

# Youth Philanthropy and Social Integration: A Functional Study

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**Abstract:** The efforts of youth philanthropic and charitable organizations in social advocacy and integration are crucial for the personal development of young people and the creation of a positive social environment. Currently, many youth philanthropic and charitable organizations have initiated a range of public education activities, aiming to not only enhance public awareness but also to engage in policy advocacy, forming basic patterns and experiences. Research on the social advocacy activities of the Y Fund demonstrates that as catalysts for social advocacy, these youth organizations draw in related organizations and the public to form cooperative networks. They leverage professional training, financial support, and event planning, using new media to focus on social issues, creating an effective model of influence that interacts both online and offline. This model effectively connects with policy advocacy, mobilizes key groups and grassroots communities to participate, and achieves the goals of promoting policy improvement and social integration. It provides valuable insights for philanthropic and charitable organizations to realize their social functions.

**Keywords:** Philanthropy and Charity; Youth; Social Advocacy; Social Integration; Social Function

## 1. Introduction

Modern philanthropic and charitable organizations, though products of modernization, have a long history in China with the concepts and practices of philanthropy and charity. In traditional Chinese culture, the philanthropic concept of "benevolence and love for people" and the practice of "great harmony under heaven" have often played a significant role in promoting social progress and human development (Xia Mingyue, Peng Baolin, 2012). After entering the industrialized society, the social problems faced by modern society have become increasingly complex, and there is a growing need for professional philanthropic and charitable organizations to maintain the social system through services and advocacy. At the same time, these organizations are also a form of social culture shared by social elites and ordinary citizens (Chen Zhiming, 2013), achieving positive social development in the process of giving back to society. In the process of China's social transformation, the role of philanthropic and charitable organizations is more prominent. Tens of thousands of such organizations actively participate in the protection of people's livelihood, social relief, and the construction of a harmonious society, becoming an important force in democratic construction and social development (Wang Ming, 2009). On September 1, 2016, the long-awaited "Charity Law of the People's Republic of China" was officially implemented, marking the beginning of a new legal pattern for the development of the philanthropic and charitable cause, and also highlighting the prominent position of philanthropic and charitable organizations in social construction.

The youth group, as an important subject in promoting the future development of the country, has always been the focus of government departments and social philanthropic and charitable organizations. Because some special needs of the youth group face difficulties in the process of socialization such as education, social interaction, and employment preparation, coupled with their lack of ability to independently deal with various social issues, and they are in a critical period of forming their worldview, values, and outlook on life, the realization of the social function of youth philanthropic and charitable organizations is particularly important for creating a social atmosphere for the growth of young people and their comprehensive development (Wang Shuyu, 2012). At present, with the continuous promotion of China's laws and policies

and the active participation of social forces, more and more youth philanthropic and charitable organizations are thriving and playing an important role in various fields of the growth of young people.

## **2. The social function of youth philanthropic and charitable organizations.**

Service and advocacy are the two main social functions of modern philanthropic and charitable organizations. In a mature society, philanthropic and charitable organizations should not only provide social services but also actively engage in social and policy advocacy (Jenkins J.C., 2006). Modern philanthropic and charitable organizations can either collaborate with governments and businesses to offer professional social services or rely on their own expertise to independently provide specialized services, such as professional psychological counseling, social work services, elderly care services, etc. These organizations can be referred to as service-oriented social organizations. Advocacy can be divided into broad and narrow senses; narrow advocacy refers to influencing government officials with decision-making power to achieve policy change, i.e., policy advocacy. Broad advocacy includes social advocacy, emphasizing the diversity and social nature of advocacy subjects, including various philanthropic and charitable organizations, and civic groups that promote, popularize, and educate the public about relevant knowledge. By doing so, they aim to change social behaviors and values. These organizations can be called advocacy-oriented social organizations.

The youth group, as an important demographic for social philanthropic and charitable organizations, often overlaps with social organizations in areas such as education, relief, poverty alleviation, and social justice. Therefore, this also determines the diversity and importance of the social functions of youth-focused philanthropic and charitable organizations. On one hand, youth philanthropic and charitable organizations focus on the personal development of young people, providing professional rehabilitation, relief, and educational services for youth with mental or physical disabilities, those from impoverished families, and left-behind children. They also offer professional positive education and personality development services for general youth (Liu Yinchun, Liu Guoxin, 2014). On the other hand, due to their modern organizational and professional nature, youth philanthropic and charitable organizations are better equipped to improve the social environment for youth growth (Schmid H, 2013), guiding young people to develop social values that love the country, are healthy and inclusive, promote equality and mutual love, and encourage striving for progress. That is, they actively engage in social advocacy, create a positive social atmosphere for youth growth, and actively mobilize the civic consciousness and capabilities of young people themselves.

Currently, youth philanthropic and charitable organizations in China have reached a certain scale and structure, which are roughly divided into three types according to the existing system: The first type focuses on services such as youth service, training, and relief, which were previously known as private non-enterprise units and are now social service organizations; the second type is committed to self-service organizations for youth group exchanges and leadership training, namely social groups; the third type focuses on development, social advocacy, and fundraising as grant-making and operational foundations. Overall, the number of social service organizations is the largest, while social groups and foundations are relatively fewer. However, the latter two types of organizations have a greater social impact and scale, divided into two categories: those hosted by the government or social forces, such as the China Youth Development Foundation, the China Soong Ching Ling Foundation, and One Foundation. These organizations mainly operate through social advocacy or funding the development of other social organizations, thus playing a pivotal role in guiding social values and forming a positive social atmosphere. In summary, with the continuous development of China's economy and society, more and more youth philanthropic and charitable organizations are beginning to focus on leading social values and maintaining a good social order, thereby fundamentally promoting the healthy development of young people and the formation of modern civic consciousness.

## **3. The ways in which philanthropic and charitable organizations promote social integration.**

How can youth philanthropic and charitable organizations with social influence transform specifically? How can they exert another social function of social advocacy and integration? What strategies and tactics

are formed in practice? Y Foundation, as a representative philanthropic and charitable organization promoting the integration of youth with mental disabilities and other special needs into society, has accumulated a wealth of practical experience in social advocacy, public education, and cultivating self-organizations, and has a certain representativeness. Therefore, this article will take the social advocacy activities of the Y Foundation as an example to explore the above issues.

In the field of youth with mental disabilities and other special needs, the Y Foundation has made continuous efforts with its influence and credibility. In terms of development and positioning, the Y Foundation has the vision of "Do my best, everyone can do public welfare," and after transforming into a public fundraising foundation, it has gradually grown into an important funding and advocacy foundation. In the process of significant crises in the philanthropic and charitable cause, the Y Foundation has won the trust and support of the public. Since its establishment in 2007, the Y Foundation has successively participated in the earthquake relief of Wenchuan and Yushu. After becoming a public fundraising foundation in 2011, it has become one of the most public donations received by a private foundation in the Lushan earthquake relief in 2013, showing strong public mobilization ability and gaining widespread public recognition.

Starting from 2011, the Y Foundation's "Ocean Heaven Plan," which focuses on caring for youth with mental disabilities and other special needs, was launched. In the first three years, it supported more than a hundred private special youth service organizations, providing rehabilitation medical life subsidies for thousands of children with autism, cerebral palsy, and rare diseases, providing social integration opportunities for more than 20,000 special youth and families, and carrying out a number of large-scale public welfare advocacy activities. Through the dissemination of these relief activities and large-scale public events, the Y Foundation has won more attention from the social public and has built a public welfare partner network in several large cities across the country.

From 2014 to 2016, the three-year plan of the Y Foundation's "Ocean Heaven Plan" shifted to focus on social and policy advocacy as the core. On this basis, it shifted to policy advocacy for social public and government departments, especially improving the social public's awareness of youth with mental disabilities and other special needs, and the capacity building of parent organizations. The social influence of the Y Foundation itself, as well as the foundation cultivated in the early stage of the plan for special needs youth, service organizations, and parent organizations, has made the Y Foundation further clarify the direction and goals of social advocacy and policy advocacy. For the Y Foundation, the shift to advocacy is not only an inevitable realization of social functions but also faces more challenges.

In summary, in order to achieve sustainable development in the future, the "Ocean Heaven Plan" has undergone transformation and upgrading. The advocacy work has achieved a transformation in concept and strategic level, which is reflected in using the project as a platform, using media information transmission to form influence, mobilizing the public to participate more widely, constructing and maintaining the relationship between the organization and the public, in order to achieve the goal of social integration.

### **3.1. Transforming the Concept: Building the Role of a Catalyst for Social Advocacy**

Due to the scientific and professional characteristics of knowledge related to youth with mental disabilities and other special needs, the dissemination of scientific knowledge should be both rational and empathetic, using empathy to break down prejudices and misunderstandings. The dissemination of scientific knowledge related to youth with special needs such as autism and cerebral palsy should continue to cooperate deeply with professional institutions, especially by involving experts who have long worked in the field of youth with special needs and professionals who are passionate about the education of youth with special needs, thereby enhancing the influence and professionalism of social advocacy. In practice, the Y Foundation has spared no effort in cooperating with professional institutions, experts, and parents to strengthen the promotion and popularization of knowledge about youth with special needs. This not only allows more parents and families to understand the basic characteristics of such youth, facilitating parents to discover their children's problems early, intervene in treatment and rehabilitation as early as possible, but also enables the public to have a more accurate and objective understanding of different types of youth with special needs, reducing prejudice and discrimination, thus laying a good foundation for further acceptance and social integration. This communication concept, which starts from different perspectives, can achieve a

process from knowing to understanding, understanding to acceptance, generating a process of empathy. This empathy is not a simple pity and compassion, but a resonance on the basis of equal consciousness between people, which is conducive to the goal of social integration.

In summary, the project itself is an open and continuous public communication platform, and the Y Foundation plays the role of a catalyst. The dissemination of philanthropic and charitable activities fundamentally lies in how the participants, whether individuals or institutions, can be motivated or emotionally rewarded, so that they can be more actively involved. The "Ocean Heaven Plan," which has brand influence, is used to achieve a virtuous cycle between public welfare organizations, public welfare projects, and public welfare participants.

### **3.2. Identifying the Nexus: The Formation of Social Advocacy and Public Awareness**

Public awareness is a process of social memory, and essentially, memory is a collective social activity. Memory originates from society and is also retrieved from it. Collective activities that people participate in can strengthen certain collective memories, reinforcing the cohesion or continuity of specific groups (Wang Chunguang, 2001). In this sense, cognition or memory is constructed or shaped by society, and positive public awareness can be promoted by changing some variables of this mechanism.

In the process of social advocacy for the social integration of youth with mental disabilities and other special needs, the Y Foundation has identified key events and channels, such as launching large-scale advocacy events like "Blue Action for Youth with Autism" on World Autism Awareness Day. Representative activities include turning major city landmarks blue, charity sales in Taobao shopping malls, and blue-themed flash mobs in the streets, all to call on all sectors of society to pay attention to the autism community and actively help them integrate into society, warming their hearts with love. These nationwide key events and activities have a greater social impact, helping to form a positive consensus in public cognition regarding youth with special needs.

In addition, social hot topics can also serve as nodes for enhancing public awareness. For example, the media dissemination of the "Ice Bucket Challenge" provided an important opportunity for the public to pay attention to and understand rare disease groups such as ALS patients, highlighting the significance of social hot activities for social advocacy. The Y Foundation promptly follows up on social hot topics, making philanthropic and charitable activities have the general characteristics of news dissemination, easily attracting the attention of mass media, triggering more media commentary, and gaining more public attention with its timeliness and novelty. This allows groups such as youth with special needs, who are not originally in the public eye, to be seen and perceived by the public in a very short time. Maintaining effective public attention and forming a long-term dissemination influence is the essence of the spread of public welfare activities. In this sense, public welfare activities themselves are oriented towards the public and must be based on and start from the life world, not only needing to accurately identify the core issues of public concern but also returning to the form and content of their advocacy.

### **3.3. Online and Offline: Innovation in the Form and Content of Social Advocacy**

The advent of the internet age has shattered the monopoly of traditional media, with new media's influence growing significantly, showing increasingly diverse and cross-platform integration characteristics. Especially as more and more young people are accustomed to using the internet for emotional communication and information exchange, youth philanthropic and charitable organizations that want to expand their influence and attract the attention of young people need to make good use of the internet. Against this backdrop, the Y Foundation's model of leveraging new media platforms to promote and expand social impact has been widely recognized.

Firstly, the Y Foundation uses new media to create communities for youth philanthropy and charity, establishing hundreds of WeChat public accounts, Weibo accounts, WeChat groups, and QQ groups in the field of youth with mental disabilities across the country. It has broken through the traditional "information dissemination" function and upgraded to "community building" and "mobilizing participation." These communities are important public spaces and domains, playing a significant role in forming the public's collective memory. Research shows that in the evolution of social groups in our country, a "club" style of social group organization has not been fully formed, but instead, it increasingly shows a "circle culture" that

blends with the characteristics of Chinese local culture. Interpersonal communication based on this has significant influence (Shenyang, Liu Chaoyang, Lu Heqiu, Wu Lian, 2013). The Y Foundation's paradigm innovation in mobilizing participation through communities is one of the important public relations construction strategies.

Secondly, online promotion, combined with social media to enhance the sense of participation. Relying on the support of large online media such as WeChat and Weibo, the Y Foundation has designed relatively complete and mature operation models, and users have strong stickiness, making it easier for projects to be promoted through self-media in a short time. At the same time, it innovates the forms and content of project participation, increasing interaction and enhancing the sense of participation. In terms of social advocacy, the "Ocean Heaven Plan" carries the mission of promoting public participation and enhancing public awareness. Through characteristic projects such as art exhibitions, creative interactions, and knowledge quizzes, it adds a sense of meaning to participating in public welfare practices and effectively guides the public's cognition of youth with special needs.

Thirdly, offline expansion, making full use of the project partner network. Offline activities need to seek more partners and build organizational networks at different levels. As an advocacy and funding foundation, the Y Foundation needs a lot of organizational and human support to truly operate the "Ocean Heaven Plan." The Y Foundation is good at attracting public attention through large-scale events, while also entering communities and schools through organizational networks, enabling the project to be implemented in thousands of small-scale activities, while considering the connections and interactions between different participants, especially the public, donors, and beneficiaries.

In the "Ocean Heaven Plan" partner network, most are youth service organizations. The Y Foundation enhances the service ability for youth with special needs by training the capabilities of organizational personnel, especially by localizing traditional social work concepts such as "strength perspective," "empowerment," and "enablement" (Yao Jinzhong, Ju Donghong, 2012). In the process of providing services, they can act as supporters, advocates, and resource intermediaries, which is not only conducive to aggregating broader resources but also more helpful for social advocacy work.

#### **4. Promotion and Integration of Social and Policy Advocacy**

Whether it is social advocacy or policy advocacy, promoting the elimination of society's reliance on a singular "medical model of disability" and the prejudices it may engender can enhance public acceptance of youth with special needs such as autism and cerebral palsy. This contributes to the formation of a pattern of social integration and, in turn, facilitates the connection between social advocacy and policy advocacy. In this sense, the objectives of both are highly aligned.

##### **4.1. Goal Integration: The Connection between Social and Policy Advocacy**

Social advocacy is a mobilization directed at the public, capable of raising public awareness; policy advocacy is directed at policymakers and decision-makers, who are also part of the public to a certain extent. In essence, driving policy change requires a broad public and social foundation, and the two are inseparable. Only by connecting the two types of advocacy in actual operations can the goals of advocacy ultimately be achieved.

Firstly, policy change is a gradual process that requires step-by-step support and participation from government departments. From the perspective of advocacy subjects, it includes not only parents of youth with special needs and their organizations, service institutions, and social organizations concerned with the field, but also government departments such as the Disabled Persons' Federation, civil affairs, and education. Policy advocacy needs to be socialized; only when public opinion is formed through social advocacy can it seek to enter the policy agenda. Therefore, in the process of policy advocacy, it is necessary to expand stakeholders and social participation, and to give voice to the youth with special needs; during social advocacy, public policy issues should be introduced to enhance citizens' sense of participation. As an organization with significant influence in the field of youth philanthropy and charity, the Y Foundation not only has a certain say within the industry but also has close relationships with government departments at all levels and large foundations, giving it good resource mobilization capabilities.

Secondly, regarding the pathways for policy advocacy, they can be divided into institutional and non-institutional channels. People's Congress delegates, members of the Political Consultative Conference, experts, and think tanks are formal channels for policy suggestions, through which information can be transmitted into the policy process. The Y Foundation, as a social advocacy group based on public positions, is not a direct interest group but acts as an agent for marginalized groups, expanding the social activity space. How it connects with internal government communication channels will directly affect the effectiveness of its social and policy advocacy.

Thirdly, in practice, grasp the motivation of local governments for social policy innovation and the characteristics of policy pilot projects. In recent years, local governments have innovated in the social governance system, social organization system, and public service mechanism under the background of deepening reforms. Caring for youth with special needs as a result of promoting related system reforms has exemplary significance. When the Y Foundation advocates for policy, it cites actual situations and data from specific services, social advocacy, and surveys, providing corresponding policy suggestions in the form of reports to achieve operational goals for government departments, which has had a good effect. In addition, with the help of its national service network, the Y Foundation summarizes the experience of existing policy pilot projects in a timely manner, providing a reference model for other regions to promote.

#### **4.2. Influence Dissemination: Penetration of Key Groups and Grassroots Communities**

In social advocacy actions, speaking on behalf and thereby generating influence is an important link. Therefore, public welfare organizations need to make good use of communication media for the organization or activities to make their voices heard, forming channels for conveying information or opinions, using media influence to form public opinion, and then entering into public or policy issues. However, the attention to youth with special needs is not an area directly related to the interests of the majority of the public, so group segmentation and strategy in advocacy work become very critical.

Firstly, seize the deep participation of the mainstream population to influence the opinion orientation of key groups. The protection policies for youth with special needs require the joint promotion of multiple subjects including the government, market, and society. The mainstream population of society, as a key group in communication, is extremely important in the process of public advocacy. Through the implementation of project activities, the awareness and perceptiveness of government officials and business groups towards youth with special needs can be enhanced. Especially for staff in relevant decision-making departments such as education and health, by mobilizing their participation in public education and volunteer service activities, they can be turned into part of social and policy advocacy, jointly carrying out activities and seeking solutions to problems.

Secondly, adopt a family-oriented, future-focused public education and participation strategy. The Y Foundation proposed the concept of "We are one family" at its inception, which is a widely supported and recognized notion. In mass communication, focusing on the mainstream of society does not entirely refer to those classes who hold wealth, have a certain economic and social status, and have the right to speak; it should be based on the family unit and future-oriented. In public activities that pay attention to youth with special needs, family-oriented participation helps more families to experience, perceive, and understand the situation faced by youth with special needs through parent-child interaction and the education of the next generation.

Thirdly, the youth group is the leader of the current social popular ideological discourse. Nowadays, it is very common for young people to participate in public welfare activities, and various communities with young people as the main body are very active. In activities that pay attention to youth with special needs, it is necessary to effectively mobilize these activists to participate, and through effective dissemination, penetrate into grassroots communities. They are also more likely to evolve from being the recipients of advocacy to becoming a role of catalyst, forming a positive external effect of advocacy activities.

### **5. Conclusion**

Advocacy is one of the important action orientations in the field of social work and philanthropy. Some scholars have tried to propose a new definition on the basis of integrating various definitions, that is, in a gathering that can be used to discuss issues, laws, conventions, rules, public affairs, different opinions, or

various arguments and solutions, the special representatives of the clients or mutual representatives, aiming to systematically influence the decision-making in unjust or inappropriate systems (Robert Schneider, Lori Lester, 2011). In this sense, promoting policy improvement through advocacy is one of the missions of non-profit organizations. Through the aforementioned research findings, it has been found that the social advocacy carried out by philanthropic organizations promotes the change of social cognition, and then achieves the goal of social integration, which is a manifestation of the social function of non-profit organizations.

Essentially, promoting the formulation of social policies related to youth with special needs, the ultimate goal is to enable youth with special needs to live and develop decently and with dignity, and to ensure their basic rights to survival and development. This is not only the responsibility and goal of the government but also a matter of concern and attention to the majority of society, and it is also the direction that the whole society should strive for. Only in this way can true social integration be achieved, providing the most basic soil for the healthy development of youth and the harmonious and orderly society, and a better society can be realized.

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