

Paths and Challenges of Chinese NGOs Participate in Global Public Health Governance—The Case Study of Chinese Red Cross Foundation*

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With the development of the world's politics and economic, the participants in the global governance system have also undergone profound changes; among them, non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as an essential role of the sub-national actors have an important impact on today's global public health governance. From the case of the Chinese Red Cross Foundation, we can see that Chinese NGOs have their own unique way to participate in global public health governance. Good project design, professional implementation plans, and diversified partners are powerful guarantees for successful governance participation. At the same time, financial issues, institutional guarantees, and further improvement of professionalism are areas that need to be improved in the future.

Keywords: global health governance, Chinese NGOs, paths and challenges

Introduction

With the continuous deepening of economic globalization and political multi-polarization, many global problems that humans had never thought of began to intensify gradually. In the context of globalization, we should solve the world's problems in a hierarchical manner like government no longer works. One of the reasons is that such an international government not only does not exist but also cannot appear; the second is the complexity of the problem and the diversity of actors that do not allow the problems to be solved in a centralized manner (such as the world government) (Cerutti, 2014, pp. 1-16). The global public health has always been an important issue that cannot be ignored in global governance. It is not only directly related to the lives and safety of people around the world, but also the foundation of world sustainable development. Therefore, to cope with the challenges of global public health issues, human society needs to take collective action.

In the new era, the development of Chinese NGOs has shown a transition from a high-speed development stage that pursues quantitative growth to a high-quality development stage that pursues quality and efficiency (Huang, 2019, p. 1). With the development of Chinese NGOs, the "going global" or internationalization has become a strategic and practical action considered by many Chinese NGOs. More and more Chinese NGOs have begun to enter the international arena and become a new force which is weak but has a strong vitality in

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promoting and participating in the global governance system. Chinese NGOs, from cooperating with various international organizations to carry out projects to their own independent overseas project operations, are increasingly making their voice be heard in the international arena and playing their unique role. In this paper, we use the case of the Chinese Red Cross Foundation to analyze and explore the paths and challenges of Chinese NGOs participating in global public health governance.

CRCF's Paths to Participate in Global Public Health Governance

Chinese Red Cross Foundation (CRCF) is a national public fundraising organization registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs of PRC. As an independent foundation under the administration of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), the mission of CRCF is to carry forward the core spirit of the Red Cross: humanity, fraternity, and dedication; to improve the living and development conditions of human beings and protect their health and lives; and to promote world peace and social advancement. The focus area of the CRCF is medical and health assistance and humanity, impartiality, neutrality, independence, volunteer service, unity, and universality are the guidelines for carrying out activities and work. Up to now, the CRCF has established a multi-level and multi-dimensional medical assistance system involving Medical Relief, Health Interposition, Disaster Relief, Community Development, Education Promotion, International Aid, Public Advocacy, and Humanitarian Communication. Besides, it has formed a very mature domestic project operation model and accumulated a wealth of practical experience. This has laid a solid foundation for the CRCF to go global and actively participate in global public health governance. Their paths to participate in global public health governance include:

Firstly, CRCF tries to meet the needs of national strategy and carry out the international humanitarian relief. The “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” project is one of them.

The background of the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” is the “Belt and Road Initiative” strategy. Before this, the international assistance of the CRCF was not systematic, and it was more of a kind of assistance under emergency conditions, such as natural disasters, border conflicts, etc. According to the overall national arrangement of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and the foreign aid work arrangement of the Red Cross Society of China, the Chinese Red Foundation established the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” to optimize the humanitarian service supply of the “Belt and Road Initiative” and to take the countries along the “Belt and Road” as the service areas to provide aid to the people with urgent humanitarian needs in February 2017. The strategic positioning of “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” is non-profit fund dedicated to serving the Belt and Road Initiative, China international humanitarian assistance fund, State-supported non-governmental fund for foreign assistance, non-profit fund dedicated to serving the Chinese enterprises’ “going global” strategy, and international volunteer service non-profit fund. In 2017, the B & R Fraternity Fund went to 16 countries along the B & R routes. In 2018, the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” launched nine overseas projects in 23 countries.

The China-Pakistan Emergency Corridor Project is a demonstration public welfare project jointly funded by the Silk Road Fraternity Fund for the Red Cross and its “Belt and Road” counterparts. It is the starting project of the “Belt and Road Initiative” Red Cross First Aid Corridor. The project, jointly with the International Red Cross Organization and the Pakistan National Red Crescent Society, has mobilized all parties to build the Red Cross emergency facilities, set up emergency rescue teams, train medical emergency personnel, and develop emergency command systems. The project will set up first aid units in villages, towns, and transportation stations along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. The first aid units consist of “first aid station + ambulance + first aid personnel + information system”. Many first aid units will be combined to form

an emergency rescue and public health service supply belt along the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, significantly enhancing the safety and public health service level of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Its progress is as follows:

On February 20, 2017, the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” of the China Red Cross Foundation was established in Beijing, and it also announced the launch of the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” key project—China-Pakistan Emergency Rescue Corridor. On May 7, 2017, the first aid unit—the China-Pakistan Fraternity Emergency Care Center was established in Gwadar. On September 22, the Chinese Red Cross Foreign Aid Medical Team arrived in Gwadar Port, providing two-year medical care services for local people. On April 29, 2018, after the first medical team successfully completed its mission, the second medical team arrived. It funded the China-Pakistan Emergency Corridor Project, continuously built the China-Pakistan Fraternity Medical Emergency Center in Gwadar Port, Pakistan, and launched the second emergency unit of the China-Pakistan Emergency Corridor. On January 17, 2019, the third medical team arrived. On September 16, 2019, the fourth medical team members departed from Beijing Capital Airport to Gwadar Port in Pakistan to carry out a half-year humanitarian medical and emergency service.

As of August 15, 2019, the China-Pakistan Fraternity Medical Emergency Center had received 4,280 person-times, including 3,087 Pakistani and 1,193 Chinese. The medical team also conducted free medical examinations and held large-scale free consultations and medical security conferences for students of Fauquier School, employees of Gwadar Port Authority, employees of the Pakistani port employees, and Chinese-funded enterprises in Gwadar. The medical aid service of the Chinese Red Cross Foreign Aid Medical Team was well received.

For the recipient country, from a practical point of view, on the one hand, it can effectively solve the plight of its health care shortage; on the other hand, it can also solve the local social conflicts caused by the shortage of medical resources, which is conducive to safeguarding social stability and security. Taking the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” as an opportunity, the CRCF has attracted a part of funding, which has also improved the overall working level of the CRCF’s staff and organizational visibility, which can effectively promote the CRCF will better operate and work in the International Red Cross Network. Besides, the local Red Cross Society (Red Crescent Society) and medical staff can be trained in abilities and skills, which will improve of the overall local medical level. It can be said that this is a sustainable virtuous circle. “More important is the emotional blending between the CRCF’s staff and local residents. In this interaction, the differences between countries have disappeared”. Local residents respond to CRCF’s staff “If you cure a child, it will have a more significant impact on a community than when you build a hospital”.

In general, the CRCF goes deep into the recipient countries, cuts-in with human interaction, and focuses on professional social services, which can effectively make up for the deficiencies of the government’s assistance, help to increase the feelings between two countries’ people and establish a lasting friendship between the recipient and aid country (Deng & Wang, 2015). People-to-people ties based on mutual understanding and respect can become an important cornerstone of national communication and cooperation.

Secondly, CRCF relies on the International Red Cross network, resources and cooperates with domestic and foreign partners to promote overseas projects.

“Because of the international Red Cross network, compared with other domestic Chinese NGOs, the CRCF has more implementation agencies abroad”. Using this international network, the CRCF can quickly and effectively participate in global governance.

For example, the China-Pakistan Emergency Rescue Corridor Project was initiated by the Pakistan National Red Crescent Society, using the Red Cross International Network to send a request to the CRCF, which will be implemented by our specific implementation. In this project, the CRCF assumes the leading role in the whole process from the preliminary evaluation, project execution to final effect analysis. However, the “Angel Tour-Humanitarian Aid Plan for Children Suffering from Serious Illness” in countries along the “Belt and Road” project is initiated by the Afghan Red Crescent Society and the Mongolian Red Cross Society. The preliminary assessment is completed by the Afghan Red Crescent Society and the Mongolian Red Cross Society, and the CRCF is responsible for rescue children suffering from severe congenital heart diseases in Mongolia and Afghanistan. In addition, other sub-projects under the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” are also launched and completed through this procedure, such as the Overseas Fraternity Homes, a cooperation project by Kenya, Uganda, Ethiopia and China. Therefore, through full communication and cooperation with the local Red Cross Society (Red Crescent Society), it will let other countries know more about our situation and will undoubtedly increase the popularity and influence of the CRCF.

In the process of participating in global governance, the CRCF not only relies on the Red Cross International Network for communication and cooperation with the Red Cross Society of other countries, but also actively cooperates with Chinese NGOs to form a good pattern of mutual assistance in resources and advantages. For example, in 2017, the CRCF, China Social Welfare Foundation Free Lunch Fund and Kunshan Yuting Charity Foundation jointly launched the “Joint Action for Africa” project. It plans to carry out overseas “Fraternity Home”, free lunch and free toilet projects in African countries, such as Kenya, Ethiopia, and Uganda. And the CRCF also participated in the construction of China-Pakistan Emergency Rescue Corridor with COSCO Shipping Charity Foundation.

Also, with the expansion of China’s foreign investment scale, the overseas investment team has continued to grow, and the investment entities have become diversified. State-owned enterprises and private enterprises have gone abroad to find international markets and resources (Gu, Wu, & Zhuang, 2017). However, in the actual process of going global, companies also have risks of being misunderstood, difficult to reach market strategic consensus, unable to cooperate and communicate without understanding the local conditions, and corporate culture conflicts. And in the process, the CRCF can play complementary roles in working with enterprises. It is especially true for Chinese enterprises that have made overseas investments, established overseas operations, and aim to become global corporations, as they have pressing need to become environmentally and socially responsible, improve communication with local communities and build trustworthy brand images. For example, the first aid units aided by the CRCF to Syria and Iraq were donated by Beiqi FOTO, which will help them to open the Syrian market again after the Syrian crisis and coordinate local community and government relations. In the China-Pakistan Emergency Rescue Corridor project,

after communication with the Pakistan National Red Crescent Society (the recipient), a team of experts (the CRCF staff, donors and technicians) was dispatched to the recipient (Gwadar, Pakistan) to investigate the local climatic conditions, soil conditions, and light. At the same time, it also communicates with Chinese companies (also beneficiaries) in Gwadar. A three-party contact framework has been formed: Chinese experts—Chinese companies—recipients.

Thirdly, CRCF tries to improve professionalism, sets up research platforms, and explores new models of participation in global public health governance.

In accordance with the standards for creating a foundation of “Modernization, Standardization and

Internationalization”, CRCF carried out a quality management in an all-round way. It successively introduced the evaluation system of International Federation of Red Cross Society OCAC (the National Red Cross Organization Ability Building Evaluation) and ISO9001 Quality Management System to review and evaluate the administrative structure, project implementation, team construction and assets management of CRCF.

Besides, on August 31, 2019, International Academy of Red Cross & Red Crescent, sponsored by the International Committee of the Red Cross and International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, was established by the Red Cross Society of China, the CRCF and Soochow University in Suzhou. Its purpose is to become a research base and platform for Red Cross Movement research, Red Cross talent training, Red Cross-cultural communication and international humanitarian communication and cooperation. After the establishment of the college, six research centers will be set up, including the Red Cross Movement, International Humanitarian Law, “Belt and Road Initiative” International Communication and Cooperation, Nightingale Rescue, Humanitarian Resource Mobilization and Cultural Communication, Emergency Management, and Disaster Preparedness. At the same time, types of humanitarian education training and teaching courses, short-term training, mid-term training, advanced training classes and other vocational training will be set up. In the future, it will also recruit master’s degree and doctor’s degree candidates in related fields. It is understood that there has not yet been a real Red Cross University (college) in the world. The establishment of the International Academy of Red Cross & Red Crescent has filled this gap.

CRCF’s Experience in Global Public Health Governance

Firstly, combined with national strategy, NGOs should design overseas projects in line with professional expertise. With the continuous improvement of China’s overall national strength, Chinese NGOs can use more and more domestic resources in the process of going global, especially in economic development and technological progress. At the same time, the continuous improvement of China’s international status and international recognition has led other countries to seek cooperation and help from China. All these provide opportunities for Chinese NGOs to “go global”. Therefore, in the process of going global, Chinese NGOs should combine the national strategy and actively use the platform and resources provided by the state. For example, the CRCF used the background of the “Belt and Road Initiative” to successfully promote the construction of the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” project, and used the advanced medical technology already mastered in the field of medical rescue and accumulated rich experience through domestic rescue practice to become one of the “vanguards” of NGOs “going global”.

Secondly, NGOs should actively seek international support networks and strive for both domestic and foreign resources. No NGOs can solve international problems on its own power in the process of participating in global governance. From an international perspective, governance concept has shifted from monistic, tool rationalism and binary opposition thinking to pluralism and partnership thinking (Qin, 2013). Therefore, in the process of going global, Chinese NGOs should use existing international networks, actively seek cooperation with domestic and foreign enterprises, NGOs and learn to use both domestic and foreign resources.

As a foundation under the administration of the Red Cross Society of China (RCSC), the CRCF can directly use the existing International Red Cross Network to participate in global governance, especially for the countries and regions where the Red Cross Society already exists. This kind of landing agency is more conducive to the CRCF to find international resources, understand local information and deal with community relations and cultural conflicts. All these have built a good bridge for the CRCF to go global.

Thirdly, NGOs should improve rescue capabilities and establish a level of professionalism in line with international standards. At present, while the resources and development space acquired by Chinese NGOs are continually expanding, the scale and brand development of NGOs are gradually consolidating the foundation of social organization development. Up to now, there are more than 150,000 NGOs established in China within three to five years, more than 220,000 NGOs established in five to 10 years, and more than 210,000 NGOs established over 10 years. These NGOs, which have been established for many years, are gradually consolidating their own development foundation and exploring the road of scale and brand development (Huang, 2019).

The CRCF clearly realizes that it is not enough to rely on international aid activities to establish international status and reputation. It must be courageous and actively seek international discourse and participate in the formulation of international rules. Therefore, in recent years, the CRCF has actively hosted international forums, participated in international conferences, increased project visibility and promoted “going global”. For example, from November 9 to 10, 2018, Soochow International Humanitarian Exchange and Cooperation Seminar with the theme of “Building a Humanitarian Bridge” was held in Suzhou, Jiangsu. This is an international exchange activity organized by the Red Cross Society of China to strengthen the international humanitarian exchange and cooperation of the Red Cross, promote the co-construction and sharing of the humanitarian education system, and promote the sustained and healthy development of the Red Cross cause in the new era. This also means that the CRCF began to participate in the formulation of global governance rules consciously, and gradually formed its own voice.

Challenges for the Future Development of CRCF

There is still a big gap between the CRCF and other international NGOs. This gap is mainly manifested in the execution ability, execution standard, and execution will. For execution ability, foreign NGOs are more mature and trained than the CRCF and are doing better in line with international standards; for execution standard, foreign NGOs often have very strict enforcement standards or are the rule-makers and optimizers. This is what the CRCF lacks but is also trying to improve; for execution will, foreign NGOs can rescue directly to the lowest class of citizens, even do the refugee projects, which makes foreign NGOs more aware of the society bottom’s demands. However, these are very difficult for the CRCF.

Shortage of funds is a problem encountered by all NGOs in participating in international activities. For the CRCF, the focus of domestic work in recent years has mainly focused on poverty alleviation, which means the reduction of special government funds. At the same time, the inverted-triangle relationship formed by the mismatch between the CRCF and companies’ demands will also lead to difficulties in raising funds. The project leader of the “Silk Road Fraternity Fund” said:

There are many companies that want to be internationalized, but some companies want to be internationalized by doing livelihood projects. However, there are many livelihood projects, such as medical assistance, skill training. In fact, among these companies that are doing democratic projects, only a small part wants to cooperate with NGOs. In the end, we have found an enterprise that wants to do a People-to-people ties’ project. It also has demands and funds, but it is challenging to integrate with our existing project, and for us, their demands are difficult to satisfy.

Although the country’s macro-strategy has given enough support for Chinese NGOs to “go global”, it has also provided corresponding platforms and resources. However, the matching micro-policies have not been formulated and upgraded accordingly. This asymmetry between macro and micro will cause Chinese NGOs to

be “The spirit is willing, but the flesh is weak” in the process of going global. For example, China’s current foreign exchange control problems: At present, the foreign exchange control policies of NGOs refer to enterprises, and the standard is 50,000 US dollars. And many proof materials should be provided, even if only remit these 50,000 US dollars. In other words, the state has not established a corresponding foreign exchange policy for NGOs to indicate what standards and methods the NGOs should implement. Moreover, the Bank of China has stopped overseas remittance services for many countries that cooperate with the CRCF. This is very inconvenient for NGOs that carry out international assistance. There are also regulatory issues related to going abroad on business. The medical team sent by the CRCF has only five days from exit to entry. In addition to the two days on the road, the remaining time is for screening, expert consultation and ordinary foreign affairs meetings. The time is very tight, which is also a huge challenge.

Shortage of professional and technical personnel is another challenge. Although the CRCF actively seeks cooperation with medical institutions such as Soochow University, Huashan Hospital affiliated to Fudan University, Beijing Anzhen Hospital and other institutions in the process of participating in global governance, the supply of talent is still difficult to meet the increasing international demand. For example, in 2017, the Afghan Red Crescent Society proposed that there are about 7,000 children with congenital heart disease waiting for treatment in their country, but, in fact, the number of children is much higher than this number. There are many international demands, but the supply of human resources cannot keep up, especially multi-language professionals, because the primary language of the countries (minority language) along the “Belt and Road Initiative” is not the current international popular language. Even if recruiting the multi-language professionals, they cannot accurately grasp the recipients’ political conditions and folk customs because they have not received systematic overseas assistance training. It is also unable to carry out actual overseas rescue work (Yang & Yin, 2019).

The most important thing is that there are a lot of objective risks faced by participating in overseas projects. Whether it is the China-Pakistan Emergency Rescue Corridor, Afghanistan operations, Africa free lunch program or overseas “Fraternity Home”, these areas have suffered wars in recent years; even now there is firefight between government forces and anti-government forces. At the same time, because these countries and regions have weak defense capabilities, these factors will pose a threat to our aid team’s lives and property, and not conducive to the development and spread of the projects. For example, in 2019, a terrorist attack against the Chinese occurred at the Pearl Continental Hotel in Gwadar, Pakistan. The place where the terrorist attack occurred was the location of the CRCF’s project. So, the security situation is a considerable challenge. Moreover, the focus area of the CRCF is medical and health assistance. There are inherent medical risks in this area, and the climate and hardware conditions in the recipient are relatively harsh, which adds much difficulty to medical assistance, such as the Afghanistan operations of Angel Tour-Humanitarian Aid Plan for Children Suffering from Serious Illness in Countries along the “Belt and Road”. Although China’s cardiac surgery technology, whether it is cardiac surgery or cardiology, is already very advanced and rich in experience, it must be admitted that in the areas of China Red Foundation’s concern, the risk of surgery due to force majeure factors also exists.

Conclusion

It can be seen from the case of the CRCF participating in global governance that it is the general trend for Chinese NGOs to go global and carry out international assistance projects. At the same time, NGOs are an

essential part of China's participation in global governance and important power for better safeguarding national interests in the new period. Encouraging NGOs to "go global" can help China better participate in global governance and enhance China's international status and influence.

At present, the process of Chinese NGOs participating in global governance is still in its infancy. Compared with developed countries, there is still a big gap in quantity, quality, and professionalism. With the deepening of China's participation in global governance, more specialized NGOs need to "go global" and use existing international platforms to better play a role in the process of global governance. And this is the general trend of the Chinese NGOs' development in the future. How to align with the national strategy in the new era, give full play to professional advantages, unite diverse partners, better participate in global governance and contribute Chinese wisdom and solutions to the world are important tasks and challenges for the future development of Chinese NGOs in the new era.

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