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A CHANGING DISCOURSE ON THE RED CROSS SOCIETY OF CHINA BEYOND CIVIL SOCIETY

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Abstract

This paper explores non-government organizations (NGOs) in the People's Republic of China, where the Communist Party of China (CCP) has extensive influence over society and Western notions of NGOs operating in civil society must be reconceptualised. To analyze this unique situation, this paper examines the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), a member of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and its distinct role in China. It also discusses how the RCSC provides a general example of how NGOs operate within a Party-State environment. This research is significant as it goes beyond the services the Red Cross Society of China provides to citizens and places these services within Western theories on the public sphere and civil society. The theoretical analysis is to support its perspective on public spheres and civil society and explore the changes of the Red Cross Society of China in the changing political climate of China.

Keywords

Public sphere, civil society, Non-government organizations, Red Cross

1. Introduction

Since the 1970s, international non-government organizations (INGOs) have experienced rapid development due to globalization, and are active in the international arena (Edele, 2005b). The concept of non-government organizations (NGOs) originated with establishment of the

United Nations in 1945 which recognized the consultative status of organizations that were neither governments nor member states (Willetts, 2002). Today the term NGO is broad and encompasses many types of organizations which are largely discussed in the context of civil society by scholars in Western countries. NGOs are part of the ‘third sector’, civil organizations, not-for-profit organizations or non-governmental organizations, that operate independently from government (What more). The functions of NGOs are diverse and include campaign, humanitarian, development, social welfare, cultural and conservation work. In addition, an NGO’s orientation refers to the type of activities in which it participates, for example human rights, environmental or development work (Vakil, 1997). In 2004, NGOs were responsible for approximately one third of total overseas development aid funding (Riddell, 2007).

The International Federation of Red Cross(IFRC) is an independent humanitarian organization which is not political, governmental, racial or sectarian in character(Statutes of the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement, 1986). The IFRC Isa ‘global’ associational revolution and states that the importance of this revolution in the late 20th century is no less important than that of the nation-state in the late 19th century (Salamon et al., 1999).

In many developing countries, governments have historically been antipathetic to NGOs, but were forced by economic recession to include them in social and economic programmers (Clarke, 1998). On the other hand, large-scale social movements that were once organizationally and ideologically cohesive became incoherent amid a shift in themes of social mobilization in some developing countries (Lehmann, 1992). In China today, NGOs are a product of economic and social reform (Edele, 2005a). Since establishment and development of China’s Reform and Opening Up, NGOs have played an important role in Chinese society and have developed with changing government functions. Between the 1980s and today, the socio-economic system has changed from a socialist planned economy to a socialist market economy and a pattern of “small government, big society” has gradually established. Today, NGOs play an important role in supporting public services and marketisation of public services(Liu, 2007). Liu’s version of public services marketisation involves introducing competitive mechanisms to government public service areas and diverting some public functions from government to the market, NGOs and the private sector. In a marketwise system, government needs only to assume regulatory responsibilities. However, in an authoritarian single-party state such as China the relationship

between state, Party and NGOs is ambiguous. Consequently, NGOs in China face challenges such as lack of legitimacy, fundraising challenges and insufficient supervision mechanisms and corporate management (Li, 2011). According to a study involving 1,508 NGOs, 41.4% indicated the largest problem was insufficient funding (Edele, 2005a).

2. Theoretical analysis of Civil Society

Hagerman focused on public spheres and established the concept of a ‘civil society’ underpinned by an ideology of ‘private’ autonomy which eventually transformed ‘publicans’ dramatically (Goode, 2005). Thus, Western scholars in philosophy and political science began to distinguish between state and society. Civil society is exposed to a sphere of association in the distinction between state and society (Shaw, 2008). Civil society is often used synonymously with NGOs, especially in policy circles. However, strictly speaking, NGOs represent only one element of civil society, albeit an important one (McIlwaine, 2009).

The principle idea of ‘civil society’ is attributed to Aristotle, a Greek political philosopher, who used the term *politike kimono* in *The Politics*, which is identified with political society or community (Ray, 2004). The phrase *politike kimono* has been translated as association or participation in political communities and means a society of citizens. The main idea is significance of the terms privacy, economic exchange and association, and state limitation. Contemporary use of the idea is found in Thomas Hobbes’ early 17th century theory of a sovereign state relating to its subjects by ‘social contract’ across two societal branches, namely political and civil society (Hobbes, 1994). Hobbes stated that sovereign power provided unique ‘social’ bond of unsocial and rational individuals (Parsons, 1949). In Hobbes’ theory, a state was created by social contract rather than by society. Social integration was completed by the power of state.

Disputing Hobbes’ perspective, John Locke’s version of the social contract is supported by the situations of civil society in spaces of association, contract and property regulated by law (Ray, 2004). Locke distinguished the identity of political and civil society from the state. In Locke’s conception, government transparently identifies with body politic (Locke, 1965) and he clearly distinguishes differences between government and society. He finds differences between

giving up power to government and to society and emphasizes between the “the dissolution of

government” and “the dissolution of society,”(Locke, 1980). Hobbes and Locke agreed that civil society was one aspect of government while other theorists attempted to discuss civil society in the field of Western philosophy.

Hegel is a representative theorist who first expanded the concept of civil society as a highly differentiated and complex social order theory. In Hegel’s theory of the social contract, civil society was distinct from the state. The difference between the two terms is on the basis of his belief that the latter is ‘natural’ and dedicated to ‘particular’ interests. Most of Hegel’s arguments emphasized disintegration represented by natural forms of ethical life of family egotism and alienation (Cohen & Arato, 1995) The definition of civil society according to Hegel is “an association of members as self-subsistent individuals in a universality which, because of their self-subsistence, is only abstract. Their association is brought about by their needs, by the legal system-means to security of person and property and by an external organization for attaining their particular and common interests”(Cullen, 1979).

Grimace represents a modern critique of civil society. He follows Marxian analysis and criticism of civil society. Grimace states that civil society “as Hegel understands it, and in the way in which it is often used in these notes” in the *pass to e presenter*, he then explains that the meaning of civil society is “the political and cultural hegemony which a social group exercises over the whole of society, as the ethical content of the State”(Grimace, 1954). In this connotation, there are two main points. Firstly, Grimace’s concept of civil society originates from Hegel’s concept and he looks into the super structural sphere, but not into the structural. Secondly, Marx includes Hegel’s concept when he describes civil society with the structural sphere, that is, the sphere of economic relations. Hegel’s *Philosophy of Right* explains civil society is not only part of the economic relations sphere. but is also involved in spontaneous associations or voluntary organizations (Hegel, 1991).

One of Hannah Arendt’s main perspectives in her book *The Human Condition* is a clear distinction between public and private realms. She argues that public and private realms can only survive in opposition to each other (Dossa, 1989). It is important to understand in Arendt’s version that the distinction between public and private spheres is an inevitable separation between households and the political realm, which have separated since the rise of the ancient city-state. Historically, the rise of the city-state and the public realm has been as a result of the

expansion of the private realm such as family and household spheres (Barrow, 1968). On the other hand, the appearance of social areas is neither private nor public; it is seen to be a relatively new phenomenon with a modern appearance that has found its political form of nation-state.

Jorgen Hagerman analyses the Hegelian project of combining normative achievements of both ancients and moderns, doing so more successfully than Hannah Arendt's concept. Hagerman extends on Arendt's previous work in two ways, firstly, by recapturing mediation between state and civil society, and secondly by restricting and revalorizing normative requirements of the public sphere (Cohen & Arato, 1995). Hagerman devised the public sphere theory in the intellectual environment of the older Frankfurt school, and in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, provides discussions on public spheres in contemporary societies, representing a species of *Verfallsgeschichte*. It is similar to Arendt's concept which tends to obscure different relations of two schemes in history. As mentioned above, Arendt's public sphere is a contradiction of decline with the rise of modern society, state and economy, though original models had disappeared. Indeed, Arendt's theory was always temporary, an example is reappearance of experiments in public freedom during modern revolutions (Cohen & Arato, 1995).

Hagerman's proposed historical societal framework in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere* is divided into two distinct areas: state and society. These sectors are mainly based on developments in France, Germany and Britain during the late eighteenth century and early nineteenth century; the public authority sphere and private sphere. The public authority sphere contains two subsystems: the state, and the court or courtly aristocracy. Hagerman's classifications of sub-division within the private realm are more complicated than that of either Hegel or Arendt. The private sphere is structured into civil society (the commodity exchange and social labor field) and the internal sphere of family (Habermas, 1962/1989). There are three other sub-categories in the private sphere; the public sphere in the political realm; the public sphere in letters worlds; and markets of cultural products. By putting all of these spheres in the private realm, Hagerman stresses and draws together connections and commonalities among all sub-groups of the private sphere (Habermas, 1962/1989). Although considered to be in the public sphere, the latter three categories are placed in the private realm because they are important in the individual coming together to form a public.

Indeed, Foucault on the differentiation social systems of modern society does not see the state or intermediate field such as Hegel's 'civil society' or Arendt's 'social' as the track of power. Foucault believes that most sites, including development of technical disciplinary authority is not only in state institutions, but also in the military, schools, clinics and prisons(Foucault, 1977). In a sense, the differences between state and society are shown through the nature of power regimes in modern social systems. Certainly, Foucault refers to control techniques including a variety of ways in which systems and subsystems are governed and self-governed.

Lehmann stresses the differentiation of state and civil society is a fictional one, because differentiation presumes stability and constancy of containment, both of state and society, and that this stability and constancy does not exist. Regarding this, the argument encompassing the "separation of state and society has misunderstood [the] phenomenon of increasing differentiation and interdependence"(Cohen & Arato, 1995). Indeed, Lehmann refuses the view of state and society:"each consist of sets of concrete human individuals separated from one another in terms of their whole lives"(Cohen &Arato, 1995). On the contrary, he accepts a multiplicity of social roles that exceed supposedly separate subsystems, which is beyond his conceptions of state and society. Thus, in Lehmann's view, the state indicates the 'political system', but society depicts the 'whole environment'(Lehmann, 1982).

The idea that 'civil society 'exists in China presumes that it has been and proceeds to be in different ways restricted, especially since the reconstruction of the People's Republic in 1949(Simon, 2013). In fact, as civil society organizations (CSO) are considered unregistered, there is no true freedom of association in recent years (Liu, 2011). In addition, under modern Communist Party domination, the notion of 'civil society' was and is lacking in China (Wakeman, 1993). From the perspective of the Party-State, there is a politically powerful idea that 'civil society 'is a Western trap for China (Deng, 2011). Furthermore, White contributes that 'civil society 'with 'political society 'is the connotation of institutionalized relationships between state and society through principles of citizenship, representation, civil rights, and constitutionality (White et al., 1996). Whiteoes not accept the 'political' definition of civil society as disengaged from the state. Other scholars state that "there is evidence that recent reforms have encouraged the resurgence of meaningful traditions of extra-state economic and associational behavior in China,"(Perry, 2002).

3. The changing Red Cross Society of China

This study takes the case of the Red Cross Society of China, which is the largest global charity organization with a number of fundraising channels. The origin of the Red Cross Society of China is ambiguous. At least four versions of the first establishment of the Red Cross Society of China have been suggested by Chinese scholars. The first version claims that its origin was somewhat unique in that it was established independently in the Three Northeast Provinces of China as Puji Good Will as a result of the Russo-Japanese war that broke out on 6 February 1904 (Zhou, 2000). The second version regards the Charities Association of China as the origin of the Red Cross Society of China which responded to the needs of the war wounded (Chi, 2005). The third version agrees that the war gave impetus to the Red Cross Society of China but suggests its origin can be traced back to 1900 (Zhu & Yang, 2004). Finally, according to the *Shun Pao of Shanghai*, Cheng Liang, the diplomat of Qing Dynasty, and representatives of the UK, the US, France and Germany met in the Shanghai Municipal Council and established the Shanghai Wangi Red Cross Organization on 10 March 1904 (Zhu & Yang, 2004). The Manchuria Red Cross Benevolent Society was established by Dunne Shen on 3 March 1904, and was renamed Shanghai International Red Cross Committee on 10 March 1904. The origin of the Red Cross Society of China is ambiguous as there were independent and State driven organizations in a period when China was part of the Western sphere of influence and the Empire was in decline. These contesting stories of the origin of the Red Cross Society of China offer a unique research opportunity to explore the relationship between the different State formations and powerful interests as well as the Red Cross' humanitarian work.

Between 1907 and 1911, Shanghai Wanguo Red Cross Organization was renamed the Red Cross Society of China. In January 1912, the International Committee of the Red Cross officially recognized the Red Cross Society of China (Zhou, 2000). In July 1919, the Red Cross Society of China joined the IFRC. In 1933, as the Second Sino-Japanese War was raging, the Act of Administrative Rules and Procedures of the Republic of China Red Cross Society was passed and the society was renamed the Red Cross Society of the Republic of China. The period of the Second World War, where China played a significant part, expanded the role of the Red Cross during the Japanese invasion and occupation of parts of China and the resistance by both the Communist Party of China (CCP) and the Nationalist government. After the People's Republic

of China was established in October 1949, the Red Cross Society, together with other government agencies of the Republic of China, moved to Taiwan. In August 1950, the Central Government of the People's Republic of China reorganized the Red Cross organization in Beijing and was admitted to the IFRC as the Red Cross Society of China. In the same year, the State Council clearly defined the Red Cross Society as under the leadership of the Central Government.

The Red Cross Organization is however an international non-governmental organization. This shows that the landscape of civil society and NGOs in China is more complex and can be made up of various kinds of organizations including those that are essentially government organized and operated. The Red Cross Society of China therefore makes an interesting case study of an NGO in a single-party state and how that may broaden the study of civil society at large. Furthermore, it is important to note that when the CCP defeated the Nationalist Party after 1949, the original Red Cross organization was an non-governmental organization which moved to Taiwan and the mainland Red Cross Society were established at that time. It could be assumed that the Red Cross in mainland China was operated by the mainland government. Therefore, this research examined why the Red Cross Society of China moved to Taiwan in 1949 and how it developed in Taiwan after 1949, compared to the establishment of the Red Cross Society in mainland China.

The Red Cross Society of China was cancelled during the Cultural Revolution from 1966 until 1978. In 1978, the beginning of the Reform and Opening-up of China, the Red Cross Society of China was gradually restored. According to the Institutions of the International Red Cross Movement, each state should recognize the Red Cross in the form of legislation, but the Red Cross Society of China lacked this before the 1980s. In 1988, the legislative issues of Red Cross were the first formal proposal of legislature concerning Red Cross Reform in China (Wang & Chen, 2007). In October 1993, the Law of Red Cross Society of the People's Republic of China was passed by the Fourth Session of the Eighth National People's Congress which with the highest state power gave legal form to determine the nature of Red Cross engagement in humanitarian and social assistance organizations. Its purposes were to protect peoples' lives and health, to develop the spirit of humanitarian ideals, and to advocate the peace and progress of society. Its duties were disaster relief, health aid, blood donation, youth activities and other

international humanitarian relief efforts (Lv, 2000). Subsequently, the Hong Kong Red Cross and the Macau Red Cross became branches of the Red Cross Society of China after their handover to the People's Republic of China in 1997 and 1999 respectively.

In 2008, the Red Cross Society of China received USD\$326 million in donations from both domestic and overseas sources during the Sichuan earthquake disaster (Wang, 2011). Moreover, the branches of Hong Kong Red Cross, Macau Red Cross and Taiwan Red Cross donated USD\$31 million to Sichuan earthquake relief. The Central Government demolished and reconstructed accommodation 183,179, 2,114 schools, 5,123 health centre's, as well as rehabilitation centre's, old folks' homes, welfare institutions and disaster prevention facilities (Wang, 2011). The legal articles including the Constitution of the People's Republic of China, the National Defense of People's Republic of China, the Regulations of Army involved in Disaster Relief, the Emergency Response Law of People's Republic of China, the Earthquakes Prevention and Disaster Reduction Law of People's Republic of China clearly explain the responsibilities and obligations of People's Liberation Army participation in disaster prevention and relief to protect peoples' lives and property (Li et al., 2009). This raises the research question of the role of the Red Cross in a society where the State is highly active in responding to areas where the Red Cross often has a key role and may challenge the roles of Party-State, especially the People's Liberation Army, have in disaster relief.

The issues of financing NGOs and claims of corruption have emerged in recent period of anti-corruption campaigns by the government of the People's Republic of China. This has had effects on the Red Cross. In June 2011, a young woman named Meimei Guo, claiming to be a "commercial general manager" of the Red Cross Society of China, flaunted her luxury purchases and extravagant lifestyle online. Due to her lavish lifestyle, much of the world focused on the Red Cross Society of China controversy although the Red Cross Society of China denied Goo's involvement within the organization, the reputation of the Red Cross Society of China has been severely placed into disrepute by Goo's claims. As a result, the Red Cross Society of China encounters issues with poor credibility. People have lost their trust in the organization's ability to manage the donated funds in an honest and lawful manner. The Guo scandal has led to significant decline in donations to the Red Cross Society of China. According to the data of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, national donations reached USD\$16 million in the first half year of

2011, but this was reduced by USD\$11 million to USD\$5 million in 2012, a 69% reduction as direct fallout of the Guo incident.

4. Discussion

In the current situation of NGO development, substantial research into the Red Cross Society of China as a case study of civil society organizations is of important theoretical and practical significance. Both Western and Chinese scholars are interested in the study of profit maximization as the target of profit-making enterprises. NGO studies, however, are in their infancy. In-depth and systematic studies of NGOs in China are scarce. Research into the Red Cross Society of China from a civil society perspective is even rarer. With the gradual rise of social welfare NGOs, more reasonable and advanced systems are needed to support their development, while the formation of advanced funding management systems needs more advanced theory for guidance (Courtney, 2002). Secondly, the outcome of the research will help improve social credibility of public welfare NGOs. Credibility refers to the degree of recognition and trust of an organization, and to some extent, it restricts sustainable development and survival of NGOs' thorough understanding of status and situation of NGOs in a Party-State environment. It also has the function of informing policy makers for the formation and improvement of public policy and democratic process so as to avoid negative impact of market orientations to ensure appropriate development of public services.

Research prior 2008 tends to focus on three periods: the late imperial period, the Anti-Japanese War period and the Demobilizations period, and the respective contributions of Red Cross to rescue and disaster relief. During the later Dynasty period, research focused on the origins, historical process and operating mechanisms. During the Russo-Japanese War period, research focused on rescue of wounded soldiers, treatment of civilian casualties, resettling of refugees and collection of donations. Through rescue experiences during this period, the mission and responsibility of the Red Cross were improved. After victory in the Anti-Japanese War, research focused on social services such as child welfare agencies, caring students, medical assistance, Red Cross hospitals and clinics, social relief and natural disaster relief. Chinese scholars focus on the founders of Red Cross who were Dunhe Shan, Kesheng Lin, Zhongshan

Sun and Zejing Shi. Researchers focus on documenting difficulties in fundraising due to wars throughout different periods before 1949. Qiujian Zhang analyzed that there were three types of financial resource, namely donations, membership fees and allowances from government in the late imperial period (Zhang, 2004). The fundraising of the Red Cross Society of China was closely tied to propaganda in the late imperial period (Zhou, 2004). Finally, Red Cross is an international organization, and as a result research also focused on international communication. The Red Cross Society of China merely communicated with Geneva, Japan and America during the later Dynasty period and the Republic of Beijing Government period. This showed that the Red Cross Society of China was closed during the late imperial period (Zhou, 2002). The first NGOs Research Centre was established by the University of Tsinghai in 1998. In 2005, the Red Cross Movement Research Centre was established by the University of Suzhou. It was the first academic and research institution on the Red Cross in China.

After 2008, despite a legal system that inhibited the development of NGOs in China, NGOs were recognized after the occurrence of the Sichuan earthquake. A large number of NGOs were actively involved in earthquake relief activities. At that time, NGOs played an important role in the management of public affairs, and crisis management was a part of this role. Therefore, researchers focused on how the Red Cross dealt with crisis management of natural disasters. Danni Liu analyzed the management problem of volunteers in the Red Cross Society of China (Liu, 2008). Chengwei Li and Hongyan Luo put resources mobilization and service delivery into the role of the Red Cross in crisis management systems (Li & Lou, 2008). After the Goo scandal in 2011, scholars focused more on the Red Cross Society of China. Most researchers agree that the lack of transparency of financial information is one of the reasons for the credibility crisis of the Red Cross Society of China (Gu, 2011). Hongxing Yang and Hongyan Zheng focus on the issue of internal management systems in the Red Cross Society of China, and its close relationship with government bodies has been a controversial subject (Yang & Zheng, 2012).

As mentioned earlier, Anglophone writings on the Red Cross Society of China are almost entirely absent. Chinese scholars have analyzed the historical processes and crisis management systems from their disciplinary perspectives. They stem from the social history research of the Red Cross movement in China, and investigate many kinds of activities during its early stages of

development, as well as research emphasis on its contributions such as rescue and relief on battlefields. Research on recent activities of the Red Cross in China all focuses on its internal management and credibility crisis. However, few scholars have examined the Red Cross in China from a civil society perspective. This research takes a civil society approach to analysis of the Red Cross Society of China.

6. Conclusion

This paper has provided an overview of different theories of public and private spheres as well as the development of these theories on different functions of social systems in Western societies. In particular it has focused on different theoretical ways to dispute division of state and society in recent history. Early demonstrations of problematic differentiations of public and private society have been given, however by and large Hegelian and Arendt a tripartite models of state, society and household have been shown valid. In addition, the Habermasian model of society in structure and function demonstrates complexities of modern societies, and the mode in which these institutions interact and combine in role and function. The ideal of the Habermasian model introduces a highly reasonable appearance of the public, but its inherently exclusionary nature has caused many criticisms on Hagerman in recent years. Indeed, the depictions of Foucault illustrate the manner of domination and power engaging at numerous levels and it is difficult for the whole of society to participate in Hagerman' models of a democratic public spheres. Consequently, the critique on Hagerman of Lehmann's systems theory most importantly stresses the differentiation of 'the state' and 'civil society'.

This paper explored divisions of public and private realms, as well as the distinction of state and society under the western theory of civil society. It also discussed the revolution of civil society during different periods from the Imperial Dynasty to contemporary China. Both western and Chinese scholars study civil society in China. The desired goal is to create a better legal framework for civil society, and enable government to support an opening space for NGOs playing a role extended from their role in the western theory of civil society. However, due to taking the Red Cross Society of China as the example in this thesis, theoretical analysis is important to prove the relationship between government and the Red Cross Society in China,

beyond the detachment of state and society of the western theories discussed. Finally, this paper focuses on the relationship between the government and the Red Cross Society of China where the Communist Party of China (CCP) as the ruling party has such extensive influence over society that the Western concept of NGOs must reconceptualise. It is significant to demonstrate that the Red Cross Society of China as an INGO historically changed its relationship with government bodies since its inception and that these changes have affected management and provision of services to victims of circumstance from the Red Cross organization in China.

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