

Welcome to China:

Foreign Donations and Chinese Foundations

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Do foreign donations to Chinese nonprofit organizations crowd in or crowd out domestic governmental funding? Theories of “crowding in” and “crowding out” effects suggest that foreign donations could crowd in governmental funding by financing the provision of public goods together with the government; alternatively, they could crowd out governmental funding because they might enhance nonprofits and civil society and thus threaten China’s authoritarian rule. However, the lack of empirical data on the subject has prevented scholars from providing a clearer answer to this question. Therefore, we used the Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations (RICF) data in this study to test the crowding in hypothesis and found that only foreign money that was donated to national public foundations crowded in governmental funding. There were no significant correlations between foreign donations and governmental funds contributed to regional or private foundations.

Keywords: nonprofit organizations, Chinese foundations, foreign donations, crowding in, crowding out

Introduction

The Chinese government's attitude toward the development of nonprofit organizations on the Mainland is ambiguous. On the one hand, it encourages the development of nonprofits as it depends on them to co-produce public goods to satisfy social needs; on the other hand, it restricts the development of nonprofits because it fears that such development could enhance a robust civil society and social movements that might lead to "color revolutions" and threaten the rule of the government and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The growth in both the numbers of nonprofits and the size of the nonprofit sector in China (see recent review in Smith & Zhao, 2016) seems to suggest that the Chinese government has encouraged the development of nonprofits. However, whether this growth indicates the development of a stronger civil society is questionable (Hsu, Hsu, & Hasmath, 2017; Smith & Zhao, 2016; Spires, 2011; Teets, 2013).

Because foreign donations to nonprofit organizations not only could finance the provision of public goods, but also enhance nonprofits and civil society (Brown & Hu, 2012), the question arises whether the Chinese government welcomes or resists foreign donations to domestic nonprofit organizations. Specifically, will foreign donations to nonprofits in China crowd in or crowd out governmental funding? On the one hand, similar to the relation between the Chinese government and nonprofits, the government encourages overseas donations to domestic nonprofit organizations because of their contributions to the provision of public goods. The Chinese government depends on these nonprofits, at least in part, to co-produce public goods to satisfy social needs and enhance its legitimacy. If the "government welcomes" hypothesis is

correct, foreign donations will crowd in governmental funds to nonprofits. On the other hand, the Chinese government will resist foreign donations if they threaten the authoritarian rule of the Chinese CCP by motivating citizens, empowering civil society, and mobilizing social movements through financing nonprofits. Thus, if the "government resists" hypothesis is correct, foreign donations will crowd out governmental funds in part or completely.

Effects of both "welcomes" and "resists" have been documented (Brown & Hu, 2012; Zi, 2007). However, most previous studies of the relations between nonprofits and the Chinese government are case studies because empirical data are lacking. Therefore, we still do not have a clear picture of the relations between foreign donations and governmental funds to nonprofits in China.

Using the Research Infrastructure of Chinese Foundations (RICF) data (Ma, Wang, Dong, & Li, 2017), this study provided empirical evidence that foreign donations signal the quality—with respect both to accountability and performance—of nonprofits, and thus crowd in governmental funds. The remainder of the paper is organized as follows. The second section provides a review of the relevant literature, based on which we hypothesized that foreign donations will crowd in governmental funds. In the third section, we describe the methods we used to construct multivariable regression models and use the RICE data to test the hypothesis. The results are presented in section four. The final section concludes and discusses implications, limitations, and future research.

Literature Review

The relation between nonprofit organizations and the Chinese government has attracted the attention of numerous scholars, and two principal

approaches—"civil society" and "corporatism"—have been discussed frequently (Hsu et al., 2017; Smith & Zhao, 2016; Spires, 2011; Wang & Yao, 2016; Yu & Zhou, 2012a, 2013). Recently, both the "civil society" and "corporatism" approaches have been challenged by alternative approaches, such as the resource dependence (Wang & Yao, 2016) and "growing out of participation" theories (Li, 2012, 2013; Yu & Guo, 2012; Yu & Zhou, 2012b, 2013). The resource dependence theory brings the managerial approach to the analysis of the state-society relation that was dominated previously by political approaches, such as civil society, corporatism, and authoritarian control. The "growing out of participation" approach illustrates a dynamic, rather than static, relation between the government and nonprofits. However, because no large datasets have been available for empirical tests, most previous studies have focused either on single or multiple cases. Therefore, even with the availability of various theories, we still did not have the empirical evidence necessary to understand the relation between government and nonprofits in China.

In addition, the financial relation between government and nonprofits in China largely has been ignored. According to the RICE data (Ma et al., 2017), foreign donations and governmental funds allocated to Chinese foundations in 2013 exceeded 1.5 billion and 3 billion Chinese Yuan (CNY), respectively. The consequences of such large amounts of money are significant. This study focused on the relation between foreign donations and governmental funds given to Chinese nonprofits. Regardless of the variations among the different theoretical approaches, the Chinese government can respond to foreign donations by either increasing or decreasing governmental financial support. If foreign donations and governmental funding vary in the

same direction, there is a “crowding in” effect; if they vary in the opposite direction, there is a “crowding out” effect.

The “crowding in/out” theory was developed first to study the effect of governmental grants to nonprofits on individual donations, and both “crowding in” and “crowding out” effects were documented (Andreoni & Payne, 2003; Borgonovi, 2006; Brooks, 1999, 2000a, 2000b; Diamond, 1999; Kingma, 1989; Payne, 1998; Steinberg, 1991). After reviewing 22 studies of the “crowding in/out” effect, Brooks (2000a) found that 13 supported the crowding out effect, followed by 5 that found no significant associations, and 4 that supported the crowding in effect. Another study found a non-linear relation between governmental grants and individual donations to private voluntary organizations: there was a “crowding in” effect when government funds accounted for up to a third of all organizational revenues, while beyond that level, government funds crowded out private contributions (Nikolova, 2014). Lu’s recent meta-analysis (2016) found no significant correlation between governmental grants and individual donations. However, de Wit and Bekkers’ meta-analysis of the “crowding out” hypothesis found that approximately two-thirds of existing studies confirmed the crowding out effect, while the remainder found the opposite (2017). Both meta-analyses demonstrated the contextual dependence—research methods, variations across different levels of governments and different subsectors of nonprofits, and longitudinal variations—of the validity of the crowding out effect (de Wit & Bekkers, 2017; Lu, 2016).

Most of these studies were conducted in democratic societies and focused on the nonprofit management approach, particularly the financial management approach. The

“crowding in/out” theory also applies to the analysis of relations between various nonprofit revenue sources. In this study, we used the “crowding in/out” theory to analyze the relation between foreign donations and governmental grants to nonprofits in China, where politics is important in administration. The Chinese context also reminds us to incorporate the literature about the dynamics between foreign funds, nonprofits, and the government in an authoritarian regime.

Crowding in Effect

According to the managerial approach, donations to a nonprofit can signal the organization’s “quality” (Glazer & Konrad, 1996). Similarly, foreign donations can signal Chinese foundations’ performance and accountability. When the government depends on nonprofits to coproduce public goods (Van Ryzin, Riccucci, & Li, 2017), it is more likely to choose as partners those that perform better (Wang & Yao, 2016; Yu & Guo, 2012; Yu & Zhou, 2012a). A case study of Wenzhou Industrial Associations illustrated the dynamics between nonprofits and governmental agencies in co-producing public goods (Yu & Zhou, 2012a). The Chinese government can use foreign donations as a measure of foundations’ performance. Unfortunately, to date, there has been no empirical evidence about the effect of foreign donations on nonprofit performance.

With respect to the political approach, when combined with foreign donations, governmental funding can enhance authoritarian legitimacy by financing the provision of public goods. For example, the Chinese government has worked for decades with the Ford Foundation, which is based in the United States, to alleviate poverty in China (Zi, 2007), which helps enhance the legitimacy of authoritarian rule (Teets, 2013). Therefore, if foreign donations help enhance the govern-

ment’s legitimacy by financing the provision of public goods through certain nonprofits, the Chinese government also might provide financial support to these organizations. In that case, foreign donations crowd in governmental funds.

Crowding out Effect

Based on the resource dependence theory (Kerlin & Pollak, 2010; Wang & Yao, 2016), and from a managerial perspective, if the government considers foreign donations a substitute for its funding to nonprofits, it will be reluctant to provide financial support to foundations that receive foreign donations. Instead, the government simply may conclude that these foundations already have sufficient financial resources and thus reduce the amount of funds they give them, or cut governmental funding completely (Bellé, 2015; Brooks, 2000b; de Wit & Bekkers, 2017; Lu, 2016; Nikolova, 2014).

From the political perspective, “Nonprofits have an important role to play outside government in shaping public opinion, setting priorities for the public agenda, and mobilizing civic voice and action” (Reid, 2000, p. 5). Therefore, if foreign donations help foster the development of civil society that threatens social and political stability, the Chinese government certainly will limit the expansion of foundations and discourage foreign donations (Smith & Zhao, 2016; Zi, 2007). In extreme cases, the Chinese government has shut down foundations that threaten the rule of the CCP (Brown & Hu, 2012; Huang, 2017).

Hypothetically, if the “crowding in” hypothesis is correct, foreign donations will be associated positively with governmental support of Chinese nonprofits (charitable foundations). In contrast, if the “crowding out” hypothesis is correct, the government will be less likely to provide financial support to nonprofits that benefit from foreign donations. Both the “crowding in” and

“crowding out” effects have been documented. For example, the Chinese government welcomed the Ford Foundation when it worked with the government and government-supported nonprofits to alleviate poverty; however, the government warned the foundation when it provided financial support to a nonprofit think tank—the Unirule Institute—that advocates a free market, the rule of law, and China’s transition to a democratic government (Zi, 2007). When a nonprofit advocates for rights, the Chinese government is more likely to restrict both its activities and foreign donations. The Women’s Legal Aid Center (WLAC), which is affiliated with Peking University, received foreign donations that the government restricted later because it believed that the WLAC’s work might increase social unrest and threaten social stability by advocating for women’s rights and disclosing societal injustices (Brown & Hu, 2012).

After summarizing the relevant literature reviewed, we created a typology to understand the relations between foreign donations and governmental funds to Chinese nonprofits (Table 1). As discussed above, because no data have been available, most previous studies of the relation between Chinese nonprofits and the government have been case studies that largely have ignored the relation between foreign donations and governmental funds. Our study filled this research gap by using the recently released RICF data and providing empirical evidence of whether the Chinese government welcomes foreign donations to nonprofits.

Data and Methods

We used the RICF data (Ma et al., 2017) to test the relations between foreign donations and governmental funding to Chinese nonprofits. The RICF data were compiled from various sources, including organizational an-

nual reports and audited financial reports that foundations submit to the Civil Affairs Bureaus with which they are registered, information governmental regulatory agencies disclose (e.g., the Civil Organization Administration Bureau of the Ministry of Civil Affairs), by the China Foundation Center, and news from foundations’ official websites and other media outlets. Currently, the RICF has documented only the 2013 data of 3,344 foundations. After dropping missing variables of overseas donations and governmental funding, a subset of 2,652 foundations in total was used in our analysis. The RICF is a national sample of all foundations registered in the Mainland China and thus, it suited the purpose of this study.

Dependent Variables

We used all forms of government financial support, whether from local or central governments, as the dependent variable. Because the distribution of government funds to all of the foundations was skewed negatively, we transformed the variable to the log of the government funds (Table 2). The original amount of government funds was used as the dependent variable in the base model, while the log form was used as the dependent variable in the comparison model and further analyses.

Independent Variables

We used all forms of foreign funds given to the foundations as the independent variable and labeled them “foreign donations.” There are two ways in which foreign donations can finance the provision of public goods and empower civil society: donating to a domestic nonprofit organization or to a field branch of an international nonprofit (Hsia & White, 2002). International organizations were not the focus of this study. Therefore, only foreign donations to domestic foundations were used as the independent variable in the analysis. To reduce their nega-

tive skew, a log transformation also was conducted and used in further analyses (Table 2).

Controls

We controlled the age, size (measured by the log form of organizational endowment), and foundation category (measured by the organization’s main project/s). In addition, we also controlled whether the foundation was public (coded as 0) or private (coded as 1) and whether it was national (coded as 0) or regional (coded as 1); this is discussed in detail later. Fiscal decentralization or federalism (Jin, Qian, & Weingast, 2005; Shen, Jin, & Zou, 2012; Wong, 1991) indicated that the central government and local governments dealt with nonprofit organizations differently. In general, the government provided the highest level of political and financial support to national and public foundations (Kim, Mason, & Li, 2017). We then focused on the national public foundations because we were interested in the relation between foreign donations and governmental financial support.

Analytical Strategy

We described the main variables first, and then performed multivariate regressions to examine foreign donations’ effects on government support of foundations. We also compared the results of the base model, which used the original values of government funds and foreign donations, to the results drawn from the model that used log-transformed values of both variables. In addition, we conducted further analyses of the national public foundations by employing the same regression strategies.

Results

Descriptive Statistics

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics for these foundations. In 2013, charitable foundations received government financial support that ranged from 0 to 878 million CNY, and foreign in-

donations that ranged from 0 to more than 1,222 million CNY. To reduce the skew, the log of both government funds and foreign donations was used in the regression models. After the transformation, the log values of government funds ranged from 0 to 8.94 ($M = 0.95$, $SD = 2.17$), and those of foreign donations ranged from 0 to 8.35 ($M = 0.51$, $SD = 1.69$).

Among these foundations, the majority (94%) were regional and local foundations, while 62% were private. By 2013, the oldest organization was 35 years old and the youngest was only 3 years old. We also used a log form of organizational endowment to represent the foundation's size, which ranged from 1.48 to 4.70 ($M = 2.59$, $SD = 0.37$). The foundations' foci varied by categories. More than 40% worked on science and education affairs, followed by multi-purpose foundations (19.08%), those that worked on emergency issues (10.52%)—including natural disaster relief, fire-fighting, and others—poverty alleviation foundations (8.75%), culture and arts foundations (7.92%), youth affairs foundations (4.56%), disabled people's affairs foundations (2.83%), health affairs foundations (2.60%), environmental affairs foundations (1.81%), aged people's affairs foundations (1.24), and foundations that worked on legal and other affairs (0.68%).

Regression Results

Main effects

Table 3 presents the main regression results. We first estimated the relation between foreign donations and governmental funding to Chinese foundations (Models 1 and 2). We then transformed both foreign donations and governmental funds to their log forms to address the skew in their distributions and estimated the relation again (Models 3 and 4). The results of Model 1 showed a significant positive association between foreign donations and governmental funds provided to

Chinese foundations. This association still held after organizational age, size, and their categories were controlled (Model 2). Thus, if a Chinese foundation's foreign donations increased 1 CNY, it was more likely to crowd in 0.84 CNY of governmental funds (Model 2). However, private/public and regional/national foundations were in a disadvantageous/advantageous position in obtaining governmental funds. Specifically, by comparison to public and national foundations, private and regional foundations crowded out governmental funds by 2.26 million CNY and 11.69 million CNY, respectively.

The positive association between foreign donations and governmental funding became less significant in Model 3 and disappeared in Model 4. Private and regional foundations still were significantly less likely to receive governmental funds (Model 4). By comparison to public and national foundations, private and regional foundations had a 0.20 and 0.62 decreased log likelihood of obtaining governmental funds, respectively.

National public foundations

We then created interaction terms between private or public foundation status and national or regional foundation status and obtained four subgroups: national public and private foundations, and regional public and private foundations. Among these four groups, a significant positive association appeared only within the group of national public foundations; there were no significant associations between foreign donations and governmental funding for the remaining three groups (Figure 1).

We paid special attention to national public foundations because they were the main subgroup in which foreign donations affected governmental funding most significantly and positively. Only the log forms of both foreign donations and governmental

funds were used in the regressions presented in Table 4. The results of Model 5 showed a slightly significant positive association between foreign donations and the amount of governmental funds. After organizational age, size, and categories were controlled, there still was a significant positive association between foreign donations and governmental funding in Model 6. A one unit increase in the log likelihood of foreign donations resulted in a 0.25 increase in the log likelihood of governmental funding.

In summary, the significant positive association between foreign donations and governmental funding largely was found in national public foundations in China. One explanation of this effect may be that national public foundations are more capable of partnering with both foreign organizations and government agencies to complete various challenging tasks; further, these foundations have more political connections and usually are supported by the central government. In addition, they typically have more managerial competence. Further studies are needed to investigate the characteristics of national public foundations and their relations with foreign donors and government agencies.

Conclusions and Discussion

The relation between foreign and governmental financial support for nonprofit organizations in China was, and remains, complicated for two main reasons:

First, from a political perspective, the Chinese government wants to rely, at least in part, on nonprofits to coproduce public goods to meet social needs, and thus encourages foreign donations to domestic nonprofits. This perspective implies the crowd in effect that was supported by the effect of foreign donations on national public foundations. On the other hand, the Chinese government does not want

foreign donations to empower nonprofits and thus increase the development of civil society that might challenge the authority and threaten the rule of the CCP. This theory implies the crowd out effect. However, we found no empirical evidence that supported this effect.

Second, from a managerial perspective, foreign donations to China's nonprofits could signal a higher quality organization and crowd in governmental funds, or could signal that the nonprofit has sufficient financial resources and thus crowd out governmental funds. In addition, national public foundations also may signal greater managerial effectiveness. We found that foreign donations to national public foundations crowded in government funds.

To understand the relation between foreign donations and governmental financial support to Chinese nonprofit organizations better, we used the RICF data to test the relation between the two empirically. The results showed that national public foundations drive the significant positive association between foreign donations and governmental funds in large part. Foreign donations to national private foundations and regional public and private foundations did not affect their level of governmental financial support. A one unit increase in the log likelihood of foreign donations to national public foundations resulted in a 0.25 increase in the log likelihood that these organizations received governmental support. We concluded that the Chinese government welcomes foreign donations when these contributions are made to national public foundations.

The study not only sheds new light on the relation between foreign donations and governmental funding provided to Chinese foundations, but also emphasizes the way in which the RICF data can be used for empirical

studies of civil society and nonprofit management in China. This study contributes to the literature on the relation between nonprofits and government by providing new empirical evidence that showed a positive association between foreign donations and governmental funding to national public foundations in China. Before the RICF released its data (Ma et al., 2017), national empirical studies of Chinese nonprofits were rare. This study is among the few empirical works that has used the RICF data. It also underscores the way in which the RICF data can be used for nonprofit research in China. A practical implication of this study is that foreign individuals and organizations that want to support Chinese nonprofits, but have not done so, may want to reconsider the role of the Chinese government and treat it as a partner rather than a hostile entity.

This study was not without limitations. The most significant concerned the RICF data. The RICF data used in this study were collected in 2013. In 2016, the Chinese government issued a new law—the Law on Management of Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-Governmental Organizations—to regulate foreign nonprofit organizations that operate on the Mainland. Thus, it will be interesting to see the way in which the relation between foreign donations and governmental funds evolves over time. The RICF is developing its data into panel data (Ma et al., 2017). When the new panel data are available, future studies can investigate the trends in the Chinese government's attitude toward foreign donations to nonprofits, particularly national public foundations.

Another limitation is that the sample size was relatively small in our analysis of the relation between foreign donations to, and governmental support of, national public foundations, and only 87 national public foundations were included. Of course,

the reality is that there are fewer national public foundations than other types of foundations, and it is more difficult to establish a national public foundation. These foundations usually have strong ties with former or current government officials and thus the governmental funds allocated to them are an endogenous effect. This study did not investigate the effect of nonprofits' leadership structure and their leaders' connections with government. Thus, further analyses are necessary to separate the influence of leadership structures from the influence of foreign donations on governmental funds.

Finally, the study did not separate the influence of local governmental funds to foundations from the influence of central governmental funds because of the lack of such data. The RICF does not include information about whether the central government or provincial and local governments provided the governmental funding. If such data are available in the future, it would be interesting to examine the dynamics across different levels of government with respect to their responses to foreign donations.

Table 1: The typology of relations between foreign donations and governmental funding

	Crowding In	Crowding Out
Managerial Approach	Signal organizational performance and accountability	Resource sufficiency
Political Approach	Enhance political legitimacy by increasing public goods provisions	Empower civil society that might risk the authoritarian ruling and political stability

Source: Created by the authors.

Table 2: Descriptive statistics of variables (in million CNY)

Variables (range)	Mean(s.d.)/Percentage
Government funding (0-878)	1.21 (23.65)
Log (Gov. funding) (0-8.94)	0.95 (2.17)
Foreign donations (0-1,222)	0.59 (6.58)
Log (Foreign donations) (0-8.35)	0.51 (1.69)
Private foundation (Private = 1, Public = 0)	62
Regional foundation (Regional = 1, National = 0)	94
Organization age (3-35 years, as in 2013)	9.43 (7.21)
Organization size (log(endowment)) (1.48-4.70)	2.59 (0.37)
Organization categories	
Legal and other affairs (=0) (reference group)	0.68
Multi-purpose (=1)	19.08
Science and education (=2)	40.01
Culture and arts (=3)	7.92
Health (=4)	2.60
Environment (=5)	1.81
Emergency (=6)	10.52
Poverty alleviation (=7)	8.75
Aged people affairs (=8)	1.24
Youth affairs (=9)	4.56
Disability (=10)	2.83
N=2652	

Table 3: Associations between foreign donations and government funding (in million CNY)

	Gov. funding		log(Gov. funding)	
	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)
Foreign donations	0.87 ^{***} (0.07)	0.84 ^{***} (0.07)		
log(Foreign donations)			0.05 [*] (0.03)	0.03 (0.03)
Private		-2.26 ^{**} (1.10)		-0.20 [*] (0.11)
Regional		-11.70 ^{***} (2.13)		-0.62 ^{***} (0.20)
Controls (Organizational age, size, categories)				
	No	Yes	No	Yes
Observations	2,652	2,652	2,652	2,652
R²	0.06	0.07	0.00	0.01
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; **p<0.05; ***p<0.01			

Figure 1: Associations between foreign donations and governmental funding by public/private and national/regional foundations

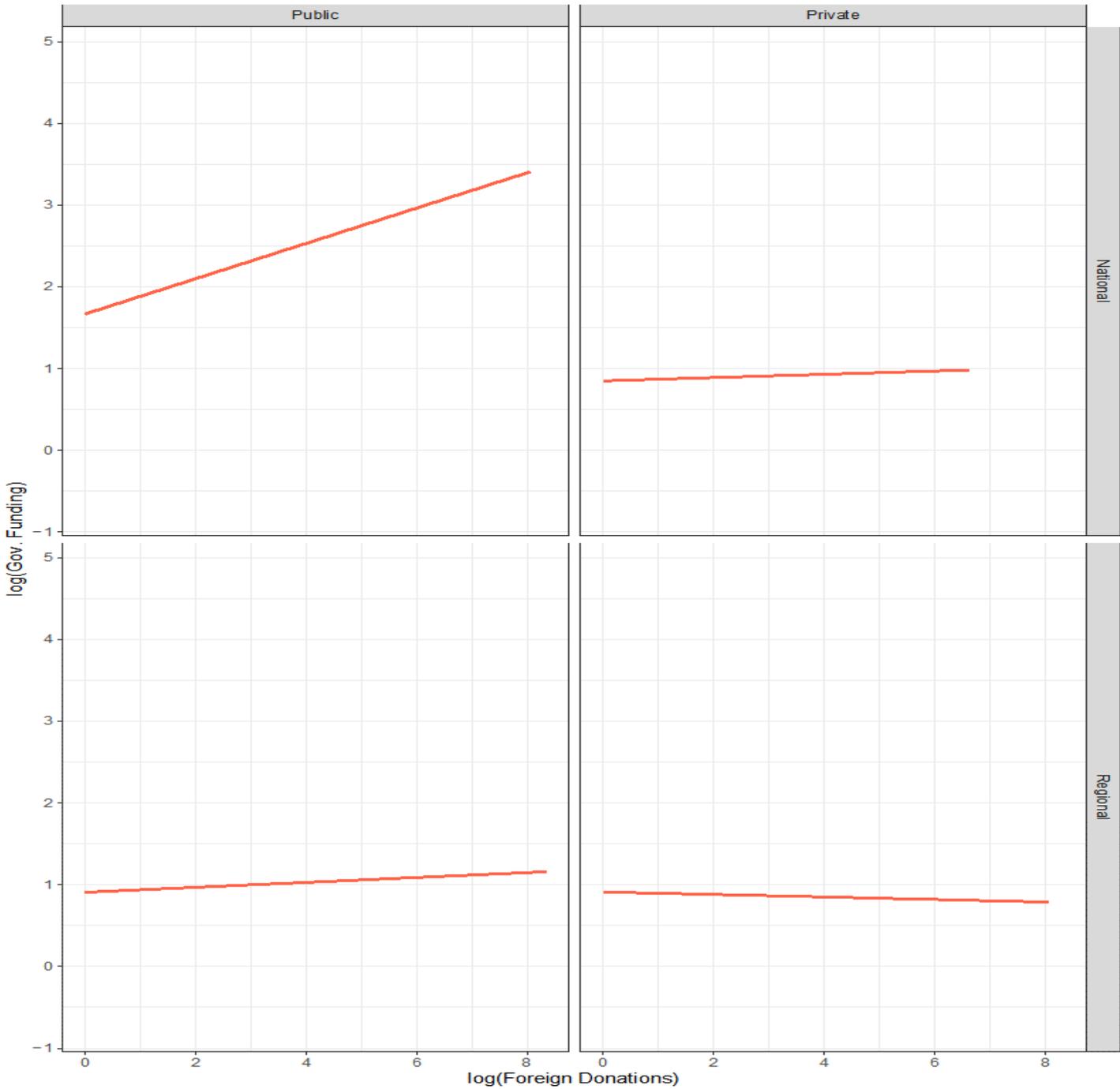


Table 4: Associations between foreign donations and government funding by national public foundations

	log(Gov. funding)	
	(5)	(6)
log(Foreign donations)	0.22* (0.11)	0.25** (0.12)
Controls	No	Yes
Observations	87	87
R²	0.04	0.21
<i>Note:</i>	*p<0.1; ** p<0.05; *** p<0.01	

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