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Motivations for Youth Volunteer Participation: Types and Structure— An Analysis of Interviews with Twenty-Four Young Volunteers

Abstract: The types and phasic features of the motivations of volunteers are analyzed based on information obtained by means of interviews with young volunteers. It is found that the motivations for volunteer participation may consist of three categories: the traditional motivation (focused on responsibility), the modern motivation (focused on development), and the postmodern motivation (focused on pleasure).

Scholars who study volunteer activities are attaching ever greater importance to the motivations of volunteers who participate in volunteer activities. However, deficiencies are, on the whole, to be found in the empirical studies by scholars in China on the participating volunteers' motivations. One of these is the dislocation of investigative research from theory. Not a few investigative reports merely set out simple percentages of the various specific motivations (Jin and Yuan 1998; Tan et al. 2005; Tu and Zhang 1998; Xu et al. 1996), lack of clear-cut theoretical assumptions before the investigations, and, after the investigations, lack empirical summarization, not to mention any upgrading to the level of theory. The second is a very limited use of theoretical paradigms, which consist basically of "selfish and altruistic" paradigms, or in other words, dividing the motivations into two major

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categories: “selfish motives” and “altruistic motives” (Chou 1998; Liu and Feng 2005; Wang and Zhang 2000). The third is that the data used by the great majority of research institutes is obtained by means of the structured questionnaire method and that no information secured by means of the in-depth interview research method for exploring the motives of volunteer participation has yet been found among the documentary information recorded in the Academic Journals Database. It is common knowledge that an obvious flaw exists in the structured questionnaire method, that is, all questions that concern motivation are previously worked out by the researcher, and the person investigated can do little else than choose within the range of closed answers previously listed by the researcher. Hence, research of this type frequently fails to detect the true motives harbored by many of the interviewees (Rehberg 2005).

To make up for the deficiencies in the research on the participatory motives of China’s young volunteers, this study will use interviews of the qualitative research method for conducting some exploratory investigations into the motives of China’s young volunteers who participate in volunteer activities. The main purpose of the study is, on the basis of exploring the motives of interviewees who participate in volunteer activities, to provide specific answers to the following six questions: (1) What, in the final analysis, are the specific motives of volunteers who take part in volunteer activities? (2) Into which main categories can their motives be divided? (3) What is the structure of their participation motives? (4) That is, are they of a unitary structure or a mixed structure? (5) Are there any changes in their motives in different stages of participation? (6) That is, is there any difference in their participation motive in the initial stage of entry and their participation motive in the sustained stage after entry? Based on the answers to the above questions, what kind of “grounded theories” may we tentatively set up regarding the participation motives of China’s young volunteers? What kind of revelations will the setting of these theories have for the formulation of relevant policies?

In 2005, I designed a semistructured interview outline (the contents of which included motive of participation, type of participation, frustrations and difficulties, pleasures and rewards, and policy suggestions) and handed the outline to graduate students for carrying out surveys. Twenty-seven volunteers were investigated during two surveys, during which twenty-four interviews concerned their participation motives. The survey samples were chosen by means of purposive sampling, and efforts were made to select different types of volunteers. Among the samples were males and females, students and professional young people, ordinary participants and organizers of volunteer activities, intra-institutional volunteers and extra-institutional (nongovernmental organization [NGOs]) volunteers, volunteers who belonged to a given volunteer organization (including governmental and NGOs), as well as freelancing volunteers who did not belong to any volunteer organization. For the circumstances of the interviewees, see Table 1.

Two methods were, in the main, used for interviews: (1) Face-to-face interviews, recorded after the interviewers obtained the consent of the interviewee. The recorded

Table 1

Basic Circumstances of Interviewees

Interviewee no.	Gender	Communist Party member?	Study or work unit
1	Female	Probationary Party member	Sociology department graduate student at a certain university; interning at the secretariat of the Beijing Volunteers Association
2	Male	No	Second-year master's degree student at a certain university; was conferred a first prize by the university for university-level young volunteers in 2004; has not joined any special volunteers' organization
3	Male	No (Youth League member)	Graduated from a certain business and trade school in Beijing; was employed in the computer business; has resigned now; received training from the Beijing Municipal Young Volunteers Association; is engaged in volunteer services related to solicitude for the elderly
4	Male	No	Manager of a certain small department in a science and technology company in Beijing's Zhongguancun district
5	Male	No	Third-year student in an English department journalism section of a certain university in Beijing
6	Female	No	Hired worker at a trading company; engaged in marketing, mainly of mobile phone components
7	Female	Party member	Fourth-year college student at a certain Beijing institute; chainwoman of a youth volunteer association since her second year in college
8	Male	No (active applicant for Party membership)	First-year master's degree student at a certain institute in Beijing; research orientation: designing of integrated circuits; has not joined any specialized volunteer organization
9	Female		Economics specialization graduate from a certain university in Beijing; currently engaged in full-time volunteer services at an nongovernmental organization

10	Female	Was chairwoman of a young volunteer association at a certain institute in Beijing while studying at that institute; has now taken up a career
11	Female	Administrator at a certain college in Beijing; intermittently took part in volunteer services while in college; before graduating, participated in the Beijing Municipal Students' Grass-roots Service Group
12	Female	Worker at a government institution; college background; applied to participate in a central demonstration project of the Young Volunteer Aid-the-Poor Relay Planning Group in 2005
13	Male	College instructor; regular college undergraduate education
14	Male	Currently a graduate student; undergraduate specialization: electronic circuits; currently studying integrated circuit design
15	Male	Unknown
16	Male	Second-year college student at an institute in Beijing; member of the Window to the West [Xibuzhichuang] Association
17	Female	First-year graduate student at a certain university in Beijing
18	Male	Second-year college student at an institute in Beijing; current chairman of a youth volunteer association
19	Female	Fourth-year college student at a certain institute in Beijing; was director of publicity for a departmental-level volunteer organization
20	Male	Second-year graduate student at a certain university in Beijing
21	Male	Second-year graduate student at a certain university in Beijing; director of the sign language group of the Loving-Hearts Society
22	Female	Second-year undergraduate student at a certain institute in Beijing
23	Female	Second-year undergraduate student at a certain institute in Beijing
24	Female	First-year graduate student at a certain institute in Beijing

information was then compiled as written materials. (2) Interviews conducted by means of the Internet chat tool QQ. This method was used for cases 2, 3, 6, 12, and 15. The first method was used for the rest of the cases. During interviews conducted by using the Internet chat tool QQ, case 2 was a fairly well known former schoolmate of the interviewer, and a face-to-face interview might not have obtained the same results as contact over the Internet. Case 12 had been introduced to the interviewer by a schoolmate. Case 6 became known to the interviewer when the latter took part in an academic forum on volunteers. Cases 3 and 15 were recruited by the interviewers by means of invitations issued by relevant forums.

Data analyses were conducted mainly in accordance with the operational procedures of grounded theory (Babbie 2005: 389–90; Chen 2000: 332–35). The most important link in the operational procedures of grounded theory was subjecting the information to grade-by-grade encoding by means of grade 1 encoding (open directory log entry), grade 2 encoding (relational or axial log entry), and grade 3 encoding (core type or selective log entry). To do this job efficiently, I used special software for analyzing qualitative data, namely Nvivo 7 (Babbie 2005: 402–9; www.qsrinternational.com). With a view to the objectives of this study, two kinds of analysis were, in the main, conducted: type (*leixing*) analysis and situation (*qingkuang*) analysis.

Type Analysis of Participation Motives

When conducting open directory log entry of the information, I found “native (*bentu*) concepts” used by twenty-six of the interviewees, such as “sense of responsibility,” “helping or serving other people,” “doing something beneficial or meaningful for society,” “specialization practice,” “building up capabilities,” “expanding my circle of contacts,” “enriching my life,” “seeking opportunities and a concurrent occupation,” “curiosity,” “novelty,” “interests,” “freedom,” “leisure,” “having fun,” “entertaining,” “amusing,” and “pleasure.” In the course of relational or axial log entry, I found that the above concepts could be linked by means of three concepts or three main categories: “sense of responsibility,” “advancement,” and “happiness.” “Advancement” is a concept I set up in light of the actual circumstances; the other two concepts were all “native concepts” that were used by the interviewees and that arose from the grade 1 encoding during open directory log entry. These three concepts that emerged during relational log entry or axial log entry constituted the three principal categories of the type analysis of the volunteers’ participation motives. And under each of the principal categories are included a number of related subcategories. For instance, under “sense of responsibility” are “helping or serving other people,” “doing something beneficial or meaningful for society,” and so forth; under “advancement” are “professional practice,” “training my abilities,” “expanding my circle of contacts,” “enriching my life,” and “seeking opportunities and a concurrent occupation”; and under “happiness” are “curiosity,” “novelty,” “interests,” “freedom,” “leisure,” “having fun,” “entertaining,” and “amusing.”

Next I will attempt to do a specific analysis of the three principal categories or main types of volunteer participation motives and of the related subcategories these comprise.

Motive Type 1: Traditional Motivation with “Sense of Responsibility” as Its Axis

Participation in volunteer activities based on sense of responsibility is a typically traditional participation motive. Ten of the interviewees mentioned this motive. And among them were three kinds of circumstances.

First were those who directly used the abstract concept “sense of responsibility” to reply to questions with regard to participation motive. For example when interviewee no. 15 was asked, “What were the main factors that prompted you when you first took part in volunteer activities,” he answered, “Sense of responsibility, sense of honor, and feeling that doing so was quite progressive.” When he was asked to put it more specifically, he merely used such abstract statements as “A college student should have a certain sense of responsibility” to explain himself.

Second were those who indirectly expressed this sense of responsibility by declaring, during their statements, that they had experienced a sense of guilt when they saw the distress in the eyes (expressions) of people who needed but were unable to get help.

“Frankly speaking, I feel it is unimportant whether one is or isn’t an association member, but whether one participates or not makes a big difference. I have a sense of guilt when I see on television the distressed expressions of people who need help. All of us are compatriots, so why is it that no one helps them? That sounds a bit like arrogance, doesn’t it?! But that is the way I feel, believe it or not. There are, after all, ‘fools’ (*shagua*) in today’s society” (interviewee no. 3).

The third kind were those who very specifically expressed their participation motive. They maintained that, as a citizen, they had the duty and responsibility to help or serve others and had the duty and responsibility to do something beneficial or meaningful for society.

“That was at a time when nationwide academic forums for Ph.D. candidates were being held and there would be a severe shortage of graduate students. I decided to sacrifice myself at this critical juncture . . . I didn’t give the matter much thought. Take up the job and talk about it later, and help out my schoolmates” (interviewee no. 2).

“I felt, before I joined the association and also today, that Beijing and China are my family, and the people here are my family members. Helping them is like helping my family members, that’s all. And anyway, there will be times when I will need help from everyone else. Other people will be helping me like this when I need help” (interviewee no. 3).

“I didn’t give it too much thought at the time. I just wanted to do something, something to help other people” (interviewee no. 19).

"As for me personally, it was because I came in contact with sign language and joined the Loving Hearts Society. I felt that sign language is very beautiful, and it gave me satisfaction. So I felt I should learn it and that I should help other people" (interviewee no. 21).

"I did indeed feel like a college student when I first came. I felt that since I had gotten into college, I should conform to the requirements of the times for college students, and I thought I should do some things that are meaningful for society" (interviewee no. 7).

"As far as my personal ideals are concerned, when I was a child I was fired by the ambition to do a bit of something for society. Volunteer service has provided me with just that opportunity—the opportunity to serve other people" (interviewee no. 16).

Some interviewees said, "Being able to do something for society is also quite honorable" (interviewee no. 7).

Motive Type 2: Modern Motivation with "Advancement" as Its Axis

A major characteristic of modernity is the fact that instrumental rationality holds a very important position in people's worldly existence. It is manifested at the level of personal values as individuals in society frequently regarding their self-advancement and achievement as the individuals' core values. There were, during these interviews, ten types of specific participation motives with "advancement" as their axis, and thirteen people mentioned this type of participation motive. Specifically, these were as follows.

Some volunteers participated in volunteer activities because the activities they took part in were very closely related to the specializations they were learning. For example, those who studied foreign languages took part in the Beijing English-Language Garden Week, and those who studied social work took part in activities to help elderly people in welfare institutions, AIDS sufferers, and other socially disadvantaged groups of people. Because the volunteer activities they take part in are similar to vocational practice, they regard such participation as an opportunity for vocational internship.

"It links up with my own specialization . . . [I can] also learn something and widen my experience" (interviewee no. 17).

"I went to an old-age home at the time, to talk with those elderly people. As I remember, it was in spring . . . In my first year of college I wanted to have more contact with society, especially since the specialization I studied was social work, and these activities were somewhat related to sociology. I felt that going to see these welfare institutions was quite nice" (interviewee no. 10).

"It was probably because social work requires practice! And I was fairly interested in this sector. The fewer the people doing this, the greater the interest I felt for it. Besides, the AIDS sector pertains more to the disadvantaged than do other disadvantaged groups. And the opportunity happened to present itself when Mei

Xinlu came to our school to hold a seminar, and so I went off together with her. That's about it" (interviewee no. 23).

When responding to the question "Why, at the very outset, did you think of participating in volunteer activities?" a graduate student engaged in social science research replied, "My supervisor's research was in this area, and since that was also the orientation of my own research, I naturally wished to widen my experience" (interviewee no. 1).

Building capabilities was one of the participation motives mentioned by quite a number of interviewees.

"Volunteer service gives one a feeling of spiritual enrichment. It enables one to build one's personal abilities and to acquire unexpected rewards" (interviewee no. 16).

"A good friend of mine was chairman of a Young Volunteers Association. She told me that if I joined up, I could straightaway become director of the external relations department. The external relations department was in charge of contacting volunteer associations at other schools as well as other departments and units for jointly setting up certain activities. I thought I would be able, in this process, to build up my practical abilities, work abilities, and interpersonal communication skills . . . and so I gladly agreed to join up" (interviewee no. 24).

There are many ways of building one's abilities in colleges and universities, and one can build one's abilities by participating in other mass organizations. So why did college students choose to participate in the activities of volunteer organizations to build up their capabilities? The answer to this was given to us in the response by interviewee no. 18.

Q: There are many ways of building one's capabilities. Why did you choose the Window to the West (Xibuzhichuang) Association and the Young Volunteers Association?

A: That was because those were the only two mass organizations at XXX (name of an educational institution) that could go off campus. None of the other mass organizations could do that . . . I feel I'm the kind of person who wants very much to get things done. Not like the functionaries recruited by some associations. Most of those want to get some kind of title but don't want to do any work. I want to get something by working. I'm not as utilitarian as those who have what they've done and what positions they've held written into their resumes. I want to train myself for the work I do, not for writing future resumes (interviewee no. 18).

Another important motive for participation frequently mentioned by volunteers was expanding their circle of contacts. For example, in addition to mentioning the above-described possibility of building abilities when talking about her participation motives, interviewee no. 24 also said that participation in volunteer activities "can expand one's circle of interpersonal contacts."

Some students talked about motives that were more specific than expanding one's circle of contacts.

Q: What were the main factors that prompted you when you first participated in volunteer activities?

A: Sense of responsibility and sense of honor, and feeling that doing so was being quite progressive.

Q: Can you put that more specifically?

A: In the first year of college, one is not so busy and has time on one's hands. One also feels that, as a college student, one should have a certain sense of responsibility. Besides, one has more opportunities to contact schoolmates through such activities (interviewee no. 15).

"I feel that the motive for participation should, from the very outset, be a matter of perspective, but there probably will also be utilitarian motives . . . Take, for instance, school anniversaries. These are directed by the school's administrative office and by teachers on the Youth League committee. If one has utilitarian thinking and deliberately makes contacts with the teachers during such activities, one will later obtain feedback of various kinds. That, I feel, is easily attained if one has that kind of thinking. In fact, it depends really on the mental attitude a person takes to it" (interviewee no. 8).

"When I first came to the school, I felt I should take part in some activities. It might bring more variety into my life. At that time, the youth volunteer association was, in our view, most often conducting activities outside the campus, and those activities were fairly abundant. So I chose to join the youth volunteer association" (interviewee no. 7).

"I joined the youth volunteer association at XXX (name of educational institution) when classes began in my second year in college. That is when I started to take part in youth volunteer work. That was chiefly because studies were fairly relaxed then, and there was little if any course pressure. I normally had little to do, and I joined the youth volunteer association only to bring variety into my spare time existence to keep from getting bored" (interviewee no. 24).

Some students talked about coming into contact with, understanding, and adapting to society.

"I became a graduate student straightaway, without first going to work. That made it necessary for me to acquire understanding about life in society" (interviewee no. 1).

Interviewees nos. 10 and 18 also stated similar motivations. The former declared she had rendered services at a welfare home at the time because she "wanted to have more contact with society," and the latter stated that he had engaged in volunteer services because he "wanted to come in contact with and be geared to society." He maintained that "a true college student should have a sort of public benefit-type of personality and must be informed about matters in society outside the campus."

Interviewee No. 10 clearly articulated this motivation.

Q: Why did you take part in Beijing's volunteer service activities?

A: Before I graduated, I had already found a job, so I thought of going to the grass roots to toughen myself and get more opportunities to engage in practice. I felt this was a rare chance, so I applied and joined up.

Q: What opportunities, do you feel, this has brought you?

A: The opportunity to learn, to improve some of my understanding about the grass roots. It also served as a bridge and an intermediary for the switch from a student to a social person, and it taught me how to adapt to this society. I feel it was a very good opportunity to put things into practice (interviewee no. 10).

Some volunteers regard participating in volunteer activities as an opportunity to look for a concurrent job. Interviewee no. 17 clearly articulated this intention of hers.

Q: Why were you willing to participate in these volunteer services?

A: I could learn things, broaden my horizons, and see if there were opportunities to look for a concurrent position.

Motive Type 3: Postmodern Motivations Centered on "Happiness"

In the stage of postmodernization (or later stage modernization or reflexive modernization), people have begun to reflect on the classical modernity of the early stage of modernization and have fully understood the limitations of classical modernity and especially of instrumental rationality. Hence they no longer regard the achievement motive and personal development as the core values of personal advancement but instead see pleasure and happiness and the core values sought by the individual.

In this survey, I found eleven specific participation motives centered on "happiness" and, in addition, ten other specific motives. Altogether two persons mentioned this type of motivation. The specific circumstances were as follows.

Interviewee no. 11 had frequently come across the term "volunteer activities" in newspapers and in the news media. Feeling curious, she wanted to experience these personally, so she took part in volunteer activities.

Q: What prompted you to take part in volunteer activities? What was the main factor?

A: At first it was curiosity, because I frequently came across the term "volunteer activities," for instance in newspapers and the news media.

Q: What sort of feeling did you get from these reports?

A: I felt these were quite noble activities, and I was very curious to know what they were all about, because I had only heard of them and did not know what, after all, was being done. I wanted to personally experience the feeling of being a volunteer. When I was a child, my school organized some activities, like visiting lonely old people who had no support, but all that was mandatory. I feel that these activities are quite meaningful, that they can improve a person in many respects and bring much content into one's life, so I wanted to take part in these activities (interviewee no. 11).

Interviewee no. 2 had similar participation motives. When he talked about why he had taken part in volunteer activities, he said, "I just wanted to experience them." And when the interviewer further asked him, "Simply to experience them?" He replied, "Right. I had no other intentions."

There were other interviewees who had taken part in volunteer service because they thought these activities were quite novel. An example was interviewee no. 17.

Q: Why did you want to take part in these volunteer services?

A: I thought they were quite novel. I had never taken part in such activities (interviewee no. 17).

Interviewee no. 7 joined a volunteer organization when mass organizations were recruiting new members. He took part in volunteer services because he was quite interested in the activities of the youth volunteer association. And so he joined up.

"Many mass organizations at the school were recruiting at the time, and I felt that this youth volunteer association was, well . . . It had put out a brief introduction about itself as a mass organization, and when I read about its previous activities I was very much interested, and so I joined up" (interviewee no. 7).

Interviewee no. 23's decision to take part in some volunteer activities to assist AIDS sufferers was—in addition to specialization factors—inseparable from the fact that she "took much interest in this sector."

Some volunteers took part in volunteer activities out of a quest for freedom. The story told by interviewee no. 5 is typical of this. In his first college year, he was a class monitor and later an ordinary cadre in the student association. However, whether he served as class monitor or student association cadre, he felt "no interest" and "uncomfortable." That was because both positions were "institutional" and "for one thing, afforded too little freedom, and second, many of the things I did there were not things I wanted to do. Like those things I did in the class committee and student association, they had a circle drawn around them, and one had to work within that circle." Hence, during the second year of college, a research society related to the "three agriculture" issues was established, and later an NGO focused on the "Western Sunshine" was established. Sponsorship was sought from various foundations, such as the Ford Foundation. Once the money arrived, many difficulties were resolved. His deepest impression was that when doing volunteer service in organizations such as NGOs, "one isn't subject to too many restrictions, and there's a fair amount of room to give play to one's own interests." Also, volunteer organizations of this type are "highly humanist." In organizations like these, "people are fairly unsophisticated and seldom second-guess others . . . One says whatever one thinks. Altercations are unavoidable over such things as disagreements over work matters, but once the altercation is over, it's over, and all is OK . . . For instance, when the person in charge of the NGO does something wrong somewhere, I point it out straightaway, and even bawl him out (laughs). We send e-mails and say some nasty things over the Internet. It doesn't matter. After a while it blows over and the person doesn't take it to heart."

Leisure and Having Fun

Q: As a volunteer, you do not do just anything. You choose to do certain things, and you have your own value considerations, is that right?

A: The things I do mainly help me in my own life, but, even more, constitute a sort of leisure activity, a sort of relaxation (interviewee no. 20).

Interviewee no. 17 unequivocally articulated this motivation:

Q: Why do you want to take part in those volunteer services?

A: I don't get many chances to go downtown. It is too far from my school. Going there once is a treat, and I see it as going to have some fun.

She also specifically analyzed her own state of mind and those of two of her schoolmates in taking part in volunteer activities. She said,

"The three of us in research group number 1 are of three different states of mind. Among the three of us, I'm the group leader and therefore frequently exchange views with the others. One of my schoolmates has come purely to while away her time. She joined because I did and, in any case, she did it for fun. The other schoolmate came to learn things. As for me, I came here both to have fun and to learn something. The schoolmate who came to learn something takes studying quite seriously, and her goal is quite clear. She wants to learn things. So she conscientiously listens in at the experts' seminars held in front of the Imperial Ancestral Temple. Whereas the schoolmate who came to have fun—that's the one whose clothes were taken away by someone—only goes to pick up some materials and the like" (interviewee no. 17).

She maintains that these three different attitudes have to do with their respective family backgrounds.

"My schoolmate who came to have fun is from a well-off family. She lives very affluently, like a little princess. The schoolmate who came to learn something grew up in the countryside and has a younger brother. Her family is not very well off, so she highly treasures this chance to study. I'm in between the two. I learn what I can, and have fun when possible. I think this has to do with each person's attitude toward and way of dealing with matters, with their family background, and experiences as they grew up" (interviewee no. 17).

"It's very easy to get along with these people who do work related to NGOs, and one feels very lighthearted and relaxed when one is with them" (interviewee no. 27).

Q: What is the most important factor for joining the volunteers?

A: Some come to while away their time. They come to join up when they have nothing else to do, and they think it is great fun.

"The factors that prompted me to participate in volunteer activities probably consisted, in part, of the influences I was subjected to when I was in the homes of working girls and, in part, of the mental edification I get from participating" (interviewee no. 6).

"Volunteer service gives one a sense of spiritual edification" (interviewee no. 16).

"I feel that, where persons who have just entered the volunteer domain are concerned, the greatest motivation is interest, or the sense of superiority or satisfaction one gets from helping others" (interviewee no. 21).

If the various specific participation motives mentioned above indirectly exhibit the “axial” motive of “happiness,” interviewee no 4’s participation motive directly indicates the “happiness” axis.

He maintains there are two kinds of good people. Those who are happy while others are happy as well, and those who are miserable while others are happy. He does not want to be the second kind. And so he performs volunteer services today “because that is part of his life and it is something happy . . . and because I wouldn’t be doing it if I felt it is unhappy.”

“I feel what I am doing is quite representative. I wish to represent a group of people, that is, to represent a group of people born after the 1970s . . . One sees many people, like those of the 1950s who were always saying ‘shed our blood and lay down our lives.’ People of the 1960s used to say, ‘We stake our youth on the future.’ People of the 1970s say, ‘I wish to approach each day with a lighthearted way of living.’ I share that idea with people near me, and that is, ‘If only we could make ourselves and nature and our parents happy as though playing a game, in a lighthearted manner.’ That is the way of life I have always wanted to promote” (interviewee no. 4).

Process Analysis of Participation Motives

An unexpected and pleasant surprise during this study was the discovery that some of the interviewees, when stating their participation motives, divided these into stages. Judging from their statements, the motivations of individuals were not static or immutable but continue to evolve. This process of evolution may, by and large, be divided into two stages: the initial participation stage at the time of entry, and the sustained participation stage after entry. There were substantial differences in participation motives in these two stages, that is, in the “initial participation motives” at the time of entry and the “sustained participation motives” after entry.

The feeling of interviewee no. 21 was that his initial motivation for participation in volunteer activities had been “interest” or a sense of superiority and contentment at helping other people (initial participation motives). However, as time passed, this sense of contentment morphed into a sense of social responsibility, a sense of being responsible for stretching out a helping hand when seeing others about to fall down. This sense of responsibility grew stronger with time. “Once, on a bus, I saw a deaf-mute person get into a conflict with another person. Since I know sign language, I helped them resolve the matter. Again, for example, I do childcare work, and when I come across autistic children, I use my knowledge to help them resolve difficulties” (interviewee no. 21).

Such changes in the participation motives of different stages are also clearly visible in the statement made by interviewee no. 23. The reason for her initial participation in a project for assisting AIDS sufferers in Henan province was quite fervent: “I myself am a native of Henan, and I wanted to change people’s impression of the Henanese” (initial participation motive). She is, at the same time, being

fairly rational about it, as the specialization she studies is social work, and she needs practice. At present, she is experiencing a transition from fervor to responsibility (sustained participation motive):

"I feel that my present stage is one of transitioning from fervor to responsibility. This semester, I've reached the state where I feel uncomfortable if a day passes without reading up on AIDS-related matters. And so my roommates tell me every day that I'm 'getting stuck in that stuff.' I myself feel that since I got involved in this matter, I've felt I can't walk away from it, nor do I feel I want to walk away. I feel there are so many things I need to do" (interviewee no. 23).

Interviewee no. 9 is a full-time volunteer worker who manages volunteer activities at an NGO. In her statement, she further divides the second stage, that is, the motivation in the stage of sustained participation, into two stages, that is, the "responsibility stage" and the "highest realm stage":

Many times, when our volunteers come in (initial participation stage) they are full of fervor, and we try from time to time to help them moderate their emotions. That's because being fired up with fervor is a very good thing, but being fervent alone is likely to mess things up. So we frequently provide some guidance in terms of knowledge as well as mental state to gradually make these volunteers aware that their work is a kind of social responsibility, that fervor alone is not enough, and that one needs a sense of responsibility and knowledge to bolster one's ability to render services (sustained participation stage I). And then, when we need it, they will enter the highest realm of volunteerism (sustained participation stage II), that is, volunteers will regard the content and work of volunteer service as part of their everyday lives. Like, "I feel uncomfortable if I don't brush my teeth every morning, and I feel as though something is missing in my everyday life if I don't get some information about that child every month." I feel this is the best of realms. Also, every volunteer, irrespective of the kind of volunteer service he or she is doing, will come up against difficulties. We often tell volunteers that a very important aspect promoted by the volunteer spirit is that you help others very cheerfully and optimistically, that you are not in the least dispirited when you come up against difficulties, and that you think of ways to resolve them as though they are your own business. (interviewee no. 9)

Inspirations

"Responsibility" Contribution and Its Inspiration

Today's volunteers are a generation of a new type of volunteers. Their participation in volunteer activities of a contributory significance is motivated more by considerations of responsibility than of conviction. They show great concern for the objective results of volunteer activities and are not content with symbolically conducting performances of the type that are replete with iconic contribution values. In their minds, the activities carried on by volunteer organizations are, in reality, currently implemented "social projects." They not only choose among the various projects, but also, more importantly, pay special attention to the significance and

value of the projects per se. They often contemptuously dismiss as beneath their notice such activities as cleaning up riverbanks or parks on Lei Feng Day. In their opinion, such activities are entirely needless and without value, because they fall within the scope of garden and park sanitation work. The volunteer activities they really wish to take part in are those that can get things done for disadvantaged groups in society, activities such as the Caring Hearts Activity, Support Agriculture and Support Education Activity, Western Sunshine, Aid-the-Poor Relay Program, and College-Students-Go-Three-Times-to-the-Rural-Areas (sanxiashang) activities.

The inspiration we get from this finding is that formalism must be strenuously avoided when planning volunteer activity projects and practical results must be sought during implementation, otherwise the activity projects implemented will hold no attraction whatsoever for young people.

“Advancement” Contribution and Its Inspiration

Theoretically speaking, volunteer acts are a sort of contributory activity that does not seek remuneration or recompense. However, in terms of current realities, today’s volunteers do have expectations when they take part in volunteer activities (Hustinx 2001). Judging from the present survey, when talking about their participation motives, a substantial number of China’s young volunteers touched on motives other than the traditional ones (such as a sense of responsibility, helping other people, and doing beneficial or meaningful things for society). They also mentioned many motives that had to do with personal development, such as “specialization practice,” “specialization research,” “building capabilities,” “expanding my circle of contacts,” “enriching my life,” “understanding and adapting to society,” and “seeking opportunities to find a concurrent occupation.” This means that the contributions by these young volunteers are contributions based on self-development. Or at least, such contributions should, in their view, not come in conflict with their own development.

The lesson from this finding is that, when designing volunteer activity projects, ample attention should be given to the possibility of the volunteers progressing and developing during such activities. And when conducting mobilization in society for volunteer activities, more publicity should be done from the perspective of the development of young people per se rather than sticking solely to the perspective of social needs.

“Happiness” Contribution and Its Inspiration

It was found during the current survey that many of the participation motives mentioned by interviewed volunteers had, to a considerable extent, to do with their happiness as individuals. This signified that, in their minds, the contributions they made during volunteer activities were to be pleasurable rather than painful experiences.

The inspiration we get from this finding is that more emphasis should be placed on “enjoyment” than on “hardship” in mass media publicity on volunteer activities, especially when publicizing volunteer activists.

“Gauging One’s Ability” Contribution and Its Inspiration

Some volunteers stated, during this interview survey, that they did not recommend the kind of spirit shown by Cong Fei. They maintained he had overreached himself in some of the things he had done. Volunteer contributions should be kept within the limits of one’s ability, and “one should perform things that fall within the limits of one’s ability.”

Cong Fei was originally a singer, but as things turned out, he strained his voice and overtired himself so badly he contracted cancer, because he wished to give the money he got from his singing career to children in the countryside who needed it to complete their studies, and to other children. I feel that by doing so, he lost his ability to create future productivity [*sic*], and even his own child didn’t get into school . . . Because he had no time to care for his child, and his wife wanted to divorce him, his child was simply left at home. He had no time for, and did not look after, his own child. He failed to take proper care of his own little household, yet he concerned himself with the larger household. I feel he failed to balance matters properly. He should have taken proper care of his own little household before concerning himself with the larger household. One should keep within one’s own capabilities and not go to such extremes. If you want society as a whole to emulate you, you have to care first for your own little family and first do the things you yourself are responsible for. (Interviewee No. 19)

This finding was quite instructional. It means that one should not overstate the spirit of dedication in describing the volunteer activities of young volunteers. Young volunteers go for contributions within the limits of their abilities, not for those that overextend their abilities. They also proposed that model personages publicized by the media should be “emulatable (capable of being emulated)” and that more should be done to publicize volunteers who make outstanding contributions that are within the limits of their capabilities.

To sum up the above, I feel that the four statements listed below could become slogans used during social mobilizations for volunteer activities:

“I participate; I contribute; I develop; and I am happy.”

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