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Freedom of Association in Contemporary China: An Examination of its Structure, Content, and Nature

Abstract: The exploration of freedom of association in China can take on particular significance due to China's unique socio-political landscape. This article reviews the general legal structure that governs freedom of association in China from the perspectives of legislature, administration, and courts, and provides an in-depth analysis of the legal sources and contents of the relevant laws and regulations while revealing the limitations faced by the associations and their members. It discusses the nature of freedom of association in China and examines its implications for the development of associations in the long term.

Keywords: Freedom of Association, China, Legal Structure, Political Right, Quasi-Official Nature

1. Background

China's journey towards embracing freedom of association has been shaped by a complex historical backdrop and ongoing socio-political developments.[1] While China's approach differs significantly from many other cultures, a substantial body of English literature has explored the evolution of freedom of association in the country. Much of this research highlights the restrictive conditions under which these freedoms are exercised. For instance, grassroots NGOs and civil society organizations in China are often required to operate within state-controlled spaces that align with government goals, avoiding claims for promoting democracy or criticism of the state.[2] Although some associations can advocate on specific issues, their activities are limited by financial and structural ties to the party-state, blurring the lines between civil society and state control.[3] Legal consequences can occur for those engaging in advocacy outside government-sanctioned parameters, including deregistration,[4] arrests, and criminal charges against labor activists.[5]

However, other scholars have noted a gradual expansion of freedom of association and civil society in China over recent decades. Between 1978 and 2008, civil society organizations gained greater influence over government policy, and despite ongoing restrictions NGOs developed a mutually dependent relationship with the government, achieving increased autonomy as the state withdrew from certain social responsibilities.[6] In the early 2000s, local experiments to promote social organizations were carried out in Shenzhen by granting de facto legal personality to social organizations and allowing direct registration without approval from

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[1] Zuoliang Zhang, "Civil Organizations in Chinese History" [中国历史上的民间组织], in: Xiaoyong Huang, Xiang Gao, and Chenguang Pan, *Annual Report on Chinese Civil Organizations* [中国民间组织报告] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2008) p. 86.

[2] Anthony J. Spires, "Contingent Symbiosis and Civil Society in an Authoritarian State: Understanding the Survival of China's Grassroots NGOs", *American Journal of Sociology* 117(1) (2011) 1 - 45.

[3] Sophia Woodman, "Segmented Publics and the Regulation of Critical Speech in China", *Asian Studies Review* 39 (2015) 100 - 118; Xueyong Zhan, Shui-Yan Tang, "Political Opportunities, Resource Constraints and Policy Advocacy of Environmental NGOs in China", *Public Administration* 91 (2013) 381-399.

[4] Alan Neal, "Guaranteeing Freedom of Association in China's Socialist Market Economy", *International Labor Rights Case Law* 3 (2) (2017) 158–162.

[5] Freedom of Association and Collective Bargaining: Complaint Against the Government of China Presented by the International Trade Union Confederation (ITUC), Case No. 3184. *International Labor Rights Case Law* 3 (2) (2017) 151–157.

[6] Qiusha Ma, "The Governance of NGOs in China since 1978: How Much Autonomy?" Nonprofit and Voluntary Sector Quarterly 31 (2002) 305 - 328.

a sponsor organization, [7] thereby offering more legitimacy while reducing the administrative burden for establishing social organizations. Paradoxically, China's semi-authoritarian structure, while restrictive, has fostered a degree of embeddedness in social movements, creating opportunities for activism within the system.[8] Additionally, under the socialist market economy, social organizations in China have gained more autonomy over time. Interestingly, their desire for freedom from the party-state has diminished since 2001.[9]

Alongside the development of associations, a modern legal framework governing social organizations and associations has also emerged. Its evolution has been influenced by political, economic, and social factors, as well as the development of the state as a whole. On the one hand, changes in the economic system, such as the reform and opening-up period, and shifts in government functions and ideologies have shaped the legal environment for associations.[10] On the other hand, the legal governance framework has responded to the emergence of civil societies and economic and technological organizations, as well as the needs of cultural movements.[11] But overall, the aim of making sure civil society's alignment with government objectives and values[12] has barely changed. This approach is rooted in the concept of "Chinese-Style Constitutionalism," under which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) provides the substantive norms and values that form the basis of the constitution.[13] This system is also described as a "socialist rule of law" where law serves to institutionalize the Party's objectives rather than act as a constraint on the Party.[14] In this framework, social organizations and fundamental rights are viewed as extensions of the Party's political leadership and its representation of the people, rather than as independent entities. The Party positions itself as the political leading force that reflects the will of the people, rather than as a system of independent rights and competitive political parties.[15] As a result, the exercise of freedoms, including freedom of association, is often subordinated to the broader objectives of state control and social stability.

This selective approach is also reflected in China's non-ratification of the two core International Labour Organization Conventions on freedom of association and its declaration of a reservation on Article 8(1)a of the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. Under the framework of Chinese-Style Constitutionalism or the socialist rule of law, governance and legal norms prioritize the collective good, manifested in economic development and social stability, under Party leadership, sometimes at the expense of

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[7] Sijing Zhang, "China's NPO Law and Its Implication on Freedom of Association", *International Journal of Civil Society Law* 10 (3) (2012) 43 - 62

[8] Peter Ho, "Embedded Activism and Political Change in a Semiauthoritarian Context", *China Information* (21) (2007) 187 - 209.

[9] Kazuko Kojima, Jae-Young Choe, Takafumi Ohtomo and Yutaka Tsujinaka, "The Corporatist System and Social Organizations in China", *Management and Organization Review* 8 (2012) 609 - 628.

[10] Keping Yu, "The Emerging of China's Civil Society and Its Significance to Governanc" [中国公民社会的兴起及其对治理的意义] , in: Keyping Yu, *The Rise of Civil Society and Changes in Governance in China* [中国公民社会的兴起与治理的变迁] (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press (China), 2001) p. 208.

[11] Xijin Jia, *The Third Reform: Strategic Development of the Non-Profit Sector in China* [第三次改革: 中国非营利部门的战略发展] (Beijing: Tsinghua University Press, 2005) p. 3.

[12] Keping Yu, "Some Reflections on Improving the Institutional Environment of China's Civil Society" [改善我国公民社会制度环境的若干思考], *Contemporary World and Socialism* (1) (2006) 4-10.

[13] Jiang Shigong, "Chinese-Style Constitutionalism", *Modern China* 40 (2014) 133 - 167.

[14] Larry Catá Backer, "Crafting a Theory of Socialist Democracy for China in the 21st Century: Considering Hu Angang's Theory of Collective Presidency in the Context of the Emerging Chinese Constitutional State", *Asian-Pacific Law & Policy Journal* 16 (1) (2014) 29-81.

[15] Xiaodong Ding, "Law According to the Chinese Communist Party: Constitutionalism and Socialist Rule of Law", *Modern China*, 43 (2017) 322 - 352.

individual rights.[16] In contrast, the ILO Conventions and Article 8(1)(a) of ICESCR emphasize individual rights to freely form and join associations, particularly trade unions, to protect workers' interests and promote labor rights.[17] However, within the Chinese constitutional framework, freedom of association is regarded as a means to achieve broader collective objectives, such as advancing economic development and promoting socialism under the Party's leadership. The legal structure governing associations, including sources from international law, functions to ensure compliance with state and Party interests.

2. The Legal Structure Governing Freedom of Association

2.1 Legislature, Administration, and Courts

The legal structure governing freedom of association in contemporary China involves the roles of the legislature, administration, and courts.

The National People's Congress (NPC) of the People's Republic of China plays a vital role in developing, supervising, and implementing regulations related to freedom of association. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China, established in 1954, recognizes the right of association as a fundamental political right for citizens. Article 62 of the Constitution empowers the NPC to amend the Constitution and oversee its implementation, which is supposed to play the leading role in shaping the legal framework for freedom of association.[18]

Within the administrative sphere, the Ministry of Civil Affairs holds the responsibility for the registration and regulation of associations in China. It adopts administrative tools and mechanisms to enforce compliance and issues penalties for non-compliance when necessary. Additionally, other ministries such as the Ministries of Labor, Taxation, Finance, and others may also issue regulations that impact the operations and management of associations. They act as competent authorities for associations in a specific industry or through their particular functions related to labor protection, taxation, financing, and so on, further influencing the practice of freedom of association.

In contrast, the role of the court system in safeguarding the rights and freedom of associations is relatively limited. Most cases related to freedom of associations are linked to labor unions, charitable organizations, and trade associations. When conducting searches for relevant judgments using keywords like "right of association" and "freedom of association," only a small number of cases were found, indicating a relatively lower level of judicial engagement in association-related matters or the exercise of freedom of association per se.

2.2 Constitutional and Legislative Provisions

Within the legislative realm, the right to freedom of association is explicitly stated in Article 35 of the Chinese Constitution, which affirms that "The citizens of the People's Republic of China have the freedom of speech, publication, assembly, association, procession, demonstration."[19]

There are various statutes that are relevant to social organizations or associations in China. Some of the most significant ones include *Charity Law of the People's Republic of China (2016)*, and *The Law of the People's Republic of China on the Administration of the Domestic Activities of Overseas Non-governmental Organizations (2016)*. In addition to these specific legislations, there are broader statutes that could govern social organizations and associations in China.[20] The extensive range of statutes reflects the comprehensive legal

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[16] Qianfan Zhang, "A constitution without Constitutionalism?: The Paths of Constitutional Development in China", *International Journal of Constitutional Law* 8 (2010) 950 - 976.

[17] Clifford B. Donn and Minghua Zhao, "Freedom of Association: A Comparison of Chinese and US Approaches to ILO Standards", in: J. M. Jensen et al. (eds.), *The ILO from Geneva to the Pacific Rim: West Meets East* (International Labour Organization, 2016), pp. 251-268.

[18] Article 62 of *Constitution of the People's Republic of China.*

[19] Article 35 of *Constitution of the People's Republic of China.*

[20] Such as *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China, Public Security Administration Punishments Law of the People's Republic of China, and so on.*

framework within which social organizations and associations operate in China. It demonstrates that there are diverse legal sources that can influence the practice and compliance of freedom of association in the country.

2.3 The Administrative Regime

Under the current administrative regime, associations in China are subject to government regulation and supervision to ensure compliance with legal requirements and prevent unauthorized or deceptive activities. Associations fall under the jurisdiction of the Ministry of Civil Affairs, and registration with the ministry is a prerequisite for engaging in activities as social organizations. The *"Suggestions on Preventing Illegal Associations from Deceiving and Enriching in the Name of Public Welfare and Charity,"* issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 2021, further emphasizes the government's role in regulating associations. This departmental rule defines illegal social organizations as those that operate without proper registration or continue activities after registration revocation or suspension. It also provides guidelines for identifying such organizations based on their names, including common suffixes such as "association," "society," "research association," and others. These measures aim to ensure that associations operate within the legal framework and maintain the integrity of the social organization sector.

3. The Content of the Freedom of Association

3.1 The Rights

The right to freedom of association in contemporary China refers to several key aspects. First of all, it is recognized that entities and individuals have the right to voluntarily form and join an association.[21] Secondly, associations, as nonprofit legal persons,[22] have the right to independent management and the freedom to engage in external activities.[23] This further extends to associations' authority and autonomy to independently determine the mode and scope of their external activities, establish branch offices, set up banking accounts, organize teams, and collaborate with other associations.

Regarding internal management, associations have the autonomy to create and amend their own constitution and rules, establish a suitable management structure, select leaders and staff,[24] and handle day-to-day operations. This internal autonomy allows associations to function independently and make decisions that align with their objectives and interests. However, it is not clearly stated in any statutes or administrative regulations regarding the right and process of withdrawing from an association, as well as how associations regulate their membership. It only appears that in Guangdong Province, an economically more advanced province than many other regions, there are rules stating that citizens have the freedom to organize and join associations, as well as the freedom not to join and to withdraw from associations.[25]

In recognition of the importance of social organizations and their lawful activities, Article 5 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016) explicitly states that the state is committed to protecting social organizations and their activities in accordance with relevant laws, regulations, and rules. It also prohibits any unlawful interference in the functioning of a social organization by any other organizations or individuals.[26]

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[21] Article 2 of *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016)

[22] Article 87 of the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China.*

[23] Article 57 of the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China.*

[24] Article 91 of the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China.*

[25] Article 21 of the *Implementation Rules for the Registration and Management of Social Organizations in Guangdong Province* (1988), Article 16 of the *Guangdong Province Social Organizaiton Corporate Governance Structure and Governance Rules* (2015).

[26] Article 5 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

3.2 The Restrictions

3.2.1 Restrictions on Association Members

Certain restrictions apply to individuals who wish to become members of an association. These restrictions primarily refer to some specific groups of individuals.

Firstly, current laws in China impose subject-specific restrictions on the exercise of freedom of association. There are limitations for state servants, including military personnel, police officers, civil servants, judges, prosecutors, and others who are engaged in official state duties, from participating in certain organizations.[27]

Secondly, Chinese laws and regulations impose restrictions on the freedom of association for certain categories of prisoners. For example, individuals sentenced to deprivation of political rights are also deprived of their freedom of association.[28] And individuals who have been convicted and sentenced with the deprivation of political rights cannot serve as initiators or be proposed to be in charge of any association.[29]

Thirdly, foreigners could face restrictions when exercising freedom of association in China. While foreign associations should be protected under domestic law and foreigner's freedom of association should exist in accordance with the principle of national treatment, the special status of foreigners can lead to certain restrictions and specific regulations on their association activities. For instance, the *Provisional Regulation for the Administration of Foreign Chambers of Commerce* in China defines a foreign chamber of commerce as a non-profit organization established within Chinese territory by foreign commercial establishments and personnel and requires the association to only engage in non-commercial activities.[30] This regulation specifically governs the establishment conditions, procedures, supervision, and penalties applicable to foreign chambers of commerce.

Lastly, in certain professions or occupations, mandatory membership requirements can restrict the freedom of association. This approach, known as negative freedom of non-association, obligates individuals in specific fields like law and medicine to join a designated association or group in order to practice their profession. For example, lawyers or law firms must join the local lawyers association in the location where they operate. By joining the local lawyers association, lawyers and law firms automatically become members of the All-China Lawyers Association.[31] While these requirements may limit individual autonomy in choosing whether to associate with a particular group, they aim to uphold the professional integrity and accountability of practitioners within their respective fields.

3.2.2 Restrictions on the Objective and Purpose of Association

In addition to the restrictions on individuals, there are also restrictions on the objectives and purpose of the associations, which play a significant role in shaping the boundaries of freedom of association in China. These restrictions are commonly imposed to safeguard national security, public order, public health, and public morals.

The *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016) outline specific restrictions on the purpose and profit-making nature of associations in China. Firstly, the purpose of an association must align with the fundamental principles of safeguarding national security, public safety, unity of the country, public order, social morality, and the rights and freedoms of others.[32] Social associations are prohibited from engaging in

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[27] Article 22, Paragraph 1, of the *Police Law of the People's Republic of China*; Paragraph 9 of Article 46 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Judges*; Paragraph 9 of article 47 of the *Procurator Law of the People's Republic of China.*

[28] Article 54, paragraph 2, of the *Criminal Law of the People's Republic of China.*

[29] Article 13(3) of the *Regulation on the Administration of Social Organizations*; Article 11(2)(4) of the *Provisional Regulations on the Registration and Administration of Private Non-Enterprise Organizations.*

[30] Article 2 of the *Provisional Regulation for the Administration of Foreign Chambers of Commerce in China.*

[31] Article 45 of the *Law of the People's Republic of China on Lawyers.*

[32] Article 4 (1) of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

profit-seeking activities.[33] Associations involved in political, religious, or labour-related activities are subject to additional restrictions specified in relevant laws or regulations, such as the *Regulations on Religious Affairs* and the *Trade Union Law of the People's Republic of China*.

3.2.3 Restrictions on the Establishment of Associations

The process and requirements of establishment for associations in China is also subject to specific restrictions and regulatory requirements. Associations and private non-enterprise units are generally required to undergo review and approval by the relevant authorities and register with the civil affairs department to obtain legal recognition.

Most associations in China follow the principle of double censorship licensing, and associations operating without the necessary permission and proper registration are considered "illegal." *The Provisional Measures on Banning Illegal NGOs* identify three categories of illegal organizations: (a) those engaging in preparatory activities to establish social associations without authorization, (b) those conducting activities in the name of social associations or civil non-enterprise units without proper registration or authorization, and (c) those that continue to operate under the name of social associations or civil non-enterprise units after their registration has been revoked.[34]

Chapter 3 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations (2016)* provides comprehensive guidelines on registration procedures and requirements for establishing associations. It specifies conditions such as minimum membership numbers, standardized name and structure, a fixed location, qualified staff, legal assets and funding sources, legal liability, and compliance with naming regulations.[35] There are restrictions on using certain terms in the names of social organizations, especially for organizations at the national level or local level. Associations may face the possibility of being banned under specific circumstances, including engaging in activities contradicting constitutional principles, profit-making activities, redundancy with existing organizations, involvement of disqualified individuals, fraudulent registration, or inappropriate naming conventions.[36]

These restrictions and registration requirements are in place to ensure compliance with legal procedures, monitor organizational activities, and prevent the operation of unauthorized or unlawful associations.

4. In Practice

While the laws aim to establish and provide a solid framework for understanding and exercising the freedom of association, in practice, the situation can be more complicated. There are hundreds of thousands of social organizations in China, but their legal identity can be confusing because some terms are only customary names and are not legally defined, or some of them seem to exist outside the above structure due to the unique political system.

The first and perhaps the easiest distinction to make here is that social organizations in contempary China usually refer to three types of entities: social associations, foundations, and private non-enterprise units, each subject to different registration regulations. The regulation governing the registration of social associations is the previously mentioned "*Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations (2016)*," although it primarily pertains to social associations, excluding the other two types.

According to the *2022 Civil Affairs Development Statistics Bulletin* released by the Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs, as of 2022, there were a total of 370,093 registered social

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[33] Article 4 (2) of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

[34] Article 2 of the *Provisional Measures on Banning Illegal NGOs.*

[35] Chapter 3 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

[36] Detailed regulations can be found in Articles 29, 30, 31,32, 33, 34 and 13 of the *Regulations on the Registration and Management of Social Organizations* (2016).

organizations in China. Among them, 1,995 were registered with the Ministry of Civil Affairs, 32,210 were registered with provincial civil affairs departments, 90,761 were registered with municipal civil affairs departments, and 245,127 were registered with county-level civil affairs departments. In the same year, there were 9,319 foundations and 511,855 private non-enterprise units.[37]

The second distinction has to be understood is that socail organizations (or social associaitons) defined in the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016), differ from people's organziaitons or people's associations. People's organizations (or associations) are not a defined legal entity, although this term apperas in the Preambel of the Chinese Constitution and the *Charter of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference*. According to *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016), the difference between social organizations and people's organizations is that the latter participate in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference.[38] Trade Unions, the Communist Youth League, and Women's Federation are classic examples of people's organizations; they are part of the People's Political Consultative Conference and participate in the deliberation and administration of state affairs.[39]

The third distinction is that grassroots mass self-governing organizations (Qunzhong Zuzhi), such as villagers' committees and residents' committees, are also massively existing associations but are social organizations that are defined in the above legal structure. According to the Civil Code, an urban residents' committee or a villagers' committee has the status of a basic self-governing mass organization legal person, and may conduct civil activities necessary for performing its functions. [40] And the restrictions mentioned above for other associations don't apply to them.

The fourth distinction is that organizations that are established and active within a State organ, an association, an enterprise or a public institutions are also not governed by the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).[41]

In addition, there are a few organizations that are exempt from registration with the approval of the State Council. [42] These organizations are specific, and they include: China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, the China Writers Association, the All-China Journalists Association, the China Association for Friendship, the China Society of Diplomacy, the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, the China Disabled Persons' Federation, the Song Qingling Foundation, the China Law Society, the Red Cross Society of China, the China Association for Ideological and Political Work among Workers, the China Alumni Association of Europe and America, the Sun Yat-sen University Alumni Association, and the All-China Vocational Education Society.[43]

5. Nature

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[37] Chinese Ministry of Civil Affairs. *2022.* "Civil Affairs Development Statistics Bulletin," Retrieved 10 October 2023, https://www.mca.gov.cn/n156/n2679/c1662004999979995221/attr/306352.pdf

[38] Article 3 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

[39] According to the "Notice Regarding Certain Issues Concerning Exemption from Registration for Some Organizations" issued by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in December 2000, people's organizations participating in the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (at the national level) include: the All-China Federation of Trade Unions, the Communist Youth League of China, the All-China Women's Federation, the China Association for Science and Technology, the All-China Federation of Returned Overseas Chinese, the All-China Taiwan Compatriots Association, the All-China Youth Federation, and the All-China Federation of Industry and Commerce.

[40] Article 101 of the *Civil Code of the People's Republic of China.*

[41] Article 3 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

[42] Article 3 of the *Regulation on Registration and Administration of Social Organizations* (2016).

[43] Article 2 of the *Notice Regarding Certain Issues Concerning Exemption from Registration for Some Organizations*, Ministry of Civil Affairs, December 2000

While this legal structure emphasizes state-defined objectives, it also reflects the government's recognition of the important role that social organizations play in uniting diverse groups and contributing to the nation's political and social life. As advocated on the Chinese government's official website,[44] "social organizations are considered a vital component of contemporary Chinese political life. These organizations have branches in both urban and rural areas, uniting and mobilizing workers, youth, women, and individuals from various sectors across the nation. They actively participate in national and local political activities, coordinate public affairs, safeguard the legitimate rights and interests of the masses, and play a significant role." The article explicitly underscores that freedom of association is a political right in China and points out that, at present, most of China's social organizations possess a quasi-official nature.

First, the establishment of a social organization necessitates approval documents from the competent authorities, in addition to registering with the civil affairs department. Competent authorities refer to government departments at or above the county level and organizations authorized by them. Social organizations, in practice, operate under the supervision of these competent authorities.

Secondly, among the previously mentioned 1995 national social organizations, approximately 200 of them operate under the administrative and budgetary systems. While these organizations are non-governmental in nature, they significantly fulfill some governmental functions. Their work tasks, organizational structures, and leadership appointments are directly determined by central administrative agencies. They receive full financial support from the national budget.

Additionally, another reason supporting the argument that freedom of association is a political right in China is that the establishment and development of these organizations reflect a close alignment with the state's goals and interests. They are often viewed not only as supplements but also as extensions of the government and play a substantial role in implementing government policies. On one hand, those receiving significant government funding and performing functions traditionally associated with the government often play a role in promoting and implementing government policies. On the other hand, social organizations are expected to align with government values and priorities. Organizations advocating positions contrary to government values or mainstream values are unlikely to be registered. Organizations conducting activities in the name of national strategies, using terms like "China" or "the State" in their names, or performing mysticism will face closure, as reported on the official website of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. [45] Despite the fact that most social organizations in China primarily focus on civil society activities and have limited involvement in political life, their need to secure approval and consensus from government departments for their establishment and growth underscores the political nature of freedom of association in contemporary China.

6. Conclusion

While the legal structure governing social organizations has been evolving in response to the exercise of freedom of association, the political nature of freedom of association in contemporary China has not changed much. It is marked by a top-down approach to the governance of the quasi-official social organizations. While these organizations may genuinely own a particular social, cultural, or charitable vision and mission with their own objectives and approaches, the broader political alignment can influence the types and scope of activities they

[44] Xinhua News. 2005. "Chinese Social Associations." Retrieved 10 October 2023, https://www.gov.cn/ziliao/zgjk/2005-05/24/content_531.htm

[45] China News. 2021. "China's Crackdown on Ilegal Social Organizations Escalates." Retrieved 10 October 2023, https://www.mca.gov.cn/zt/n201/n213/c1662004999979988969/content.html

engage in. While these organizations may operate independently in pursuing their goals, they often do so within the parameters set by the government's political and economic agenda, for reasons such as receiving governmental support, integrating social resources, avoiding non-compliance, and media criticism. As a result, these social organizations and associations might find themselves emphasizing certain activities and preferences that are in harmony with state policies or objectives and receiving expected and unexpected rewards in return from their best partner, the government. And in the long term, they may be less likely to engage in endeavors that could be perceived as contrary to these broader political goals. This alignment naturally shapes the landscape of social and charitable activities in China and the exercise of freedom of association and other related freedoms and rights in the long term. While this article is not in any way suggesting that it is a negative thing, as it may very well serve the purpose of focusing all public and private resources onto the priorities that the State has confirmed after all intelligent research and analysis, it is a nuanced interplay between the pursuit of independent social goals and the unspoken, yet tangible, influence of political influence.