

# A Brief History of the Early Development of China's Social Philanthropy Field and Its Impact on the Later Development of the Philanthropy Field

Zhiguo Wang<sup>1,a</sup>, Siying Liu<sup>1,b</sup>, Yuhui He<sup>2,c</sup>, Kwisik Min<sup>3,d</sup>, and Jing Hu<sup>1,e\*</sup>

<sup>1a</sup> GSIS, Graduate School of International Studies, Hanyang University, South Korea;

<sup>1b</sup> School of Global Governance, Shanghai University of International Business and Economics, China;

<sup>2c</sup> Academic Research Committee, Eternal Light International Social Development Team, South Korea;

<sup>3d</sup> GSIS, Graduate School of International Studies, Chinese Research Institute, Hanyang University, South Korea;

<sup>1e\*</sup> School of Languages, Literatures, Cultures and Linguistics, Monash University, Australia.

<sup>a</sup> endwangzhiguo@gmail.com, <sup>b</sup> linshi5970529@gmail.com, <sup>c</sup> arthur23331119@gmail.com,

<sup>d</sup> samwoohyun@hanyang.ac.kr, <sup>e\*</sup> jing.hu@monash.edu

**Abstract.** Although charity has been developed in China for decades, its basic value attributes have not been truly stimulated in Chinese society. If we look at the development of philanthropy in China alone, we will not only fail to touch the core of the problem, but also deviate from it. Based on a brief analysis of the early development history, this paper finds that the problem has been foreshadowed in the earliest historical development. Through a combination of qualitative research methods, this paper realizes that the key to improving and even solving the problems in the field of public welfare and charity in Chinese society does not lie in the problems of the field itself, but rather in the political behaviors and modus operandi behind the problems that appear to be public welfare and charity.

**Keywords:** Chinese Society; Philanthropy; Social Governance; International Development; Social Development; NGOs; History of Philanthropy in China.

## 1. Introduction

As an important part of society as a whole, public charity not only occupies an important position in the social system, but also plays a very important, even critical role. Especially in the promotion of civil rights development, social governance, poverty relief and social progress. Considering the history of the international community and international development, in the process of democratization and development of countries all over the world, the field of public welfare and charity not only occupies an important and key position, but also has an irreplaceable social public role.

As for Chinese society, although it has been less than one hundred years since the founding of the PRC, it has been playing an important role in the development of public welfare and charity since the founding of New China in 1949. Although from the historical perspective, after the founding of New China, a short period of time said that the field of public welfare and charity, in fact, the international community through the way of public welfare and charity to the Chinese society to make a kind of resource input. However, the development of the localized philanthropy field in Chinese society has gradually emerged and developed after the founding of New China. Although the development of localized philanthropy has not lasted as long as that of Western countries, it has played a very important role in the overall development of Chinese society, especially in the improvement of poverty, inequality, and social discrimination in Chinese society.

This paper takes "A Brief History of the Early Development of China's Social Philanthropy Field and Its Impact on the Later Development of the Philanthropy Field" as its theme. Philanthropy Field", this paper aims to explore the major impacts of the early development of China's social

philanthropy field on the later development of the field. This is not only rarely covered by existing research on the Philanthropy Field, but also a distinctive feature of the Philanthropy Field in China's overall social development process. At the same time, by summarizing this early development, it may also provide a reference for scholars who want to study China's existing social development, especially in terms of a more intuitive understanding of China's socio-political operations. This is also one of the research values of this paper.

In terms of research methods and perspectives, this paper adopts a qualitative research methodology. Within the broad scope of qualitative research, this paper makes comprehensive use of textual analysis, case study analysis, data summarization, and historical timeline combing, aiming at completing the brief description of the early development of China's social welfare and charity sector and the discussion of the hidden political influence of the late development of the sector through the mix of various research methods. The purpose of this study is to use a mix of research methods to accomplish a brief description of the early development of China's social welfare and philanthropy field and to discuss the hidden political implications of the field's later development. Compared with the existing and commonly used micro research perspective, this paper focuses more on the macro perspective, i.e., to analyze the early development history and the existing impacts of China's social welfare and philanthropy sector from the perspective of the society as a whole. In addition, as for the starting point and thinking of the research, this paper adopts the macro research perspective of understanding the local on the basis of the whole, and locating the current society from the historical overview, aiming at a brief interpretation of the early development of China's social welfare and charity sector in the present tense.

In terms of research structure, in line with the requirement of streamlining conference papers, this paper not only deletes the literature review section, but also makes a more streamlined adjustment to the research structure of the whole paper. The author tries to simplify and synthesize the comprehensive and broad research contents in a less textual scope by means of streamlining the narrative, so as to clarify the research problems of this paper and focus on the contents of the brief description in a simplified way. At the same time, compared with the existing research works and presentation methods, the macro perspective and brief description adopted in this paper is not only a streamlining innovation to the existing large number of complicated literature databases, but also a new type of attempt to analyze the entry point and perspective of research on China's social welfare charity field. This is also another research value of this paper.

## **2. The Early Development of China's Public Welfare and Philanthropy Field**

From the perspective of historical timeline, the local development of China's public welfare and charity sector took place during the period of reform and opening up, and on May 11, 1978, Guangming Daily, a Beijing newspaper, published a commentator's article "Actual practice is the sole criterion for judging truth", which was not only a good example but also a good example of how China's public welfare and charity sector has been developed. The article not only helped to free the Chinese people from the shackles of the "Two Whatevers", but also contributed to the national liberation movement of Marxism (German: Marxismus). At the same time, the development of localized social charities also took place. The formal construction of China's localized philanthropic organizations took place within the official attributes of the Chinese government: on July 28, 1981, China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF), the first national public foundation in China, was officially established (Zhang, 2023), and it was the first public foundation in China to be established by the Chinese government. (Zhang, 2023) From a macro perspective and the developmental attributes of Chinese society, the establishment of the "China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF)" not only marked the formal birth of China's social philanthropy, but also seemed to foreshadow the current development of the social welfare and charity sector in Chinese society, which is dominated by official attributes. The establishment of the CCTF not only marked the official birth of social welfare and charity in China, but also seemed to

foreshadow the current structure of the social welfare and charity sector in China, which is dominated by official attributes. Meanwhile, although in April 1985, "The Amity Foundation" was established as the earliest civil non-profit organization established after China's reform and opening up, initiated by Chinese Christians and participated by people from all walks of life, the organizational structure of its managers shows that it is not the civil society that holds the actual power of speech. However, from the organizational structure of its managers, the actual power of speech is not held by civil society, but by people with official government backgrounds (Zhang, 2017). (Zhang, 2017) This is an early example of how the government's official attributes dominate China's social welfare and charity sector today.

Based on the establishment of the "China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF)" in 1981, coupled with the proactive involvement of central government leaders, for example, in honor of China's Honorary President Soong Ching Ling, and in order to carry on Soong Ching Ling's unfinished business, the CCTF was established. For example, the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation was established in May 1982 in honor of Soong Ching Ling, the Honorary President of China, and in order to carry on and promote Soong Ching Ling's unfinished business, on the initiative of the President of China, Comrade Deng Xiaoping. <sup>1</sup>

The building of organizations in the field of social welfare in China has thus been on a journey of gradual development and growth. For example, in March 1984, "China Foundation for Disabled Persons" was founded; in March 1989, "China Youth Development Foundation" was founded; in 1987, "China Youth Development Foundation" was founded. "In March 1989, the China Youth Development Foundation was established; in June 1987, the China Population Welfare Foundation was established.

The successive establishment of these public welfare foundations with official attributes of the Chinese government not only strengthened the structure of government-led development of social welfare and philanthropy, but also further promoted the birth of relevant charitable organizations in China under the name of "charity". For example, the Jilin Provincial Social Welfare and Charity Federation, established on January 8, 1993, was not only the first social organization named "charity" since the founding of New China, but also marked the further advancement of China's philanthropy to a new stage of development. (Zhang, 2023) This is also a sign of the multidimensional development of Chinese foundations, Chinese charities and Chinese public welfare. On this basis, from the perspective of the comprehensive development of society, such a situation also further establishes the development trend of China's public welfare and philanthropy field in the following decades, which has been dominated by the government.

### **3. Classification and Explanatory Notes of Chinese Public Charitable Organizations**

Since July 28, 1981, when China's first national public foundation, the China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF), was established, the role of a leader in China's philanthropic sector has been established both directly and indirectly. This may not have been obvious in the early stages of development, but it is a common understanding within the philanthropic sector today that cannot be crossed. Discussing the development of the philanthropic field in Chinese society, and discussing the problems arising in Chinese society, including but not limited to "politics, economy, culture, education", etc., in essence, from the starting point, in fact, have the same basic attribute, that is, the underlying structure of Chinese society - the characteristic Chinese political attribute. -The political attributes that characterize China. For example, from the economic and social point of view, there is no essential difference between the problems in the field of public welfare and charity, which need to be explored on the basis of the most fundamental political attributes of Chinese characteristics,

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<sup>1</sup>See: February 2000, History of the Soong Ching Ling Foundation, China Soong Ching Ling Foundation, [https://www.sclf.org/jgij/jgyg/200611/t20061128\\_2851.htm](https://www.sclf.org/jgij/jgyg/200611/t20061128_2851.htm). 2024.07.27

and it is not possible to precisely understand the development history of the field of public welfare and charity in the Chinese society without exploring the unique political attributes of China, and likewise, if this point is missing, it will not be possible to make real substantive changes for the solution of the problems and the subsequent sustainable development of the field of public welfare and charity. Similarly, if this point is missing, it will not be able to make a substantial change for the solution of the problem and the subsequent sustainable development of the charity sector. (Wang, 2024)

From the perspective of the categories of founders of Chinese social welfare and charity organizations, the founders of Chinese social welfare and charity organizations are mainly composed of government, enterprises, universities, and private organizations. Among these four categories, the government category has the greatest overall advantage. In terms of the development of the organization's operation, if the main factors affecting the development are divided into six factors, namely, "political inclination factor, policy support factor, funding source factor, network source factor, social responsiveness factor, and resource integration factor", no matter which factor is involved, the government category is in the first place, while the enterprise category and the university category are in the first place. For enterprises and universities, it is not possible to determine exactly which one is in the second place and which one is in the third place. In this case, for foundations of large enterprises such as "Tencent", "Alibaba" and "Vanke", regardless of whether they are owned by the state or the government, they are ranked first according to the number of their foundations, and second according to the number of their foundations. Whether or not they are owned by the government, they have a clear advantage according to the comprehensive characteristics of large enterprises. Similarly, for foundations such as "Tsinghua University", "Peking University", "University of Chinese Academy of Sciences", etc., they have a clear advantage in terms of the overall characteristics of a large enterprise. Peking University, "University of Chinese Academy of Sciences" and other national high-level universities, also has a sufficient and significant advantage of comprehensive resources. From this aspect, the enterprise category and the university category of public welfare organizations are basically in the second order and the third order of the division, basically in the same state. At the same time, however, it should be noted that in the other case, that is, SMEs and universities, in this case, the specific ranking of the two parties may show a "clear-cut" result.

In addition, it is worth noting that for the "enterprise category", there is now an additional category of "social enterprises" between profit-making and non-profit-making, the emergence of which has played a role in balancing economic and social benefits, and has contributed to the development of social welfare and charity in China. The emergence of this type of social enterprise has also struck a balance between economic and social benefits for the development of social welfare and charity in China, and may gradually become a new development trend for the future development of Chinese society from the perspective of the predictability of society in the future. As an innovative form and emerging subject in the field of social welfare and charity, social enterprise is not only a new type of organization centered on social mission, but also an existential characteristic with the ability to obtain sustainable income through commercial means after effective operation, so as to realize self-financing. Therefore, from this point of view, "social enterprise" has both the public welfare attributes of traditional non-profit organizations and the commercial attributes of enterprise profit-making, and this is also known as a relatively new combination of public welfare and charity and market economy in the field of social welfare in China today, which is an innovative output. (Li, Zhang, Xue & Ge, 2024; Peng, li, 2012) In addition to this, "social enterprises" also have more obvious differences compared to "corporate philanthropy" in society, and the first social perception they obtain is sometimes higher than that of "corporate philanthropy". The perception of "social enterprises" is sometimes higher than that of "corporate philanthropy". A clearer example of this argument lies in the initial motivation of "social enterprises" versus "corporate philanthropy". Corporate philanthropy tends to have a stronger self-interested motivation than the "personal charity" motivation of social enterprises. Among such

motives, economic, political and reputational motives are often the main ones. Therefore, in this respect, the "social enterprises" emerging and developing in Chinese society nowadays have motives that are easier to gain social acceptance and governmental approval than those of "corporate charities". It is easier to gain social and governmental approval than corporate philanthropy in terms of motivation. (Gao, 2024)

In the ranking of the four categories listed in this paper, the bottom of the list has always been the "civil society" public welfare organizations. In this paper, it is important to note that the "civic category" referred to in this paper does not mean public interest groups such as "The Amity Foundation", a non-profit organization initiated by Chinese Christians with the participation of people from all walks of life. The Amity Foundation is not a public welfare organization such as The Amity Foundation, a non-profit organization initiated by Chinese Christians and participated by people from all walks of life. Although the registered body belongs to the category of civil society, the organizational structure of its operation and administrative personnel has the intervention of powerful governmental forces, either explicit or implicit. Therefore, in this paper refers to the "civil category", this kind of registered body is a civil society, but from the actual management and operation of the government forces involved in the aspect, and can not be divided into this paper described as "civil category". At the same time, this paper needs to make another definition of the "civil category" mentioned in this paper is that there is no involvement of government forces, whether explicit or implicit, the government forces have not been involved in its actual management and operation of the civil society, which is completely self-generated. Although in the relevant regulations and the management level of government work, as part of the national government, the relevant government agencies or departments have jurisdiction over them, but in the actual operation, but did not participate in the civil public welfare groups, such a situation is the "civil category" described in this paper, but also this paper on the "civil category" of the This is the basic definition of the "civil category" of social welfare organizations in this paper.

In addition, it should also be taken into account that the four categories mentioned above are classified and explained in terms of the qualifications of independent legal persons and their actual registration status. From the perspective of the international community and international development, the categories and forms of social welfare organizations are more than the existing scope of China's public welfare and charitable field, in addition to the four existing categories of Chinese society, there are also many non-registered social welfare organizations that are not formally registered but are still of great social value to the international community, and at the same time, for the international community, the non-registered social welfare organizations are not registered. At the same time, for non-registered social welfare organizations in the international community, although they cannot enjoy independent legal personality qualification because they are not formally registered, and there are some obvious restrictions on their scope of operation, they are less subject to special government supervision and have smaller input costs, which makes these non-registered organizations have greater autonomy and creativity in project operation, especially in the operation of some projects for improving or solving social problems. Especially in projects to improve or solve social problems, they play a very important role in promoting positive social development. This is something that is missing and regrettable for social organizations in China today.

#### **4. The Impact of Early Development on Later Development and the Existing Restrictive Development Conditions**

Summarizing the above, this paper finds that the development of different types of groups in the field of public welfare and charity in Chinese society began on July 28, 1981, with the establishment of China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF), China's first state-level public foundation. The writing was already on the wall. In terms of governance and management costs, government-led social welfare organizations not only reduce management costs and make it easier

for the government to gather the strength of all sectors of society in a short period of time, especially in the case of major social crises, but they have a more obstructive impact in the long run, especially in today's increasingly complex social environment and frequently changing social problems. Especially in today's increasingly complex social environment and constantly changing social problems, the government-led social organizations are no longer suitable for the development of today's society. For the Chinese government, it may be time to gradually reduce the government's intervention and bring Chinese social welfare organizations back to their roots in civil society.

Unfortunately, in the current development situation, the government's intervention has not only not contracted, but has also become more and more difficult to manage. For example, in terms of sources of funding, the Chinese government's restriction on foreign funding is gradually increasing, which, in the context of globalization, not only affects China's progress towards the world, but also hinders the investment of international public welfare funds, and puts China's civil society groups, which are already struggling and seldom able to obtain funding from their own countries, at risk of closure and closure. The Chinese civil society organizations, which are already struggling and have little access to domestic funding, are facing closure. At the same time, the spirit of "community of human destiny" and "telling China's story" advocated by China's central government will further affect the international community's perception of China's society, which will in turn affect the building of China's national image in terms of the concept of the state. In addition, the Chinese government's current policy on social enterprises is also a major factor. In addition, the Chinese government has raised the barriers to the registration of social enterprises, public welfare foundations, special public welfare funds and other forms of social welfare organizations. (Zhang, Wang, 2017) This may to some extent reduce the probability of the occurrence of vicious incidents of certain undesirable social welfare groups, but it also hinders the development of China's social welfare and charity sector, especially for the people who are waiting for help and in need of assistance, and the nonprogressive development of social welfare groups will bring irreparable losses to these people in need of social help, thus aggravating the situation of the country's image. The non-progressive development of social welfare organizations will bring irreparable losses to these people in need of social help, thus aggravating the original burden of survival. Moreover, it is worth noting that whether such blindly restrictive measures have really reduced the probability of adverse events in the field of social welfare and charitable organizations has yet to be further debated and assessed in detail. If we choose to blindly restrict development for fear of problems, it may bring about irreversible public losses in the future for the sustainable development of society.

For the government, the emergence of social problems should be a process of self-reaction and correction, rather than a cover-up of problems. In recent years, China's society has continued to appear in the field of social welfare and charity of negative news, negative materials, bad events, the government needs to have a response, need to improve and even solve these bad events, but, likewise, to solve the problem of the way is also very important, the present further contraction of social welfare and charity areas of the management of the authority, and can not really solve the problem, from a certain point of view, this may be a kind of "Lazy government" behavior. At the same time, for the process of social development, this approach is likely to become an obstacle to the development process of social democratization. In view of the bad phenomenon in the field of social welfare and charity, perhaps for the government, what it needs to do is to make profound, systematic and direct corrections from the aspects of politics, policies and legal responsibilities, instead of making the suspicion of "avoiding" and "covering up" handling behavior.

## **5. Conclusion**

From the point of view of social components, public welfare and charity is one of the important and indispensable contents, and correspondingly, from the point of view of the core proposition of social governance theory, social governance should be the governance behaviors and related actions for the transformation of the society to a more democratized development. In addition, in terms of

the world's pluralistic development, the development of democratization also depends on the pluralistic layout of the main body of social governance. Such a plurality of actors includes not only the public sector, with the government as the main form of existence, but also political parties, the private sector, social intermediaries, and independent citizens. The functioning system of a healthy society requires not only different values as the public guidance of the society, but also respect for different subjects to choose their own recognized social actions that do not violate the concept of human nature. Effective social governance is not a unidirectional centralization of a single voice and resource holder, but a multidimensional joint action through the participation of multiple parties in the field of public affairs, such as the government, the market and social organizations. (Kuang, 2017; Xia, 2015)

As the middle ground between the government and the private sector, social welfare organizations not only help the government to check and fill the gaps, but also help the general public to improve their living conditions. In addition, from the viewpoint of the social role of the public welfare and charity sector, social welfare organizations also play an important role in promoting social reform, which is not only an essential attribute of the public welfare and charity sector, but also its social function and social responsibility. Although Chinese society has initially established government-led political attributes in the field of social welfare and charity, it does not mean that this initiative is entirely correct. Similarly, for the ever-changing civil society, the government's initiatives need to be adjusted accordingly to the ever-evolving changes in society.

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