

Solutions to Child Malnutrition: Promoting Social Advancement through Modern Media Technology

Yifeng Yang ¹

¹ Yifeng Yang, Post-doctorate in School of Public Management at Tsinghua University. The author likes to thank Ford Foundation for its generous support on this research. Translated by Yuqi Wang and Shuang Lu, doctoral students, and Morgan Clark, graduate student, School of Social Work, Rutgers University.



华民慈善基金会
HUAMIN CHARITY FOUNDATION

RUTGERS
School of Social Work



清华大学
公共管理学院

I. Child Malnutrition: A Health Problem that Requires Close Attention

In some poor areas in Mid-west China, students have to bring lunchboxes to school due to their long distances from home to school and poor food quality in school dining hall. Because of their destitute economic condition, however, their families can only prepare them with food that can barely meet their nutritional needs, or even no food at all. Consequently, the issue of child malnutrition has existed in these areas for a long time. The Chinese government promotes boarding schools in these areas in recent years, and, as a result, many students being enrolled in boarding schools. The problem of child malnutrition in poor areas becomes more intensive. Among 130 million students in elementary and middle schools of rural China, more than 30 million live and eat three meals at boarding schools. There are also a considerable number of students, although not living in schools, having their lunch at school.

The Chinese central government has made a series of efforts to deal with the problem of child malnutrition. For example, in 2001, the government introduced *Free Tuition, Free Textbooks, and Gradual Living Subsidy to Boarding School Students* policy (referred to as "Two Exemptions and One Subsidy") to poor students in the compulsory education period (Grade 1-9) in rural areas. In 2007, the government launched a reconstruction project of junior high schools in Mid-western rural areas, in which the reconstruction of student dining hall was such an important part that received 3 billion yuan investment

from the central government. In addition, local governments also took a number of measures to improve student nutritional conditions. For example, at the beginning of 2005, Zhejiang Province conducted Love and Nutritious Meals project; in 2006, Jingle County, Shanxi Province operated One Egg project; in 2008, Liuzhou City began the Free Lunch project; and in 2009, Shaanxi Province officially started the Eggs and Milk project. However, these scattered efforts are far from enough to solve the widespread child malnutrition problem.

In February 2011, a survey conducted by the China Development Research Foundation reported findings regarding the nutritional status of students in poor areas. The study found that in the poor central and western regions, children were still suffering from seriously inadequate nutritional intake. Among the respondents, 12% of the students were stunted and 72% felt hungry at class. Respectively, the average weights of male and female boarding students were 10 kilogram and 7 kilogram less than the average weights of rural students nationally, and the heights are 11 centimeter and 9 centimeter shorter. Child poverty, according to the survey report, would result in a great loss of human capital in future, thus formatting the intergenerational transmission of poverty

Children are the future of a country. Children's health is not only the fundamental right of children themselves, but also the hope of the nation. Recognizing the importance of children's health, western social welfare states, such as the United Kingdom, gradually established Free Lunch projects for chil-

dren in the 20th century, especially after World War II. However, until the early 2000s, child malnutrition still remained abounding in China's poor Midwest areas.

II. Case Description

1. The Free Lunch Project Overview

The Free Lunch program was originated by chance. In February 2011, Fei Deng attended the awards party hosted by the Tianya Forum as the 2010 Annual Journalist.

Sitting next to me, a rural volunteer teacher named Xiaoyu told me that in her school (Shaba elementary school in Huaxi Village, Qianxi County, Guizhou Province), students did not have lunch. Every day, when carrying a lunchbox alone, she could not face students' desiring eyes and had to walk quickly to her dorm to eat. At first, we were only meant to help the children in her school."

After making this commitment, Fei Deng did research about the operation of related projects in China and other countries. On March 1, 2011, he posted a message on his microblog:

Call for Free Lunch: The Indian government launched a free school lunch system ten years ago to solve the hunger and nutritional problem of elementary school students. It has allowed 120 million students to get sufficient food for lunch and has also increased education coverage. Japan had promoted the rationing lunch system during difficult postwar times. The United States has a similar govern-

ment-subsidized Free Lunch program that has benefited 30 million students. Yet the Chinese government has not developed such a plan.

As the government does not have plans regarding this issue, Fei Deng intended to start it from grassroots. On March 24, Fei Deng posted another microblog message:

“On March 25, we will go to Guizhou Province and visit a rural elementary school located under a cliff. The local students do not have food for lunch, and have to drink water to get full. We will try to build a dining hall in that school and promote China’s Free Lunch project in poor mountainous areas.”

Two days later, Fei Deng flew to Qianxi County, Guizhou Province. He not only went to Huaxi Village, but also went to Tailai, a poorer township. He found students there had unboiled water as their lunch instead of food. Because of their hunger, they could not focus on classes in the afternoon. Fei Deng began to realize that helping one school is far from enough. After returning Beijing, Fei Deng mobilized 500 journalists through QQ group chat (an instant messaging software service in China) and then began the planning of a Free Lunch project.

Thanks to the Internet, Fei Deng’s idea was quickly disseminated and responded by the public, and has raised the initial funding for the project. On April 2, 2011, the first Free Lunch project started at Shaba Elementary School, Qianxi County. A total number of 169 students had a free lunch that in-

cluded: rice, a boiled egg, one spoon of pork with sauerkraut, roasted potato, and cabbage soup. Villagers in neighborhood also came to watch the students enjoying their free lunch. They said, because of poor family condition and long distance from school to home, children’s lunch problem had troubled several generations in this area.

At the same time, to help more children in poor areas, Fei Deng, more than 500 other journalists, and dozens of Chinese media cooperated with the China Social Welfare Foundation, and officially launched the Free Lunch philanthropic project.

As a special fund of the China Social Welfare Foundation, which is qualified to raise funds from the general public, the Free Lunch Fund started to use microblogs and other approaches to raise funds from the public. The Fund proposed that everyone made a donation of 3 yuan every day to provide a free lunch for poor students. The Fund is dedicated to helping students who cannot enjoy nutritious lunch because of poverty, and also calls for the participation of more businesses and individuals. Through the power of public donation, the Fund aims at improving the condition of kitchens and dining halls in poor mountainous schools.

2. Innovations in the Free Lunch Project

As an entirely spontaneous project launched by private sectors, the Free Lunch project conducted a series of innovative activities to gain the public’s trust and donations, and to benefit more children in poor areas.

A. Use of Microblogs and Other Modern Media to Mobilize Social Resources

The biggest feature and innovation of the Free Lunch project was the full use of microblog and other modern media technology to mobilize social resources.

First, the Free Lunch project chose not to be a low-key philanthropic action, but a highly publicized one. Different from the traditional philanthropic mode, the project actively marketed itself through the Internet and attracted widespread concerns from the public.

“In the beginning, many people might not know that children in poor areas could not afford lunch. I did not know it either until a very incidental chance. The pictures of starving children would attract public concern only through dissemination. And only by publicizing what we are doing, we would be able to draw attention from the public, mobilize public resources, and solve the social problem together.”

Secondly, the combination of the Internet and traditional media expanded the information coverage from netizens to general readers and audiences.

Fei Deng admitted, Traditional media gave us little space to publicize our project from the beginning. It pursues news value and advertising benefits, resulting in unstable dissemination of our project. Therefore, we chose to use new media, including individual microblogs and other private media, to establish a huge communication network, which in turn attracted traditional media’s atten-

tion to the Free Lunch project and developed a strong, comprehensive propaganda system.”

Finally, the project used a variety of the latest online fundraising methods while raising resources. The Free Lunch project team jointly used microblogs, online forums, Taobao, Alipay, SMS and other new Internet tools to maximize the advantages of Internet fundraising. For example, the team launched a Free Lunch charitable auction on its microblog, and set up an online shop on Taobao (a website for online shopping, operated in China by Alibaba Group) with the help from Shuai Wang, the Chief Marketing Officer of Alibaba Group. On one hand, Fei Deng advocated microbloggers to donate their unused items and put them in the Taobao store for sale or auction; on the other hand, netizens all over the country can buy a virtual product priced 3 yuan to provide one free lunch to a child.

In addition, while traditional fundraising relies on fundraisers' mobilization, the Free Lunch project utilized the Internet influence to mobilize the donation not only from individual donors, but also the donors' followers on their microblogs; the followers also attracted their own followers to participate. Thus, it formed a “nuclear fission” of fundraising, which greatly expanded the scale of participants and improved fundraising efficiency. Moreover, in the mobilization process, the Free Lunch project adhered to the culture of microphilanthropy and happy philanthropy. Netizens could choose their own ways of contribution from in-kind donation, auction, and cash transfer, and make a donation anytime any-

where. For example, the first large donation was from a netizen with the screen name Guangzhou Liu-Rong, who posted a microblog message that he would donate 9 yuan every time someone forwarded the message. Later, he admitted that he felt a little anxious when he saw his message being forwarded very frequently. Then he set up a maximum of 900,000 yuan donation and it only took 22 hours for him to reach this amount. In addition to microblog, on May 11, the Chinese Social Welfare Foundation and LaShou Website launched the LaShou Philanthropy-Free Lunch for Children groupon project in 500 cities across the country simultaneously. This project used the printed slogan of “only 3 yuan from you can help to serve a hot meal to one poor child and satisfy his/her little happiness of having class after saturation!” With a warm slogan and convenient ways of donation, the project mobilized 330,447 people through the Internet and raised 991,311 yuan for the Free Lunch Fund in only 14 days.

B. Create an Efficient Information Disclosure System

Another innovation of the Free Lunch project was its financial transparency and timely information disclosure.

“We are operating a pure grassroots philanthropy project. The initiators are a group of journalists. We have neither administrative nor enterprise resources. The only reason we exist is to tell the public that we are doing something, something good, and we need everyone's support. To obtain funding, we would have to be open,

transparent, and display our projects to everyone. We use microblogs every day to publish information, which allows donors to see a transparent foundation and a transparent project. Openness and transparency are particularly helpful to our project.”

In order to be open and transparent, Fei Deng and other project sponsors developed a funding principle: no transparency, no grant.

From the very beginning of registering the microblog and opening accounts, as long as the money is involved, it is all open. Each school must open microblogs, which can be assisted by volunteers. Those schools should be monitored through microblogs every day and prepare to open their income and expenditure information anytime. Otherwise, there may be problems in the account if saved to the end of the month. For each amount of money spent, the school principals have to make it clear in details through microblogs. Each school sends these financial information to us and we send it out, therefore people across the country can find it. And chances to play tricks in the lunch price is very slim, because we gave our phone number to the parents, and if they find that their children did not have lunch or the lunch does not meet certain standards, they can always report the misdeeds. Moreover, we also mobilized local volunteers. Once some problems are identified, volunteers go for an on-site verification. We also have a full-time team member that can travel for the

verification. Of course, there is another important source, which is the local media. Most of our initiators are journalists, which in itself is an important supervisory power”.

In the perspective of timely disclosure of financial information, the Free Lunch project presented a challenge to the traditional philanthropic mode. In the past, most philanthropic organizations had a low level of information transparency; particularly, it took these organizations too long to disclose financial information, which was one reason why the traditional public philanthropic organizations lacked public trusts.

To improve philanthropic information transparency, in July 2012, the Ministry of Civil Affairs of China issued the *Provisions for Regulating Foundations (Trial)*. The provisions clearly stated that if a Foundation accepts public donations for philanthropic work in natural disasters or other incidents, detailed information about donation income and expenditure should be published on the organization's website and other media regularly. The information may include donation income, money and materials directly allocated to recipients, and every operational cost that relates to the project. If staff or administrative costs are charged from donations, the detailed items should be published as well. For projects that last longer than three months, these information should be published every three months; a full report must be released at the end of all projects. Although the government made a mandatory requirement, some philanthropic organizations’

disclosure cycle was still far longer than three months, partly because of the high cost of information publishing without using modern media technology. However, by using online media and new technology, Fei Deng’s team was able to publish the information once a week. Fei Deng said:

“If we want to raise money with microblogs, we must learn how they work. In other words, it is similar to understanding the habits of the sea. We fished in a small pond before, got limited income, and we could see how many fish were caught clearly. But now, as we are fishing in the sea every day, a steady stream of philanthropic donations is gushed out from the Internet every day, and donors always ask for our financial statements, if in the traditional way, one financial statement per year is definitely not working well. But by utilizing new technology, we can guarantee one financial statement per week, and that is why we can gain credibility from the public. Especially after the Guo Meimei incident, government-run foundations were strongly questioned, we acted as a strong contrast, so that public donors certainly would support us.”

C. Construct a Pragmatic Mode of Organizational Operation and Management

On May 5, 2011, at the same time of the establishment of the Free Lunch Fund under Chinese Social Welfare Foundation, the Free Lunch Fund Management Committee was also set up with a total of seven members. Compared to previous special fund manage-

ment committees, which usually composed of donors, the Free Lunch Fund Management Committee consisted of members from various fields, including media people, philanthropic lawyers, NGO professionals, leaders from private foundations, and public volunteers. The composition of the committee relatively represented the general public, and the committee members had their own professional backgrounds to ensure sound decision-making and organizational democracy. In addition, the Foundation also voluntarily set up a supervisory committee that included major donors and celebrities. Before making major policy decisions, the Free Lunch Fund would ask for opinions and suggestions from the supervisory committee members to secure more professional and rational decisions.

In addition to improving the organizational governance structure, the Free Lunch Fund also worked to strengthen organizational operation and management. Regarding financial expenditure, the Free Lunch initiators believe that the most important thing is the appropriate usage of funding, which requires ongoing assessment and evaluation of schools that provide free meals. Currently, many philanthropic organizations allocate a one-time donation to recipients, but ignore follow-up supervision after the allocation. The Free Lunch project shortened the time period of allocation from semester base to bimonthly to ensure the appropriate use of the funds by continually monitoring the schools’ project operation. Secondly, given the long term and sustainability of the project, there is a need

of reserving certain amount of allocation quota. As Fei Deng said:

We have to make priorities. Last year, we helped 129 schools in 14 provinces, which reached the limit of our team. I would not try to show my potency by increasing the number of schools we helped. Instead, we must first make sure that the donors' money is safe. Every school I am going to donate to has to pass my assessment, and only when the school meets my criteria, will I begin to throw money in. Otherwise my money may never return, people will no longer trust me, and then there will be a dead end. Moreover, for each school that we donate to, we must prepare a long-term and sound project plan. We did not expect the government to take over the project so soon at that time, so we needed to raise two years' money for each school before we began the project in order to ensure that this school's students would still have something to eat the next year. "

Regarding project operational and management costs, until December 31, 2012, the fundraising-related costs and management fees were 85,200 yuan and 173,400 yuan, respectively, accounting for 7.4% in total among the total project expenditure, 3.47 million yuan. Although an operational expenditure that accounts for 10% or less of program funding is necessary and legal, the concept of operational expenditure has not been generally accepted in mainland China. Therefore, to avoid public mistrust, few foundations would like to publish their own operational and fund-

raising-related costs. In this case, the Free Lunch Fund not only used open and transparent methods to actively construct mutual trust with its donors and the public, but also allowed donors and the public to accept the idea of necessary operational costs gradually.

D. Team up with Others and Build a Platform for Multi-Sector Cooperation

At the beginning of the Free Lunch project, the main target group of fundraising was individuals, but the project also sought for resources from other parties, including governments, businesses, nonprofit organizations and civil groups. By building a multi-sector cooperation platform, the project exerted greater influence.

a) Constant communication and cooperation with local governments

In the past, some private nonprofit organizations were reluctant to cooperate with the government to maintain their autonomy. In contrast, the development strategy of Free Lunch is *to develop public welfare policy through strategic philanthropy*. As Fei Deng said, "Grassroots fundraising is at most a catfish. The state's investment is the shark." During project promotion, the Free Lunch team always kept communicating with local governments to promote "locally universal benefit." Indeed, many local governments expressed recognition and support of the project. Currently, the *Xinhuang cooperation mode* and *Hefeng cooperation mode* are formed in Hunan and Hubei Province respectively.

When the Free Lunch project launched in Gongxi Township

Tianjia elementary school, which was the fourth project participant in Xinhuang County, Hunan Province, Bozhi Yang, the project leader of Free Lunch Hunan branch and the deputy editor of Voices Online, made a request to the government leaders of Xinhuang County. He proposed that "Children are part of families, the society, and also the state. The healthy growth of children is the responsibility of family, society, and state." This was the original blueprint of the Free Lunch "1+1+1" model in Hunan, which was later widely disseminated by the media. On June 1, 2011, on the opening ceremony of Free Lunch project in the Hujiaba elementary school in Fangjiatun Village of Xinhuang County, Longjun Xiao, the Free Lunch Fund Management Committee Director, signed a donation agreement with the Department of Education of Xinhuang County. Based on a "1+1+1" model, the Free Lunch Fund and the Xinhuang Department of Education promised to provide free lunches for over 1,500 poor students in 41 elementary schools together. Subsequently, the Xinhuang government has pledged 600 thousand yuan annually to subsidize 1 yuan per day per child for their lunch in 41 primary schools of the entire county, and agreed to construct school kitchens, which opened up a new prospect for promoting the Free Lunch project in the county. Thus, Hunan became the first province that had free lunch provided for students in a whole county, which meant that a private grassroots action was raised to the governmental level.

On October 8, 2012, Fei Deng and government leaders of Hefeng County, Hubei Province,

set a Free Lunch project plan that would cover the whole county. They also preliminarily developed the “1+2” funding program, which meant that “1 yuan from the government combines with 2 yuan from the Free Lunch project.” On November 7, the *Free Lunch program implementation plan for rural elementary schools in Hefeng County* and the implementation details were officially released. From December 1, 4,381 students from 42 rural elementary schools were served with free lunch, which made Hefeng County the first county in Hubei Province that universally implemented the Free Lunch project.

b) Cautious cooperation with enterprises

In contrast with the active communication with governments, the Free Lunch project team was cautious of cooperation with enterprises. On one hand, enterprises’ trust of the project was not established in the beginning; many companies were still holding back to see the project effectiveness. On the other hand, to protect the project brand and reputation, the Free Lunch did not accept all enterprises’ donations unconditionally.

In the beginning, donations for Free Lunch were mainly from individuals rather than enterprises, and trust with enterprises still remained to be built.

Because we appeared so suddenly as a force to do philanthropy, we do not have strong persuasion to central enterprises, state-owned enterprises and major businesses. We first attracted the public and established a good reputation and credibility, and then we began to work on enterprises.

The earliest donors to the Free Lunch were our microbloggers because our donation account was first published on microblog. The second batch was middle-class residents in cities and the greatest portion of contributions were from women. One individual might only donate 3-30 yuan, but we had so many individual donors—roughly speaking, over 2 million donors at least. In this case, those who donated small amounts actually occupied the largest share of all Free Lunch donations.”

With respect to the attitude towards cooperation with enterprises, Longjun Xiao said:

All along, for brand protection needs, the Free Lunch project has been cautious of accepting donations from enterprises. Our fund rejected all donations with strong profiting purposes. For a long time, the Free Lunch team did not actively solicit money from enterprises. Next, the Fund will make efforts on outreach and collaboration with institutions and enterprises to attract more donations while protecting the project reputation.”

In the beginning of the project, Free Lunch applied for national registered trademark, including the text and logo, to protect the Free Lunch brand on the legal level. The frequency and place of the brand use is strictly controlled. Written authorizations are required for all organizations and individuals who apply for using the Free Lunch brand and logo. These measures have effectively protected the purity of the brand and prevented mis-

use of the brand in cooperation with enterprises. In this context, Fei Deng described his plans to cooperate with enterprises:

According to our plan, the environment of schools participated in Free Lunch will undergo enormous change before the end of this year. Each school will get a library and local villagers can also come to read. Some pharmaceutical companies also wanted to participate in Free Lunch, therefore I suggested them to equip each school with a medicine kit, containing medicine for cold, safflower oil, anti-diarrheals, and Band-Aids. Some microcredit programs also support our project; parents of the children in Free Lunch can apply for small loans. For some video companies who wanted to participate, I suggested them to videotape lectures of best teachers in Beijing and show the clips to these kids.”

c) Collaboratively build a Free Lunch ecosystem

The innovation of the Free Lunch project also lied in creating a Free Lunch ecosystem, which referred to using the Free Lunch project to introduce a steady stream of other matched philanthropic projects. These interrelated and mutually supportive programs would form an integrated philanthropic system, generate agglomeration effects, and solve social problems fundamentally.

In Fei Deng's words, Free Lunch will be more than just lunch, but eventually a window: *We are actually trying to open a window through our own efforts. The successful operation of Free Lunch would give participated schools credibility and reputation, help*

these schools receive continual resources from other charities, and then fundamentally solve the problem."

For example, on the opening ceremony of the county-wide implementation of Free Lunch project in Xinhuang County, the initiator Fei Deng said that nutritious lunch was only the first step. The next step was to integrate governmental and social resources to continue promoting other services such as health insurance for children with serious illness, school library constructions, and providing various vitamins for Free Lunch school students to improve their nutritional condition and health. In February 2012, after Free Lunch was launched in the whole Hefeng County, Fei Deng organized a number of philanthropic organizations and enterprises to visit the county and initiated supporting projects for Free Lunch to create a Free Lunch ecosystem. With the efforts of philanthropic groups, enterprises and the media, Hefeng not only promoted Free Lunch successfully, but also developed other matching programs; it became the first national pilot of the Private Health Insurance for Children with Serious Illness program.

3. Effects of the Free Lunch Program

In 2011, at the same time that the Guo Meimei incident led to mistrust of traditional philanthropy, the Free Lunch project created a series of innovative initiatives that eventually made marvelous achievement through the Internet. Since its official launch on April 2, 2011, the project mobilized tens of thousands of donors in five months,

raised more than 16.9 million yuan, and provided free lunch for over 10,000 children from 77 schools. Until June 2012, the donation amount to Free Lunch had exceeded 35 million yuan and the project had covered 163 schools and over 34,000 children. Currently, the project is continuously expanding.

More importantly, influenced by the success of the Free Lunch project and related organizations' facilitation, the central government quickly launched the children's nutritious meal project. On May 11, 2011, the People's Daily published an article named *Free Lunch expects the government to take over*, arguing that, "As indicated in the Free Lunch project, nutrition is a basic right of human being; it is closely related to the right of life and health, as well as social justice and long-term social development. Governments are responsible for providing material and financial supports, legislative procedure, and services to protect this right." On October 26, 2011, the China State Council decided to implement nutrition improvement programs for rural students in the compulsory education period. The central government would allocate more than 16 billion yuan annually to subsidize nutritious meal for rural students in compulsory education period, with 3 yuan per day per student. The central government also increased subsidy by 1 yuan for poor students in boarding schools, making it 4 yuan per day for elementary school students and 5 yuan for middle school students, which amounted to 1,000 yuan per person per year for elementary school students and 1,250 yuan for middle school students. The Gov-

ernment's nutritious meal project covered 680 counties, and 26 million students nationwide.

III. Case Study

The success of the Free Lunch project is not accidental. In addition to a pragmatic organizational operation and management mode, full use of microblog and other new media, and collaboration with others, there are some other critical factors, such as the project initiator's spirit of social innovation, wise choice of philanthropic area and the opportunities coming with philanthropy crises.

1. The Initiator's Spirit of Social Innovation

Previous experiences show that social innovators are usually key to the initiation and development of social innovation. Social innovators' personality, philosophy, knowledge and social capital are particularly important when there is a lack of intellectual property protection, financial interest incentives, and policy support for social innovation. Obviously, the success of the Free Lunch project is also inseparable from a key figure - Fei Deng, a man with spirit of social innovation.

A. Coexistence of Sensibility and Intellectuality

During Fei Deng's 10-year career as an investigative journalist for the Phoenix Weekly, he wrote and published over 100 reports, such as *Shenyang Ants' Dream*, *Kill Zonghai Yang*, *Bastard Jiuzao Pu*, *Xiangxi Governor's one night in Beijing*, *Industrial chain of selling children in South China*, and *Zhouzhuang lung disease*. Many of these reports revealed serious social

problems that relate to orphanages, reservoir resettlement, organ traffic from executed prisoners, government corruption and other fields.

Fei Deng's experiences as an investigative journalist enriched his life and social experience. He gradually formed social awareness and cognition regarding what fairness and justice were, and how the society should operate. His bravery of speaking out and acting, integrity and generosity became prominent as well. Meanwhile, his identity as an investigative journalist also endowed him with calmness and rationality that allow him to jump out of personal emotions and social conformity.

Emotionally, I have sympathy for every vulnerable person and victim. I have a natural born consciousness of caring for others. Besides, I tried to learn from legal knowledge and develop my quick and accurate insight and judgment.”(Fei Deng, Jan 2011)

The coexistence of sensibility and intellectuality provided Fei Deng with the capability to initial philanthropic activities and become a social innovator. He believes that one should use his/her conscience to do good things; but once public benefits are involved, a rational design also becomes necessary. When talking about the effects of his occupational identity on the Free Lunch program, Fei Deng said:

“The long-term research on China's social problems gave me deeper understanding of many things [and made me] down to earth. I follow simple and practical methods and common sense to

solve problems, rather than some so-called theories. Because I was an investigative journalist, I know that I can do anything wrong except falling into financial problems such as corruption; thus, we set up a completely open and transparent [philanthropic] mode. I know how to display something meaningful to the public. From the beginning of Free Lunch, we abandoned the idea of doing philanthropy in a low profile, but actively publicized it to the public to promote information dissemination and communication, which allowed more people to understand and accept the project. I do things with conscience, and only by letting the public see your sincerity and conscience, would they completely trust you and merge into a stronger force to work on philanthropy.”

B. Capacity of Organization and Mobilization

In the field of media, Fei Deng is generally recognized as an actor. In 2005, he established a QQ chat group named "knife" with the aim of integrating the power of journalists.

Because all the investigative journalists were facing a harsh news environment, we need to talk, exchange ideas and help each other. I named the QQ group “knife,” which meant that we were like a small knife cutting rotting flesh, little by little, scooping and dissecting the rotting flesh from the body of Chinese society. Soon, the number of group members reached the cap of 200. Almost everyday, we exchanged professional skills, chatted and shared anything fun and interesting with each other.”(Fei Deng, Jan 2011)

In 2008, Fei Deng set up an advanced QQ group that composed of 500 journalists to organize and coordinate national journalists and integrate resources, which gradually formed a potent media force. Later on, the emerging microblog further extended Fei Deng's capacity of organization.

QQ is 1 to 1, or 1 to 500, which limits the speed and efficiency; a microblog is different, it only takes 2 minutes to inform the whole world the message that you want to publish.”

In fact, before the beginning of Free Lunch, Fei Deng had already shown part of his capacity of organization and mobilization through programs such as the Microblog Anti-Human Trafficking, which also made him realize the importance of microblog. After the Microblog Anti-Human Trafficking program, Fei Deng's status as an Internet opinion leader had been formed. Currently, he has 2.46 million followers on his microblog. The online journalist alliance, which was established by Fei Deng, and Deng's microblog followers played very important roles in the Microblog Anti-Human Trafficking and the Free Lunch program.

Previously, we relied on writing articles to influence the reader and make changes; today, we can bypass (traditional media) to make changes by ourselves. Everyone helps each other on microblogs. Drips converging into the ocean; we merge into a new force and will dramatically change our society. China does not lack jour-

nalists like me, but does lack actors."

C. Reputation and social capital

Fei Deng's efforts as a journalist soon received recognition from media and the society. In 2008, he was awarded the bronze price of *the Most Popular Media and Journalist* by the Tianya forum. In 2008, 2009 and 2010, he was consecutively nominated for *Annual Journalist* on the Tencent Chinese Media Festival. In 2010, he was awarded the *Annual Journalist* by Sina microblog and the Tencent Chinese Media Festival, the *100 People that Influenced China's Progress of the Times* by the *Times Weekly*, and the *50 Charismatic Chinese* by the *Southern People Weekly*.

Reputation is an undoubtedly important social capital. In philanthropy, organizations' reputation is their credibility, which unfortunately is lacked in many philanthropic organizations. Having worked in the media for many years, Fei Deng clearly understands what reputation and brand mean to him and his team. Therefore, standardization, openness, and transparency have always been the most important rules since the beginning of Free Lunch, which also have helped with building trust and credibility of the project. As its public credibility increases, the Free Lunch project is able to raise more money and also reduce fundraising-related and management costs gradually, which is inseparable from Fei Deng's social network. For example, many of Fei Deng's air tickets to the project sites were sponsored by businesses and his friends, which greatly reduced administra-

tive costs of the Free Lunch.

As I have to travel a lot, all of my air tickets would amount to certain percent [of administrative costs]. So I would say that because of my uniqueness, I was able to maintain a good reputation of [spending only] 5% [of budget on administrative costs]. Actually, I raised the moral standards [of philanthropists]; in effect, I increased the pressure on my friends from other nonprofit organizations who do not have as much social capital as me. (Fei Deng, Nov 2011)

2. Wise Choice of Philanthropic Area

Carnegie once said that to pursue the influence of philanthropy, we should conduct philanthropic activities in the most valuable areas. The right choices of philanthropic area are related to the roots and mechanisms of social injustice, such as establishing libraries, schools, hospitals, and research institutions. However, current philanthropic donations in these areas are relatively small in China, mainly because these areas require long-term investment, manifest fewer short-term outcomes, and have greater risk for donors. Thus, due to a lack of incentives and motivations to work in these areas, philanthropic project initiators mainly focus on hotspot issues of the society, leading to the strong correlation between philanthropic donations and social events. For example, the amount of donation suddenly increased after an earthquake, but then plummeted soon after. In other words, donations begin with the occurrence of certain social events

and vanish as the events move on, but do not impact the roots of social injustice, where exactly philanthropy should be of great importance.

Currently, modern philanthropy just emerges in China. Philanthropic resources are relatively scarce while there are a lot of social demands. Therefore, how to choose the right philanthropic areas and balance short-term and long-term interests becomes an important topic. Two factors demonstrate that Fei Deng chose the right areas: first, the nutritional growth of children is an issue that is worth philanthropic investment; second, this issue can receive maximum resonances from all social classes even in a stratified society. Since the reform and opening-up era, the increasing social differentiation and uneven interest distribution makes China a stratified society. The stratification manifests in two ways: one is the polarization between the poor and the rich, the reducing class mobility, and the low level of recognition among different classes; the other is the slow political reform process, acute contradictions between the government and the public, the public's low level of trust of the government, and the limited government investment in philanthropic programs. In this social context, the child malnutrition problem can lead to a broader scope of consensus and unite all sectors of civil society as well as the central and local governments to establish a joint force. Particularly, the Free Lunch project can make up the rift between the government and the public through their collaboration.

I was an investigative journalist before, and revealed corrup-

tions and scandals everywhere. I believe it was of great value to society because my oversight would make the society better. However, so many oversights made me felt powerless. Therefore I thought, why not take our own action? Actions with love and kindness would easily reach a consensus and make changes, which would be a good way to change our society. "

3. Opportunities Coming with Philanthropy Crises

In June 2011, the Guo Meimei incident ignited crisis in traditional Chinese philanthropic model. Guo Meimei, the 20-year-old girl who self-proclaimed "living in a mansion and driving a Maserati", published photos of her luxury house, cars and bags on her microblog with an authorized identity as "China Red Cross General Business Manager", which soon caused an uproar in society. While government-affiliated philanthropic organizations' credibility was greatly challenged because of their low financial transparency and scandals, microphilanthropy that initiated in civil society filled in social needs and people's passion of helping others just in time. *Some open and transparent private philanthropic work became a rescue of the public's belief,*" Fei Deng said, *After the Guo Meimei incident, the public even increased their donations to private-run philanthropic programs.* 'Solving a child's hunger problem by donating 3 yuan makes donors feel warm and realistic. Every item of donations and expenditures is published in time on microblog and the project is truly open and transparent, which is the spirit of philanthropy. In other

words, the crisis of government-run philanthropic organizations caused by the Guo Meimei incident in turn provided development opportunities for private microphilanthropy that are more transparent.

IV. Experience and Implications

Free Lunch also calls attention to questions of how a philanthropic project can benefit more children and make a greater influence? In addition to the innovations in the project design, other valuable experience and lessons include: value-oriented projects that are initiated by celebrities are more easily to stand out; local-level breakthroughs are more practical; engaging the public in the whole process of philanthropic project is very important.

1. Value-Oriented Projects Initiated by Celebrities are More Easily to Stand Out

In recent years, innovative philanthropic projects initiated by celebrities, especially media elites, usually generate more widespread social impact. In addition to Fei Deng's Free Lunch, other successful projects include: Love Save Pneumoconiosis, which was launched by Keqin Wang (an influential Chinese journalist, blogger, and professor) to rescue people with pneumoconiosis; I Fly: Training Rural Teachers, initiated by Yongyuan Cui (a famous Chinese talk show host) and has offered six sessions already; Art Education for Migrant Children, founded by Lan Yang (a Chinese media proprietor, journalist, and talk show hostess); and Returning Veterans, launched by Chunlong Sun, a philanthropist transformed from a media person.

Among philanthropic pro-

jects initiated by celebrities, programs with a clear value orientation stand out more easily. These social innovative projects aim at addressing urgent social issues, advocate justice and civil rights protection, and uphold openness and transparency in philanthropy. On one hand, celebrities themselves can expand the influences of philanthropic projects and mobilize more social resources such as their fans. On the other hand, celebrities, who often are social elites, are more visionary and have a better understanding of the nature of social problems. They select philanthropic programs with foresight and address social issues fundamentally. Moreover, celebrities are more likely to adhere to principles of openness and transparency since they do not want to engage in programs that may harm their reputation, which also makes philanthropic programs more likely to succeed.

2. Local-Level Breakthroughs are More Practical

As Fei Deng and his team expected and dedicated to work for, the Free Lunch project successfully led to government action and policy reform on the central-government level. However, the speed of the policy reform is far beyond Fei Deng's expectation. Fei Deng admitted that the Free Lunch project never actively sought attention from the top government officials; instead, the project team kept communicating with local governments to promote "locally universal benefit."

Private philanthropic projects, especially those related to social welfare, need to clarify their relationship with the government

and boundaries in the relationship in order to achieve better outcomes. An ideal situation is that private philanthropic organizations first conduct pilot projects at the local level and explore solutions to social problems, and then the government takes over the projects and expanded them once the pilot projects succeed. In the example of Free Lunch, the private philanthropic organization cooperated with local governments and launched pilot projects in areas such as Hefeng County, Hubei Province. These pilot projects explored feasible plans of solving the child nutrition issue, with respect to the required amount of funding for meeting children's nutritional needs, project management and supervision mode and so forth. In March 2012, Hefeng County became the pilot area of the national nutrition improvement program, and government funding of the nutrition improvement program and project funding of Free Lunch were integrated and coordinated. The success of such local pilot programs facilitated the expansion of the project and provided empirical experiences for the central government's policy-making.

The Free Lunch project exemplifies that cooperation with government on the mezzo level and achieving local breakthroughs are more practical for private philanthropic organizations. According to Yuxin Lan's research on management innovations of nationwide social organizations, local-based innovative explorations are neither driven by bottom-up pressure from social demands, nor by top-down instructions from the central government, but are driven by the local government leaders' innovation."

On the other hand, local governments also need to integrate private forces in their public management innovation. The Free Lunch project created an opportunity for the integration of government and social forces. In recent years, national emerging innovative managerial practices of social organizations showed the possibility of cooperation between local governments and social organizations. Furthermore, innovation in the localities would provide empirical evidence for policy change on the state level.

3. Engaging the Public throughout the Project Process

The Free Lunch project also illustrated the importance of spreading philanthropic values and ideas to the public, stimulating the public's enthusiasm in philanthropic participation, and building a harmonious society and changing China through the public's own philanthropic actions.

With the hope of making everyone care about others, Fei Deng's team tries to foster the public's social responsibility and enthusiasm of helping vulnerable groups through microphilanthropy. In recent years, a series of Chinese governments' corruption and philanthropic scandal impacted public trust of the government and the society. The XiaoYueyue incident caused a great debate on public apathy; the declining social trust resulted in "everyone criticizes and harms each other, but no one really takes an action [to deal with problems]." Therefore, the Free Lunch project is of great importance because it gives the public an opportunity to stop blaming and com-

plaining about others and start doing something to build a better future for children together. In addition, the public is engaged in decision-making, implementation and supervision throughout the project, which also improves the public's civil awareness and democratic governance capacity.

V. Conclusion and Recommendations

Back in the 1930s and 1940s, the Western welfare states carried out Free Lunch programs; however, in poor areas of central and western China, the malnutrition of school-age children is still a long-standing social problem. To deal with this issue, a private philanthropic organization, the China Welfare Foundation's Free Lunch Fund, has made its own efforts and achieved great effects through innovations. This project raised 35 million yuan and benefited more than 34,000 children in only one year since its initiation. More importantly, this social innovation eventually led to the central Chinese government made related policies that would improve child nutrition and health fundamentally.

The success of the Free Lunch project highlights two implications. First, social innovators are the promoters of social innovation; therefore, the government and the society should pay attention to cultivate and find social innovators, and provide them with a supportive environment, which is of significant importance to improve a nation's social innovative capacity. Second, using modern media technologies to mobilize resources and build a transparent management system is the innovation of the Free

Lunch project, and is also the key to its success. The case of Free Lunch provides valuable experience for a large number of philanthropic organizations in China. It suggests that using modern information media technology can expand organizational influence, greatly improve organizational efficiency, reduce the costs of information release, and eventually achieve goals that were impossible in the past. Third, public participation throughout the process of decision-making, project implementation and supervision is not only critical to the success of the project, but also plays an important role in cultivating the public's civil awareness and democratic governance capacity. Last, an effective model to solve social issues is that private philanthropic organizations carry out innovative pilot projects at the local level, and then governments expand the projects to a broader scope.

The case of Free Lunch also leaves us some important questions. First, while highlighting the role of civil philanthropy on leading public policy transition, it is also important to focus on the effect of policy context on social innovation. An ideal model for government-society cooperation is to have civil organizations explore first and the government takes over afterwards. In countries and regions where philanthropy is more developed, civil organizations, which are characterized by autonomy and flexibility, are usually the first actors in detecting social issues and exploring corresponding solutions, and then governments take over and promote related projects after the exploration.

However, not all projects get the luck to be promoted by the government. The Free Lunch project, which successfully led to public policy change and set a good example for cooperation between social organizations and governments, was distinctive because its leader strategically chose to work on the issue of child nutrition. On the contrary, policy changes led by projects working on other areas are relatively slow. Therefore, researchers should focus on more case studies to explore two issues: on one hand, how can civil organizations usher public policy change in areas that are more easily to obtain government support, given China's current political context; on the other hand, perhaps more importantly, what kind of policy context are needed for social innovation, and what should the government do to facilitate social innovation.

Second, social innovation should be accepted more as a process than an outcome. Over the past few years, China's philanthropic donation continuously grew, the philanthropy was thriving, and research and practices regarding social innovation developed constantly. According to Seelos and Mair (2012), "although our knowledge of many organizational and contextual aspects of innovation has grown tremendously, meta-reviews synthesizing innovation studies consistently lament the fragmented nature of innovation research." Social innovation is a complex process that depends on the combination of various organizational and contextual factors in specific situations. Thus, understanding and facilitating social innovation require the consid-

eration of not only positive factors that are potentially helpful for social innovation, but also negative organizational and contextual factors that may prevent or impede social innovation. No matter in the field of research or practice, and no matter in the government or social organizations, the efficiency as well as difficulty of innovation should never be overestimated nor downplayed. Innovation must be based on reality rather than simply the pursuit of the idea of innovation.

China NGO Case Study Series - 4

January 2014

華民研究中心
Huamin Research Center

Rutgers, The State University of New Jersey
School of Social Work
390 George Street, Room 503
New Brunswick, NJ 08901
848-932-5383, ext. 25383
socialwork.rutgers.edu/huamin



华民慈善基金会
HUAMIN CHARITY FOUNDATION

RUTGERS
School of Social Work



清华大学
公共管理学院