Abstract: Uncertain political boundaries and formal cooptation institutions often make NGOs in China self-censor on sensitive issues. A growing body of literature has focused on various strategies NGOs proactively adopt to circumvent formal restrictions and manage the risk of participation. However, a comparative case study from a four-month fieldwork in this paper reveals a previously neglected aspect of state-NGO interaction, i.e., how do NGOs perceive and process the information they get? We find that endorsement outside of the formal institution—a retired official in our case—is not perceived as credible because the retired official does not have to bear the consequence of miscalculation. On the contrary, endorsement from local supervision institution is perceived as credible. Paradoxically, the credibility comes from the institutional design that originally intends to make restriction and monitoring effective. Our study suggests that while NGOs have various ways to seek endorsement, not all of them are perceived as credible. State, as the creator of uncertainty in the first place, is also the ultimate solution for it.