

Stumbling in the One-way Street: Constraints and Opportunities of NGOs in Post-socialist China

In modern industrialized democracies, the civil society has its voice and can wield influence on public policy by negotiating with state. The contributions and discourses of NGOs and civil society has been heatedly debated and widely discussed in China since the mid-1990s. There are obvious changes on how the government perceives the roles and contributions of NGOs and the civil society in China since 1989. NGO might be perceived with suspicion as roots of anti-government and counter-revolutionary organizations. The active contributions of volunteers in the Wenchuan Earthquake and the Beijing Olympic Games in 2008 had convinced the authority of a need to change policy directives by relaxing its stringent control on the registration of NGOs to revive the civil society. In the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015), China declares her intention to further nurture and strengthen the collaborative roles of social organizations in social services and social management. From central to local, government aims to provide an integrative tax reduction privilege policy, financially support social organizations and adopt a contracting-out mechanism to involve NGOs in social service delivery at the community level. In some economically developed regions, the social organizations or NGOs mushroomed. In this paper, the researcher aims to discuss the following issues based on case analysis of NGOs in Beijing: First, what is the recent progress of NGOs development and relevant policy change in China? Second, how were local NGOs confronted with government regulation in the current socio-economic and political climate? What are the major constraints facing NGOs? Third, how can NGOs seize their opportunities of augmenting social impact by enhancing accountability, professional capacity, governance and innovation within the One-Party regime in future? The implications of NGOs and social entrepreneurship for China's future development are also discussed in the paper.