related to rights, justice and democratic governance (China
Development Brief, 2014). In a 2015 ranking conducted through a survey of Chinese NGOs, FF was placed third out of 155 foundations (93 Chinese foundations and 62 foreign foundations) eligible to participate in the ranking. FF’s trajectory in China thus constitutes an ideal case of an activist organization’s pre-movement strategy because of its pioneering and prominent role in China’s rights and justice pre-movement. Its decades-long commitment to this unlikely cause may shed interesting new insights to our understanding of activist mobilization strategies.

While I started my project with a broad conceptualization of social or institutional change, I arrived at the decision to cast FF as an SMO rather than an institutional entrepreneur. I decided on the former because it was a better fit with the data. While the two theories overlap in significant ways, their theoretical emphasis is distinct. Institutional entrepreneurship research is focused on “heroic” actors who directly take entrepreneurial actions to instigate change. For instance, Lawrence, Suddaby and Leca (2009:1) described institutional entrepreneurs as “hypermuscular”. Similarly, Powell and Colyvas (2008:277) noted that the move in institutional theory to consider “institutional entrepreneurs was motivated by a desire to replace the over-socialized individuals who seemed slavishly devoted to habit and fashion. But the celebration of entrepreneurs has perhaps gone too far, as not all change is led by entrepreneurs, and surely heroic actors … are a poor representation of the gamut of human behavior”. Social movement research takes a more embedded and boundary spanning approach to explain how change happens. SMOs are seen as “vehicles” for recruiting and mobilizing other actors for organized insurgency. SMOs function more as brokers and facilitators of change across boundaries rather than standalone muscular actors. For instance, FF believes that the key to social change is to catalyze distributed agency rather than acting alone. Its grant-making activities mostly involve efforts to support other actors (with only a small percentage of grants being administered by FF itself). Consequently, FF’s actions fit better with the concept of an SMO, and its strategic actions fall into my conceptualization of a pre-movement.

Using a combination of historical analysis and inductive methods, I analyzed over 7,000 pages of primary FF archival documents and the data of 12 field interviews. I find that FF
engaged in four mobilization activities, each targeting a particular type of Chinese actors: 1) FF first trained Chinese scholars to strengthen their position in the existing authoritarian systems, and then enabled them to be change catalysts; 2) FF coopted¹ some actors among the ruling elites in China’s central and local governments to adopt human rights practices; 3) FF encouraged Government-owned NGOs (GONGOs), a type of semi-government, semi-NGO organization, to transition to be representatives of grassroots interests; 4) When the political opportunity expanded in the 2000s, FF developed extra-institutional Chinese actors – grassroots NGOs. These four activities took place across the 33 years of my research frame, representing an emergent strategic process guided by one organizational ideology (Mintzberg & Waters, 1985).

Each of the four mobilization activities involves a brokering process and a scaffolding process. A brokering process is related with the transfer, translation and embedding of human rights-related knowledge and meaning (Carlile, 2004), and it was a response to the lack of human rights consciousness in China. A scaffolding process is related with the development of concept-espousing Chinese actors and the efforts to link them into issue-based networks. It is a response to the lack of movement-ready actors and their organization in China. Thus, these two interrelated processes create movement potentiality by developing knowledge/meaning (to enhance movement consciousness) on the one hand, and by developing actors/networks (to improve organizational readiness) on the other hand.

While these findings answer my first research question about the strategic process of creating a pre-movement, my second question asks how the SMO bypasses the repression from ruling elites. By ruling elites, I refer to China’s political elites, or, elites who control the political resources in a state (Rahman Khan, 2012). While the term “elite” also refers to actors who possess other types of social resources such as economic, cultural or knowledge capital (Lindsay, 2008; Yue, Luo, & Ingram, 2013; Zald & Lounsbury, 2010),

¹ “Coopt”: to cause or force (someone or something) to become part of your group, movement, etc. to use or take control of (something) for your own purposes. [http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/co%25E2%2580%2593opt]
in this thesis I focus on the ruling elites (or, political elites), which are uniquely important in China because they monopolize political power to the exclusion of not only grassroots, but also knowledge elites and business elites. I refer to actors other than the ruling elites in non-theoretical terms, such as scholars, GONGOs, or NGOs. I find that FF bypassed elites’ repression by adopting “robust action”: multivocal actions that “can be interpreted coherently from multiple perspectives simultaneously” and that keep future lines of actions open (Padgett & Ansell, 1993: 1264). Robust action is important for actors operating in opaque and fluid political situations. Specifically, China’s economic development triggered and intensified a series of institutional contradictions – “various ruptures and inconsistencies both among and within the established social arrangements” (Seo & Creed, 2002: 225). FF exploited these contradictions in the system to progressively develop double-sided actors: scholars trained in Western law and economics, government agencies adopting rights-based practices to increase efficacy, GONGOs and grassroots NGOs using Western civil society concepts to approach local social issues. These double-sided actors addressed imminent institutional contradictions to help elites’ rule, but they were also developed to possess human rights consciousness. In this way, FF’s actions were multi-vocal to elites, blurring the role of friend and challenger. Robust action helped FF bypass elites’ repression because these actions and their implications (i.e., the creation of double-sided actors) could be interpreted in multiple ways. Such multivocal actions also allowed FF to maintain a flexible strategic position from which it could adapt its future actions to be more conservative or more aggressive, depending on the shifting political climate in the authoritarian China.

This thesis contributes to social movement research by unpacking SMO strategies in a pre-movement, which I argue is an integral and important, but understudied, phase of social movements. The thesis highlights the importance of meaning/knowledge

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2 A recent case of government repression of dissident voices of business elites is the overnight deletion of a real estate tycoon’s microblog with 38 million followers, followed by verbal attack and threat on news media, to retaliate the tycoon’s comments criticizing some of President Xi Jinping’s policies. [http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/19/world/asia/china-ren-zhiqiang-weibo.html?_r=0](http://www.nytimes.com/2016/03/19/world/asia/china-ren-zhiqiang-weibo.html?_r=0). Accessed March 27, 2016.
brokering, actor development and scaffolding in creating potentiality for movement-like mobilization. Without such potentiality, mass mobilization is unlikely to take place, or to generate sustained pressure on ruling elites. The additional contribution of this thesis is to introduce a dialectical view into social movement research to expand the extant largely static understanding of political opportunity: it reveals how FF continually transformed a series of institutional contradictions in existing social systems into political opportunities. FF then grasped these political opportunities to create double-sided actors – embedded actors with human rights consciousness. I describe this approach as SMO robust action, and I suggest it is an essential strategy to bypass elites’ repression in movement-inhibiting contexts.

In the following chapters, I first present a theoretical overview, then I explain my empirical contexts, data sources and analytical approach. Following that, I use three chapters to present three historical accounts, each describing FF’s activities in a specific strategic phase. Next, I analyze these historical accounts from a theoretical perspective. I exit with a discussion of my contributions to theory, the limitations of this research and future research directions.
Chapter 2 THEORETICAL OVERVIEW

In this chapter, I first review extant research about the conditions that facilitate movement-like collective mobilization, tapping into both social movement research and institutional theory. I then turn to the role of social movement organizations (SMOs) in social movements and explain their task of engaging diverse constituencies in stimulating change. Following that, I examine the intertwined relationship of two distinct social movement constituencies: elites and grassroots. Lastly, I present a definition of pre-movements and explicate relevant constructs; I also review relevant literatures that help us understand pre-movements and SMO strategies in pre-movements.

2.1 Conditions for Movements

Social movements are a form of collective action through which non-institutional actors, those actors not being involved in political processes, make political claims (Tilly, 1978). In other words, social movements are public expression of collective grievances (den Hond & de Bakker, 2007); the expression includes sustained campaigns that employ disruptive tactics to challenge existing power relations (Andrews, 2001; King & Soule, 2007) and involve concerted public display of “worthiness, unity, numbers, and commitment” (Lindsay, 2008; Tilly, 2004, 2006). Earlier research has focused on social movements targeting the states, but more recently, scholars have expanded the scope to also include movements targeting educational institutions or corporations (King & Soule, 2007; McDonnell, King, & Soule, 2015; Soule, 1997; Walker, Martin, & McCarthy, 2008; York, Hargrave, & Pacheco, 2015).

The primary feature of movements is that they are a form of collective actions taking place outside institutional channels (Snow, Soule, & Kriesi, 2004). This feature differentiates social movements from conventional politics: “when conflict occurs outside institutionalized channels, the tools of social movement analysis are brought into play” (Zald & Berger, 1978: 825). Thus, social movements are extra-institutional forces that stimulate change; typical extra-institutional actions include meetings, associations and alliances conducted outside existing political structures, and rallies, protests and
demonstrations which take place in public spaces. For example, protests accentuate “the extent to which activists are shut out from institutional channels of change by bringing their grievances to a public space and appeal to a wider audience than the decision makers operating behind closed doors…Protest… bypass direct communication with insiders… calls for the involvement of various audiences in the change process, appealing as much to the masses as to internal decision makers” (King & Soule 2007: 415). Although movements’ “trademark” activities are as such, this does not rule out complementary oppositional activities that leverage existing institutional channels, such as, leveraging court actions, submitting petitions to decision makers, or seeking participation in existing political channels (Bloom, 2015; McCammon et al., 2008; Sine & Lee, 2009; Zietsma & Lawrence, 2010).

Collective grievances constitute the source of social movements. But one converging insight of contemporary social movement research is that grievances alone do not give rise to social movements, nor can we presume that the gravest grievances are the most likely to generate movements. Scholars point to several key factors that activate selective grievances into social movements, among which: 1) the opening up of political opportunities, 2) a grievance constituency that possesses consciousness of their repression and of their capacity in challenging elites, and 3) organizational readiness (i.e., people are adequately organized in pre-existing, movement-relevant structures, such as churches, associations or clubs). I review these core constructs in the following.

**Consciousness and Organizational Readiness**

For a movement to emerge, the aggrieved population needs to have developed movement consciousness. First, the constituency has arrived at a collective understanding of the nature and scope of their grievances, and is ready to subscribe to the cultural meaning of a social movement that presents these grievances (Ansell, 1997; Snow, Rochford, 3

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3 This condition is also referred to as organizational strength or indigenous strength in literature, and overlaps with the concept of mobilization structure.
Worden, & Benford, 1986; Snow et al., 2007; Weber, Heinze, & Desoucy, 2008).
Second, the constituency has developed the consciousness of their capacity to wrestle political concessions from elites; such consciousness of their own power is often developed by taking cues from the broadening of political opportunities or by witnessing the participation in movement of people around them.

Social movements depend on an organization structure to mobilize their constituencies for political struggles (McAdam et al., 1996; Tilly, 1978). Mobilization structures comprise formal and informal networks that connect individuals and organizations. Such structures are “conduits” through which new models, concepts and practices diffuse and become part of a movement’s repertoires and become available for use by other actors in the movement (Campbell, 2005). Pre-existing organizational structures serve several critical functions. First, movement-relevant organizations make member recruitment efficient. Typically, a movement does not recruit a large number of isolated individuals since such an approach would be too costly in terms of time and other resources. Rather, movements engage in “bloc recruitment” and recruit members *en masse* from existing movement-relevant organizations where people are already organized. Effective recruitment happens along established lines of interactions. For example, the civil rights movement bloc recruited from black churches and black students’ associations in black colleges, both were thriving during the 1950s (McAdam, 1999). In addition to serving as a recruitment structure, existing movement-relevant structures provide other support for a movement. For instance, the established structure of solidary incentives encourages participation (for example, church members and student groups were already a solidary group when civil rights movement started); the communication network inherent in existing structures disseminates, throughout the movement population, the meanings of a social movement and its strategies and tactics.

**Political Opportunities**

The success of breaking old institutions and lodging new claims is contingent on the nature and extent of political opportunities. For example, in a study of the American history of corporate control, Davis and Thompson (1994) suggest that the pro-shareholder
political climate in the Reagan years facilitated the rise of organized shareholder activism in the mid-1980s. Overall, repressive social control has to be lessened, ruling elites need to be receptive to grievances or become vulnerable to grassroots pressures. Such openings decrease the risk associated with launching political challenges. Relatedly, political opportunities also determine the types of strategies to be used. When the political environment is favorable, activists adopt more radical strategies; an unfavorable environment, conversely, led to conservative strategies (Tarrow, 2011; Tilly, 1978).

Scholars suggest that political opportunities can be approached in two ways: 1) *elite divisions* that allow non-elite actors to take advantage of their differences and/or to coopt allies from them; 2) *political openness* for new claims, including popular access to the political system and diminishing state repression (McAdam et al., 1996; Tarrow, 2011).

McAdam’s (1999) study of the American civil rights movement powerfully exhibits how *elite divisions* enabled black insurgency in the 1950s. He shows how the decline of the cotton economy in the South and black migration to the North had made black votes matter to the Democratic Party, pushing the democratic government to be receptive to black grievances despite strong opposition from Southern elites. Furthermore, Soviet Union, during the Cold War, leveraged U.S. racial segregation as a propaganda tool to challenge American moral supremacy; this pressured the democratic-led American government to consider racial reform despite the fact that such reforms hurt the interests of Southern elites.

As for *political openness*, scholars suggest a curvilinear relation with the frequency and intensity of protests. When ruling elites offer a constituency institutionalized avenues for political access, this constituency is more likely to leverage these less costly avenues to influence elites rather than lodging costly extra-institutional protests. At the other end of the spectrum, when *political openness* is very low, elites routinely repress constituencies such that they are unable to develop the requisite consciousness and organizational capacity to put forward political claims. As a result, social movements are likely to take place in contexts of moderate *political openness*: where meaningful avenues for political access are partially open, and where elites refrain from explicit repression of alternative
claims (Meyer, 2004; Tilly, 1978). In support of such a relationship, Tilly (1995), in his historical study of popular contentions in Great Britain from 1758 to 1834, describes how the establishment of a more democratic Parliament, the development of mass parties, and electoral participation allowed popular contention to move from the streets to inside the political institutions. In other words, when the political opportunity shifted from moderate openness to wide and meaningful popular access, social movements were replaced by conventional politics. Similarly, Clemens’ (1997) more contemporary study of American politics shows that in the early 1900s, the U.S. partisan politics transitioned to interest group politics to channel the claims-making of plural social groups into conventional politics. Furthermore, a comparative study of left-libertarian movements in four European countries (France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Switzerland) finds that Swiss activists largely used conventional political channels and formats to lodge their claims; conversely, the French activists, despite a lower degree of mobilization, launched some highly confrontational and violent actions (Kriesi et al., 1995). The authors suggest that these patterns can be explained by the higher degree of political access in Switzerland that channeled claims-making to existing institutions, versus a more closed elite system in France that drove activists to the streets.

Tilly (2006), in his book about regimes and repertoires of collective contention, further elaborates this thinking about political openness and movement possibility. He emphasizes that regimes shape contentious repertoires by determining which repertoires are acceptable, which are tolerated, and which are forbidden (i.e., zones of prescribed, tolerated and forbidden repertoires); forbidden repertoires evoke state repression. Walker, Martin and McCarthy (2008) also emphasize that the repressive capacity of the movement target shapes the forms of protests. While the U.S. government possesses the broadest capacity for response including repression, facilitation, or channeling/routinization, non-state actors are limited in their capacity to repress a movement. As a consequence, events that target the U.S. government tend to be less disruptive than those targeting non-state actors. However the states in the world have different capacities and inclinations for repression. Tilly (2006:210) admits that “[a]lmost by definition, democratic regimes leave more room for legitimate contention than do nondemocratic regimes”. His conceptual framework suggests that regimes of high
capacity and low democracy (such as China and Russia) leave little room for public dissent; Tilly (2006) speculates that, in such contexts, any collective claim-making occurs either within stringent limits imposed by the government, or on the periphery where it has somehow escaped government surveillance and control.

Despite significant consensus around the explanatory power of political opportunities to social movements, a review by Meyer and Minkoff (2004) suggest that current work posits a simple, positive relationship between political opportunities and movement mobilization, providing little theoretical leverage underlying this relationship. The authors (Meyer & Minkoff, 2004: 1463) conclude that “[a]lthough changes in political opportunity correlate with changes in the volume and tactics of social mobilization, we know less about how opportunities translate into collective action. Clearly, understanding the relationship between context and action is critical to tackling the larger theoretical question of the relationship between structure and agency. The literature is unclear on this critical issue.”

Institutional Contradictions as the Opportunity for Movement-like Change

Institutional theory is also concerned about the conditions leading to radical collective actions. While movement scholars emphasize political opportunity structures and grassroots consciousness in constraining and enabling collective actions, institutional theory was interested in the tension between institutional determinism and human agency. For instance, in institutional change analysis, a predominant concern is the paradox of embedded agency: “If our norms and collective beliefs are institutionally determined, how can human agency be a factor in institutional change?” (Battilana, Leca, & Boxenbaum, 2009: 67).

Some scholars have suggested that the multiplicity of structures (Sewell, 1992), or institutional plurality or complexity (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012; Dorado, 2005; Greenwood, Raynard, Kodeih, Micelotta, & Lounsbury, 2011), enables human agency despite our embeddedness in existing institutions. Multiple meanings and arrangements offer actors opportunities to tap into these “cultural toolkits” (Swidler, 1986) to develop alternative consciousness. Multiplicity also implies a relatively modest degree of
institutionalization since the dominant institution cannot rule out other institutions. As such, actors are more likely to overcome institutional resistance and promote new institutions.

Other scholars have attempted to resolve the paradox of embedded agency from a dialectical perspective. They suggest that even without institutional multiplicity, the existing institution, in its own development, inevitably generates a series of institutional contradictions – “various ruptures and inconsistencies both among and within the established social arrangements” (Seo & Creed 2002: 225), and such contradictions stimulate doubts about existing institutions and shift actors’ consciousness. Inherent “instabilities unfold developmentally, as when the faculty-graduate student relationship designed to produce new colleagues must be transformed from a supervisory into a collegial relationship; the success of the first institutional arrangement requires its own transformation…Models or scripts for behavior may be appropriate in one situation, yet dysfunctional in the new conditions brought about by following the script…like capitalism, institutions may produce their own grave-diggers. Citizenship classifications used to administer empires or federations may construct ‘minorities’ or ‘nationalities’ that become the basis for challenges to the rule of the central state…Policies that require workers to fund their own insurance through unions may strengthen those unions as the organizational base of a politicized working class” (Clemens & Cook, 1999: 449). 

Scholars argue that because the existence of such dialectical tensions, the taken-for-grantedness of institutions will inevitably be shattered (Hargrave & Van De Ven, 2006).

Similarly, Seo and Creed (2002) suggest that the process of institutionalization has inevitable “by-products” that become sources of contradictions. They theorize that ongoing social construction produces a complex array of contradictions. For example, the pressure of conforming to existing institutions may generate *functional inefficiency*, and the reproduction of existing social arrangements left low-powered actors’ interests underserved, resulting in *misaligned interests* of social groups. In theorizing the relationship between institutional contradictions and institutional change, the authors suggest that misaligned interests generate potential change agents, and inefficiency will gradually undermine the taken-for-grantedness of existing institutions, leading to the shift
of consciousness of non-elite actors. Given other conditions such as a crisis, collective mobilization becomes possible. Like this, the authors appear to have conceptualized institutional contradictions as a type of “political opportunities” for collective actions, and they also speculated how institutional contradiction may generate grassroots consciousness. However, they have not addressed the other critical question concerning divergent claims-making in highly institutionalized, repression-prone contexts: how can subversive collective actions bypass elites’ repression? For example, in today’s China and Russia, grassroots actors may have developed movement consciousness and even launched localized actions (China is known to have tens of thousands of local protests each year), but these local actions tend to be easily repressed by elites and do generate sustained political pressures for elites.

2.2 Vehicles of Movements: Social Movement Organizations (SMOs)

Organizations are critical to movements and SMOs are widely acknowledged to be the locus of movement mobilization. An SMO is “a complex, or formal, organization which identifies its goals with the preferences of a social movement or a countermovement and attempts to implement those goals” (McCarthy & Zald, 1977:1218).

SMOs provide strategic leadership to movements (Campbell, 2005; Rao & Giorgi, 2006). They interpret the grievances, construct the movement’s agenda and represent the challenger group vis-à-vis the movement target. Davis and Thompson (1994) describe how shareholders’ grievances (including a stagnant takeover market and widespread managerial misdeeds) did not directly stimulate a shareholder-rights movement; the movement rose only after issue entrepreneurs seized the political opportunity offered by a pro-shareholder Reagan administration to set up SMOs that represented institutional investors’ interests vis-à-vis corporate managers. Similarly, Rao (1998) documents how non-profit consumer watch dog organizations in the 1930s escalated the consumer movement in the U.S., legitimated and diffused the impartial testing model, and eventually shifted the power relationship between consumers and manufacturers.

Many empirical studies have shown that SMOs’ leadership is critical for movement
mobilization and movement impact. Lounsbury (2001) demonstrates that a national SMO, the Student Environmental Action Coalition, significantly shaped the staffing practices of university recycling programs. They did so by providing resources and support to student environmental groups at particular schools. Sine and Lee (2009) show that greater numbers of environmental SMO members increased nascent entrepreneurial activity in the windmill sector. They argue that SMOs play a critical role in fostering nascent entrepreneurial activity by challenging existing practices and advocating alternatives, by pushing for regulatory changes, and by serving as a mobilizing structure to bring people together for collective actions at relatively modest individual cost. A study on the rise of community-based collective actions in the U.S. finds that the density of community-based non-profit organizations predicts the frequency of such collective actions (Sampson, McAdam, MacIndoe, & Weffer-Elizondo, 2005). Maguire et al. (2004) show that SMOs helped movements to strive for political participation because formal organizations were seen by elites as more legitimate actors to enter the political process. Andrews (2001), in a study of Mississippi civil rights movement and the War on Poverty, illustrates that counties with strong movement organization and leadership generated greater funding for Community Action Programs; these counties also managed to overcome initial barriers by local whites to gain access to decision-making bodies. Hiatt, Sine and Tolbert (2009), in a historical study, depicts how one SMO, the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU), had a dramatically negative effect on breweries, the target of the anti-alcohol movement. Meanwhile WCTU inadvertently benefited the soft drink manufacturers.

Social movement research recognizes the role of SMOs, but research has largely focused on the field or movement level, rather than the organizational level. Scholars following the resource mobilization tradition have studied SMOs in gestalt through so-called social movement industries (McCarthy & Wolfson, 1996; McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Minkoff, 1997, 1999). Other scholars have unpacked the movement mobilization process by focusing on tactics, alliances, protest cycles and other movement-level factors (Briscoe et al., 2015; Soule, 1997; Strang & Soule, 1998; Walker et al., 2008). Few studies have treated SMOs as differentiated strategic units, tracked their strategic evolution, and explored the implications of their strategies to movement mobilization. Despite the
relative lack of attention to SMO strategies, some scholars have proposed that social movement research can benefit from a more nuanced understanding of SMO strategies. For example, Ganz (2000), as one of the few papers that looked into individual SMOs’ strategies, shows how a lesser-resourced new SMO, United Farm Workers, managed to mobilized Californian farm workers where better-resourced SMOs had failed. Ganz (2000) suggests that greater access to salient information, heuristic facility, and motivation may generate more effective strategy and that resourcefulness can compensate for the lack of resources.

In the same vein, I suggest that treating SMOs as distinct strategic units and tracking their strategic evolution can expand social movement research to generate new insights. Organization and management scholars have leveraged social movement research to explain the formation of markets, contestations in the markets (Ingram & Rao, 2004; King & Pearce, 2010; Schneiberg, King, & Smith, 2008; Schneiberg & Lounsbury, 2008), and interactions between corporations and activists (King, 2008; King & Soule, 2007; McDonnell, 2016; McDonnell & King, 2013). I suggest that the contribution can go the other direction as well: organization and management scholars are squarely positioned to introduce a strategic management perspective to social movement research. For example, we can better unpack the “black box” of SMOs which is arguably “a serious deficit in social movement theory” (Ganz, 2000: 1005). SMOs are actors who strategize under severe structural and operational constraints, because the nature of their struggle sets them up for challenges other organizations rarely face. As an example, in as early as 1977, McCarthy and Zald (1977: 1217), in their seminal work on SMOs, highlighted the fact that SMOs need to make tradeoffs of their multiple, and often conflicting, aims and that SMOs face dilemma in the choice of their tactics, “since what may achieve one aim may conflict with behavior aimed at achieving another”. As of today, there has been relatively little empirical research or theoretical development to explain how individual SMOs strategize to address institutional pressures and to resolve conflicting factors in their structural environment. One of such conflicting factors is SMOs’ strategic needs to work with elites and grassroots at the same time, when the interests, motivations and goals of these two movement constituencies are often at odds.
2.3 Movement Constituencies: Elites versus Grassroots

Social movements research is concerned of how politically excluded groups use extra-institutional collective actions to advance their interests, typically by gaining political concessions from ruling elites. The distinction between elites and grassroots is essential for movement research. Early scholars suggest that the central difference among political actors is captured by the idea of being inside or outside the polity – the decision-making collectivity of a state; those who are inside are polity members whose interest is vested and those who are outside are challengers who lack routine access to decisions that affect them (Gamson, 1990). In this thesis, I refer to the former as ruling elites, and the latter as non-elites.

Movement scholars hold different views about the role of elites in grassroots movement. Some scholars believe elite support is critical for movements. They base their arguments on two assumptions: 1) grassroots constituencies, whose interests the movement represents, lack financial resources, political access, or political capability to challenge existing institutions; 2) elites can be willing movement sponsors for moral reasons or for political reasons (McCarthy & Zald, 1977; Minkoff, 1999; Zald & Ash, 1966). Tilly (1978) also suggests that allying with elites is the central ingredient for movement success, but he believes elites do so only for political gains: “If the polity is divided, members have lost their normal coalition partners, or find themselves in jeopardy for want of resources, the normally risky strategy of supporting the entry of a movement is more likely to be adopted” (Tilly 1978: 213-4). Soule and Olzak (2004) show that the effect of social movement organizations on the ratification of the Equal Rights Amendment was amplified in the presence of elite allies.

Other scholars challenge the two aforementioned assumptions about the advantage of elite ties. First, they argue that grassroots possess latent political leverage which rests in their “structural power” (McAdam 1999: 37), the power to disrupt the existing structure by non-action and non-cooperation. Although grassroots constituencies often are plagued by a shared sense of powerlessness, once they develop movement consciousness they can activate their latent power. Second, these scholars challenge the assumption that elites can be willing and helpful movement sponsors. They argue that elites attempt to coopt
the movement, neutralize it, or hold the movement back. In some cases, elite linkage implies “ominous control possibilities” (McAdam 1999:167); for example, in the civil rights movement external support initially benefited the movement, but turned to a liability in the long run to constrain further mobilization. Other studies also documented how elite linkages may tame, coopt, and routinize movements into institutional channels (Walker et al., 2008).

Despite the long-running controversy about elites’ role in grassroots movement, recent research has complicated our understanding of elites and grassroots on both directions. At one direction, scholars suggest that elites and grassroots are mutually dependent and can engage in mutual cooptation. At the other direction, some scholars show elites-grassroots linkage indeed can be ominous to movements. I review these works in the following.

**Elites and Grassroots Mutual Dependence and Mutual Cooptation**

Some scholars suggest that while elites try to coopt movements, movements sometimes coopt elites as well. Fligstein (2001) suggests that occasionally incumbents might defect to the side of challengers and help produce change. O’Mahony and Bechky (2008) show that challengers – community projects in the open-source movement – engaged in mutual cooptation with the incumbent – firms that supported proprietary-based software development. By discovering convergent interests, the two parties worked to transform contestation into collaboration. Likewise, in a study about how sustainability tourism activists transformed the Dutch outbound tour operations (Wijk, Stam, Elfring, Zietsma, & Hond, 2013), the authors find that incumbents initially attempt to defuse the movement through cooptation but, as actors develop relationships and form networks, incumbents and challengers engaged in “mutual cooptation”. They responded to, and influenced, one another’s beliefs, practices, and opportunities, which led to a convergence of ideologies in the field and spurred field innovations that adopted sustainability concepts. The authors (Wijk et al., 2013: 382) conclude that “our results show the power of shared relationships and culture to change the way actors think and act, and to change the opportunities open to them”.

Indeed many scholars argue that elites, in order to stay in power, need to learn to rise beyond their narrow interests and heed the claims from grassroots. Yue, Luo and Ingram (2013) investigate how New York Clearing House Association, a private market-governance institution representing large elite market players, failed to govern in the early 1900s because they prevented smaller banks from having equal access to emergency resources during bank panics. Market elites' inability to move beyond their narrow self-interests and their efforts of excessive control of markets resulted in a crisis; subsequent shift in societal logics diminished elites’ power. This paper demonstrates that social groups are mutually dependent; excessive promotion of elite interests will encounter resistance from grassroots and plant the seeds of elites’ downfall. Therefore, elite control needs to be sustained strategically by “managing mutual dependence between the institutionally advantaged and other groups” (Yue et al., 2013: 57).

**Ominous Elite-Grassroots Linkage**

Despite the aforementioned research documenting cooperation potentials between elites and grassroots, the linkage is by no means always benign. To induce elite consideration of grassroots interests, or coopt elites into movement causes, grassroots need to have sufficient political savvy. This often is not the case, especially in authoritarian countries where grassroots consciousness and organization are underdeveloped. In a study of grassroots mobilization in Central Asia, Radnitz (2010) finds that the apparent showing of “people power” during Kyrgyzstan villagers’ protests of election fraud were actually staged and coordinated by non-regime elites, defined as elites who garnered wealth and some power during the post-USSR era but were excluded from the polity. Non-regime elites adopt “subversive clientelism” to patron deprived rural communities and, at times, prod these communities to protest the regime on their behalves. As such, “people power” can be deceptive if the protesting grassroots are acting as proxies for others’ interests. This insight can explain why regime overthrows from apparent mass mobilization in many transitional countries did not produce democracy and newly formed ruling elites exerted even more intense autocratic control.
In summary of the earlier review, prior research has suggested that grassroots possess “structural power” that can potentially disrupt elites’ rule, but the activation of such latent power is a delicate process. If the grassroots cannot articulate their own interests and cannot organize to struggle for these interests, they may be exploited by elites (McAdam, 1999; Radnitz, 2010). SMOs can be an important force to help grassroots articulate, and organize for, their own interests. But SMOs operating in movement-inhibiting environments face the threat of elite repression that can nip a movement in the bud. In the next section, I zoom in to the specific phenomenon of mobilizing in a movement-inhibiting context.

2.4 Movements in Movement-Inhibiting Contexts

Like the concept of embedded agency, it appears paradoxical to think about movements in movement-inhibiting contexts. In this section, I lay out a preliminary view about a pre-movement. I first define a pre-movement, explaining its contexts and its purposes; then I look into relevant literature to identify possible strategic approaches by pre-movement activists.

Pre-movements: Contexts and Purposes

I define a pre-movement as mobilization by one (or a few) activist organization(s) in a movement-inhibiting context for the purpose of creating movement potentiality. If the pre-movement activist organization is formally organized, it falls into the scope of SMOs, defined as formal organizations identifying their goals with a social movement and attempting to implement these goals (McCarthy & Zald, 1977).

I leverage the constructs and relations in existing social movement research to clarify the concepts of movement-inhibiting contexts and movement potentiality. Table 1 summarizes movement-enabling conditions, and I use examples in literature to illustrate each condition. The far right column contrasts with the converse movement-inhibiting conditions.
Table 1 Movement-enabling Versus Movement-inhibiting Conditions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Conditions</th>
<th>Movement-enabling Conditions</th>
<th>Movement-inhibiting Conditions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Political opportunities</strong></td>
<td>Institutional channels are open or partially open; Extra-institutional channels are open or partially open; ruling elites are somewhat divided over the focal issue</td>
<td>Institutional channels and extra-institutional channels are closed; ruling elites are largely solidary regarding the focal issue and repress divergent claims-making by grassroots</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Example of accessing institutional channels:</em> Women’s groups in the U.S. lobbied politicians for supporting woman suffrage around 1900 (Clemens, 1993); Environmentalists in British Columbia filed court actions to pressure the government to open the political process (Zietsma &amp; Lawrence, 2010)</td>
<td></td>
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<td></td>
<td><em>Example of accessing extra-institutional channels:</em> Napster challenged the Record Industry Association of America, the music industry incumbent who labeled Napster “pirates”, by leveraging the extra-institutional channel of claims-making offered by the Internet (Hensmans, 2003); The Salvation Army in the U.S. and the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt bypassed states to establish extra-institutional welfare facilities to disseminate their cause (Davis &amp; Robinson, 2009)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Example of elite division:</em> Civil Rights activists in the U.S. in the 1950s and 1960s leveraged the division between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party, and the conflicts between the Federal government and the southern states, to pressure for change (McAdam, 1999)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grassroots consciousness</strong></td>
<td>Grassroots understand their rights and interests and can frame these rights and interests for political purposes; have a sense of power in challenging elites</td>
<td>Grassroots have low consciousness about their rights and interests; they share a sense of powerlessness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>Example:</em> GLBT rights activists used “legitimating accounts” to argue for their rights at the Congress hearing and inside their organizations (Creed, Scully, &amp; Austin, 2002); Activists for grass-fed meat in the U.S. leveraged broader cultural codes to interpret their cause in a way that appealed to deeper cultural meanings and that enabled a collective identity (Weber et al., 2008)</td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Grassroots organizational readiness

Grassroots are organized in clubs, churches, and other civic associations or networks

Example:
In the 1950s and 1960s, American Civil Rights SMOs recruited from Black churches and student organizations in black colleges; they also tapped into these existing organizations for movement leadership and communication (McAdam, 1999)

Grassroots association is minimal

I define movement-inhibiting contexts by leveraging the existing conceptualization of political opportunities emphasizing political openness and elite division. By movement-inhibiting contexts I refer to socio-political environments where: 1) institutional channels for claims-making are closed to grassroots actors, and/or 2) extra-institutional channels for claims-making are closed to grassroots actors, and/or 3) relatively solidary elites use repression against other actors’ divergent claims-making. Earlier research on social change has described the change contexts as “hostile and unfavorable” (Gawerc, 2013), or “change-resisting” (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015) or constrained, among others. My definition of movement-inhibiting contexts allows a theoretically grounded assessment of the nature and the degree of the inhibiting-ness of a context to a particular movement. Figure 1 is a visual representation of this three-dimensioned conceptualization; I use a few examples to illustrate the varied degrees of inhibiting-ness.

Figure 1 Movement-inhibiting Contexts

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institutional channel</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Partially open</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Closed</th>
<th>Closed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Extra-institutional channel</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Elite repression</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Most inhibiting</th>
<th>Less inhibiting</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Human rights pre-movement in China; Tempered radicalism in corporations and business schools</td>
<td>Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; Reform movement in Iran (1997-2005)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-pizza in Sicily; Peace movement in Israel/Occupied Palestinian territories</td>
<td>Anti-pollution community movement in the 1970s’ America</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Placed on the far right of the continuum in Figure 1 are contexts with a relatively low degree of inhibiting-ness. As an example, in the 1970s, a loosely coordinated anti-pollution and anti-development community movement took place in the communities of the U.S.; it was the predecessor of the more powerful recycling movement in the late 1970s and 1980s (Lounsbury, Ventresca, & Hirsch, 2003). These early-stage activists did not face significant repressions from incumbents and they could access extra-institutional channels (i.e., communities and the civil society) to make their alternative claims. These activists, however, could not access institutional channels through which key policy decisions of recycling were made and resources allocated.

Next to this type of contexts is a different type of contexts where activists have access to extra-institutional channels and partial access to institutional channels, but face repressions from ruling elites. One example is the Iranian Reform Movement of 1997 to 2005, in which activist groups attempted to promote democratic reforms. Reformists had access to extra-institutional channels (i.e., the civil society); they also had partial access to the institutional channels: representatives of reformist groups ran in elections, but their candidacy was subject to the approval of ruling elites (Kadivar, 2013). Iran’s ruling elites repressed reformists by removing their candidacy in elections and by political harassment or prisoning. Another example is the rise of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. The religious organization built an orthodox movement through extra-institutional channels (i.e., the religious establishment in Egypt); it also accessed the institutional channel by sending its candidates for elections to win seats (Davis & Robinson, 2009). Similar to the Iranian Reform Movement, the Muslim Brotherhood was subject to various repressions by the Egyptian ruling elites.

Farther to the left are contexts with an even higher degree of inhibiting-ness, featuring repression and closed institutional channels, but with open extra-institutional channels. Two cases highlight such contexts. Sicily is an inhibiting context for the anti-pizzo movement (i.e., the movement against the payment of protection money to the Mafia), because the powerful actor, the Mafia, used repression – “social isolation, physical assaults, intimidation…assassination” – on other actors (Vaccaro & Palazzo, 2015: 1075). Meanwhile, the anti-pizzo movement could not leverage the institutional channels
inside the Mafia system (which, of course, would safeguard the “Pizzo Institution”) or the government system (which was infiltrated by the Mafia influence). However, activists had access to extra-institutional channels – the civil society, through which they mobilized other actors and gradually eroded the “Pizzo Institution”. Peace-building SMOs in Israel and occupied Palestinian territories operated in a similar context: powerful actors in both Israel and occupied Palestinian territories repressed the movement by treating its members with animosity, mistrust, isolation and even violence; nonetheless the movement managed to survive by accessing the civil society (Gawerc, 2013).

At the far left side of the continuum are contexts that are the most inhibiting, characterized by closed institutional and extra-institutional channels and the threat of elite repression. I use two cases to illustrate such contexts. The first one, central to this thesis, would be the human rights pre-movement in China from the 1980s till the present. Although China has undergone dramatic change over the past three decades, grassroots have continued to be excluded from institutional channels and their ability to leverage extra-institutional channels has also been highly constrained, with elite repression a constant threat. My second example would be corporations and business schools in the 1980s and the 1990s for “tempered radicalism”, as described by Meyerson and Scully (1995) and Meyerson (2001). Some tempered radicals promoted feminism in male-dominated corporations, and others advocated radical humanism in business schools which were then highly institutionalized with a rational economics-based approach to management. GLBT ministers promoting diversity in churches also count as tempered radicals (Creed, Dejordy, & Lok, 2010). These reformists could not make bold claims of divergent change through their organization’s institutional channels, nor could they actively engage in external activism. Either way, they could be considered too radical and lose their standing as credible members in their institutions, which, being hierarchical and authority-based, could lash out punishment to repress their activism.

I suggest that the purpose of pre-movements is to develop movement-enabling conditions that are missing in a movement-inhibiting context. In such contexts, as compared with more open contexts, grassroots have insufficient opportunities to engage in civic
associational activities. Hence they tend to be less conscious about their interests and less articulate about their grievances. They also share a sense of powerlessness, having not bonded together with peers to develop a collective sense of power (McAdam, 1999; Tilly, 2006). Meanwhile, grassroots actors have a low degree of organizational readiness, because elites discourage grassroots associations through law or police monitoring and harassment, making it unlikely for sophisticated grassroots associations and networks to develop over time. Consciousness and organizational readiness are critical conditions for launching and sustaining a movement, therefore I propose that creating movement potentiality along these two conditions would be the core purpose of a pre-movement.

After establishing the theoretical boundaries of a pre-movement, two research questions become salient in understanding SMO pre-movement strategies: 1) How does a SMO create a pre-movement to develop movement potentiality? 2) How does the SMO bypass elite repression in gaining institutional and extra-institutional access? A few unconventional studies have shed insights that are relevant to these two questions. In the following I look into these studies to develop a preliminary understanding of possible strategic approaches by pre-movement SMOs.

**Covert Politics: Everyday Resistance of the Weak**

Morrill, Zald and Rao (2003) study covert political conflict, a type of social movements enacted by low-powered actors in organizations. Covert political conflict is defined as “officially forbidden forms of dissent” launched to contest institutionalized authority and to express collective grievances (2003: 391). Such collective actions take place in movement-inhibiting contexts, as formal organizations generally lack institutional or extra-institutional channels to allow subordinates to make divergent claims. The authors (2003: 393) illustrate the repressive nature of this context as such: “organizational authorities can directly interrupt this process, should they discover it, by suppressing would be activists as deviants”; therefore “covert political conflict must avert the detection and direct engagement of various social audiences, especially elites and other authorities”.
Covert political conflicts can be categorized into material and symbolic forms. Material forms include: sabotage by direct action (such as, in factories), sabotage by non-cooperation, circumvention (such as, withdrawing information needed for decision making), “open mouth” (i.e., leaking information to customers, competitors, press or regulators), and compensatory theft (i.e., stealing to compensate for monetary rewards unjustly denied by superiors). Symbolic actions refer to symbolic escape (for instance, taking extra break time and covering for each other), hidden transcripts generated by dissident subcultures, workplace “carnivals” in which employees collectively bad-mouth their bosses, and ritualized confrontation (e.g., a female executive telling her boss to “go to hell” in conformance to the masculine norm of direct confrontation, while disrupting expectations of proper feminine behavior). These actions range from being disorganized co-action to tacit complicity, to informal and formal coordination.

Similarly, Ewick and Silbey (2003) document how low-powered people resisted law, the “hegemony” and an ultimate form of power. Grassroots citizens, when confronting the legal institutions, have little room for alternative claims-making. The authors find that people told stories of their mundane resistance to law; these stories then spread the message of resistance. Story-telling may appear to be discrete and individual, but stories interact with other stories in time and space to form a stream of sociocultural knowledge that help grassroots develop insurgency consciousness.

These studies suggest that actors in movement-inhibiting contexts may engage in loosely coordinated actions to make alternative claims, and such claims bypass elite repression through two mechanisms. First, some of these actions are secret and untraceable (e.g., various forms of sabotage). Second, some other actions may be observable but ambiguous in meaning. For example, ritual confrontation takes place in front of authorities, but its meaning is elusive (Morrill et al., 2003); the subversive nature of law-resisting stories and office carnivals is wrapped in the form of everyday jokes and gossips (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Morrill et al., 2003).

Covert politics by subordinate actors lead to “micro emancipation” that allow these actors to break away from oppression in small ways. Occasionally they can lead to
organizational change, such as, by subverting unfair organizational routines. Nonetheless, these loosely coordinated actions hardly count as pre-movements: they lack clear strategic purposes that define a pre-movement. There is little evidence to indicate that such everyday resistance can systemically enhance movement consciousness and grassroots organizational strength, although scholars speculate that they have an erosion effect on existing institutions (Ewick & Silbey, 2003; Morrill et al., 2003; Scott, 1985).

**Tempered Radicalism inside Traditional Organizations**

Meyerson and Scully (1995) portray an unconventional type of change agents: tempered radicals, by which they refer to individuals working inside mainstream organizations but holding divergent ideas and beliefs. For example, feminist executives who work in a male-dominated culture, professors who are radical humanists but work in business schools, which are part of the system maintaining the capitalist power structure, or, gay men and lesbians who work in traditional heterosexual institutions. In a separate paper, Creed et al. (2010) offer a similar example: GLBT ministers in two mainline Protestant denominations in the U.S. wanted to promote diversity in their church.

Tempered radicals are committed organizational members who have made their career advances through existing institutional systems, and they are pressured to conform to organizational norms. The authorities of their organizations can shut them off if they go too far in their efforts to change the institution.

Meyerson and Scully (1995) and Meyerson (2001) report that tempered radicals leverage their ambivalent identity to promote change from inside. The dual nature of the tempered radical's identity creates a state of enduring ambivalence. Unlike compromise, which seeks a middle ground, ambivalence involves pure expression of both sides of a dualism. Through an ambivalent posture, tempered radicals manage to retain both voices. On the one hand, through their insider identity, they can “learn the dynamics of the local system and be able to act more confidently within it” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 596). On the other hand, as reformists, they actively promote a change agenda using the approach of “small wins” (Weick, 1984), small-sized experiments that are “driven by unexpected opportunities” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 595). Similarly, Creed et al. (2010) report that
GLBT ministers learned to use their ambiguous and marginalized identity to promote change in the organizations they were committed to and embedded in. The authors call such a process *embodied identity work* and suggest such work helps to resolve individual experience of institutional contradiction and their marginalization. Therefore, similar to actors involved in covert politics, tempered radicals seem to have leveraged an ambivalent posture to carry out small-scale “movements” while avoiding repressions from authorities.

Although tempered radicals may appear to be conservative in their “small win” approach, they were aware that the “accumulation of small wins changes the organizational landscape for later battles” (Meyerson & Scully, 1995: 596). Hence tempered radicals were intentionally creating the potentiality for future movements. In spite of this, they did not appear to be intentionally developing organizational strength. Tempered radicals yearn to affiliate with like-minded individuals to gain strength from each other, but their attempts of affiliations were largely informal and with modest thrusts, lacking a clear purpose of building movement-relevant networks.

**Robust Action Through Multivocality and Brokering**

In their influential study about the rise of the Medici family in the 15th century’s Florence, Padgett and Ansell (1993) describe how Cosimo de’Medici conducted his political activities in a constrained environment, in which powerful Patrician families considered the Medici family class traitors and took action to marginalize the family and monitor family members’ political activities. Despite a movement-inhibiting environment, Cosimo de’Medici used robust action to develop a powerful network comprised of elites (Patricians through marriage ties) and non-elites (“new men” through economic ties), and mobilized these diverse sets of actors to overthrow the incumbent Patricians. Robust action, in the authors’ conceptualization, is centred on multivocality: “the fact that single actions can be interpreted coherently from multiple perspectives simultaneously, the fact that single actions can be moves in many games at once, and the fact that public and private motivations cannot be parsed” (Padgett & Ansell, 1993: 1263). The authors further suggest that multivocality is anchored on the ambiguity of
one’s motives in taking certain actions: “Cosimo, after all, ‘merely’ responded graciously to the flow of requests” (Padgett & Ansell, 1993: 1264); the incumbent Patricians did not fully grasp Cosimo’s motives until it was too late. Robust action permitted Cosimo to weave together a powerful network without alarming the opposing Patricians.

Expanding the concept of robust action, Ferraro, Etzion and Gehman (2015) suggest that it can be deployed to tackle “grand challenges”, problems that are complex, radically uncertain and that implicate multiple evaluative criteria, such as, the problems of climate change and poverty alleviation. The authors specifically emphasize multivocal inscription – one important dimension of robust action – in bringing in diverse actors into the “game”. For example, the United Nations-backed Principle for Responsible Investment (PRI), in introducing new evaluative criteria of responsible investment, referred to both fiduciary duties and the alignment of investing practices to societal interests. Ferraro et al. (2015) suggest that PRI, in so doing, harnessed multivocality to appeal to not only mainstream investors, but also governments and NGOs which were concerned about realigning the financial system with broader societal needs. Accordingly they (Ferraro, Etzion, & Gehman, 2015: 376) argue that “multivocal inscriptions allow coordination within and between multidisciplinary communities with different evaluative criteria, without requiring explicit consensus…multivocal inscriptions promote enrollment of others into the game, and invite new moves to be made”.

Robust action is found to be generalizable to other constrained contexts in which strategic actors attempt to advocate divergent ideas vis-a-vis powerful incumbents. In a study of Most Trusted Advisors (MTA) of family firms, Strike and Rerup (2016) describe how social skills constituted a vital component of the MTAs’ strategic approach in advising family members to change their entrapped cognitive frames. Like Cosimo, MTAs maintained a flexible position; they presented themselves as being neutral to the family’s political struggle while keeping the family’s best interest in mind. In a similar vein, Lindsay (2010) portrays the Fellowship, a religious organization of national and world leaders that intentionally maintained an ambiguous identity and eschewed formal organizational structures (such as, clear ranks and explicit organizational goals). By so doing, the Fellowship maintained a flexible strategic posture and brought a diverse group
of political leaders into informal networks. Lindsay (2010) suggests that the Fellowship possessed liminal entities that defied classifications and helped the organization to maintain a low profile and avoid criticism, even when it was involved in politically sensitive activities.

Ambiguous identity and flexible standings permit a strategic actor to broker interests and knowledge among diverse groups. Brokering is a main tactic of robust action and it enables the brokering actor to exert subtle influence to others. For example, Cosimo’s power arguably lay in his unique capacity to broker the interests of the Patrician families (the incumbent) and the “new men” (the challenger) (Padgett & Ansell, 1993). Similarly, Bismarck in the late 19th century used “dual-inclusion” brokerage to constitute a new state despite a high degree of political conflicts and fluidity: “Prussia was in Germany and Germany was in Prussia because new bridging institutions and political actors in the interface made them overlap and interpenetrate”; depending upon which institutions and actors were activated in politics, Bismarck could toggle the two faces of the system accordingly (Obert & Padgett, 2012: 237).

While ambiguous and seemingly “neutral” identity helps the strategic actor to engage in brokering, other conditions are also required, among which the actors’ social positions. Social positions refer to an actor’s position in the structure of social networks (Battilana, 2011; Dorado, 2005; Lockett, Currie, Finn, Martin, & Waring, 2014). Such positions are related to actors’ economic capital, cultural capital (knowledge, skills, taste, and preferences) and social capital (relationships, and resources embedded in such relationships); social positions both enable and constrain actors’ approach and effectiveness as change agents (Lockett et al., 2014).

Specifically, research has found that some aspects of social positions facilitate brokering activities. First, relevant cultural capital can be useful to other actors; when properly dispensed, such capital helps the strategic actor to earn the trust of powerful others. Strike and Rerup (2016) find that MTAs’ professional expertise and experience (such as, tax knowledge and familiarity with the family’s business) earned them trust from family business entrepreneurs, making their subsequent brokering effective. Second, social
positions that intersect multiple networks aid brokering activities. Domain-crossing actors are more likely to generate novel ideas and new practices (Furnari, 2014; Powell & Sandholtz, 2012), and to initiate and adopt divergent change (Battilana & Casciaro, 2012). SMOs with multiple types of affiliations and ties can better facilitate diffusion of protest tactics across movements (Wang & Soule, 2012). Hybrid SMOs — those whose organizational identities span the boundaries of two or more social movements, issues, or identities — play a vital role in brokering across movements and mobilizing a critical mass of supporters in today’s multi-movement environment (Heaney & Rojas, 2014).

Research has also found that effective brokering often takes place in a carefully bracketed space, which allows safe interactions of dissimilar actors. Kellogg (2009) documents how middle managers and subordinates in one hospital leveraged “relational spaces” – isolated space in which actors of different ranks interacted freely to develop new patterns of association — to develop a cross-position collective for change. In contrast, actors in a similar hospital who did not have access to such informal, experimental spaces failed to implement change. Howard-Grenville, Golden-Biddle, Irwin and Mao (2011) find that skillful change agents inside organizations transformed everyday occurrences such as meetings or workshops into “liminal” phenomena – way stations bracketed from, yet connected to, everyday action in the organization. These constructed liminal occasions enabled experimentations and invited different interpretations that hold potential for cultural change. Mair and Hehenberger (2014) discover that, although front-stage interactions in public spaces (such as, large conferences) served to publicize new institutional models to a broad audience, backstage interactions in protected spaces (such as, invitation-only workshops) invited incumbents and challengers to come together to reconfigure these models. Backstage interactions, therefore, helped dissimilar actors to overcome conflicts, identify common grounds, and move to mutually beneficial coexistence. O’Mahony and Bechky (2008), through a case study of four community projects in the open-source movement, illuminate how such projects collaborated with firms defending proprietary approaches to software development; the collaboration was made possible by creating a boundary organization, through which incumbents and challengers negotiated joint solutions to the key issues of governance, membership, ownership and control over production. In Lindsay’s (2010) account, the Fellowship
organized events, such as the National Prayer Breakfast, to facilitate dissimilar politicians to develop informal relations; although the Fellowship claimed its events were apolitical, “the social lubrication provided by Fellowship gatherings likely facilitated political and business deals that took place outside the context of Fellowship-hosted events” (Lindsay 2010: 175). Furnari (2014) conceptualizes “interstitial spaces” as small-scale settings where individuals from different fields interact occasionally and informally around common activities (e.g., hobbyist clubs, hangouts, workshops, and meet-ups). The author argues that the institutional diversity and the informal nature of interstitial spaces enable actors of different identities and with different expertise to experiment collectively with new ideas. While such experimentations are of informal nature and tend to be short-lived, the presence of multivocal actors can sustain these interactions to develop new meanings and practices. Multivocal actors coordinate different others with cultural symbols that can be simultaneously interpreted from multiple perspectives. These symbols then become broadly shared among dissimilar members to bond them around the new practice.

Therefore, strategic actors use robust action to overcome constraints in their political contexts. Robust action involves multivocality and brokering from favorable social positions (such as, positions with access to knowledge and expertise, or straddling multiple networks). Robust action sometimes also involves creating bracketed informal or experimental spaces to encourage dissimilar actors to interact and develop new meanings and practices. Informal relations and networks built over such activities can have powerful generative potentiality. Emirbayer and Goodwin (1994) suggest that incorporating social structural (such as, actors’ social positions) and cultural analysis into network analysis can explain how networks form, reproduce, and transform themselves and how networks powerfully harness and enable agency. Padgett and Powell (2012) argue that networked actors go through self-transformative processes that generate novelty, for example, through constructive feedbacks or by transposing models and meanings from one social world to another. They draw analogy to “autocatalysis” in biochemistry which explains the formation of new life forms: “Chemicals bump into other chemicals, triggering reactions that make new chemicals…a chemical reaction network…reproduces itself through time” (Padgett and Powell: 2012: 8). Hence, robust action through multivocality and brokering holds the potential of accumulating relations
and networks that can be unleashed to change existing institutions.

In summary, a few studies are suggestive of possible strategies an activist organization might pursue to promote change in a movement-inhibiting context. Those studies document a variety of strategies, but one consensual finding appears to be the usefulness of ambiguous actions or identity in bypassing elite repression. Such ambiguity veils the true intention of a specific action. Ambiguity casts the activist as non-aggressive and cooperative (he or she takes actions to respond to others’ requests), and they allow the activist to push the envelope through his or her actions without going so far as to alienate elites. On the other hand, boundary-spanning social positions create favorable opportunities for brokering, which is essential for the focal actor to harness the power of networks and to manipulate meanings and knowledge forms.

Such being said, these studies have largely documented individual-based activities or local activities. They foreshadow what strategies might work for activist groups attempting large-scale mobilization, but they do not proffer systemic processes through which movement potentiality is intentionally built up over time in movement-inhibiting contexts. While acknowledging the importance of continually pushing envolopes through small wins (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), prior studies do not tell us how the focal activist carries out accumulating strategies through discrete actions. For instance, how to broker meaning in a way that allows increasingly divergent meanings to infiltrate and amass in a context that rigidly inhibits such meanings? Similarly, prior research points to the importance of affiliations, coordination and networks but has not explicitly addressed the strategies being used to carry out such activities. Therefore the central issue related with pre-movements remains unattended: how does an early-stage activist or SMO mobilize and organize other actors to join divergent claims-making (i.e., to create a pre-movement)? Moreover, actors portrayed in these studies succeeded in veiling their true motives through ambiguous actions or identities, but they largely engaged in ad hoc activities. For an activist or SMO with a clear strategic purpose of creating movement potentiality, how can it continually bypass elite repression, when repeated actions point to a pattern and may eventually reveal the true motives, leading to elite repression? My thesis will address these two unanswered questions.
Chapter 3 METHODS

The literature review identified gaps in our understanding about activism in movement-inhibiting contexts. These gaps stimulate my research questions: 1) How does an activist organization or SMO create a pre-movement in a movement-inhibiting context? 2) How does it continually bypass the repression of ruling elites while creating a pre-movement? When unanswered questions are identified within the boundaries of a well-developed theory, an inductive theory-building approach is appropriate (Edmondson & McManus, 2007). I conduct a historically oriented inductive process study (Langley, Smallman, Tsoukas, & Van De Ven, 2013; Van de Ven, 1992) that covered 33 years (1975-2008) of the history of the Ford Foundation’s grant-making in China.

3.1 Overview of the Empirical Context: The Ford Foundation, China and Human Rights

The Ford Foundation and Human Rights  The Ford Foundation (FF) is one of the world’s largest private foundations with assets over $10 billion and annual spending of about US$500 million. Headquartered in New York City, FF has ten international offices located in main cities of Latin America, Africa, the Middle East, and Asia. FF’s organizational focus is to promote human rights and development around the world through “chang(ing) social structure and institutions” (FF website). Specifically, FF addresses eight global human rights issues, including Democratic and accountable government, Economic fairness, Educational opportunity, Freedom of expression, Gender, sexuality and reproductive justice, Human rights, Metropolitan Opportunity, and Sustainable Development⁴. FF promotes these issues by working with grantee organizations, including research entities, civil society organizations (i.e., NGOs), and government institutions.

⁴ During the drafting of this thesis (February –March 2016), FF was undergoing a revamp and appeared to be highlighting inequality as its main grant-making focus. It announced on its website that its programs would be restructured soon.
Human rights are arguably one of the most influential concepts originated in Western contexts, but spread across the world to become a universal ideology. A radically democratized idea of the Western concept of inherent dignity of the human person (Donnelly, 2013), human rights as a concept and a set of ideology and practices has consistently built up its momentum since the World War II, marked by the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) by the United Nations General Assembly in 1948. In 1966, the UN General Assembly adopted two covenants detailing economic, social and cultural rights, as well as civil and political rights, respectively. During the same period, an increasingly large and powerful group of NGOs and academics were actively involved in promoting human rights concepts and practices across the world. Over time, the concept of human rights has become “objectified” in international human rights laws, agreements, academic or popular texts, and in programs and actions by NGOs working on “rights-based demands for change” (Donnelly, 2013:12). The diffusion of human rights is often regarded as a global social movement (Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Korey, 1998). Foundations are widely known as a source of financial resources for social movements; they also provide resources such as legitimacy, templates for action, and social ties (Edwards & McCarthy, 2004). FF precisely played such a role in the global human rights movement.

Although FF was founded by politically conservative businessman Edsel Ford and later managed by his son Henry Ford II (both were presidents of the Ford Motor Company), since the 1950s, the Ford family gradually yielded control to a liberal-minded management with close ties to America’s political and knowledge elites. Since the 1950s, FF invested in international development, legal aid for the poor, and fellowships for the arts and humanities. In the 1960s and 1970s, FF experienced dramatic social change in the U.S. and the world under the leadership of McGeorge Bundy, son of an elite Boston family, a former Harvard dean and influential national security advisor to Presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson. FF recast itself as an active supporter of civil rights organizations, women's organizations and other human rights initiatives. This transition was profound. An FF former executive described how the staff collectively confronted tragic events, such as when FF-funded scholars in Latin American countries were repressed by military governments. These experiences pushed FF to transition. FF
“started to move away from economic and agriculture hiring, started to hire people with expertise and an interest in human rights and legal justice” (Interview, former FF executive, 2013). Bundy’s successor, Franklin Thomas, FF’s first black president and son of a poverty-stricken Western Indian family in Brooklyn, furthered this agenda. Under his leadership, FF was deeply involved in anti-apartheid initiatives, made bold moves to enter Russia, China and Vietnam, and made major investment in global human rights organizations including Human Rights Watch, Amnesty International (Carmichael, 2001; Korey, 1998, 2007), as well as human rights groups in developing countries (FF website).

Despite the transition to human rights and grassroots movements, FF maintained its close ties with political elites and academia, with its key personnel coming from these elite backgrounds. When working in foreign countries, FF did not hesitate in leveraging its elite identity and its ability to work with a nation’s elites. For example, FF’s Indian office had close ties with Indian political elites from the very beginning. Even in authoritarian countries like Indonesia, FF country representatives developed close ties with ruling elites and worked from inside the institutional system (Bresnan, 2006). FF, over the years, maintained a low profile in media and did not seek media attention either in the U.S. or in other countries it operated in. Thus, FF tended to remain a “mysterious” figure to people outside the grantee circle it operated in. To illustrate this, the editor of the Social Innovation section of the arguably most influential Chinese daily newspaper was not aware of the details of FF’s work in China. When I asked her what she thought about FF, she replied that she thought FF was “an NGO with good relations with the China government”, and FF was a “professional organization focusing on NGO talent development” (Interview, section editor of Millennial News, 2013).

FF was among the first to bring the concept of human rights to China. It began making grants in China in the late 1970s when China started to open-up and engage in economic reform, and it remains active today. With annual spending of US$15-20 million (since 2000), it is the biggest foreign non-governmental organization (NGO) in China dealing with issues related to rights, justice, and democratic governance. Since 2000, FF’s Beijing Office has openly promoted five out of the eight FF global issues. FF program officers are issue experts with deep ties to communities they work in; for example, almost
all program officers who had worked in FF Beijing Office, despite being expatriates, spoke fluent Chinese and had years of work experience in China or Asia before joining FF. The responsibility of FF program officers is to monitor issue domains to identify leaders and projects and they favor “bold ideas and scalable solutions” that tackle “structure and system” problems (FF website). One FF officer working in China described his challenge this way:

*It is difficult in that...no one can change the system. For any system, there are good parts and bad parts, strong parts and weak part; or, no good or bad, but some parts are appropriate for the time being and some are not... the system is not one person or one task. It is many parts integrated together. There are people; there are tasks. There are methods...how to change? Where to start? If you don’t change the system, changing one person is not very useful. But if you don’t change the person, how do you change the system?* (Interview, FF program officer, 2013)

This comment reflects a general ethos of FF program officers when approaching change. As highly educated individuals with extensive knowledge in the issues they work in, these officers tend to approach problems intellectually and analytically. But meanwhile they are activists — they engage with the issue community, proactively construct issues and strategically use their grant-making to catalyze much bigger social change.

**China and Human Rights**  
China, in the 1970s, was under tight communist rule and in many ways was a totalitarian regime. The best way to describe the society was “one hundred rule one billion” (FF Discussion Paper, 1983). Other than the ruling elites, other social groups were excluded from political processes. Elites imposed tight social control to ensure that average citizens were isolated from the outside world and were instilled the Communist ideology. Grassroots citizens lacked consciousness about the deprivation of their political and social rights.

In the 1980s, as China opened up to the world, the Chinese academia and universities were among the first to be exposed to Western concepts including human rights and democracy. In the summer of 1989 a student pro-democracy movement was suppressed by the government. The armies and tanks on the Tiananmen Square and the bloodshed constituted a tragic image representing an open confrontation between the Communist ruling elites and the Chinese people demanding political rights.
In the 1990s and early 2000s, China made strides in its economic development, but limited political reform continued to leave citizens with few institutional routes to challenge ruling elites. Grassroots NGOs started to develop in this period, but this extra-institutional space was tightly regulated by elites, and crackdown was a constant threat and oftentimes a reality. China continued to be a movement-inhibiting context. Any political dissent was nipped in the bud before having a chance of mobilization. Human rights were among the most sensitive of all issues.

Still, with China’s economic reform and opening-up to the world, the concept of human rights inevitably gained its saliency. While it is difficult to accurately assess the multi-faceted change related with human rights in China, as an illustration, I conducted a comparative search with the key words of human rights, justice, and democracy in China Daily – the flagship English language newspaper in China – during the year 1994 (earliest year accessible from Factiva) and 2013. The search generated 67 results for year 1994 and 1,399 results for year 2013, a 2088% increase. A deeper look into the data revealed that China initially denied Western meanings of human rights, justice, and democracy; although these labels were used, their meanings were either empty or shallow and one-dimensional. Over the years, the same labels took on increasingly substantive and pluralistic meanings; in the 2013 media samples, they were used as multi-dimensional concepts and their meanings significantly overlapped with their Western meanings. Because changes in the use of language are closely related to changes in higher-level institutions (Fairclough, 1993; Phillips, Lawrence, & Hardy, 2004; Phillips, Sewell, & Jaynes, 2008), the two media samples suggest that the Western concepts of human rights and related ideas have become increasingly salient in the China context over the past 20 years.

FF made contact with China in 1975 and launched its China program in 1979. FF entered China with a goal of advocating for human rights. Till late 1990s, FF was the only non-bilateral or multilateral donor based in China working on rights-related issues and it was able to open projects and select grantees without going through the Chinese government. In the 2000s, more foreign and Chinese NGOs worked in rights-related issues, but FF was acknowledged as a pioneer and continued to be an influential figure in these areas.
While FF has not solely contributed to the diffusion of human rights in China, it was the earliest activist which had opened multiple lines of work for the followers in 2000s. For an activist organization that managed to sustain its activities in a movement-inhibiting context for well over three decades (FF Beijing Office is still active as of the writing of this thesis), FF constitutes an ideal case for me to track the strategic unfolding of a pre-movement.

3.2 Data Collection Process

My thesis project originated from an initial interest in understanding how a civil society sector emerged in China despite legal and political environments that strongly discouraged such emergence. As an authoritarian state, the Chinese government imposes rigid control over the society, down to the small social units of urban communities and rural villages. The government also designates itself as the sole provider of health care, education, poverty and disaster relief, and other critical social services, leaving little room for the participation of the private sector. In order to catch up with the rest of the world, around the 1980s the government set up a series of government-owned non-governmental organizations (GONGOs). These organizations received funding from the government and were headed by government officials and as a result, they had limited incentive and capacity to promote alternative templates of social organizing. The Chinese law posed extreme difficulty for citizens to register extra-institutional entities such as a grassroots NGO by requiring them to first find a government agency willing to supervise their work. In spite of these difficulties, since the 1990s, grassroots NGOs distinct from government-run groups have emerged. These NGOs were typically formed by Chinese citizens (on rare occasions, by foreigners based in China) without the government’s initiative or approval. They operate in social spaces where the government was absent, impotent, or unwilling to act (Spires, 2011). Typically, they advocate the rights of under-privileged groups (such as migrant workers and their children, women, disabled people, HIV/AIDS victims, and prostitutes). They also provide much-needed services and other support to these groups. Many such organizations have registered as businesses (or, have not registered at all) due to severe constraints imposed by the government on NGO registration. Such NGOs were the first extra-institutional social group in China and the
Intrigued by this phenomenon, I began to seek out these groups and had informal conversations from 2009 to 2011 with five grassroots NGOs. During the process, I learned that FF participated in funding these grassroots NGOs from an early age. For example, in order to draft a teaching case, I had spoken to one such NGO with a national presence and over 200 employees, which were widely regarded as a pioneer in China’s civil society sector. After a few conversations, it turned out this NGO was funded by FF throughout its nascent years. I then studied FF’s Chinese website and found that it openly displayed “controversial” issue labels such as “Transparent and accountable governance”, “Human rights”, “Community Rights” and “Sexuality and Reproductive Rights”. I was puzzled: how could a foreign NGO with a small office in Beijing be so bold as to openly promote controversial human rights concepts? How did it avoid the government’s repression?

With these research questions in mind, I set out for answers. I discovered from the Internet that FF kept an archive. I emailed the contact email listed on the website, sent my research proposal, and requested archival access. In three weeks I received a positive response from the archivist in charge of FF archives; it turned out that FF only recently entrusted its archives to a large archive centre – the Rockefeller Archive Center (which already was hosting archives of several foundations and NGOs). I was extremely lucky to be one of the first researchers to be granted access to FF archives at the Rockefeller Archive Center. In the following, I document my four data collection trips and the types of data being collected.

**FF unpublished reports on China, collected through my first archive-collection trip to NYC.** In October 2012, I traveled to Tarrytown, near New York City, where the archive centre was located. I worked for ten days in the archive centre from 9am to 5pm. With the professional assistance of the archivist in charge of the FF archive, I searched the FF internal database using the keyword China and scrutinized the results to exclude documents that did not directly explain FF’s China strategy. Of the 76 reports (about 1,600 pages total) retained, nearly 70 percent are internal memos authored by FF staff.
Other documents include: program overviews and discussion papers prepared for the Board of Trustee meetings, selective grantee narratives, program flyers, and conference papers. The majority of these unpublished reports fall into the category of “non-intentional evidence” which means “anything remaining from the past that was not made with the intention of revealing the past to us, but simply emerged as part of normal life” (Megill, 2007: 29). Because I visited the archive centre when it just began to host the FF archive, I was given access to reports up until year 2008. This was a lucky break, as a sweeping ten-year restriction was imposed on all FF archives in the following months, and I would not have had the same level of access at that point. I photographed reports relevant to my research page by page and then assembled them into PDF files.

Semi-structured interviews, conducted on my field trip to China. Soon after my first archive-collection trip, I applied for ethics approval to Western University for interviewing FF officers and grantees in China. Upon receiving ethics approval, I emailed all five incumbent program officers of the FF Beijing office, requesting interviews. One of them, the acting representative, agreed to meet with me. The other officers declined, citing reasons of being too busy. I was not surprised that FF officers were reluctant to give interviews because FF worked in politically sensitive terrains. For the same reason, I expected FF officers to be cautious in speaking about politically sensitive and ongoing projects. My one-hour interview with the FF acting representative confirmed this speculation. I met with the acting representative in the FF Beijing Office in June 2013. For instance, when I asked him whether there were conflicts between FF and the Chinese government, the representative offered a diplomatic answer: “You say conflicts, I say difference… each different aspect has its reasonable side and its unreasonable side…”.

When I mentioned that in his earlier memos (which I accessed as part of the FF unpublished reports on China), he had spoken about the challenge of making the government understand FF’s approach as well as political difficulties he encountered in certain issue areas (such as videography on sensitive social issues), the representative replied: “(that was) because the government has its own experiences, I have my own experiences. No good or bad, but different.” When I pointed out the fact that over half of FF grants were issued to “safe institutions” such as universities or researchers rather than grassroots groups, the representative again avoided the question by saying “It’s not that
we prefer those, it’s about who approached us…” As a contrast, in his internal memos, he was more forthright in talking about his differences with the Chinese government and the challenges he had to deal with in his grant-making work. The reason was that these memos, when being drafted, were intended as a medium of near-real-time internal information sharing and internal learning and discussion, and the officers were encouraged to frankly speak about the challenges and problems they encountered in the field. Therefore, after this interview, I concluded that the best way to understand FF’s strategic approach in China was through its unpublished reports. I then focused on interviewing FF grantees instead of pushing for more interviews with FF officers. Grantee interviews were of particular importance as I needed these alternative perspectives to compare with the perspectives in FF unpublished reports for the purpose of data triangulation (Jick, 1979).

FF grantees were, in general, quite open to my interview requests. I used theoretical sampling to select informants who represented a variety of perspectives (Lock, 2011). Of the eight grantees I interviewed, three were in the Governance portfolio, two in the Environment portfolio, two in Education, and one in Sexuality and Reproductive Health. I also interviewed an issue expert – a journalist/editor covering Chinese civil society (in a section called “social innovation”) in a leading Chinese newspaper.

**FF external communications and FF grant list, collected on my second archive-collection trip to NYC.** In September 2013, I visited the Rockefeller Archive Center for a second time. I stayed 3 weeks and worked in the reading room of the Center 9-5 during business days. On this trip, I delved deep into FF’s historical grant-making in other developing countries including Latin American countries, India, and South Africa. This background research gave me a firm grasp of FF’s missions and global strategies promoting human rights. Because FF adopted different strategies in varied country contexts, I developed a richer understanding about the tension between movement contexts, political opportunities, and FF strategies. These data served as my background knowledge and did not enter the project, as I need to contain the project within a
reasonable scope. I collected data that were directly incorporated into the thesis project, including: 1) **FF Grant-makers Resource Handbooks**: This 120-page internal document (2002) about the “craft of grant-making” explains internal FF practices; it helped me to interpret the memos and program reviews more accurately by providing an organizational context in which these internal documents were generated; 2) **FF president’s public remarks**: Ten reports containing the public remarks made by FF’s president that explained FF’s goals and strategies to external audiences; 3) **A list of FF grants made in China**: A spreadsheet contains 1197 grants made in China and closed during 1975 and 2003 (2003 was the latest year to access FF internal grants database due to the 10-year data access restriction). Each case lists the grantee organization, grant purpose, date awarded, amount, program field (such as: environment, or governance), and the program officer who made the grant. This document corroborates the grant-making strategies being articulated in the textual data of FF unpublished reports. For example, if one officer in her memo highlighted her support to a particular organization, I could find the same grantee in the spreadsheet to collect all grants made to it, therefore more precisely “profiling” this grantee’s relationship with FF.

During this trip, I became acquainted with three executives of the archive centre; all of them were former foundation executives or senior program officer. I scheduled lunch meetings with all of them to seek their opinions about FF and to understand the perspectives and approaches of American grant-makers. One of them arranged for me to interview a retired FF executive (over 20 years’ tenure with FF, with 8 years as Vice President, Developing Country Programs) two times (half an hour and 2 hours, respectively). Although the former FF executive did not directly participate in the China operation, he shared with me insights about the FF identity and its involvement in the

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5 I did collect grant documents related with FF’s grant-making in Apartheid South Africa and reserved these data for a separate project.

6 In 2016 I requested, electronically, grants that closed in 2004 and 2005 (as these grants were lifted from the 10-year restriction by then). My grant list thus expanded to 1536 grants. I also downloaded recent-year FF grants from its website containing 825 grants issued during 2006 and 2015. The latter grant list does not enter my data sources (partly because my research frame ends at 2008, partly because I cannot access these newer grant files). But, it helped me trace some grantees and FF’s overall grant-making trajectory.
world’s human rights movement. He also helped me understand FF’s strategizing approach. He described how FF executives and officers would approach a foreign context (such as the Apartheid South Africa, which he directly worked in), how they developed networks with local actors, and how they strived to develop nuanced understanding of local situations through formal or informal information channels and the general ethos of FF staff in formulating their social change strategies. These approaches resonate with FF approaches in China as revealed in FF unpublished reports on China. I added these two interviews to my list of semi-structured interviews.

**FF grant files, collected on my third archive-collection trip to NYC.** In 2016, with access to two more years of grants (in line with the 10-year data restriction), my spreadsheet of FF grants contained summary information of 1,536 grants (grants closed during 1975-2005); after taking time to review them, I identified about 150 grants of particular research interest. I selected these grants using theoretical sampling, focusing on grants that shed more light than others about FF strategies in China. My selection criteria was a combination of grant size, number of years of commitment, and most importantly, strategic shifts (e.g., grants related with a new issue, or grants given to a new type of grantee). In January 2016, I visited the Rockefeller Archive Center again with a focused goal of collecting these grant files. A grant file is a compilation of documents related to a particular grant, including, among others: 1) grantee proposals accepted by FF, 2) reports by the responsible FF officer to headquarters requesting this grant (Request for Grant Action, or RGA), 3) reports by the grantee documenting their activities using the grant money (Grantee narrative), as well as 4) correspondence between the grantee and FF officers. These grant files range from 30 pages to over 2000 (when grants were issued to the same grantee over many years through separate grant actions, but with the same grant file number, documents involved can be huge). During two weeks I worked with microfilms in the reading room, scanning relevant documents in each selected grant file. Overall, I collected 148 grants containing about 5,000 pages.

**Additional data: four case studies about three Chinese grantees; two media interviews of a Chinese grantee.** In order to deeply understand FFs activities in China, I read about FF’s activities in the U.S. and other countries (Bresnan, 2006; Ferguson, 2013; Korey,
2007; Parmar, 2012) and the global human rights movement (Dezalay & Garth, 2002; Keck & Sikkink, 1998; Korey, 1998) in which FF played a major role. I also read scholarly books about China’s economic reform and social change in the past four decades (Day, 2005; Evans & Strauss, 2011; Hildebrandt, 2013; Hsiung, Jaschok, & Milwertz, 2001; Tai, 2015; Yang, 2004) to learn more about other actors that have influenced social change within China. These books provided important background knowledge that increased my trustworthiness as a researcher tackling a highly complex research context (Decker, 2013). Moreover, from these scholarly sources, I identified four case studies of three grassroots NGOs that were mentioned in FF unpublished reports (Evans & Strauss, 2011; Hsiung et al., 2001; Tai, 2015) and included them into my data. These case studies either were written by a leader of the FF grantee or included rich interview data about a grantee by a third author. Additionally, by browsing the website of a flagship magazine for Chinese NGO practitioners (titled Social Entrepreneurs), I found two articles that featured the founder of a FF grantee and his organization. These case studies and media interviews served the same function as my semi-structured interviews with the eight FF grantees by allowing me to triangulate the perspectives contained in FF unpublished reports.

Table 2 lists all my data sources as described above.

TABLE 2
OVERVIEW OF DATA SOURCES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data source</th>
<th>Number of documents</th>
<th>Length and/or content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FF unpublished reports on China (1974-2008)</td>
<td>76 reports in total - 52 memos, 8 program reviews, 8 grantee narratives, 8 other</td>
<td>Between 1-90 pages. Total pages: ~1600.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7 Although 1975 was the first year an FF officer visited China and was thus the starting year for the AF case study, I kept the 1974 report. This report was a review of FF’s program supporting China Studies, and it foreshadowed and explained FF’s proactive response to the initial opportunity of entering China in following years.

A list of FF grants related to China (1975-2005) | One spreadsheet containing basic data on 1536 grants | Each grant lists the name of the grantee, grant purpose, date, amount, program field and program officer.

Interviews | 12 (8 FF grantees, 1 FF officer, 1 issue expert, 1 former FF executive) | Between 30-150 minutes (excepting one interview conducted over Skype and another by email)

Case studies and media interviews about FF’s grantees in China | 4 case studies about 3 FF grantees, contained in 3 books; 2 media interviews of the founder of a FF grantee | Chinese women organizing: cadres, feminists, Muslims, queers (Chapter 9: Strategies and space: A case study of the Shaanxi Association for Women and Family, p. 193-208; Chapter 10: The Women’s Media Watch Network, p.209-233)

Gender in flux: agency and its limits in contemporary China (From the Heyang Model to the Shaanxi Model: Action Research on Women's Participation in Village Governance, p. 54-82)

Building Civil Society in authoritarian China: Importance of Leadership (case study of Rural Women: all through the book)

Social Entrepreneurs (magazine): two interviews of Lui Zhao, founder of NPI

FF Grant-makers Resource Handbooks (supplemental data) | 1 | Total pages: 120. The booklet explains FF’s grant-making practices and internal processes for program officers.

FF President’s public remarks, non-China context; 1996-2002 (supplemental data) | 10 | Between 1-30 pages. Total pages: ~180. These remarks explain FF’s missions and goals as an organization as being understood by its top leader.

FF external communications (supplemental data) | - FF webpages of global programs, China programs
- FF webpages on China initiatives and grantees (recent years)
- A brochure on FF China programs
- 34 annual reports (1975-2008) | These data explain FF’s organizational missions, beliefs and programs to the public.

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9 These are the numbers of pages that I chose to copy from the original grant files, which, stored in microfilms, can range from 30 to 2000 pages for one grant.

10 Interviewed twice.
3.3 Data Analysis

My analysis consisted of two major steps. In the first, I strived to reconstruct a credible, rich yet structured historical account. In the second, I linked the historical account to theory. In the following, I explain these steps.

**Step 1: Reconstructing a Historical Account of FF’s Activities in China**

In using FF archives to reconstruct a historical account, I embraced the historian’s method of *source criticism* to keep analytical distance from the archival texts (Decker, 2013). First, I gathered biographical information about each author to gauge if her/his voice on a topic could be trusted; this step also made me cognizant of the ideological frames that the authors brought into the text (Howell & Prevenier, 2001). In Appendix 1, I list a few illustrative short bios of FF China officers. As shown, FF officers shared a few characteristics: 1) highly educated (most officers held a PhD in their issue areas; 2) speaking fluent Chinese (a few officers were of Chinese origin, but many were non-Chinese who had learned the language through education or earlier work); 3) having worked extensively in the issue area and/or in China/Asia.

Second, I used other sources — books and papers I read about China’s economic and social change — to better understand the historical events mentioned in FF unpublished reports. This allowed me to establish the historical context; accordingly I could read FF reports with scholarly confidence and with a critical eye (Gunn, 2006). The overall approach was to stay close to archival authors while keeping an analytical distance from them.

Because my data spans as many as 33 years, I sought to structure the historical account. I used “*temporal bracketing*”, a typical technique in historiography (Chandler, 1970; Rowlinson, 1995) and in process research (Langley, 1999). After having read through the data and developed a basic picture of what was going on, I set out to identify critical events that divided a longitudinal phenomenon into “phases”, with a phase being “an
interval of time in which qualitatively similar work activities occurred that differed from activities that came before or after” (Davis & Eisenhardt, 2011:167).

My research questions are concerned with understanding the SMO strategic process of pre-movement mobilization. Therefore, I looked for major changes in FF’s China strategies. I identified three junctures, or critical events, that subsequently shifted FF’s main strategies in China to the extent that core strategies in the following years substantively differ from these preceding the juncture.

1) The first juncture was in 1975 when FF’s Asian expert explored China’s “relevance to the Foundation.” This juncture triggered a series of trips and internal debates that led to FF’s investment in exchange programs supporting Chinese scholars and academic institutions.

2) The second juncture was in 1988: FF opened an office in Beijing and began making grants locally. FF was among the few foreign NGOs (and the first non-bilateral donors) to be on-the-ground in Communist China and this special status allowed FF to shift from supporting academic exchange to supporting policy-relevant projects that could influence China’s economic reforms. FF worked with scholars and other institutional actors to spread and implement rights-related concepts and practices from inside the existing institutions.

3) In 1999, the third juncture ensued: FF launched a generic grant program to support China’s emergent civil society. This program shifted FF’s focus from supporting institutional actors to emphasizing extra-institutional actors in China.

These three junctures demarcated FF’s strategic thrusts in China (1975-2008) into three phases. Figure 2 is a graphic presentation of the three phases. In the following three chapters, I present my historical account and I label Phase I (1975-1988) Developing Chinese Scholars, Phase 2 (1989-1998) Stimulating Change from Inside the Institutions, and Phase 3 (1999-2008) Developing Extra-institutional Actors.
Although I drew most from FF archives in this analytical step, I also read carefully my interview data and the four case studies. These additional sources helped me to corroborate with the primary historical data and to add granular details to the historical account (Jick, 1979).

**Step 2: Linking the Historical Account to Theory**

This step was informed by inductive methodology in social science (Charmaz, 2014; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Locke, 2001; Miles & Huberman, 1994). The purpose was to elevate the empirical account to theory. To identify theoretical patterns, I started by creating a large number of initial codes from FF unpublished reports, grant files, interview data, as well as the four grantee case studies and two media interviews. For example, data that described FF’s initial activities in China contained sections about how FF identified Chinese individuals or organizations to work with. Below is one such quote:

*For the past several years, the Foundation has been actively involved in efforts to strengthen the competence of leading Chinese institutions in the fields of economics, law and international relations. A major participant in those efforts has been the influential Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing. Often described as China’s "leading think tank," the Academy and its 30-plus institutes and graduate school play a major role in providing research and graduate education in the social sciences and humanities in China. (Grant File 8500796, RGA 1985)*
I developed an initial code “Identifying Chinese actors to work with”. I then located data sections describing how FF identified other actors. I grouped them together under the same code.

Following the inductive approach, I clustered my initial codes into larger categories. For instance, in addition to the above code of “Identifying Chinese actors to work with”, I developed initial codes such as: “Developing actors by sending them overseas”, “Developing actors by bringing them Western expertise”, “Linking actors with their overseas counterparts through working groups and conferences”, “Coopting policy elites”, “Linking scholars and elites in the project”, “Linking scholars and grassroots NGOS in the project”, and “Building an issue network with newsletters and magazines”. These codes described how FF developed local actors; to varied degrees, these codes also suggested how FF linked these actors in formal or informal networks. I felt that scaffolding was an appropriate word to capture the overall pattern and purpose of these interrelated activities. A scaffold, in its literal sense, refers to “a temporary structures used to support a work crew and materials to aid in the construction, maintenance and repair of buildings bridges and all other man-made structures” (Wikipedia). These informal or formal networks developed by FF could serve as the base of mobilization when a movement arises. Their purpose was to support a movement and they were temporary support because formal movement organizations would develop from these movement-relevant organizations, just as major American civil rights organizations in the 1950s were developed out of the infrastructure of black churches and black student associations. I then clustered these codes under a category I called “FF scaffolding activities”.

Similar to this process, I developed another category that described FF’s activities that I called “FF brokering activities”. This category incorporated several codes related with how FF transferred human rights concepts and practices from Western contexts, or world society, to China. World society refers to the transnational space that is constituted of a world cultural account and its associational processes; human rights are central values in world society (Meyer, Boli, Thomas, & Ramirez, 1997). Examples of FF brokering activities include: “Training scholars in Western universities for technical knowledge”,

...
“Encouraging scholars to research and translate Western human rights research”,
“Sponsoring local elites to implement rights-based practices in pilot projects”, and
“Bringing Western NGOs to transfer civil society know-how”.

The above two categories described FF’s strategic activities. I also developed categories
that depicted the context. One category described various institutional contradictions that
emerged during China’s reform processes; the other showed how elites sought external
help to address these problems. A few other categories described expected characteristics
of China as a movement-inhibiting context: elites fear of Western influence, the
suppression of social dissent, tightening social control, government roadblocks for
change, monitoring foreign NGOs and their grantees, among others.

Having developed a structured understanding of FF’s activities and their contexts, I then
attempted to identify a theoretical framework that could best capture and explain this
empirical pattern. The initial attempt was to adopt the framework of institutional
entrepreneurship, but after discussing with other researchers, I realized it was not the best
fit. Institutional entrepreneurship research is largely an approach featuring one heroic
actor (or a small group of such actors) who transforms an institution. The main thrust of
FF’s activities in China was about developing other actors who had the potential of
changing institutions, rather than directly instigating change in the frontline. This is a
subtle, but significant, difference from the institutional entrepreneurship approach. After
much debate, I identified the social movement perspective as an appropriate lens for
looking into FF’s activities in China because this perspective is interested in
understanding political opportunities and the process of mobilizing other actors; it is also
interested in the tension between elites and grassroots in movement mobilization. Such
theoretical foci fit my data.

Once I decided on the theoretical framework, I intensified my iteration between theory
and data, trying hard to understand “what this is a case about”. I arrived at the conclusion
that FF’s actions can best be captured as “creating a pre-movement”. Although FF
engaged in mobilizing Chinese actors, its purpose was not to instigate a typical social
movement, defined as sustained campaigns of claims-making using mass mobilization
and disruptive tactics (Snow et al., 2004; Tilly, 2004). FF’s activities focused on developing selective groups of Chinese actors, brokering human rights meanings and knowledge to them, and linking them into networks. These activities did not constitute mass mobilization and were not obviously disruptive; however, they were subversive in nature. Through these activities divergent meanings and knowledge were transferred to China that raised consciousness, and they built loose networks that could provide members, leaders and communication structures for possible bigger mobilization. In accordance with existing theory, these activities built up the potentiality of mass mobilization. Consequently, I wove my categories into a process model that explains how a pre-movement is created.

In Chapters 4-6, I will present three historical accounts, describing how FF rolled out this pre-movement in China in its three strategic Phases. In each account, I focus on delivering a rich and credible narrative structured by distinct types of FF actions. At the end of each chapter, however, I summarize the actions and foreshadow my theoretical categories — the brokering process and the scaffolding process that ran through these actions. In Chapter 7, I follow exemplary practices in qualitative research to offer a second-order analysis (Balogun & Johnson, 2004; Rerup & Feldman, 2011); I systemically unpack the narratives in Chapters 4-6 to reveal the intertwined brokering process and scaffolding process, as well as institutional contradictions and FF’s strategic responses to these contradictions.
Chapter 4  FF IN CHINA: DEVELOPING CHINESE SCHOLARS (1975-1988)

4.1 The Context

The People’s Republic of China (hereafter China) was isolated from the West before 1976. Shortly after Mao’s death in 1976, a new leadership ascended to power and announced a new policy of economic reform. For this purpose, Chinese elites started to solicit western governments and institutions for technical assistance. The United States was a major target of Chinese solicitations. In the middle of the Cold War, the U.S. was motivated to influence China. After establishing diplomatic ties in January 1979, the two countries began to carry out academic exchange programs. In 1980, the signing of a series of Sino-U.S. agreements and America’s granting of Most Favored Nations (MFN) status to China further facilitated these exchange programs.

China as a Highly Repressive Regime

China, in the 1970s, was extremely authoritarian with the government controlling every aspect of citizens’ lives. The rural population was organized into communes with land and key properties controlled by the communes. Urban residents worked in “work units” such as large factories, educational institutions, or government agencies that provide them life-time employment and social welfare, but meanwhile prohibited work mobility. These arrangements made farmers and workers highly dependent on their communes or work units for basic livelihoods. The Chinese Communist Party, with party units established in every commune and work unit, sat on a dense nationwide network to influence, control, and monitor citizens down to the grassroots level. The household registration system (hukou\textsuperscript{11}) further enhanced the control; it assigned citizens to urban or rural status which gave them drastically different access to social welfare and also tied the provision of the social welfare to the registration locality. This system significantly

\textsuperscript{11} In this and other places, I added the pinyin romanization (bracketed and in italics) of some Chinese terminologies after their English translations.
restricted citizens’ social or physical mobility. One FF officer, after visiting China, was shocked at the degree of social control in China:

Coming from our society, where we put such a premium on individual discretion in making choices, it is sobering to confront a situation where the individual's overall life choices are so heavily influenced by the country's needs, such as, being told by the commune or the factory where to go, what to train for, even in work assignments, place of residence, and permission to marry. (FF Staff Newsletter, 1980)

In addition to social and economic control, the government also imposed sweeping ideological control over its citizenry, by isolating Chinese people from the Western world and blocking access to information from the West. The Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), in attempting to impose Maoist thought as the dominant ideology and to purge any Western and Chinese traditional influences, persecuted millions of people (many of them being academics). When the Cultural Revolution ended in 1976, the Chinese, even those at the high-level, were deeply ignorant about Western ideas and practices. After a trip to China, one FF officer observed: “(China) is ideological and self-centred in the extreme – to the point of woeful indifference and ignorance about the outside world…” (FF Memo, Finkelstein, 1975). One of his colleagues’ experiences resonated with his. When this colleague visited China in 1979 with a small group of American legal experts specializing in human rights, their Chinese host proudly gave them tours of prisons to showcase the socialist legal system:

It was interesting in Bolge (?) to see extensive prison industries in which the inmates were involved in the manufacture of goods that were sold commercially under labels -- socks and shoes, for example. In the prison in Shanghai they were making men's suits (with proceeds going to the government). The work was very well organized and along with recreation and educational classes there was no idle time for anybody...We were told that the prisons were peaceful and that there was no problem of inmate homosexuality or any of the other tensions that plague American prison communities. (FF Staff Newsletter, 1980).

The low awareness of human rights concepts and practices was also reflected in other spheres of Chinese socio-political life. For example, the Chinese legal professionals had no concept of “presumption of innocence” in the criminal trial procedure. Even scholars in top social science research institutes had only limited understanding of capitalism and U.S. democracy (FF Staff Newsletter, 1980).
The elite-initiated economic reform initially excited Westerners about the possibility of opening up the Chinese society, but it soon became clear that Chinese elites only intended to engage in economic reform while upholding the Communist authoritarian rule. The elite-initiated reform was not meant to change China’s basic characteristic as a “firmly hierarchical and authoritarian society” (FF Memo, Bresnan, 1980). Rather, China was meant to remain an elite-controlled society where “one hundred rule one billion” (FF Discussion Paper, 1983).

**Institutional Contradiction: Economic Development vs. Low Technical Capacity**

Elites’ decision to undertake economic reform engendered a major institutional contradiction, that is, the mismatch between the sweeping goal of modernizing China and the country’s low technical capability in undertaking this endeavor.

China had a thin pool of science and engineering talents, and it also lagged far behind in social sciences. In the late 1970s, there were about 600 lawyers in China, and no capacities to train new lawyers because of the decade-long disruption of the Cultural Revolution. FF noted that “there is a tremendous sense of urgency to build legal resources, but facilities are poor, personnel are scarce, and libraries at these places are almost nonexistent … only a very small portion of the profession is practicing law in the sense that we have practicing attorneys here (in the U.S.)...But the legal profession has the potential for increased recognition because of the key role it may play in moving China in the direction the country now wants to take” (FF Staff Newsletter, 1980).

China needed economists in order to carry out its economic reform. Chinese economists, trained and practiced in the Communist economic ideology, were not useful in helping elites experiment with market economy. Bemoaning Chinese economists’ limited knowledge of other countries’ economic strategies, an FF officer commented: “For China to have so little in the way of wider experience, in a policy arena in which such large-scale experimentation is underway and projected, appears risky at best” (Grant File 8090352, RGA 1980).
In the 1970s, China was largely a rural country, however, by the end of the Cultural Revolution, China had merely 500 members in the Chinese Association of Agricultural Economists, most of whom had little post-graduate training (FF Memo, Germain, 1980). One Canadian economist who visited China in 1979 commented that agricultural economists in China “are a dispirited lot presently doing work of pitifully low quality” (FF Memo, Hardin, 1979).

In a letter to Franklin Thomas, then president of FF, Edson Spencer, then Honeywell CEO/Chair, had the same observation about how the Chinese were confronting a drastic mismatch of their tasks and capabilities:

*There is a great lack of experience, training, and ability to develop proper economic plans. The lack of systems feasibility studies on the impact of ... projects like Baoshan have led to their cancellation or delay...It will be a monumental task. The government ministries are having trouble determining how to properly use credits already or about to be available. There is also a woeful lack of capability in industrial management.* (Grant File 8090352, Correspondence, 1981)

**Elites Sought External Help**

Many elites who ascended to power after Mao’s death had experienced arbitrary persecutions during the Cultural Revolution. They wanted to introduce laws to prevent similar abuse of power by party members. They also wanted to improve the living standards of Chinese people, having experienced the tragedy of the Great Famine (1958-1961) in which inappropriate government policies led to millions starving to death (Yang, 1996). An FF executive documented his observation of elites’ desire to modernize China:

*First, we saw and heard strong evidence, in four widely separated parts of China, of the widespread Chinese desire to reverse their isolation of the past thirty years, to catch up with modern science and technology, to decentralize and loosen up their rigid planning and control system, to introduce more incentives and market forces in their economy and more democracy in their political and legal system. It is not clear how far and how fast changes in these directions will proceed. There will undoubtedly be difficulties and setbacks. But there is no doubt of the seriousness with which the changes are being attempted, nor the depth of the underlying conviction that major modifications are needed in their past course.* (FF Memo, Bell, 1979)

Elites wanted to change, but such change was not intended to relax the Communist Party’s control on the China society. Elites wanted to promote economic development
and introduce basic rule of law to regulate the society. They were well aware of the capability gap and for that reason wanted to learn from Western countries in science and technology. Examples were numerous; for instance, when a FF consultant met with a Chinese official, the latter expressed his eagerness to learn from the U.S.:

_We want to borrow, and adapt to China, the most useful elements of the management systems of America, Japan, and Yugoslavia... We want to foster exchanges in which foreign experts visit here and we send observers and students abroad. We see a need for new departments in our universities, new programs for training management teachers; also short courses for people in industry and new institutes for the collection of information abroad and for research on management in China._ (FF Memo, Robinson, 1979)

### 4.2 Developing Chinese Scholars

**Evaluating and Debating the China Opportunity**

FF, having earlier supported China studies in American universities, took a keen interest when China opened up to the Western world. FF Asia expert visited China in 1975. Upon returning, he circulated a memo to his colleagues suggesting that China, when expanding its involvement in world affairs, “had to confront a number of new situations” and needed help in “broaden(ing) its perspectives” (FF Memo, Finkelstein, 1975). In a memo titled “China”, an FF executive exclaimed that the West was faced with “a historical opportunity to contribute to the improvement of welfare in a country that accounts for a quarter of the human race, and to facilitate its integration into the comity of nations” (FF Memo, Bresnan, 1978). FF, as a social change organization, was excited about the historical opportunity of influencing a giant country like China. This sentiment reflected that of liberal Americans, as the Honeywell CEO who visited China also commented: “I start with the assumption that it is in the interest of the democratic world to have the PRC government’s present economic program succeed. The alternative could well be a return to a reactionary, anti-western, anti-modernization philosophy” (Grant File 8090352, Correspondence, 1981).

After some research, FF identified where it could play a constructive role. Despite the quick acceleration of academic exchanges between China and the West, physical science and technology exchange dominated, with social sciences and humanities exchange being
marginalized. Chinese elites wanted “prescriptions, recipes and direct transfers” of knowledge and programs, rather than a “slow, difficult process of acquiring understanding and their own updated analytical capacity” (FF Memo, Hardin, 1979). The reality jarred with FF’s strong feeling that the Chinese “needed to know more than they did about the world outside” (FF Memo, Sutton, 1985). FF had always believed that social sciences were critical in expanding visions and in changing societies. The great fear was that China would only learn from the West the natural sciences and practical technologies, and learn the social sciences only at a superficial level. As one FF internal document expressed:

*A pessimistic view would have China learning about computers and statistical analysis and little else – more or less on the pattern of the Soviet Union. This moment, therefore, is a crucial one for Chinese social science. If exchanges build momentum and are seen to be paying off in various ways, the consequences will be profound.”* (FF Memo, Germain, 1980)

While the political opportunity for natural science exchange was ripe and ready, “the prospect for exchange in the Social Sciences and Humanity...still require(s) patient and sensitive attention” (FF Memo, Germain, 1980). FF, after an internal debate, decided to take up this challenge. It wanted to nudge China toward the direction FF had envisioned for it: a nation that is modernized not only in economy but also in mind, embracing universal values of human rights and democracy.

**Identifying a Chinese Partner**

In 1979 and 1980, FF sent to China three delegations of executives and issue experts to chart a roadmap of entering China. On one trip, FF executives identified an ideal partner, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (hereafter CASS). CASS, China’s leading social science research platform, with a conglomeration of research institutions, was just resurrected after the Cultural Revolution. It welcomed the support of FF, a prestigious American foundation with extensive ties to the worlds’ elite academic institutions.

FF saw CASS as an ideal partner because CASS was a boundary-spanner, not part of the ruling elites but connected to them:
The Academy is a place of considerable potential influence, since it is being used as a policy analysis group for the top government agencies. It has strong and pragmatic leadership...They are well connected to the top leadership of the government. At the same time, the Academy is a step removed from the bureaucracy and has more freedom to explore new ideas and policy alternatives.” (FF Information Paper, 1979)

CASS wanted to improve its competence in economics (including agricultural economics), law, and international relations. These priorities were aligned with FF’s vision for China, as explained in the earlier section. FF soon entered into a partnership with CASS; in the following years, FF helped CASS to train its scholars in these three areas. FF also gradually expanded its reach to the economics, law, and international relations faculties of leading Chinese universities, as well as research institutions in the three subject areas. A New York-based FF staff managed these programs. FF placed an American agricultural economist as a visiting research fellow at CAS; this research fellow helped FF New York staff interpret developments in China, weave together an informal network in China, plan grant activities, and facilitate implementations.

In developing economists, lawyers and international relations scholars, FF took a few notable approaches, as elaborated below.

**Mobilizing Western Scholars to Develop Their Chinese Counterparts**

FF mobilized American scholars to organize the training of Chinese scholars. For the economics exchange program, FF engaged an American NGO — Committee on Scholarly Communications with PRC (hereinafter CSC). From 1980 to 1990, FF gave nearly one million U.S. dollars to CSC for it to carry out the exchange program with Chinese scholars.

In the area of law, in 1983, FF, along with another American foundation, helped found the Committee on Legal Education Exchange with China (CLEEC), an organization housed at Columbia University and led by a Columbia law professor, R. Randle Edwards, an American expert on the law of China. Other key organizers included a law professor from UCLA and one from Harvard Law School. All three had visited China as FF consultants in 1982 to explore the legal education landscape in China. CLEEC, as a temporary organization, had the clearly defined goal of “enhanc(ing) the Chinese law
teachers’ familiarity with and understanding of U.S. and international law” (Grant File 8300666, Grantee proposal 1988). From 1983 to 1992, FF gave grants amounting to over 3 million U.S. dollars to CLEEC.

In international relations, in 1984, as “one of several highly focused American responses to the Chinese Open Door (kaifang) policy”, FF helped establish the Committee on International Relations Studies with the PRC (CIRS) (Grant File 8400812, Grantee proposal 1987). Professor Robert A. Scalapino, an eminent American political scientist particularly involved in East Asia studies, chaired this institution dedicated to mobilizing American resources to help Chinese scholarly development.12 CIRS’s specific role was to develop programs to strengthen China’s international relations scholars and academic institutions. From 1984 to 1992, FF issued grants to CIRS exceeding 2 million U.S. dollars.

In addition to mobilizing these influential American scholars and academic institutions to help China, FF also engaged Western scholars who were either of Chinese origin or were mandarin speakers.

**Exposing Chinese Scholars to Western Knowledge**

The initial exchange programs were carried out by FF (through self-administered programs) and its designated Western grantees (CSC, CLEEC, CIRS). These programs included study tours, short-term exchange, and overseas degree programs that brought the Chinese to the West, as well as short-term lectures that brought Western scholars to China to lecture on Western concepts and knowledge. For example, CIRS in the late 1980s, sponsored study tours for delegations from two leading Chinese research institutes in international relations. CIRS also sponsored a lecture series by American professors at

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Peking University and Fudan University, two prestigious universities in China (Grant File 8400812, Grantee proposal 1990).

Similarly, CSC described how it hosted a prestigious delegation from the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS) in 1987:

The delegation was headed by Dr. Zhang Zhongli, President of the Academy, and included the directors or deputy directors of the Academy's institutes of world economy, law, philosophy and foreign affairs plus the deputy editor-in-chief of the World Economic Herald, a leading economics weekly, affiliated with the Academy. During their three weeks in the United States, the group visited universities, think tanks, the Congress, newspapers, museums and exchange committees in seven U.S. cities. They were able to discuss specific opportunities for collaborative research and other joint activities with American scholars, to survey the state of their disciplines in the United States, and to brief their hosts on education and research in China. (Grant File 8200736)

Compared with short-term visits that exposed a large group of Chinese scholars to Western concepts and practices in a compact time frame, longer-term overseas studies functioned differently. Such programs focused on the depth of learning and were aimed to develop a critical mass of Chinese scholars well versed in Western knowledge. One example is the FF-funded program at the Oxford University to train young economists from Chinese research institutes. It was a customized 14-month non-degree program, “designed not only to strengthen and broaden their analytical skills, but also to give them an international comparative perspective on how complex economic policy issues are addressed and resolved in other countries” (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1989). Such a program was costly (in 7 years FF doled out 625,000 U.S. dollars, to train only 2-5 scholars in each of the 14-month rounds), but the full immersion program potentially facilitated a transformation of these Chinese scholars. The program contained not only economics theory and method courses, but also English language training, “special seminars in which specialists in various problems and countries expose the participants to a broader range of topical issues; visits to governmental agencies, research bodies and private firms and banks; and, in selected cases, internship with governmental and non-governmental institutions” (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1989). Grantee narratives detailed how these junior scholars experienced their “transformation”. For example, one candidate from China’s Systems Reform Institute, apparently challenged in English,
received such comments from his instructors: “He has shown interest and intelligence, but the amount of reading and writing has been very limited - I think basically because of the language problem. My approach has become more applied economics - which is where the interest seems to lie”. Some other candidates managed to overcome the language barrier to thrive. A candidate sent by CASS’s Institute of World Economics and Politics, Li Yong\(^{13}\), received appreciative comment from one professor:

“After a shaky beginning, he improved quite markedly, producing competent and, at times, rather good essays. He was alert in discussion and was usually able to reach the right conclusions very quickly….”. (Grant File 8700885, Grantee narrative, 1991)

Another professor noted:

“He is sharp, clever, hard working and a bit arrogant - a pleasure to teach! He is good at applying theory to reality - he thinks like an economist. At this rate of progress he could enter a graduate course in the university next year.” (Grant File 8700885, Grantee narrative, 1991)

While some of the scholars returned to China after the program, many others chose to stay in the U.K. or go to the U.S. to pursue a doctoral degree in economics, with or without the approval of the Chinese institutes that sent them to Oxford.

**Facilitating Lasting Relations Between Chinese and Western Scholars**

FF programs strived to help Chinese scholars and their Western counterparts to establish lasting relations. For example, FF’s law exchange programs paired Chinese visiting scholars with Western scholars with similar interests:

*Professor Cheng Tianquan (6-mth Visiting Scholar) returned to Shanghai after completing his six-month stay at Washington University. He worked closely with Professor William c. Jones on Qing legal questions. They had planned to continue their research efforts for several weeks in Shanghai in July and August 1989...Mr. Fang Liufang and Associate Professor Wang Liming, both of People’s University arrived in February 1989. Mr. Fang, in residence at Columbia university’ has been working with Professor Harvey Goldschmid on American corporate law. Mr. Wang works with*

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\(^{13}\) A pseudonym was used because the material cited here is of a sensitive nature. All other names cited from archives are real names.
professor Olin Browder, a property law specialist at the University of Michigan Law School. (Grant File 8300666, Grantee narrative, 1989)

CSC, FF grantee running an economics exchange program, organized a working group of Chinese and American economists as a vehicle for developing lasting relations between economists in both countries:

In 1979 CSC used FF general support grant to send a major delegation of US economists to China...the visit was the first of its kind. The group gained Chinese agreement to a joint conference on “Strategies of Economic Development”, and the establishment of a working group of Chinese and American economists to discuss plans for joint research. In 1980 the conference is to be held during a month-long visit by a group of senior Chinese economists from CASS and planning agencies and universities. The symposium will deal with topics as agricultural-industry balance, equity and growth, employment, foreign trade, planning in centralized vs. decentralized economies. Joint working group will meet to review the status of mutual knowledge and suggest avenues for develop. Try to meet annually. (Grant File 8000896, RGA 1981)

In November 1980, CSC organized the first meeting of the U.S.-China Economics Liaison Committee. Nineteen American and European scholars and 7 Chinese economists presented their papers at this meeting. This was the first U.S.-China bilateral symposium in social science held in the U.S. After the 4-day conference, the Chinese delegation visited economic research institutes, universities, private industries in DC, San Francisco, Houston, Chicago, Boston, New York, Princeton and Philadelphia, met American economists, and established scholarly communications. In 1981, the second meeting of the working group was held in Beijing.

Similar efforts at organizing scholar groups and conducting regular conferences were made in the law and international relation programs as well. CLEEC, the FF grantee in charge of its law exchange program, reported that it organized a five-day conference on international trade and investment in Wuhan (a city in mid-China) in 1985, with 15 American and Chinese law professors and lawyers presenting and discussing papers. CLEEC also co-sponsored two seminars on international law in Beijing in the same year, one at Peking University with 100 professors of international law from all over China in attendance, and the other at the College of Foreign Affairs, attended by a large number of China’s foreign service officers and international law scholars.
FF emphasized the importance of both formal and informal relations. It believed informal relations fostered trust and deep learning, constituting a conduit of communication that could last longer than formal relations. This philosophy was reflected in many of its exchange programs. For example, CLEECC organized an Economic and Civil Law conference in Hawaii to discuss China’s legal reform in May 29-June 2, 1989. The Chinese delegation was prestigious, led by Professor Jiang Ping, a leading legal scholar and President of a top university. The Vice Delegation Leader was Professor Dong Shizhong, Dean of the Fudan University’s Faculty of Law. The ten-member Chinese delegation also included officials from the Ministry of Justice and the State Education Commission. Their counterparts were 12 American professors from Ivy League universities. CLEECC reported that “discussions occurred in an atmosphere of openness and honesty; real intellectual exchange took place; and hopes were expressed by all participants for continued dialogue and cooperation” (Grant File 8300666, Grantee narrative 1988-89). CLEECC also detailed the activities designed to build informal, trusting relations with the Chinese delegation members:

*In addition to the Conference, CLEECC arranged some special activities for the Chinese participants. The University of California, Berkeley, arranged for those arriving from China to be met at the airport in San Francisco on Friday, May 26. Professor Robert C. Berring ... invited the group to dinner in San Francisco the night of their arrival. Upon arrival in Honolulu the following day, the group was met at the airport by Professor Edwards, who escorted the delegates to their hotel and took them to dinner. On Sunday, Professor Edwards and a law student from the University of Hawaii escorted the Chinese delegation on a tour of scenic spots on Oahu.* (Grant File 8300666, Grantee narrative, 1989)

In this way, through activities that fostered formal and informal relationship building, FF not only transferred economic, law, and international relations knowledge to China, it also helped Chinese scholars to link to their Western counterparts to broaden their vision and redefine their role as scholars and intellectuals. Ostensibly, FF’s actions in Phase 1 helped China to resolve the *institutional contradiction between economic development and low technical capacity*. However, FF actions also deliberately facilitated a deeper-level of learning that could transform mental models and identities. The effects of deeper-level of learning were not immediate but could be lasting. One suggestive evidence was
that in Phase 2, some FF-funded scholars and academic institutions became change agents to revise the authoritarian system from within.

4.3 Summary of FF Actions in Phase 1

The following table summarizes FF’s activity in Phase 1 along the *brokering process* and the *scaffolding process*. My intention is to foreshadow the theoretical aspect of the same story (which I will fully unpack in Chapter 7). These two processes, as will be shown in the next 2 chapters, ran through FF’s actions as persistent and intertwining patterns.

**Table 3  FF Activities in Phase 1**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FF Action</th>
<th>Developing scholars</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><em>Brokering-what</em></td>
<td>Technical knowledge (Western economics, law, international relations).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Brokering-how</em></td>
<td>1) Mobilizing Western scholars to develop their Chinese counterparts by organizing exchange programs, lectures, and conferences; 2) Exposing Chinese scholars to Western knowledge through study tours, academic exchange, overseas degree programs, and customized workshops.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scaffolding-what</em></td>
<td>A critical mass of Chinese economists, legal scholars, and international relations scholars; their institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Scaffolding-how</em></td>
<td>1) Enhancing the technical capacity of Chinese scholars to increase their status and influence; 2) Linking Chinese scholars to their Western counterparts through formal research relations; 3) Facilitating lasting relations between Chinese and Western scholars through informal interactions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

4.4 Narrowing Political Opportunities in Developing Scholars

FF was aware of the existence of hardliners inside the elites, and had anticipated the politicization of academic training programs from the beginning of its entry (FF Memo, Bresnan, 1981). The hardliners grew to be loud in the late 1980s. For example, in addition to the inevitable problem of “brain drain” (as in the case of the Oxford training program) that usually accompanied exchange programs, the State Education Commission “grew increasingly anxious about the extended time abroad required for Ph.D. studies..."
and the possibility that this would result in acculturation by overseas students to foreign standards and cultures and increasing reluctance to return to China”, or even became a source of opposition to the China regime (Grant File 8400812, Grantee proposal, 1990). For these and other reasons, in the late 1980s, the elites decided to reduce graduate study programs in the U.S. in sensitive subject areas. In the 1990s, with the narrowing political opportunities for scholarly exchange programs, and the opening up of other opportunities, FF gradually shifted its focus to supporting research projects that directly tackled policy issues. This shift started in 1988, when FF funded policy-relevant research projects by CASS including a research project on income distribution by CASS’s Institute of Economics, a second project on rural land issues and a third on natural resource pricing and national income accounting. FF also supported two high-profile research centres under China’s Cabinet-level State Council. Subsequently, FF entered the next strategic phase in which it started to influence China’s reform processes.

As FF’s relation with CASS strengthened, FF enlisted its help to apply for a special license from the State Council for opening a Beijing Office. FF received special permission and opened this office in 1988. Being on-the-ground allowed FF to monitor in close range the Chinese socio-political terrain and adapt its strategy accordingly.

5.1 The Context

The Student Democracy Movement and Its Failed Mobilization in 1989

Soon after the opening of FF Beijing office, a major event took place in the city. Abundant academic exchange programs, combined with wide access to translated copies of Western books and new curricula in universities, brought Western concepts of human rights and democracy to Chinese academia and university students. Idealistic embrace of these concepts was combined with growing discontent with China’s one-party rule, leading to a large-scale student protest on Beijing’s Tiananmen Square in 1989 that demanded political reform. During this dramatic event, students largely acted alone. They lacked networks to reach out to other social segments to mobilize sympathizers in society. Subsequent crackdown by elites was almost inevitable. The Tiananmen Square tragedy spoiled Chinese elites’ relationship with Western powers. The Sino-U.S. relationship was especially strained. In 1993, the Clinton administration linked the renewal of China’s Most Favored Nation trading status to human rights, demanding that China make progress in seven areas of human rights (ironically, China’s prison labor exports was one of the two primary areas that the U.S. deemed as human rights violation and demanded change).

Institutional Contradiction 1: Deepened Economic Reforms vs. Shallow Capability in Configuring Complex Market Economy

The Tiananmen Square tragedy did not prevent Chinese elites from carrying out their economic agenda. Economic development continued and received a boost in 1992 when
Deng Xiaoping called for the acceleration of market-oriented reforms. Guided by Deng’s ideas, Chinese elites pushed forward for more radical reforms of China’s economic structure including financial decentralization to give provinces more autonomy, the restructuring of state-owned enterprises, and various policies to encourage the growth of private enterprises. Therefore, after initial reform measures in the 1980s, in the 1990s, the economic reform touched upon the more complex issues of reconfiguring a large national economic system. Elites again were in search of help to tackle this unprecedented challenge.

**Institutional Contradiction 2: Plural Society vs. Top-Down Control**

The elites pushed for economic reform but refrained from major political reforms. This uneven approach engendered profound contradictions in the system. The economic reform created a business class and a middle class, but it also created disadvantaged groups including peasants who migrated to cities to find employment (hereafter migrant workers), and urban residents who lost jobs after the restructuring of state-owned enterprises. Social stratifications produced heterogeneous interests and values, resulting in dissenting voices in society. Without political reforms, the government continued to be top-down and authoritarian. It dealt with social dissents by tightening social control, as one FF report commented:

*Over the last two years, the Party has moved to tidy up what it sees as the messy and unruly aspects of the society... As a result, we have seen new curbs placed on newspapers and journals, social organizations, and a greater wariness of the role of foreign organizations in China and tougher approval processes for the receipt of foreign funding and for collaborative research with foreigners. (FF Discussion Paper, 1997)*

However, top-down control were oftentimes not effective in managing a plural society:

*While the Chinese Communist Party has...raised the country out of poverty through bold economic liberalization, those very reforms have rendered many of its traditional means of governing obsolete. Chinese society is no longer a homogeneous mass; on the contrary, Chinese are increasingly divided by differences in stature, wealth, lifestyle and belief. Ideology no longer binds or disciplines, but has become largely irrelevant. Private enterprise and job mobility have weakened – and in some cases, completely ended – individuals' dependency on the state. And though the power of the official bureaucracy remains great, citizens have begun to question authority and to demand the punishment of officials who have acted illegally. (Grant File 9300350, RGA 1997)*
The contradiction of using top-down control to govern a plural society was especially acute at the local level, where officials had to work with grassroots and induce grassroots cooperation day by day.

5.2 Helping Central Elites to Explore Complex Policy Issues

As mentioned in the earlier chapter, in the late 1980s FF had begun making modest-sized grants to support policy-oriented research projects. These actions were taken in response to the emerging contradiction between deepened economic reforms and China’s shallow capacity in configuring complex market economy (institutional contradiction 1), and marked a tentative “foray” into the “real issues” in China. Another change was that FF, in addition to supporting CASS’s research projects, started to fund projects by central government agencies. In 1989, FF grants supported the project of the State Council’s Leading Group for the Economic Development of Poor Areas, an inter-ministerial committee recently founded to expedite the development of poor areas. Economic reforms aggravated the inequality among different areas of China, making poverty an urgent policy issue. The Leading Group identified the low educational level of government officials in poor areas as a crucial impediment to development, and undertook an ambitious program to train tens of thousands of township and county officials in economic management skills and help them learn ways to strengthen the role of the markets in local development. After carrying out this program for two years, the Leading Group felt the need to improve its effectiveness. FF supported a re-assessment of the training needs by bringing in three consultants from other countries: an Indian expert in management training, an American scholar, and a World Bank staff member who had directed two Southeast Asian regional training centres.

FF also funded a series of projects by the Development Research Centre of the State Council, a high-profile advisory body that recommended policies to the State Council. FF supported the Centre to host an international conference on “China and the World in the Nineties” in 1988. The meeting “brought together a small group of distinguished international personages for private discussions with leading Chinese decision makers” (Grant File 8951227, RGA 1989). In addition to conference sessions, the visitors had
lengthy discussions with each of China’s (then) paramount leaders, Deng Xiaoping, Zhao Ziyang and Li Peng.

After the Tiananmen Square tragedy, FF decided to continue to support the Development Research Centre and funded two conferences that would bring researchers and policy makers together to discuss next stages of reforms. The FF officer explained why it was important to continue to support Chinese elites:

_The events of this past June have dramatically altered the international climate as well as domestic environment for China’s future development. Popular opinion in the West has swung from an unrealistically positive view of the reform process to an equally extreme negative view. Neither view adequately reflects the complexity of the situation. In these circumstances it is particularly important that knowledgeable outsiders have the opportunity to assess through direct discussion with their Chinese counterparts the impact of recent events on the prospects for China's development and the possibilities for specific reforms. It remains equally important for China's new generation of leaders to become familiar with their counterparts abroad as well as with global trends and their likely impact on China._ (Grant File 8951227, RGA 1989)

Like the 1988 meetings, in these two post-Tiananmen meetings, “the emphasis will be on informal, off-the record discussions based on briefing papers circulated in advance” (Grant File 8951227, RGA 1989).

More importantly, in Phase 2 FF began to identify and access high-level, large scale research projects that promised to directly impact China’s reform processes. These projects were “undertaken by a small selection of key universities, research centres and ministries, and in certain cases...by leading economists working with teams of economic advisers and researchers of their own choice” (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1992). In identifying these projects, FF relied on its scholar network established through the academic exchange programs in Phase 1. In Phase 2, CASS had buttressed its position as a top research institution and think tank providing analysis and policy advisory to central elites; many scholars funded by FF in Phase 1 directly took up policy-advisory positions in central government agencies. Two cases illustrate how scholar networks helped FF to get involved in research projects on key reform issues.

In 1992, FF funded two research projects, each coordinated by a leading economist with policy influence and involving a group of specialists from major research centres and
government institutions. One project was led by Zhou Xiaochuan (who became governor of China’s central bank in 2002 and was still incumbent as of the writing of the thesis) and involved 20 experts, most of whom from institutions FF had sponsored before. This project explored means to deepen China’s financial and tax reforms. As the FF Program Officer explained, this project was important for elites:

*The new reform policies have brought about a massive decline in the ratio of central government revenue to national income. As a result, provinces now have much more financial and economic leeway than before. While in some ways this is a positive trend, it also creates strains in centre-provincial relations and undermines the central government's capacity to invest properly in infrastructure, education and the environment.* (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1992)

To put together a comprehensive report on public finance that was appropriate for a “socialist market economy”, Zhou’s elite research squad would draw upon the experiences of other countries. Through multiple grants FF supported the team’s research trips to the U.S., the European Community, Brazil, Malaysia and Thailand.

Another project was led by Wu Jinglian, a prominent pro-reform economist in the Development Research Centre of the State Council. Wu put together a team of star Chinese economists from academia and government agencies to map out an integrated reform process taking into account pricing, financial reform, banking, foreign trade, enterprise ownership, and social security reform. The motivation of this comprehensive project also stemmed from the reform process:

*To date, China's reform process has been an ad hoc affair – what the Chinese themselves describe as “crossing the river by feeling for stones underfoot”. Some senior Chinese economists, especially those who favor a rapid transition to a market economy, are concerned about this ad hoc approach and want to undertake a more systematic analysis of current trends and future goals.* (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1992)

Like Zhou’s team, Wu’s team sought to access the world’s experience in economic systems by taking research trips to multiple countries (the U.S., Russian, Eastern European countries, Latin America), by consulting American and European economists, and by inviting American economists from top universities (University of Washington and Stanford University) to lecture to Wu’s team on key issues including trade, taxation and credit.
These two economic research projects helped elites to resolve the contradiction between deepened reforms and shallow capacity in configuring complex systems (institutional contradiction 1). FF also helped central elites to address the contradiction between plural society and top-down control (institutional contradiction 2). Through a 1-million U.S. dollar grant, FF supported the Department of Basic-Level Governance of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, to research and to conduct trial runs of participatory local governance reforms. New models included village direct election and the promotion of public hearing. FF was among the first to have captured the needs of central elites to improve its capacity in governing a plural society:

The elites knew that these problems must be resolved if China was to continue on a stable path of development. Hence the initiatives of local governance reform by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. FF was the first foreign donor funding the Ministry’s village self-governance program in 1992. The program in subsequent years “rocketed from almost complete obscurity both within and outside of China to become the most frequently cited example that democracy has begun to take root in China. (Grant File 9300350, RGA 1997)

In this project, FF linked young sociologists and political scientists (from institutes that benefited from FF-funded exchange programs in Phase 1) to assess the economic, social, and legal changes in Chinese countryside. This research aimed to inform the Ministry of Civil Affairs on fundamental shifts in state-citizen relationship and devise effective new governance practices accordingly. FF also helped the Ministry to engage academic experts from Western countries as program advisors. As the program deepened, FF strived to develop proto-institutions, frameworks and policy models that could be disseminated nationally. In 1997, it pushed for a system that would link counties in the self-governance pilot projects to one of six academic advisory teams, and each advisory team would submit to county leadership and local Ministry officials an annual report containing policy recommendations to improve governance. The six teams would share information and research once a year and also publish a master report to disseminate among relevant agencies.
5.3 Helping Local Elites to Experiment with Participatory Governance

In Phase 2, FF also discovered the opportunity space to work with local elites to address the *contradiction between plural society and top-down control* (*institutional contradiction* 2). Decentralization, an important element in the economic reform, empowered provincial governments. In the 1990s, local elites enjoyed higher financial autonomy and were sometimes more entrepreneurial than the central government, willing to conduct social experimentations to solve local problems. One salient local problem was the increasing challenge of inducing cooperation of local residents. Some local elites became aware of the inadequacy of top-down governance and began to take an interest in the participatory model of governance. In this political climate, FF entered Yunnan, a southwestern province with a large poverty-stricken population of ethnic minorities distributed in remote mountainous areas. Figure 3 shows where Yunnan is located.

*Figure 3 Map of China by Provinces*
With 2-million U.S. dollar support, FF worked with two government agencies in Yunnan: 1) the Provincial Forestry Bureau to introduce the Social Forestry model that emphasized ethnic communities’ rights to participate in sustainable development (the Social Forestry project, or SF); 2) the Provincial Leading Group for the Economic Development to alleviate rural poverty (the Yunnan Upland Management project, or YUM). Both projects also involved scholars from provincial academies.

**The Social Forestry (SF) Project**

In the 1990s, China’s forestry agencies encountered problems in implementing reforestation policies, which were imposed by the central government to address environmental degradation and soil erosion. Forestry agencies, however, ran into conflicts with villagers in implementing this policy. Villagers relied on forests for livelihood and were not cooperative in implementing a logging ban and reforestation programs. When forestry agencies attempted to impose reforestation targets and other environmental protection measures, villagers defied and some argued that they owned the right to manage the land (reform of communes in Phase 1 had assigned significant rights of land use to villagers). One FF document explained local Chinese elites’ dilemma in implementing environmental policies:

*In China, the authorities have had considerable difficulty in formulating a forestry strategy reconciling these different interests. Government land management agencies at all levels have expressed their concern about this problem and are discussing how best to address it, but admit that they understand little about many of the issues involved. (Grant File 9101104, RGA 1991)*

This conflict was grave in Yunnan where poor ethnic villages had long relied on a meager income from the forests. The double whammy of poverty and environmental degradation called for a solution that local forestry agencies found elusive with the traditional top-down governing approach.

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, FF began to want to address the various problems in Yunnan. FF believed that existing models in other countries could be transferred to Yunnan to address its problems. With smart policies and appropriate training of villagers, local elites could encourage land use habits to not only protect watersheds but also
generate income for villagers. In particular, FF felt the Social Forestry (SF) model that had been adopted in some Southeastern Asian countries might be suitable for Yunnan as well. The starting point of the SF model was to identify, through social science research and survey, how villagers interacted with the land. Then it required the collaboration of government agencies, researchers and peasant communities to “negotiate” and implement an appropriate model of land use. This model was thus a big departure from the top-down approach that Chinese elites were accustomed to.

FF began its Yunnan interventions by supporting a number of smaller projects on poverty and land management. FF brought two Thai experts to visit Yunnan and conduct a survey of village level forest management systems. The survey by Thai experts identified a range of factors that had limited villagers’ interests in planting and managing trees. These insights intrigued the Yunnan Provincial Forestry Bureau. With a grant from FF, the Bureau dispatched a group of people to visit SF programs in Thailand. Meanwhile, FF brought to Yunnan an American SF expert to give lectures and advice. In the next 6 years, with continued FF support, the Yunnan Provincial Forestry Bureau implemented the SF model with enthusiasm and the model was then spread to nearby provinces.

Yunnan Upland Management Project (YUM)

Poverty was another major problem in Yunnan. In parallel with the SF project, FF-engaged rural development specialist Dr. Nick Menzies (who later joined FF as a Program Officer) succeeded in persuading several other provincial agencies to form a consortium to alleviate the poverty of local minority groups:

Through participation in field trips to poor counties within the province, commissioning and distributing translations of review articles on rural development, and accompanying two key policymakers to social forestry and other projects in Thailand, Mr. Menzies has catalyzed the formation of a provincial consortium...to experiment with new approaches to agricultural research and development in upland areas. The consortium has elected to work under the administrative umbrella of the Office for the Yunnan Provincial Leading Group for the Economic Development of Poor Areas, with decision making vested in a management committee representing seven core institutions. The consortium has planned an ambitious program of training, research, and experimentation on upland management. (Grant File 8900256, RGA 1989)
These projects started by exposing local elites to Western concepts of rural development. In the initial phase, the YUM project sent selective researchers abroad to study rural development models in the U.S., the Philippines and Thailand. It also invited scholars from abroad to teach these models and to assist in pilot project design and implementations. FF engaged Winrock International, a longtime grantee of FF, to guide this 9-year project (1990-1999). Winrock was an American NGO with extensive expertise in empowering disadvantaged rural populations through economic development, and it was uniquely positioned to identify and invite Western issue experts to help Chinese actors. For example, in the first year, training sessions included a month-long course in rural survey techniques conducted by Professor Nancy Peluso of the University of California, Berkeley, and a two-week practicum in agroecosystem research conducted by researchers from the Southeast Asian University Agroecosystems Network, a FF grantee.

To summarize, in the SF project and the YUM project, FF provided practical Western methodologies to help government agencies to implement change. Although the project started as a response to elites’ call for help in addressing the contradiction between plural society and top-down control (institutional contradiction 2), FF’s ultimate goal was not simply to help elites, but also to influence them with rights-based philosophies undergirding these Western practices. FF explained its rationale as such:

*In sum, for the Foundation to have significant impact, work has to engage government agencies whether one is operating at a national or a local level. However, our work is geared towards making these agencies more responsive to the communities they serve and to listening to diverse voices, particularly those of the poor, the socially disadvantaged, and women…This also requires helping state agencies and social organizations develop dynamic interactions with the communities concerned to help think through needs as well as the means and partnerships to address them.* (FF Discussion Paper, 1997)

In implementing the SF and YUM projects, participating elites grew to be appreciative of Western methodologies that helped them resolve local problems. Both projects generated positive outcomes that enabled these methodologies to “scale up” to reach central government agencies.
5.4 Enabling Scholars to Catalyze Rights-related Concepts and Practices

In Phase 2, FF continued to develop scholars, but a new focus was to enable scholars to influence the reform process. This was done through various approaches. I use three examples to illustrate the FF strategic process.

Recruiting Overseas-Trained Economists to Found Semi-Independent “Think Tanks”

In the mid-1990s, China’s economy heated up and was under inflationary pressure. The policy debate also heated up regarding the next path China should take in economic reform. There were three radically different positions among elites: 1) halting further reforms to contain inflation; 2) accelerating reforms to complete the transition to a market economy which would control inflation; 3) rolling back reform measures to take back state control over the price and economy. FF felt that “independent and rigorous economic analysis can play a useful corrective role in this contentious debate” by “adding intellectual firepower” and by expanding the perspectives of policy makers with high-quality analysis (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1995). FF wanted to influence the debate so policy makers could incorporate the interests of plural social groups. One way for exerting influence was to provide high-quality socio-economic analyses that used Western economic frameworks to incorporate plural interests. To this end, FF’s economics exchange program was expanded to incorporate an initiative of promoting “plural voice” in economic policy making.

How to attract policy makers to analyses and policy recommendations based on Western economics theory? FF developed an innovative approach. As mentioned in the Phase 1 historical account, a fair percentage of young scholars FF helped to train had decided to stay overseas to pursue advanced degrees in Western universities. In Phase 2, a large body of Chinese economic analysts with advanced training was working outside China and was isolated from the reform effort in China. FF wanted to bring some of the brightest scholars back to China and enable them to play an influential advisory role in China’s reform process. For this goal, FF helped establish think tanks affiliated with
prestigious domestic institutions but funded by FF and independently managed by overseas returnees. Importantly, this move resonated with elites’ call for attracting overseas talents to meet the country’s increasing demand for such talents. For example, the State Education Commission and some Chinese universities had already designed special programs to attract overseas-trained Chinese scholars to go back to China for research and teaching.

The China Centre for Economic Research (CCER) of Peking University was one of FF-funded think tanks. Led by Dr. Lin Yifu (who was trained in the University of Chicago before returning to China), CCER recruited a small team of overseas-trained economists throughout the 1990s and grew to be an influential policy advisory institute. Before founding CCER, Dr. Lin worked for the Development Research Centre of the State Council and he brought to CCER his institutional ties and reputation among policy makers. Under his leadership, CCER established critical research and training relations with government policy groups in each of its chosen research areas. It also strengthened its strategic ties with its host, Peking University, offering advanced economic courses in the University’s economic and management colleges as well as to the graduate schools of CASS and the Research and Statistics Department of China’s central bank. The FF officer in charge of this program commented with pride that “for the first time in China, a critical mass of well-trained modern economists enjoying substantial autonomy work together in one place” (Grant File 8700885, RGA 1995).

In a similar model, in 1998, FF supported the establishment of the Centre for Chinese Agricultural Policy in Beijing, a think tank advising China’s agricultural policy makers. The Centre’s director and another senior researcher received their doctoral degrees from University of the Philippines Los Baños/International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), a renowned world society actor. IRRI was founded by FF, the Rockefeller Foundation and the Philippines government in 1960 to fight hunger, and the Institute subsequently gained international fame for its involvement in the Green Revolution movement that preempted famines in Asia. Other fellows received their degrees from universities in the U.K., U.S. and Canada.
The establishment of semi-independent think tanks appealed to Chinese elites’ desire of resolving the contradiction between deepened economic reforms and China’s shallow capacity in configuring complex market economy (institutional contradiction 1). In the same period FF took two additional measures to address the contradiction between plural society and top-down control (institutional contradiction 2), as described below.

Creating Legal Aid Centres Inside Elite Universities to Represent Grassroots Voices

In the 1990s, China was becoming a more plural and open society with grassroots starting to have a voice. But grassroots organization in China was weak and the authoritarian state’s default mode of top-down control repressed many grassroots grievances. Leveraging compassionate scholars was one way to give more voices to grassroots.

In Phase 2, FF expanded its law exchange program to include a “law-in-action” initiative. The initiative encouraged the use of law to protect the rights of disadvantaged groups. In Phase 1 FF had worked extensively with the law faculties in Chinese universities and introduced to these faculties the concept of public interest law. In Phase 2, FF leveraged such relations to encourage law scholars and their students to establish legal aid centres and provide pro bono legal services to disadvantaged social groups.

Under the “law-in-action” initiative, FF supported a national network of legal aid centres to provide legal counseling to disadvantaged populations, including China's first non-governmental legal aid organization—Wuhan University’s Centre for the Protection of the Rights of the Socially Disadvantaged, which in early 1990s brought hundreds of cases to court. As this model helped resolve the contradiction between plural society and top-down control (institutional contradiction 2), its usefulness was acknowledged by elites. Specifically, the Ministry of Justice approved the Wuhan centre as an innovative example and established its own ministerial legal aid centres in a similar model.

Theorizing About Human Rights

In Phase 2, FF-supported academic institutions gained more political stature and some were representing the more progressive voice in China’s political circle. FF leveraged these scholars to theorize about human rights concepts in China.
In Phase 1, the Chinese were ignorant of the notion of human rights. As the open-door process deepened, Chinese elites were exposed to this concept. As elites confronted international hostility after the Tiananmen Square crackdown and grappled with the reality that China was transforming into a plural society less amenable to top-down governance, they were pressured to reassess “the relationship between the individual, the collective and the state” (Grant File 9101031, RGA 1992).

One or two years after the Tiananmen Square tragedy, elites showed a willingness to discuss human rights questions. Elites’ loosening attitude might be due to an effort to amend their international image or to appease domestic dissents, or it might be out of a genuine desire to understand, and possibly incorporate, this Western concept in China’s policy making. No matter what the motives were, a relaxed political climate encouraged progressive scholars to open human rights research.

The Chinese tradition emphasized the authority of the state and had developed little understanding of rights. As such FF felt it was necessary to educate the Chinese about human rights from the basic ideas; it also trusted that human rights could be a powerful means of transforming Chinese legal and political discourses:

Like many other non-Western countries, China has no tradition of "rights" in the sense of spheres deemed off-limits to the state...internal reforms aimed at limiting the role of the state and broadening the scope for individual initiative, and external influences have introduced powerful new concepts into the political and legal discourse in China. Given this background, scholarly research on rights has a role to play in China that is more basic--and potentially more far-reaching—than might be the case in other countries where a broad consensus already exists about the appropriate allocation of authority between the individual, the collective and the state. (Grant File 9101031, RGA 1992).

Under this backdrop, FF supported a large-scale research project of CASS’s Institute of Law, which was by then China’s premier legal research body. The Institute had regular access to policy makers. For example, the Institute provided internal reports on law and rights-related issues to the State Council, the courts, the procuratorates and the Communist Party offices (Grant File 9101031, RGA 1991).

FF supported the CASS research team to visit the U.S., Canada and several European countries. Scholars visited a variety of academic centres, NGOs and government agencies
to understand human rights theories and practices. These trips helped this group of scholars to establish contacts with their counterparts in Western countries and opened doors for continued communications. For instance, several European institutions invited the CASS Institute of Law to send them a scholar for further study of human rights; other European institutions, intrigued by China’s interest in human rights, soon paid visits to CASS. CASS also invited Western experts on human rights to lecture. By 1992, the CASS Institute of Law had purchased 1000 copies of human rights books to set up a human rights data centre, translated a series of foreign works on human rights, and had published a series of papers and books on human rights. These efforts constituted a major foray that explicitly and systemically introduced human rights concepts to China.

5.5 Enabling GONGOts to Transition to New Roles

During the reform process, the government cut off or significantly reduced the funding of many Government-owned NGOs (GONGOts). GONGOts were established around the 1980s to represent the voices and interests of various constituencies such as workers and women. In reality, however, government-funded GONGOts had functioned as extended arms of the government rather than as true advocates of grassroots voices. After the defunding, a few entrepreneurial GONGOts were actively looking out for new “businesses”. Among them was the China Family Planning Association (CFPA).

CFPA was founded in 1980 as the only broad-based NGO working at the grassroots level on reproductive health in China. Its first ten years were financed by the government and staffed with retired government officials. In the late 1980s, CFPA began to search for new issues and new operation models. CFPA was not a primary provider of clinical health service like the Planned Parenthood in the U.S. (such services were organized by two Chinese government agencies). It therefore tried to fill some of the gaps in government services by identifying niche issues through which it could mobilize a loose network of thousands of local Family Planning Associations (FPAs) distributed throughout China. One of these issues was poor women’s livelihood. CFPA received significant grassroots enthusiasm for its poverty-relief projects, but the scope did not grow to be influential enough to energize its national grassroots network.
FF identified CFPA as an appropriate candidate for promoting the concept of reproductive health and rights. The concept was elaborated in the 1995 United Nations World Women’s Conference in Beijing. This event created a political window for pushing this concept to revise China’s top-down family planning regime. The FF officer, Dr. Mary Ann Burris, spent time to discuss a pilot project promoting reproductive health in the poor Yunnan province where FF already had a footing and where CFPA was relatively weak but wanted to enter. Burris was persuasive. In a letter to FF’s then Beijing representative seeking a FF grant, CFPA’s Secretary General made the following statement:

After a considerably long time of discussion and identification, we found that to start a project on reproductive health education now in China is especially essential. It is not only beneficial to the health of the women and children, but also to the improvement of their social status. China is a country with 1.1 billion population, almost half of whom are women. The women, especially those at reproductive age in the rural or remote areas, need badly knowledge on MCH (mother-child health), reproductive health, sex and family planning. On the other hand, CFPA is capable to implement such a project if it could get the necessary cooperation and assistance from such international agencies as the Ford Foundation... We are very confident that, through some pilot trials, the experience gained can be used in most of our vast rural areas including such remote areas as Yunnan. (Grant File 9200745, Letter from Qiu Shuhua to Peter Harris, 1991)

FF subsequently started its ten-year financial and technical support to CFPA (1992-2002, $827,000). FF, meanwhile, issued several additional grants in support of the CFPA projects: 1) a grant to Beijing Medical University’s School of Public Health to support a group of medical experts to advise the Yunnan reproductive health project, including assessing the needs and identifying the pilot sites; 2) a grant to Western Consortium, an international advisory body comprised of public health experts from America’s top universities, headed by Dr. Virginia Li, a professor at the University of California at Berkeley with Chinese origin; 3) FF supported another GONGO, All-China Women’s Federation, to organize a national competition on reproductive health, in order to identify deeper local issues and also to enable the Federation to establish its leadership position in women’s research.

In the following years, CFPA carried out waved pilot projects, first in Yunnan and then in other provinces. It disseminated the concept and knowledge of reproductive health down
to the county level and provided sexual health counseling, which was a “glaring omission” in China’s family planning work. Through this cooperation, CFPA “emerged as a technically innovative and independent organization with a huge potential...served as a catalyst for change in a number of important and sensitive areas” (Grant File 9200745, RGA 1999). CFPA’s change was manifest in several aspects. First, its commitment to rights-based practices had escalated over time; CFPA grew to be a champion of the rights- and choice-oriented approach in family planning, extending its mission to include “democratic participation and supervision” program which served as a conduit for complaints about local family planning officials’ inappropriate practices including the use of coercion. Second, CFPA transitioned from a semi-government agency to a representative of grassroots constituencies (i.e., reproductive-age women in China, especially poor rural women). As an NGO, CFPA mobilized its wide-ranging network of one million branches (with a proclaimed 80 million members) down to every village and neighborhood in China, constituting a major force of change. Third, as a boundary-spanner between the government and the grassroots, CFPA was able to promote politically and culturally sensitive concepts in China without repression. Surveys suggested CFPA had been effective in spreading the concept of reproductive health at the grassroots levels; for instance, in a survey CFPA conducted after public educational counseling by the Hebei Provincial FPA, 67% of respondents said they obtained the basic knowledge of reproductive health and 31% reported they had put forward suggestions or opinions to the Family Planning agency of their local government.

The National Population and Family Planning Commission, the government agency in charge of China’s population policy, later initiated its effort of system-wide reform (with some involvement of FF) and it was arguably because CFPA had laid the initial groundwork.

5.6 Summary of FF Actions in Phase 2

In Phase 2, FF enacted four types of actions. The following table summarizes these actions and linked elements of these actions to the brokering process and the scaffolding process.
Table 4 FF Actions in Phase 2

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FF Action 1</th>
<th>Helping Central Elites to Explore Complex Policy Issues</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-what</strong></td>
<td>Western economic policies (rural and urban land use, market pricing, monetary and fiscal policy, etc.); Western practice of democratic governance.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-how</strong></td>
<td>1) Funding overseas research trips; 2) Meetings and conferences involving Western counterparts; 3) Bringing in Western consultants; 4) Pilot projects that explored Western practices’ applicability to China.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding-what</strong></td>
<td>Policy advisors and policy makers in central government agencies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding-how</strong></td>
<td>1) Facilitating informal, off-the-record discussions between Chinese and Western elites at specialized conferences to foster mutual understanding and establish more trusting relations; 2) Supporting reformist policy advisors to conduct high-quality research that would strengthen their voice in policy debates; 3) Supporting ministerial agencies to test models of democratic governance to increase their commitment for change.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FF Action 2</th>
<th>Helping Local Elites to Implement Participatory Governance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-what</strong></td>
<td>Rights-based practices (Social Forestry, Participatory Upland Management) and related expertise (rural survey, ecosystem research, etc.).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-how</strong></td>
<td>1) Bringing in Western consultants; 2) Funding overseas research trips; 3) Engaging specialized Western NGOs to guide the project; 4) Inviting Western scholars to train Chinese researchers and to assist project design.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding-what</strong></td>
<td>Provincial government agencies in charge of forestry and poverty alleviation; scholars in provincial academies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scaffolding-how</strong></td>
<td>1) Training scholars in practical techniques of conducting field projects; 2) Co-opting provincial agencies that were willing to experiment with rights-related practices.</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FF Action 3</th>
<th>Enabling Scholars to Catalyze Rights-Related Concepts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-what</strong></td>
<td>1) “Rigorous economic analysis” using Western methodology to incorporate plural interests; 2) The Western model of University legal aid centres; 3) Human rights concept and theories.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering-how</strong></td>
<td>1) Bringing back overseas-trained Chinese scholars to conduct rigorous economics research; 2) Establishing legal aid centres in Chinese universities that carried out the Western model of legal aid to vulnerable social groups; 3) Supporting Chinese scholars to bring human rights theories to China through overseas trips, translations, research and publications; 4) Inviting Western experts to lecture on human rights theories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Scaffolding-what

Scholars and their institutes that were willing to act as change catalysts.

### Scaffolding-how

1) Founding semi-independent think tanks that had status, connection and caliber to influence policy makers;
2) Founding University legal aid centres that protected the legal rights of vulnerable groups;
3) Supporting scholars and their institutes to make a mark with leading-edge human rights research.

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### FF Action 4  Enabling GONGOs to Transition to New Roles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Brokering-what</th>
<th>Rights-based concepts and practices (such as, reproductive health and rights).</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Brokering-how</td>
<td>1) Bringing in Western consultants;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Bringing in medical experts from Beijing to guide local field projects;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Conducting a national competition on reproductive health to raise interest and consciousness, which invited Western scholars as judges.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding-what</td>
<td>GONGOs looking to transition (China Family Planning Association, All-China Women’s Federation).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scaffolding-how</td>
<td>1) Improving GONGOs’ issue research capacity;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2) Enabling GONGOs to be issue leaders;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>3) Encouraging GONGOs to continually push the issue envelope.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.1 The Context

In this Phase, the earlier economic reform measures paid off and generated double-digit annual growth in China. The country’s economic transformation gave birth to new types of institutional contradictions that concerned Chinese elites.

Institutional Contradiction 1: Authoritarianism vs. Elite Legitimacy

The Chinese economy had become deeply interdependent with the rest of the world since its entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 2001. China wanted to be regarded as a cooperative and respectable member in the international community so as to preserve a favorable trading environment. To show its compliance with world society values, China joined international organizations and also signed a series of international treaties, including the signing of the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights on 1998.\(^\text{14}\) China also hosted international conferences and forums promoting rights-related concepts and practices. For example, in 2004 China’s ministry in charge of its population policy (i.e., National Population and Family Planning Commission) organized an international forum to celebrate the 10\(^{th}\) anniversary of the International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) held in Cairo in 1994, which marked the first time a rights-based approach to population policy was established in the international community.

Despite these aspirations, China’s human rights record was tainted; it was generally regarded as a source of “anxiety” by the international human rights system. Chinese elites had to grapple with the “deep tensions between China’s traditional statist conception of sovereignty and its efforts to be regarded as a benign and responsible global power” (Sceat & Breslin, 2012). This tension was not only present in the international arena, it

also spilled over to domestic domains because Chinese citizens were increasingly aware of Western values of human rights and democracy and would evaluate their government with these international benchmarks. Thus, Chinese elites faced eroding legitimacy both internationally and domestically.

To alleviate the contradiction between authoritarianism and the need to be viewed as a legitimate regime, Chinese elites symbolically adopted human rights concepts and practices in various domains. Rights-related concepts, such as the rule of law, social justice, equality and transparency were incorporated into government policies to varied degrees. The implementation, however, tended to be superficial. A typical example was the phenomenon of “rights on the book”. By 2000s, China had established laws protecting the rights of women, children and the disabled and its criminal procedure protected defendants’ rights in trial processes. Nonetheless, courts, being dependent on the government, often “shut the courthouse door to sensitive cases or unpopular and powerless litigants” (FF Memo, Law, Belkin, 2008). Similarly, although the government made efforts to be transparent and “service-oriented”, significant gaps persisted between rhetoric and actions, as an FF officer noted:

For all the rhetoric in recent years about openness of information on governmental affairs and despite experiments with approaches like public hearings and press conferences, few institutionalized norms or procedures yet exist for ensuring that openness. (FF Memo, Governance, Hartford, 2007a)

This officer also pointed out that as of 2007, the practice of direct elections, initiated in early 1980s in villages of Southern China, remained confined to the lowest administrative level of villages without a prospect to scale up.

Yet another example was superficial treatment of inequality. In Phase 3, deepened inequality led to social unrests across China. As the FF Beijing Representative observed, “[t]he fact that social disturbances have increased dramatically in the past 10 years (reaching some 87,000 protests in 2005) has led to a strong focus on maintaining stability” (FF Discussion Paper, 2007). As a result, the government announced grand programs to combat inequality, such as the “Harmonious Society” movement that
intended to “harmonize” the relations of different social groups. Yet in reality, the government often used such rhetoric to shut off dissent, as one FF officer explained:

_While the leadership's call for building a "harmonious society" was previously taken to emphasize the need to redress widening inequalities resulting from the unfettering of market forces, it is now often encountered as a call for the dampening of debate or protest... Some local whistle-blowers have suffered severe legal repercussions. Our grantees have been feeling the pressures in a variety of ways, including visits from state security agents, denial of permission to hold some public meetings, and more complicated requirements for approval from higher level authorities before they can formally apply for grants from us or other foreign donors._ (FF Memo, Governance, Hartford, 2007b)

Elite legitimacy was further strained by the country’s authoritarian cultural tradition. One example was the stigma on AIDS. Although the central government acknowledged the existence of AIDS in China in the early 2000s, local elites continued to deny the existence of AIDS in fear that their regions would lose business and tourism. Surveys indicated that many senior party members believed AIDS was a consequence of immoral behaviour. As an FF officer lamented:

*Despite legal protection against discrimination, People living with HIV/AIDS in China have lost their jobs, been driven from their homes and disowned by their families. They have been barred from attending school, receiving health services, getting married, or visiting public swimming pools... fifteen years after the first AIDS case was reported in China, and at a time when one million individuals may be infected, only a handful of people living with HIV or AIDS have voluntarily gone public._ (FF Memo, Sexuality and reproductive health, Lee, 2003)

Hence the institutional contradiction between authoritarianism and Western concepts of rights and social justice, which was increasingly used to assess elite legitimacy, resulted in elites’ superficial adoption of rights-based concepts and practices. Such being said, symbolic adoption still created a political space for other actors to promote rights-related concepts and practices legitimately, although such actions needed to be conducted with great caution.

**Institutional Contradiction 2: Market Economy vs. Domestic Social Service Gaps**

In the communist system, the government used to be the sole provider of a comprehensive array of social services. With the economic transition to a market
economy, the government receded from providing many of such services. The contraction of the government’s role took place during the increasing stratification of the Chinese society; as a consequence many poor social segments were too deprived to fend for themselves. Hence, one major problem the elites wrestled with in Phase 3 was a lack of social service to disadvantaged citizens and subsequent social disturbance. The aforementioned extensive social protests (87,000 in year 2005) worried elites.

Increasing social service gaps also worried many average Chinese citizens. Starting from the 1990s, grassroots NGOs — non-profit organizations set up and managed by Chinese citizens without government involvement — emerged as a spontaneous response to the deprived state of many social groups. It was for the first time since the founding of PRC that a large group of extra-institutional organizations went into existence.

6.2 Developing Grassroots NGOs

In as early as 1989, FF had taken an interest in China’s non-profit sector (by hiring an intern to survey this sector). In 1990, FF reached out to the Ministry of Civil Affairs (which regulates NGOs, or Social Organizations as they were called in China) and funded overseas research trips of the Ministry-affiliated Chinese Social Organizations Research Society, a policy and legislative research group drafting China’s first non-profit organization law. Although the birth of the law had proven to be difficult, the 1990s saw the emergence of a civil society sector in China. My earlier chapter described how GONGOs were transitioning to represent the voices and interests of grassroots constituencies. The transition of GONGOs was important as it legitimated NGOs in general, and GONGOs’ extensive national networks constituted important resources to the emergent civil society sector. However, GONGOs were not independent NGOs.

Different from GONGOs which were more or less still connected to the government, grassroots NGOs were truly independent, extra-institutional organizations.15 Supporting

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15 Some of these NGOs were founded by grassroots citizens, and some by people who used to work in government agencies, GONGOs, media or academia. As Tai (2014:133) points out, due to the state’s dominance in China, some NGOs or their founders may possess administrative connections to the state at
extra-institutional organizations in China was a politically sensitive matter. In Phase 1 and 2, FF did not openly emphasize its support of China’s civil society organizations although it interacted with these NGOs through ad-hoc projects. As the FF Beijing representative explained, “There is uncertainty in the Chinese establishment about the implications of social organizations outside of direct state management” (Grant File 10151517, RGA 2001). Toward the late 1990s, elites turned to be more tolerant, or even encouraging, of the development of grassroots NGOs, for two reasons. First, as the contradiction between China’s authoritarianism and elites’ legitimacy (institutional contradiction 1) started to intensify, there was a need for partially adopting Western practices, including grassroots NGOs. Second, grassroots NGOs provided social services to disenfranchised groups, helping central and local elites to address the contradiction of market economy and domestic social service gaps (institutional contradiction 2). Spires (2011), in a field study of China’s grassroots NGOs, described this phenomenon as “contingent symbiosis”: ostensibly illegal groups were allowed to operate in a grey zone because they relieved the government of some of its social welfare obligations.

With the loosening political climate, in 1999 FF decided to lend overt support to China’s civil society sector: “The strategic goals of the Foundation are to help such organizations grow, to encourage a positive view of them in government circles, to support research and other activities which help generate a benign regulatory framework, and to create a situation where the contributions of such social organizations to solving the challenges facing China can be recognized” (Grant File 10151517, RGA 2001). FF adopted several measures to develop civil society organizations. I elaborate on each of them in below.

**Playing “Angel Investor” for Nascent NGOs**

FF was known for funding grassroots NGOs at their inception or when they were just an idea. Non-Profit Incubator (NPI hereafter) was one of such examples. NPI’s founder, Lui...
Zhao, was a young professional with years of experience in the NGO sector in Beijing. When he was dispatched by his organization to Shanghai in 2006 to investigate local opportunities, he discovered that Shanghai’s NGOs were smaller and less developed than those in Beijing. Lui subsequently came up with the idea of an NGO “incubator” that could offer funds, office space, equipment, legal and other consultative services to struggling small NGOs. Lui received his first grant from an unexpected funder – FF. FF was a funder of Lui’s earlier employer, and Lui got to meet Andrew Watson, then FF representative in Beijing, during a project meeting. Lui took 2-3 minutes in the break to “sell” his idea about the incubator to Watson. He did not hold much hope that the prestigious FF would take an interest in his idea. A few days after the meeting, Lui received a surprise call:

On the other end of phone was an unfamiliar voice: “I have been looking for you for quite a few days, and you didn’t pick up my call! Didn’t you tell me the idea of an NPO incubator? I think it is good, and I have been waiting for you to send me your proposal!” Lui was stunned. To launch the incubator he had been visiting all kinds of potential funders and met numerous people. Then he realized it was Mr. Watson, whom he met only half a month ago…he was thrilled. (Social Entrepreneurs, Feature story on Lui Zhao, 2015)

The surprise call brought Lui the critical “seed” money of 400,000 RMB (about 60,000 U.S. dollars) that enabled Lui to found NPI and launch the incubator project. NPI later obtained other sources of income, but it continued to receive support from FF, and FF often was the one to fund NPI’s most innovative projects that were difficult to find financial support elsewhere. As of 2016, NPI has grown into an organization with over 200 employees, a national presence and was widely regarded as a leading organization in the civil society sector. NPI completed the “incubation” of about 500 grassroots NGOs, many of which grew into successful organizations with national fame.

NPI’s relationship with FF was typical. Overall, FF exhibited a bold funding pattern. FF officers pursued high-potential NGO leaders from an early stage and consistently supported them to build their organizations. Although some of these NGOs fell flat after a productive period (e.g., for reasons such as leader succession), many FF-funded NGOs grew to be important players. This fairly consistent funding pattern could be explained by
comments from several FF officers’ memos. In the following quote, an FF officer explained how she leveraged the philosophy of “resourcing people first”:

This emphasis on building grantee capacity reflects a second core characteristic of the Beijing Office Environment and Development portfolio. This is the reversal of the more usual donor sequence of creating projects \(\rightarrow\) devising implementation processes \(\rightarrow\) finding people to implement them. Instead, the portfolio has sought to identify and resource people first in the belief that (a) innovative people explore and experiment with different processes that lead to projects; (b) the rapidity of change in China requires flexible thinkers, processes and networks rather than just fixed projects; (c) the movement of people within institutions in China can be so rapid that “development” and “sustainability” often exist at the level of these people - in what they continue to do, and how they do it - rather than in the project alone. However, this investment in people and processes requires a long time-frame and does not yield many rapid and reportable achievements as project activities often do. (FF Memo, Environment, Bain, 2007)

Another officer’s comments offered a structural explanation about why FF was good at playing “angel investor”:

Because the Foundation is the only non-bilateral or multilateral (UN) donor based in China working on reproductive health and is not, therefore, obliged to work via the national government, the Foundation often plays a strategic and unique role in opening up new lines of important work in the reproductive health field. FF is unique in its support for the NGO community. Our freedom to directly select and support non-government-designated institutions and individuals has allowed us to identify and develop new talent, which other donor agencies later utilize. (FF Memo, Sexuality and Reproductive Health, Kaufman, 2000)

“Angel investing” involves high-risk decision making whose success depends on identifying the right “entrepreneurs”. Why was FF capable of identifying the right NGO leaders to invest in despite the fact that its officers were expatriates? During an interview I posed this question. My informant, a senior vice president of a grassroots NGO who received funding from FF, commented that FF officers were “China experts” (zhongguotong):

The most critical is to look into the people, and to understand the mission and strategic direction of the NGOs they are going to support. It’s absolutely not as simple as just evaluating the project. Of course, the grant will have to go to a specific project...but FF supports those projects that average grant-makers cannot understand, and thus won’t give money to... The sharpest people are beyond the boundary of nationality....many MNE’s CEOs are also foreigners, but they have no problem finding good partners and
Doing business in China...this has little to do with language or culture. (Interview, Executive, The Nest, 2013)

When I pushed her about why FF officers possessed this capability of identifying the right actors, the NGO executive suggested that they had a broad understanding of the “rules of development” (fazhan guilu) of civil societies in the world; this broad mental pattern helped them to develop business acumen beyond language and culture.

Another NGO leader offered a similar opinion. She commented that FF officers’ international perspective enabled them to distill the issues that local practitioners could not:

“’cause it is not just China who has gone through social changes. During social change, various issues would emerge that are similar (across countries). Take suicide as an example. Before I undertook this project, I didn’t know there were NGOs in the world tackling this problem, and there was a world annual conference on suicide. In China, we never considered suicide an issue worthy of intervention. We considered it a private matter and didn’t link it with issues of public health... They (FF officers) could see that this is a world problem. China has a higher suicidal rate among women than men, and they wanted to know why. So we started our project. FF wanted very much to know why Chinese women would commit suicide and how to stop such actions...The issue of women’s political participation is the same: the World Women’s Conference proposed women political participation should not be lower than 30%...but the rate is much lower in China...they (FF program officers) can see such issues. (Interview, Founder, Countryside, 2013)

Socializing NGO Leaders to World Society

In the early 2000s, Chinese grassroots NGOs were small in size and weak in capacity. They were isolated from NGOs in other countries and thus unable to access existing organization templates and issue expertise. To systemically support this sector, FF’s approach was to identify high-potential leaders, financially support their organizations, and continually expose them to Western concepts to broaden their awareness and horizons. I find consistent patterns across FF programs that FF had strategically elevated

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16 A pseudonym. While names (of FF officers, NGOs and NGO leaders) from FF archives, book chapters and media interviews were real names, I use pseudonyms for organizations and informants I interviewed to comply with the research ethics protocols of the Western University.
NGO leaders from individuals with vague awareness of Western concepts into actors who more deeply embraced Western concepts.

For example, a young academic in a city plagued with environmental deterioration started a small NGO as a way to educate young city dwellers about environmental protection. He got to know the FF Program Officer of Environment through his initial funder. The relationship had developed over a few years, until one opportunity came up:

In 2007 I wanted to attend an environment conference in Australia, I told this to the program officer, she said we could also support you to include some extra visits to Australian environment NGOs, government agencies, professors and research institutions. She personally made calls to government and environment institutions for me to visit...So I went as a Ford-funded researcher, and I ended up making many visits. I felt that the Program Officer...had high expectations about me. I felt I hadn’t done enough...after this trip, I quit my job in the local Academy of Social Sciences, and started to work for Westgreen full time. (Interview, Founder, Westgreen, 2013)

Another NGO leader had a similar experience. In the late 1990s, she worked with a small environmental NGO which was an FF grantee and encountered problems implementing her projects in urban communities. In 2001, FF sponsored her attendance at a workshop on city governance and community building in the U.K. The NGO leader recalled:

I realized at this conference that city governance can be a bottom-up approach, and it needed techniques...I realized, I had been working on community issues but I was not working to meet their needs...I was imposing my understanding upon them. I approached the Ford Program Officer in environment, telling him I wanted to work on city governance. He was enthusiastic, introduced me to his colleague in charge of governance. In 2002, I set up Bright Sky, and started to train community Cadres (the lowest level of government organs in China supervising urban communities) on participatory approach. (Interview, Founder, Bright Sky, 2013)

In 2004, FF again sent this leader to a 2-month workshop in the U.S., through which she learned and appreciated the concept of resident self-governance. She felt these experiences helped her to be more innovative.

**Coaching NGO Leaders for Organization Skills and Issue Expertise**

FF’s efforts also included leadership coaching. Its officers encouraged and pushed NGO leaders to build projects and organizations for sustained influence. One FF officer
described this approach as “fishing theory”— to help grantees learn “fishing” rather than to give them fish (FF Memo, Education, He, 2004). For example, an FF officer challenged the leader of a small NGO to be bolder and more thorough in her grant proposal:

_We were pushed to think how to make the solution replicable...how to grow the institutional capacity of our NGO, to increase its impact. The Ford officer... would ask: you say your goal is to spread the service to 500 schools in 3 years, you’ll need more money than Ford could give you. How do you get it? What else do you have to do, with government, with media, with other foundations? Those questions made us think...I was used to seeing myself as a professional (a psychologist), but, confronted with those questions, I realized I had to build relations with local governments in order to push the project into local schools, and I needed to aggressively solicit funding. I have changed – I realized those were needed for us to grow._ (Interview, Co-founder, Joyful Children, 2013)

In yet another case, the FF officer of Sexuality and Reproductive Health got to know a young researcher in a provincial All-China Women’s Federation who organized a grassroots NGO (Shaanxi Research Association for Women and Family) on the side to study rural women’s issues. The FF officer sent the researcher abroad to study reproductive health and social research methods in 1994, “where she attended course on feminist research methods and began to develop an interest in action research. The Research Association...then began to change its research orientation and to initiate a series of interventionist projects” (Gao, 2011: 58-59). In 2002, FF funded the same NGO leader to visit India to investigate gender issues in rural governance. During 2008-2012, her NGO carried out a FF-funded four-stage, large-scale project improving rural women’s participation in village elections across the Shaanxi province.

**Supporting “Platform NGOs” to Develop and Link Other NGOs**

In addition to the aforementioned NGOs that focused on specific social issues, FF supported platform NGOs that served as the incubators, trainers and resource centres for other NGOs. I already mentioned FF’s investment in NPI, an incubator and a platform NGO. In addition to incubating, NPI opened other innovative models to help build the civil society sector. It organized NGO competitions and NGO Fairs that connected grassroots NGOs with resource providers, managed charity venture funds for big
corporations and government agencies, and acted as a “broker” to help government agencies to outsource their social service contracts to trustworthy grassroots NGOs.

Yet another example was FF’s long-term funding of the China NPO Network (NPON hereafter). NPON was established in 2001 to conduct training, networking and research activities for the emergent NGO sector. Its two leaders were Mr. Shang Yusheng, former Secretary-General of the Chinese Association of Science Foundations and a long-term FF grantees, Mr. Xu Yongguang, a founder of the China Youth Development Foundation (a GONGO known for its innovation) and a significant figure in China’s NGO sector. From 2001 to 2005, FF issued five grants to NPON, totally 637,600 U.S. dollars.

In addition to providing financial support, FF helped NPON to access international resources. By issuing a complementary grant to the Private Agencies Collaboration Together (PACT), a U.S.-based NGO consortium, FF enabled PACT to transfer the Organization Capacity Assessment tool (OCA) to NPON and help NPON to implement it in China. An initial analysis of local needs and resources were followed by one round of implementation of OCA in collaboration with PACT, then a series of training conducted by NPON itself. In parallel with the three grants to NPON for conducting training programs, FF issued two large grants as core support to NPON to enhance its own organizational capacity.

**Preferring NGO Leaders with Boundary-Spanning Skills**

The NGO leaders FF had funded tended to be boundary spanners that possessed experience and skills to move smoothly between existing institutional systems and the nascent space of the civil society. Examples were numerous. Countryside, an NGO that advocated the rights of rural women was founded by an incumbent journalist with prominent editorial position in a government-owned women’s newspaper. Through work, she learned about the pressing needs of rural women and wanted to launch a magazine to provide information and knowledge that could help these women. Normally, launching a new magazine in China was extremely difficult without government sponsorship, but the journalist leveraged her influence at the women’s newspaper and her connections with the All-China Women’s Federation (a GONGO) to launch this independent magazine.
Unfortunately, due to a lack of marketing and selling experience, her magazine stalled in circulation. An FF officer met with the founder at a conference and took an interest in her initiative. FF bought 10,000 copies each month to distribute to its reproductive health project sites in Yunnan, which provided the magazine 96,000 RMB a year. The fund allowed the magazine (and the related NGO, Countryside) to survive and to be increasingly innovative. The founder started to aggressively leverage her access to All-China Women’s Federation’s grassroots network:

*The subscription increased to 56,000 in the second year, 80,000 in the third year, and then 220,000 in the fourth year... We used many tools to push for subscription, including giving a Jeep to lower level Women’s Federation who made major contributions to increasing the subscription... We sent a dozen copies at least to each of the 2000+ counties in China, in addition to FF’s project sites... so the coverage was extensive. (Interview, Founder, Countryside, 2013)*

This NGO later initiated a range of sensitive projects, including projects calling for adjustment in China’s *hukou* system (which deprived migrant women and their children of their rights to access the health care and educational systems in the cities they lived in), and projects calling attention to the high suicide rates of rural women and introducing interventions. When I asked this leader how she managed to take up sensitive issues, she commented that FF managed to do the same; FF’s cooperation with Chinese government agencies helped it to tackle sensitive issues, which in turn helped its grantees:

*FF not only supported us, it also supported All-China Women’s Federation. So FF paid much attention that it not only supported NGOs but also the government, and it hopes we would collaborate to solve social problems. I think they (FF) did well in this regard. Some other foundations only support the NGOs, and their relations with the government can become strained. They don’t seem to be able to reach FF’s level (of skills). (Interview, Founder, Countryside, 2013)*

In the case of NPI, Lui used to be the editor of Philanthropy News, a flagship newspaper sponsored by the Ministry of Civil Affairs. On this post, he got acquainted with government officials in charge of China’s NGO sector. Lui was known for his ability to persuade government officials to support his many innovative projects; in this way he opened doors for hundreds of smaller NGOs under NPI’s incubation. In another interview by the Social Entrepreneurs magazine, Lui jokingly cited a famous quote from the legendary novelist Lu Xun: “I came from the old fortress, so I can see the whole battle...
ground with a full vision”. He explained his advantage: “My earlier experience... prepared me to launch NPI; these experiences made it easier for me to deal with various parties, because I am familiar with their language” (Social Entrepreneurs, Feature story on Lui Zhao, 2015).

In yet another case, an NGO leader explained to me how she learned to use the government officials’ language even though she did not subscribe to them:

I learned that government officials use their own terms, which are different from terms used by us, but sometimes have overlapping meanings. For example...we say governance (zhili), they say “social management innovation”... when I discussed with them about citizen participation (canyu), they often related it to Mao’s slogan “coming from the mass, going back to the mass”, or “establishing cadre-mass relationship”. (I adopted their terms when speaking to them but) I don’t think these are the same concepts, as their languages still keep a hierarchical division between the cadre and the mass—it is condescending. However “participation” (canyu) is based on absolute equality of different groups. (Interview, Founder, Bright Sky, 2013)

The founder not only adopted elites’ languages, she also identified opportunities to “sell” her own rights-based concepts. In another example, she explained to me how she managed to convey the concept of “citizen” to officials:

Government officials were sensitive to the mentioning of “citizen” and “civil society”. In referring to average citizens, China has gone through several stages: from “emperor’s subordinates” (chenmin) to “the people” (renmin). The former had lasted 5000 years, and the latter over 60 years. Government officials call themselves “the people’s parents”. As “parents”, they do everything for “the people”. But now they found they can’t really do everything. “The people” have changed after the reform and after having private properties. Their awareness to their own rights has increased, and their dependence to the government decreased. I told the officials that the only way to solve their problem was to turn “the people” to “citizens”. “Citizens” means they have not only “rights”, but “obligations” to the society. Our (social) experimentations found that Chinese people are willing to stand up to their obligations. However, the government officials are worried about this term of “citizens”. It is because they don’t have skills to manage “citizens”. (Interview, Founder, Bright Sky, 2013)

6.3 Developing Other Civil Society Organizations

FF also “created” other types of actors it deemed necessary for a rights-based society to function. Examples include:
1) Independent Professionals. Following the launch of legal aid centres in Phase 2, FF wanted to improve the number and status of China’s public interest lawyers. Public interest law in China was a politically risky and economically untenable career path, so FF launched an initiative called “Creating a career path for public interest lawyers” to generate supportive conditions (salaries, political recognition, public prestige, etc.) for law students to pursue this path.

2) Beneficiary’s Organizations. In 2002, FF helped found China’s first People Living With HIV/AIDS organization; in 2006, when funds from the Global Fund and other donors spurred many such groups, FF supported them to form a working group called “China Alliance for People Living with HIV/AIDS (CAP+)”. Different from social service-focused NGOs, beneficiary’s organizations were more focused on rights advocacy and community building.

3) Chambers of Commerce. From 2000 to 2007, FF issued three large grants to Wuxi Market Association, a chamber of commerce that represented the local business class. FF first supported the Association to develop “its potential as a model in the emergence of civil society and the democratization of local communities”, then issued grants “for research on reforming the role of the (Communist) Party in local governance”, and lastly “for research on local government policies, institutions and practices affecting rural migrants’ equitable integration into Wuxi and similar cities” (FF Grants Spreadsheet). These grants escalated the role and functions of the Association in representing private business interests.

6.4 Summary of FF Actions in Phase 3

Toward the end of Phase 3, FF’s actions had helped to bring up a small group of NGOs, some of which grew to be sector leaders. These included platform organizations (NPI, NPON) and NGOs who focused on one or two social issues to become a well-known NGO in their issue domains. FF also raised the consciousness of many NGO leaders by offering them international study trips or focused study on one issue subject. In this way, FF integrated the promotion of human rights with leader and organizational development.
The following table provides a summary of FF actions and shows the underlying processes of brokering and scaffolding.

**Table 5  FF Actions in Phase 3**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FF Action</th>
<th>Developing grassroots NGOs</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Brokering</strong>-what</td>
<td>Rights-based concepts and practices; civil society knowledge and organizing templates.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| **Brokering**-how | 1) Overseas study trips and non-degree programs to expand NGO leaders’ horizon and issue expertise;  
|                | 2) Bringing in Western NGOs to provide training;  
|                | 3) Training platform NGOs to train other NGOs for civil society organizing templates. |
| **Scaffolding**-what | Grassroots NGOs.                                                                       |
| **Scaffolding**-how | 1) Playing “angel investor” to fund nascent NGOs;  
|                | 2) Socializing nascent NGO leaders to the world society;  
|                | 3) Coaching NGOs leaders;  
|                | 4) Supporting platform NGOs to develop and link other NGOs;  
|                | 5) Preferring NGO leaders with boundary-spanning skills. |
Chapter 7 EXPLAINING SMO STRATEGY IN CREATING A PRE-MOVEMENT

FF’s activities may appear complicated but looking across the three strategic phases, FF actions demonstrate clear patterns. They fall into four trajectories:

- Strengthening scholars’ position as meaning/power brokers in the existing system (Phase 1) and then enabling them to catalyze change (Phase 2&3)
- Coopting progressive central and local elites to adopt change (Phase 2&3)
- Encouraging GONGOs to represent grassroots interests (Phase 2&3)
- Developing extra-institutional actors (grassroots NGOs) when political opportunities allowed (Phase 3)

Yet another way to distill patterns from the rich empirical account is to explore it theoretically from the perspective of creating a pre-movement using theoretical categories I described in Chapter 3. In the following, I unpack these patterns by separating the narratives into relationships between my core categories — FF brokering activities and FF scaffolding activities to describe FF actions; Institutional contradictions and Elites’ need for external help to describe the socio-political context.

Specifically, I show how FF, in each of its strategic actions, combined a brokering process (to create meaning and knowledge) and a scaffolding process (to create actors and networks). This is the first level of processes. I then show how FF exploited institutional contradictions: in responding to the call for help from Chinese elites, FF created double-sided actors who embodied the type of knowledge needed to resolve the contradictions to help elite rule, but who also possessed human rights consciousness. This is the second, and a more encompassing, level of processes, which I call “SMO robust action”. In the following two sections, I explain these two levels of processes.
7.1 SMO Strategic Processes of Creating a Pre-Movement: Brokering and Scaffolding

In creating a pre-movement, FF’s activities emphasized a brokering process to create meaning and knowledge (to enhance movement consciousness, one important movement potentiality), and a scaffolding process to create actors and networks (to improve organizational readiness, another movement potentiality). The brokering and scaffolding processes unfolded incrementally across three Phases.

Figure 4 visually describes FF’s strategic progression over time. The boxes (and the oval in Phase 2) denote Chinese actors that FF created and linked (i.e., the scaffolding), and the arrows show how meanings and knowledge flowed between actors through FF’s brokering (i.e., the brokering). Over time, meanings and knowledge being brokered expanded, and actors being involved became more diverse. Meanwhile, the grassroots, submerged and invisible in Phase 1, gradually emerged in Phase 2 and 3. I will explain the brokering process and the scaffolding process separately.

**Figure 4  SMO Strategic Processes (Brokering & Scaffolding) Over Time**

*Note: Arrows denote the direction of meaning transfer. FF mediated the transfer of meanings/knowledge and it also mediated the linkage between two actors connected by each arrow (I skip drawing FF in the relationship for the sake of visual simplicity).*
**Brokering to Create Meaning and Knowledge**

An important goal of a pre-movement is to develop meanings and knowledge about a collective grievance, so that consciousness can be raised. As shown in Figure 4, FF developed such meanings and knowledge through its brokering process; the brokering
first flowed from the world society – institutions and actors representing universal values of human rights and democracy – to Chinese actors, but later it also flowed between Chinese actors.

The types of meaning and knowledge FF brokered shifted from Phase to Phase. In Phase 1, FF transferred technical knowledge – Western economics, law and international relations/political science – to Chinese actors. This knowledge had human rights implications, but the transfer prioritized the technical content rather than rights-based assumptions. Why didn’t FF transfer human rights concepts and practices more directly? It was because the Phase 1 socio-political context prohibited such meanings and knowledge. China had just opened up to the world after decades of isolation; it was a complete void of Western meanings like human rights. Meanwhile, political risk in directly promoting human rights was too high.

In Phase 2, FF started to broker selective human rights concepts and practices. As the historical account illustrates, FF sponsored human rights research, encouraged scholars to implement rights-based practices (such as, university legal aid centres), and brought overseas-trained scholars to Chinese institutions to influence policy processes.

FF also brokered rights-related practices to elites and GONGOs. They were receptive to such practices because the latter could help solve their difficulties: local elites must resolve their conflicts with grassroots, while central elites wanted to resolve various difficulties that emerged in the elite-led reform processes. As for GONGOs, they were defunded by the government and were “forced” to establish their bona fide on their own. GONGOs then had the incentive to represent grassroots, but lacked the capacity to do so. Through a variety of pilot projects, FF helped elites and GONGOs to receive Western concepts and practices (such as, policy models, Social Forestry framework, reproductive health service provision, and sexuality counseling) to China. These projects usually started by inviting foreign experts to survey the Chinese situation, to train Chinese researchers and project managers, and oftentimes to help them implement the practice, monitor results, and revise the practice to better fit local situations. By so doing, the
rights-based practices were not only disseminated, but were revised to fit the Chinese contexts.

In Phase 3, FF brokered additional meanings to China, that is, civil society’s specialized knowledge and organizing templates. FF expanded the horizon of nascent grassroots NGO leaders by sending them on overseas study trips and conferences, and even enrolling them in Western universities to systemically absorb human rights knowledge and practices. Reversely, FF brought in Western NGO experts to train Chinese NGOs. FF also purposefully developed platform NGOs which would translate world society knowledge to fit local situations and then disseminate this knowledge in large scale to other Chinese NGOs.

**Scaffolding to Create Actors and Networks**

In parallel to the brokering process, FF engaged in the scaffolding process through which it developed actors with rights consciousness and linked them in movement-relevant loose networks.

As Figure 4 suggests, over three Phases FF sponsored increasingly diverse types of Chinese actors. In Phase 1, FF developed scholars and their institutions through academic exchange. In Phase 2, FF continued to work with scholars and went one step further to encourage them to catalyze change by promoting and implementing rights-related concepts and practices. FF-funded economists provided socio-economic analyses to policy makers that incorporated plural social interests; meanwhile FF-supported legal scholars to establish legal aid centres and to protect the rights of disadvantaged groups. In the second image of Figure 4, scholars began to connect with a few grassroots constituencies.

In Phase 2, FF began to issue grants to central and local political elites. FF helped elites access Western practices that strengthened their voices in policy debates or helped them gain political accomplishments. FF also reached out to GONGOs which were ready to transition to new roles. FF helped GONGOs access Western resources that helped their transition; for example, FF helped GONGOS to conduct issue research and promote
innovative ideas in social services. As seen in Figure 4 Phase 2, elites and GONGOs each developed some grassroots connections (dotted lines).

Moving to Phase 3, FF continued to engage scholars, elites, and GONGOs, but it also emphasized its support of the nascent grassroots NGOs. The transition of GONGOs in Phase 2 helped to legitimate the concept of a civil society in China; in Phase 3, grassroots NGOs were allowed to develop and to fill in social service gaps. GONGOs and grassroots NGOs constituted a civil society. FF were involved in identifying nascent NGOs, coaching and socializing their leaders, investing in platform NGOs that served as “trainers” and “conveners” of nascent NGOs. In Phase 3 of Figure 4, I visually show how the Civil Society had grown bigger including GONGOs and grassroots NGOs and how the Civil Society was semi-embedded in grassroots constituencies. I also show Civil Society’s stronger and denser linkage (thick orange lines) with grassroots constituencies as compared with scholars’ and elites’ grassroots linkage (dotted lines).

FF not only developed diverse Chinese actors, it also linked them. In Phase 1, FF grants were designed in ways that not only provided training to scholars, but enabled them to network with their Western counterparts. FF emphasized the importance of helping actors develop lasting relationships, believing these relationships mattered in achieving mutual understanding and mutual influence. For instance, economics training program at the Oxford University was designed for junior Chinese economists to have personalized educational experience in a Western context. Another example is the Honolulu conference in which Chinese legal scholars were given abundant opportunities to interact with their hospitable American counterparts to develop personal understandings and friendship.

In Phase 2 and 3, FF continued to link elites, GONGOs, and grassroots NGOs with their world society counterparts. More importantly, FF began to link Chinese actors through collaborative projects. For example, FF almost always included scholars in projects, no matter if the grantees were elites, GONGOs, or grassroots NGOs. Scholars played the important role of conducting initial analysis, designing the pilot projects, monitoring and assessing the project performance, and at the end, institutionalizing project learning into
policy reports, curricula or training materials. Scholars gained from such involvement as it improved their research. Nascent grassroots NGOs benefited from the expertise of scholars and they also benefited from the project linkage with GONGOs and elites. As the Countryside founder suggested in an earlier quote, linkages with institutional actors enhanced her organization’s legitimacy and gained access to resources and networks. Elites and GONGOs benefited from such linkage as well: while scholars provided overall guidance to projects, grassroots NGOs provided grassroots connections and they also took up the legwork in the fields.

Beyond project-based multi-actor collaborations, FF sponsored newsletters, magazines, and specialized websites that shared and consolidated issue information and knowledge. Examples included the newsletter for Social Forestry practitioners and a magazine for NGO practitioners. FF also encouraged the development of specialized networks, for example, the network for women’s studies scholars and feminist NGOs and the AIDS network. These actions were field-configuring initiatives. By so doing, FF helped construct tentative issue fields comprising scholars, elites and civil society organizations.

7.2 Creating a Pre-movement in Movement-inhibiting Contexts: A Full Model of SMO Robust Action

The brokering and scaffolding process model in Figure 4 addressed the content of FF strategies, but it did not fully address the implications of operating in a movement-inhibiting context. Figure 5 is a full model that takes into account both the China context and the corresponding FF strategic content of brokering and scaffolding. It also distills more subtle mechanisms that explain how FF was able to use its social position to engage in brokering and scaffolding, and what the implications or consequences of its brokering and scaffolding activities were. I refer to this model as a process model of SMO robust action.
Authoritarian countries are inhibiting for divergent claims-making. How did FF, an advocate of human rights, manage to operate in China and mobilize diverse Chinese actors to promote divergent concepts? The historical account points to institutional contradictions that emerged during China’s economic reform process and the way FF exploited these contradictions.

The historical account shows that in each Phase the China context generated institutional contradictions. Elites, who wanted to resolve these contradictions, sought external help. FF stepped in to develop actors that could address institutional contradictions to help elites. The FF archive suggests how FF executives and officers approached elites to discuss their goals and problems and then came up with solutions. Similar to a highly skilled “salesperson”, FF offered the elites solutions that not only addressed elites’ problems, but also allowed FF to achieve its own goals — that was, to “sell” human rights concepts and practices in China.
In Phase 1, elites were confronted with the institutional contradiction between economic reforms and China’s low technical capacity. FF aided elites in developing economists and legal experts whose technical capacity enabled elites-led economic reforms.

In Phase 2, elites wanted to deepen the economic reform, but as the reform became increasingly complicated, technical requirements for configuring a large market economy contradicted with elites’ shallow ability in doing so (Institutional Contradiction 1 of Phase 2). This institutional contradiction opened the doors for FF to get involved in the policy processes: it helped central elites develop policy capacities based on Western models of market economy. This contradiction also allowed FF to bring back overseas-trained Chinese economists who would establish semi-independent think tanks and participate in China’s policy processes.

Also in Phase 2, elites encountered the contradiction of governing an increasingly plural and stratified society with simplistic top-down control (Institutional Contradiction 2 of Phase 2). FF helped elites to implement participatory models (social forestry, village direct election) that allowed them to achieve better governance.

In Phase 3, China’s authoritarianism contradicted elites’ needs of gaining legitimacy on the world stage (Institutional Contradiction 1 of Phase 3). To achieve such legitimacy, elites adopted human rights concepts and practices, but only superficially. Domestically, elites were plagued by the contradiction that market-centred reforms created social service gaps and eroded elites’ legitimacy (Institutional Contradiction 2 of Phase 3). FF helped develop a civil society that aided the elites to achieve some legitimacy on the world stage, and that also allowed elites to fill in social service gaps.

As such, FF exploited an emergent series of institutional contradictions to create actors that assisted elites to resolve or alleviate these contradictions. What was unusual of FF’s actions, however, lay in the fact that the actors developed by FF were not only useful to elites, they were “double-sided”, in the sense that they were also developed to possess human rights consciousness and commitment. In Phase 1, overseas-trained scholars became receptive of human rights rationale underlying Western law, economics and political science. In fact, the double-sidedness pushed some of these actors in Phase 2 to
take up the role in catalyzing change from inside their institutions. In Phase 2, when working with elites, FF’s goal was to persuade elites to be more responsive to grassroots needs and to revise their conventional top-down approach. In Phase 3, FF strategically exposed grassroots NGOs to their counterparts in the world; as a result, Chinese NGOs learned more radical advocacy models and more effective tools of civil society organizing. Their leaders became more committed to rights-related concepts when their horizons were broadened to connect with a world of movements and networks that established their identities and purposes.

We now have a fuller picture of how FF created a pre-movement in a movement-inhibiting context. In Figure 5, the first part of the model shows how FF exploited institutional contradictions to create political opportunities; in the middle part of the model, these opportunities enabled FF’s brokering and scaffolding processes; lastly, the third part of the model suggests that the implication of FF’s brokering and scaffolding processes was the creation of diverse double-sided actors and their thickening networks. These actors and networks represent movement potentiality — they possessed human rights consciousness and they also served as the scaffolding infrastructure for larger-scale mobilization, should it arise. FF’s actions were multivocal: these actions were taken as a response to elites’ call for help; they created double-sided actors that served elites’ needs but also contained seeds for divergent change. Therefore, FF used robust action to bypass elite repression when creating movement potentiality.

However, not all activists can engage in robust action to bypass elite repression. In a repressive country like China, many activists have been persecuted and their organizations shut down, and the trend is continuing on. As shown in Figure 5, FF’s social position constitutes the last piece of the puzzle about creating a pre-movement in a movement-inhibiting context. As an organization, FF was a combination of passionate grassroots advocacy and elitism. This was explained in Chapter 3 when I traced FF’s

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17 For a recent example, see http://www.nytimes.com/2016/01/26/world/asia/china-to-expel-swedish-human-rights-advocate.html.
evolution from a business elite-controlled, international development-oriented traditional foundation to a much more radical and liberal SMO-type of organization, explicitly supporting activists and movements. However, FF as an organization has continued to be close to American political and academic elites. As a result of FF’s ambiguous identity, FF executives and staff tend to have blended backgrounds spanning grassroots and elitism. Examples include the former FF President, Franklin Thomas, and the incumbent President, Darren Walker, both African Americans from poor families, but joined the elite circle through education and social mobility. In Appendix 1, the illustrative biographies of FF Beijing officers show a similar DNA of blending grassroots-orientation and elitism.

FF is an old American foundation (founded in 1936) with over 60 years of international experience. Its global presence is large, not only through its international offices, but through its support to international movements, most notably the international human rights movement. As one of the world’s richest foundations, FF was an impactful world society member. Thanks to such a history, FF is capable of harnessing resources from its diverse country and issue networks.

Identity ambiguity and a favorable network position allow FF to enact the most salient dimension of its social position in each situation. In Phase 1, FF enacted the identity of an old and wealthy American foundation with experience of collaborating with the world’s powerful. It activated its network position that bridged Chinese scholars and Western academic institutions; in the 1970s and the early 1980s, neither the American or the Chinese academics knew much of the other; each had sought FF’s input in understanding their counterparts and in identifying suitable exchange partners. In Phase 2, FF continued to leverage the same dimension of its social position to gain access to elites and GONGOs, but it slightly shifted the emphasis: it started to stress its capacity in assisting Chinese elites and scholars to access policy-relevant and issue-salient Western academic networks. Phase 3, however, marked a more obvious shift, as FF began to highlight its identity as a human rights advocate. FF openly emphasized its support of the nascent Chinese civil society; it restructured its China programs and changed program labels from development-oriented ones (such as, economic development, poverty and resources) to
human rights labels (such as, Accountable and Transparent Government, Sustainability and Community Rights, Reproductive Health and Rights). In this Phase, FF activated its network position spanning Chinese civil society and that of the world, helping Chinese NGOs access the global NGO network, human rights knowledge and the expertise of civil society organizing.

FF entered China with the goal of transforming China’s authoritarianism. However, FF initially presented to Chinese elites as a traditional incrementalist, attempting to improve a few conditions in China and willing to respect elites’ needs and wishes in so doing. Nonetheless, when the networks of diverse rights-espousing actors were woven together, the power of such a network was out of the hands of ruling elites. It was difficult to completely dismantle these movement-relevant networks through repression because these networks were comprised of double-sided actors whose work also benefited elites.
Chapter 8  DISCUSSION

This thesis highlights pre-movements, an understudied phenomenon in social movement research. It also takes the important first step in unpacking this phenomenon. In so doing, I contribute to social movement research in several ways. I elaborate on these contributions in the following.

Pre-movements: SMO Mobilization Processes

Social movement scholars have identified consciousness and organizational readiness as requisite conditions for movement mobilization. Prior research largely started unpacking mobilization processes from the point when the key conditions have ripened, resulting in visible disruptions in the social system. This approach leaves a gap in our understanding of the incubation phase in which these movement-enabling conditions have been developed over time. In particular, this approach does not systemically explain how early-stage activists may have intervened to influence the trajectory of these conditions, thus missing a key link in explicating actor agency in social change.

Conceptually, movement theorists have advocated a more processual approach (McAdam, Tarrow, & Tilly, 2001). Empirically, more recent research started to look into how movements have influenced the pre-policy stages leading to new laws rather than solely focusing on the last, and more visible stage, of how movements affected policy outcomes as represented by the passage of new laws (Soule & King, 2006). Relatedly, Morrill, Zald and Rao (2003: 392) suggest that while bringing social movement theory into organizational research has yielded useful insights, “this theoretical innovation suffers from a narrow focus on open confrontation that overlooks a range of political action simmering beneath the surface of mass mobilizations and other movement-like phenomena”. These developments and comments resonates with insights of scholars studying similarly disruptive phenomena, such as crises. Roux-Dufort (2007:109) points out that in crisis management, the dominant approach is an event-centred approach “in which the triggering event is seen as the starting point”; he suggests that research could benefit from also adopting a processual approach “in which the event is considered as the
point of arrival of a destabilizing process, which has been ignored until now”. In my thesis, I adopt these viewpoints to explore the “destabilizing process” or “political actions simmering beneath” that slowly deconstruct institutions to create potentiality for mass mobilization. I argue that this approach allows movement research to integrate a broader time perspective to investigate the origination of collective insurgency and the role of activist agency in its origination.

I suggest that pre-movements are more prevalent than scholars may have realized. We tend to miss these processes because issues are largely invisible and we only notice them when they enter the movement phase — when mass mobilization is launched to visibly disrupt the social system. As Meyerson (2001: 38) powerfully argued with the example of Rosa Parks: “Most people learn about Parks in school as ‘the black woman who refused to go to the back of the bus to give up her seat in the white section’. History books cast her as ‘the mother of the civil rights movement’ and they depict her refusal to take a back seat as the single act that ignited the year-long Montgomery bus boycott. Missing from this account, however, is the long list of often frustrating and behind-the-scenes actions that set the stage for this dramatic act – the resisting, planning, recruiting, networking, and organizing that took place more quietly everyday. Most reports miss the fact that many people, and Parks herself, had worked for civil rights for twelve years outside the public eye, slowly building the platform for her dramatic refusal to comply”.

The literature points to illustrative examples that parallel pre-movements. Narratives about tempered radicals (Meyerson, 2001; Meyerson & Scully, 1995) and other reformists inside traditional organizations (Creed et al., 2010) allow us to take a peek at the activities of early-stage activists promoting gender equality and GLBT rights in workplaces and in religious communities, respectively. Lounsbury, Ventresca and Hirsch (2003) document the activities of anti-pollution and anti-development community volunteer organizations in the U.S. in the late 1960s; these multi-local, loosely coordinated activities spread consciousness about recycling as a divergent approach to waste management (which was dominated by a landfill approach and controlled by major waste management companies). Similar examples that fit into my description of a pre-movement can be picked up from news media as well. A recent example is an activist
minister of the United Church of Canada promoting an atheist view of Christianity within the church. As a minister supported by her congregation and some key leaders of the Toronto conference, and founder of the Canadian Centre for Progressive Christianity, Reverend Greta Vosper has been furthering a humanistic view of Christianity (as opposed to a doctrinal belief in God and Jesus) since 2001. However, she recently encountered an attempt by her church to fire her.¹⁸

A few nonconventional studies point to some activist strategies in movement-inhibiting contexts, including: engaging in multivocal activities that can be interpreted in multiple ways (Morrill, Zald, & Rao, 2003; Padgett & Ansell, 1993), maintaining an ambivalent posture and using two voices (Meyerson & Scully, 1995), and leveraging social position to broker meanings and power (Padgett & Ansell, 1993; Strike & Rerup, 2016; Furnari, 2014). These studies, however, have not explained how activists purposively and systemically develop movement potentiality. My research fills this gap by offering explanations to this understudied and hard-to-observe process.

First, I find that a brokering process is critical for infiltrating movement-relevant meanings and knowledge to a pre-movement context so as to foster consciousness. FF transferred human rights concepts and practices from a world society that have originated, developed and safeguarded these meanings and knowledge. FF also worked with Chinese actors to “translate” these meanings and embed them in local contexts. The brokering process was progressive; initially FF brokered ideologically neutral technical knowledge (economics, law, international studies), then it brokered policy-relevant methods and practices that could intervene in China’s economic development process, and lastly it directly brokered human rights related concepts and civil society technology (organizing templates, training curricula, and mobilization tactics). I therefore explained not only how brokering is conducted, but also how it is scaled up over time.

Second, I discover that a scaffolding process allows the SMO to develop local actors and to enhance organizational readiness over time. In a pre-movement, the SMO discreetly mobilizes actors and links them. The ability of identifying actors for such mobilization is important. FF selected individuals and organizations that already had incentive to be mobilized and were in a position to directly or indirectly influence the political process. Furthermore, in each phase of the pre-movement, the focal SMO targets actors with the most potential of exerting political influence to ruling elites. In a more open context, FF would have worked with civil society organizations from the beginning, because civil society actors directly represent grassroots grievances and their mobilization tends to exert high pressures to elites. Unfortunately in Phase 1, FF had no access to such actors – they did not yet exist. The constrained political environment in Phase 1 also prohibited FF from creating such actors. FF therefore chose to work with actors inside existing institutions. FF first supported scholars, then reform-minded elites and GONGOs, and lastly, it funded grassroots NGOs. FF linked these actors through informal networks, projects, issue-based conferences, newsletters, websites, and field journals and magazines. Over time, loosely coordinated actor networks were formed, which can serve as a mobilization infrastructure should a movement arise.

My thesis directs our attention to the criticality of SMO brokering and scaffolding processes, which simultaneously create meanings/knowledge and actor/network in a context where neither exists. It also shows how such processes are configured and intertwined in every strategic action by FF like an organizational DNA. Furthermore, my thesis indicates that the brokering process and the scaffolding process are continually scaled up, so as to allow movement potentiality to accumulate over time, until it is capable of supporting a major disruption in the social system.

These two processes are hardly new to scholars of movements or institutional change, but unpacking their salience in a pre-movement context brings about new understandings. For example, the brokering process highlights that, in a movement-inhibiting context, the content of brokering is both constrained and enabled by the political environment in specific historical phases. It also shows that the brokering process includes, not only transferring, but also translation and embedding (Carlile, 2004), and this is done through
pilot projects and field experimentations in which diverse actors collaborate (elites, GONGO, scholars, and grassroots NGOS) to generate proto-institutions (Lawrence, Hardy, & Phillips, 2002). Proto-institutions are rights-based concepts and practices in a local package: They have proved their efficacy in the local environment, and, being packaged, they are ready to be institutionalized and disseminated in larger scales.

The scaffolding process of a pre-movement involves both elites and grassroots. This enhances our understanding of these two movement constituencies, whose relationships of each other and whose salience to movement mobilization are much debated in the literature (see Chapter 2, section 2.3 of this thesis). Scholars of movements and institutional change have suggested that marginalized or grassroots actors initiate change at the periphery (Battilana, 2010; Battilana et al., 2009; Tilly, 2006). Recent empirical work on Chinese civil society also highlights the view that divergent change takes place in the margin, initiated by small-sized grassroots NGOs; these NGOs constantly struggle to bypass elite repression and maintain a local niche (Spires, 2007; Spires, 2011). While this image of the nascent Chinese civil society is very true, my research shows other dimensions of the same phenomenon to enrich our understanding. FF supported both elites and grassroots; it created human rights consciousness at both the centre (by working with scholars, elites and GONGOs in Beijing and other major cities) and the peripheral (by supporting grassroots and pilot projects in remote provinces). Through its scaffolding activities, FF then linked the centre and the periphery for the purpose of scaling up change. Therefore, I build on earlier work that suggests elites and grassroots (or incumbents and challengers) can collaborate during radical change; such collaborations are based on the mutual dependency between elites and grassroots, and create opportunities for mutual influence and even mutual cooptation (O'Mahony & Bechky, 2008; Wijk et al., 2013; Yue et al., 2013). I further this idea with the concept of scaffolding, suggesting that elites and grassroots, linked through formal or informal networks, substantiate the mechanism of mutual cooptation and mutual influence. Should a movement arise, networked actors are more likely to communicate than if they were not previously linked. They also can communicate and influence each other more effectively, and possibly more discretely, through existing networks. Moreover, pre-movement
networks provide social lubrications that may facilitate political access, alliance, and negotiations between elites and grassroots during movements (Lindsay, 2010).

**Pre-movements: SMO Robust Action**

My thesis also generates insights about how an SMO bypasses elite repression in movement-inhibiting contexts. I identify a process of SMO robust action, which involves two sub-processes.

The first sub-process reveals how FF “created” political opportunities for human rights mobilization from what appeared to be a void of such opportunities. FF operated in an environment of high institutionalization and low multiplicity. Scholars of institutional theory have generally suggested that such contexts are not conducive to radical change (Battilana et al., 2009; Dorado, 2005; Hardy & Maguire, 2008). A few scholars, however, suggest a dialectical approach in understanding institutional change (Clemens & Cook, 1999; Seo & Creed, 2002). The FF case empirically illustrates such a dialectical process: *institutional contradictions* from existing socio-political processes were transformed into opportunities of pre-movement mobilization. This revelation from data is consistent with other scholars’ observation that economic development in authoritarian countries will inevitably lead to social conflicts and the need of social development, despite elites’ unwillingness to do so (Lehrer & Delaunay, 2009). Furthermore, I unpack the critical role of agentic actors, like FF, in stimulating and enabling dialectical processes of institutional change. Without FF’s systemic exploitation, *institutional contradictions* might just pass by without leading to change, or only leading to incremental change. FF’s involvement generated the potentiality for divergent change.

This insight about how actors artfully transform contextual conditions into political opportunities for mobilization is aligned with the recent development in social movement theory. In a study of how black activists pressured President Harry Truman to advocate civil rights, Bloom (2015) finds that activists leveraged institutional cleavages (i.e., divisions among political elites) to develop insurgency practices that further widened the cleavage to the advantage of the movement. Bloom (2015: 396) suggests that “institutional cleavages abound, but insurgents rarely develop practices that take
advantage of the opportunities they offer”. My research is aligned with this more dynamic conceptualization of political opportunities and it uniquely reveals a dialectical process of transforming institutional contradictions into political opportunities. In so doing, I highlight the agentic role of SMOs, like FF, whose social position allows them to take advantage of institutional contradictions and to mobilize pre-movements in movement-inhibiting contexts.

Meyer and Minkoff (2004), through a comprehensive review of literature about political opportunities, find that most social movement studies adopt a rather simplistic approach toward this core construct, resulting in a paucity of mechanisms to explain how political opportunities lead to mobilization. My thesis directly answers the call of these authors: it presents a mechanism that challenges the conventional understanding of political opportunities as straightforward macro conditions accessible to all activists. Rather than taking political opportunities as a given, I show how SMOs need to possess certain social position and skills to exploit institutional contradictions. Echoing Bloom (2015), I argue that institutional contradictions may be abundant, but activists rarely are able to develop strategic processes that exploit such contradictions to their advantage. Institutional contradictions do not neatly fall into the conventional definition of political opportunities that focuses on elite division and political openness (McAdam et al., 1996; Meyer & Minkoff, 2004; Tarrow, 2011). Despite the fact that Chinese elites were largely solidary (lack of elite division) and political channels remained closed to non-elites (lack of political openness), FF leveraged institutional contradictions inherent in the existing socio-political system and exploited these contradictions like political opportunities. As such, I introduced the dialectical thinking in institutional change analysis to social movement theory, and I show that political opportunities can be approached dynamically rather than as given.

The second sub-process of the SMO robust action model shows how FF, taking advantage of institutional contradictions, created double-sided actors and linked them into thickening networks. Double-sided actors possessed human rights consciousness, but were embedded in existing systems and functioned in these systems to alleviate institutional contradictions. The act of creating double-sided actors was multivocal and
could be interpreted in multiple ways. As a result, it allowed FF to claim that these actors served China’s economic reform and social development in alignment of elites’ goal. Nevertheless, these actors could also serve as the “scaffold” for future grassroots mobilization. Like this, FF bypassed elites’ repression while engaging in activities that potentially subvert elite rule.

The concept of robust action is rooted in network analysis (Obert & Padgett, 2012; Padgett & Ansell, 1993). Seen from an organizational perspective, robust action is a type of organizational strategic response to institutional constraints. Oliver (1991) conceptualized how such responses can range from passive forms (acquiesce, compromise, or avoid) to more active forms (defy or manipulate). Oliver predicts that when the dependence on the source of institutional pressure is high, and when the pressure is imposed using coercion, the pressured organization is more likely to respond passively (i.e., acquiesce or compromise). When institutional requirements are not consistent with organizational goals, and when they impose constraints on organizational discretion, the organization is likely to either avoid, or adopt more active strategies of defying and manipulating. FF operated in an environment that crisscrossed these two sets of predictors. FF both exemplified and defied Oliver’s (1991) predictions by adopting robust action, which was “passive” and “active” at the same time. Passive, due to the fact that FF acquiesced to elites’ needs and was cautious to stay within the zone of actions ascribed as tolerable by elites in a specific historical period (Tilly, 2006). Active, since FF strategically developed double-sided actors, and the actions involved coopting elites and shaping values and criteria. Therefore, my thesis expands this line of work in strategic management by showing how an organization can use robust action to combine passive and active responses, and how such responses enable an organization to promote non-conformant goals under coercive, high institutional pressure.

Moreover, my model of SMO robust action reveals novel insights about how an SMO “replicates” other actors who also use robust action to respond to institutional pressure. In extant research, robust action is conceived as strategies adopted by individual actors to bypass contextual constraints. FF, on the other hand, selected and developed diverse actors who were also capable of deploying robust action. For instance, FF-sponsored
scholars, through their policy advisory role, exerted political influence that subtly nudged institutions toward rights-based concepts and practices. GONGOs, like the China Family Planning Association (CFPA), skilfully leveraged their ambiguous identity as both government-owned organization and a civil society member to push for sensitive rights-based concepts and practices. In selecting grassroots organizations to develop, FF preferred NGO leaders who understood how to maneuver in opaque Chinese political contexts and who also were dedicated to rights-based concepts and practices. These NGO leaders knew how to adapt to elites while pushing boundaries. As an example, in promoting a democratic approach of urban governance, the leader of Bright Sky used government officials’ language (which were rooted in China’s Communist movement) to convey rights-based meanings. FF carefully built relations with elites, GONGOs and grassroots NGOs, and linked them in projects and issue networks; in so doing, FF boosted the legitimacy of grassroots NGOs in the eyes of collaborating institutional actors. Through such exemplary robust action and through coaching and other interactions, FF appeared to have subtly signaled to grassroots leaders about how to accomplish social change in a movement-inhibiting context. Hence, FF replicated diverse actors who also were capable of robust action. Obert and Padgett (2012) show us how Bismarck skillfully deployed robust action to pull Germany together and to de-escalate conflicts with surrounding powers, but after he retired, the empire was taken over by less-skilled political leaders and was soon in tatters. The authors criticize Bismarck as a one-man show, failing to develop a system or other actors that could sustain Germany after his departure. My thesis conversely shows how FF avoided the one-man show by replicating its political skills in diverse Chinese actors.

To summarize, I demonstrate that robust action is a critical approach for instigating radical change in movement-inhibiting contexts. Robust action allows the SMO to bypass elite repression during pre-movement mobilization. Through pre-movement mobilization, the SMO can strive to develop a critical mass of actors who possess similar political skills to bypass elite repression in pursuing divergent change. As such, robust action is not only a passive mechanism to avoid repression, it also constitutes an active mechanism for excluded actors to accumulate political access and influence over time.
Chapter 9 CONCLUSION AND LIMITATIONS

My thesis addresses a lacuna in current social movement research: how can a SMO mobilize other actors in a context where requisite conditions for social movements do not exist. I explore how the Ford Foundation, a SMO of human rights, created what I call a “pre-movement” in an authoritarian China, when none of the requisite conditions for movement mobilization existed. I thus contribute to social movement research in several significant ways: first, by identifying critical mechanisms of creating a pre-movement; second, by offering an explanation about how an SMO can bypass elite repression in the process of creating a pre-movement. Additionally, this thesis contributes to institutional theory by explicating a micro-mechanism through which actors skillfully leverage institutional contradictions for institutional change.

My thesis has certain limitations which points to opportunities for future research. The first limitation is an inevitable outcome of the chosen research design. I committed to an in-depth study of the strategic processes of one single social movement organization, rather than a more expanded design that favors a broad exploration of the history of the development of human rights in China, which in itself is an intensely interesting phenomenon to many readers. Either design could have yielded useful insights: the former is more capable of revealing specifics of organizational strategies, and the latter could generate broad-based understandings of multiple actors and their relations in promoting human rights in China. As a management scholar spanning strategy research and organization theory, the former approach was more intriguing to me. I also felt my training positioned me the best in exploiting the former angle. This design commitment inevitably omits comprehensive accounts of other actors that were also involved in promoting human rights in China. Still, my design generates significant insights to the human rights development in China for two reasons: 1) FF, as described in the thesis, was a pioneer and arguably the most important organization in promoting human rights in China; 2) FF developed a large number of diverse actors who promoted human rights in China; these actors that were linked to FF were also portrayed in my thesis. Future research can explore a more comprehensive understanding of the trajectory of human
rights in China, contrasting the approach of FF and FF-linked actors with the approaches by actors farther from FF’s circle of influence.

The second limitation is related with my data sources. The process of dis-embedding from existing institutions and the development of alternative consciousness are important pre-conditions for movements. I was able to interview FF grantees who vividly revealed how FF helped them develop human rights consciousness in Phase 3. However, it was difficult to gather similar interview data for Phase 1 and Phase 2. First, it was difficult to track down early-stage grantees, especially since China had undergone dramatic change resulting in unusually high personnel mobility. Second, even if I were able to interview some of these grantees, retrospective bias would be a significant barrier for the rigor of my research. I thus chose to rely on FF archives to develop my understanding of how FF stimulated local actors’ consciousness in Phase 1 and 2. Further research may be able to identify unique data (e.g., archives from FF’s Chinese grantees) to reveal consciousness development in the early phases of China’s human rights pre-movement.

The third limitation is due to the nature of a single case study. As in all single case studies, my thesis has boundary conditions that scope its generalizability. First, specific characteristics of the Chinese socio-political environment may have affected the generalizability of my findings. I suggest that the brokering and scaffolding processes, and the deployment of robust action to bypass elite repression, can be used to understand similarly inhibiting contexts: contexts in which institutional and extra-institutional channels of claims-making are closed and where solidary elites repress other actors’ divergent claims-making. Nonetheless, inhibiting contexts can exhibit different degrees of inhibiting-ness (see Figure 1); in less inhibiting contexts, SMO strategies may have variations. This sets a boundary condition for the findings from this thesis, but also opens up avenues for future research to explore these variations and link them to the inhibiting factors of the context.

A second boundary condition is related with FF’s social position. As a grant-maker, FF is a mediating SMO rather than an SMO of direct actions. FF also occupies a unique position in world society sitting on plentiful network resources. Hence, the brokering
process is particularly salient and vivid in this case study. I argue that brokering would be an essential process for pre-movement mobilization in most situations. Movement-relevant concepts, knowledge and organizing templates, as well as material resources, will need to be transferred from outside the pre-movement since the latter is in an infantile stage in terms of the focal movement. The specifics of the brokering process, however, may differ; there may also be distinctive types of SMOs who engage in pre-movement brokering. For example, what if the brokering SMO is a local organization that is more vulnerable to elite repression than foreign brokers such as FF? What if the brokering SMO possesses different types of network positions than FF? Future research can build on my research to pursue more varied understandings of the brokering process in pre-movements.
References


Appendix 1 Illustrative Profiles of FF China Officers

Andrew Watson, Representative 1999 -2007

Before joining FF in 1999, Watson was professor of Asian Studies at the University of Adelaide, Australia. He was a member of the Board of the Australia China Council and President of the Chinese Studies Association of Australia. His teaching has encompassed China's economic and social history, Chinese politics, the Chinese economy and the Chinese language. He has published books and articles on a variety of topics related to China's political and economic development. Watson has been a frequent visitor to China since 1965, when he lived and worked in Xi’an (capital city of China’s northwestern province Shan’xi) for two years. He has worked with a wide range of colleagues in China, including two Ministries in Beijing, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and a number of provinces. Watson is fluent in Chinese.

Titi Liu, Program Officer of Law and Rights

Education: J.D. cum laude Harvard Law School. Before joining the Foundation in July 2000, she was a visiting professor at the East China University of Law and Politics, and a consultant to a number of Chinese law schools on the development of clinical legal education. Prior to that, she was a practicing lawyer with the U.S.-based law firm, Paul, Weiss, Rifkind, Wharton & Garrison in the firm's Hong Kong office and advised international clients on a range of legal issues arising from transactions in China.

He Jin, Program Officer of Education, Arts and Culture

Education: Ph.D. in Education, Stanford University. Before joining the Foundation in 2001, he was the Sector Coordinator for Human Development at the World Bank Resident Mission in Beijing, responsible for education, health and social protection projects. Prior to that, he was the Assistant Resident Representative of the United Nation Development Program, Beijing Office, taking charge of social and rural development projects.

Irene Bain, Program Officer of Environment and Development

Education: Ph.D. in Human Geography, the Australian National University, Canberra. Before joining the Foundation in 2004, she was Community Development Advisor and Gender Specialist to a group of Australian government bilateral aid programs addressing issues of natural resource degradation in western China. Prior to that, she had lived and worked in China since 1990 as a specialist in a number of multilateral, bilateral and NGO poverty reduction and environmental improvement projects. This included co-managing one of the first international NGO offices and field programs in southwest China.
Appendix 2 Summary Information of Interviews

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Informant’s organization</th>
<th>Informant’s role</th>
<th>Issue area</th>
<th>Year founded</th>
<th>Headquarters &amp; other locations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bright Sky (NGO)</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Urban community governance</td>
<td>2002</td>
<td>Beijing, with operations in other cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communicators (NGO)</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Migrant workers’ rights</td>
<td>2003</td>
<td>Beijing, with branches in other cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Age Vocational School (NGO)</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Free vocational education and job placement for migrant workers’ children</td>
<td>2005</td>
<td>Beijing and 7 other cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Joyful Children (NGO)</td>
<td>Co-founder</td>
<td>Psychological intervention to improve vulnerable children’s mental wellbeing</td>
<td>Around 2008</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Countryside (NGO)</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Rural women’s rights; migrant workers’ rights</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Beijing, with projects in other provinces</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Westgreen (NGO)</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Environmental protection</td>
<td>2004</td>
<td>A Northwestern city of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highland Green (NGO)</td>
<td>Founder</td>
<td>Conservation and ethnic community development</td>
<td></td>
<td>A Northwestern city of China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Nest (NGO)</td>
<td>Executive</td>
<td>Platform NGO</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Shanghai, with branches in other cities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Millennial News</td>
<td>Section editor, journalist</td>
<td>Covering China’s NGO sector and social innovation</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF Beijing Office</td>
<td>Officer, acting Representative</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>Beijing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FF</td>
<td>Former executive</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>NA</td>
<td>New York</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 3 FF Grant File: General Format (as in Original Microfilms)

Note: I collected the highlighted sections.

Section 1. BASIC DOCUMENTS:
  Program Action Forms
  **Accepted Proposals**
  Tax Forms and Certifications
  Docket Excerpts
  **Request for Grant Action (RGA)**
  Grant Notification Letter & Budget
  Terms of Grant
  Grant Acceptance Letter
  Supplementary Requests & Agreements
  Modification Requests & Agreements

Section 2. PAYMENTS:
  Requests
  Letters
  Acknowledgments

Section 3. REPORTS:
  Grant Status Report Forms
  **Grantee Narrative and Financial Reports**

Section 4. **CORRESPONDENCE**:
  *All other correspondence and material, in reverse chronological order*
Curriculum Vitae

Name: Yanfei Hu

Post-secondary
Education and Degrees:
- Ivey Business School, Western University, London, Ontario, Canada
  - Ph.D. in General Management, expected 07/2016
  - Master of Business Administration, 2002-2004
- University of International Business & Economics, Beijing, China
  - Bachelor of Economics, 1988-1992

Related Work Experience:
- Director (2008-2010), Associate Director (2005-2007)
  - China Business Development
  - Ivey Business School, Beijing & Shanghai Offices
- Dow Jones Publishing Company (Asia) Inc., Hong Kong
  - Special Projects Manager, 2004
- Reuters Canada Ltd., Toronto, Canada
  - Online Editor, 2001-2002
- Dow Jones & Company, Beijing Office, China
  - Assistant Editor, 1999-2000
- International Business Daily, Beijing, China
  - Reporter & Section Editor, 1993-1999

Research in Progress:

Hu, Y., & Rerup, C. 2015. “Sensebreaking and sensegiving during radical change”. In preparation for submission to *Academy of Management Journal*. 