



# The Social Governance and Revocation Crisis of Advocacy NGOs in Contemporary China

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## Introduction

Reviews of literature shows a baseline agreement that governance is its focus on governing mechanisms which do not rest on recourse to the authority and sanctions of government. Chinese government adopt the concept of “social governance” in official document from 2013 with a focus on the fundamental interests of the general public, in which one of the key strategies is inviting NGO participation in the governance process while regulating them to ensure public security. How the NGO-Government relationship change under the new social governance discourse?

This article aims at enrich the government theory through empirically comparing the situation of advocacy NGO before and after the Chinese government start social governance process. A quantitative data collected at 2011 draws on a large 126 sample of advocacy groups shows the relationship between party-state and advocacy NGOs could be identified as uncertainty, lack mutual trust however generally coexistence. However, recently media evidence mapped a large-scale “crack-down” reality of Chinese advocacy NGOs in which proved the coexistence space is disappearing. At the same time, a series of regulation law formulated to systematical restrict or destroy the societal support system of advocacy NGOs.

Governance is about the regression of state power and the self-governing of civil society and good governance achieved at the end. The revocation crisis of Chinese advocacy NGO bring out a theoretical question that if civil society lost its self-governing space and authoritarian state stressed its power, could good governance happened or not?

## Method

- Our study draws on a data of large sample of advocacy groups—126 in total—using data gathered through face-to-face interviews with NGO leaders across three locations (Guangdong, Yunnan and Beijing), which represent almost all the active NGOs in these areas at that time. The data collected from early 2009 through early 2011, the major requirements for qualifying as a “advocacy NGO” were: a) the group had been up and running for at least two years; b) it was not founded by a government agency; and c) at least one of three main current working area belongs to environment, civil rights & advocacy and China-specific rights issue.
- We proceed from a quantitative content analysis to collect 68 news related to Chinese NGO from *WiseNews* (A database of full-text newspaper clippings with search capabilities mainly on Hong Kong newspapers) from 1 Feb, 2015 to 31 March, 2016, the period leading up to and including the released for public comment the *Overseas NGO Management Law* draft and many recently crackdown events of advocacy NGO. There are 55 advocacy NGO news (80.1%) and 55 non-advocacy NGO news (19.1%) in total.

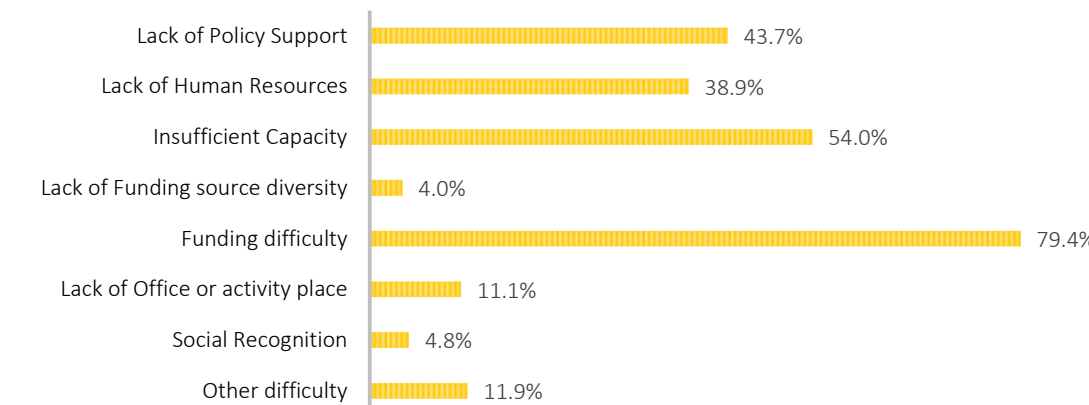
## The Societal Support of Advocacy NGO

**Table 1. Registration status**

| Registered status    | % of Advocacy NGO Sample | % of Non-Advocacy NGO Sample |
|----------------------|--------------------------|------------------------------|
| unregistered         | 29.4                     | 24.1                         |
| Business             | 30.2                     | 26.3                         |
| Social Org.(shetuan) | 11.9                     | 11.8                         |
| PNCE(minfei)         | 15.1                     | 19.9                         |
| "Under another org." | 11.9                     | 13.9                         |
| Registered in HK     | 0.8                      | 2.9                          |
| Other                | 0                        | 0.7                          |
| Unknown              | 0.8                      | 0.7                          |
| Total Percentage     | 100                      | 100                          |
| N(Number of NGOs)    | 126                      | 137                          |

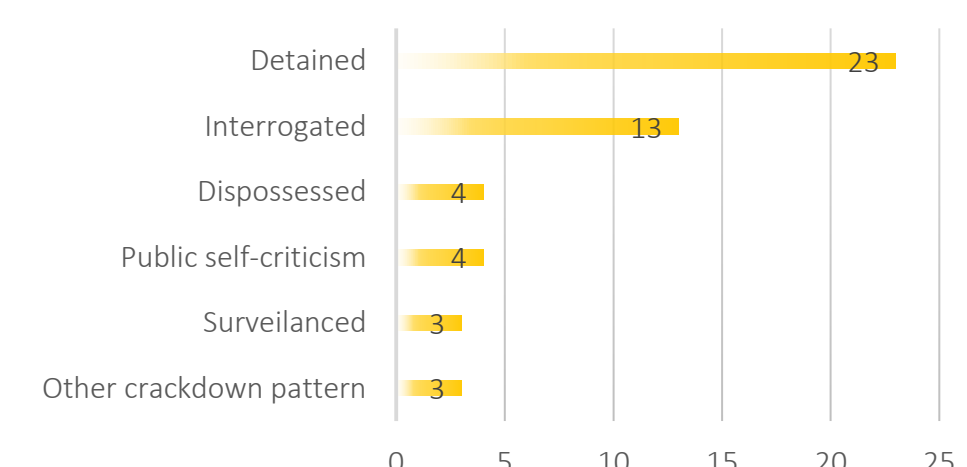
**Table 2. Source of funding in previous 12 months**

| Funding source       | % of Advocacy NGOs in Sample Reporting "Yes" | % of Non-advocacy NGOs in Sample Reporting "Yes" |
|----------------------|--|--|
| Chinese individual   | 50.8   | 55.9   |
| Chinese foundations  | 24.6   | 21.5   |
| Foreign foundations  | 38.9   | 32.8   |
| Chinese businesses   | 26.1   | 35.9   |
| Foreign businesses   | 17.5   | 15.6   |
| Other Chinese NGOs   | 20.6   | 15.0   |
| Foreign NGOs (INGOs) | 19.8   | 10.2   |
| Chinese government   | 25.4   | 27.0   |
| Foreign government   | 9.5  | 6.6  |
| N(Number of NGOs)    | 126  | 137  |

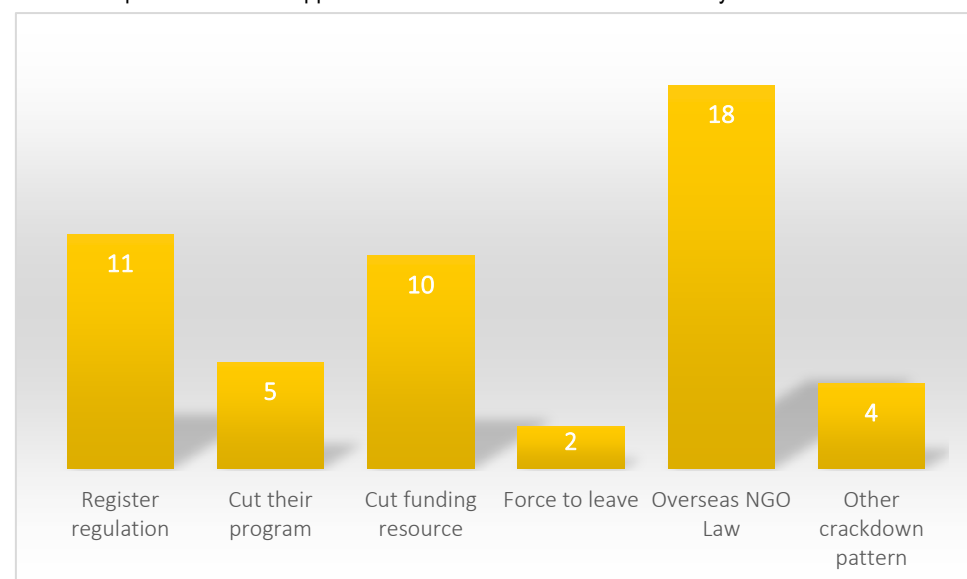


- Chart 1. Current Problem**  
Notes: The percentages in each column add up to more than 100, as each organization was asked to describe their no more than 3 current main difficulties. The questions were worded as, "What do you think the most important difficulty of your organization (Please list no more than 3 difficulties)?"
- Of 126 cases in our study, current working area of advocacy NGO is focus on legal service, labor rights, environment and HIV.
  - As shown in table 1, the percentage of unregistered and registered as businesses of advocacy NGO is 59.6%, which is 9.2% higher than non-advocacy NGO. This reflects advocacy NGO is far more difficult to achieve a legal register status.
  - As shown in table 2, the fact that half the advocacy groups received donation from mainland Chinese individual indicates their social legitimacy. Advocacy NGO have more foreign funding than non-advocacy NGO, however, they are not shortage of local funding such as 25.4% of them receive Chinese government funding.
  - As shown in chart 1, advocacy NGO faced both internal difficulties about insufficient capacity(54 percent) and lack of human resources (38.9 percent) and prominence external difficulties mainly on funding difficulty (79.4 percent), and lack of policy support (43.7 percent). Many reported the causal relationship between external difficulties and internal difficulties, e.g. lack of training and funding caused the instabilities of workers.

## Evidence of Revocation Crisis



**Chart 2. The crackdown approach of advocacy NGO workers and volunteers**  
Notes: Of 55 articles in our study, we count the frequency of every crackdown approaches in each article. Repeat of the same approaches in an articles will be counted only one time.



**Chart 3. The crackdown approach of advocacy NGO**  
Notes: Of 55 articles in our study, we count the frequency of every crackdown approaches in each article. Repeat of the same approaches in an articles will be counted only one time.

**Table 3. Chronicle of events from 1 Feb, 2015 to 31 March, 2016**

| Date          | Event  |
|---------------|--|
| March 7, 2015 | Five feminist activists were detained on suspicion of “picking quarrels and provoking trouble” after planning a multi-city protest aimed at bringing an end to sexual harassment on public transport.  |
| May 5, 2015   | The Chinese government released for public comment the Overseas non-governmental organization management law (Second review draft) the draft law require foreign NGOs to accept a high level of state oversight and control over all their activities by public security authorities and Chinese professional supervisory units. |
| July, 2015    | Dozens of human rights lawyers were arrested.  |
| Dec, 2015     | Seven labor activists from four labor rights NGOs in the country’s southern industrial powerhouse were arrested.   |
| Dec, 2015     | Two volunteers from ENGO were interrogated by police for a tip-off that they were involved in prostitution, since they were conducting a private investigation into local environmental pollution before their detention.  |
| Jan, 2016     | Swedish human rights advocate Peter Dahlin had been detained for three weeks and made what his organization described as an “apparent forced confession” on state television.  |
| Jan, 2016     | Beijing Zhongze Women’s legal Counseling Service Center announced close down, which working on issues that used to be considered relatively “safe” in the past 20 years.   |

- Through 55 newspaper articles from 1 Feb, 2 to 31 March, 2015, the Chinese government conducted a widespread crackdown on advocacy NGO working on issues which used to be considered relatively “safe”, the top three frequently reported working areas is legal service (13 times), labor rights(12 times) and environment (10 times). Table 3 list the crackdown event in the period.
- The crackdown of advocacy NGO conducted both on organization level and workers, the individual level. As shown in chart 1, on the individual level, there are 23 articles reported workers were detained, 13 articles mentioned workers were interrogated. Advocacy NGO workers also faced dispossessed from their rented apartment, public self-criticism on state television, tele-surveillance and other crackdown pattern. Furthermore, donators like Peter Dahlin could also faced crackdown too.
- As shown in chart 2, on the organization level, 18 articles reported the Overseas NGO Management Law that would make many overseas advocacy NGOs, who used to bring theory, skills and funding to China, are difficulty to conduct work in China if the law implemented. 11 articles concerned the revocation of register status and forced to shut down. 10 articles mentioned advocacy NGO was demanded to refuse some foreign funding, or their funding from government was cut because of advocacy work.

## Conclusions

The survival of civil rights and advocacy NGO in the authoritarian state is becoming much more difficult since the Chinese government put “innovate social government” in the official document 2013. The reality is that faced advocacy NGO faced severe revocation crisis. The discourse “develop professional social work, volunteer service and charity undertakings” in annual government work report reflects social governance in China emphasis the centralized state power and followed a strong top-down NGO participation pattern. NGO are getting easier to achieve legal register status, however their advocacy work must be more cautious to follow the “national security” demands of government, else they could faced revocation crisis, both on organization level and individual level.

Our study preliminary illustrates the most prominence character about revocation crisis on advocacy NGO is not based on specific working area because almost every right issues are facing the same crisis. The revocation crisis is aimed at damage the societal support system of advocacy NGO by claiming them as illegal or criminal. To be specific:

- Compared with non-advocacy NGO, advocacy NGO have more foreign funding source also many local funding source. Government legislate to limit not only the input of foreign funding but also the application way of local funding, which could influence the survival of advocacy NGO profoundly.
- While more and more NGO registered to operate under government surveillance, those unregistered or “inappropriate” registered advocacy NGO would become a “standing-out” minority which are easier to be crackdown.
- The advocacy NGO need experienced stuffs, the crackdown on the individual level might hinder more citizens participate in the advocacy work.

Since most of them are concentrate on right issues and working to organized people to strive for their own rights in a less violent way, the crackdown of advocacy NGO might influence the self-governance of citizens. The strict NGO management law might also diminish the possibility of non-advocacy NGO conduct some advocacy work too. Future study could explore whether good governance happened or not under the new social governance pattern, and where advocacy NGO goes in the Post-Mao Era.

## References

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