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Promoting Compulsory Education in Rural China: What Are the NPOs Doing?

Abstract Due to imbalanced social and economic development, education in poverty-stricken rural areas in China is lagging behind that of urban areas. The current study explores the role of the nonprofit organizations (NPOs) involved in rural compulsory education promotion. Results show that the NPOs are providing a variety of programs to promote rural compulsory education, and the types of programs, as well as their implementation strategies and impact, are influenced by their registration statuses and background characteristics. Due to lack of coordination and skills, there still remain service gaps, and the quality of the existing programs is questionable. The article proposes strategies to strengthen the nonprofit sector's work in rural compulsory education.

Keywords rural education, compulsory education, non-profit organization (NPO), the nonprofit sector

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Introduction

Access to quality basic education is an important part of human welfare and also a key way out of poverty (Gough, 2004; World Bank, 2004). Currently in rural China, particularly the poverty-stricken central and western regions, education lags behind that of urban areas in terms of infrastructure, instructional quality, and student support (China Bureau of Theoretical Research, 2010; China Institute for Reform and Development, 2008).

In order to address this problem, the Chinese government has launched a series of public initiatives (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2006; Xiang & Yun, 2006; Zhang, 2008). In addition, the government encourages the market sector to assist its mission through channels such as establishing private schools (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2002). Nonprofits, since their emergence in the 1980s, have also been active participants

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in rural education promotion. However, because the nonprofit sector is relatively young, there is little systematic knowledge regarding how the sector works to promote rural education, e.g., the types of services Chinese private nonprofit organizations (NPOs) are offering.

This knowledge gap regarding the role of the nonprofit sector makes it hard to evaluate the efficiency and effectiveness of the current rural compulsory education promotion system, because it is not known whether the NPOs are covering enough of the service gaps left by public and commercial programs. Without the basic knowledge of the NPOs' roles, it is also impossible to propose ways to strengthen the sector, its collaboration with other sectors, and the entire compulsory education promotion system.

The current study aims to bridge this knowledge gap by exploring an exhaustive snowball sample of NPOs involved in rural education promotion in China. This paper will start with an introduction to the current state of rural compulsory education in China, elaborating the problem, the contributing factors, as well as the current responses from the government and private investors. Then, it will focus on the role of the NPOs. A brief overview of the data collection methods will be provided. Afterwards, the paper will (1) provide a demographic overview of the NPOs currently involved in rural education promotion; (2) describe program areas and characteristics, illustrating how NPOs' registration and background characteristics influence the services they provide; (3) discuss the NPOs' program impact, strengths, and limitations; and (4) propose ways to improve NPOs' performance and to maximize their contribution to rural education promotion.

Background

Compulsory Education in Rural China

In China, compulsory education (six years of primary school plus three years of middle school) is a right and obligation for all Chinese children and adolescents who have reached school age (National People's Congress, 2006). The system was introduced in 1985, and by the end of 2009, according to the government, compulsory education had been implemented in 99.5% of all counties in the nation, covering 99.7% of the population. Primary school and middle school net enrollment rates were as high as 99.4% and 99% respectively; and the rate of completing compulsory education reached 90.8% (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2010; Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2010).

These achievements seem impressive. Furthermore, a nationwide coverage rate masked the severe imbalances that exist between rural and urban areas. For example, controlling for variables such as gender, age, ethnicity, and family income, rural children are 3.7 times less likely than urban children to enroll in school (Hong, 2010).

Moreover, the rate of coverage does not say anything about the quality of the education provided. Rural schools are lagging behind both in terms of physical infrastructure and teacher quality (China Bureau of Theoretical Research, 2010). Many rural school buildings are classified as extremely dangerous and should not house students (Pan, 2005; Zhang, 2004). In 2007, 73.8% of urban primary schools were equipped with proper infrastructure to carry out experimental teaching for science classes, while only 53.1% rural schools had these equipments (China Institute for Reform and Development, 2008). In urban areas, about 60% of the primary school teachers have a 2- or 3-year junior college education, and more than 40% of middle school teachers have a 4-year college education. However, in the rural areas, the figures are only 25% and 11% respectively (China Institute for Reform and Development, 2005).¹ Rural schools rely more heavily on substitute or *daike* teachers, many of whom are not qualified to teach² (Robinson & Yi, 2008). It has been reported that 94% of all China's substitute teachers work in rural and township schools (China Institute for Reform and Development, 2005). As a result, there is a significant achievement gap between rural students and urban students (Ren, 2007).

Five macro level factors have been identified by previous studies as dragging rural compulsory education back. First, in the 1980s, China started to decentralize the education finance system, placing the responsibility for education on local governments (Chen, 2009; Mei & Wang, 2006). Since rural areas, especially those in the central and western regions of China, were (and still are) significantly poorer than urban and coastal regions, they had significantly fewer resources to invest in education (Hannum, 2005; Hannum & Park, 2002;

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¹ The newly released UNDP report *China Human Development Report 2007/2008: Access for All: Basic Public Services for 1.3 Billion People* (China Institute for Reform and Development, 2008) on China showed a very high "teacher qualification rate." However the rate was calculated using full-time teachers, which does not take into account the informal teachers. Furthermore, some schools do not have a teacher at all. Thus, the number is inflated.

² In China substitute or *daike* teachers consist of two groups: unqualified teachers employed on a temporary basis (due to a shortage of qualified teachers) and qualified teachers employed on the same terms and conditions as unqualified teachers (due to the lack of funding of lack of government-designated positions, or *bianzhi*). *The Teachers Law* (1993) requires all primary school teachers to hold at least a diploma from normal teacher training schools or *zhongdeng shifan xuexiao*, and all middle school teachers to hold at least a diploma from teachers' colleges or *gaodeng shifan xuexiao*, or a university degree. *The Amendment of the Compulsory Education Law* (2005) required all teachers to have recognized teaching qualifications.

Saich, 2008; Tsang, 2002; Zhang & Kanbur, 2005). It was not until the mid-1990s that China started to recentralize the system. However, the regional disparities in education spending kept increasing after these policy changes (Zhao, 2009).

Second, public spending on compulsory education is not only imbalanced, but also insufficient in general. For the past fifteen years, the Chinese government has never achieved its goal of spending 4% of total GDP on education (Li, 2006; Tang & Yang, 2008).³ In fact, the government has often failed to pay the budgeted amount. From 1996 to 2000, for example, each year, the central and provincial governments allocated RMB 100 billion less than planned to cities and counties (Zhang, 2004). Moreover, in an effort to reduce rural families' tax and tuition burdens, the central government prohibits local governments from raising extra taxes, fees, or surcharges for education (Peng, 2002). This has further limited funding for rural education.

Third, because of the lack of funding, many rural teachers are not paid. It was estimated that in 2001, the central and local governments combined owed RMB 18 billion in teachers' wages, which was equal to the annual wage of the 2 million rural teachers combined (Zhang, 2004). Low wages, or sometimes no wages, have caused teacher burnout, teacher dropout, and discouraged qualified individuals from becoming teachers in rural areas (Zhao, 2004). According to *The People's Daily*, in 2011, out of the 10,597 normal university graduates who received tuition waivers from the government, only about four percent went to teach in rural schools (Wu, Huang, & Yin, 2011).

Fourth, the recent initiative of school consolidation has made it inconvenient for rural students to attend school. Originally, the initiative aimed to combine the small rural schools, so as to improve the quality of education and make efficient use of educational resources (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2001). The initiative resulted in the closing down of many local schools, and forced students to commute long distances or live at school. However, rural areas lack easy transportation, and rural schools are not always suitable for boarding (Qin, 2010; Xue & Liu, 2009). As a result, since the implementation of the new policy, the country has witnessed increasing dropout rates in rural areas (Ye & Meng, 2010).

Fifth, the current curriculum may not meet the needs of rural students. For years, basic education in China prepared students to take exams and enter higher education. Even though the government launched an ambitious curriculum reform to promote a more holistic approach to education (quality education or

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³ This study was conducted in 2011. On March 5, 2012, Prime Minister Wen Jiabao reported that in 2012, the government would spend 4% of GDP on education, thus achieving the 4% goal for the first time in history (Xinhua News Agency, 2012).

suzhi jiaoyu), it has failed to challenge the examination system and the strong social values attached to the system (Dello-Iacovo, 2009). A large portion of rural students completing compulsory education do not enter high school, let alone college (Xiong & Ma, 2009), and what they have learned in school does not prepare them for the job market (Zhao, 2004). Parents and students view this as a waste of time and money (Party School of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, 2005; Zhang, 2004). As a result, many students drop out of school to pursue low-skilled employment instead (Liu, 2004).

In addition to these macro factors, the vulnerable condition of the rural families, though less discussed in the education literature, is also influencing students' educational achievement and personal development as a whole. Being generally poorer than their urban counterparts, the rural parents could offer significantly less financial support for their children's education. Moreover, labor migration from rural to urban China has left many rural children without parents, and thus without critical emotional support and guidance (National Population and Family Planning Commission of P. R. China, 2010). Research has long established that parental involvement is positively associated with students' academic performance (see e.g., Griffith, 1996). Thus it is not surprising that parental absence in rural China has imposed negative effect on children's school performance (Liang, Hou, & Chen, 2008).

In general, the problem of rural compulsory education, which includes insufficient funding, insufficient infrastructure, an unqualified teaching force, ineffective curriculum, and lack of support for students, is rooted in economic inequality and policy that fails to be constructive (Gustafsson & Shi, 2004; Hannum, Behrman, Wang, & Liu, 2007; Hannum, Wang, & Adams, 2008). More than half of China's population still resides in rural areas, meaning more students will be enrolled in schools in rural areas. Hence, improving rural education and closing the rural-urban gap has become a pressing need (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2010).

Current Efforts to Promote Rural Education in China

The government is the dominant provider for compulsory education in China. In rural areas, public schools constitute 99% of primary schools, and 95.9% of middle schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009). Aside from establishing and operating public schools, the central government and local government have jointly launched a series of programs, such as targeted aid to poor regions, school infrastructure improvement, and teacher training (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2006; Zhang,

2008). In most of these programs, the central government spent a larger portion of the budget in poorer areas (mostly in the west), thus alleviating the burden on local governments in those areas.

In 2005, the government also implemented the Two Exemptions and One Subsidy (TEOS) or *liang mian yi bu* initiative, an effort that seeks to relieve qualified poor rural students from tuition, miscellaneous fees, and other costs, such as textbooks and boarding expenses. From 2005 to 2008, 178 million students benefited from tuition and miscellaneous fee exemption, 150 million rural students received free text books, and 11 million families received subsidies for sending their children to boarding schools (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2008). TEOS considerably lightened the financial burden of rural households, and increased parents' enthusiasm for sending their children to school (Sun, Zhao, & Wang, 2008).

To encourage educated individuals to teach in rural areas, especially in the country's poorer western areas, the government introduced the special-position teacher or *tegang jiaoshi* program in 2006. This program recruits graduates from three- or four-year colleges to teach in rural areas for three years. Once they have fulfilled this responsibility, participants enjoy favorable policies to enter graduate school, pursue other careers, or become public school teachers on the government's payroll (Xiang & Yun, 2006). From 2007 to 2009, a total of 104,621 special-position teachers were recruited to teach in the central and western parts of the country (Luo & Han, 2010). According to the official report, among the first group of special-position teachers that finished their contract, 88.7% decided to remain in their positions (Gao, 2009). However, another study found that only 16.2% of the special-position teachers opted to continue teaching in the west after finishing their contract (Xiang & Yun, 2006). Hence, whether this program can solve the long-term problem of teacher shortage remains questionable.

Although the government has taken multiple approaches, it is not likely that the government alone can solve the problem at hand. It is estimated that in 2020, national education-spending demands will climb to RMB 31,300 billion, equivalent to 8.6% of China's GDP (Li, 2006), which seems to be beyond the capacity of the central and local government. Thus, there is a pressing need to introduce new resources to help support the education system. The government promoted the slogan "mobilizing all resources for education" and reached out to foreign resources (e.g., The World Bank, and The United Nations), to the market sector and to the nonprofit sector (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2010; Ma, 2006).

In order to solicit support from private investors, the government has put forward favorable policies for private schools,⁴ which allow investors to profit from the schools they establish (State Council of the People's Republic of China, 2002). However, since rural areas are significantly poorer than urban areas, it is hard for private investors to make a profit in these regions (Yue, 2002). The new TEOS policy further challenges the profitability of private schools in rural China (He, Zhang, & Sun, 2007). As a result, most of the increases in private school numbers have been in urban areas (Ministry of Education of the People's Republic of China, 2009). Thus, it is clear that relying on private resources is likely to exacerbate rather than ameliorate education investment disparities (Hannum & Park, 2002).

The nonprofit sector, although only emerging in the 1980s, has been an active supporter of rural education promotion. For example, the China Youth Development Foundation (CYDF), since its establishment in 1989, has constructed 16,355 primary schools, trained over 60,000 rural teachers, and provided financial aid to over 3.49 million students (China Youth Development Foundation, n.d.). The China Children and Teenagers' Fund (CCTF), with a mission to promote gender equality, has constructed over 1,000 primary schools, and helped over 2 million poor girls to go back to school (China Children and Teenagers' Fund, 2011). Although it is currently unknown exactly how many NPOs are involved in rural education promotion, together these organizations have great potential to fill in the service gaps left by the government and the market.

Unfortunately, just as we do not know the exact number of organizations, we do not have systematic knowledge regarding their operations either. Most of the information about Chinese NPOs' work has come from the media. Existing studies on the nonprofit sector in China tend to focus on organizations' relationship with the government (e.g., Lu, 2009; Ma, 2006; Ru, 2004; Shieh, 2009). The few studies that touch on the operations of Chinese NPOs are often case studies involving a single organization or a few organizations (e.g., Friends

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⁴ In official documents, these non-public schools are called people-managed or *minban* schools, rather than private or *sili* schools, although people nowadays tend to use the two terms interchangeably. These private schools are licensed by the Ministry of Education, and are all registered as NPOs (subtype: non-governmental and non-commercial entities). Hence, by official status, they do not belong to the market sector. The Education Law prohibits any individuals or entities from setting up schools for the purpose of making profits. However, the Non-Public Education Promotion Law, which was introduced in 2002, contradicted the Education Law by excluding this provision. Although the new law still holds that the non-public schools should be philanthropic or *gongyi xing* (literally, "for the public interest"), it allows investors to receive reasonable rewards if they want to. This way, the policy has created nonprofit private schools, which belong to the nonprofit sector, and for-profit private schools, which belong to the market sector, both of which are registered as NPOs.

of Nature, in Hildebrandt & Turner, 2009; Sun Village, in Keyser, 2009; and China Youth Development Foundation, in Lu, 2009), which cannot be generalized.

Not knowing about NPO operations prevents efficient and effective usage of societal resources. As explained earlier, there have been quite some studies on public programs and private schools. When effective strategies are identified, they can be preserved and further developed; when problems are identified, researchers, practitioners, and policy makers can start to address them. Since there is currently virtually no knowledge regarding the programs provided by Chinese NPOs, no proposal can be made for improvement. Furthermore, this lack of knowledge regarding the nonprofit sector makes collaboration and coordination among different sectors hard. It is possible that some critical needs are not met by any sector of the society, while in some other areas, the overlapping of public, commercial, and private nonprofit programs may result in wastage of resources.

In order to make efficient and effective usage of societal education resources, and to improve the accessibility and quality of compulsory education for rural students, it is crucial to investigate the current role of NPOs in rural education promotion, and to explore potential ways to strengthen their performance. The current paper aims to fill this important knowledge gap by exploring the following questions: (1) Who are the Chinese NPOs promoting rural compulsory education? (2) What goods and services are they providing? (3) How do they do their work? (4) What is their current contribution? (5) How can we improve their performance?

Methods

The current study is an internet-based mixed-methods study, involving an exhaustive snowball sample of NPOs working in the area of rural education. Any quantitative study of NPOs in China faces three major barriers. First, researchers cannot reach an agreement on the definition of a Chinese NPO. Some question the autonomy of many of these organizations, and do not believe they should be considered as part of civil society (Fisher, 1998; Kang, 1999). Others, however, believe that NPOs in China enjoy more autonomy than it might seem on the surface, and even some seemingly government-organized ones are in fact operating quite independently of the government (Lu, 2009; Ma, 2006).

Second, for various reasons such as barriers in the registration system, many NPOs in China are registered as business entities or are operating without registration (Lu, 2009; Ma, 2006; Watson, 2008). Thus, there is no existing master list of all NPOs in China. Even for the officially registered ones, among

the three recognized types, social organization (SO) or *shehui tuanti*, nongovernmental and non-commercial entity (NGNCE) or *minban fei-qiyedanwei* and foundation or *jijinhui*, the government only provides a complete list for foundations. Thus it is impossible to perform probability sampling.

Third, Chinese NPOs are unwilling to answer surveys. Previous survey studies of Chinese NPOs, whether by phone or by mail, usually suffered from low response rates. This seriously challenged the validity of findings (Deng, 2000; Organizing Council of China Private Foundation Forum, 2009).

In view of these difficulties, the current study opted for an internet-based snowball sample of NPOs, employing the definition of “self-identification and peer recognition,” which required an organization to self-identify as an NPO⁵ and be recognized as a peer by at least one other NPO. Some exclusion criteria were developed during the sampling process, guided by the Comparative Nonprofit Sector Project’s framework (formality, not-for-profit, self-governing, and voluntary; see Salamon, Sokolowski, & List, 2003).⁶

The sampling started with three known sources of NPOs: (1) organizations that participated in a conference held in Beijing in 2009, called “Responding to Changes: Action and Reflection of Education NPOs, (2) student organizations from the *Project 211* institutions,⁷ and (3) the China Foundation Center’s database.⁸ Almost all organizations from the three sources have a website, a blog, a forum, a group on a social networking site, or a simple webpage describing its mission and activities. Using information from these online sources, organizations were screened. Organizations which are foreign (including organizations registered in Hong Kong, Macau, and Taiwan, as well as international organizations such as the UNICEF), not private or self-governing, or not working in the areas of rural compulsory education promotion, were

⁵ There are several ways Chinese NPOs identify themselves. Some common terms include popular philanthropic organization/group or *minjian gongyi zuzhi/tuanti*, private charitable organization/group or *minjian cishan zuzhi/tuanti*, and non-governmental and not-for-profit organization/group or *fei-zhengfu fei-yingli zuzhi/tuanti*. Sometimes, organization will also say they are “purely private” or *chun minjian*, or unofficial or *fei-guanfang*. It is common for organizations to use a combination of the terms too.

⁶ Here are some examples of the exclusion criteria: “Not private” is an organization that is funded entirely by the government (including local branches of people’s organizations); “Not an organization” is an informal entity that has only one individual with no signs of incorporation; or a website that claims to provide a place to exchange information but takes no responsibility for the content posted.

⁷ The Project 211 institutions are the most nationally prestigious universities and receive special funding support from the government. In 2011, Project 211 consisted of 112 universities. For each university in Project 211, university websites (general sites, web pages for the office of student life, and web pages for the university’s Communist Youth League) were searched to identify potential student organizations.

⁸ Accessible to the public with free registration at www.foundationcenter.org.cn

excluded.⁹ Those that passed the screening became the initial pool of eligible organizations. Most of them identify “partner agencies” or “collaborators” or simply list other agencies in their “links” section. Being listed by another NPO is considered “peer recognition.” Thus, all organizations that were listed by included organizations were again screened using the exclusion criteria. During the snowball process, the researcher encountered several organizations that provided lists of other organizations working in the same area. Those lists were screened using the same exclusion criteria. The search continued until no new organizations emerged (as of February 11, 2011).

Because the snowball process was done online, any organization that did not have a webpage was excluded from the study. It is impossible to estimate how many were excluded, but the number is not likely to be high. The internet is widely used today in China, and it is an important resource for organizations to raise donations and organize volunteers. Even though some small organizations may not be able to afford to purchase a server and a domain name, given the availability of free online forums and blog spaces, it is not likely that an organization would forgo a webpage because of a lack of money, particularly when the internet can help to bring in resources.¹⁰

Organizational and program information of NPOs were collected from their websites, including some blogs and online forums operated by grassroots organizations. Organizational data were extracted from the online documents provided by the organizations, including general organizational information in the “about us” and “projects” areas, annual reports, news, and forum and blog posts by the organizations’ members. Demographical information collected included: year of initiation (when the organization was first formed), geographic location, and registration status. Additionally, using various documents on the organizations’ websites, such as

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⁹ Since the primary interest of this study is on the indigenous Chinese NPOs, any organization registered outside the Mainland of China is excluded, including diaspora organizations registered in other countries but for the pure benefit of rural China. Furthermore, children of migrant workers are still officially rural residents. Hence, when they migrate with their parents into the cities, they face significant barriers in the urban education system. This is a serious problem which has attracted a lot of research attention. However, this study concerns only children who are currently residing in rural China. As a result, any organizations just benefiting children of migrant workers were excluded. When collecting program information later, any programs benefitting only children of migrant workers were also excluded.

¹⁰ To assess the bias generated by the online sampling procedure, a list of grassroots organizations ($n = 27$) was obtained from a government commissioned research project at Northwest Normal University. Most of these organizations do not have websites. Only one organization from the list met all inclusion criteria, and was added to this study. Thus, the bias generated by the online search is not likely to be substantial.

descriptions in the “about us” section, information on organization leaders and staff, and news stories regarding the organization’s history, organizations were categorized based on their “background,” which was operationalized as sources of startup funding, identity of first generation leader(s), and sources of current support network.

Program information was first extracted, and then categorized into eight different areas, including: aid to rural schools, aid to rural students, volunteer teaching, aid to rural teachers, aid to the rural education system, research and advocacy, networking and resource mobilizing, and direct establishment of charitable schools and education programs.

The data source was limited and could be biased by the range of information that organizations opted to make available on the internet. However, when it is impractical to conduct surveys, online data is the best way to get general information regarding these NPOs. In fact, what the organizations made available online is the information donors and beneficiaries could usually access. Also, unlike financial information, program areas and organization activities are not sensitive information that an organization would hide from the public. Of course, sometimes an organization may claim to be providing some service but not providing it at all. To avoid including such non-existent programs, any program lacking evidence of implementation (e.g., date, money spent, number of students receiving the assistance, and pictures of the event) were excluded. Some organizations were also contacted to ask for further clarification regarding their programs.

Results

Demographical Characteristics of the Included NPOs

The study identified a total of 464 NPOs currently working in the area of rural compulsory education promotion (see Table 1). Among them, four operate exclusively online, with no physical headquarters. For those that have a physical headquarters, be it an office, a bank account, or a central person of contact, 85 are located on Beijing. This clearly reflects the city’s role as the political center of China. The eastern and southern coastal areas (e.g., Guangdong, Zhejiang, and Shanghai) tend to have more organizations than western, northern, and inland areas. As a southwestern province, Sichuan is an exception. The reason might be that the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake relief efforts led to the establishment of a series of new organizations.

Table 1 Geographical Locations of the Included Organizations

Location	Number of Organizations	% of Total	Location	Number of Organizations	% of Total
Anhui	13	2.8	Liaoning	3	0.6
Beijing	85	18.3	Inner Mongolia	7	1.5
Chongqing	6	1.3	Ningxia	2	0.4
Fujian	21	4.5	Qinghai	6	1.3
Gansu	9	1.9	Shandong	8	1.7
Guangdong	59	12.7	Jiangxi	6	1.3
Guangxi	22	4.7	Shanxi	4	0.9
Guizhou	13	2.8	Shaanxi	16	3.4
Hainan	5	1.1	Shanghai	30	6.5
Hebei	10	2.2	Sichuan	22	4.7
Henan	5	1.1	Tianjin	4	0.9
Heilongjiang	1	0.2	Tibet	4	0.9
Hubei	10	2.2	Xinjiang	3	0.6
Hunan	14	3.0	Yunnan	18	3.9
Jilin	5	1.1	Zhejiang	30	6.5
Jiangsu	19	4.1	Online only	4	0.9
Total	464				

As illustrated in Fig. 1, the majority of organizations (78%) are relatively young and were formed within the last decade. One underlying reason for this observed pattern could be that the central government launched the Western China Development Initiative or *xibu da kaifa* in 2000, which resulted in tremendous awareness about western China, as well as increasing contact with western China among the public (e.g., through participating in government projects).

All organizations claim to be “philanthropic” or *gongyi*, “charitable” or *cishan*, or “nonprofit” or *fei-yingli*. However, only about 65% of organizations provided relatively clear information regarding their registration status. After searching government databases and contacting the organizations, registration status for 432 organizations were identified (Table 2). It is not surprising that organizations with formal NPO status are more open about their status, whereas those that are registered as business entities, or not registered at all, tend to hide their status. In fact, all but one unregistered organization said nothing about their status on their website.

Fig. 1 Distribution of Organizational Time of Initiation

Note. Year of initiation refers to the year when the organization was first established. For grassroots groups, it measures when a loosely connected group began to take the form of an organization (e.g., had a name, chose a leader, had a structure, or formed a charter and bylaws). For corporate foundations, this measures when the company first started to engage in corporate social responsibility activities. In 2000, the central government launched the “Western China Development Initiative.” In 2004, The Regulation for Foundations was introduced.

About half of the organizations ($n = 220$) included in this study are officially registered NPOs. Among them, 174 are foundations, 23 are SOs, and 16 are NGNCEs; the remaining seven are registered, but the sub-type could not be determined. Foundations might be overrepresented because they are easily identifiable and their information is readily accessible. Thus, officially registered NPOs are also likely to be overrepresented.

The 464 organizations were then categorized based on their “background.” A total of nine background categories were identified (besides the “unknown,” which means insufficient information, Table 3). The biggest category is grassroots organizations (37.5%), followed by organizations with governmental backgrounds (16.4%), with university backgrounds (15.5%), and corporate backgrounds (12.9%). Cross-tabulation results for organizations’ registration statuses and background characteristics (Table 4) shows that 95% of organizations with governmental and corporate backgrounds are formally

Table 2 Distribution of Registration Status of Included Organizations

Registration status	Total (<i>n</i> = 464)		Organizations Providing Clear Information Online (<i>n</i> = 301)		Organizations Not Providing Clear Information Online (<i>n</i> = 163)	
	Number of organizations	%	Number of organizations	%	Number of organizations	%
NPO	220	47.4	210	69.3	10	6.2
Business	12	2.6	3	1	9	5.6
Associated	18	3.9	7	2.3	11	6.8
Internal	96	20.7	82	27.1	14	8.7
Unregistered	87	18.8	1	0.3	86	53.4
Missing	31	6.7	0	0	31	19.3
Total	464	100.0	303	100.0	161	100.0

Note. In China, three executive documents govern the field of NPO registration and management: the 1998 *Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Social Organizations of the People's Republic of China*; the 1998 *Temporary Regulations for the Registration of Non-Governmental and Non-Commercial Enterprises*; and, the 2004 *Regulations of Foundations*. Based on these documents, the government recognize two types of legal private nonprofit entities: NPOs that are registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs (including SOs, NGNCEs, and foundations), and organizations which are exempted from registration. The latter further includes three types: (1) people's organizations; (2) organizations that are granted exemption from the State Council, such as the Chinese Writers' Association, the China Disabled Persons' Federation, the Red Cross Society of China, and the Soong Ching Ling Foundation; and (3) organizations within government, state-owned enterprises or nonprofit entities such as student organizations in universities. Among these three, people's organizations appear more like government bodies. None of them were recognized by other NPOs included in this study, and thus were excluded from the analysis. The special-exemption organizations, when meeting the inclusion criteria, were treated as registered NPOs. Organizations within government, state-owned enterprises or nonprofit entities are listed in the table as "internal organizations." Some independent organizations could not meet the criteria for registration; they could apply to certain types of institution, such as an existing NPO, a government body, or university, to become a subsidiary organization, or called "an associated organization" or *guakao*. Then, they can be treated the same as the internal organizations. Other organizations may opt to register as business entities, or operate without any official identity.

registered as NPOs, whereas fewer than 15% of grassroots organizations have legal NPO status. Since groups within universities are exempted from registration, most of them only maintain their status as an internal organization, and do not seek formal registration.

Table 3 Background Characteristics of NPOs

Background Characteristics	Operationalization	N (%)
Governmental	An organization is deemed to have a governmental background if (1) it was organized by government or people's organizations before 2000; (2) it was founded after 2000 but part of the initial funding came from the government or people's organizations; or (3) government officials took leadership in establishing the organization.	76 (16.4%)
Corporate	An organization is deemed to have a corporate background if (1) it was set up by a corporation or a group of corporations; (2) it was set up by chief executive or president of a corporation; or (3) it was set up by trade unions or merchants' associations with corporate members.	60 (12.9%)
University	An organization is deemed to have a university background if it was established in a university.	72 (15.5)
Non-university academic	An organization is deemed to have a non-university academic background if it was established by scholars or researchers but is not internal to a university.	12 (2.6%)
Religious	An organization is deemed to have a religious background if it was established by a religious institution.	10 (2.2%)
Famous individuals	An organization is deemed to have this background if it was established by a celebrity, famous writer, or other prominent public figure.	9 (1.9%)
Overseas	An organization is deemed to have an overseas background if (1) it was established by individuals from overseas; or (2) it is a sister organization of an overseas entity that is registered independently in China.	9 (1.9)
Grassroots	An organization is deemed to be grassroots if it was established by common individuals that do not fit into any of the above categories.	174 (37.5%)
Other	This category was created for four organizations that did not fit into the above categories. One of them was created by a foundation, two were a mixture of corporate and academic backgrounds, and one was a mixture of government and corporation.	4 (0.9%)
Unknown	Organizations that do not provide sufficient information to determine their background.	38 (8.2%)
Total		464 (100%)

Table 4 Organizations' Registration Status by Background Characteristics

Background		Registration Status						
		Business	NPO	Associated	Internal	Unregistered	Unknown	Total
Governmental	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	72 (94.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (5.3%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	76 (100.0%)
Corporate	<i>N (%)</i>	1 (1.7%)	57 (95.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.7%)	1 (1.7%)	0 (0.0%)	60 (100.0%)
Grassroots	<i>N (%)</i>	8 (4.6%)	25 (14.4%)	14 (8.0%)	18 (10.3%)	84 (48.3%)	25 (14.4%)	174(100.0%)
University	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	70 (97.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (1.4%)	72 (100.0%)
Non-university academic	<i>N (%)</i>	3 (25.0%)	5 (41.7%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	1 (8.3%)	12 (100.0%)
Religious	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	6 (60.0%)	1 (10.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (30.0%)	10 (100.0%)
Famous individual	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	9 (100.0%)
Overseas	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	7 (77.8%)	1 (11.1%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	1 (11.1%)	9 (100.0%)
Other	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (100.0%)
Unknown	<i>N (%)</i>	0 (0.0%)	35 (92.1%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (5.3%)	1 (2.6%)	0 (0.0%)	38 (100.0%)
Total	<i>N (%)</i>	12 (2.6%)	220 (47.4%)	18 (3.9%)	96 (20.7%)	87 (18.8%)	31 (6.7%)	464(100.0%)

Services Provided by NPOs

As illustrated in Fig. 2, NPOs in China are providing a variety of services to promote rural compulsory education. The most popular types of services are matching, or One-to-One Financial Aid (provided by 42% of the organizations in the study), followed by establishing libraries in rural schools (30.4%), financial aid to rural students (28.9%), and in-kind donations to rural schools (27.8%). No organization in the sample is providing counseling to rural teachers. Only one organization provides training to education officials; and two organizations provides training to rural school administrators.

Cross-tabulation results for organizations' registration statuses and program areas (Fig. 3) show that certain programs are conducted almost exclusively by registered NPOs. Such programs include construction of new schools (95 out of 111, or 85.6% done by registered NPOs), other school infrastructure improvement projects (72 out of 94, or 76.6%), training for rural teachers (37 out of 45, or 75.8%), financial aid for rural teachers (50 out of 66, or 82.2%), and charitable schools (9 out of 12, or 75%). These are generally programs which involve large sums of funds, and usually require a lot of negotiation and coordination with local governments, schools, and donors. It is unlikely that unregistered groups can mobilize enough resources, or handle the complicated process.

Some other programs are usually provided by organizations without formal NPO status. Such programs include short-term volunteer teaching (83 out of 97, or 85.6% of organizations providing this type of program do not have formal NPO status), counseling for rural students (11 out of 14, or 78.6%), in-kind support for rural students (97 out of 125, or 77.6%), home visits (63 out of 77, or 81.8%), exchange of letters with rural students (12 out of 14, or 85.7%), and rural education research (22 out of 28, or 78.6%). These are generally programs that require fewer financial resources, but more labor (staff members or volunteers will need to go to rural schools to teach, and into rural homes to visit the students; in-kind donations need to be shipped to rural students, and if the items are old, labor is needed to clean and sort them). The groups without formal NPO status are mainly university organizations and grassroots organizations, which are largely volunteer-based. Hence, these organizations can tap into their pool of volunteers to conduct labor-intensive projects in the field.

Organizations' background characteristics and registration statuses not only influence the kind of program they conduct, but also how they conduct the programs. For instance, both registered NPOs and organizations without formal NPO status are involved in building libraries and setting up reading corners for rural schools (69 out of 141, or 48.9% of organizations offering such programs are registered NPOs). The registered NPOs, especially those with a strong

Fig. 2 NPOs' Programs to Promote Rural Compulsory Education

Note. Numbers in parenthesis stand for the total number of organizations in the sample providing a certain type of service; A total of eight service areas were identified: aid to rural school (cash donation, in-kind donation, school construction, library projects, and other infrastructure projects), aid to rural students (financial aid, in-kind support, academic tutoring, extra-curricular activities, counseling, home visit, exchange of letters, nutritional material, other), volunteer teaching (short-term, long-term, unspecified), aid to rural teachers (financial aid, training, organizing, counseling other), aid to rural education system (training for school administrators, training for education officials), research and advocacy (rural education research, curriculum development, policy advocacy), networking and resource mobilizing (matching, opportunities for volunteer groups and corporations, forums and conferences), and direct establishment of charitable schools and education programs (charitable school, special classes/ experimental sites within a school, special academic programs).

Fig. 3 NPOs' Programs to Promote Rural Compulsory Education v.s. NPOs' Registration Statuses

Note. Numbers in parenthesis stand for the total number of organizations in the sample providing a certain type of service; The bars show among all organizations providing a certain type of services, what percentage have legal NPO status (solid black bars) and what percentage do not have legal NPO status (dotted bars). Organizations which are not formally registered as NPOs may have other identities, such as business entity, internal organization, entity associated with another organization or *guakao*, or simply operation without any formal identity.

governmental background, e.g., CYDF, offer library projects as a “one-size-fits-all” package, i.e., the organization will provide every rural library they build with certain equipment and certain types of books according to the Ministry of Education’s guidelines; donors are asked to pay a set price for all items (books, bookshelves, and other equipment) needed for establishing this library; donors cannot select the items; and sometimes, the organization will cut an overhead. Organizations without formal NPO status, especially university groups and grassroots organizations, usually do not have a set standard for their libraries. They raise donations to buy books or ask people to donate new or used books, and then ship these books to rural schools. These organizations have very general guidelines regarding the books, e.g., no text books, no books with inappropriate content. In general, donors have tremendous freedom in deciding what they want the rural children to read. Organizations without formal NPO status never cut overheads.

Furthermore, organizations’ background characteristics and registration statuses can influence the scale of their work. For example, among the 22 organizations sending long-term volunteer teachers, only one has a governmental background, the China Youth Volunteer Association (CYVA). Backed by the Communist Youth League (CYL) and the All-China Youth Federation, the organization runs the “Youth Volunteers for Poverty Alleviation Relay” or *zhongguo qingnian zhiyuanzhe fupin jieli jihua*. From 1999 to 2009, the organization recruited and deployed 4,172 college graduates and graduate students to teach for a full year in rural schools (Department of Youth Volunteers, 2009). Compared with CYVA, the long-term volunteer teaching programs offered by other organizations are significantly smaller, usually involving fewer than ten teachers. Thus, the number of long-term volunteer teachers sent by CYVA is likely to be larger than all other organizations combined.

Not only is CYVA’s program big, but it is also very selective. All potential volunteers need to be high achieving students who are either already in graduate school, or have been recommended to enter graduate school without taking the entrance exam. They will be further assessed based on their academic performance, community service involvement, and leadership skills. Once they are accepted by the program, they go through mandatory training. The organization provides volunteers with a stipend, and health insurance. As part of the benefit package, the organization offers volunteers the opportunity to work part time as local government officials, which implies that they can use this as a stepping stone to become a civil servant in the future. The central government has issued several documents to show support for the program. Upon finishing the program, volunteers will receive a certificate from the Central Committee of the CYL. No other program can beat the prestige and benefits of CYVA. Although some have raised concerns about the motivation of CYVA volunteers

and how it will affect their performance in the schools, so far no research has been carried out. In the near future, it is likely that CYVA will continue to be the leading long-term volunteer teacher provider in the country, second only to the central government's Special Position Teacher Project.

An organization's background characteristics and registration status may further influence the impact of their work. For example, although there are nine organizations claiming to be conducting curriculum research, the Chinese Society of Education (CSE) is the only one that actually has had some influence on the national curriculum; the rest are just studying various components of the national curriculum (e.g., developing school-based curriculum for a certain school). Established in 1979, the CSE is the oldest of all organizations included in this study. With a close relationship to the Ministry of Education, the CSE is directly involved in the writing of textbooks and sometimes providing consultation to central and local governments on curriculum change. In fact, the relationship between the CSE and the Ministry of Education is so close that it is sometimes hard to tell whether it is the CSE giving suggestions to the Ministry of Education, or it is the Ministry of Education giving orders to the CSE. In other words, the CSE, despite being an officially registered independent NPO, looks like the Ministry of Education's research arm. Instead of saying the CSE influences national curriculum, maybe a more accurate description is that the CSE co-produces national curriculum with the Ministry of Education. For the same reason, the CSE is likely to be the most influential organization in terms of policy work, although it is questionable whether their work is more advocacy, consultation or merely policy implementation.

So far, the results of the study suggest that NPOs are currently responding to all areas of concern in rural compulsory education, including: insufficient funding, insufficient infrastructure, unqualified teaching force, ineffective curriculum, and lack of support for students. NPOs' areas of work, strategies of work, scale of work and potential impact are influenced by their registration statuses and background characteristics.

Contribution of NPOs: Strengths and Limitations

It is hard to quantify the contribution of NPOs to rural compulsory education, because (1) it is impossible to estimate how many NPOs without formal registration are operating; and (2) many NPOs, registered or not, do not report quantified data regarding their programs. However, based on the findings in this study, it can still be concluded that the nonprofit sector is only playing a supporting role. Most of the services the NPOs provide overlap with those provided by the public and the market sectors. The scale of the programs provided by the NPOs is much smaller, especially when compared with the

public programs. As mentioned previously, the largest long-term volunteer teaching program among the NPOs is CYVA's "Youth Volunteers for Poverty Alleviation Relay," which from 1999 to 2009 deployed 4,172 volunteers (Department of Youth Volunteers, 2009). The government, however, from 2007 to 2009 alone deployed 104,621 special-position teachers (Luo & Han, 2010). The biggest school builder among all NPOs is CYDF. From 1989 until now, CYDF has constructed 16,355 primary schools. The government's "Nationwide Re-Building of High-Risk Primary and Middle School Buildings" project, however, between 2001 and 2005 alone, re-built 60,833 schools (Ministry of Finance of the People's Republic of China, n.d.). It is clear that compulsory education is a public responsibility in China, and the government intends to serve as the dominant provider, while the NPOs are mostly assisting in areas that the government has not yet been able to cover.

However, this is not to say that NPOs can only passively cover service gaps within the public system. In certain areas, the NPOs are playing a dominant role. For instance, mass migration has disrupted families, and challenged families' capacity to continue providing physical and emotional support for rural students. So far, there are hardly any public programs addressing these crucial needs of the rural students. The NPOs' nutrition programs, home visits, letter exchange initiatives and other activities that attend to the children's physical and emotional needs become important sources of care and support, which might substitute the role of the missing parents. Grassroots organizations are especially active in providing support to rural students. Almost 80% of organizations conducting home visits are grassroots organizations (61 out of 77); close to 75% of organizations providing in-kind support to rural students are grassroots organizations (92 out of 125); out of the 14 organizations providing counseling to rural students, nine are grassroots organizations. As discussed earlier, grassroots organizations are mostly volunteer-based. Programs such as home visits, counseling, and letter exchange all require a lot of manpower. Furthermore, the private nature of the physical and emotional needs of rural students calls for private responses, making it hard for government to design large scale public programs, or for the NPOs with governmental background to address these needs in their "one-size-fits-all" fashion. Therefore, in these areas, services provided by NPOs, especially the grassroots organizations are crucial to promoting the physical and emotional well being of rural students.

In terms of types of services provided, it seems that the nonprofit sector is filling important service gaps, both by supporting various public initiatives, and by attending to the needs unaddressed by public programs. However, it should be noted that since the nonprofit sector is quite young, organizations may lack experience in designing, implementing, and evaluating programs. Most organizations in the sample do not have program reports; those that do, tend to

report information such as the amount of donations raised, how much aid was distributed, how many libraries were established, how many volunteer teachers were deployed, and how many teachers attended training sessions, rather than whether these efforts have improved students' learning experiences or academic achievement. Thus it is unknown whether resources have been used efficiently and effectively.

In fact, based on the information collected in this study, it seems that several types of programs are of questionable quality. Take libraries and reading corners as an example. Three out of ten NPOs in the sample are providing this service. In addition, a number of organizations involved in in-kind donations to rural schools are donating books to an existing or future school library. However, not many organizations in the sample are interested in running their libraries. In other words, very often, libraries are built, and then "abandoned" by the organization, providing little support for maintenance or development. In fact, lack of maintenance, and lack of effective reading programs are identified as some of the most urgent problems facing rural libraries now (Yan, 2010); without these crucial services, many libraries in rural schools will become storage rooms for books that are opened only for inspection by educational officials.

Volunteer teaching, especially, short-term volunteer teaching is another popular type of program with questionable quality. None of the organizations included in the study provided any evidence showing that they have ever conducted a systematic evaluation of their short-term volunteer teaching programs. Previous research revealed that volunteer teachers deployed by some of these organizations are ill-prepared for their jobs in rural schools, and make little positive impact on the students' academic achievement (Zhou & Shang, 2011). Some suggested that volunteer teachers may have some creative strategies that stimulate the interest of rural students; however since they stay only a short time, the students would then have a hard time readjusting to the teaching style of their own teacher (Zhao, 2010). Some other researchers pointed out that volunteers sometimes are not mindful about what they tell the students; when college volunteers complain openly about their meager employment prospects after graduation, their rural students may decide to drop out of school (Wang & Ke, 2010). Of course, these criticisms about volunteer teaching programs are mostly based on case studies, and thus could not be generalized to all volunteer teaching organizations. However, these findings should caution volunteer sending NPOs to carefully evaluate their programs, so as to avoid resource waste and harm to rural students.

It is important to clarify that lack of systematic evaluation of the programs, or lack of publicly accessible program reports does not mean that the NPOs are providing low quality service. However, these are signs of weak accountability and lack of transparency. Both will have a negative impact on the future

development of Chinese NPOs and their ability to provide better programs, because after several NPO scandals, the Chinese donors are increasingly demanding greater accountability and transparency. On the contrary, when an NPO can demonstrate to the public that their programs are having a positive impact, they may attract more donations and more service users. For example, the Adream Foundation developed the Cherished Dream Curriculum, using multi-media to promote student-centered teaching and learning. Their evaluation results show that the program has had a positive impact on teachers' skills and students' learning experience. Several other organizations are now using the Cherished Dream Curriculum.

To summarize, the newly emerged nonprofit sector has great potential to provide crucial services to promote compulsory education in rural China. Although their role is only supplementary to public programs, NPOs are irreplaceable. Their contribution can be increased, if they focus on the areas which cannot be addressed by public programs (e.g., emotional support). Their impact can also be increased, if the organizations improve the efficiency and effectiveness of their programs.

Discussion

The current study provided an overview of the demographic characteristics of Chinese NPOs involved in rural compulsory education promotion. It also mapped out the programs currently provided by the NPOs, illustrating how NPOs' registration statuses and background characteristics influence the types of services provided as well as the ways in which organization conduct their programs. The findings suggest that currently, the NPOs are only playing a supplementary role in the compulsory education system. However, the nonprofit sector has a potential to fill important services gaps left by the public system.

Findings of the current study have identified two types of service gaps in which the NPOs are working: (1) Service gaps created by insufficient public coverage (e.g., infrastructure, teacher quality), possibly caused by the lack of resources of the public system; and (2) service gaps created by the non-existence of public programs (e.g., physical and emotional support for the students), possibly caused by the private nature of these service needs. If the government decides to increase investment in the public system, organizations working in the first type of service areas will face competition from the government, and it is likely that they would soon be crowded out. For instance, providing financial aid to rural students to cover tuition and miscellaneous fees used to be a popular program. After the implementation of TEOS, such types of private assistance were no longer needed. Many of the organizations included in this study made it

clear that they only provide financial aid to high school and college students (programs not included in the current analysis); and some others stated that the aid they provided to primary school and middle school students are for food and clothing. In a word, using TEOS, the public system pushed the NPOs out of the financial assistance market.

NPOs working in the second type of service area are, however, less likely to be challenged by new public programs. Hence, NPOs may want to consider developing programs in fields where the government is unlikely to provide services. Right now, physical and emotional support for rural students has already attracted many organizations. Other possible program areas, such as emotional and professional support for rural teachers, have not received much attention. Studies have found that rural teachers are experiencing tremendous stress and anxiety (Li, Li, & Wei, 2010). They are suffering from severe burnout, i.e., teachers have low expectations for their careers, are not interested in their jobs, and are not willing to improve their skills (Huang, 2007). However, no organization in this study is offering counseling to rural teachers. Research has repeatedly demonstrated the benefits of teachers' peer-support group and self-organized research groups or *jiaoyan zu* for teachers' professional development (Wu, 2008; Zhu & Ju, 2009). Unfortunately, few organizations help rural teachers to establish these grassroots groups. In the future, NPOs may want to develop programs in these areas.

Filling in the service gaps not only means creating programs, but also means providing quality services. Earlier studies have criticized Chinese NPOs as inefficient (Lu, 2009; Shang, 2009, July; Teets, 2009). Although the current study did not systematically evaluate the performance of rural education NPOs, findings seem to suggest that certain programs (e.g., rural library and short-term volunteer teaching) are not well designed, and NPOs are not used to evaluating the impact of their programs, or making the evaluation results public. Since the nonprofit sector is still young, it is not surprising that the sector and its organizations have yet to develop skills to plan, implement and evaluate their programs. Both the government and the NPO community have realized the importance of improving NPO performance. Indeed, professionalization has been identified by the government as the top priority for philanthropic work in 2010 (Liang, 2010).

One way that the Chinese nonprofit sector can adopt to improve service quality is to develop the quality of the nonprofit workforce. According to government reports, among officially registered NPOs, only 27% of their employees are educated beyond junior college level (China Bureau of Management of NPOs, 2010). It is questionable whether these employees possess sufficient knowledge and skills to handle the complicated task of program planning, implementation, and evaluation. In fact, an early study with nonprofit

employees found that project management (design, operation, and evaluation) was perceived as the biggest internal challenge facing their organizations (Zhou & Shang, 2010, November). If training on project management could be provided to current employees, organizations would be able to conduct more accurate needs assessment, and make more efficient usage of their limited resources.

Another element that NPOs can adopt to improve their service is improved communication with one another. In the process of the research, many of the organizations the researcher contacted were eager to find out about others working in the same field so as to share resources, exchange experiences, and collaborate to provide better services. Such knowledge about their colleagues is crucial to avoid overlapping investment and to find out about service gaps. Currently, some organizations, such as the Foundation Center, and the Education NGO Online, have started to provide a platform for NPOs to network. However, since these two organizations are quite new, their services are not known to the NPO community yet.

The government could also play an active role in promoting NPO development. For example, at the request of the government of Pudong District in Shanghai, the Beijing NPO Information Center helped to establish the Nonprofit Incubator (NPI), which provides grassroots organizations with free office space, office equipment, capacity-building programs, funding, and registration help. This model was later replicated in the Puxi District in Shanghai, Beijing, Chengdu, and Shenzhen. When the NPOs possess sufficient skills to provide services, the government could incorporate them into the public system through purchase of services, which will provide the NPOs with resources to pursue further development. The government of Shenzhen, for instance, shifted a large portion of government's welfare responsibility to the nonprofit sector, streamlining government bureaucracy and improving the quality of services for citizens. The central government praised this effort as innovative and encouraged other cities to learn from Shenzhen (State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, 2011). If programs such as an NPI can be established in other jurisdictions, the service quality of NPOs can be greatly improved, and the rates of NPO registration can also be increased.

Although International Non-Governmental Organizations (INGOs) are not included in this study, many of these organizations (e.g., Save the Children, UNICEF, UNESCO, ActionAid International, and World Vision) are actively involved in promoting rural education in China. These INGOs typically have a long history and have accumulated many valuable experiences, knowledge, and skills, which they could share with indigenous Chinese NPOs. Hence, Chinese NPOs may want to reach out to INGOs for guidance in areas such as program planning, implementation, and evaluation.

The end consumers of the nonprofit sector can also play a crucial role in improving service quality. Through listening to service consumers, organizations can learn whether their services are efficiently and effectively meeting consumers' needs, and whether the programs are implemented in a culturally appropriate way. For example, if rural schools do not need more libraries, but need librarians, they should be able to tell the enthusiastic NPOs involved in such projects. However right now, the consumers in poverty-stricken rural China are not empowered to voice their concerns or to demand better services. Either the government will need to adopt policies to protect consumers of the nonprofit sector just as consumers of the market sector, or the NPOs will need to take initiative to listen to their clients.

Finally, individual citizens of China, as donors and volunteers, can also play an active role in improving NPOs' services. As the former are donating their money, and the latter are donating their time, they can demand better accountability and transparency, urging the NPOs to evaluate their programs, and make the results available to the public. Then, effective programs can be identified and replicated, while ineffective programs can be modified.

In conclusion, this study found that the emerging nonprofit sector has started to fill in critical services gaps within the rural compulsory education system. In areas such as providing emotional support, it substitutes the role of missing parents, and provides an irreplaceable service. Because the sector is so young, it still suffers from the "growing pains" of all newly established entities. Its efforts are not well-organized, and sometimes of questionable quality. However, when the sector is given proper support to professionalize, to better network within itself, and to listen to consumers' voices, the sector will become more mature, and will be able to fill more service gaps efficiently and effectively, which will greatly improve the accessibility and quality of rural compulsory education.

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