

The Relationship between NGO Participation and Policy Implementation in China

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Abstract: *China has not been left behind in terms of cooperation among non-governmental organizations within its national borders. NGOs have been defending the citizens' shared interests for quite a while now. Environment, gender equality, poverty, public health, and education, among others, are just but a few aspects that the Chinese Non-Governmental Organizations focus on. The Non-Governmental organizations in China assist the government in coming up with policies and enforcing them to ensure that the people's shared interests are safeguarded. Transactional collaboration in funding shared opinions, campaigns, and advocacy assists Chinese non-governmental organizations in offering their services and, in some instances, questioning the status quo.*

Keywords: *Non-Governmental Organizations; Chinese NGOs; Policy Implementation*

1. Introduction

The mounting challenges and issues have made citizens in different parts of the globe unite in order to pursue their common interests. Competing constituencies and interests in Chinese society have risen mainly due to modernization and economic reform in the country. A rising number of activists have put in place organizations to ensure that the society member's shared interests are protected. However, the Chinese government has, over the years, imposed restrictions on Non-Governmental Organization's activities that focus on politically sensitive issues such as human rights. The NGOs activities are predominantly focused on what the authorities view as politically sensitive areas, such as gender equality, economic development, environment, migrant workers, and animal protection, among others. The NGOs in China have been given a huge privilege in promoting the implementation of policies that protect the citizen's shared interests.

2. Literature Review

2.1. The Growth of NGOs in China

Since the start of the reforms in 1978, China's state and society have changed significantly, which has directly led to the development of an NGO sector. The state has deliberately created and sponsored NGOs in order to delegate to them some of the tasks that it used to carry out directly under the command system^[1]. Changes have not only resulted in a relaxation of government control over the society and economy. The establishment of intermediate groups, such as chambers of commerce and trade associations, to carry out regulation tasks and sectoral coordination has allowed the government to lessen its direct managerial involvement in the economy. The government aims to support the NGO sector so that it may transfer part of the burden of service providing in the area of social welfare. The government expects that NGOs can mobilize societal resources to support its own expenditure on social development.

In the meanwhile, social actors have been eager to take advantage of the expanded social space and the non-state-controlled resources now at their disposal to further their own personal agendas and interests. NGOs offer a crucial conduit for such endeavors. The number of NGOs has significantly expanded during the reform era, with both the state and society providing the drive for their development. According to data from the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA), China had only approximately 100 national social groups before 1978. They were 1,736 strong by the end of 2003. In the meanwhile, there were 142,121 more local social groups, up from 6,000^[2].

Prior to the changes, there were no PNEUs; today, there are 124,491. ^[3] Additionally, social groups that were in place prior to the reforms were completely under the authority of the state and primarily worked to further the goals of the state, as opposed to the numerous NGOs that have appeared after the reforms and enjoy a great deal of autonomy. NGOs that are "organized around minority interests" are an excellent example, such as those that support labor rights or self-help groups founded by persons suffering with HIV/AIDS. NGOs have expanded quickly, but a number of issues have made it difficult for them to properly carry out public-benefit tasks. These elements span from the nature of political engagement in China to governmental regulations on NGOs.

2.2. *The Government of China and NGOs*

While pertinent research is still being conducted in the country at a macroscopic extent, overseas research on governance have grown more concrete and technical. China has had some experience with plural government. The need of developing a multi-level social management system, comprised of society coordination, accountability of the government, engagement by the members of public, party leadership, and rule of law, has been consistently emphasized by the central government since the 18th CPC Central Committee. Wong believes that national control may be separated into shared profit-split international and national control from the standpoint of corporate governance. In order to execute democratic control, it is vital to make policy creation and enforcement accessible to the community in order to offer an appropriate institutional, legal, and policy framework for plural governance.

The government created a semi-official NGO sector, a strategy that has been implemented with growing zeal since the 1990s, motivated by both practical necessities and a fear of bottom-up social mobilization. To further charitable, research, informational, and policy goals, Communist Party and government departments at different categories have put up other organizations and foundations. Common names for these species include "GONGOs" (Government Organised NGOs). Traditional Leninist mass organizations (renmin tuanti), one of the principal GONGO categories, are the origin of this term. The All China Federation of Trade Unions, All China Women's Federation, and All China Youth League are among the eight of them. In an effort to shift these mass organizations' original mission as Communist Party overseers of certain constituencies into one of service provision and facilitation, the government is working to progressively change it. Satellite organizations (associations and foundations) have been established as a result. The GONGO sector serves two main objectives. One is to get knowledge and charitable financing that the state finds challenging to obtain, especially from overseas sources such as INGOs. In order to undertake exchanges with foreign organizations and take part in unofficial study tour programs abroad, certain government offices form organizations in their respective fields of expertise.

Another factor is that government-initiated organizations may more easily explore new fields of endeavor when they are somewhat removed from traditional government institutions, such as offering contraceptive advice to singles or developing HIV/AIDS prevention programs for drug users and sex workers. The interests of GONGOs are generally similar to those of the more independent groups, with a few notable deviations, such as the China Society for Human Rights Studies, which was founded to support the government's human rights diplomacy and research international standards. Both focus primarily on delivering social services, fostering economic growth, defending the rights of women, and safeguarding the environment. The NGO community in China is made up of both autonomous NGOs and GONGOs. As per statistics from the Ministry of Civil Affairs, there are currently 244,000 legally recognized NGOs in China, including GONGOs. Unknown is the overall number of bottom-up, self-governing, independent NGOs. But according to Chan, 26,000 officially recognized social organizations in China in 2000 fell under the category of "NGOs in the Western sense."^[4]

2.3. *The Chinese Government and Policy Advocacy by Chinese NGOs*

Numerous studies have examined how Chinese NGOs participate in national government and lobbying for particular policies, and many of these analyses use a macro and classification approach. Three significant flaws, nonetheless, leap out. First, the topic of NGO identity has not been well addressed by the previous research, either on environmental or national governance. In other words, these findings either disregarded the problem or simply treated NGOs as a member of the "public." The idea of "public engagement" is hazy in this regard, both practically and intellectually. NGOs are viewed as a specific form of autonomous participant in plural government in this article. Second, the prior research mostly concentrated on two facets of involvement, namely the current context and the pathways. The governance analysis, however, has been disregarded. This article seeks to close that gap. Third, there

aren't enough case studies available in the field. The macroscopic studies are instructive, but without a clear case, the arguments cannot stand. As a result, this study will carefully examine one scenario based on extensive fieldwork before addressing the theoretical underpinnings of governance.

The effectiveness of non-governmental organizations is perceived as a vital sign of the active participation of civil society in creating policies, whether they are of an international or national nature. Various approaches to new governance structures are in existence. The objective has been to make it possible for the Sovereign State to change its position in establishing guidelines for the International Agenda's most important concerns. As a result, the effect of NGOs must be understood in the context of their interactions with the State and must be examined in light of two complimentary axes: legitimacy and normativity. Performers, who were formerly simply an object of such discussions, now have a favorable atmosphere in which to perform due to the necessity to legitimize the public decision-making process. There is a fresh change in their interaction sequence with the social medium they act in as soon as they are legally recognized and begin positively influencing the formulation and implementation of policies.

Growing NGO engagement has been cited as a factor changing the way political power is used. As a result, their performance is promoted as an intervening variable in the theoretical paradigms that claim the traditional Westphalian perception, in which States seem as the real performers in this process, is outdated. This would entail transforming how political power is used. States would be less powerful in this aspect, while non-state-owned performers would acquire power. As a result, governance arrangements would develop in which the State plays a strategic but not necessarily dominating role. The necessity to reorganize the political decision-making framework is one of the new difficulties brought on by complex interdependence and the growth of international flows.

In this context, NGOs begin to play a supportive role in the execution, and creation of official policy. In various major intergovernmental and federal organizations, they are issued the status of observers. In these circumstances, they must examine the selection of policies and the decision-making processes, as well as keep an eye on the progress and results of their implementation and the responsible deployment of funds. In these situations, taking action by a third party that appears to have distinct interests from those in public office will provide these efforts more openness and validity.

NGOs may also take on a technical role. In these situations, they provide pertinent data to establish policies, either at the time of their formulation or at the time of their implementation (to be sure the actions are effective). Moreover, they might act promptly after receiving governmental approval by putting the policies into practice. This occurs when the State cannot adequately handle the matter for political or technological reasons. Because they are not affiliated with any State, these groups can provide humanitarian relief without encountering political obstacles and with the cooperation of the local populace. They can also help the less fortunate members of the population so that they can use the legal rights that have been granted to them.

NGOs can function as lobbyists and influence political choices that, in theory, belong to the state in addition to using the methods that the States have granted them. Because of this, these organizations frequently act as a tool for elevating social groups that are, for whatever reason, meant to be excluded from the political system. In these situations, they would contribute to enhancing participatory democracy. Non-governmental organizations can act as true change agents in certain circumstances. This is mainly because they may play a vital role in spreading awareness of concepts that are ignored in the inter-state domain, divulging and putting scientific findings on the agenda, as well as helping to establish meanings and forge agreement around certain concerns.

NGOs also have the advantage of enacting resolutions and facilitating negotiations more conventional methods of dispute resolution have not materialized. Finally, in some circumstances, they are able to generate a substantial amount sum of money that has to go toward a certain classification of insurance policies. By doing thus, they continue to develop, fund, and carry out initiatives regardless of the state seal. Thus, these initiatives can supplement state political shortcomings and circumvent bureaucratic process bottlenecks. In reality, the NGO's activities typically follow five distinct patterns: (i) acclamation of values readily recognized in international community, for instance, human rights; (ii) because of support for their initiatives, whether through membership or financial donations; (iii) depending on their technical knowledge and excellence of how to resolve specific scenarios; and (iv) the scope of their interventions, for instance, several humanitarian NGOs fill spaces in which States would not be able to in the case of a crisis.

NGO influence is expanding, but there are hazards. Studies focusing on a practical viewpoint, in which the efficacy of performance by agents from the third sector was discussed, advanced a number of

pertinent criticisms of these techniques. A legitimacy crisis is said to be characterized by a lack of accountability and control systems as well as the extent of openness to engagement by organizations from civil society inside the NGOs themselves. In a different vein, some authors even challenge the notion that NGOs can alter the conventional mode of political power-exertion. There is no interaction between the state-run sphere and the third sector on a normative basis. Its advent would be an extra-systemic force that emerged with other factors (internalization of international norms, soft law, etc.) in reaction to the conventional legal system's failure to adapt to the difficulties posed by the contemporary dynamics of the international society.

2.4. Chinese NGOs' Participation in Policy Advocacy and Environmental Governance

Existing research on NGOs' involvement in national government frequently highlights the unique characteristics of the Chinese setting. Institutional involvement is the most empowering model among the three presented forms of citizen engagement in China that use NGOs as intermediaries. However, the majority of NGOs in China now struggle with self-organization and frequently take part in governance as separate entities. Despite their sporadic accomplishments, NGOs' advocacy has not created an institutional and universal avenue for participation even if the decision-making participation paradigm is relatively prevalent. The participatory governance paradigm seems more promising and well-liked among vulnerable groups, urban and rural communities, and groups that benefit from government-bought public services than the first two models.

Waste production in Chinese cities is increasing as a result of urbanization, population growth, and industrialization. The nation's rate of waste recycling is lower than that of several other nations, and by 2030, it is anticipated that Chinese cities will produce twice as much waste as US cities. However, the public's participation in trash recycling and reduction is minimal; this scenario is linked to a lack of associated information and waste recycling facilities. The Central Government has consequently looked to other nations' approaches in response to rising waste volumes and discovered that participatory strategies involving the non-governmental organizations (NGO) and the general public actors, or participatory waste governance, may help increase public acceptance of policies of waste management.

The activities of Chinese environmental NGOs were evaluated and concluded that the majority of these projects are usually "un-political," and that only a limited number of environmental NGOs had a little involvement in "political activities," such as helping victims of pollution or taking on local corporations^[5]. In addition, some researchers came to the conclusion that although the modification of the Chinese political system offered more chances to participate for policy advocacy, Chinese environmental NGOs rarely took part in such advocacy or massive social movements. This was according to two rounds of surveying 28 Chinese environmental NGOs. Environmental NGOs in China, in contrast to its counterparts in the West, have relatively weak organizational capacities and little interest in influencing public policy. Jia's research defined participation paradigms, while Tang and Zhan's two studies show how Chinese environmental NGOs are now participating in governance, indicating that they are still in the early stages of growth.

3. Research Methodology

This article uses both focused secondary research and primary research from secondary sources. In order to give a quick summary of Chinese NGO internationalization, or "getting out" activities, it first draws on a desk assessment of the literature. In addition, it highlights areas of China's present development cooperation program that NGOs may significantly contribute to, as stated in the White Paper. In order to highlight difficulties in performing that job, it again relied on an interviews and desk review with seven specialists and leaders of Chinese NGO. We sought out complexity and detail in our talks, email correspondences, and semi-structured interviews with these leaders of NGO in an effort to close some of the gaps in the existing literature.

The NGOs here represent a variety of fields. The China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA) is one of the first and largest Chinese NGOs to internationalize, and the Beijing Normal University (CINF-BNU)/Center for International NGOs and Foundations has both a practitioner and policy viewpoint^[6]. The Beijing Rongzhi Institute of Corporate Social Responsibility (Rongzhi) brings in certain private sector perspectives, while the Global Environment Institute (GEI) carries out advocacy and development work. The fact that the leaders of these organizations wanted to participate in the world discussion regarding China's global engagement and advance Chinese policies is why they spoke with us. Their opinions, which are outlined below, also affected our suggestions.

4. Discussion

4.1. *The Internationalization of China's NGOs*

Chinese NGOs make up a relatively tiny part of the country's development assistance. However, as the government of China, businesses, and NGOs realize the strategic potential this relationship offers, this position has grown. Finding concrete information on the scope of Chinese NGO activity abroad and how it could have shifted with time is challenging. Statistics from the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) reveal that towards the end 2014, four private non-enterprise entities, nine foundations, 215 social groups, and had worked abroad out of China's 606,000 social organizations. After 2015, the MCA stopped offering this kind of information. 20 Chinese non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have engaged in operations outside of China, according to a search of the UNDESA database, while 71 Chinese NGOs have "consultative status" with the UN (UNDESA 2021). By 2017, the China Foundation Center (CFC) had listed 49 foundations of as influential foreign countries, and that the China NGO System for International Exchanges (CNIE) highlighted 63 of their NGO members as having a concentrate on international affairs^[7].

4.2. *The role for Chinese NGOs and China's 2021 White Paper*

China's prior promises to cooperate with NGOs in development cooperation are reiterated in the 2021 White Paper. It makes three references to social organizations, implying three different levels of devotion. The document first highlights a high-degree commitment by quoting President Xi's remarks at the Road Forum and Second Belt, in which he said that China will promote social organization engagement in public wellness initiatives along the BRI. The second announcement in the paper is a funding mechanism: in collaboration with Chinese social organizations, China's US\$3 billion South-South Cooperation Assistance Fund (SSCAF) will concentrate on small and micro projects across various sectors, and investment facilitation and trade promotion.

The paper also suggests an institutional structure in its third section, which is titled "Future Prospects for International Cooperation." Under this section, China's inter-ministerial coordination strategy for foreign assistance will be in charge of coordinating the efforts of various government levels and social organizations to increase cohesion and efficiency. Although earlier iterations of these promises may have existed before the 2021 White Paper, their mention confirms the possibility of involvement by NGOs and social organizations, no matter how nebulous the specifics. Chinese social organizations, and NGOs can have a greater influence in two key areas by applying the White Paper's guidelines, as shown below.

4.3. *Challenges faced by Chinese NGOs*

4.3.1. *Lack of enabling policy framework*

The absence of a strong legal or legislative framework to assist NGO internationalization appears to be a significant difficulty in the literature. Official orders have not yet resulted in actionable plans. Our interviewees made it quite evident that the SDGs and globalization drive the growing internationalization of Chinese NGOs. NGOs also expand as China does, but with less assistance from the government. The irony of the BRI is that while businesses and investors travel quickly across continents, NGOs are still awaiting passports. Chinese NGOs are "spontaneously" expanding abroad without any assistance from the government, which puts the government under pressure to both accept and control these phenomena. According to Ren Peng, a representative of GEL, China does not favor Chinese NGOs participating in development cooperation, and the majority of such initiatives are hampered by the lack of a national plan.

Additionally, there is still no centralized management for NGO foreign operations. 12 NGOs are not subject to the same regulations as businesses when it comes to participating in foreign assistance initiatives, according to the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). The China International Development Cooperation Agency (CIDCA), established in 2018, lacks an NGO partnership framework similar to those that are crucial to the Development Assistance Committee (OECD-DAC) country assistance systems, such as Australia's.

Chinese NGOs have been and may continue to be a tool of China's soft power diplomacy in the present geopolitical climate. The State had pushed its NGOs to back China's geopolitical objectives. Yang Li, the director of CINF-BNU13, emphasized that Chinese NGOs' abroad activities will rehabilitate China's reputation and foster cross-cultural dialogue. Some Chinese NGOs have put themselves in lime light by choosing to engage in global governance and "share Chinese methods with the Western world,"

according to CFPA Vice President Wang Xingzui¹⁴. Yang cited the Amity Foundation as an illustration, which opened an office in Geneva in 2015 in part to serve as a conduit for Chinese social organization activity along the BRI. The degree to which CFPA makes its Chinese heritage publicly visible depends on the environment. Some local stakeholders in Myanmar have doubts about the CFPA's work there. The NGO status must be emphasized, and separation from the government is required for efficient operation. On the other hand, in Nepal, the CFPA's affiliation with the Chinese government reassures its Nepali colleagues and makes it easier for it to carry out its job there.

4.3.2. Funding Constraints

For Chinese NGOs "moving abroad," access to money has always been a problem. Rarely do they get money from government foreign development funds directly. Despite the SSCAF's foundation was announced by President Xi in 2015, virtually little of its financing has gone to Chinese NGOs. As soon as CIDCA was founded in 2018, it replaced MOFCOM as the manager of SSCAF. This change was a factor in the modest progress made by NGOs in SSCAF^[8].

The Silk Road NGO Cooperation chain was created in 2017 by the China NGO Network for International Exchanges (CNIE) to assist the BRI through coordinated Chinese NGO activities to strengthen individual-to-individual connectivity, carry out beneficial initiatives, and increase public aid for the BRI^[9]. The connection has drawn 352 members from 72 different nations. Coordination of Chinese NGO applications to the SSCAF is the responsibility of CNIE, which does this by examining NGO project ideas and recommending financing to CIDCA. Since CNIE's initial request for proposals was issued in July 2020, no Chinese NGOs have been funded through this approach^[10]. You Fei, the Executive Director of CINF-BNU, asserts that CNIE need to take on a bigger part in assisting Chinese NGOs working abroad and in promoting communication with the Chinese government, especially on issues like getting access to government funds via the SSCAF^[11].

4.3.3. Limited Capacity

For Chinese NGOs, capacity issues and a lack of global expertise provide additional difficulties. Chinese help abroad is frequently criticized for being insensitive to regional conditions and local populations. This is a reflection of the widespread practice of carrying out infrastructure projects like stadiums, roads, and bridges through Chinese contractors and businesses, who are unaware of the benefits of or know how to involve local populations in the process. Chinese NGOs may theoretically fill this gap, but they are nonetheless constrained by a lack of qualified employees or international experience. Internal capacity was mentioned by every respondent as a barrier to effective "getting out" in our interviews. Chinese NGOs have difficulty finding staff that are knowledgeable about the social and political environments of their partner nations as well as the technical processes involved in administering international initiatives abroad. Interviewees frequently comment on the scant to nonexistent training their NGOs get in diversity awareness, international or intercultural involvement, or the socioeconomic and cultural settings of the nations where they operate.

Several of the capacity limitations are related to the difficulty of harmonizing policy frameworks that were not initially intended to function together. For instance, the government of Nepal mandates that INGOs sustain a yearly contribution of US\$200,000 and collaborate with local NGO partners in the putting in place of programs^[12]. Transferring funds also presents challenges as a result of Chinese laws regarding foreign exchange management. To manage these administrative obstacles, several Chinese NGOs with recent "going out" experience need more skilled people.

The difficulties of coordinating numerous languages and donor criteria are other capacity limitations. Rongzhi finds it difficult to carry out surveys or other tasks in the targeted nations due to language problems. CFPA Myanmar frequently has to provide project reports in Burmese, English, and Mandarin that are tailored to the preferences and needs of various sponsors. For instance, while their Chinese mainland-based donors place great importance on local relationships, which are frequently promoted through events and local media coverage, and local profiles of projects, their Hong Kong-based foundation donors prefer visual records outlining implementation and have less interest in fund utilization. All NGOs operating internationally will be familiar with these issues, but Chinese NGOs are more limited in their access to individuals with expertise in international development.

In this regard, our respondents emphasized the value of exchanging experiences with other NGOs working in a similar setting. The CFPA has developed strong relationships with western INGOs that have greatly aided the opening of their new offices. For instance, the CFPA Myanmar National Director completed an eight-month internship with Mercy Corps in Myanmar, with an emphasis on building working connections with local personnel and setting up country offices). Similar to this, Mercy Corps

Nepal hosted a helpful country-office training for the CFPA Nepal Country Director. The operating guidebook created by The Asia Foundation for Chinese NGOs getting ready to deploy was noted as being beneficial by both country directors.

4.4. Recommendations

We advise that the government make clear and enhance the policy framework for Chinese social organizations, and NGOs, particularly addressing capital and material outflows, personnel rules, financial flows, given the lack of a strong legislative funding and framework assistance. With the aid of a regulatory framework, and a public-private partnership (PPP) paradigm and, NGOs might use SSCAF money to engage with Chinese corporations and so have a greater influence on global alliances. The government-mandated organizations, could set up a regular coordination and systematic framework, including semi-annual conversations between the internationally and government active NGOs and social organizations, to improve understanding between different government agencies and NGOs.

Smaller task groups that are co-led by government and an NGO representative might participate in in-depth discussion on issues including establishing national offices, controlling financial outflows, requesting financing from SSCAF, and other important policy initiatives. We urge that CIDCA or CNIE create a thorough database of Chinese social organizations and NGOs that have "gone abroad" in various ways in order to improve coordination, foster knowledge-sharing, and encourage mutual learning. Last but not least, the government need a method for evaluating the contributions of Chinese NGO's to international cooperation, including their worldwide practices, social effect, successes, and difficulties. This can lead to suggestions or actions for better planning and more efficient resource allocation.

5. Conclusions

In the global push for sustainable development, China's international development cooperation's scope and depth play a crucial role. Although China's 2021 White Paper makes room for further NGO participation, our research here shows that these NGOs continue to suffer gaps in organizational capacity, financing sources, and policy enabling. It may be more than ten years before Chinese NGOs see a boom in their international expansion, according to interviewees. As Chinese NGOs have an official and important standing but with unclear articulation of their specific function or the methods of allowing it, our findings highlight to areas of opacity in China's strategy for development cooperation.

The NGOs activities are predominantly focused on what the authorities view as politically sensitive areas, such as gender equality, economic development, environment, migrant workers, and animal protection, among others. The NGOs in China have been given a huge privilege in promoting the implementation of policies that protect the citizen's shared interests. Environment, racial equality, and education are just but a few of the shared interests that non-governmental organizations strive to protect. The Chinese NGOs work hand in hand with the government in promoting policies and suggesting policies that benefit Chinese citizens in general.

The scope and atmosphere for Chinese NGO engagement in Chinese development cooperation are discussed in this article from the primary qualitative viewpoints of a few significant Chinese NGOs. I was unable to do primary study with pertinent Chinese government players or perform a wide quantitative assessment of the experience of Chinese NGOs because to time restrictions and limitations brought on by the epidemic. I anticipate that our study will contribute to future discussions with government stakeholders and a wider variety of Chinese NGOs, especially as more organizations enter the field of development cooperation. Further study can follow the White Paper's implementation to find out if and how NGO relationships develop.

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