Starting in 1978, a new and important phenomenon began to emerge from China’s sexual and reproductive health sector, the vigorous rise of Non Governmental Organizations (NGOs). Among the NGOs working in this field, there is both a well-developed network of Government Organized NGOs (GONGOs), and some of the country’s most active grassroots NGOs. By examining the trajectory of growth of China’s sexual and reproductive health NGOs since 1978, we can see the general course of development that China’s civil society has taken during this period.

1 Other than NGO, different terms are used in different countries: non-profit organization in some countries, voluntary organization in others, tax-exempt organization, and more. Each of these terms emphasizes that the organization is other than government. They all share the characteristics of being: an organization, non-governmental, autonomous, non-profit and voluntary. The term non-profit organization (NPO) emphasizes the differentiation between an organization and a private enterprise. The term NGO emphasizes its difference from the government. The term voluntary organization (VO) emphasizes the voluntary nature of the organization, which is popular in European countries, such as Great Britain. The term tax-exempt organization emphasizes the organization pays reduced or no taxes; this concept is commonly used in the United States. The term civil society organization (CSO) emphasizes the organization’s role and relationship within society, based on a three-sector model of society: government, the market and civil society. Civil society relies primarily on the participation of citizens, and is characterized by autonomy, voluntary participation and democratic control. In this chapter, we use the term NGO to refer to two types of organizations: GONGOs and grassroots NGOs.

2 A GONGO is organized by the government, and operates ‘top down’. The hallmarks of GONGOs are that personnel, financial affairs and all important activities are dependent on government, including the appointing of organization leaders.

3 In political science, the term grassroots NGO refers to a nonprofit organization that is rooted in and organized by people from the community, especially in developing countries. Here it refers in particular to those autonomous organizations that operate independently, using a ‘bottom to top’ model.
Since China implemented national economic reforms and the opening-up policy in 1978, China’s sexual and reproductive health NGOs have experienced two general stages of development. The first stage was from 1978 to 1994. During this period, the Family Planning Association (FPA), China’s core GONGO in this sector, was established and expanded rapidly. The FPA quickly formed a comprehensive, national network with operations all the way down to the local level. The second stage began in 1995 and continues to the present. This period is marked by the emergence of active, and increasingly influential, grassroots NGOs. In 1995, the Fourth World Conference on Women (FWCW) was held in Beijing. This was a major turning point in the development of China’s civil society, as it instigated the rapid growth of grassroots women’s NGOs. Starting in 2000, however, a new phase began when NGOs working in HIV/AIDS prevention and control, (including mutual assistance and self-help groups) started to emerge at a rapid and unexpected pace. Although the actual quantity of these grassroots NGOs is not large, they play an active and important role in promoting women’s reproductive health and HIV/AIDS prevention and control.

1) **Background**

a) *New Public Management and the Global Revolution of Association*

Accompanying the rise of the postwar modern welfare state, some developed countries saw a continual expansion of government functions, which caused a huge burden to state finance. The growth of government organizations, however, did not correspond to improvements in management efficiency and effectiveness. On the contrary, the inflated bureaucratic system became increasingly clumsy, and was unable to respond effectively to the growing demands for public services. Moreover, some government departments focused on pursuing self-interests, including the maximization of their own budgets, rather than solving pre-existing social problems. This resulted in wasted public resources and a severe public management crisis.

As society develops and awareness of civil democracy increases, the public’s demands of government also shift. The collection and reallocation of scarce public resources alone is not enough; government must also make use of resources in an effective and efficient manner.