

# *The Emergence of Social Corporatism in China: Nonprofit Organizations, Private Foundations, and the State\**

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## *Abstract*

During the past two decades, one of the most significant phenomena in the Chinese social sector has been the proliferation of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and private foundations. The two dominant approaches to interpret state-society relations (state corporatism and liberal civil society) are insufficient to explain their relations with the Chinese state. This article revives and tests an understudied model, social corporatism, by presenting two detailed case studies on Non-Profit Incubator (NPI) and China Foundation Center (CFC). The two agencies serve as new intermediary organizations in interest representation and intermediation between the state and NPOs and private foundations. In line with the three indicators of social corporatism, NPI and CFC were initiated in a bottom-up or spontaneous manner, enhanced the social integration

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in NPOs and private foundations, and facilitated the enactment of five new government policies. The two cases support the applicability of social corporatism in explaining NPO–government and private foundation–government relations in China.

## 1. Introduction

During the past two decades, one of the most significant phenomena in the Chinese social sector has been the proliferation of nonprofit organizations (NPOs) and private foundations.<sup>1</sup> In terms of the present regulations, social organizations or registered non-governmental organizations (NGOs) in China include three categories: social associations (SAs, 社會團體 *shehui tuanti*), nonprofit organizations (社會服務機構 *shehui fuwu jigou*), and foundations (基金會 *jijinhui*). SAs are membership-based interest groups, including industrial associations, professional associations, academic associations, and united associations. NPOs are social service providers and grassroots organizations, including private schools, private hospitals, social service agencies, environmental organizations, nonprofit research institutes, and so forth. Foundations are organizations specialized in fund-raising and grant-making, including public foundations and private foundations.

In contrast to SAs and public foundations, which are often established in a top-down fashion by the state, particularly in the early market transition period, the majority of NPOs and private foundations are usually initiated in a bottom-up manner by ordinary citizens, the middle class, and the wealthy. Since 2000, NPOs and private foundations have proliferated significantly. According to the official statistics, there were about 6,000 NPOs in 1999, while by the end of 2014 the number of NPOs had increased about 50-fold to around 292,000. The number of private foundations in 2014 was 2,610, roughly twice the number of public foundations (1,470 in 2014).<sup>2</sup> By contrast, SAs increased only about twofold, from 137,000 in 1999 to 300,000 in 2014.<sup>3</sup> The proportion of SAs versus NPOs among the overall social organizations was 96 percent versus 4 percent in 1999, but it became 51 percent versus 48 percent in 2014. This is a dramatic shift in the Chinese NGO sector: the proportions of government-organized SAs and bottom-up-initiated NPOs in social organizations become closer (both about 50 percent), and the number of private foundations far exceeds the number of public foundations.