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Title

A Study of the Policy Attention Alignment between Government and Social Actors in Hong Kong

Abstract

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) argues that government can pay attention to a restricted number of social issues at a given time due to bounded rationality and institutional friction. Conventional theories of nonprofits, on the other hand, suggest that the focus of action of nonprofits is largely affected by government’s policy agenda. Some scholars argue that nonprofits exist to address social issues that government has neglected or failed to address; others emphasize the symbiotic relationship between government and nonprofits, arguing that nonprofits are often the service delivery arm of government. While the literature suggest the existence of relationships between the policy attention of government and nonprofits, it is not clear as to what these relationships look like and how they operate. Perhaps more importantly, are the allocations of policy attention of government, businesses, the media, nonprofits, and the philanthropic sector aligned with one another?

To address this question, this study conducts an empirical analysis of policy attention in the context of Hong Kong. A novel data-base has been constructed which contains: 1) panel data of government attention, as measured by the number of government press release themed on different social issues, and the frequency of the social issues being mentioned in government press releases, the Chief Executive’s speeches, the annual Policy Addresses, and the Budget Addresses; 2) panel data of media attention, as measured by the number of news reports on different social issues in major newspapers; 3) cross-sectional data of companies’ attention and contributions to different social issues, measured by the amounts of donation to projects of in different policy areas; 4) cross-sectional data of philanthropic foundations’ attention and contributions to different social issues, gauged their donation information; and 5) cross-sectional data of individual attention, measured
by information of individuals’ giving patterns collected by a survey. Preliminarily analysis of the data has suggested that the government and the corporate and philanthropic sectors’ allocations of attention to social issues (such as education, health care, environment protection, etc.) are in general aligned; the corporate and philanthropic sectors are allocating more resources to social issues that have been given priority by the government. In-depth qualitative analysis will be conducted to explicate the logic and mechanisms behind the alignment. By applying the theory and methods of PET to the study of government-nonprofit relationships and collaborative governance, this study contributes to a better understanding of the policy-nonprofit nexus and its implication for public governance.

Keyword

Punctuated Equilibrium Theory, Policy Attention Alignment, government, social actors