Non-state Service Provision in Community Governance System of Urban China:
New Strategy of Power Penetration in the Transition

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by

**Ms Letian LI**

*PhD Student*

Department of Public Policy  
City University of Hong Kong

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The calling of social groups into public welfare service system can be traced back to 1983. After exploring it for several years, the Ministry of Civil Affairs (MCA) further proposed a service delivery model on the participation of social groups in 1994. In the reform of Service-Oriented Government (SOG), officially proposed in 2005, non-state organizations (civil organizations and private enterprises) in public service provision system have been juxtaposed as the alternative public service providers. This indicates a retreat of state agencies from certain public realm and the society is brought in.

This policy has led the nationwide debates on the roles of non-state service providers. Whilst the established literature concentrates on the empowerment of non-state service providers and the partnership of state-society in public service delivery, yet there are also evidents of the state still controlling nonstate service provision. The “foreground ideational rhetoric” states that the government allows the non-state sectors to play freely via purchasing their service or financing them; the "background practical work” signifies that it still intervenes in the operations of the nonstate service programme by assigning them activity themes (related to the political policy) and involving them in local party construction. Sophisticated interplay can be particularly probed in the community governance network, the frontline in reaching people and penetrating state power. This research argues that, more than ameliorating public service delivery, the non-state service provision can be recognized as the political strategy employed to construct and enhance the infrastructural power in contemporary China. This research targets to 1) examine the steering mechanism of non-state service provision in urban community governance system; 2) shed light on the nature of it in the state-society interactive process; and 3) offer insight into the rationale of the transformation of state power in its nondemocratic and transitional systems.

Enquiries: Cris TSAI
Email: lytsai@cityu.edu.hk
(Free admission)

All are welcome!