

**RESOURCE DYNAMICS IN THE PROCESS OF  
FORMAL VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: A CASE  
STUDY OF FRIENDS OF NATURE, CHINA**

**DIAO NA**

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**by**

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

- CSOs - Civil Society Organisations (CSOs).
- ENGOs - Environmental Nongovernmental Organisations
- FON - Friends of Nature
- MCA - Ministry of Civil Affairs
- NGOs - Non-governmental Organisations
- NPOs - Not-for-profit organisations
- TSOs - Third Sector Organisations
- SES - Socio-economic Status

**DINAMIKA SUMBER DALAM PROSES PENGLIBATAN SUKARELA  
FORMAL: SATU  
KAJIAN KES “FRIENDS OF NATURE” CHINA**

**ABSTRAK**

Organisasi sukarela semakin memainkan peranan yang penting dalam proses transformasi sosial masyarakat China. Setiap tahun, penduduk China dari semua lapisan masyarakat mengambil bahagian dalam kegiatan organisasi secara aktif. Mereka menjadi pendorong kuat organisasi sebegini. Namun, kajian empirikal yang menyelidik cara proses di mana sukarelawan mengambil bahagian dalam kegiatan pertubuhan-pertubuhan ini - proses penyertaan sukarela formal – masih kurang lazim. Secara khusus, pemahaman wawasan dan sudut pandang para sukarelawan China yang bekerja di organisasi-organisasi sukarela masih terhad. Oleh sebab itu, pengetahuan mengenai topik ini bermanfaat bagi pengamal mahupun bagi para saintis sosial.

Tesis ini melaporkan kajian yang menjelaskan dinamik yang mendasari proses penyertaan sukarela dengan menggunakan perspektif sumber. Kajian ini cuba (1) untuk memahami pandangan para sukarelawan berkenaan dinamik dalaman yang menyumbang kepada proses penyertaan sukarela formal yang berterusan dan aktif, dan (2) untuk menggambarkan pengetahuan asli berlandaskan penglibatan sukarela China dalam konteks kes organisasi sukarela China.

Tiga pertanyaan asas yang cuba dijawab oleh kajian ini adalah: (1) Apakah jenis sumber dalam proses penyertaan sukarela? (2) Bagaimanakah bentuk dan aliran sumber-sumber dalam proses penyertaan sukarela? (3) Apakah kepentingan jenis sumber-sumber

dan aliran sumber dalam proses penyertaan tersebut?

Untuk menjawab soalan-soalan ini, kajian kes kualitatif dilakukan. Tiga puluh sukarelawan yang bekerja dengan sebuah organisasi sukarela berpengaruh China - *Friends of Nature* atau FON (Persatuan Sahabat Alam Sekitar) - ditemubual untuk mengumpulkan pemahaman mereka terhadap proses tersebut.

Penemuan kajian ini menunjukkan bahawa aliran bertimbal-balik sumber-sumber antara sukarelawan dan FON adalah terbenam dalam proses penyertaan kegiatan FON. Sukarelawan menyumbangkan dan memperoleh berbagai jenis sumber. Sumber ini mungkin termasuk modal manusia, modal sosial, modal budaya dan modal kewangan. Dalam proses ini, transformasi kapasiti, potensi atau sumber para sukarelawan - kepada sumbangan sebenar berlaku; pada masa yang sama sumber tersebut telah berlipat-ganda. Aliran sumber adalah penting untuk kelancaran dan kelangsungan penyertaan mereka. Secara khusus, sumber yang diperolehi sukarelawan melicinkan dan memudahkan semua proses penyertaan sukarela. Satu hubungan timbal-balik telah terbentuk melalui aliran sumber-sumber tersebut

Tegasnya proses aliran sumber yang tertanam dalam proses penyertaan formal sukarela menjadikan proses ini berterusan dan dinamik. Oleh sebab itu, aliran sumber merupakan satu konsep yang berguna untuk memahmai proses penyertaan sukarela. Berdasarkan penemuan ini, penyertaan sukarela formal boleh difahamkan sebagai satu proses dinamik yang melibatkan aliran sumber-sumber bertimbal-balik dan bersandaran antara sukarelawan dan organisasi. Cadangan berdasarkan keputusan kajian ini diajukan dalam tesis ini

# **RESOURCE DYNAMICS IN THE PROCESS OF FORMAL VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION: A CASE STUDY OF FRIENDS OF NATURE, CHINA**

## **ABSTRACT**

Voluntary organisations have become increasingly visible players in social transforming process of Chinese society. Every year, Chinese people from all walks of life actively take part in activities of these organisations. They become life force of these organizations. However, empirical research that examines the process in which volunteers take part in activities of these organisations – the process of formal voluntary participation - is less prevalent. In particular, understanding of insights and viewpoints of Chinese volunteers who work in the voluntary organisations is still limited. Therefore, knowledge of this topic is valuable for practitioners as well as for the social scientists.

This thesis reports on the study undertaken to elucidate the underlying dynamics of the process of voluntary participation by employing a resource perspective. This research attempts (1) to understand volunteers' insights of the underlying dynamics which make the process of formal voluntary participation sustainable and dynamic; and (2) to capture the indigenous concepts in the context of voluntary participation of Chinese volunteers as they appeared in the case study of a Chinese voluntary organisation.

Three fundamental questions which are addressed by this study are: (1) Which types of resources flow in the process of voluntary participation? (2) How do the resources flow in the process of voluntary participation? (3) How important are the different types of resources and the flow of resources in the process of participation?

To answer these questions a qualitative case study was conducted. Thirty

volunteers who work with an influential Chinese voluntary organisation - Friends of Nature (FON) - were interviewed to collect their understanding on such process.

Findings of this study showed that a mutual flow of resources between volunteers and FON were embedded in the process through which volunteers took part in the activities of FON. Volunteers contributed and gained various kinds of resources. These resources may include human capital, social capital, cultural capital and financial capital. In this process, they transformed their potential capacities – the resources – to actual contributions and also multiplied these resources. This flow of resources was significant to the smoothness and continuity of their participation. Specifically, resources which volunteers contributed and gained facilitated the whole process of voluntary participation. A reciprocal relationship was formed through the mutual flow of resources

Evidently such a resource flow which is embedded in the formal voluntary participation process makes this process sustainable and dynamic. Accordingly, resource appears to be useful tool in which the process of voluntary participation can be understood. Based on these findings, it might be appropriate to conceive formal voluntary participation as a dynamic process which involves a mutual or reciprocal circulation of resources between volunteers and the organisation. Suggestions based on these outcomes were offered in this thesis.

# CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

## 1.1 Introduction

Since 1980s, China has witnessed a fast growth of voluntary organisations. Increasingly receiving support from multilateral institutions, public sector, corporate sector and the general public, these organisations have become social players which can not be neglected in China. On the topic of fast growth of voluntary organisations in China, Zhu (2004, p. 57) asserted that proliferation of these organizations was one of the most visible changes of Chinese society. More and more Chinese people are voluntarily taking part in the activities of these organisations to enhance social well-being. With the help of dedicated volunteers voluntary organisations have exerted positive influence on Chinese society (Sun, 1997).

Voluntary organisations benefit greatly from voluntary participation. Therefore, in order to strengthen functions and vitality of these organisations, it is necessary to have a better understanding of formal voluntary participation. Volunteers' participation in these organisations has long been the interest of social scientists, practitioners in voluntary sector, and policy makers.

In their work on volunteering and wellbeing, Thoit and Hewitt (2001, p. 116) argued that previous exploration "has been and continues to be dominated by studies of volunteers' socio-demographic characteristics, motivations, attitudes, and values". Consistent with this argument, the previous studies gave the author the expression that much was written about the contributory factors towards sustainability and continuity of voluntary participation. Voluntary participation, in most cases was described as a social consequence which was resulted from these conditions. The current study suggests



voluntary participation to be viewed as a continuous and dynamic process.

Having laid the foundational proposition, the study further explores the mechanism and dynamics of this sustainable process. Specifically, a case study was conducted to illuminate the resource dynamics which was inherent in the voluntary process. Volunteers who worked with an influential Chinese voluntary organisation - Friends of Nature (FON) - were interviewed to provide rich and in-depth understanding of the process.

At the outset, the introductory chapter will start with the session of discussing the background of current research – the proliferation of voluntary organisations in China. This is followed by the conceptualisation of formal voluntary participation. A statement of the problems existing in previous studies will be provided. Subsequently, the clarification of objectives, research questions, significance, limitations of current research and the description of FON will be provided. This introduction chapter will end with a brief overview of each chapter of this thesis.

## **1.2 Uplifting of Voluntary Organisations in China**

The current research is set on the background of the proliferation of voluntary participation which is evident in Chinese society. These organisations in voluntary sector represent a growing social space where Chinese citizens take action collectively to enhance the social well-being. Millions of Chinese from different ages, income levels, areas and social backgrounds make huge contribution through taking part in activities of these organisations.

### **1.2.1 Defining Voluntary Organisations**

Salamon and Aheier (1992) suggested a widely accepted “structural-operational” definition of voluntary organisations. According to this definition, a broad range of organisations which meet the following five criteria were referred to as voluntary organisations in the context of current research. First, they are organisations which have some structure and regularity to their operations, whether or not they are formally constituted or legally registered. Second, they are private entities. These organisations are not part of the apparatus of the state even though they may receive support from governmental sources. Third, they are non-profit-distributing, which means although they can earn profits, they do not distribute profits to a set of owners or directors. Fourth, they are self-governing. Voluntary organisations should have their own mechanisms for internal governance and are fundamentally in control of their own affairs. Finally, they are voluntary. Participation of these organisations is not legally required or compulsory and they attract some level of voluntary contribution of time or money. With dedicated volunteers, these organisations can play their important roles in the society. In this sense, volunteers’ participation is the most important definitive characteristics of voluntary organisations.

In the discussion of organisations operating outside the commercial organisations of market and state organisations, terms which have been variously applied are non-governmental organisations (NGOs), not-for-profit organisations (NPOs), the third sector organisations (TSOs) and civil society organisations (CSOs). Without willing to join the debate on nuances of these terms, in the context of this thesis, the research employs the term of voluntary organisation to emphasise the voluntary characteristics which differentiates voluntary organisations from organisations in other social sectors.

### 1.2.2 Background of Growth of Voluntary Organisations

The particular socio-political situations of China<sup>1</sup> gave rise to the surge of voluntary organisations. China has been undergoing a dramatic social transition, which is caused by the reform and opening up policy since 1980s. The profound change from the planned economy to the market economy and the loosening of political control has fostered a favorable environment for the development of voluntary organisations (Saich, 2000; Ma, 2002; Ding, 2004; Yang, 2005). In their research paper of Asia's Third Sector, Lyons and Hasan (2002, p.108) asserted that in China

“communist regimes are slowly transforming into market style economy, the state and party are encouraging the emergence of genuine people's organisations at the grassroots”.

Ding (2004, p. 208) argued that before the reforms, a very powerful and ubiquitous government exerted control on almost every facet of social life. Government provided all kinds of social service and pursued public goods on behalf of the people. Therefore, voluntary organisations were unthinkable in Chinese society where the government was ubiquitous.

Changes of the Chinese society came in the 1980s due to the political, administrative, and social reforms (Wang et al., 2001; Ma, 2002; Wang & He, 2004; Zhu, 2004; Ma, 2008). Ma (2002, p. 312) stated:

“the most significant change in China's official policy toward NGOs since the late 1970s is the government's recognition of the non-governmental efforts as an indispensable part of China's economic and social development”.

---

<sup>1</sup> Researchers have explored the background in which the uplifting of voluntary happens globally. According to Salamon (1994, pp. 115-117), four crises (the crisis of the welfare state, the crisis of development, the crisis of the environment and the crisis of socialism) and two revolutions (the communications revolution and the bourgeois revolution) contribute to the development of organised voluntary action.

Furthermore, as mentioned by Saich (2000, p. 134), down-sizing of the public sector necessitated the expansion of the voluntary organisations. These organisations took on the functions which the governments were unable or unwilling to perform.

Tan (2005, p. 47) summarised that analysis on the causal factors of the existing and development of civil society often focus on two interlocking factors: market and state. However, researchers (Ma, 2002; Ding, 2004; Yang, 2005) identified other factors which may contribute to the rise of these organisations.

In this work on Chinese volunteers, Ding (2004, p. 208) attributed the uplift of voluntary organisations in China to the following factors: globalization, economic integration and expansion of on telecommunications. Yang (2005, p. 46) also emphasised the positive influence that media, internet and international organisations had on the growth of voluntary organisations.

### **1.2.3 Current Status of Voluntary Organisations in China**

Indeed, the prominence of the voluntary organisations has been recognized as a significant social phenomenon by many observers (Saich, 2000; Ma, 2002; Zhu, 2004; Yang, 2005). More and more organisations are engaged in various areas of social life of Chinese people. These organisations have significant impacts on the many aspects of Chinese society.

Accordingly, the current section of this thesis examines briefly the current status of the voluntary organisations in Chinese society by presenting the categories, quantitative growth, scope of activities and functions of the organisations.

### 1.2.3 (a) Categories and Quantitative Growth of Voluntary Organisations

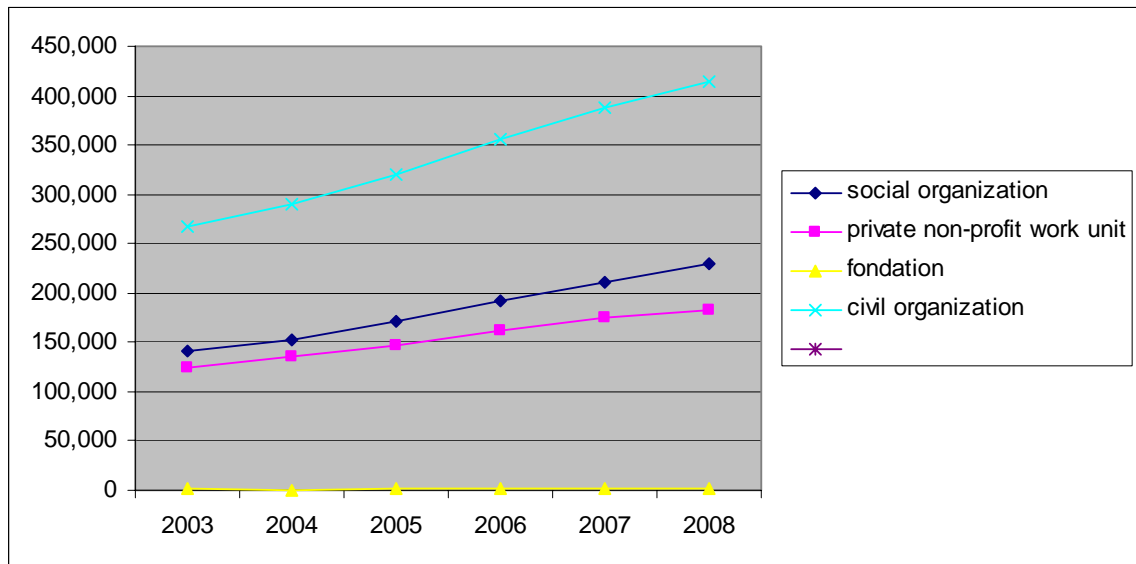
The organisations which have registered with Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) and its subsidiaries throughout the country according to Chinese official regulations are officially termed as “*minjian zuzhi*” (civilian organisation). These formally registered organisations are categorized into two groups: “*shehui tuanti*” (social organisation), ‘*minban fei qiye danwei*’ (private non-profit work units) and foundations.

This sector has been developing within a highly restrictive legislative framework, including “*shehui tuanti dengji guanli tiaoli*” (“Regulations on the registration and management of social organisations”), “*minban fei qiye danwei guanli zanxing tiaoli*” (“Provisional regulations on the registration and management of private non-profit work units”). According to these regulations, *shehui tuanti* are those not-for-profitable organisations which are voluntarily established for the achievement of members’ shared interests or purposes. *Minban fei qiye danwei* are providers of social services whose purposes are not to maximize profits.

Figure 1.1 shows the fast growth of *minjian zuzhi* over the last six years nationwide. Statistical data derived from MCA (2009) demonstrated that the total number of civilian organisations nationwide rose to 413,660 in 2008 including 229, 681 social organisations, 182,382 private non-profit work units and 1,597 foundations by the end of 2008.

The numbers shown in Figure 1.1 just involves the officially registered *mianjin zuzhi*. In fact, voluntary organisations registered with MCA only occupy a small corner of the vast landscapes. Numerous voluntary organisations that have been established without formal registration as civilian organisations operate throughout the country. However, there is no reliable data on how many are these non-registered organisations.

Tao (2005, p. 54) estimated that there were 2,000,000 to 2,700,000 unregistered voluntary organizations around China by the year 2005.



Source: adapted from Ministry of Civil Affairs (2009, p21)

**Figure 1.1** Numbers of *mianjian zuzhi* in China

### 1.2.3 (b) Scope of Activities

Currently, a large amount of voluntary organisations are engaged in various kinds of social activities: they help to provide social services and humanitarian aids; they work for the interests of people living with HIV/AIDS; they promote children's rights; they provide health care to the senior citizens; and they give free tutorial to the underprivileged children; and they protect wild animals. The different kinds of activities in which those registered organisations were engaged by the year 2008 were: research, healthcare, education, business and industrial services, in social service, culture, sports, environmental protection, law service, religion, rural development, employment and training, international cooperation and other areas (Ministry of Civil affairs, 2009).

### **1.2.3 (c) Functions and Roles of Voluntary Organisations**

Chinese society has been undergoing intensive dramatic social transition of social structure, social values and social wealth system (Zheng, 1996. p.78). In an era of transition, individuals and the society as a whole are facing huge challenges. Having said this, it is critical to ask ourselves the following questions. What are the efficient ways to provide important public goods? How can we resolve the growing social problems? And , what can we do to protect the interests of vulnerable and marginalized social groups? Voluntary organisations may provide effective solutions to these challenges.

Chinese voluntary organisations are efficient in fulfilling social welfare functions (Tan, 2005; Xing & Zhang, 2006). Accompanied with rapid economic growth and socio economic transition of China, demands of social services are increasing.

At the same time, the political and administrative reforms have resulted in down sizing and lay-off in government organisations (Saich, 2000; Burns, 2003). Government who fails to adequately meet such increasing has to turn to the voluntary sector for help (Ma, 2002). Hence, a great many voluntary organisations have been recently established to carry these expansive responsibilities to meet the increasing social demands (Lu, 2005; Tan, 2005; Liu et al., 2000).

The achievements which China has made since the start of reform have attracted global attention. However, China continuously face such social problems as social exclusion, inadequacy of social safety nets, degradation of environmental and HIV/AIDS. The voluntary organisations might be a key to unlock these problems. Lu (2005, p. 1) pointed out:

“much hope has been pinned on their role in helping to meet the enormous challenges which China currently faces in addressing a large number of social problems”.

These organisations encourage Chinese people participate in public affairs and decision making (Tan, 2005). They also help in shaping the relationship between the government and the general public by facilitating a more effective coordination mechanism to deal with the social problems. In summary, voluntary organisations in China facilitate the adaptation of people to the dramatic social changes and eventually contribute to the stability of the society.

### **1.3 Formal Voluntary Participation**

Volunteers make enormous contribution through formal voluntary participation. The following section will briefly discuss how formal voluntary participation is defined and categorized in the literature.

#### **1.3.1 Defining Formal Voluntary Participation**

With considerable variations, definitions of formal voluntary participation adopted by previous researchers shared four common defining tenets (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 695; Musick, 2000, Pp. 215-216; Tan, 2005, p. 34).

The first tenet is that voluntary participation should be based on free will of people. Secondly, voluntary participation should not for monetary rewards. This characteristic differentiates voluntary participation from the paid work which is mainly conducted for the monetary rewards<sup>2</sup>. Thirdly, voluntary participation should benefit individuals out of the immediate family of volunteers, organisation with specific causes and society as a whole. Finally, people take part in activities of some formal organisation.

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<sup>2</sup> There are some debates of if it is appropriate that any activity which is remunerated is defined as voluntary activity. See further discussion in Wilson (2000, p. 216).



In the context of current analysis, formal voluntary participation refers to people's participation in activities of formal organisations which will benefit to individuals, organisations with specific causes or society on the basis of free will and not for monetary rewards.

### **1.3.2 Typology of the Formal Voluntary Participation**

A number of typologies have been proposed for categorising formal voluntary participation (Brudey & Warren, 1990; Gilder et al., 2005). For instance, Gilder et al., (2005) proposed a typology to address organisational context of voluntary participation. They identified three types of formal voluntary participation: voluntary participation in public sector, business sector and voluntary sector. For instance, they may take part in activities organized by their employers. It is worth mentioning that although voluntarism is also found in public and private sector organisations, much more so in the voluntary organisations. This study therefore focuses exclusively on people's participation in voluntary organisations.

Independent sector and United Nation Volunteers (2001) differentiated three types of formal voluntary participation based on functions: (1) philanthropy or service to others (e.g. people give services by teaching and mentoring others); (2) campaign and advocacy (e.g. people volunteer in an environmental movement); and (3) participation and self-governance (e.g. people become members of government consultative bodies). Similarly, Thoits and Hewitt (2001, p.116) in their research paper identified three types of formal voluntary participation: direct provision of services, political activism and community representation.

#### **1.4 Formal Volunteers in China**

Voluntary service is increasingly considered as the basis on which a harmonious society can be established. In China, a handful of local and international voluntary organisations are engaged in service provision at the community level (Ma, 2002; Tan, 2005; Zhu, 2004). The first voluntary group on community level was established in Xinxing community of Tianjin city in 1983. Ever since then, especially in large cities, neighborhood-based voluntary organisations have been growing rapidly (Ding, 1999; Ma, 2008). Volunteers provide services to people in need through these organisations.

By the year 1996, in Guangzhou, voluntary service organisations existed in 80 percent of communities and the total number of 36,615 volunteers made their contributions through these organisations (Guangzhou government statistics 1996, cited in Ding, 1999, p. 24). Ding (1999, p. 56) found that in the Xinxing community, 1,600 volunteers joined a community-based volunteer association to provided six categories of services to 53,049 residents. There were over 75,000 voluntary groups or associations that are active in the communities throughout China to provide needed social services through 16,000,000 community volunteers by the year 2008 (Guo, 2009, p. 58).

Chinese people work in all kinds of voluntary organisations to pursue the causes they believe in. However, researchers have primarily given their attention to the volunteers' participation in philanthropy or service voluntary organisations rather than in other types of voluntary organisations (Ding, 1999; Tan, 2005). Volunteers also take part activities of organisations in other areas, such as environmental, human rights, public health and cultural exchange. For instance, volunteers take part in HIV/AIDS prevention activities organised by Red Ribbon; they participate activities of Earth Village to protect the wild animals and provide free training for migrant workers through Peasant Lady.

However, volunteers' experience in other types of voluntary organizations has rarely attracted researchers' attention.

### **1.5 Problem Statement**

Voluntary organisations are increasingly exerting positive influence on Chinese society. Relying on volunteers, these voluntary organisations are able to carry out their projects and eventually achieve their missions. If volunteers become less active, so would these organizations. Formal voluntary participation is thus the foundation for the success of the organisations. Accordingly, understanding on formal voluntary participation is vital for vitality and sustainability of voluntary organisations.

Unsurprisingly, formal voluntary participation has been studied extensively by researchers. Previous studies focusing on the determinants of voluntary participation were intensive. A wide range of factors which might influence voluntary participation have been identified. These studies viewed voluntary participation as social consequence which was affected by these factors. However, few researchers examined voluntary participation as a dynamic process. Furthermore, most of the previous studies were descriptive in nature. What was absent in the literature is the exploration on the dynamics which make this process sustainable and continuous.

Previous studies described volunteers' contributions to the organisation they worked with and the benefits they would enjoy in the process of voluntary participation. Although those studies did not employ the concept of resource directly, they implied that some resources were contributed and some resources were gained by volunteers when they took part in activities of voluntary organisations. However, the process in which volunteers took part in the activities of voluntary organisations was not fully understood

through the lens of resource.

In addition, a considerable number of studies on voluntary participation employed quantitative methodology. They generally employed preset and close-ended questions to understand voluntary participation. Very few studies have examined how volunteers understand and perceive the dynamics of the process of voluntary participation.

Given these findings, the current study investigates the social dynamics which is embedded in the process of voluntary participation by adapting a resource perspective. Due to the exploratory nature of this work, qualitative methodology was used. Volunteers of FON were interviewed to capture their understanding and perceptions.

## **1.6 Research Questions**

The following questions are resolved by this research:

- 1) Which types of resources flow in the process of voluntary participation?
- 2) How do the resources flow in the process of voluntary participation?
- 3) How important are the different types of resources and the flow of resources in the process of participation?

## **1.7 Significance of the Research**

This current research is grounded in the following concerns. In the first place, this research is theoretically innovating. Knowledge generated in this research would be helpful in understanding the underlying dynamics which sustain the formal voluntary participation process.

Secondly, this research focuses on volunteers' own insights and perceptions of the underlying dynamics of formal voluntary participation. Thus, at a methodological level, this research has the merit of exploring formal voluntary participation in a qualitative way. Volunteers need to be understood in a way that the diversity of the insights they hold can be captured better.

Thirdly, most of the studies of formal voluntary participation focus on formal voluntary participation in Western cultures. In contrast, this research pays attention to the indigenous concepts in the context of formal voluntary participation in Chinese society. Therefore, the current research helps to understand how Chinese volunteers understand voluntary participation in the context of formal voluntary organisations.

Finally, understanding the dynamics of process is germane for the voluntary organisations. The more voluntary organisations know about what makes the process of formal voluntary participation sustainable, the easier these organisations provide volunteers with satisfactory experiences. For many voluntary organisations, exploration of the process is instructive for the ways in which volunteers can be recruited and managed effectively. Knowledge of this issue underpins improvements in what organisations can do to enable and encourage their volunteering.

In conclusion, knowledge generated in current study is valuable for the social scientists and the practitioners who are interested in understanding the underlying social dynamics which sustains and underpins formal voluntary participation.

## **1.8 Objectives of the Research**

The objectives of the current study are:

- 1) to understand volunteers' insights of the underlying dynamics which make the

process of formal voluntary participation sustainable and dynamic.

- 2) to capture the indigenous concepts in the context of voluntary participation of Chinese volunteers as these concepts appeared in the case study of a Chinese voluntary organisation.

## **1.9 Overview of the Thesis**

The rest of the thesis proceeds as follows. Chapter 2 gives a brief overview of the relevant literature. Chapter 3 outlines the theoretical framework in which this research is conducted. Chapter 4 explains the methodology of this study. Chapter 5 reports the findings and discussions of the current study. Chapter 6 further summarizes this research by presenting concluding arguments, theoretical contributions and implications of this research.

## **CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW**

### **2.1 Introduction**

A review of the existing literature shows that most of the researchers in this area have thought of formal voluntary participation as social activity which is influenced by certain social and individual factors. Obviously, formal voluntary participation is viewed as social activity which is caused by certain social and individual circumstances. Thus, they have shed light on the determinants of formal voluntary participation. However, formal voluntary participation has not been examined thoroughly as a dynamic social process. Understanding on the process through which volunteers take part in the activities of voluntary organisations is limited.

As will be presented in the first section of this chapter, a systematic review of literature dealing with determinates of formal voluntary participation is given. Subsequently, current understanding of the process is summarised in the second section of the current chapter. The last part of this chapter highlights the limitations of previous studies.

### **2.2 Formal Voluntary Participation as Consequence: Factors Associated with Formal Voluntary Participation**

Reed and Selbee (2000, p. 572) argued:

“The desire by many voluntary organisations to recruit more volunteers more efficiently is creating an interest through the sector in understanding the characteristics of individuals who contribute time and effort to such organizations.”

Consequently, a dominant theme of the voluntary participation literature has been the identification of the individual characteristics which are associated with voluntary participation.

Two theoretical approaches were identified from the literature. One approach accounted for volunteers' participation through examining socio-structural factors, such as socio-economic status, social connectedness and ethical values of people (Wilson, 2000; Choi, 2003; Mutchler et al., 2003; Tang, 2008). Another approach explained voluntary participation by understanding the motivations of voluntary participation (Bussel & Forbes, 2002; Oesterle et al., 2004; Handy & Brudney, 2007; Laverie & McDonald, 2007).

### **2.2.1 Social Structural Approach**

The first approach, social structural approach explored the influence that some social structural factors had on voluntary participation (Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Sokolowski, 1996; Bradley, 2000; Jones, 2006).

Social structural factors are those factors which “define an individual’s position in the social structure” (Herzog & Morgan, 1993, Pp. 123-124, cited in Choi, 2003, p. 180). Researchers who adopt this approach examined the influence of socioeconomic status, level of social integration and ethical values of volunteers had on the voluntary participation.



### **2.2.1 (a) Socioeconomic Status**

According to Tang<sup>3</sup> (2008, p. 3), socioeconomic status (SES) is one of the most important factors which might affect voluntary participation. Indicators of SES-age, gender, ethnicity, level of education, income, and marital status proved to be significant determinants of voluntary participation (Fischer et al., 1991; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Choi, 2003; Liu & Besser, 2003).

#### **i Age, Gender and Race**

Previous studies found that age significantly affected voluntary participation (Bradley, 2000; Liu & Besser, 2003). Voluntary participation peaks in middle age and as people age, the rate of participation decreases (Bradley, 2000; Liu & Besser, 2003; Timbrell, 2006).

Bradley (2000), for example, found that in America those people belonging to 30 to 49 age group took part in voluntary activities at the highest rate while the older adults (ages 50-plus) was at the lower rate. The senior citizens who have left the paid work are expected to provide the majority of voluntary manpower due to the availability of free time (Mutchler et al., 2003). Surprisingly, the lowest level of participation was found among those senior citizens above 65 years (Timbrell, 2006). These findings suggested a curvilinear effect which age had on voluntary participation (Wilson & Musick, 1997, p. 698).

Many researchers attributed such age variation of voluntary participation to life course effect (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Rotolo, 2000; Liu & Besser, 2003; Tang, 2006).

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<sup>3</sup> Tang (2008, p. 3) suggested that SES could be measured by income, profession, education, employment status, home ownership, residence location, and race.

Liu and Besser (2003) argued that voluntary participation

“gradually increase as income increases and adults become parents with children in school and little league, etc., and then decreasing in old age as income and health decline”.

In the voluntary market, women are supposed to be major source of voluntary labour force. However, some studies showed that females in comparison to males were not likely to volunteer formally but informally (Fischer et al., 1991; Wilson & Musick, 1997).

Even though the influence that gender had on the likelihood of formal voluntary participation was insignificant, many studies showed that gender did significantly influence the specific types of activities which volunteers took part in (Fischer et al., 1991; Anheier & Salamon, 1999; Choi, 2003).

In a cross-country research of volunteering, Anheier and Salamon (1999) found that women tended to take on the role of services and health care. In contrast, men were more active in the areas of sports, recreation, and culture activities. In addition, men were more likely to undertake committee work-thirty percent versus twenty-two percent for women-and less likely undertake befriending and visiting activities-seventeen percent versus twenty-five percent.

In the same respect, Fischer et al., (1991) found that elderly were more likely to do yard work, repair, and work for citizen-types of organisations. Elderly women, on the other hand, were more likely to do cooking and work for church related organisations. Such finding was confirmed by the research carried out by Choi (2003) who found that men were more likely to take part in physically demanding activities than women. The results of these studies indicated that both women and men tended to take part in voluntary activities which were the extension of their traditional roles in the family.

Although relatively little attention has been given to the relationship between race and participation in voluntary organisations, previous studies showed that racial difference was eliminated when other variables like education, income, occupational status and social capital were controlled (Latting, 1990; Brown & Ferris, 2007). Smith (1994, p. 249) even reported that once other variables are controlled, Blacks had slightly higher voluntary participation rates than Whites.

## **ii Education**

Many studies investigated the effects of education on voluntary participation (Fischer et al., 1991; Ding, 1999; Wilson, 2000; Choi, 2003; Wang, 2005; Egerton & Mullan, 2008; Li, 2009). Briefly, the results consistently showed that people with higher level of education (measured by the number of years in education) are more likely to volunteer formally than those with lower education level. An earlier study conducted among Chinese youth volunteers by Ding (1999) found that 53% of the respondents were collegiate students. Another recent research was recently carried out by Li (2009) in Hubei province of China. The results showed that voluntary participation was most prevalent among people having college education (55%) and those having secondary education (38%). It is least so for those having primary education (11%).

Studies conducted among volunteers in other countries reached similar results. With regard to role of education, a study found that older adults who volunteered had higher level of education (12.8 years) than non-volunteers (10.6 years) (Choi, 2003). Moreover, some studies demonstrated that people with higher level of educational attainment donated more time on voluntary organisations than those with lower level (Fischer et al., 1991; Tang, 2008).

Using longitudinal data from the Americans' Changing Lives surveys, Tang (2008) examined the association of education and income with the type and scope of voluntary organisations which older people took part in. The findings demonstrated that the highly educated older adults were more likely than their less educated counterparts to volunteer in all five types of organisations (i.e., religious, educational, political, senior citizen, and others) and devoted more hours to these organisations. These studies indicated that level of education could be used as a useful predictor of formal voluntary participation.

### **iii Paid work: Working Status, Occupation and Level of Income**

Many studies suggested that older adults who have paid work were more likely to get involved in voluntary activities than those who do not (Caro & Bass, 1997; Wilson, 2000; Morrow-Howell, 2007). Staying in the job market may increase the chances of getting access to recruitment opportunities. However some studies found that for those who already did voluntary work before their retirement, retirement may increase the number of hours dedicated towards voluntary work (Caro & Bass, 1997; Wilson, 2000). These studies indicated that working status was also relevant to voluntary activities.

Occupation was found as an important factor which influences likeness of voluntary participation. Studies indicated that people having non-manual positions (e.g. managerial or professional work) were more likely to volunteer than those in semi or unskilled work (e.g. clerical, sales, or blue-collar occupations) (Wilson & Musick, 1997; Choi, 2003). On the topic of occupation and formal voluntary participation Rotolo and Wilson (2004) found that professional and managerial workers tended to work according to more flexible schedules than manual workers and therefore they were more likely to

be asked to join voluntary organisations than the manual workers.

Increase of the income could lead to higher possibility of voluntary participation (Fischer, et al., 1991; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Bradley, 2000). Choi (2003, p. 183) explained: “The rationale behind this can be attributed to the ability to cover the extra costs associated with volunteering (i.e., transportation, food, and lodging)”.

#### **iv Health Status**

Previous studies showed significant positive correlations between health status and the possibility of formal voluntary participation (Fischer et al., 1991; Herzog & Morgan, 1993; Caro & Bass, 1997; Chambre, 1993). Wilson & Musick (1997, p. 699), on the topic of the relationship between health and voluntary participation, stated that “the ability to do volunteer work, or to assist those in need of help, depends on one's physical capabilities”.

To sum up, formal voluntary participation is not distributed evenly among the general population, but based on SES which people occupy. Besides SES factors, there are other individual characteristics which might influence formal voluntary participation. These factors will be examined briefly in the following section.

#### **2.2.1 (b) Social Connections**

Another group of investigators have explained voluntary participation by the social ties and interactions through which individuals are connected to other members of society (Oliver, 1984; Sokolowski, 1996). They found that level of social connections in which people are embedded in was positively related to voluntary participation. Sokolowski (1996, p. 260) named this approach “micro-structural model”.

The literature demonstrated that personal ties seemed to be an important influence. One of those was Oliver (1984) who conducted an investigation of the 1456 Detroit residents who were nonmembers, token members, or active members (either currently active or past leaders) of their neighbourhood associations. The results revealed that members knew more people in their neighborhood than nonmembers, and active members knew more people than less active members. The underlying reason is that probably people who have more personal ties than others can get access to information through their friends and acquaintances.

Organisational ties that people have are also related to voluntary participation. Jackson et al., (1995), in their research about volunteering and charitable giving, found that participation in church promoted voluntary participation. A more recent work of Putman (2000) consistently demonstrated that members of formal groups were likely to take part in voluntary activities efforts than those nonmembers.

### **2.2.1(c) Ethical Values, Norms and Attitudes**

A number of studies demonstrated that cultural values, norms and attitudes had important influence on formal voluntary participation (Wilson, 2000; Mutchler et al., 2003). The stronger pro-social values people profess (e.g. belief in the importance of serving or helping others and the attitude of taking social responsibility), the more likely people participate in voluntary activities which are consistent with these values (Mutchler et al., 2003). People's pro-social values enormously shaped voluntary participation. In summary, Thoits and Hewitt (2001, p. 117) asserted that "civic-oriented values and attitudes do positively influence volunteerism".

Hodgkinson and Weitzman (1994, cited in Mutchler et al., 2003), reported a substantially higher level of volunteering among people who attended religious services weekly than among those who did not attend any religious services. Brown and Ferris (2007, p. 95) found that people who believed that religion was very important for them volunteered 5.8 more time per year than those do not think so.

Religiosity may encourage voluntary participation since religious faiths promote helping others as a valued social activity and religious organisations provide convenient vehicles for engaging in such voluntary activity (Caro & Bass 1997; Brown & Ferris, 2004; Wilson & Janoski, 1995).

One study investigating whether or not cultural individualism was related to greater levels of pro-social behavior provided different understanding on this issue (Kimmelmeier et al., 2006). They argued:

“patterns of giving and volunteering are shaped by core cultural values of individualism, such as self-actualization, individual achievement, and personal autonomy” (p. 327).

To sum up, the previous studies indicated that socio-economic status, level of social connections and ethical values may have direct influence on voluntary behaviors.

### **2.2.2 Motivational Factors**

Whereas the social structural approach emphasised the significance of social structural factors, another group of studies largely focused on what motive people to volunteer (Cnaan & Goldberg- Glenn, 1991). According to Handy and Brudney (2007, p. 7), motivations influence not only people’s decision to initiate voluntary actions but also their “commitment, involvement and performance of the work”. Clarifying motives of voluntary participation is valuable for volunteer managers who seek to recruit more

volunteers and to make them work more efficiently (Oesterle et al., 2004; Handy & Brudney, 2007; Laverie & McDonald, 2007).

Many studies classified motives of volunteers into two major domains: other centered interests or collective motivations and self interests or individual motivations (Clary & Snyder, 1991; Wilson & Musick, 1997; Wilson, 2000). One influential research was conducted by Clary and Snyder (1991) who identified six potential motives of voluntary participation: values (voluntary participation allows individuals to express altruistic and humanitarian values), understanding (voluntary participation provides learning experiences), social (volunteers strengthens their social interaction and approval), career (volunteers gain career-related benefits), protective (volunteers reduce negative feelings about oneself) and enhancement (voluntary promote positive feelings of self).

Previous studies showed that volunteers acted simultaneously on both other centered and self-centered reasons. In a qualitative research of 24 young volunteers in China, for instance, Wu (2008) identified three types of motivations: traditional motives related to social responsibility, modern motives centered in self-development, and post modern motives around happiness. He also illuminated the co-existence of these motives. Indeed, a mixture of collective and personal motives was identified when examining motives of volunteers.

Bowman (2004, p. 250) summarised so well the relationship between altruism and egoism by the following few words: “there is no logical incompatibility in altruism and egoism working together to motivate volunteers”. However, self-oriented and other-oriented interests may affect volunteers in different ways. A study comparing reasons for volunteering in American and Canada found that collective oriented concerns were the