

Conflicts and Cooperation: Analysis on Relationship of the Government and NPOs in the Field of Old-Age Service

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Abstract

Under the circumstance of growing old population, the cooperation between the government and NPOs in the field of old-age service has become an effective way to meet increasingly diverse service demands for the aged. But, as a new pattern of providing old-age service, the cooperation has been encountering a series of conflicts currently, because of the dislocation role of the government and the inadequate capacity of the NPOs. To alleviate the increasing pressure of providing good and diverse old-age service, it is essential to analyze and discuss the conflicts and corporation between the government and NPOs. Reforming community management system, redefining the roles of the government and NPOs, strengthening the construction of NPOs are all effective measures to resolve those conflicts. Through the ways, better cooperation between the government and NPOs can be achieved in the field of old-age service.

Key Words: Old-age service, The government, NPOs, Conflict, Cooperation

1 Problem

According to the latest statistics of China's Old-age Work Committee, the population aged over 60 years old in China has reached 17.4 million till 2010, accounting for about 12.78% of the total population. Among the total population, approximately 12.25% are aged over 80 years old, which has reached 2.132.million. By 2015, the population over 60 years old will reach 21.6 million. The elderly over the age of 80 will reach 2.4 million. With the population of aging and the miniaturization of family structure, the demands for old-age service have been grown greatly. The development of the community old-age service has become an important way to deal with the challenge of the population aging. Community old-age service is a relatively new model of old-age service, which is advocated by the government and based on the cooperation of many organizations from the district, the sub-district and the community, aiming at serving the community elderly residents and meeting the various needs of the elderly in the community (Li-ping Xiang.,2007). In addition to the government, different types of community organizations play an important role in providing old-age service, which are commonly known as the non-governmental organizations, NPOs, and social organizations. The NPOs in the paper is referring to these organizations which is not governmental organizations or enterprises, actively participating in providing public service without profit purposes, having the characteristics of non-governmental, non-profit, independent. Generally speaking, NPOs include social associations, foundations and civil non-enterprise units.

The research on the relationship between the government and NPOs has been conducted relatively early and deep by foreign scholars. But in our country, there are three basic different ideas about the relationship between the government and NPOs, including “cooperative relationship”, “complementary relationship” and “antagonistic relationship”. And most scholars agree that the relationship between the government and NPOs are both conflicting and cooperative (Jing-min Sun, 2006). To sum up, the previous research on the relationship between the government and NPOs focus on general relationship in all kinds of filed, and few relevant research has been done in the field of the community old-age service.

Therefore, it is necessary and essential to study further on the specific relationship between the government and NPOs in the field of the community old-age service. So this article will theoretically analyze the cooperation and conflicts between the government and NPOs based on the current practice of old-age service in China.

2. Cooperation between the Government and NPOs

2.1 Theoretical interpretation of the cooperative relationship

The cooperation of the government and NPOs has undergone a dynamic process. With the growing old population and increasing old-age service pressure, it is urgent and important for the government and NPOs to cooperate. How to make them cooperate effectively has become a hot academic issue. And lots of theoretical research has been carried out. Broadly speaking, there are two kinds of opinions about the cooperation between the government and NPOs. Some scholars, represented by Salamon, believe that the cooperation is a kind of public-private partnership, mainly concerning the NPOs' financial support and service outsourcing from the government. But some scholars take the cooperation as a dynamic interaction between the government and NPOs, highlighting on the equal status of subjective participation in the interaction.

Western scholars' theories on the cooperation between the government and NPOs is mainly derived from the Sector Failure Theory and Cross-sector Theory (Shao-qing Zhan & Jie-yun Hu 2005). Sector Failure Theory illustrates that the operation mechanism of each part of society are affected by market failure, government failure and voluntary failure in modern society. Based on the discussion of the difference and mutual supplements among these three systems--marketing, government and social NPOs, this theory also emphasizes the importance of the existence of NPOs and the cooperation with the government. Further, Cross-sector Theory clarifies the relationship between the government and NPOs, which is competitive as well as cooperative (Xiao-yi Zhang, 2012).

With the development of NPOs, NPOs have played more important role in participating in public service and their advantages have become more obviously. To rapidly evaluate the cooperation between the government and NPOs from a macro perspective, scholars began to explore the patterns and the ways to realize their further cooperation. For example, Salamon puts forward the concept of "the seller-cooperation" and the model of "in cooperation with partners". Coston proposes the continuous cooperation spectrum, including contract, cooperation, and other six kinds of the specific cooperation models. Chinese scholar Wang Jin-jun presents three kinds of cooperation models between the government and NPOs from the perspective of function, which included synergistic interaction, service substitution and supplement. Deng Ming-fen argues that the relationship of the local government and social organizations can be divided into four kinds and then establish the model and mechanism of cooperation between the government and NPOs.

The most commonly cited model of cooperation between the government and NPOs is "the government funding and private organizations providing service", which is put forward by Salamon et al (Xiao-yi Zhang, 2012). Through choosing the two key elements as core variable, which are the raising and authorizing of service fund and the actual distribution of the welfare services, they put forward four basic models of the relationship between the government and NPOs:(1) The government dominating model: The government is not only the main provider of funds, but also the main provider of services. The living space for NPOs is very small. (2) NPOs dominating model: NPOs are dominate in financing and service delivery. (3) Dual model: The government and NPOs provide public goods together, but they are responsible for their financing and service delivery respectively. (4) Cooperative model: The government and NPOs are in cooperation with each other, with the features of the government providing fund and NPOs delivering services. There are two different forms of cooperation models, one is "cooperative sellers" model and the other is "partners" model. In the "cooperative sellers" model, the government plays the role of welfare decision-making and resources supplying, and NPOs only play the role of execution, as the agent of the government in the process of project management. In the partnership model, NPOs can discuss with the government on the issues of service content, service scope, service delivery, resource allocation and even the management. Therefore, the NPOs not only play a direct role in welfare provision, but also exert their influence on participating in governmental decision-making on social welfare, so as to have more independence.

2.2 The practice of cooperation – the government purchases old-age service from NPOs

As everyone knows, the old-age service belongs to the public service. And the government is the main subject to provide service for the elderly.

Since the 90's of the last century, the Chinese government began to promote the transformation of the government function and aims at realizing "small government, big society". At the same time, our country has been facing tremendous pension pressure and dramatically demands of the old-age service. It is difficult for the government to meet all the demands alone because of the limited resources. Therefore, in order to satisfy the public interests, the government tries to transfer the functions of providing public services to NPOs by purchasing services.

The so-called purchasing old-age service by the government is a new model of providing old-age service, in which the government spend social welfare budget which belongs to the public finance in purchasing old-age service from kinds of social services institutions to perform the functions of providing social services (Xiao-yi Zhang, 2012). With the unique characteristics of public, nonprofit, altruism, voluntary, NPOs play an irreplaceable role in the areas of government failure and market failure. So, in the specific process of purchasing old-age service, the government makes agreements with the community old-age service center on the level of the city, district and other NPOs; then it is NPOs' duty to offer a variety of old-age services directly to the citizens. Visibly, the government purchasing old-age service from NPOs is not only an important way to solve the supply gap of old-age service in China, but also a typical example of partnership between the government and NPOs, which belongs to the model of "cooperative sellers".

3. Conflicts between the Government and NPOs

The NPOs in China are facing common problems, such as the problems of finance, construction of ability and the autonomy of NPOs, which have emerged in the development process in other countries,. But in the specific field of community service for the aged in China, the conflicts between the government and NPOs are more serious due to the government's management mechanism of NPOs and community. Undeniably, the government should play an important role in community service for the aged. But the deficiencies of the government dominating model are also obvious. This kind model of taking care of every single thing personally in the community makes the government lack of knowledge about NPOs' function and lack of corresponding cultivation mechanism of NPOs. So the "dislocation" of the government and the unhealthy development of NPOs cause some conflicts between the government and NPOs in the field of old-age service.

3.1 Conflicts between the government and NPOs

3.1.1. Conflicts between development and regulation

The current social organization management system which is characterized by "double management" has restricted the development of NPOs and their participation in old-age service. With the acceleration of the aging population, the demands for old-age services are increasing. It demands more NPOs' participation in supplying diverse old-age service. But current double management system in China has greatly restricted NPOs' participation in community old-age service. A part of the NPOs are excluded from the policy which is supposed to cultivate the development of NPOs in China. To a certain extent, they do not enjoy the subsidies and preferential policy of the government.

3.1.2. Conflicts between investment and resource

The development of NPOs in China is different from the NPOs in western society. The prominent characteristic of NPOs in our country is most of them are underdeveloped, reflected by their finite capacity of integrating social resources. The government should provide appropriate subsidies to the NPOs to participate in community service for the elder in any society. According to the investigation in a city in Hunan Province, which made by Wang Ming and other scholars in 2000, 40% of the NPOs have been lack of funds to carry out activities in recent years. It's difficult for some organizations to continue developing without enough founds from the government.

3.1.3. Conflicts between management and supervision

On one hand, the current double management system set a strict policy, which makes it very hard for a potential social organization to register to be a legal NPO. Under this condition, a lot of social organizations can't be registered as NPOs or exist as illegal organizations.

On the other hand, except for the annual finance check is kind of symbolic, the current management system also lack effective evaluation and supervision on NPOs. It leads to many public corruptions. And some tax relief policies cannot be put in place. All of these are not conducive to the cooperation between the government and NPOs.

3.1.4. Conflicts on value orientation between the government and NPOs

Compared with NPOs in the western society, NPOs in China show more obedience to the government's instructions during the process of their development. The fully development of NPOs is the prerequisite of good cooperation between the government and NPOs. Benefited from the western culture and market economy, the citizen consciousness, the idea of autonomy, the awareness of law, the spirit of contract, public spirit in western society are well-developed, leading to their NPOs get more civil characteristics. But in our country, the value orientations of the market and the government are different from that of NPOs. And it is not conducive to the development of NPOs.

3.2 The reasons of the conflicts between the government and NPOs

The reasons of the conflicts between the government and NPOs can be analyzed from two different aspects.

3.2.1 The government's "dislocation" leads to conflicts

In China, the reform of social system lags behind the reform of economic system and the development of economy. The government still continues the old social management model which is used in the planned economic period, which is characterized by the government being in charge of most of social service. As far as community service is concerned, the government managed and controlled the community by two grassroots organization: the subdistrict office and the residential committee. The subdistrict office is a basic administrative organization under the jurisdiction of the city. On the behalf of the government to exercise the management power, the subdistrict office handles various administrative affairs of the community. So it is a powerful promoter of community construction. The administrative function of subdistrict office involves many aspects, including economic, political, social community, culture, sports, education, health, and environmental protection. At that time, most of the social organizations developed so insufficiently that the subdistrict office had to provide a large number of social services and promoted the development of the community services by using the administrative power. However, with the development of society, it is apparently inappropriate for subdistrict office to deal with a large number of social services by him, which actually should be transferred to NPOs. This reflects the government role dislocation.

The residential committee is a kind of self-government organizations, in which residents manage their own affairs, educate themselves and serve their own needs. The rights of residential committee in the public affairs are related to the immediate interests of residents. It plays a role as a bridge between the government and the people by managing and constructing the community. But in the actual community, the residential committee is usually seen as dispatched office which is lack of autonomy. And residents are inclined to regard the residential committee as a kind of semi-administrative organization rather than their own self-governing organizations. Residents are lack of correct recognition of community organizations.

3.2.2 NPOs' under-development leads to conflicts

In China, many NPOs are under-development, which can be reflected by their poor capacity.

3.2.2.1. Insufficient ability of raising funds

The survey carried out by the NGO research centre of Tsinghua University demonstrates that 41.4% of NPOs view lacking of funds as the main problem. Even worse, some NPOs have been on the verge of a standstill condition due to being short of funds. And the data also confirms that half of the income of NPOs is given by the government in the way of appropriation and subsidy (Wei-qin Yang, 2009). The government has a monopolistic advantage in terms of resources. In fact, some NPOs must strive for the support from the government to survive. In China, many NPOs have taken the mechanism of "half folk and half governmental" and keep good relationship with the government. This kind of special relationship can help NPOs share the resources within the official system, which are crucial to their development.

In another word, the NPOs in China have been dependent on the government for a long time and their ability of raising fund is very poor. Once without the support of the government funds, most of NPOs can't survive.

3.2.2.2. Inadequate capacity of self-governing

Self-governing, to some extent, means that NPOs are not parts or branches of the government, and do not assume the functions of the government. Under the condition of obey the law, the decisions and behaviours of NPOs are not influenced by the government. But many NPOs in our country are directly set up by the government departments.

In terms of organizational functions, activities and management system, NPOs depend on the government so much so that some NPOs function as a subsidiary part of the government. "The Regulations of Registration and Management on Social Association" and "The Provisional Regulations of Registration and management on civil non-enterprise units" stipulate that NPOs are jointly managed by the Civil Administration Departments and authorized organizations which have great power. The government intervenes and even directly manages the daily activities of NPOs. It makes many NPOs become the "quasi-government" which has a profound official feature and the tendency of administration. So they lack of independence and aren't able to carry on the effective self-management.

3.2.2.3. Poor ability of initiating voluntary spirit

Voluntary spirit is a kind of important spirit, with which people participate voluntarily in various public-interest activities without any rewards, and it is helpful to promote human development and improve community service. (Yuan Ding & Xun-qing Jiang, 2002). The voluntary spirit of is an essential characteristic of the NPOs. However, NPOs in our country are going through a voluntary crisis. As we all know, volunteers in our country are organized by the community committees and lunch activities under the direction of the subdistrict office. This kind of voluntary activity is more administrative than autonomous. So, it is difficult to get people's approval, which affects people's voluntary participation enthusiasm. At the same time, the community needs many professionals whose majors are sociology, psychology and medicine participate in providing services for the elderly. If we can't bring some talents to join in providing service, we would not improve the quality of NPOs' service.

4. Suggestions to promote cooperation between the government and NPOs

4.1 Reform the management system

To reform the management system of NPOs, we should mainly focus on reducing registration "threshold" and changing control-oriented management model so as to simplify the procedures of registration. These organizations that meet the registration requirements ought to be inducted into the supervision scope of the Civil Administration Department, and be changed from "illegal" to "legitimate". On one hand, China can establish a more flexible registration system. According to three different types of NPOs, the government can implement different qualification examinations and different registration systems varying from leniency to strict, and treat them with different policy, making them have different responsibilities and rights (Ke-ping Yu, 2006). On the other hand, the necessary, effective policies of support and evaluation must be made to promote the development of NPOs. First of all, some practical supports can be given to NPOs to help them solve actual difficulties, such as capitals, talents, technology, interest rates.

4.2 Redefine the role of the government

In the field of old-age service, the government ought to intervene reasonably. The government has its duties of policy formulation, supervision, coordination and management of community affairs, etc. During the process of building old-aged service system, the function of the government is mainly manifested as the "paddle", including formulating institutions, providing support, planning, supervising and evaluating. Further, the government must change the idea and actively cultivate NPOs, support diversified development in service system, so as to establish the most positive form of cooperation between the government and NPOs.

4.3 Strengthen the ability of NPOs

Firstly we should have a clear knowledge of the goals and the missions of NPOs, which is providing good and diverse service for the public. The purpose of NPOs is different from that of enterprises. NPOs should carry out actions to improve the social influence and enhance their abilities.

NPOs should strengthen the construction of system, enhance the autonomous capacity. For instance, the government and NPOs should standardize the operational procedure of organizations and rectify the tendency of bureaucracy, perfect financial management procedures to improve the management system to resolve the conflicts between the government and NPOs (Hong Li, 2003).

4.4 Cultivate the citizen consciousness

Cultivating the citizen consciousness is a very important way to solve some conflicts between the government and NPOs. By strengthening the propaganda of the citizen consciousness, the majority of residents can better understand the relationship between the NPOs and the residents' interests.

At the same time, it arouses and enhances the civic consciousness of residents to participate in public activities. Therefore, the government and the society should try their best to cultivate the citizen consciousness, especially educate those people who set up NPOs and who work in NPOs. In a word, cultivating the citizen consciousness can promote the development of NPOs in the future. (Meng-hua Qiu,2012).

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