

Case Study

The Evolution and Reform of the Friends of Nature

Friends of Nature (FON) is the first environmental NGO in China, which formally and firstly registered in March 1994 as an affiliate to the non-governmental Academy for Chinese Culture. FON is a nonprofit, public welfare organization funded mostly by membership fees and international foundation and domestic public support. FON's main goal is to promote environmental protection and sustainable development in China by raising environmental awareness and initiating a 'green culture' among the public.

How FON was founded?

FON became China's first legal, environmental NGO 10 years ago. "We knew from television about Greenpeace. But there wasn't anything like that in China. My friends and I began wondering, why not here? We decided to try." Liang Congjie, co-founder and president of FON spoke these words. His "friends," the other founding members of FON, were 3 of his fellow teachers at the Academy for Chinese Culture, a private Philosophy institution. FON was founded after an informal meeting and discuss among those four people and dozens of environmentalists.

[Image removed for copyright purposes]

Liang Congjie addresses the first meeting ever held to organize a non-governmental environmental group in China. This informal meeting led to the formation of "Friends of Nature"

Who are the members?

FON has more than 2000 members now. However, it had no more than 200 members four years ago. Its membership is growing fast and steadily in recently few years. "Membership," says Congjie "is everybody. It's less like a western environmental lobby and more like a club. We have a homey atmosphere and I like it that way." (I will give more details on the membership development on presentation with a newly published membership investment)

Main Programs

Until now, the most successful and important part in FON's programs is to develop informal environmental education, such as field trips and vacation camps for students, lectures, seminars and training classes for teachers, publications and activities for the general public. Below is a list of FON's long term running environmental education programs:

- Tree Planting
- Bird Watch
- Tibetan Antelope Conservation

- Rural Teaching Training
- Environmental Education Van Program
- Better Environmental Scheme Program in Colleges

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This is a picture for the Environmental Education Van Program. The well-decorated van with teachers and hand out materials had gone to hundreds of villages and community to play environmental games with kids.

Shifting from its first decade to the second one, FON is going to expand its programs and functions into two mainly directions

- Shift from public awareness to public participation for the environmental education
- Strengthen its interaction with government and the governmental decision making (their first step is to help the State Environmental Protection Agency, SEPA in organizing public hearings.)

Management Reforms

Liang's success is all the more startling given that his group functions with only three paid staff and an annual budget of about \$23,000 in 2001. Liang takes a token payment, surviving on his teaching salary from the academy for Chinese history. However, at the end of 2004, FON has increased its budget to \$125,000 per year (mainly from international foundations) and formed a well-functioned board. During 2004, many reforms were carried in FON and the biggest challenges it faces today is (1) how to evolve FON from Christmas's management scheme into a higher level management. (2) how to run the financial aspect of an NGO more professionally.