

RESEARCH ARTICLE

Social work organizations' initiatives towards community empowerment among rural migrant workers in Xiamen, China

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Abstract: Social work organizations (SWOs) are under rapid development in Mainland China, and they are characterized as both non-government organizations (NGOs)' features and Chinese features. This research investigates SWOs' capacity to develop community empowerment through a case study on two SWOs in Xiamen China. The study found that SWOs organized individual activities, family activities, group activities, and community activities; their community empowerment strategies are soft and modified in the Chinese practical environment and political background; SWOs' empowerment approach emphasizes personal empowerment but not organizational or institutional empowerment; SWOs' interventions are not that successful but are still under development towards community empowerment with their path, and their over-dependence on government leads to their sluggish promotion in community empowerment. The study suggests that SWOs in China should change their development strategies, diversify their funding sources, and explore their professional methods to develop equal connections with other organizations, especially governmental departments. It is necessary to re-conceptualize the definition of community empowerment in China.

Keywords: social work organization, China, community empowerment, rural migrant workers

1 Introduction

As a response to the market failure and government failure, the third sector is springing up as an alternative public service provider, serving a more and more essential role in solving social problems and enhancing social harmony in Mainland China. Among them, social work organizations (SWOs) are considered a core force, supported by society and government [1]. SWOs are social organizations providing social work services or practices such as education, training and evaluation, functioning on collaborative governance, professional service provision, and harmony building [2]. Their development is closely related to the upsurge of "purchase of service contracting" (*zhengfu goumai fuwu*) promoted by the government. Social work is functioning as a replacement in filling the gap of social welfare where government fails, owing to the transformation of social functions, and as a social welfare provider, it can also ensure social stability [3].

SWOs are local burgeoning NGOs in China, shaped by environmental factors such as political, cultural, economic, and social factors, which are characterized by indigenous features. They aim at providing social service for vulnerable groups, and empowering these groups is highlighted as one of their goals, which is seen on many SWOs' homepages. There is no doubt that community empowerment is set as a major objective of organizations' intervention, to benefit these vulnerable and poor groups, then further promote their welfare, but little literature has looked into SWOs' role in promoting community empowerment in China. Looking into their roles in facilitating community empowerment not only contributes to examining organizational capacity but also provides implications for social work interventions in China, hence this study attempts to delve into SWOs' initiatives toward community empowerment in China.

2 Literature review

2.1 NGO and SWO

NGOs are private, non-profit, professional organizations, with a distinctive legal character, concerning public welfare goals [4]. NGOs as new actors are lauded as the institutional alternative to existing development approaches, however, compared to other development issues, the research literature on development NGOs remains underdeveloped, and less attention is paid to in-depth or systematic research at the empirical level for development NGOs [5]. In China, NGOs are social organizations (*shehui zuzhi*) under the regulations and management of the Ministry of Civil Affairs,

including social associations (*shehui tuanti*), non-governmental and non-profit units (*minban feiqiye danwei*), foundations (*jijinhui*) [6], as well as international non-government organizations (*shewai zuzhi*). Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a policy on “Facilitating the Development of SWOs” in Mainland China, putting forward a goal aiming at strengthening the construction of social organizations and promoting the transition of a governmental function, thus SWOs are the most active social organizations in China in the recent years [7].

SWOs are local NGOs in Mainland China because they are registered as social organizations in China but it has intertwined with local governments on resources, funding, and cooperation. On the one hand, SWOs are characterized as “non-governmental, non-profit, spontaneous, sustaining, altruistic and charitable”; on the other hand, they have some peculiarities during the developmental stage, which is presented as duality in system construction predicament. The purchase of service contracting by the government endows SWOs legality, provides resource support, and improves service provision, and SWOs should improve their professionalism and policy support [8]. It is also criticized that governmental intervention causes weak autonomy, obscure professionalism, and low identity. SWOs in China are quite different from western NGOs stemming of the internal social force. They don’t follow a bottom-up development approach, but blossom along with governmental alienation and breeding, “purchase of service contracting” is presented as one important strategy [9].

2.2 NGOs and community empowerment

Community empowerment promotion with more radical agendas and strategies has been more particularly associated with the voluntary, or non-governmental, organization sectors (NGOs), and with community organizations and people’s movements [10]. Compared to government agencies, NGOs have addressed themselves to poor people, both in urban and rural areas. NGOs are associated with the notion of counter-development, becoming related to empowerment more generally. It takes time to form alliances with each other and other political parties for NGOs. NGOs assisted grass-rooted organizations to approach local or regional authorities in practice, with access to some government services or public good, which is claimed as the first step towards empowerment [11].

Nowadays, social organizations (NGOs) in China have developed towards de-politicization, they are no longer required and expected to be political-driven or politically-bonded ineffective organizations, and are also not allowed to be opposed to the administrative system. They are quite different from western civil society, which is embedded in a controlled web, and also show potential for professional and organizational development [12]. Yang and Ma (2017) [13] investigate a Hong Kong foundation delivering social service project for the disabled in Mainland China and discuss personal empowerment, organizational empowerment, and institutional empowerment from a combined empowerment perspective. This process not only involves the community empowerment towards the service receivers but also includes empowerment of the social organizations initiated by the government. Zhou and Zhao (2022) [14] examine a local foundation’s ability on community empowerment based on a people-oriented perspective, and argue that personal empowerment, group empowerment, and organization empowerment are included in its interventions, and the organizational empowerment helps service receivers gain personal development on rights, consciousness, and ability.

This paper adopts Laverack’s definitions of different components of community empowerment because it is generally accepted and this research looks into the organization’s capability, which is appropriately fit for the research objectives. Community is “heterogeneous individuals and groups who share common interests and needs, and who can mobilize and organize themselves toward social and political change”. Community empowerment is interpreted as “a process along a continuum that provides the most insight into the measurement of the competencies and capacities developed toward social and political change with the timeframe of most programs” [15]. The specific elements of community empowerment include improving participation, developing leadership, building empowering organizational structures, increasing problem assessment capacities, improving resource mobilization, strengthening links to other organizations and people, enhancing the ability to ask “why”, creating an equitable relationship with outside agents, increasing control over program management [15, 16]. Nevertheless, this definition is not fixed cause it may render diversely according to a specific context in this research.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research questions and methods

The main research question is: What are SWOs’ initiatives toward community empowerment? The auxiliary questions are as follows: What are activities organized by SWOs? How do SWOs interventions have effects on community empowerment? In the consideration of research questions, the qualitative research approach is applied in the study, as it is exploratory and more inductive. Case

study is employed as the research method here, because it devotes to explaining “how” and “why”, and focuses on events that can’t be controlled by investigators, as this contemporary phenomenon is in a real-life context [17], which is akin to the research questions and the goal of this study.

This study is located in Xiamen, a vice-provincial coastal city in Fujian Province, where SWOs develop fast and early. Xiamen has been designated as one of the pilot regions for developing talented social workers (*shehui gongzuo rencai duiwu jianshe shidian*) in China since 2007, and one of its districts is nominated as the first batch of nationwide demonstration pilot districts (*diyipi shehui gongzuo rencai duiwu jianshe shidian shifanqu*) in 2009. In addition, Xiamen accounts for the largest number of rural migrant workers (RMWs) in Fujian, China. Even though Xiamen is the first experimental unit to develop social work nationwide and is made up of the largest amount of social workers in Fujian so far, there are only two SWOs are involved in RMWs’ service provision, so these two indigenous SWOs are both selected as the research objects. SWO-1 is initiated by a university professor, its predecessor is a grass-rooted NGO providing service for the elders, then registers as an SWO in response to policy inclination in 2010, for the sake of official registration. SWO-2 is a market-oriented SWO established in 2011.

The RMW project was selected to evaluate the two SWOs’ capacity in a local context. The reasons to choose this community are as follows: firstly, this group is of Chinese feature, they are not covered in official governmental assistance, most of their service is delivered by NGOs; secondly, RMWs have their voice due to their vulnerability, some of them go on a strike for their rights and have conflicts with the government, their social welfare promotion is related with safeguarding rights and challenging social structure, investigating the projects for this community provides us with a more rounded perspective to examine SWOs’ role in fostering community empowerment; thirdly, community empowerment is deemed as essential for RMWs’ development, including economic, social and political aspects.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Three data collection approaches are employed in this study, including interview, observation, and documentation. Interviews were conducted among RMWs (service receivers), SWO staff members, service purchasers, government staff and leaders, community people, and institution supervisors. Observation was applied when the author participated in diverse activities held by the SWO. Documentation was employed as the third data collection method as it is longitudinal, which enables the researcher to look into the organizational activities held from beginning to end.

This study collected data from 38 respondents through open-ended interviews, six participatory observations, and numbers of documentation from two SWO managers and the internet. All the data are recorded by the digital recorder, phone, and laptop, saved as computer files, pictures, videos, and records, and Nvivo software is applied in this study to arrange data. To match the research framework, research questions, and philosophical basis of this research, grounded theory is undertaken to analyze data in this study. As Charmaz (2014) proclaims, three stages of coding are applied in this paper, initial coding, focused coding, and theoretical coding. To confirm emerging findings, triangulation is used as a data collection method accounting for the reliability and validity of this research, and adequate time is spent on collecting data to make sure data become “saturated”. This research follows codes of ethical guidelines formulated by the University of Malaya. Referring to the limitation, this study is only conducted in one city by choosing two SWOs, failing to elaborate on all the situations of SWOs in diverse areas in China, since it may vary due to the political, economic, and cultural diversity among different districts.

4 Research findings

SWOs organized different activities and provided services to RMWs, including individual activities, family activities, group activities, and community activities.

4.1 Individual activities

Individual activities include three aspects. The first is to understand RMWs’ lives and needs, establish a relationship with them and earn their trust, as SWO is still assumed as something new for them and they are mistrustful of it. The second aspect is focusing on their health, as needs assessment shows, most of them have health issues, suffering from occupational diseases, and encountering difficulties in treating sickness due to poverty, lack of medical insurance, and self-protection awareness. Therefore, SWOs undertake activities like gratuitous treatment, health consultation, compulsory medical examination, and health lectures holding to arouse their consciousness to improve RMWs’ health conditions. Lastly, personal problems like emotional problems, and economic hardship are brought into focus as well. Nevertheless, casework can only be directed to a small number of clearly identified groups, especially those most vulnerable groups, who are in the

situation of limited human, material, and financial resources or experience other unforeseen events and emergencies.

4.2 Family activities

It is stated by both SWO staff and RMWs frequently that even a variety of activities are organized, service recipients cannot spare time to take part in. Considering that those RMWs don't have much time to develop a relationship with their children, SWOs serve family services from two perspectives, one is for the development of RMWs' children, and the other one is for the family relationship building. These activities not only benefit children's development in diverse aspects but also relieve parents' stress by reducing their expenditure on children's study and interest development, ensuring children's safety while their parents are not available. SWOs also celebrated the festival with RMWs' children on account of family ties, such as Father's Day, Mother's Day, New Year's Day, other parent-child activities are also designed for the family meaning to facilitate communication among family members and promote parenting skills.

4.3 Group activities

SWOs gather RMWs together and celebrate the festival with traditional Chinese activities and food, like eating *tangyuan* (glutinous rice balls), *zongzi* (glutinous rice dumpling), *yuebing* (mooncakes). These traditional activities are not only aimed at celebrating festivals, bringing spiritual consolation to those diasporas, merging themselves into the local community, but also extending their social networks and strengthening mutual support. Other than festival celebrations, SWOs also undertook a great diversity of leisure and skill learning activities, like Tai Chi group, ballroom dance, cheongsam team, baking training, making up training, singing, storytelling, English learning, and so on. Tea Parties are also held as one kind of regular activity to bind these RMWs together, also as a platform to express their needs and figure out problems, and to promote further mutual understanding and support.

4.4 Community activities

Community performance and voluntary activity are two major community activities designed by SWOs, their primary objective is to cultivate and propagate values and norms. These activities may be carried out in other performances like women RMWs domestic violence theatre, Spring Festival celebration, community fun games, and so on. Voluntary activity is another kind of community activity proposed by SWOs, for benefit of resources integration and community development. SWOs organized RMWs to do arts and crafts or cook meals for the elder, children, and poor families, or drive people in need like the elder and people that have handicaps or limited mobility by deducting expenses. Voting for "Model Landlord" held by SWO is to encourage further understanding between landlord and tenant, which would advocate landlords to provide more service for the convenience of the RMWs, and RMWs would do good in return such as keeping tenement clean and tidy.

By examining and evaluating these activities, it found that some community empowerment elements and strategies are employed in SWOs' activities in our research.

4.5 SWOs' ability in developing community empowerment

SWOs' interventions on RMWs embrace some elements of community empowerment such as improving participation, developing local leadership, improving resource mobilization, strengthening links to other organizations and people, and increasing control over program management. But some strategies are missing in their programs, including building empowering organizational structures, increasing problem assessment capacities, creating an equitable relationship with outside agents, and enhancing the ability to ask "why". It is found that the community empowerment approach adopted in China is soft and modified, and the empowerment development addresses more personal empowerment but neglects organizational and institutional empowerment.

4.6 Soft and modified empowerment but less radical

Both SWOs design activities to develop community empowerment among RMWs, their contribution includes improving participation, developing local leadership, improving resource mobilization, strengthening links to other organizations and people, and increasing control over program management. By attending SWOs' activities, RMWs know more people and strengthen links to other organizations, especially their connections with other RMWs from different hometowns are expanded, and the diversity further promotes resource mobilization. As a taxi driver said, "through attending activities, we meet more taxi drivers... our expansion of social networks is useful, for example, now my service license is under my friend's car, I can not work without his car, and this friend is the one I made from Taichi team". Through SWOs' intervention, some leaders are elected among this community, therefore, their leadership is developed as a result. These local

organizations may be official or unofficial, such as Taichi team, which is organized by themselves; Staff Home, and Rainbow Women's Home, which are initiated officially by the government and developed by these SWOs. RMWs are encouraged to improve their leadership ability, to facilitate organizational self-development.

These SWOs also focused on developing RMWs' control of the program, they evaluated their needs and requirements once the project was initiated in diverse approaches, like focus group discussion, personal interviews, questionnaire surveys, and so on. Trying to capture the comprehensive demands of service recipients, SWOs attempted to modify the program as the project proceeded, by gathering this community together, developing self-organization, and fostering local leaders among them, leading them to become more empowering in designing projects. SWO-1 has held a tea party and found taxi drivers' difficulties in parking when they have to have dinner or go to the toilet during working, they have to park in random areas at the sacrifice of being fined by the police without provision of an official car park. Therefore, SWO organized them to discuss how to solve their problem by themselves, then these taxi drivers drew a map and took a video to advocate for the government department to make new policies, at last, this issue was settled. SWO-2 also designed projects for young RMWs to engage in planning programs with the support of SWOs' funding, encouraging them to carry out their dreams and expectation with their effort.

However, these efforts seldom come to RMWs' political and economic empowerment. It is attributed to the initiatives of program design and intervention points. SWO-1's service for taxi drivers is supported by a sub-district office, a governmental department. Because there was a demonstration held by the taxi drivers where is under the administration of the sub-district office, this government department wanted to conform to this community and maintain order, so they purchased this three-year service project. SWO-1 has the background of university professors' supervision, so the director-general and supervisors arise more consciousness avoiding being controlled by the purchaser, but they always encounter issues while driving the project. A supervisor from SWO-1 convey her helplessness, "we want to raise their awareness of empowerment but we cannot present it openly, so we design the project from the perspective of taxi drivers' health, and then we gather them together to draw pictures on difficult parking spots to report their problems, trying to strive for some taxi parking lots to eliminate being fined while going to the toilet or have dinner". She held that this project was going well, and the social workers built strong relationship with taxi drivers, but did not follow up due to the turnover of staff. As a director-general A13 from SWO-1 said:

"(After attending our activities), they have received support, and at least, they would live better and happier in this city, including enhancing community inclusion, I think it is getting better...(maybe they do not know what community exclusion is), they do have this concept in mind. But now they are aware that their biggest difficulty is identity recognition, it is about household register and house-purchase, if these two parts can work out, their kids' trouble in entering school will be solved easily, this is the essential issue...however, we have nothing to do with this problem, we can not do anything, it is so deep-rooted."

SWO-2 admitted they avoided this part while designing projects. Its director-general B12 said: "What we pay more attention to this process, is to help our RMWs understand and tolerate more on our government, local residence, and local community, their workplace, rather than safeguard their legal rights. We'd like them to look at tolerance and understanding from others from different perspectives. Then they feel that they should improve themselves since so much understanding is received so that others will like them more, then they have a better and happier life. When I get on well with my neighbor and my landlord, my kids will be treated better. So we are not problem-oriented but focus more on their strength from a positive perspective, we don't want them to have conflicts with the local community, and we don't emphasize defending their legal rights, we may tell them, you could have more possibilities (to solve the problem), but what we do most is to eliminate their discrepancy between residents."

In conclusion, SWOs' strategies on empowerment are soft and modified, their projects are always intertwined with interest development and health caring without directly connecting with empowerment. This approach is harmonious and emphasizes more on the RMWs' adaption into the urban area, expecting them to make their voice heard through a gentle connection with the authority.

4.7 Personal empowerment

SWOs' activities promote more personal empowerment among service receivers, but organizational and institutional empowerment are seldom discovered in this research. As we observe from the extension of social networks, not only personal ties are strengthened, but also links with other organizations are created through SWOs' activities. This process in turn facilitates their community participation and resource mobilization, more and more RMWs are becoming active in community events. RMWs do not only act as service receivers but also start to take responsibility for providing voluntary service to the public. In SWO-2's one-year evaluation for the woman

RMW project, it cultivated eighty-three volunteers and twenty volunteer leaders, and organized six volunteer training. In another project about “Model Landlord” in SWO-2, its evaluation report reveals that community volunteering initiatives are built, fifty-one volunteers are recruited, including twenty-one environment protection volunteers, thirty volunteer leaders, and two voluntary activities are organized, their voluntary hours reach 443 hours.

It is also found that RMWs get more access to more resources, such as donations from enterprises and government supplies. According to SWO-1’s monthly report, the numbers of resource links from April 2017 to July 2017 are 13, 16, 16, and 16 respectively. A project manager B2 shows an instance:

“(As their social networks develop), they can enjoy more resources, like local resources, because they know more about where and how to find resources in need...for example, they are getting more familiar with here (community) and interacting more with community workers, and they will get some more welfare and service as they are seen as active in the eyes of community workers...maybe while allocating goods and making welfare policy, they (community workers) preferred to focus on local residence or relatives before, and now they would pay more attention to our RMWs and their kids.”

SWOs would gather information to share among RMWs during the activities, and also contact enterprises to donate products such as tents, and shoes. Meanwhile, the information flows online and spreads fast with the fast development of social software platforms in China, then further mobilizes resources. Their communication circle is becoming bigger and bigger, the more connections established, the more information spread, and then the faster resources are mobilized. This process does benefit RMWs as they do not have time or do not know how to search for relevant information, and the flowing of information and resources not only enriches their daily life but also provides more possibilities and opportunities for this community.

However, even the participation of volunteers developed, both of the service purchasers from two SWOs claimed their participation development is not enough, in an assessment meeting on project evaluation in SWO-2, a service purchaser from a government department claimed that “the number of volunteers is still far beyond our expectation, more efforts are needed in this area, to attract more volunteers to join in our activities”. This is also put forward by supervisor A12 from SWO-1, she stresses that participation of RMW volunteers is closely related to social stratification among taxi drivers, for those who have high living pressure, attending voluntary activities means they have to give up one-day salary, which is unrealistic.

Nevertheless, SWOs’ initiatives toward community empowerment are superficial and unsustainable, once the project stops or terminates, intervention and influence will suspend as well, this is observed in the communication status in Wechat group in SWO-1 and SWO-2’s “Model Landlord” project. Due to the situation of SWOs, the social networks between RMWs and other organizations built are not equitable. As awakening critical awareness and empowerment organizational structure are not drawn as their centrality, even SWOs cannot control the program process because of the dominance of stakeholders and donors, service purchasers such as government departments, enterprises, and other involved sponsors in activities. These SWOs faced the purchasers’ control and they had to negotiate with them all along, so the SWO-1 director-general A13 argued that the government departments were too capricious, they changed their proportion in assessment every year. He said these SWOs with university support were much better than other market-oriented SWOs, those did not even fight with them. This is also verified by the findings in SWO-2, but according to SWO-2’s findings, SWO-2’s staff B13 said their organization had more control over their projects supported by the foundation or enterprises compared with the government, and these agents cared more on the professionalization of service provision.

That’s why a rural migrant A2 who suggested his friend to ask for help on his kid’s enrolling issues to the public school sighed, SWO’s capacity was really limited, he did want to have more opportunities to have an equal communication with the governmental department. These SWOs both did not intervene radically, which is seen in their initiatives toward community empowerment. Due to SWOs’ initiatives and self-orientation, SWOs’ ability toward community majorly has effects on personal development and community participation but fails to alter structural transformation, resulting in their weakness in economic, social, and political transformation. This is closely related to NGOs’ general characteristics and also SWOs’ Chinese features, so taking these findings, we now shift to research discussion.

5 Discussion

It is found that SWOs are working towards community empowerment in some aspects, and also encounter obstructs in building it. The conceptualization of community empowerment encounters some problems while applying this concept amongst NGOs in Bangladesh, because “the definitions of the concept are vague, qualitative and open to subjective interpretation”. Additionally, such an

approach has limitations in terms of its broad applications within the local community and local issues, and NGOs' social contributions could not be visualized entirely so as its measurement of community empowerment [18]. However, in contrast to little theoretical knowledge about community empowerment owned by the NGOs' staff in Bangladesh, SWOs' staff in China have received professional social work training and most of them have social worker certification through national qualification examination, SWO's community empowerment approach application is still under development in China.

Both SWOs in this study avoided the radical "community empowerment" approach while they were practicing, therefore no obvious economic and political changes are made after SWOs' interventions, which is different from a study on NGOs credit programs in Bangladesh [19]. Political and economic empowerment is brought out as urgent demands in the need assessments conducted by SWOs' staff, but SWOs' interventions seldom pay attention to these parts. As SWO principals indicate, they are worried about conflicts caused among RMWs and local community or government departments, connections with the government built by SWOs are to show the government's efforts and concern for RMWs, to alleviate RMWs' contradiction with the government. This is also distinct from the research undertaken by Rahmawati and Astuti (2019) [20] in Central Java, Indonesia, which proves that Spedagi NGOs facilitate the local community's economic empowerment, physical development, social empowerment, and also political participation. This is attributed to China's specific political system and social structure, which can not be changed in a short term.

However, it is seen that SWO-1 has organized taxi drivers to discuss parking problems encountered by them while picking up passengers, especially when they have to go to the toilet or go for dinner, and their effort was made out with governmental documents issued to spare space for them to park cars. Moreover, SWO-1 planned to take a video of taxi driver's daily life and made society know more about this community, but this project was terminated because of SWO staff's turnover. SWO-2 seldom took any specific action in community empowerment, especially on political empowerment. As explained by SWO-1 manage director A13, "our organization has a scholar background as we are from a university, and we will argue when something irrational or illegal, so we are much better than other SWOs, but we still feel the strong manipulation and willfulness of government". Indeed, organizational capacity varied due to different factors and barriers, as argued by Islam and Morgan (2012) [18]. Even most of the community empowerment of SWOs in China is not ideal, some organizations have achieved gratifying results, which indicates that under China's specific political system and social structure, SWO's community empowerment path may be completed in stages, rather than directly entering the levels of institutional empowerment or political participation as in Western social organizations or NGOs in underdeveloped countries.

Chen and Hou (2020) [21] argue that even though the socialization and social service marketization initiated with the background of Government Purchase of Services, the government's role is still dominant in this area through selective co-optation with different kinds of social organizations. According to Xu's comparative research of two types of labor service organizations: grass-rooted organizations and SWO, grass-rooted labor service organizations are inclined to adopt an empowerment approach to increase clients' capacity and awareness, and encouraged collective social action, to promote community development. But SWOs played more Functionalism reparative roles, evaded labor rights, and emphasized labor's family life services, it represented SWOs' safeguards for existing structures [22]. The conclusion of this study answers our research findings, SWOs in this study are seen as a professional commodity or an extension of the state, but it is also found that some SWOs may choose soft and modified community empowerment to achieve the RMWs' needs. This phenomenon is closely related to SWOs' dependency, even though the number of SWOs in China is large, they are still weak overall, unable to become the assistance of government, this is further attributed to organizational dependency on the environment as resources deficiency [23].

These research results are quite opposite to the findings of Yang and Ma (2017) [13] and Zhou and Zhao (2022) [14], the author deems that it is not only because of their differences in organization types such as foundations, but also because of the service receivers here are RMWs, their vulnerability is not only resulted from personal factors but more related to their social structure and the opposed relationship between the city and the village. Their empowerment refers to challenging the traditional administrative system and authorities, unlike other communities' empowerment. It is argued that only when services provided by SWOs are regarded as a privilege, which restricts the power of government, it is not decided by the government whether to provide service or not or which agent to deliver service but chosen by service receivers, the SWOs should seek their professionalization means. On the condition that SWOs can choose clients and service provision freely, then it is possible to solve their dependency on the government, therefore ensuring equal negotiation and cooperation among SWOs, government, and individuals [24]. This calls for SWOs' strategies towards community empowerment should pay attend to personal empowerment organizational and institutional empowerment, and seek more funding supports and have a soft and

modified but also radical approach in cooperation with these sponsors.

6 Conclusion

SWOs in China have applied some elements of community empowerment in practice, however, their interventions have limitations, such as paying more attention to their family services but ignoring their demands for economic and political empowerment. Therefore SWOs' interventions are not sustainable and they are unable to reform construction, the community empowerment among vulnerable groups is not achieved yet. Therefore, the content and effectiveness of community empowerment that may be played by SWOs at different stages, and their requirements for capacity and resources are different. Such as most of the current SWOs may develop in different stages because of their various capabilities and resources, they can only achieve their functions towards family services and individual empowerment with current capabilities and resources. When some institutions have higher-order conditions, it is possible to enter the governance link and play the role of organizational and institutional empowerment, which is a higher leveled stage of community empowerment. Hence, the community empowerment of SWOs in China cannot be regarded as a simple "failure", but the whole is in a stage of initial development, and a small number is beginning to develop to a higher level.

What's more, while conceptualizing "community empowerment" in the context of China, Lavarack's definition involves too many elements and some of them are overlapped, it is suggested that the utilization of the community approach should merge some of the sub-definitions, and their expression should be improved to fit for social context. For further investigation, it is meaningful to look into different SWOs' capacities in different areas in China and examine their barriers and strengths for practical implications, the definition of community empowerment should be rooted in the indigenous knowledge system and embrace its local characteristics.

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