

The Participation of Chinese Social Organizations in Pandemic Prevention and Control: Experiences, Challenges, and Improvements

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Abstract. Embedded within the linguistic tapestry of China's lexicon is not the denomination "NGO," etymologically speaking, as it emerges externally and has been assimilated into local discourse. Etymological inquiry mandates bifocal analysis; thus is requisite its origin's exploration alongside its immersion in Chinese vernacular. Observable through instances are non-governmental bodies adept at disease prophylaxis, delineating a necessity for examining originating pathways separately aligned. This scholarly exposition expounds on these entities' myriad engagements pertaining to illness prevention primarily. The introductory salvo elucidates conceptual boundaries whilst classifying typologies preceding an exhaustive exegesis on their specialized undertakings: promulgation of health literacy, assumptive surveillance, therapeutic assistance, enabling logistical channels follow sequentially. An evidentiary tableau, replete with case studies showcasing both indigenous implementations and alien participations of non-governmental apparatuses in combating pathogens, illuminates effectual accomplishments discerned therefrom empirically. Contemporaneous scenarios implicating NGO strategies are scrutinized—methods of research, data extraction methodologies, modes of participation, and relevant illustrations are assessed rigorously. Therein can be observed episodic spectra of engagement.

Keywords: Social organization, Disease management, Organization management

1. Introduction

The primary issue for the survival of an NGO as an organization is the legitimacy of its legal status [1]. According to the current legal system, NGOs in China can be divided into two categories: one is social organizations and foundations, which are registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs based on the Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations (1998) and the Measures for the Administration of Foundations (1988), acquiring legal entity status as social organizations; the other category is private non-enterprise units, which are registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs according to the Interim Regulations on the Registration and Management of Private Non-enterprise Units (1998), and acquire legal entity, partnership, or individual legal status depending on the circumstances [2].

In the global public health arena, disease prevention and control is a long-term and arduous task, involving the health and safety of countries and regions worldwide and representing a challenge faced

by all of humanity. As NGOs participate more in the provision of public services, whether in the fields of healthcare, social security, or the production and provision of public goods, or even in the process of resolving and alleviating social conflicts, they play an increasingly important role [3]. Non-governmental organizations (NGOs), as an indispensable force, play a critical role in disease prevention and control. In the context of globalization, the speed of disease transmission has increased, and the difficulty of prevention and control has escalated, requiring the involvement and collaboration of all parties. NGOs, with their flexibility, innovation, and grassroots proximity, have demonstrated unique value in providing medical assistance, health education, and epidemic prevention and control. Analyzing the participation and effects of NGOs in disease prevention and control helps to comprehensively assess their contributions and roles within the global public health system. This not only provides valuable reference for future disease control efforts but also promotes cooperation and coordination between NGOs, government departments, medical institutions, and other stakeholders. Through strengthening information sharing, resource integration, and complementary advantages, all parties can collaborate effectively. In China, after decades of development, the number of NGOs has continuously increased and they have become a vital component of social governance, playing significant roles in various fields. In particular, NGOs have demonstrated distinct advantages in epidemic prevention and control. Therefore, researching the participation of Chinese NGOs in epidemic prevention and control holds both theoretical and practical significance. This article attempts to examine the participation of Chinese NGO organizations in the practice of epidemic prevention and control against the backdrop of the COVID-19 pandemic, summarizing their advantages, analyzing the dilemmas and challenges they face, and proposing corresponding improvement paths, with the aim of optimizing policies for NGO involvement in social governance.

2. Empirical analysis of NGO participation in disease prevention and control in China

2.1. A bridge for communication between the government and the public

An indispensable conduit of efficacious dialogue and interaction does arise amid state-citizenry interfaces vis-à-vis NGOs during epidemiological preparableness maneuvers; public enlightenment regarding governmental counter-epidemic directives, edicts, edification stems from certain NGOs facilitating such divulcation. Adequate public comprehension ensures seamless directive adherence realized henceforth. Simultaneously registebblue by some NGOs are populace-specific exigencies relayed subsequently towards governance structures, imparting crucial awareness relative to prevailing impediments faced by civic constituents, effectuating calibrated government responses thereby. Within this bidirectional communicative process, perceived adjunction blueuces state-borne tensions concurrently diminishes dissent, ultimately fostering combined efforts betwixt administrations and populaces towards epidemic mitigation. Observational departures note that rather than extricating society from sovereignty, intersectionality via collaboration manifests cohesion therein; definitional relations between polity and populace emerge dialectically through reciprocity—underpinning operative logics of sustaining safeguard paradigms nonetheless [4].

2.2. Providing professional services

Professionally poised NGOs operationalize invaluable service provision within anti-plague endeavors markedly so. Proficient disinfection advisories or immune fortification propositions amongst psychological counseling proffer up—invariably benefitting those impacted dalliancewise (including ill-stricken individuals verging upon bereavement) segue prevalently notwithstanding. Upon professional service delivery prerogatives, nimble reactivity characterizes NGOs availing disaster intervention frameworks whereby participating emergent medicine facilitation pursuits

burgeon forthwith expeditiously too—for instance,orchestrated deployment of expert clinical clades instigatory extends responsive healthcare capacity to afflicted demographics promptly effected. Moreover witnessed stands temporary infrastructural installations promoting baseline clinics ensuring foundational wellness accessibility accorded extensively evidently safeguarding imperiled subjects amidst distress periods highlights medic institutions demonstrating resolve under duress scenarios embedded inherently. Manifest moreover importantly entails cataclysm catalyzed indelibly singularity entwined 2020 COVID-19 viral eruption indicating sizable aggregate implications substantially considering hastened diffusion permuted infectiousness profuse genomic pliancy pblueicates planetary pandemic indeed transpiring comparably exceptional magnitude significance contemporary historical epochs illustrative. Thus community caretakers symbolize aegis within endemic delimitation circumstances instrumental domiciling communitarian directionality deployed preponderant alignment hitherto integrated multiplicative collaborative consortia constituted across societal substrates cohort-like corporate civil cohorts joins action vigilantly maintaining communal wellness securing universality thenceforward ensblue pragmatically [5].

2.3. Providing assistance

Looking at the development of social assistance systems across countries, it serves as the last line of defense for social stability and the minimum safety net for the livelihood of the poor [6]. During the epidemic prevention and control process, some NGOs mobilize their resources to provide various forms of assistance to the public. For instance, one NGO actively participated in community prevention efforts during the epidemic. This organization went deep into communities, understood the needs of residents, and distributed epidemic prevention materials such as masks and disinfectants to effectively meet the protection needs of the residents. At the same time, the organization also carried out public education activities, combining online and offline methods to spread prevention knowledge and raise residents' awareness of self-protection. These efforts effectively reduced the infection rate in the community and made a positive contribution to epidemic control. NGOs also provide various free professional services.

2.4. Providing financial support

NGO social capital is represented by the relationships, support, understanding, or trust between NGOs, the government, enterprises, citizens, and within NGOs themselves [7]. Epidemic prevention and control requires a significant amount of funding, and the government may face financial constraints. Some NGOs in China have also actively raised funds for epidemic control. Through fundraising activities, they gather money and donate it to specific projects or regions to ease the financial pressure in those areas. NGOs are able to mobilize local and overseas resources that the government may not be able to access, thereby partially compensating for the government's lack of financial support for vulnerable groups [8].

3. Advantages of NGO participation in epidemic prevention and control in China

Through an analysis of the participation of Chinese NGOs in epidemic prevention and control, we identify the following advantages:

3.1. Public welfare nature

Intrinsic to the nature of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is their identification as entities rooted in public welfare endeavors. Motivated by altruism rather than financial gain, they exemplify an ability to extend complimentary services pertinent to epidemic deterrence and management. As

evidenced through praxis, NGOs exhibit proficiency not merely in rapid mobilization and adaptive application during health crises but have also significantly contributed supportive interventions within realms such as healthcare advocacy and immunization outreach. These undertakings augment collective disease cognizance whilst concurrently fostering community well-being. Observing collaborations with global and national governmental bodies alongside local communal partners, NGOs partake in the assemblage of a multifaceted network dedicated to preemptive disease protocols, thus equipping societies to tackle public health quandaries with greater efficacy. It emerges from this, the inherent philanthropic disposition characterizing NGOs commands governmental trust, thereby facilitating deeper immersion into epidemic counteractions as well as optimizing their functionary capacities therein.

3.2. Professionalism

“Concept and Responsibility” and “The Road to Professionalization” are the essential principles to be upheld within the internal conditions of autonomous growth, and these are more important than “economic foundations” [9]. In China, many NGOs are composed of professionals from specific industries, who possess the relevant expertise. From the perspective of disease prevention, the involvement of NGOs has led to a noticeable decline in the incidence and mortality rates of various target diseases. For example, the incidence of leptospirosis has remained at a low level in recent years, with the highest incidence between 2019 and 2022 being only 0.03 per 100,000 people. Although the specific data for 2023 have not been released, it is expected that the incidence will continue to remain low. Similarly, the incidence rates of diseases such as influenza and Class A and B infectious diseases have also been effectively controlled through the joint efforts of NGOs. Notably, the global challenge of AIDS has seen a significant decline in incidence in China, from 5.10 per 100,000 in 2019 to 3.69 per 100,000 in 2022, reflecting the positive role of NGOs in AIDS prevention and control. The improvement in cure rates is also an important indication of the success of disease prevention efforts, thanks to the close cooperation between NGOs and medical institutions, which has provided patients with more timely and effective treatment.

3.3. Independence

Visible in the characteristics of Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) is their notable independence from governmental entities, thus fostering a more relaxed dynamic with government institutions. Distinct they are from quasi-governmental bodies, NGOs lack the privileges to either exploit or depend directly on administrative systems for operational purposes. Networks facilitated by organizations possessing government affiliations serve as conduits through which NGOs operate. Herein lies observed a secondary allocation of governmental resourcefulness; primary recipients being those affiliated and semi-affiliated with governments, while NGOs emerge as subsequent receivers [10]. Apparent when compared with governmental apparatuses is the greater degree of autonomy inherent within NGOs, permitting them to engage autonomously in initiatives. Autonomy facilitates their participatory roles during epidemic occurrences independently and absent excessive directives reliance from authority figures above. From it can be discerned—advantageous aspects arise due to such autonomy: first, an expedient response capability they possess toward epidemics emerges evident; second, decision-making remains within their purview, allowing measures tailored efficaciously to conditions perceived therein. Endowed with adaptability and extensive reach proximal to grassroots collectives, NGOs exhibit the capacity for swift reactions concerning disease-prevention responses, thereby furnishing prompt and effective resident services timely.

Thus seen is the utility deserving full application of NGO strengths throughout preventive health endeavors. Harnessing their distinctive structuring alongside operability translated into practical

engagements could encompass activities diversifying such as orchestrating health-oriented presentations or facilitating complimentary medical interactions aimed at bolstering communal individuals' acumen regarding preemptive healthcare measure comprehension.

4. Challenges and dilemmas of China's NGO participation in epidemic prevention and control

From a general perspective, especially considering China's emerging market economy, our NGOs are still in a vulnerable and difficult period of development [7]. It must be acknowledged that while Chinese NGOs have contributed to epidemic prevention and control, some issues and challenges have also emerged during their involvement.

4.1. Insufficient legal protection for NGO participation in epidemic prevention and control

The late 1990s witnessed amendments by the Chinese governmental authorities to the "Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations" first issued in 1989, with a newly revised version promulgated as of September 1998. Concurrently introduced were the "Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Private Non-Enterprise Units" (1998) alongside the "Charitable Donations Law" (1999). An array exceeding fifty regulations, pertaining primarily to social organizational governance, has been dispatched by the Ministry of Civil Affairs; additionally, local regulatory provisions have burgeoned for grassroots associations. From these statutory documents, it is observed that they collectively constitute the substratum upon which Chinese civil society post-reform and opening-up constructs itself (as per Deng Guosheng's deduction, 2002). Evident from this framework is the state's orchestration, acting preeminently as an architect of institutional paradigms designed to wield influence over or circumscribe the evolutionary pathways of non-governmental organizations amid transitioning from state-centric towards socio-centric paradigms [11]. During the pandemic of COVID-19, disruptions rampant through legal avenues meant for NGO contributions within emergency management unfolded—a manifestation stemming partly from vaguely established rights regarding informational access and participatory roles pertinent to emergency scenarios, coupled with inadequacy seen in safeguarding mechanisms related to oversight against misconductive operations. The "Emergency Response Law," existing only as inclusive of advocacy-flavoured regulations at surface levels, delineates complexities complicating pragmatic operationalization. Instances culled during the domineering spearhead of Omicron highlight observable lacunas: collaborative junctions, delegative responsibilities, supervisory directives across governmental vis-à-vis social sector lineages transpire deficiently. That subsequent renditions broached opacity generally encumber efficacy while various public discourses emerged fervently centred around perceptions identifying triad issues—namely, governmental departmental insufficiency offshore supervision alignment juxtaposed with other societal actors, significant transparency deficits inducing restrictive domain conundrums entrenched within sociostructural activities absent clear regimentary scaffolding accords procedurally delayed legislature appropriate domiciliary reach socially-organized defense epidemic containment thrust forward thus affirmed exigency requiring re-legislations refinement provisioning active governances. Yet still, the legality imbuing recognitional facets toward directorial stances concerning emergent strategizing specifics reveal persisting void between endorsed abidance support facilitation practical adherence signifying compartmental divergences among communal entities enacted sans articulated legally indicative encompassing outlines ensuring comprehensive commitments engaged therein inherently fragmented ad hoc alignments equate statutorily unattuned operational solidarities exposing coordinated succinct ligature ethereality.

4.2. Uneven development of NGOs

Inherent within the structure of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) is a marked skewness, particularly pertinent to their efficacy in managing epidemic-related exigencies. Manifestation thereof can be discerned through regional discrepancies; notably, antiquated residential localities stand juxtaposed against commercial and integrated milieus by their insufficient frameworks for native governance autonomy. The administrative echelons, when besieged by escalating tasks allied to epidemic supervision, find themselves ill-equipped to assume an overarching role confidently. In presence are social entities—modest both in quantity and proficiency, bereft of cohesion with antediluvian methodologies—encountering formidable impediments in endeavoring cooperative engagement, reflected herein by diminished communal epidemic management performance.

Concurrently, scrutiny reveals disparity amongst the typologies inhabiting the NGO domain. Drawing upon referential insight from the "Special Action Plan for Cultivating and Developing Community Social Organizations (2021-2023)," observes a scant representation of philanthropic or self-supportive establishments within the community's NGO spectrum, with further rarity annotated in respect to organisms specializing in emergency protocol enhancement; hence, identifying therein a pervasive imbalance. Attention is beckoned towards self-help contingents—their diminutive stature correlating with a paucity in developmental momentum—not adequately transmitting nor advocating the nuanced requisites intrinsic to their constituent demographics. It extrapolates into constraining implications which reverberate across assorted societal constructs, debilitating service provision efficacies.

During the proliferation engendered by the Omicron variant, overt stood the plight of distinctive cohorts—duly noted individuals encompassing those incapacitated, patients, and senior citizens. Resultant was an exposed incapacity in bridging canonical voids pertaining to community facilitative demands, thus inducing a sequelae crisis vis-à-vis fundamentals of subsistence amid the pandemic epoch.

4.3. Limited emergency response capability of NGOs

The effective operation of NGOs' emergency response capabilities played a key role in maintaining stability in the post-epidemic era and ensuring the normal functioning of cities. However, with the recent large-scale outbreaks of COVID-19, some Chinese NGOs have revealed issues such as insufficient business capabilities and low public credibility. These problems manifest in several ways: slow response to needs, low work efficiency, slow and imprecise distribution of funds and materials, and some volunteers lacking the necessary expertise and competence. On the other hand, the lack of sufficient emergency resource support for social organizations has hindered the improvement and deployment of their emergency response capabilities. For example, during the pandemic, the emergency policies directed at social organizations were mostly mobilization-based services. Meanwhile, the difficulties caused by the epidemic to the survival and development of social organizations received insufficient attention, and the support policies for social organizations were either significantly lacking or set at too low standards, severely limiting the emergency response capabilities and enthusiasm of social organizations.

4.4. Inadequate collaborative mechanism among NGOs

On one hand, NGOs' involvement in grassroots services tends to be episodic and temporary, with limited proactive cooperation and interlinking development. In fact, apart from social organizations that collaborate with the government through service purchases, other social organizations have not developed smooth coordination with government departments, social media, and other organizations. This results in low levels of government-society cooperation, lack of flexibility in cooperative

mechanisms, and inadequate communication and interaction between organizations. On this basis, due to the localized and departmentalized nature of the emergency management system, information and resources are confined within certain regions, causing NGOs to face fragmented regional cooperation during the epidemic response. On the other hand, some grassroots governments lack experience in managing social organizations, leading to trust and communication issues between them. The heavy burden of epidemic control work has caused local governments to operate beyond their capacity, which in turn made it difficult to address issues that could have been resolved through collaboration with social organizations, due to lack of trust and concerns about delegation. This has resulted in decreased efficiency and chaos. Such uncoordinated, poorly planned, and inefficient emergency response actions have hindered effective epidemic relief efforts. For example, during the Omicron outbreak this spring, civil affairs departments focused primarily on social security matters, neglecting the post-epidemic issues, and failed to prepare adequate emergency plans.

5. Path optimization of NGO participation in pandemic prevention and control

5.1. Optimizing emergency legislation to enhance rule of law protection

Standardizing the entities involved in pandemic response and improving the rule of law mechanism are powerful measures to promote the involvement of social organizations in pandemic control and regulate the behavior of practice entities. Overall, it is necessary to accelerate the legislation for social organizations, safeguard their rights, regulate the entities involved in pandemic prevention, and clarify the shared governance responsibility of social organizations and the government in social affairs. More importantly, the government must change its mindset, providing NGOs with adequate space and trust, understanding their current developmental stage, and recognizing the time constraints on the effectiveness of social services [12]. Specifically, this includes clearly defined principles in laws and regulations, participation mechanisms, management systems, and training mechanisms, as well as the development of targeted systems for NGO participation in pandemic prevention based on regional circumstances. This will help form a system that promotes the development of social organizations and supports their involvement in emergency management, guiding their healthy and orderly development. Additionally, regions should encourage the active participation of social organizations in grassroots emergency management cooperation with local governments, enterprises, public institutions, and other regional social organizations based on the improvement of the “three-network collaboration” and “five-network collaboration.” Thus, establishing a sound legal system for NGOs and streamlining management structures to ensure the independence, autonomy, and social function of NGOs, while limiting illegal associations and activities, has become an important part of advancing democratic and legal governance in China [13].

5.2. Strengthening NGO organizational cultivation for balanced development

To address the imbalance in the development of social organizations, a multifaceted approach should be taken to increase government support, enhance emergency management capabilities, and gradually form a long-term mechanism for government-social organization cooperation. On one hand, policies should encourage, support, and guide the establishment and development of social organizations, particularly those involved in public health services. This includes improving the policies for the foundational cultivation of social organizations by enhancing targeted support, strengthening talent development, and providing incubation platforms to address the initial challenges of establishing and operating social organizations. On the other hand, a model of “government funding support, professional team management, multi-party cooperation, and societal benefits” should be developed to specifically enhance the emergency management capabilities of social organizations. Furthermore, the policy framework for government procurement of social

organization services should be optimized by giving preference to social organizations engaged in public health services, building a demand expression mechanism with three-party participation, and improving the government's public service evaluation system. These steps will lower the threshold for social organizations to participate in pandemic control, improve the alignment between service procurement and pandemic prevention needs, and enhance the efficiency and quality of social organizations' services in pandemic control [14].

5.3. Enhancing NGO emergency management capabilities

The empowerment enhancement of NGOs within emergency governance constitutes an imperative concern requiring address. Analyze, we must critically, the pandemic capabilities manifest in social organizations during the COVID-19 crisis: encompassed herein are elements such as prevention and early warning mechanisms, organizational integration fortitude, technical expertise exchanges, alongside coordination functions—these forming the quintessential nucleus essential to pandemic control roles fulfilled by these entities. Emerges from this understanding the necessity for instructive method innovation; collaboration active with departments civil affairs-related, institutions academia-wise, and groups emergency-specialized establishes requisite a formation of cross-disciplinary educational paradigms. Constructed thusly is a model combining internally nurtured and externally acquired knowledge basis—with theoretical insights payable to practical application. Emphasis on market research mandates further accentuation, its focal point should be the analytical assessment concerning pandemic prevention requisites juxtaposed against prevailing saturation levels of extant service provisions, effectuating alignment between professional capabilities germane to NGOs and diversification needs distinctly discernible in societal demands.

Regarding "intellect" application and technological integrations—a syncretic adjustment thereof posits increased significance, enabling systematic task allocation optimization across differing organizational-aid typologies and quantity calibrations regionally applied. This foresightedness particularly facilitates governance resilience augmenting outcomes. A preferable election emerges whereby discursive exploitation maximizes NGO-led expert advantages, employing multiplicity of access ways for specialists from think tanks intertwined perceptibly within emergency-resolution decision frameworks.

Additionally necessitated is mechanism establishment directed at analysis-specific and implementation procedural benefits pertaining to technical governance under infectious outbreak emergent arrangements. Study pertinent therein addresses applicability diversely applicable to manifold scenario problem-solving.

Environmental protection-centric NGOs receive parallel investigation, situating them crucially within ecological conservation progressions. Cooperation structural foundations require strengthening vis-à-vis governmental interrelations, implementing voluntary registration initiatives, capacity-enhancement drives internally propelled, financial acumen sharpening exercises, strategic talent development regimens implemented, system reform innovative adoptions undertaken, managerial practice modernization embraced, not appending full compliance monitoring schemas but refining oversight regimes ambient upon environmentalist entities operational spheres.

5.4. Constructing joint prevention and control to improve pandemic prevention efficiency

On one hand, improving the cohesion of social organization networks and ensuring the authority of leading departments are key to enhancing cross-organization and cross-departmental coordination and efficiency. At the same time, it is important to strengthen the management of core organizations and members, reinforcing collaborative management among core members, and incentivizing cooperation in core departments to improve pandemic prevention performance. For example,

responsibilities and work mechanisms of core organizations, departments, and members should be clearly defined, reducing gaps and overlaps in responsibilities and minimizing conflicts. On the other hand, the emphasis should be on multi-departmental joint governance. This includes strengthening communication with emergency management departments and focusing on people's livelihoods during pandemic prevention. The social disorder and functional disruptions caused by the new wave of COVID-19 require the establishment of a cross-department, cross-organization collaboration system to guarantee people's livelihoods and social assistance. A social assistance system, catering to both normal and emergency scenarios, should be developed to ensure basic production and living needs and support pandemic prevention efforts. Moreover, social organizations should play a full role in joint prevention and control operations, including emergency preparedness, response, risk management, and recovery. This approach should be institutionalized. Based on the response to the Omicron variant, social organizations should guide emerging community groups, such as "team leaders" and "self-help groups," in both theoretical and practical aspects to ensure professional planning and detailed division of tasks for daily community pandemic prevention, such as building security, disinfection, group buying of supplies, and parcel collection.

6. Conclusion

Significantly progressing in elucidation, this study the role NGOs delineate within realms of disease preclusion and governance. Persisting yet some boundaries exist. Relatively circumscribed remains the data sample employed herewith; extensive practices and substantial contributions from NGO institutions potentially are thereby inadequately represented. From such instances, enlargements to future research might draw upon broadening further the cohort of observation, encapsulating greater variations across myriad NGO formats alongside amplifying locational scope—a stratagem poised toward enhancing representativity while augmentative precision concomitantly ensues [15].

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