Abstract Reference Number: 117

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Title

Voluntary provision of social services in China: government use of volunteering or voluntary sector use of government?

Abstract

Voluntary sector’s participation in the provision of social services is widespread in the field of public governance in contemporary China. Governments increasingly seek to achieve social welfare objectives through voluntary organisations. Meanwhile, voluntary agencies try to approach governmental resources for the purpose of accomplishing their mission. Different forms of the relationship between governments and voluntary organisations in social service delivery have been widely discussed and examined, such as contracting for services, collaborative provision, co-production, and public-nonprofit partnerships, etc. However, the nature of government-voluntary sector relations in the provision of social services is questioned. Drawing on qualitative research with both public organisations and voluntary associations in China, this article explores public-voluntary interdependence in the provision of social services within the context of China. It explores how and why the interdependent relations between public and voluntary sectors have been formed in the activities of social service delivery, how both sides understand and negotiate the tension between the policy goals and voluntary missions, and between policy implementation and mission-driven social action. It closes by considering the implications for the change of balance between public and voluntary agencies in social service delivery. In doing so, this article highlights the nature of voluntary provision of social services as well as the dynamic relationships between governments and voluntary associations in a changing policy climate. This article draws on a case-based qualitative study in Beijing, the capital city of China. Data is collected from the related public agencies and 26 voluntary organisations with the mission of delivering social services. There are two strands of data collection with the public and voluntary agencies: interviews with the public officials working in the related public organisations and with the leaders
of the 26 voluntary associations; and focus group discussions involving both public officials and
the voluntary organisation leaders. The data will be analysed and interpreted by using framework
analysis based on the identified key themes.

Keyword

Voluntary sector; Volunteering; Social service provision; Public-voluntary relations; China