



# Examining Globalization through Chinese HIV/AIDS Activism

Sara Elizabeth FARINA

Department of Anthropology, the College of William and Mary, Williamsburg, VA 23187 USA

**ABSTRACT:** I came to learn of China's HIV/AIDS situation through a two-semester (Feb. to May and Aug. to Dec. 2007) internship at an HIV/AIDS-related organization in Beijing called the China Orchid AIDS Project (Dongzhen). This internship opportunity, organized by my study abroad program, the Institute for the International Education of Students, enabled me to engage in participant observation on a weekly basis at Dongzhen. Through these experiences, I became interested in how civil society organizations (CSOs) like Dongzhen came into being and responded to the HIV/AIDS crisis in China, given the shame and secrecy surrounding the disease. Due to tensions with the government and lack of charitable giving by Chinese companies and individuals caused by the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, the majority of Chinese HIV/AIDS activists must rely upon support from abroad to fund their organizations and increase awareness of their causes. Thus, Chinese HIV/AIDS advocates form what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink call a "transnational advocacy network" (1998). I use this transnational phenomenon to examine the complexities of globalization in post-reform China.

**Keywords:** HIV/AIDS; Globalization; Chinese CSOs; Chinese NGOs; HIV/AIDS activism.

## 中国艾滋病行动全球化的分析

范怡娜

威廉玛丽学院人类学系, 美国弗吉尼亚州 威廉斯堡 23187

**摘要:** 在北京的东珍纳兰文化传播有限责任公司, 一个关注艾滋病的组织, 作者实习了两个学期(2007年2月-5月与8月-12月)。作者获悉了中国的艾滋病状况。这次实习经美国学生国际教育研究所安排, 作者每周都在东珍参与调查。经此, 作者开始关注东珍这样的民间社会组织, 深入探索在中国对艾滋病有着回避和负面心态的环境下, 这些组织的构建方式。因为政府的压力和国内企业慈善捐助活动的缺乏, 大部分的中国艾滋病活动家必须依靠国外提供资金, 或者提高公众的意识。因此, 中国艾滋病活动家组建了“跨国行动网络”。作者从类似的跨国现象来分析中国改革开放后全球化的复杂性。

**关键词:** 艾滋病; 全球化; 中国民间社会组织; 中国非政府组织; 艾滋病行动

### I. "Reform and Open Up": Globalization in Modern China

#### Introduction

In 1979 China's Vice Premier of the State Council DENG Xiaoping (邓小平) declared, "To get rich is glorious," thus ushering in a series of economic reforms that marked a dramatic shift in Chinese history. Through the "reform and open up policy" (改革开放政策), Deng proposed a new system of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" (中国特色社会主义) that would promote market forces, attract foreign enterprises, and reduce government control. In doing so, Deng seemingly advanced two of the main characteristics of capitalism that challenge the ideological underpinnings of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP): the progression of neoliberalism through privatization [1] and the reduction of nation-state power [2]. While Anthony Giddens

argues that these aspects of globalization and modernization have led to the "evaporating of the privileged position of the West" [3], I agree with Dennis Altman [1] who perceives international institutions such as the United Nations (UN), World Bank, and World Trade Organization (WTO) as legitimizing Western ideology as necessary for advancement. In this way, "globalization is not a single unified phenomenon, but a syndrome of processes and activities that are imbedded in a dominant set of ideas largely influenced by liberal, free-market economics" [4]. Because neoliberalism has been tied to Western notions of political liberty and stability, China's 2001 entrance into the WTO and increasing marketization have led many to predict the rise of democracy and other ideals espoused by Western ideology [5]. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" has thus led to a conflict of interest within China between the CCP and proponents of Western

thought that go beyond the country's interest in economic development.

During this period of rapid globalization in China, the onset and spread of acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) has greatly impacted its society. Shortly following the first reported case of AIDS in 1985, the Chinese government attributed the disease to a rise in deviant Western behavior (e.g. homosexuality and promiscuity) perpetuated by reform [6]. This stigmatization created a sense of shame and secrecy surrounding AIDS that consequently led to inadequate AIDS education. For this reason, many Chinese did not and still do not know how the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) responsible for AIDS is transmitted (Interview, Dongzhen Staff, Beijing, Dec.5, 2007). This lack of information coupled with post-reform privatization of health services led to the rapid spread of HIV during the blood-selling schemes of the 1990s. In an attempt to finance previously state-funded health and social services, local officials in rural central China enticed farmers to sell their blood which was in turn sold to pharmaceutical companies. Poor sanitation and collection methods spread HIV amongst donors and caused the populations of entire villages to become infected with AIDS [7]. To conceal the severity of this debacle, provincial governments (most infamously, Henan) withheld and continue to withhold accurate HIV/AIDS data from the central government. Provincial underreporting has consequentially complicated national HIV/AIDS estimates. In Jan. 2006 the Chinese government, World Health Organization (WHO), and United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) estimated that China had 650,000 people infected with HIV including 75,000 people AIDS. However, one Chinese HIV/AIDS activist claimed that China could have as many as 10 million people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) [8]. The confusion and secrecy surrounding HIV/AIDS statistics in China manifests and perpetuates the stigmatization and shame of the disease.

I came to learn of China's HIV/AIDS situation through a two-semester (Feb. to May and Aug. to Dec. 2007) internship at an HIV/AIDS-related organization in Beijing called the China Orchid AIDS Project (东珍纳兰文化传播有限责任公司) commonly called "Dongzhen" among employees. This internship opportunity, organized by my study abroad program, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES) enabled me to engage in participant observation on a weekly basis at Dongzhen. IES is an American

study-abroad provider with programs in 31 cities around the globe. The IES Beijing Center is located at Beijing Foreign Studies University (北京外国语大学) in Haidian District(海淀区). Like many of its other centers, IES Beijing offers students the opportunity to participate in a for-credit internship at organizations and businesses throughout the city. At the end of my internship, I held formal interviews with Dongzhen's director, LI Dan (李丹), five current employees, and two former employees. My affiliation with Dongzhen and contacts through IES's internship coordinator, Wendy Kang, enabled me to interview key players in China's grassroots fight against HIV/AIDS, participate in one of Dongzhen's capacity- building meetings, and attend a UNAIDS meeting in Beijing.

Through these experiences, I became interested in how civil society organizations (CSOs) like Dongzhen came into being and responded to the HIV/AIDS crisis in China, given the shame and secrecy surrounding the disease. Here, "civil society" refers to the "...wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organizations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations" [9]. Neoliberal ideals progressed via globalization after the economic reforms of the late 1970s and bolstered the growth of civil society in China. Furthermore, increased privatization during this time presented an opportunity for CSOs to provide services previously funded by the state. However, as a group of organizations outside direct state-control, civil society contradicts Marxist-Leninist ideals of the Chinese Communist Party [10] and thus poses a potential threat to the Party-state. In the case of HIV/AIDS-related CSOs, the local and central governments' sensitivity surrounding HIV/AIDS exacerbates this threat. Due to tensions with the government and lack of charitable giving by Chinese companies and individuals caused by the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, the majority of Chinese HIV/AIDS activists must rely upon support from abroad to fund their organizations and increase awareness of their causes. Thus, Chinese HIV/AIDS advocates form what Margaret Keck and Kathryn Sikkink call a "transnational advocacy network" [11]. In light of the approaching Beijing 2008 Olympic Games, the transnational nature of the Chinese HIV/AIDS activist network has become particularly relevant. David R. Black and Shona Bezanson [12] note that these

advocacy networks have become stronger as state sovereignty has weakened in recent years. Moreover, Black and Bezanson note the relationship between state and foreign press, recognizing that international limelight pressures countries sponsoring the Olympics to be on their “best behavior” [12]. In this way, the 2008 Olympics represent a major stage in China’s history as the country prepares to present itself to the world.

Just as Dennis Altman [1] argues that HIV/AIDS as a pandemic can be used as a “case study” to examine the intricacies of globalization, I argue that the transnational Chinese HIV/AIDS activist network can be seen as ingrained in and representative of the increasingly global character of post-reform China. As explained above, the strengthening of these networks in China has occurred alongside and contributed to the weakening of the Party-state’s power. I examine herein how the inherently international phenomena of HIV/AIDS, civil society, and advocacy networks result from globalization and can thus be used to study the complexities of reform.

### *Activism on the “Ground”*

During the spring 2007 semester, I decided to follow a path taken by numerous college students across the United States and study abroad. Two and a half semesters of Chinese language courses taught by native Beijingers had piqued my interest in this up-and-coming city; I felt that spending time abroad would enable me to improve my Mandarin and learn more about the People’s Republic of China. Guided by a vague desire to understand and “experience” life in Beijing, I enrolled in a local internship program through my study abroad program, the Institute for the International Education of Students (IES). Because of my interests in anthropology and social issues in China, the program’s internship advisor, Wendy Kang, assigned me to a local CSO dedicated to assisting people living with AIDS. At first, I felt dissatisfied with my placement at the Dongzhen as I had no interest in China’s HIV/AIDS problem and no knowledge of the disease beyond what I learned in high school health classes. Despite my initial chagrin, I agreed to accompany my advisor to Dongzhen’s office. After an hour-long journey via taxi-cab, subway, and bus, Professor Kang and I arrived at Gulou West Avenue in Xicheng District (鼓楼西大街, 西城区), a quaint *hutong* (胡同) or alley-way neighborhood lined with fruit vendors, small shops, eateries, and old courtyard style houses

known as a *siheyuanr* (四合院). This area seemed much more relaxed than other parts of Beijing I had explored as it lacked construction and heavy traffic. People quietly moved about their business interrupted only by sounds of an occasional bus or gentle ring of a passing bicycle. While this idyllic image of “old Beijing” (老北京) changed throughout my time at Dongzhen as construction projects engulfed the area and tourism from the nearby Drum and Bell Towers increased, this first introduction to *hutong* life greatly impacted my earliest impressions of the city. Professor Kang led me to an old *siheyuanr* across the street from our bus stop. As I entered the concrete courtyard, I immediately noticed the stark contrast between this building and tourist *siheyuanr*. Whereas some old courtyard-style houses have been renovated mainly to serve as tourist attractions or as hotels, this courtyard complex had been turned into office space for several organizations including Dongzhen. Dongzhen’s offices spanned four small rooms in the courtyard; the exterior’s peeling paint and stark concrete atmosphere suggested the *siheyuanr*’s utilitarian and economical functions.

After entering one of Dongzhen’s tiny offices, Professor Kang introduced me to LI Dan, a tall and impossibly thin man in his late twenties, and a fashionably-dressed young woman around the same age as LI Dan. During formal introductions, I shivered in the Feb. cold while my internship advisor and LI Dan, Dongzhen director, discussed the nature of my work. LI Dan’s female employee, Dongzhen’s director of fundraising and foreign affairs, rarely spoke and spent most of her time pouring over my English-language resume. I later learned that she was the only one in the office who could speak English. Though I attempted to keep up with LI Dan and Professor Kang’s rapid-fire Mandarin, I found myself asking my internship advisor to translate the majority of the conversation. While I feared my sub-par Chinese would hinder my work, Professor Kang assured me that I spoke well enough and that Dongzhen wanted a native English speaker to help translate materials and contact foreign charitable organizations. After determining the routine details of my semester at Dongzhen, Professor Kang and I thanked LI Dan for his time. Just as we were rising to leave, my advisor asked LI Dan something in Chinese to which LI Dan laughingly responded. My teacher asked if I had understood the interaction and I sheepishly admitted that I had not. Professor Kang proceeded to explain that she had asked him about his relationship with

the government to which LI Dan exasperatedly responded: we would be happy if the government just left us alone.

In the midst of mundane scheduling concerns and standard work-related introductions, this comment seemed as cryptic and confusing as the language in which it was uttered. Why would Professor Kang ask about LI Dan's relationship with the local government? Why would the government interfere with such a small organization? Still, my interest had been piqued and my internship suddenly appeared more intriguing because LI Dan had situated himself as a renegade struggling to enlighten an oppressive government. As time progressed along with my language abilities, I came to realize the full implications of this statement. In retrospect my earliest encounter with LI Dan can be seen as a microcosm of China's transnational HIV/AIDS activist network: to appeal to me, a foreigner, LI Dan presented himself as a martyr against a tyrannical government. During my two semesters at Dongzhen, I participated in and observed the intricate relationship between the international community, Chinese local and central governments, and HIV/AIDS advocacy organizations. In this way, I began to see Dongzhen as imbedded in and therefore symbolic of the complex state of affairs that had arisen due to the nature of Chinese civil society and the history of HIV/AIDS in China.

### ***Key Players in Chinese HIV/AIDS Advocacy***

To understand Dongzhen, one must know the background of the organization's charismatic leader. LI Dan's interest in HIV/AIDS began during his freshman year of college while distributing pamphlets for World AIDS Day as a Red Cross Society volunteer. However, LI Dan's passion for HIV/AIDS activism began after watching a pirated version of "Philadelphia." Inspired by the tenacity of Tom Hanks's character, LI Dan decided to create a Chinese "Philadelphia" and worked with Song Pengfei (宋鹏飞), the first Chinese person to openly admit to being HIV positive. LI Dan attributes this early endeavor to youthful idealism [8], a quality that pervaded his work during my brief tenure at Dongzhen. LI Dan's work with Song won him the title of the Communist Party's Youth League "excellent member" in 2002 [8]. During this time, LI Dan visited numerous villages in Henan that had been devastated by HIV/AIDS. Drawn to the situation in Henan, he abandoned his doctoral studies in astrophysics in 2003 to

devote himself entirely to AIDS activism. That same year, LI Dan founded a school for AIDS orphans in Shang Qiu, Henan, (河南商丘) which local officials closed before it could be registered. During my interview with LI Dan, he claimed that he often pursued sensitive activist work that tested local government limits (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). For this reason, he has been repeatedly detained and beaten (Interview, LI Dan, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). In 2006, LI Dan won the Reebok Human Rights Award (a \$50,000 granted to individuals who have endured personal risk to advance human rights through nonviolent means)[8], thus enabling him to expand his operation to include offices in Beijing and Kaifeng, Henan, dedicated to HIV/AIDS law, news translation, education, and arts.

Since LI Dan spent most of his time at Dongzhen's office in Kaifeng (河南开封) during my first semester, another IES intern and I worked with only two employees on a regular basis. The first was an effusive middle-aged man who laughed often when he spoke and allayed my initial language concerns. The other was a warm though quiet middle-aged woman also made me feel at home at Dongzhen. Though I had met the director of fundraising and foreign affairs upon my first introduction to Dongzhen, I never worked with her because she moved to the United States to pursue graduate studies at Columbia University. By the end of May, LI Dan had hired two new employees, one who remained at Dongzhen and another who left during the summer. Upon my return in Aug. 2007, LI Dan informed me that local officials had closed the Henan office and his male employee planned to leave Dongzhen. LI Dan hired four recent college graduates during my second semester in Beijing, one of whom left after two months. By working with these enthusiastic employees and interacting with the intense and charismatic LI Dan on a regular basis, I came to experience first-hand the trials and tribulations of a civil society organization in China.

In addition to conducting participation observation on a weekly basis at Dongzhen, I met many key figures in China's fight against HIV/AIDS through my affiliation with LI Dan and Professor Kang. During my first semester in Beijing, I met Jane Cohen, a former employee at Dongzhen who had left graduate school at Columbia University to pursue HIV/AIDS advocacy work in China. After a disagreement with LI Dan concerning Dongzhen's direction, Ms. Cohen quit and took a position with the Ministry of Health. Though



I only met her on two occasions, Jane Cohen provided valuable insights into how LI Dan's aggressive tactics contributed to the tensions between government and civil society. For instance, LI Dan's work in Henan (a province particularly sensitive to HIV/AIDS due to its connection with the blood-selling schemes of the 1990s) posed a threat to local officials while his attempts to garner attention from abroad undermined the central government. Sabina Brady, the former country director of the William J. Clinton Foundation in China, shared Cohen's opinion of LI Dan. While talking to Ms. Brady after her presentation to IES students on HIV/AIDS in China, I learned that she had briefly worked with LI Dan in the past and believed that he needed confrontation to justify his existence. Though these conversations made me question my work at Dongzhen, they served as the impetus into my research of the complicated relationship between Chinese HIV/AIDS activists, foreign press and organizations, and Chinese local and central governments.

Aside from these negative accounts of LI Dan, many others shaped my understanding of Dongzhen and its role in Chinese civil society. At a capacity-building exercise sponsored by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR), I had the opportunity to discuss Dongzhen and Chinese CSOs with IIRR's China Program Coordinator, Amelia Chung. Ms. Chung recognized problems in LI Dan's attitude towards the government but believed that Dongzhen could eventually learn to cooperate with local officials.

Though I did not have the chance to meet in person with Asia Catalyst executive director Sara Davis, Ms. Davis also helped me understand Dongzhen through work-related e-mails and by answering my questions conveyed by e-mail about the organization and civil society in China. Before founding Asia Catalyst (an organization dedicated to assisting social activists in Asia), Ms. Davis worked as a researcher for Human Rights Watch. In 2006, LI Dan contacted Sara Davis with plans for starting a legal aid center for Chinese HIV/AIDS patients; together, they opened the Korekata AIDS Law Center in Jan. 2007. Unlike many others who had worked with LI Dan, Ms. Davis did not find LI Dan antagonistic but rather an individual willing to cooperate with anyone who shared his vision (E-mail with Sara Davis, Nov.17, 2007). While Amelia Chung and Sara Davis provided mainly Dongzhen-related information, the AIDS Relief Fund for China's Program Director, Humphrey

Wou, shared his experiences working with grassroots HIV/AIDS activists in China. This information illuminated the problems faced by organizations smaller than LI Dan's and therefore gave me a fuller understanding of China's budding civil society.

During my second semester in Beijing,

Professor Kang introduced me to LI Xiang (李想), a person living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) who founded the Mangrove Support Group (红树林支持组织), China's first support group for PLWHA. Just as Mr. Wou provided an account of organizations which differ from Dongzhen in size and scope, activist LI Xiang contrasted LI Dan in his organizational mission and advocacy strategy. Though more subdued than LI Dan in conversation, this young man emanated warmth as he discussed his work at Mangrove. Since its inception, Mangrove has expanded from an organization that provides counseling to PLWHA and training to health care professionals to one that assists 16 HIV/AIDS-related grassroots organizations in eight provinces across the country. Dubbed as one of China's most notable "positive" AIDS activists [6], LI Xiang supports the growth of civil society but said that he worked with the government and had never "made them angry" (Interview, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). Given the various accounts of LI Dan's antagonistic activist work, LI Xiang provides a contrast to better understand HIV/AIDS activism in China.

My two semesters in Beijing enabled me to experience and understand the various levels of the transnational Chinese HIV/AIDS activist network. Although I conducted my research in Beijing, the global nature of these advocacy networks eclipses the physical location of my fieldwork. Instead the complexities of post-reform China are inherent to and manifested through the more abstract relationship between activists, governments, and international community. For this reason, my "field site" is not Dongzhen, Beijing, or China but rather the network itself. To better understand the characteristics of this unique "locality," I must first examine the phenomenon that led to its rise: HIV/AIDS and civil society.

## II. "Loving Capitalism Disease": HIV/AIDS in China

### *Introduction*

From China's first reported case of HIV/AIDS in 1985, numerous myths have been created to explain its inception and spread. For example, some scholars [6] attribute the spread

of HIV/AIDS to insufficient education, limited media coverage, subjugated grassroots organizations, and deficient official reports. Therefore, prevention of any infectious disease must first start by fixing the country's macrosocial problems, namely poverty (E-mail with Humphrey Wou, Nov.20, 2007). Others have argued that historically China's central government has been incapable of controlling infections epidemics such as smallpox and measles in the early 1950s [13], making it all the more susceptible to HIV/AIDS.

While these accounts blame inadequate education and governance for the spread of HIV/AIDS in China, the Chinese story of HIV/AIDS follows a very different narrative. On the first day of my internship, I was assigned the task of reading through all of the English language HIV/AIDS-related materials in the Dongzhen library and classifying each as pertaining to education, law, or AIDS orphans. As I skimmed through the various publications, one piece in particular caught my attention, stating that the Chinese transliteration for AIDS (艾滋病) was once referred to as "loving capitalism disease" by using the same pronunciation (*aizibing*) but using different characters (爱资病). This clever language manipulation posits HIV/AIDS as a Western disease resulting from the evils of reform. Today, most Chinese view HIV/AIDS as an infectious disease with a high fatality rate rather than one an inherently foreign illness (E-mail with Sabina Brady, Nov. 16, 2007). Though the conception of HIV/AIDS has changed throughout the years, this early attribution to foreignness greatly impacted the history of China's response to the disease. According to experts from the Chinese Foundation for Prevention of Sexually Transmitted Disease (STD) and AIDS (中国防治性病艾滋病基金会) and the China Preventative Medicine Association (中华防治医学会), the development of HIV/AIDS in China has three stages: the Entry Phase (1985-1988), the Spreading Phase (1989-1994), and the Expansion Phase (1995-Present) [14].

### **Entry Phase**

On Jun. 6, 1985, China reported its first AIDS-related death: an Argentine tourist from the United States known to have AIDS died from respiratory failure [6], thus marking the beginning of the country's Entry Phase (1985-1988). During this phase, the majority of reported cases came from foreign nationals or Chinese from abroad living in mainly urban areas along China's coast [14]. From its

inception, the central government through the Ministry of Health presented HIV/AIDS as a foreign disease spread by immoral and illegal behaviors. In 1987, Minister of Health, Chen Minzhang (陈敏章), attributed the spread of HIV/AIDS to homosexuality, promiscuity, the unlawful importation of blood products, and prostitution between Chinese female sex workers and male foreign nationals [6]. That same year the *Beijing Review* (北京周报) attributed AIDS and other "social ills" found in China to "decadent" American ideology [6]. In 1988, the Vice Minister of Health announced "Several Regulations on the Detection and Control of AIDS" which presented the increased contact with foreigners after reform as a major force behind China's susceptibility to AIDS [15]. These regulations prohibited blood importations, required people entering the country to complete a health questionnaire, and required people living in China for a year or more as well as Chinese nationals who had lived abroad for one year or more to submit an approved AIDS test [15]. Because AIDS had been attributed to Western behavior, blood products from the West were considered particularly suspect [16]. During this post-reform period of rapid globalization, the central government stigmatized the West in order to distance itself from HIV/AIDS, thereby preventing the dissemination of accurate, unbiased HIV/AIDS-related information [6].

### **Spreading Phase**

During the second phase (1989-1994) of HIV/AIDS in China, the disease spread mainly among intravenous drug users (IDU). In 1989, 146 IDU cases were diagnosed in Ruili, Yunnan (云南瑞丽) and officials did not know if this represented an isolated outbreak or signs of a spreading epidemic [14]. As one of the earliest provinces to report its statistics, Yunnan has been one of the most progressive regions in accepting help from international NGOs and adopting effective HIV/AIDS policies (E-mail with Humphrey Wou, Nov. 20, 2007). A small number of HIV-positive cases were reported among IDU outside of Yunnan as well as through sexually transmitted infections (STI) among commercial sex workers (CSW) and Chinese foreign nationals [14]. At this time, the disease remained within these groups and had not yet spread into the general population. Because HIV/AIDS was still confined to marginalized members of society, it retained its association to deviant Western behavior.

### *Expansion Phase*

Throughout the beginning of the Expansion Phase (1995-present), HIV/AIDS continued to spread through “Western social ills” and began to permeate into China’s general public. In addition to IDU and CSW, migrant workers and men who sleep with men (MSM) emerged as high risk groups during this time and HIV’s main route of transmission became sexual intercourse [17]. This stage also marks the beginning of numerous commercial blood operations throughout Central China. Due to the unsanitary conditions of these blood collection centers, HIV spread amongst paid donors and into the general public through blood transfusions; in 2001 alone, the number of people living with HIV increased by 30 times [6]. This particularly contentious issue in China’s HIV/AIDS history evinces numerous problems surrounding post-reform policy and political ideology. As Dongzhen originally started as an orphanage and school for children whose parents had died from AIDS as a result of these blood-selling schemes in China’s central province of Henan, I came to learn much about this issue through my discussions with LI Dan and co-workers.

When asking LI Dan about blood-selling in Henan, he responded, “Farmer’s lives aren’t money, but [in China] there are a lot of people, so a few people are treated carelessly. This is a stage of reform” (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). During the 1980s, liberalization of the Chinese economy led to drastic alterations in the funding of health and social services which in turn resulted in unregulated privatization of provincial and local health institutions [7]. As local officials searched for ways to operate previously state-funded health institutions, they turned to the albumin (a blood plasma protein) industry to finance the newly privatized health system. Because albumin was used to treat numerous diseases including cancer, the international plasma industry was highly profitable. Moreover, China’s 1984 restriction on blood products from “capitalist countries” and the 1988 “Several Regulations on the Detection and Control of AIDS” increased demand for albumin in the national market. In response to the high demand for plasma, as well as increased market oriented reforms after 1989, local health officials across rural China established commercial blood collection centers during the 1990s. To entice the rural poor to donate blood, local authorities offered between 20 and 200 yuan (\$2.40 and \$24.00) for each donation [7] and used slogans patterned after

those of the father of reform, DENG Xiaoping, such as “To Donate Blood is To Grow Wealthy” (献血致富) and “To Donate Blood is To Be Glorious” (献血光荣) [6]. Officials thus called upon the local poor to pump life back into struggling localities. After collecting and pooling blood by type, administrators at these centers ran whole blood donations through a centrifuge to separate the plasma from other blood products. The plasma was sold to pharmaceutical companies while the pooled blood refuse was often re-injected (sometimes with unsanitary equipment or reused needles) into donors to prevent anemia and thus increase donation frequency [7, 18]. Operating under the assumption that foreign blood was “dirty” and Chinese blood “clean,” central health officials neglected to test the domestic blood supply at this time [16]. Because of this, HIV spread rapidly throughout Central China’s countryside leading to entire villages infected by AIDS.

These villages, scattered throughout rural central China, are commonly referred to as “AIDS villages.” Though first uncovered by the Chinese journalist, Zhang Jiechang, in 2000, his editor refused to publish the story about the villages. After finding another paper that agreed to publish the story, local officials forced Zhang’s editor to fire him [6]. Elizabeth Rosenthal’s reports on these villages brought international attention to China’s AIDS villages (as discussed below) and drew activists and journalists to these localities to interview PLWHA. In this process, many villagers felt they had been exploited by outsiders [19]. Under increasing media attention, officials in Henan provided villagers with free antiretroviral (ARV) treatment but without corresponding medical services in 2003. However, the harshness of the ARVs and lack of medical care led many PLWHA to believe they had been abandoned. In her presentation to IES students on HIV/AIDS in China, Sabina Brady alluded to the local governments’ lack of concern for PLWHA when she noted that from an epidemiological perspective blood transfusion victims in AIDS villages were easy to track and contain: local officials could merely give them ARV treatment and wait for them to die. Though the central government claims conditions have improved in these villages, LI Dan believes that several poorly managed blood collection centers are still in operation today [8].

Inadequate communication between local and central governments and restricted access to AIDS-related information kept the Chinese public unaware of the country’s blood-selling

and its burgeoning AIDS epidemic until the early 2000s. Elizabeth Rosenthal's 2001 report on "China's AIDS villages" in the *New York Times* [20] and UN General Secretary Kofi Annan's 2002 announcement that China faced "an explosive AIDS epidemic" [6] represented great strides in bringing attention to the disease. While both Rosenthal's article and Annan's speech increased international awareness of HIV/AIDS in China, the UN Secretary General's remarks left the Chinese public "greatly bewildered" [6], thus unveiling this problem to Chinese citizens.

Under increasing international pressure, the State Council put forth the "China Plan of Action to Contain, Prevent, and Control HIV/AIDS (2001-2005)" in May 2001 and the "Control the HIV/AIDS Epidemic through the Implementation of a Five-year Action Plan in China" in Aug. of the same year [6]. In addition to increased international attention, the 2002-2003 SARS epidemic also influenced AIDS policy. SARS originated in Guangdong, China in Nov. 2002 and thus coincided with HU Jintao's (胡锦涛) rise as the head of the Communist Party and subsequent election as President in Mar. 2003. The disease spread throughout China and around the world in 2003, and the WHO issued SARS-related travel warnings for the PRC and Hong Kong until Jun. 2003. Though the central government did not acknowledge the spread of SARS at first, Hu eventually adopted a policy of greater transparency and strict quarantines. This change in attitude led to several other modifications at the central and local levels that altered the course of HIV/AIDS in China. For example, health authorities within the central government welcomed help from international health organizations such as the WHO. Moreover, local Centers for Disease Control received substantial funding from the central government, and the public health system became re-centralized by giving the Ministry of Health more control over local offices [6]. Not only did SARS encourage several policy changes, but it also made Chinese officials more familiar with international criticism in the face of a health crisis [6]. This change in attitude could be seen when Premier WEN Jiabo (温家宝总理) shook hands with AIDS patients on Dec. 1, 2003, World AIDS Day, and when Vice Premier of the State Council and Minister of Health (Apr. 2003-May 2005) WU Yi (吴仪) visited one of Henan's most outspoken activists, GAO Yaojie (高耀洁), during that same year [6]. In addition to these symbolic strides, the central government

implemented the "Four Frees and One Care" (四免一关怀) policy which provided free anti-retroviral treatments (ARVs) to AIDS patients without insurance, free ARVs to pregnant women living with HIV/AIDS as well as free testing for their children, free voluntary counseling and testing, free schooling to AIDS orphans, and care in the form of economic assistance to households of PLWHA. Backed by increasing international and central government assistance, WU Yi established and headed the State Committee of AIDS Control and Prevention in 2004 which provided a more focused commitment to AIDS by coordinating policy decisions across the country through the Ministry of Health [6].

Despite these recent improvements in policy, AIDS remains highly stigmatized due to inadequate AIDS-related education and information. Before working at Dongzhen, most of my co-workers believed that HIV could only be spread through sexual intercourse, an attitude prevalent across the country [6]. Moreover, aside from two county-level officials in Inner Mongolia, local authorities were not held accountable for the 1990s blood-selling schemes [16]. Local implementation of the "Four Frees and One Care" policy in Henan has also been difficult, as many people remained unaware of their new rights or simply abandoned treatment due to the medicine's harsh side effects [17]. While China has made vast improvements in a short amount of time, in the words of Humphrey Wou, "China's AIDS story is still being written" (E-mail with Humphrey Wou, Nov. 20, 2007).

### III. "Civil Society with Chinese Characteristics": Civil Society in the People's Republic of China

#### Introduction

Certain events that occurred during the early expansion phase in China's HIV/AIDS history directly evince the power of globalization on the nation-state. For instance, by drawing domestic and international attention to China's HIV/AIDS crisis, the foreign press and global institutions pressured central government officials into addressing this problem. In this way, media and international institutions acted as strong alternative forms of power that ultimately undermined the legitimacy of the nation-state [2]. In a similar fashion, China has opened itself to civil society, an essentially Western concept that opposes Marxism-Leninism. For this reason, Chinese civil society has been purported as advancing



democracy [19]. However, civil society has evolved with contradictions in post-reform China, thus creating “civil society with Chinese characteristics” [21]. I discuss herein the concept of civil society and its manifestations in China before examining how AIDS activists operate within this system.

According to sociologist Thomas Gold, “civil society” is “the realm between society and the state, where associations of autonomous individuals, participating voluntarily enjoy autonomy to establish themselves, determine their boundaries and membership, administer their own affairs, and engage in relationship with other similar associations” [10]. He further notes that applying the term “civil society” to China might appear problematic, as it developed in European intellectual discourse during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries to critique the relationship between the state and individual and became popular again during the 1980s to analyze the collapse of Marxist-Leninist totalitarian regimes in Europe [10]. Given China’s similarities to the former Soviet bloc and limitations in terminology, “civil society” is the most relevant term to describe the autonomous organizations that have arisen outside of direct state control. Economic liberalization and resulting changes in quality of life and quality of life expectations have paved the way for civil society in China [10]. While reform can be understood as providing a path for autonomy through civil society, Gold [10] warns that the proliferation of Western values in modern China does not signify the country’s adoption of Western democracy. Though the Chinese Communist Party has allowed the rise of civil society, it remains wary of any organization that challenges its monopoly of power. In this way, the CCP advances neoliberal ideals so China can compete in the expanding global marketplace while attempting to retain the power of the nation-state essentially threatened by globalization.

When discussing civil society with Dongzhen’s employees, I asked how they perceived their contribution to this nascent realm in Chinese society. While most viewed their job at Dongzhen as an opportunity to learn more about AIDS or to help those in need, one coworker saw his work somewhat differently. As an employee within Dongzhen’s law program, Xu saw himself as contributing to Dongzhen’s development and thus helping China develop (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). In a similar fashion, AIDS advocate and director

of the Mangrove Support Group, LI Xiang, saw the development of civil society as necessary for China’s social development: “The government [needs] to realize that civil society is necessary to develop society. They should accept this and they should also recognize [that] the government cannot do everything and the country is better if it’s done by civil society...it’s much better” (Interview, Nov.19, 2007). While many working in the civil society sector see themselves as advancing national objectives such as modernization through social development, the government sees these activists as a potential threat to their power. The 1989 Tiananmen incident contributed to this sentiment of distrust and has transformed how the international community and government view Chinese civil society. To the global community, the demonstrations manifested the increasingly autonomous and active nature of Chinese citizens as well as the accelerated movement towards civil society [10, 22]. The central government, however, responded to the Tiananmen protests by instituting a compulsory registration system to better monitor social organizations outside of its control [23]. Rather than examining this registration system in depth, a task that would require a comprehensive overview of its applications to a wide array of CSOs and thus divert from my original inquiry, I examine how it specifically applies to HIV/AIDS-related organizations.

### *Registration Restrictions on Civil Society Organizations*

While interviewing my co-workers, I found that several terms were invoked to discuss the organizations that composed China’s civil society. Some used “popular organizations” (民间组织) while others used “grassroots organizations” (基层组织) or “non-governmental organizations” (非政府组织). These terms describe registered or unregistered organizations that fall outside the central government’s direct control. “Government organized non-governmental organizations” (官办或半官方组织) describe those organizations that work as an extension the Party-state while “semi-official organizations” (半官半民组织) contain elements from both government-organized and popular organizations [22]. In addition, numerous international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) constitute a major component in China’s civil society. Restrictions and registration operate differently for each type of organization, and not all organizations choose to register with the

government. Hence, three different categories of organizations exist within Chinese civil society: those that are officially registered, those that are affiliated with legal associations, and those that have not officially registered. Though technically “illegal,” the government does not usually force unregistered organizations to register or close down their operations [19].

To register as an NGO in China, an organization must first find a government agency sponsor (commonly referred to as “mother-in-law” or “婆婆” in Chinese slang) to supervise its operation. If this agency finds that the CSO does not comply with its original mission, it has the power to rescind the organization’s registration, thus limiting the potential for politically sensitive activities. To bypass these complications, many CSOs choose to register as a corporation [19]. Dongzhen, for example, calls itself a “company” in its official Chinese title: Eastern Treasure Orchid Cultural Dissemination Limited Responsibility Company. Recently, local governments (e.g. Beijing in 2005) have started imposing naming restrictions on businesses to persuade social organizations to register with the Bureau of Civil Affairs (民政局). Because it is so difficult to find government sponsors, most organizations choose to comply with the new naming regulations rather than attempt to register [24]. Laws concerning registration manifest themselves differently in each province leading to open establishment practices in some localities and more restricted establishment practices in others. Moreover, local government officials such as those in Henan remain highly sensitive to any HIV/AIDS advocacy groups and impose strict limitations on their activities. In the words of the director of Humphrey Wou, “You could be building toilets for the AIDS families and get into trouble with the local government there” (E-mail with Humphrey Wou, Nov. 20, 2007).

#### **IV. “Transnational Advocacy Networks”: HIV/AIDS activism in China**

##### ***Introduction***

The growth of civil society in China and the government’s consequent restrictions on CSO registration manifest the complications caused by post-reform globalization in China. While the government recognizes civil society as essential for meeting new needs arising as a result of the economic liberalization, it remains suspicious of any entity with resources to

challenge its monopoly. HIV/AIDS-related CSOs face particular pressure as they often challenge the government’s established systems and call attention to a sensitive health issue (E-mail with Amelia Chung, Dec. 12, 2007). Because HIV/AIDS activists face particular pressure due to the stigmatized nature of the disease itself, they must build international networks in order to operate.

Through my experiences at Dongzhen and conversations with other key players in China’s fight against HIV/AIDS, I came to understand how activists operated around the stigma and secrecy surrounding the disease and strict government restrictions. Due to the sensitive nature of the HIV/AIDS problem, advocates cannot find funding from within China as potential donors do not want to be associated with the disease (Interview, LI Xiang, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). Moreover, central and local governments view health care issues like AIDS as a possible loss of face that would prohibit China’s acceptance in the international community. To navigate these barriers as well as those established by the local governments that fear their political motivations, activists rely upon the foreign press and international foundations to raise awareness and funding. By utilizing the international press to raise awareness of their cause, activists bring about the public-relations nightmare feared by local and central governments. In an attempt to quell HIV/AIDS advocates, some local governments take harsh measures against them, thus perpetuating the global community’s perception of China as a “human rights spectacle” [7]. While the government acknowledges the necessity of allowing HIV/AIDS advocates to establish themselves within the contours of civil society, it attempts to retain the Party-state’s power by severely limiting these groups. The global community, through the news media and international institutions, often perpetuates the tense relationship between governments and activists. While not every organization devoted to HIV/AIDS-advocates draws upon assistance from the international community, I found that more controversial advocates like LI Dan rely heavily upon this type of support. Though I did not have the opportunity to meet with HIV/AIDS advocates from smaller organizations, I was able to interview LI Xiang, director of Mangrove Support Group which provides financial support and training to grassroots HIV/AIDS-related organizations. Because LI Xiang’s mission and strategy differed greatly from LI Dan’s, I compare and contrast their

positions in the transnational Chinese HIV/AIDS activist network.

### ***The Rise of Transnational Chinese HIV/AIDS Advocacy Networks***

Keck and Sikkink's theory of "transnational activist networks" best describes how Chinese HIV/AIDS activists maneuver their complex relationship with China's state and local governments and the international community [11]. These networks do not merely advance globalization through the diffusion of Western ideas, but rather offer a means through which players influence and transform each other. Moreover, the Party-state's attempts to retain ideological power while accepting contradictory values through globalization demonstrate a process more complex than mere diffusion. The complexities and competing powers inherent in "civil society with Chinese characteristics" [21] have created a situation through which HIV/AIDS advocates, the international community, and Chinese local and central governments interact and consequently transform to conform to new standards created in this process. This trend is manifested in aforementioned policy changes in the face of international pressure, advocates' organizational amendments in reaction to government restrictions, and news media responses to activist outcries. Furthermore, Keck and Sikkink recognize that these systems most often arise when the ideological issue behind activist work is one of "high value content and informational uncertainty" [11] which epitomizes China's HIV/AIDS situation.

As mentioned above, I had the opportunity to meet LI Xiang, a prominent HIV/AIDS activist and director of the Mangrove Support Group. As I talked to LI Xiang, I realized that his organization's mission and strategy differed greatly from Dongzhen's. Throughout the year, I discussed Dongzhen with Jane Cohen, a former Dongzhen employee from America, and Sabina Brady, the former country director of China's William J. Clinton Foundation, both of whom disagreed with LI Dan's antagonistic stance towards the government. Whereas LI Dan relies upon aggressive tactics to gain attention from the international press, LI Xiang cooperates with the government to advance the objectives of his organization. Although these men have adopted different strategies that coincide with their organizations' missions, both have nonetheless built transnational activist networks to support and run their respective establishments. Before examining how LI Dan and LI Xiang respond

to the problems that require the formation of these networks, I will first provide a brief overview of their backgrounds as a reference for how and why they have taken such different paths.

### ***Examination of Contrasting Network Strategies***

During my first conversation with LI Xiang, I felt his compassion and energy as he discussed his work with Mangrove. After learning more about LI Xiang, I realized that he provided an interesting contrast to LI Dan and asked if I could interview him. During the interview, I noticed that LI seemed less enthusiastic than the day I had met him; he coughed occasionally and answered questions in a low, tired voice. Though LI Xiang never mentioned that he had AIDS, he assumed that I knew as he alluded to hospital stays and being just like a "normal" person (Interview, Beijing, Nov.19, 2007). Before meeting him at Mangrove's headquarters, I read that LI Xiang, a hemophiliac, contracted HIV through a blood transfusion during the mid-1990s [6]. While interviewing LI Xiang, I learned that he met Kofi Annan and the director of Beijing's Joint United Nations Program on HIV/AIDS (UNAIDS) office while they were visiting You'an Hospital (北京佑安医院) where LI was receiving treatment. The director of UNAIDS introduced LI Xiang to the UN system and other AIDS organizations around the world and invited him to be a trainer to help PLWHA cope with discrimination and fear (Interview, LI Xiang, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). After receiving a grant from the Ford Foundation to attend a conference in Thailand, LI Xiang decided that he could effectively start and manage China's first support group for people living with HIV/AIDS (PLWHA) in China. In 2002, he gave up his well-paid career in information technology and founded Mangrove with financial support from Beijing Ditan Hospital (北京地坛医院) and grants from international organizations such as APCO Worldwide (a global communication consulting firm), Ford Foundation, and Marie Stopes China (Interview, LI Xiang, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). Since its inception, Mangrove has expanded from an organization that provides counseling to PLWHA and training to health care professionals to one that assists 16 HIV/AIDS-related grassroots organizations in eight provinces across the country. Dubbed as one of China's most notable "positive" AIDS activists [6], LI Xiang supports the growth of civil society but said that he worked with the

government and had never “made them angry” (Interview, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). While walking me to the door after our interview, LI Xiang mentioned that he wanted to retire soon; working thirteen hour days in a career that received little respect or financial reward exhausted LI Xiang, and he plans to let someone else manage Mangrove so that he can return to information technology and enjoy married life.

As set forth earlier, LI Dan gave up a promising future to pursue AIDS advocacy much like LI Xiang. Whereas LI Xiang attempts to cooperate with the local government, LI Dan has adopted a different approach. Though his work with AIDS orphans in Henan has resulted in detainment and other problems with local officials, LI Dan acknowledges media attention as a necessary component in Dongzhen’s development (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Thus, LI Dan’s dedication to sensitive issues combined with a combative stance towards government policies that do not align with his own activist strategies greatly differentiates him from LI Xiang.

Though dramatically different in their scopes and mission objectives, Dongzhen and Mangrove both face serious funding issues. While interviewing LI Dan, he claimed that all of his organization’s problems stemmed from a lack of funds (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). LI Xiang also complained about the difficulty of finding funding and about the arduous process of applying for grant money (Interview, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). However, due to the contrasting nature of their organizations, LI Dan and LI Xiang have very different responses to the issues that led to their adopting transnational networking. As discussed earlier, registration regulations and stigmatization alike evince the complications of globalization during post-reform China. How Chinese HIV/AIDS activists address these concerns further highlights the interactive nature of advocates, governments, and international institutions. As integral components of this ever-evolving system, advocates both symbolize the process at hand and actively affect transformations at varying levels. In this way, HIV/AIDS advocacy networks act as a microcosm of the inter-connective and inter-relational processes of globalization that simultaneously strengthen neoliberal international institutions over the nation-state.

While interviewing LI Xiang, he lamented upon the difficulties of registering Mangrove as an NGO. Though he had attempted to register his five year-old

organization in 2007, he had failed. Repeated failures led him to believe that, “You can’t register in China...it’s really hard” (Interview, Beijing, Nov.19, 2007). Like many other organizations, particularly those concerned with HIV/AIDS, LI Xiang said that he registered as a company and laughed while stating that he used another NGO’s name to avoid the six percent tax incurred by corporations. LI Xiang felt that the government should make registration easier for HIV/AIDS-related organizations and cited problems with funding and community support as direct results of these strict regulations (Interview, Beijing, Nov.19, 2007). Because of these problems, LI Xiang stated that 95% of Mangrove’s funding comes from foreign foundations while a small percentage comes from government organizations like the Ministry of Health and Center for Disease Control (中国疾病预防控制中心). Intrigued by these registration issues, I sought more information from Sara Davis, a China researcher at Human Rights Watch who worked closely with Dongzhen’s law program. According to Davis, relaxing registration regulations would positively influence the development of civil society in China (E-mail with Sara Davis, Nov. 17, 2007). In addition to changing these restrictions, Davis suggested that government funding would foster NGO growth, as they would not be forced to rely upon foreign support (E-mail with Sara Davis, Nov. 17, 2007).

Though Sara Davis and LI Xiang found registration to be an impediment to successful domestic growth, LI Dan did not share their concerns when I questioned him about this problem. He claimed that being officially registered as an NGO did not matter because foreigners understood that most of these organizations were private enterprises (Interview, Beijing, Dec.5, 2007). When talking about tax laws, LI Dan treated them more as an abstract matter that did not seem to concern him. LI Dan’s distinct attitude reveals much about his activist strategies. While Sara Davis and LI Xiang believe that civil society can best grow through expanding domestic support, LI Dan focuses on methods for garnering international financial backing rather than attempting to foster an environment supportive of CSOs within China.

Though advocates like LI Xiang hope to transform China’s HIV/AIDS activist system through increased domestic support, barriers in addition to registration make this process extremely difficult. Because HIV/AIDS has



been highly stigmatized since its discovery in China, very few people want to associate themselves with the disease by donating to HIV/AIDS-related organizations. According to LI Xiang, many potential donors refuse to support organizations fearing people will believe they or someone in their family has HIV/AIDS (Interview, Beijing, Nov. 19, 2007). In addition to difficulties surrounding private donations, corporations face similar apprehensions. While interviewing my co-workers at Dongzhen, one noted that businesses often contribute to social welfare projects out of a sense of corporate responsibility but avoid those concerning HIV/AIDS. She reasoned that these companies do not want to have their brand associated with the stereotypes surrounding the disease and so refuse to contribute (Dongzhen Employee interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). In addition to the stigmatization of HIV/AIDS, institutional barriers and negative perceptions of CSOs deter charitable donations in China. Without an institutional structure that encourages charitable contributions such as the United States' 501(c) tax law, there is little impetus for public support [25]. Moreover, many Chinese feel that CSOs mismanage financial support due to a lack of public accountability and/or corruption [25]. This attitude might be traced to the incipient nature of civil society as well as isolated accounts of misconduct such as the Project Hope's (希望工程) 2002 scandal involving financial corruption [25]. Project Hope is a NGO dedicated to supporting children's education sponsored by the China Youth Development Foundation (中国青年发展基金会), a subsidiary of the Communist Youth League. The NGO's mishandling of funds dates back to 1994 when the head of Project Hope admitted to investing unallocated donations thus violating the Bank of China's (中国银行) rule that prohibits charities from engaging in profit-making activities [26]. In 1997, Yi Xiao, a former employee at Project Hope, was convicted of "graft involving a large sum of money" [26]. In 1988, former deputy head of accounting for the Youth Foundation quit her job and informed several Hong Kong-based newspapers of Project Hope's history of illegally diverting money [20,26]. While Chinese government-sponsored papers could not publish articles about Project Hope mishandling of funds [20], the news spread throughout the country and impacted citizens' perceptions of NGOs in China [25]. This atmosphere of fear and distrust makes domestic funding a near impossibility

for Chinese HIV/AIDS-related organizations. Institutional barriers such as severe registration restrictions and poor charity infrastructure contribute to this problem, making international organizations all the more necessary.

HIV/AIDS advocates' reliance upon overseas funding strengthens the process of globalization in China because it legitimizes the necessity of international institutions, thus challenging the authority of the Chinese nation-state. Furthermore, it has created a difficult environment for China's budding civil society. Just as the Chinese HIV/AIDS activist network legitimizes the global community by relying upon it for support and thereby diminishes the necessity of the Chinese nation-state, its alliances tend towards international institutions over domestic organizations. Thus, HIV/AIDS organizations rarely work together, but instead compete for financial backing from abroad. While political scientist Suzanne Ogden attributes lack of cooperation to an inherently "cultural" predisposition to infighting [19], competition amongst CSOs has arisen from an economic need rather than some inherent "Chinese" characteristic. By learning English for global communication and attending world conferences for international networking, activists are able to advance their operations. However, because financial resources are necessary to hire capable English speakers and travel abroad, well-funded organizations become stronger while smaller organizations become weaker or shut down completely (Interview, LI Dan, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Though LI Dan speaks little English, he often travels to international conferences to promote Dongzhen. He also mentioned that he found it difficult to cooperate with weaker organizations that are unwilling to build communication networks out of fear of provoking the government or lack of adequate resources (Interview, LI Dan, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Contrary to LI Dan's internationally-focused activism strategy, LI Xiang has taken a more domestic approach throughout his years at Mangrove. Although LI Xiang has also traveled abroad for training workshops and other conventions, he said that he felt uncomfortable doing so because of his self-proclaimed poor English skills. This statement shocked me at the time because LI Xiang speaks relatively fluent English and LI Dan only knows a few words. However, I later realized that these different approaches not only arose from LI Dan and LI Xiang's contrasting personalities but also from Dongzhen and Mangrove's different objectives.

### ***Examination of Dongzhen***

Though LI Dan and LI Xiang represent a group of Chinese HIV/AIDS activists who successfully garner support from abroad and continue to operate under government restrictions, they still face numerous problems from insufficient funding. Because I spent most of my time observing and participating at Dongzhen, I will focus on this organization's problems. Though not representative of every type of HIV/AIDS-related organization in China, it faces many problems characteristic to this branch of Chinese civil society. Thus, an in depth study of Dongzhen's obstacles and corresponding survival techniques provide insights into the general condition of Chinese HIV/AIDS activist networks. Furthermore, Dongzhen's international focus illuminates many of the issues raised by the transnational aspect of these networks. Through my experiences at Dongzhen, I came to understand transnational activist networks as deeply rooted in processes of globalization as well as advancing globalization by questioning the legitimacy of the Chinese Party-state.

During my first semester (Feb. to May 2007) at Dongzhen, another intern from my study abroad program and I worked alongside two regular employees. By the end of the semester, LI Dan had hired two other employees, one of whom left Dongzhen during the summer at the request of her parents to pursue a more stable government job. Upon my return in the fall, I joined one of Dongzhen's capacity training meetings conducted by the International Institute of Rural Reconstruction (IIRR) held at a local tea café called "Be for Time" (避风塘茶楼). There, a Dongzhen informed me of his decision to leave Dongzhen because of management problems and poor income. While interviewing him in Dec., I learned that concern for his parents' safety also contributed to his decision. When Tang left in Oct., Dongzhen had six regular staff members including four new hires. By the beginning of Dec. one of the Dongzhen's new hires in the translation program had left. After talking to the remaining employees at the end of the semester, I learned that only three intended to remain at Dongzhen while two others planned to pursue other careers.

While most employees appreciated their work at Dongzhen for teaching them more about HIV/AIDS, exposing them to China's budding NGO community, and enabling them to effect social change, low salaries and management problems led to high turnover

rates. According to LI Dan, building a strong team has proven to be one of the most difficult aspects of his work (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Dongzhen cannot afford to hire experienced employees or to adequately pay existing staff. In addition to insufficient financial support, Dongzhen also faces issues with management. While discussing Dongzhen's high turnover rate with a co-worker, she attributed the problem to LI Dan's work style, complaining that LI Dan had problems communicating his plethora of ideas for Dongzhen (Dongzhen employee interview, Beijing, Dec.5, 2007). In addition to communication problems between management and employees, one co-worker noted that LI Dan lacked an overall direction for Dongzhen and relied upon Mao Zedong's slogan "to serve the people" (为人民服务) to describe the objective of a proposed activity rather than explaining it in depth (Dongzhen employee interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). According to Amelia Chung, IIRR's China Program Coordinator and director of Dongzhen's capacity building exercise at Be for Time LI Dan's management style mirrors that of the autocrat he often quotes; Dongzhen employees follow orders from LI Dan and are too afraid to take part in the organization's decision making process (E-mail with Amelia Chung, Dec.12, 2007). Overall, I found this statement to be true as only one employee questioned LI Dan on a regular basis. Moreover, LI Dan rarely discussed topics unrelated to HIV/AIDS or Dongzhen with my co-workers and me. During Dongzhen's lunch hours, I observed the interactions between co-workers and LI Dan and found that this work-drive did not seem to encourage closer relationships between Dongzhen's staff and management. On days where we ate with LI Dan, he seemed to bring a pall upon the lunch hour; whereas employees spoke freely and excitedly about a variety of topics without LI Dan, they rarely spoke at all in his presence unless they were talking about work. Chung further noted that the organization depended upon LI Dan's international recognition, thus placing Dongzhen's survival on LI Dan's charisma rather than on team effort (E-mail, Dec. 12, 2007). While Dongzhen participated in numerous capacity-building and training programs like that of IIRR to improve its operations, LI Dan felt that they merely supplied a model and solved few problems (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). In the absence of more immediate solutions, Dongzhen remains dependent upon international support and must perpetuate a transnational activist network that

emphasizes the relationship between the advocate and the international community.

LI Dan and various other employees named Li's winning the 2006 Reebok Human Rights Award as one of Dongzhen's main assets. According to LI Dan, he received the award mainly because AIDS was a popular issue at the time (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Moreover the adversity in LI Dan's story inherent in the sensitivity of his work adds a powerful symbolic element that contributes to the rise of activist networks [11]. By being recognized as an individual who, according to the Reebok website, "against all odds and often at great personal risk, have made significant contributions to the field of human rights through nonviolent means" [8], LI Dan gained substantial media attention which opened the doors to numerous international conferences, foreign press interviews, and other means of raising awareness. The \$50,000 grant he received also enabled him to expand from a focus mainly on AIDS orphans in Henan to a wider range of programs. Though one employee complained that this diversification often lacks direction, it proved to be an effective survival strategy when local officials in Henan closed Dongzhen's program in Kaifeng. As Li explained, if he had not started other programs then Dongzhen would have shut down completely. At times, I could not keep up with LI Dan's ideas for new activities. During one of our pre-work meetings in Nov., he revealed his plans for a café similar to Thailand's Condoms and Cabbage that would raise sexual health awareness. As the first of its kind in Beijing, this café would attract media attention while raising funds for Dongzhen. While LI Dan revealed this scheme to me, I unconsciously felt myself being swept up in his excitement although I had deep doubts about the project. LI Dan assigned me the task of researching foundations that would possibly fund this project and interrogated me about American coffee and cafés during lunch. Like much of my other work at Dongzhen, I helped in this way to contribute to LI Dan's international survival strategy.

Though my fieldwork ended before I could see whether or not LI Dan's café would eventually materialize, I assisted in English-based research for Dongzhen's other programs. Though Dongzhen's Henan offices dedicated to advocacy for PLWHA and AIDS orphans closed in Aug. 2007, Dongzhen's main programs included: the Beijing office's law program, AIDS arts program, translation program, and Manchurian program. At the time

of my internship, LI Dan felt that the law program was Dongzhen's strongest (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Working with Sara Davis through Asia Catalyst, LI Dan started the Korekata AIDS Law Center in Jan. 2007. Through this legal aid center, Davis and Li hope to improve PLWHA's access to justice by trying cases, producing publications, and holding workshops. When I first started working at Dongzhen in Feb. 2007, I dedicated much of my time to finding AIDS-related posters, movies, and books for a potential AIDS arts database. Though Dongzhen lost its website in Apr. 2007 due to lack of funds, the translation program provided Chinese versions of HIV/AIDS-related news to the China HIV/AIDS Information Network, CHAIN.net (中国红丝带网). In addition to these HIV/AIDS-related programs, Dongzhen also pursued a Manchurian program that seemed out of place and unrelated early in my internship. Because I never worked with this program, I remained in the dark until LI Dan explained that he hoped to use his Manchurian ethnicity to entice this historically wealthy group to provide funding. This strategy embodies Keck and Sikkink's theory of leverage politics: by combining forces with a stronger, larger group of people, activists can gain the resources necessary to more effectively influence the governmental and international components of the transnational network [11].

As manifested through Dongzhen's positive growth after the Reebok Human Rights Award, international support constitutes the most vital element of LI Dan's survival strategy. Because Chinese government at the local and central levels fears exposure of certain issues regarding human rights and HIV/AIDS, domestic communication channels regarding these subjects have been blocked. To overcome this barrier, LI Dan has followed a pattern established by other activists and resorted to a "boomerang effect" through which he surpasses the government and appeals to international allies to invoke policy change [11]. Therefore, Li constantly strives to garner attention from the foreign press that will help him gain support from international charitable foundations. According to LI Dan, fame cultivated by the foreign media is necessary to survive and evolve as an HIV/AIDS-related organization. However, he also believes that the foreign press will not report positive activities but only those that oppose the government (Interview, Beijing, Dec. 5, 2007). Therefore, LI Dan has consciously adopted an antagonistic stance towards the local and central governments in order to gain

media attention. In this way, LI Dan contributes to the strengthening of Western ideals over the Chinese Party-state ideology by perpetuating the myth of China as a “human rights spectacle” [7]. Though stories of LI Dan’s previous arrests have been sensationalized in the media, [27, 28, 8] Dongzhen’s daily operations proceeded peacefully and employees had no fear of danger. This strategy of manipulating information dissemination represents a vital aspect of the activist network. By directly opposing the local government, LI Dan faces consequences considered severe amongst the international community such as detainment or operation shut-down. LI Dan uses this form of “moral leverage” to strengthen his “boomerang pattern” and encourage the international community’s pressuring the Chinese government into change [11]. In this way, foreign media coverage of sensitive issues creates a sense of shame that contributes to the strict regulations imposed upon activists that forced them to turn to the international community in the first place. Though this form of reactionary policy-making represents an attempt for the Party-state government to regain control, it contradicts ideals of democracy and civil society upheld by the global community. In turn, the foreign press and international institutions criticize the government, thereby perpetuating this cycle. Thus, the network created to solve China’s HIV/AIDS epidemic has become a problem in itself.

## V. Conclusions

With the approach of the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, the study of China’s transnational HIV/AIDS activist networks become an increasingly important means of studying the impact of globalizing forces on the country after reform. According to Maurice Roche, “Olympism appears to seek to elevate sport into the leading edge of a broader idealistic and universalistic humanitarian mission in the modern world” [12]. Under international limelight, China must thus present itself as a nation that upholds global values such as those embodied by civil society and human rights activists. However, to create a positive national image, local government officials have imposed harsher restrictions on HIV/AIDS activists, thus defeating the objectives of the ideals perpetuated by globalization. For example, LI Dan attributed the Olympics as a direct cause of local officials’ closing Dongzhen’s Henan offices. In Aug., LI Dan seemed unperturbed by this turn of events

stating that he had no control over the situation and expressed hope that the offices could be reopened after the Olympics. While LI Dan communicated similar hope in Dec., he acknowledged that finding donors would make restarting these offices difficult and possibly postpone their reopening until years after 2008 (Interview, Beijing, Dec.5, 2007). LI Xiang also faced operational problems, not as a result of government sensitivity but because his office building needs to be torn down to make way for Olympic construction. In relating this news to me, Li lamented that he would have trouble finding an office as cheap as the one he rented at the time (Interview, Beijing, Nov.19, 2007). As with other aspects of HIV/AIDS advocacy, governmental restrictions born of Olympic preparations have severely impacted activist funding. By creating this issue as one related to human rights, activists can garner attention from the global community and increase international funding. Human Rights Watch acts as a vital ally in this process by warning, “Leaders and officials of UNAIDS and the co-sponsor agencies must use all available opportunities to ensure that the Beijing Olympic Games do not become the smokescreen behind which AIDS activists in China are attacked and silenced” [29].

Though contrary in nature, this phenomenon acts as a perfect metaphor for post-reform China: to strengthen itself economically, the state must accept ideals that ultimately weaken the ideology of the nation-state. Because these global principles question the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party, numerous contradictions and complexities have arisen as a result of reform. Born of this tumultuous environment, HIV/AIDS advocacy networks symbolize globalization in China and can provide an important medium to discuss the results of this process. While my internship at Dongzhen provided a locality through which to examine how Chinese HIV/AIDS advocacy is at once embedded in and symbolic of globalization, the issues could not be directly seen on the ground but rather through an examination of this transnational network. Since Dongzhen plays an integral role legitimizing neoliberal ideals through this network, it served as an essential base of examination. By enhancing my internship experience through conversations with other people involved in Chinese HIV/AIDS work, I gained a better appreciation for the multifaceted nature behind the network and the situations that led to the rise of these systems.



In a sense, my role as a foreigner, United States citizen, and native English speaker at Dongzhen enabled them to effectively reach the international community thus perpetuate a “boomerang pattern” [11] that validates neoliberal ideals over those of the Chinese Party-state. For this reason, my opinion of LI Dan and his organization changed dramatically over the course of two semesters at Dongzhen. At first, I saw myself as assisting LI Dan in his fight against an oppressive government that attempted to thwart his noble efforts at every turn. After conversations with Jane Cohen and Sabina Brady, I realized that my original assessment had been clouded by preconceived notions of the CCP and sensationalized accounts of LI Dan’s work through the foreign media. Thus, an uneasy ambivalence towards my work clouded the second half of my first semester and first half of my second semester at Dongzhen. However, I eventually came to see LI Dan not as a martyr or instigator, but as a man attempting to promote his cause in a challenging environment. My experiences with LI Dan and others encountered during my time in Beijing have thus led me to question how problems inherent in advocacy networking evince conflicts between international community and nation-state. These problems are inherent to and representative of those contradictions in post-reform China today. While I often felt tempted to side with the CCP in its critique of Western ideology or with the activists struggling against a hegemonic government, I came to see the two as inherently similar: just as Chinese HIV/AIDS activists struggle to find an outlet for their work under numerous constraints, China is attempting to find its place in the international community. Though their tactics and ideologies differ, both activists and the CCP are “carving a niche within [the] constraints” of an increasingly global post-reform China [25].

#### List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

**AIDS**, Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome; **ARV**, Antiretroviral; **CCP**, Chinese Communist Party; **CSO**, Civil society organization; **CSW**, Commercial sex workers; **HIV**, Human Immunodeficiency Virus; **IDU**, Intravenous drug users; **IES**, Institute for the International Education of Students; **IIRR**, International Institute of Rural Reconstruction; **INGO**, International nongovernmental organization; **MSM**, Men who sleep with men; **NGO**, Nongovernmental organization; **PLWHA**, People living with HIV/AIDS; **STD**, Sexually transmitted disease; **STI**, Sexually transmitted infection; **UN**, United Nations; **UNAIDS**, United Nations Joint Program on HIV/AIDS; **WHO**, World Health Organization; **WTO**, World Trade Organization.

#### References

- Altman D (1999) Globalization, Political Economy, and HIV/AIDS. *Theory Soc* 28:559-584.
- Appadurai A (1996) *Modernity at Large*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press.
- Giddens A (1990) *The Consequences of Modernity*. Stanford:

- Stanford University Press.
- Shambaugh GE (2000) Review of Globalization Syndrome: Transformation and Resistance. *Polit Sci Q* 115:622-623.
- Zheng YN (1999) *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Wu FS (2005) *Double-mobilization: Transnational Advocacy Networks for China’s Environment and Public Health*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Maryland.
- Erwin K (2006) *The Circulatory System: Blood Procurement, AIDS, and the Social Body in China*. *Med Anthropol Q* 20:139-159.
- Poncha JS (2006) Transcript of Interview with LI Dan. Boston Globe, Mar. 27.
- World Bank (2008) *Defining Civil Society*. <http://go.worldbank.org/4CE7W046K0>.
- Gold, T (1998) Bases for Civil Society in Reform. In: Brodsgaard KE, Strand D (eds) *Reconstructing Twentieth-Century China: State Control, Civil Society, and National Identity*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 163-188.
- Keck ME, Sikkink K (1998) *Activists Beyond Borders: Advocacy Networks in International Politics*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.
- Black DR, Bezanson S (2004) The Olympic Games, Human Rights, and Democratization: Lessons from Seoul and Implications for Beijing. *Third World Q* 25:1245-1261.
- Yi Z, Xu H, Zhang JX (2004) Infectious Diseases in China. In: Lu YC, Essex M, Stiefvater E (eds) *AIDS in Asia*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum. 295-305.
- Shen J, Liu KM, Han MJ, Zhang FJ (2004) The Chinese HIV/AIDS Epidemic and Current Response. In: Lu YC, Essex M, Stiefvater E (eds) *AIDS in Asia*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. 47-59.
- Edmund S (2003) *AIDS in China: An Annotated Chronology (1985-2003)*. [http://www.casy.org/chron/AIDSchron\\_111603.pdf](http://www.casy.org/chron/AIDSchron_111603.pdf).
- Catalyst A (2007) *AIDS Blood Scandals: What China Can Learn from the World’s Mistakes*. Research Report.
- Yi Z, Xu H, Zhang JX (2004) Infectious Diseases in China. In: Lu YC, Essex M, Stiefvater E (eds) *AIDS in Asia*. New York: Kluwer Academic/Plenum Publishers. 295-305.
- Shao J (2006) Fluid Labor and Blood Money: The Economy of HIV/AIDS in Rural Central China. *Cult Anthropol* 21:535-569.
- Ogden S (2002) *Inklings of Democracy in China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Rosenthal E (2002) Under ressure, Chinese Newspaper Pulls Exposé on a Charity. *New York Times*, Mar. 24.
- Chamberlain HB (1998) Review of Civil Society in China. *China J* 39:69-81.
- Ma SY (1994) The Chinese Discourse on Civil Society. *China Q* 137:180-193.
- White G, Howell J, Shang XY (1996) *In Search of Civil Society: Market Reform and Social Change in Contemporary China*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- China Development Brief (2005) *Rules on Naming Starts to Close Door to NGO “Business”*. <http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com/node/74>.
- The American Embassy in China (2003) *Chinese NGOs: Carving a Niche within Constraints*. Report. Beijing: Embassy.
- Zeitlin A (2002) *Project Hope: They Could Not Keep a Good Scandal Down*. [http://www.jamestown.org/china\\_brief/article.php?issue\\_id=648](http://www.jamestown.org/china_brief/article.php?issue_id=648).
- Agence France-Presse (2004) *Another AIDS Activist Goes Missing in China*. *Agence France-Presse*, Aug. 9.
- Gifford R (2005) *China, a Nation of Individuals: One Man Against AIDS in China*. All Things Considered. National Public Radio. Jul. 26.
- Human Rights Watch (2007) *Letter to Peter Piot, Executive Director of the Joint United Nations Programme on HIV/AIDS*. <http://hrw.org/english/docs/2007/09/27/china16962.htm>