

# CHINA BALANCE SHEET

## NONGOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS

The direction that China and U.S.-China relations take will define the world's future. For the United States, a rising China increasingly affects American prosperity and security, calling for some clear-eyed thinking and tough economic, political, and security choices. As the twenty-first century unfurls, the stakes have never been higher for getting U.S. policy toward China right. By untangling the complex, sometimes contradictory, strands of this vast and dynamic country, *China: The Balance Sheet* lays the foundation for informed and effective U.S. policy toward China, the world's emerging superpower.

### BACKGROUND

- The past decade **has witnessed an explosion of NGOs working on a broad range of issues the government has been unable or unwilling to address.** Such bottom-up activism was facilitated by the passage of new laws in the late 1990s that created a legal framework for NGOs.
- **According to the latest official statistics, there are approximately 3 million NGOs in China, though only about one out of every 100 is registered. There are over 11 million other social service organizations across the country.** Some outside estimates calculate there are more than 8 million registered and unregistered nongovernmental and quasi-governmental associations in China.
- More than **200 international NGOs have set up offices in China and are most numerous (with more than 50 groups) in the environmental sphere.** The next five top areas of international NGO work are rural development, education, health, HIV/AIDS, and disability.
- In spite of some greater openness toward NGOs, the summer of 2005 saw a **steady tightening of Chinese government regulation on such groups.**

### CURRENT SITUATION

- NGOs, both domestic and international, present a conundrum for the Chinese leadership.
- The Party appears to allow and even encourage organizations carrying out charitable, social welfare, poverty alleviation, and other “non-political” work.

For further information, see Chapter 3:

“China’s Domestic Transformation: Democratization or Disorder?”

*China: The Balance Sheet: What the World Needs to Know Now about the Emerging Superpower*

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- However, **organizations that are deemed “political” or seen as critical of the Party still face repression.** It is up to Party officials, often at local levels, to determine which groups are “political” and which are not.
- **The authorities have started to scrutinize activities of both international NGOs that support work in China** and domestic NGOs that receive foreign funding. The Chinese leadership has been urged to conduct a comprehensive and objective assessment before drafting relevant regulations. It is speculated that new regulations might impose the same supervision and guidance requirements on foreign NGOs as are currently placed on domestic groups.

## IMPLICATIONS

- **NGOs can help fill the space that has opened** as the government has pulled back from social services and the market has increasingly taken over.
- These growing numbers of social entrepreneurs are essential to China’s future not simply because of the services they provide, but also because they are **forming the foundation for a more vibrant civil society.**
- On the other hand, the more independent and well-organized that NGOs are, the greater their perceived threat to the Party.

### NGO Activities

*While environmental NGOs were the vanguard, other major areas of social entrepreneurship have opened up:*

*Health: Health NGOs are one of the largest and fastest growing NGO sectors in China, ranging from small, unregistered self-help groups to larger NGOs carrying out education projects, legal aid, advocacy, or research. Some health NGOs focus on specific groups—women, HIV/AIDS or cancer patients, or children—while others undertake projects to improve rural health care service.*

*Legal Aid: A growing number of legal aid NGOs established within university law schools have paralleled the government creation of legal aid centers in the 1990s. One of the first was Beijing University’s Center for Women’s Law Studies and Legal Services, which since 1995 has provided women legal advice and pro bono legal support. This NGO’s success led other law schools to create or host legal aid organizations for women, children, migrant workers, and pollution victims.*

*Rural Development and Poverty Alleviation: Some NGOs in this sector are religious-based, such as the Amity Foundation, one of China’s largest and most autonomous poverty alleviation NGOs, established by the Jiangsu Christian Council in 1985. This NGO implements drinking water, health, education, microfinance, and afforestation projects in rural areas. Many rural development NGOs are locally based volunteer groups, such as the Snowland Service Group, which builds schools, medical clinics, and water systems in Tibetan communities in southwest Qinghai’s Yushu prefecture, one of China’s poorest places.*