

China's Most Generous

Examining Trends in Contemporary Chinese Philanthropy

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Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia, Harvard Kennedy School

AUGUST 2023



HARVARD Kennedy School

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About the Authors

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About the Project

The rise of private wealth is one of the most important developments in modern China, with social, political, and economic implications. How individuals choose to deploy such resources is shaping the relationships between the individual and the state, the state and business, and the state and the social sector. This project aims to strengthen understanding of China's philanthropic landscape by analyzing the makeup and choices of China's most generous individuals. We also hope the introduction of a metric on levels of generosity, while imperfect, will add a new dimension to the discussion on how China's wealthy choose to support charitable causes.

We welcome comments and suggestions on our analysis and methodology through the email address listed below. The findings compile data from a variety of sources, including media reports, government databases, foundation annual reports, and university reports. We believe that an independent, rigorous, and research-oriented database on China's philanthropic giving will enable much-needed quantitative research on the sector and provide a crucial resource for government, academic, media, and nonprofit organizations. We hope to supplement the giving database with a range of case studies, white papers, academic articles, and interviews with leading philanthropists and leaders of philanthropic organizations.

About the Rajawali Institute

The Ash Center's Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia advances research and teaching about policy challenges within the region and Asia's place in the global community. We work to deepen understanding of the region, explore possibilities for innovation, and advance important initiatives that will affect millions of lives in Asia. Additional information about the Rajawali Institute is available at ash.harvard.edu/rajawali-foundation-institute-asia.

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Executive Summary

This report on elite philanthropy presents the latest findings from the Harvard Kennedy School Rajawali Foundation Institute's [China Philanthropy Project](#) and provides insight into current trends among China's major donors and recipients. Our research team reviewed reports and articles covering over 7,000 foundations, over 1,200 charitable organizations, and nearly 3,000 universities in China. Throughout this process, we collected data on more than 17,000 donations made in 2020, accounting for 44 percent of China's total estimated national giving. We then focused on the nearly 6,000 donations valued over RMB 1 million (USD \$0.14 million),¹ resulting in over 4,000 unique donors and the following analysis.

The year 2020 is particularly interesting from a research perspective, as it marked the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic. This national—and then global—crisis shifted government priorities in China and prompted philanthropists to respond to a pronounced need in society, reminiscent of the response to the Sichuan earthquake 12 years earlier, which catalyzed Chinese giving more broadly. As a result, we found that several longer-term trends in Chinese giving remained in 2020, while COVID-19 also left a unique thumbprint on the year's data.

First, *large organizations* (most commonly corporations), rather than individuals, continued to dominate 2020 elite giving, in sharp contrast to American philanthropy. Second, as in the past, the vast majority of top Chinese donations largely supported central government policy priorities in the traditional areas of education, poverty alleviation, and, unsurprisingly in 2020, disaster relief. Third, the most notable *change* occurred as more donors gave more broadly across China's map, distributing resources *across provincial borders* to respond to COVID-19 rather than simply giving at home.

The largest five donors in 2020 were all corporate, with four private companies and one state-owned company topping the list. Three of the five gave to their own charitable foundations, providing further evidence of the growing role of foundations in elite Chinese philanthropy. Two of the top five donors chose to utilize corporate shares in their gifts.

1. [China Vanke Co. Ltd.](#), a leading private real estate developer established in 1984 and headquartered in Shenzhen, made an unprecedented donation to Tsinghua University through the gifting of corporate shares valued at 4.52 billion RMB (USD \$654.72 million) in support of the Vanke School of Public Health. Vanke's largely education-focused philanthropy also included a donation of 304.3 million RMB (USD \$44.1 million) to the Vanke Public Welfare Foundation for various charitable projects.
2. [Evergrande Group](#), a diversified private real estate conglomerate based in Guangdong, has consistently topped our list of major donors from 2017 to 2020. Despite being one of the most indebted companies in Asia, Evergrande continued giving to some of the poorest regions of China, focusing on poverty alleviation and targeting government-administered charitable foundations. Notably, Evergrande donated 1.1 billion RMB (USD \$159.42 million) to Guizhou and 750 million RMB (USD \$108.7 million) to Guangdong for poverty alleviation as well as 111.4 million RMB (USD \$16.14 million) to Henan for education-related causes. In addition, the group made contributions of 215 million RMB (USD \$31.16 million) to Hubei and 310 million RMB (USD \$44.93 million) to Beijing for COVID-19-related causes.
3. [Tencent Holdings Ltd.](#), one of China's largest privately owned technology companies, made charitable contributions totaling 2.1 billion RMB (USD \$300 million), with 1.6 billion RMB (USD \$228.1 million) allocated specifically for the prevention and control of the COVID-19 pandemic. Notably, these contributions were made through the Tencent Foundation.

4. [China Three Gorges Corporation](#) (Three Gorges Group), a state-owned energy conglomerate headquartered in Beijing, donated 785.8 million RMB (USD \$113.88 million) to largely government-affiliated recipients for a range of poverty alleviation initiatives. This included a donation of 500 million RMB (USD \$72.46 million) to the Sichuan Poverty Alleviation Foundation and 280 million RMB (USD \$40.58 million) to the Three Gorges Group Charity Foundation. Additionally, the group contributed 130 million RMB (USD \$18.84 million) to COVID-19 causes, with 100 million RMB (USD \$14.49 million) going to the Hubei Charity Federation and 30 million RMB (USD \$4.35 million) to the Wuhan Charity Federation.
5. [Hailiang Group](#), a private highly diversified conglomerate with headquarters in Hangzhou, donated 100 million company shares, valued at 1.04 billion RMB (USD \$50.72 million), to the Zhejiang Hailiang Charity Foundation. This contribution supported a variety of charitable projects, including rehabilitation programs for autistic children.

Our [Generosity Index](#), which ranks *individuals* according to the percentage of their publicly disclosed net worth that they contribute to charitable causes, highlighted several people who donated most or all of their wealth. As was the case with corporate giving, three of the top five donors in our Generosity Index gave directly to foundations or trusts, again indicating the growing role of such philanthropic vehicles. In each description below we also indicate the donor's individual ranking as measured by total absolute giving.

1. [Wang Zelin](#) topped our Generosity Index. For many years, he served as a research scientist, professor, and director of the Poultry Disease Research Institute at Henan Agricultural University. In 2020, he donated his life savings of RMB 82.08 million (USD \$11.9 million) to Henan Agricultural University to construct an advanced agricultural biosafety laboratory. This gift ranked him sixth on our Individuals List for total giving.
2. [Xu Jiankang](#), also known as Hoi Kin Hong, is an executive director and chairman of the Powerlong Group, a real estate conglomerate headquartered in Fujian, on the southeastern coast of China. Mr. Xu is also a standing committee member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference and the Election Committee of China's Macau Special Administrative Region. He donated 500 million RMB (USD \$72.46 million) to Fudan University in Shanghai to support the establishment of Fudan University International Medical Center. He also donated 10 million RMB (USD \$1.45 million) to the Jinjiang Anhai Jingzhu Public Welfare Charity Foundation in Fujian Province for poverty alleviation. These gifts ranked him second on both our Individuals List and Generosity Index.
3. [Yang Yuanqing](#) is the current chairman and CEO of Lenovo, one of the world's leading technology companies that produces PCs and mobile internet devices. Mr. Yang donated 10 million RMB (USD \$1.45 million) to the University of Science and Technology of China to support the university's research on COVID-19. He also donated 10 million RMB (USD \$1.45 million) to the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation and the Beijing Lenovo Charity Foundation for the "Yi Xuetang" charity project, which provides terminals (including tablets and internet cards) to several impoverished areas in Hubei Province. Finally, he donated 11.5 million RMB (USD \$1.67 million) to the Beijing Lenovo Charity Foundation for unrestricted causes. These gifts ranked him 24th on our Individuals List and third on our Generosity Index.
4. [Qin Yinglin](#) is the president of Muyuan Industrial Group Co. Ltd., a fertilizer manufacturer, and the chairman of Muyuan Foods Co. Ltd., a food company specializing in pork production, both founded in Zhejiang. Mr. Qin donated Muyuan company shares with a market value of 800 million RMB (USD \$115.94 million) to the Westlake Education Foundation in Zhejiang to support basic research and technological innovation as well as talent development, teaching, and research activities at

Westlake University. Additionally, he made a total donation of 8.3 million RMB (USD \$1.2 million) to the Henan Charity Federation in five tranches to support the COVID-19 pandemic response. He is ranked first on our Individuals List and fourth on our Generosity Index.

5. [Dang Yanbao](#) is chairman of Ningxia Baofeng Energy Group Co. Ltd., a company that produces and sells modern coal chemical products, and the Ningxia Yanbao Charitable Foundation, both founded in Ningxia. He donated 301.53 million RMB (USD \$43.7 million) to the foundation to support education, alleviate poverty, and promote social harmony and progress. He is ranked third on our Individuals List and fifth on our Generosity Index.

In terms of causes supported, 2020 marked a return to previous patterns, with education receiving the most donations. This has remained the case in all years for which we've gathered data since 2017, with the notable exception of 2018. In October 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping first broadly noted his war against poverty in his report to the 19th National Party Congress. The following year, poverty alleviation rose to dominate elite giving in China, dropping education to second place. It is equally notable that by February 2021, Xi Jinping had declared victory in eradicating absolute poverty in China and shifted policy priorities toward rural revitalization through infrastructure, education, and related investments. This high-profile national policy pivot may also have a powerful impact on subsequent giving, which we will analyze in our next report. Other trends continued, with the environment again suffering the most from philanthropic neglect in 2020, attracting well below 1 percent of elite giving.

As with prior years, giving from China to international causes remained limited at the elite level, and we found only one donation related to gifts made to recipients outside of mainland China. Importantly, in the past, half or more of elite giving in our database focused on local causes. By 2020, however, COVID-19-related philanthropic gifts meant that two-thirds of giving in our database crossed provincial lines. Furthermore, only 27 percent of giving remained within the province of the donor's home or corporate headquarters.

Introduction

The growth of private wealth is one of the most consequential aspects of reform in modern China, and in recent years, it has become a key focus of the nation's political leaders. Over the past four decades, China's rapid economic growth has given rise to a generation of wealthy individuals, influential corporations, and everyday citizens with a significant measure of disposable income. Some members of this generation are seeking to create meaningful change and give back to their communities through the practice of philanthropy. Others are focused on passing down such practices and lessons to their children, aiming to inspire the next generation to give back. Yet others are engaged in activities that appear to align more with the state, party, or business leadership's interests.

But all holders of private wealth are now experiencing increased levels of supervision and pressure to ensure that their giving aligns with notions of "common prosperity," even though the definition of that particular slogan remains quite broad and has changed substantially over time. In the Mao Zedong era, common prosperity was couched in terms of promoting egalitarianism and collective ownership, while Deng Xiaoping reversed such an approach and enabled some "to get rich before others" through private ownership and competition. Current President and CCP General Secretary Xi Jinping renewed the use of the term in early 2021 but instead focused its meaning on pursuing redistribution of income, increasing public services, and encouraging China's economic elite to give more. This campaign served as a way of providing some form of societal blueprint following the February 2021 announcement that China had eradicated absolute poverty. The shift was accompanied by a significant increase in

government intervention in the technology, education, and entertainment sectors of the economy, driven by an anti-monopoly push.

Yet our knowledge remains fairly limited regarding how Chinese philanthropists give, how the government shapes such giving, and how the modes and models of giving are evolving over time. Moreover, there is a widespread belief, particularly within China, that there are few modern, home-grown role models for financially successful Chinese people to emulate. In recent years, many of China's economic elites have begun searching for a "playbook" to transform simple financial capital into "philanthropic capital" and build institutions through which their giving can be sustainable and influential. These new faces and vehicles mark a new era in the history of modern Chinese philanthropy, often colliding with the more aggressive form of populism promoted by President Xi. Yet traditions of benevolent societies, clan-based support networks, temple associations, and voluntarism have long been present in China, coexisting alongside state-affiliated social welfare institutions throughout many periods of Chinese history. These traditions play a crucial role in shaping Chinese giving, resulting in modes of giving that are often coordinated through employment, government, and other "top-down mechanisms" rather than "bottom-up" ones.

The China Philanthropy Project at Harvard Kennedy School's Rajawali Foundation Institute for Asia illustrates the increasing role private wealth plays in the landscape of Chinese philanthropy. Our work also highlights how that wealth is intermediated through an evolving relationship with the party and the state that is at times contentious. The goal of the project is to contribute to the conversation about notions of generosity in China and examine the Chinese political economy through the lens of philanthropy. In this brief annual research report, we again focus on China's elite giving by highlighting donors through ranked lists of Chinese philanthropy in the calendar year 2020. To provide a stable point of comparison over time, we focus on four top 100 lists:

1. [*Composite List*](#) of the top 100 donors by absolute giving, including individuals as well as corporations and other organizations.
2. [*Generosity Index*](#) of individual donors only, as measured by their giving as a percentage of their publicly disclosed net worth.
3. [*Top 100 Individuals List*](#) as measured by absolute giving.
4. [*Top 100 Organizations List*](#) (including corporations) as measured by absolute giving.

For further detail on these donors, please click on either the donor names or the donation data points themselves in our website's [interactive charts](#).

Key Questions

By presenting the data, we hope to specifically address the following empirical questions:

- [Who were the top Chinese donors in 2020?](#)
- [From which industries did they come?](#)
- [How much did they donate?](#)
- [Which causes were they supporting?](#)
- [What was the geography of their giving?](#)
- Through what vehicles were they giving?

Results: The Top 100 Lists

Composite List

In our [Composite List](#) for 2020, we combine organizations and individuals to rank the top 100 donors in China. The resulting ranking includes seven individuals and 93 organizations contributing a total of \$4.78 billion,² with an average gift of \$42.44 million and median gift of \$18.50 million. [China Vanke Co. Ltd.](#) led this overall group as well as our Organizations List.

Generosity Index

Our project defines an individual's generosity as the percentage of the donor's publicly disclosed net worth that they contribute to charitable causes. Collecting data for the Generosity Index is particularly difficult given the opacity of Chinese wealth holdings, complexity of shareholding structures, and variety of definitions of generosity utilized in global rankings. Therefore, we restrict our [Generosity Index](#) to include only donors whose net worth is publicly identifiable. For donors with shares of publicly listed companies, we define net worth as a donor's ownership of publicly listed stocks that could be confirmed. This approach enables us to measure net worth with a standardized and transparent methodology and to compare levels of giving across the donor landscape. The drawback is that we are unable to include many deserving individuals with private companies in this specific list, since we cannot confirm their valuation and ownership. However, these individuals' donations are still included in our overall analysis and database. Our 2020 Generosity Index featured 39 individual donors. Wang Zelin, a professor at Henan Agricultural University, topped our 2020 ranking with a Generosity Index score of 100%. In 2020, he donated \$11.9 million to Henan Agricultural University to construct an agricultural biosafety protection laboratory.

Individuals List

Our [Individuals List](#) ranks the top 100 individual philanthropists as measured by their total giving. The 2020 average gift was \$4.73 million, and the median gift was \$1.45 million. In 2020, Qin Yinglin led our Top 100 Individuals List in absolute giving through a donation of shares with a market value of 800 million RMB (USD \$115.94 million) to the Westlake Education Foundation in Zhejiang. Mr. Qin is the president of Muyuan Industrial Group Co. Ltd., a fertilizer manufacturer, and the chairman of Muyuan Foods Co. Ltd., a food company specializing in pork production. For more information on any donor or donation, please click on any donor's name on the list on our website or any data point on our website's [charts](#).

Organizations List

Our [Organizations List](#) ranks the top 100 privately and publicly owned companies, professional organizations, and other organizations that gave in China in 2020. Giving by organizations again significantly exceeded giving by individuals, as was the case in past years. [China Vanke Co. Ltd.](#), a leading real estate company in China, ranked first in this list, with 4.85 billion RMB (USD \$702.9 million) in donations. [Evergrande Group](#), with 2.59 billion RMB (USD \$375.36 million) in philanthropic donations, ranked second. The average gift value was \$38.31 million, and the median gift value was \$16.09 million.

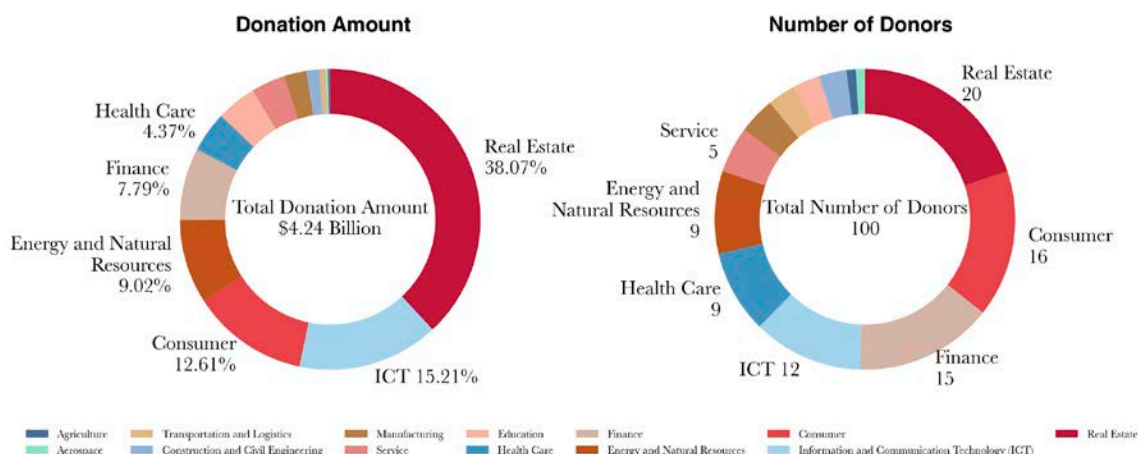
Sectoral and Cause Analysis

For more details on each sector and cause, click on our [data charts](#); their customizable settings display information by sector, cause, and various other elements.

Real Estate Gives

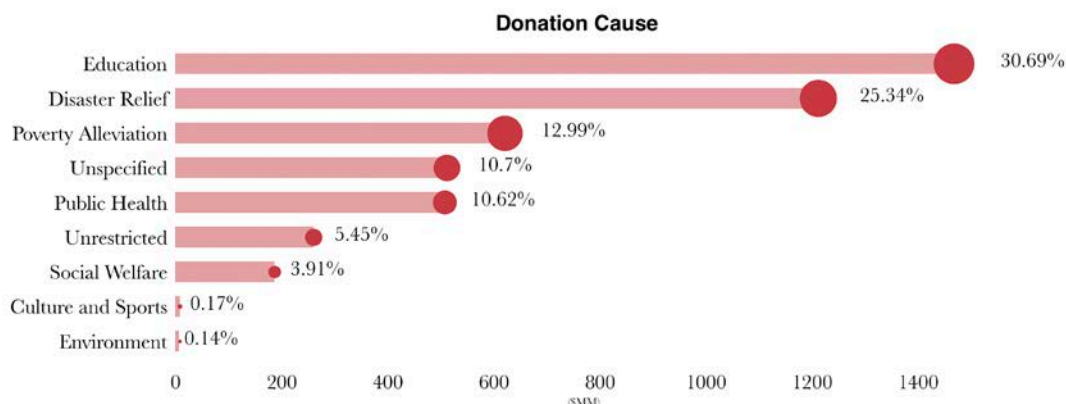
Among the 100 donors who made our [Composite List](#) in 2020, 20 came from the real estate sector. The consumer sector followed with 16 donors, and the finance sector ranked third with 15 donors. When measured by the total value of donations, however, the sectoral ranking shifted. The real estate sector still contributed the most, accounting for \$1.62 billion or 38 percent of the total. However, the information and communication technology (ICT) sector came in second, with \$645.62 million donated, making up 15 percent of the total. The consumer sector finished third, donating \$534.94 million and accounting for 13 percent of elite giving. And the energy and natural resources sector then ranked fourth, with \$382.65 million donated or 9 percent of the total.

As was the case in 2019, the continued dominance of real estate as a source of wealth among this elite group of givers is unsurprising, given the sector's role as a major driver of China's economic growth in the past two decades. Property and its associated activities contribute 17 to 29 percent of China's GDP, depending on the scope of industry included. The intensification of financial deleveraging policies by late 2018 and resulting consolidation and fallout in the real estate sector may lead to a rapid drop in the sector's relative philanthropic weight in the coming years, particularly as current industrial policy seeks to strengthen service-oriented sectors, such as ICT, finance, and consumer products. In addition, the diversification of industries supporting philanthropy could be viewed as a step toward the maturing of the philanthropic sector. This shift would better reflect a changing national economic landscape and a healthy diversity in the national sectoral donor pool.



Universities Take

In 2020, Chinese elite philanthropists gave most to the cause of education, equaling \$1.49 billion and accounting for 31 percent of total giving in our [Composite List](#). Educational giving also enjoyed the largest average donation per donor at \$42.04 million. Given that many identified donors give to educational institutions, we have also highlighted higher education recipients of such generosity. Fifty Chinese universities made our list in 2020, each receiving over RMB 10 million in total. Tsinghua University ranked first with total donations of \$696.33 million, followed by Westlake University with total



When assessing the number of education-related donations, over 50 percent were either unrestricted gifts or supported the “general development” of a given university or academic department. Such gifts grant significant autonomy to the academic institution to invest the proceeds as they see fit. While the majority of American educational giving is often focused on scholarships and infrastructure, like buildings and classrooms, only 20 percent of elite Chinese donations focused on scholarships, and only 12 percent were linked to buildings or infrastructure projects.

When measured by levels of total funding, the trends are even clearer: over 68 percent of total educational giving went to unrestricted or general development, with only 5 percent of giving going to scholarships and a mere 3 percent to research-explicit projects. Educational giving was also particularly skewed to the rich areas of the country, with 59 percent flowing to Beijing, surpassing the total amount given to all other provinces combined. Zhejiang received the second highest amount at 17 percent, followed by Guangdong at 11 percent.

Disaster Relief Rises

In 2020, COVID-19 response needs had a noticeable impact on elite giving in China. Remarkably, nearly three-quarters (71 percent) of elite donors in our data donated at least once to COVID-19-related causes, with a total of \$1.26 billion dedicated to disaster relief. This figure accounted for over 26 percent of total giving in our [Composite List](#) and ranked disaster relief as the second most popular cause, behind education. Hubei Province, which was disproportionately affected by COVID-19 since Wuhan is its capital city, was an outsized beneficiary of this generosity, with 48 percent of 2020 donors giving at least once to Hubei, as compared to 20 percent in 2019.

Interestingly, industry responded to COVID-19 by giving in a rather concentrated manner. The information and communication technology sector proved to be the most significant contributor, accounting for 38 percent of COVID-19-related donations. The consumer and finance sectors were also prominent contributors, accounting for 19 percent and 14 percent of total donations, respectively. These three sectors together were responsible for over two-thirds (71 percent) of total COVID-19-related contributions, highlighting their significant role in disaster relief efforts.

Poverty Alleviation Drops

While Chinese elite philanthropists gave most to the cause of poverty alleviation according to our 2018 data, this cause had dropped to third place by 2020, for a total of \$620.57 million and accounting for just under 13 percent of our [Composite List](#). As discussed earlier, such an outcome aligned with changing policy priorities. In October 2017, Xi Jinping pledged to win the battle against poverty in his work report at the 19th National Congress. This high-profile signaling reinforced the importance of this

goal among various policy priorities, as the nation's leaders vowed to lift every citizen out of poverty by 2020. As a result, top Chinese companies, especially private companies, took the lead in supporting the ongoing national poverty relief campaign, which is evident in our data and illustrated on our website's interactive data charts. While only 29 percent of giving directed at poverty alleviation came from state-owned enterprises, 71 percent came from private companies and less than 1 percent from individuals and families.

Environment Again Lags Far Behind

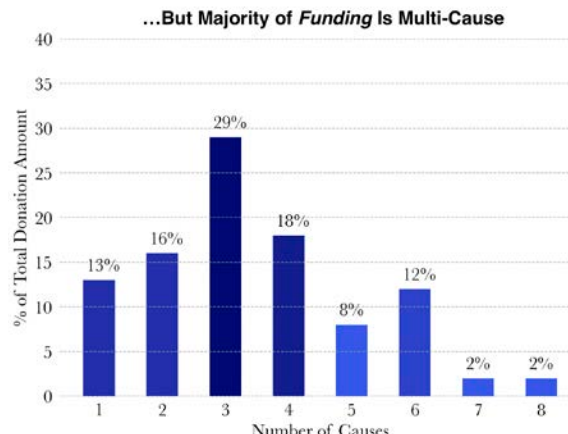
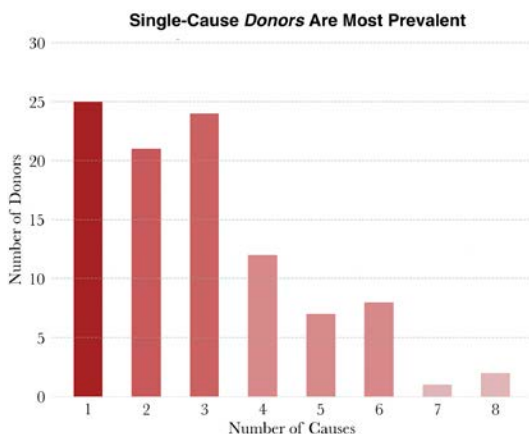
Despite widespread media coverage relating to China's air-, water-, and land-related pollution challenges, the environment again received a markedly low level of support from China's elite philanthropists in 2020. Only 0.14 percent (\$6.55 million) of donations in our [Composite List](#) were channeled for environmental protection, slightly increasing from 0.11 percent in 2019. We continue to posit several reasons for the ongoing lack of emphasis on the environmental cause. These explanations are informed by insights from our executive training programs involving leading philanthropists and senior executives of Chinese foundations, as well as qualitative research.

Over the past four years, we have continued to conduct interviews to understand the reasons behind this seeming underweighting of environmental causes. For some leading philanthropists, environmental outcomes are viewed as largely the responsibility of the state and not within the realm of the individual citizen. Others believe that the collective action challenge is particularly pernicious in the environmental realm, as we have seen in many other national contexts, and therefore limits an individual's ability to act. The actions of an individual, they believe, have little potential impact on air, water, and land degradation that is driven by large-scale negative externalities requiring systemic responses in improved governance. It is here that critical questions emerge regarding the perceived role of domestic philanthropy in China and the extent to which these resources either complement or compete with state priorities, capabilities, and resources.

Diverse Giving: Multi-Cause Donations on the Rise

In past years, one of the more striking and durable patterns evident in our data had been the focused, single-cause nature of major giving in China. For example, 50 of the top 100 donors in 2019 gave only to a single cause. However, by 2020, this figure had dropped to 25—still the largest group of donors but a clear decline from previous years. Moreover, these single-cause donors accounted for a mere 12 percent of top 100 donations. In contrast, multi-cause giving grew 31 percent year-over-year, with 21 donors giving to two causes (accounting for 14 percent of elite giving), 24 donors giving to three causes (31 percent of giving), and 12 donors giving to four causes (19 percent of giving). Finally, 18 donors supported five or more causes, contributing 23 percent of elite giving in our data. Significantly, a national state-owned company, the China National Tobacco Corporation, and a large private company, Ping An Insurance, gave to the broadest range of causes in 2020. They both donated to eight of nine possible cause areas that we have identified, and together covered the majority (23) of China's provinces or provincial-level cities.

The pervasiveness of the COVID-19 crisis may have significantly influenced this trend. Among the donors who supported multiple causes, a compelling 85 percent had earmarked some level of funds toward COVID-19-related initiatives. Many of these donations were fairly small, as COVID-19-linked donations accounted for 26 percent of the total funds donated toward multiple causes. This alignment between the expansion of multi-cause giving and the COVID-19 crisis underscores the potential impact of extraordinary events on philanthropic inclinations and decision-making.



The fact that donors often give to causes in which they have certain expertise or knowledge may largely drive the historical persistence of more narrowly focused philanthropy in China, thus narrowing the range of sectors addressed. Elite philanthropists and executives leading Chinese foundations often highlight the immaturity of the sector and a pronounced lack of trust between the broader public and philanthropic or charitable organizations, as well as a lack of trust between the organizations themselves. Focusing on one cause area enables the staff of a particular foundation to know the major stakeholders, the risks inherent in giving in that area, and the landscape of credibility when it comes to grantees. In particular, early phases of a philanthropic sector’s growth are often characterized by giving that is shaped more by personal experience—supporting the institution or cause that most affected an individual’s life. The pandemic’s national effects seem to have disrupted the dominance of single-cause giving, and future data collection will enable us to detect whether there will be a return to prior patterns.

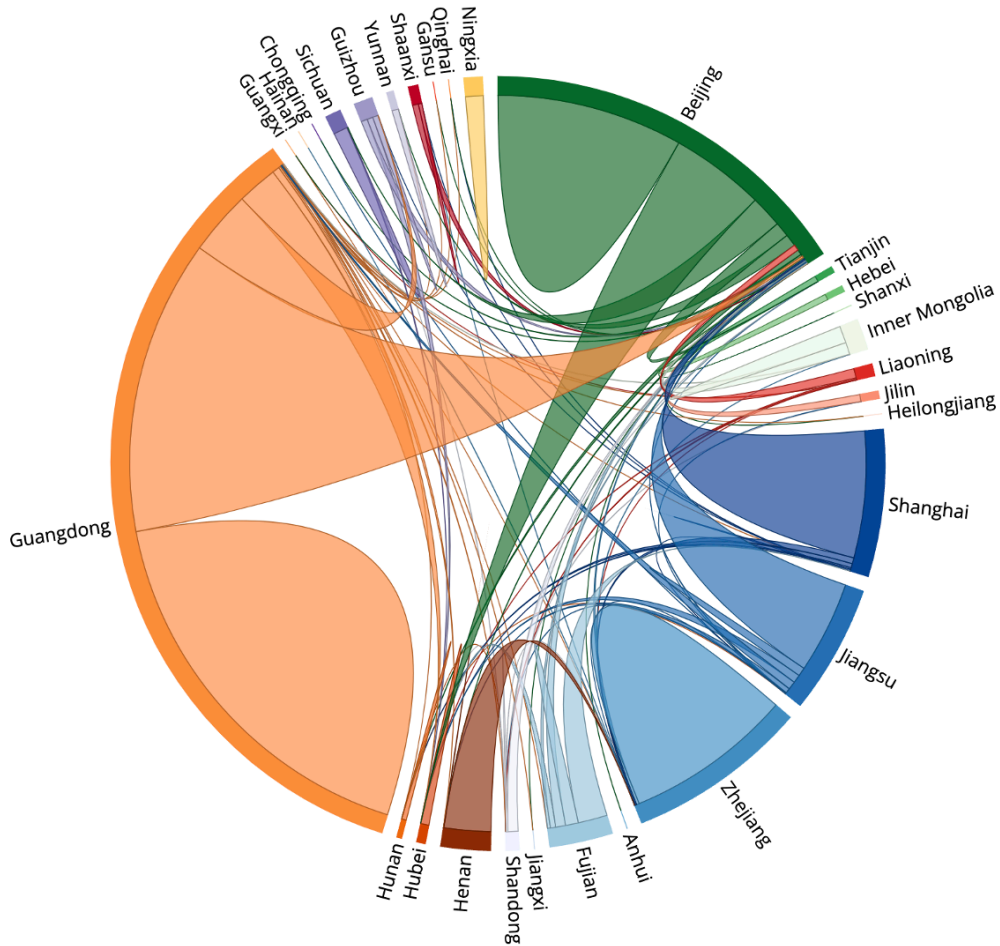
Shift from Local Giving to Cross-Provincial Generosity

On our [Composite List](#), only 27 of 2020 donors gave within the same provincial-level jurisdiction as their corporate headquarters, marking an important decline from 39 donors in 2019. Part of this shift can be explained by COVID-19’s national effects and the resulting geographic diversity of need. Yet while donors have clearly become increasingly aware of philanthropic causes outside their home provinces, the poorer regions were often still overlooked.

As in 2019, some of China’s poorer provinces—Tibet, Xinjiang, Gansu, Yunnan, and Qinghai—cumulatively received only 1 percent of total donations from the Composite List in 2020. Despite its similarly pronounced poverty, Guizhou again remained an outlier, ranking as the fifth most popular destination for elite giving. It received \$144.29 million (4 percent of total giving) from the Composite List of the top 100 donors. In 2018 and 2019, Guizhou received 8 percent and 4 percent of the Composite List giving, respectively. Notably, such giving was still concentrated in one locality, Bijie City, and via a single donation from the Evergrande Group. In 2020, approximately 91 percent of the giving to Guizhou came from a significant RMB 1.1 billion (\$159.42 million) donation made by the Evergrande Group to a government charitable foundation for poverty alleviation. Moreover, from 2017 to 2019, the Evergrande Group contributed over RMB 6 billion (\$869.57 million) to the Guizhou Poverty Alleviation Foundation, supporting stable poverty alleviation efforts for over one million impoverished individuals

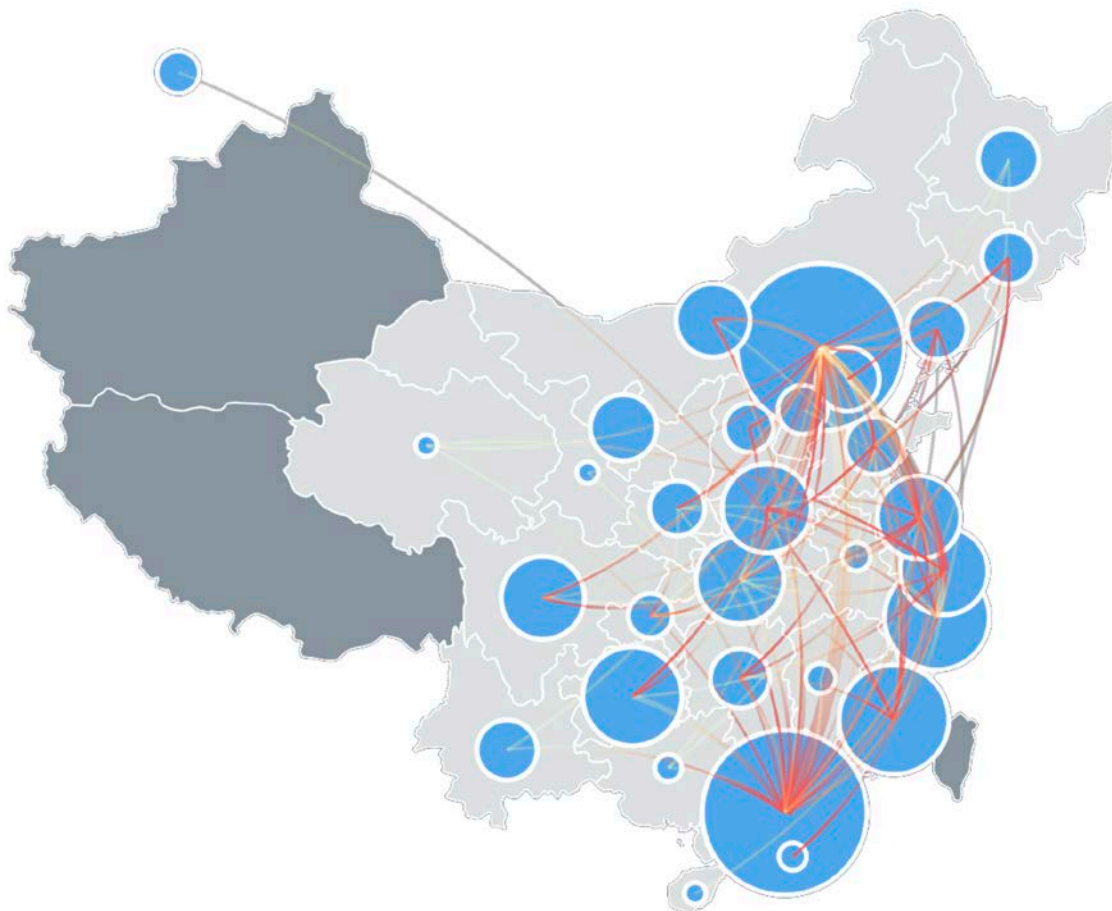
in Bijie. According to an announcement by the China National Rural Revitalization Administration in September 2020, the Evergrande Group committed to investing a total of RMB 11 billion (\$1.59 billion) in poverty alleviation funds to help lift all 10 counties and districts in Bijie City out of poverty.

Geography of Giving



We visualize all of this data through [three interactive maps](#) online. The “Donation Origins” map highlights the geographies in which 2020 giving originated, while the “Donation Destinations” map highlights the geographic recipients of such giving. Hovering over each point reveals the underlying data. The final map, titled “Donation Flows,” highlights net flows of giving in 2020, and “flight paths” illuminate each discrete interprovincial flow.

Donation Flows



Few International Donations

Despite media attention to high-profile giving by Chinese philanthropists abroad, very few of the 2020 gifts in our database were international, a pattern that holds from past years. Of the donors in our 2020 Composite List, only one donated to recipients outside of mainland China: [Yiming Zhang](#), the founder of ByteDance, headquartered in Fujian Province, donated \$10.29 million to Gates Philanthropy Partners for public health projects in the U.S. However, it is worth noting that our research methodology may underestimate donations to recipients outside of mainland China, as we only track donations cited in English or Chinese. We may expand to searches in additional languages in the future.

Methodology

In our data collection, we include only amounts donated in 2020 and exclude unfulfilled pledges. This year, our published elite philanthropic rankings include cash and stock donations. Our database focuses on mainland Chinese citizens, Chinese corporations, and the China-based branches of multinational corporations. We exclude donations made by non-mainland Chinese citizens to China, such as gifts to

China by overseas Chinese in the U.S., Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, as their tax laws differ significantly from that of the mainland. We also exclude donations from China's government and government foundations as well as other charitable foundations that can receive public donations (and therefore create risk of double counting).

This report and the supporting website analyze data compiled through more than four years of manual online search by a team of research associates. The manual approach involves a range of set keyword searches on Baidu and Google as well as a review of the annual reports of accessible Chinese foundations.

For the year 2020, our manual approach to capturing data on elite giving identified 38,284 articles through search engines. We gathered information from all of the 7,166 Chinese foundations listed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs of the People's Republic of China; 1,220 of China's charitable organizations; and 2,597 Chinese universities. After manually checking the validity of all the donations, we found 17,256 valid donations in total. Among them, we identified 5,949 donations that were over RMB 1 million (\$0.14 million); these were given by 4,046 unique donors.

Finally, to be considered valid by our team, a donation must appear on an annual report or website of the recipient or three separate reports by third parties. Reports or articles by the donor organization, or by two or fewer media sources alone, do not suffice.

Early Trends and Next Steps

In many respects, core trends in Chinese elite giving continued in 2020. Corporations remained a driving force behind such giving, education reclaimed its position as the top cause supported, and the real estate sector continued to lead in philanthropic activities. Similarly, donors from affluent regions continued to give to affluent regions, particularly to locally registered charitable organizations. However, some notable changes were also evident.

First, the rise of COVID-19 led to the rise of disaster relief, which became the second most popular cause for Chinese philanthropists in our data, pushing poverty alleviation from a dominant top ranking to third place. Second, there was a shift toward less localized giving than in the past, with the majority of donations crossing a provincial border in response to national-level needs resulting from the pandemic, despite the continued neglect of poorer regions. Third, philanthropists increasingly gave to multiple causes, a significant change that may be temporarily attributed to the impact of COVID-19 or could indicate a lasting shift toward a more diverse palette of giving for top Chinese philanthropists.

Finally, charitable foundations and trusts continued to proliferate, broadening their range of tools to deploy. In 2020 the national charitable trust sector witnessed an addition of 257 new trusts for a total of 537, with an asset increase of RMB 390 million for a total of RMB 3.319 billion, representing year-over-year growth rates of 97 percent and 13 percent, respectively. As a result of this growth, some donors began to explore opportunities to leverage and combine the asset management capabilities of a trust with the growing project management expertise of a traditional foundation. The actual independence of such trusts is an interesting area of future research. Such giving is one step forward in the professionalization and standardization of the tools available to philanthropists, but it also suggests continued distrust in institutions that are truly separate from the donor in terms of geography and/or management.

We are still early in our effort to build a time-series database of giving in China, so trendlines are difficult to draw at this stage. However, in just a few years of data collection, interviews, and executive education in this sector, a few patterns are apparent.

1. The shifting composition—and *regulation*—of China's economy should lead to a decline in donors from the real estate sector and an increase in donors from the finance and, potentially, technology sector over time. Significant and seemingly stable outliers, like the Evergrande Group, may become less common.

2. We expect some degree of volatility in top causes supported, given shifting national policy objectives. However, we expect education, poverty alleviation, health care, and social welfare to continue to compete for the top position. Natural disasters are by nature infrequent, but when they occur, they often dominate giving patterns. As in many parts of the world, including the U.S., environmental concerns will continue to rate low in terms of donor priorities in the near- to medium-term.
3. Over time, we expect the average age of donors to increase, perhaps more clearly aligning with U.S. age distribution, as China's rapid growth slows and the minting of young billionaires normalizes.
4. Despite such changes, it is telling that 20 of our top 100 donors appeared in both our 2019 and 2020 lists. That one-fifth of these top donors gave consistently every year suggests sustained commitment even at significant giving levels. We will test this commitment by tracking this metric over subsequent years of data, using it as a potential proxy for the deepening and professionalization of the philanthropic sector as a whole.
5. Given ongoing political pressures on the private sector in China and the central government's emphasis on "common prosperity," we expect that international giving will remain at relatively low levels.

While existing organizations, like Forbes and Hurun, have compiled data related to China's "rich lists," and academic institutions, like Johns Hopkins, have built useful comparative indices related to giving and volunteering, an interactive research platform is needed to consider definitions of generosity and the geography of giving in the Chinese context. The resulting maps, donor database, "Top 100" lists, and key findings serve as the foundation of such a user-focused platform. Additionally, the website includes social and email links for visitors to submit their recommendations, identify errors, and share the findings; we welcome such feedback, as it helps us improve and expand our platform. In the coming years, we expect to conduct more in-depth research based on several broad patterns, as noted above.

Over time, we hope that the site will become one of the key clearinghouses of information on the changing nature of giving in China, complementing much of the expanding work on grassroots voluntarism, local giving, and other forms of generosity that our colleagues are pursuing in many academic institutions across the U.S., Europe, and China. We also hope that all those seeking to expand the boundaries of philanthropy will continue to find this site a useful resource.

Notes

1. While most donations in our data were made and recorded in Chinese renminbi (RMB), this report converts such amounts to US dollars (USD). We use annual average currency exchange rates for such conversion as provided by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS). In 2020, the average exchange rate for Chinese renminbi to US dollars was 6.90.
2. Our database includes donations of cash, stock, and in-kind contributions with associated monetary value. However, for the purpose of ranking donors, we exclusively take into account cash and stock donations. We exclude in-kind donations such as goods and services, given the high variance of this category of giving.

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