

STUDENT VOLUNTEERING IN CHINA AND CANADA: COMPARATIVE PERSPECTIVES¹

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Abstract. While many of the theoretical frameworks for volunteering have been developed and empirically tested in the West, our understanding of volunteering in non-Western countries, such as China, is relatively limited. Nevertheless, in recent decades enormous efforts have been made by the Chinese government to encourage and support volunteering among its citizens, especially youth. Chinese youth are volunteering in greater numbers in response to these initiatives. Given the strongly state-led nature of volunteering in China, as opposed to the voluntary, more citizen-initiated nature of volunteering in Western societies, this paper seeks to understand the impact of these contextual differences on student volunteering. Using data from 1,892 questionnaires completed by university students in China and Canada, we examine differences in their volunteering. The findings clearly show the impact of the differences in sociopolitical structures that are reflected in the nature of students' volunteer participation and perceived benefits.

Keywords: civil society, NGOs, postrevolutionary mobilization, volunteering, students, cross-cultural analysis

Résumé. Alors que de nombreux cadres théoriques pour le bénévolat ont été développés et testés en Occident notre compréhension du volontariat dans les pays non occidentaux, comme la Chine, est relativement limitée. Récemment d'énormes efforts ont été faits par le gouvernement chinois pour encourager et appuyer le bénévolat chez ses citoyens, surtout les jeunes. De jeunes Chinois font du bénévolat en plus grand nombre en réponse à ces initiatives. Étant donné le caractère fortement étatique du bénévolat en Chine, par opposition au volontariat de nature plus citoyenne dans les sociétés occidentales, cette communication cherche à montrer l'impact de ces différences contextuelles sur le volontariat des étudiants. En utilisant les données de 1,892 formulaires remplis par des étudiants d'universités Chinoises et Canadiennes, nous examinons les différences dans leur

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bénévolat. Les résultats montrent clairement l'impact des différences de structures socio-politiques qui se reflètent dans la nature de la participation bénévole des étudiants et des avantages perçus.

Mots clés: société civile; NGOs, postrevolutionary mobilization, volontariat, étudiants, cross-cultural analysis

INTRODUCTION

Volunteering is a ubiquitous social phenomenon that intrigues scholars as well as policy makers. Although much of the scholarly literature is North American or European focused, there is a growing interest in studying this phenomenon globally (Hodgkinson 2003; Inglehart 2003; Salamon and Anheier 1998; Salamon and Sokolowski 2003). Theories regarding who volunteers, why individuals volunteer, and how they volunteer have been developed and tested, yet are largely relevant only to Western countries (Musick and Wilson 2008). What is ill-understood is how and why individuals volunteer elsewhere and how this compares to volunteering in the West. Given different sociopolitical and cultural systems, does volunteering differ? In this study we turn to China, a country that is significantly different from the West in both its social and political positions, and we examine the volunteering done by university students. To understand how their volunteering differs, we contrast our findings with a similar study of university students in a Western country, Canada.

China is an intriguing case for sociological inquiry on this topic. Until the 1940s, it was a Confucian society that emphasized filial piety. Then it underwent some 40 years of strict Communist ruling; since the Chinese government launched market-oriented reforms in 1978, state-society relations have been changing dramatically. One of the most significant developments in the post-Mao era has been the rapid growth of social organizations — ranging from quasi-governmental institutions to unregistered and self-organized community groups — which assist the Chinese state in economic, social, and cultural matters, and provide historically new opportunities for citizen participation and voluntary action. As a result, there has been a burgeoning interest in the study of an emerging civil society in China (Brook and Frolic 1997a; Calhoun 1993; Lu 2009; Ma 2002a, 2002b, 2006; Xin 1993; Xu 2007; Xu and Ngai 2011).

The unique characteristics of China's political and cultural constellation pose fundamental challenges to using Western conceptual lenses, Canada included. Based on the Western notion of civil society as an intermediate sphere of voluntary association and collective action, separate from (and possibly against) the state, the Chinese case is often

cast as a “problem” or “exception” (Brook and Frolic 1997b; Ma 2002a, 2006; Wong and Jun 2006). In a society that continues to be directed by a one-party system, and in which there has been a retreat to political conservatism in the post-Tiananmen period, there seems little room for “freedom of association” and “voluntary action” that is not government sanctioned. The state, which is quite tolerant of citizen’s entrepreneurial initiatives in the business arena, still to a great extent controls social and political life in China (Edele 2005; Xu and Ngai 2011). While NGOs, as a new phenomenon in post-Mao China, have been mushrooming in the past two decades, they operate under severe policy and legislative restrictions, and politically risky organizations are banned by the state (Li 2011). Thus, in many areas in which citizens and voluntary organizations challenge Western democracies, Chinese citizens and voluntary organizations do not oppose the state (Ma 2002a, 2002b; Chen 2009). Scholars, however, caution “against either celebrating the Western narrative of democratic development or proclaiming Chinese exceptionality” (Brook and Frolic 1997b:4) and seek to develop new paradigms of state-society interaction that better accommodate China’s particular institutional path of development.

In a similar vein, the Western notion of volunteering is not directly applicable to the Chinese context. Volunteering is commonly understood as a free act, where individual choice is motivated by a variety of factors such as satisfying religious values, building social capital, or enhancing one’s career prospects (Hall et al. 2009; Hustinx et al. 2010; Musick and Wilson 2008, Reed and Selbee 2003). Furthermore, volunteers are generally recruited at the grassroots level by nonprofits and voluntary associations; government interventions play a relatively negligible role in recruitment. In China, although volunteering remains an individual act, it has been chiefly promoted by the government and most volunteer efforts are (in)directly government initiated or government funded. In a population that is used to taking instruction from government on many aspects of its social life, volunteering may be seen as yet another response to government initiatives rather than one that is purely voluntary. While the party-state remains wary of voluntary associations, it encourages voluntary service as a superior type of morality and respectable social behaviour (Xu and Ngai 2011), making it subject to deliberate public policy, in particular towards Chinese youth. For example, the Ministry of Education in China announced plans to incorporate volunteer service into the evaluation of student performances to promote the spirit of selflessness. Students’ volunteering records will play an important part in university entrance selection, which hitherto has been dominated by exam scores (China Daily 2009).

While knowledge on volunteering in Canada is quite established (see, among others, Hall et al. 2009, 2006, 2004; McLintock 2004; Reed and Selbee 2000, 2003), our understanding of the emerging field of volunteerism in China is very limited and in need of an alternative conceptual framework. This paper contributes to this task using a particular analytical strategy: to compare and contrast volunteer participation in China with a “typical Western country,” Canada. In the literature review, we examine theoretical perspectives on state-society relations, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and volunteering, and then construct a comparative analytical framework. Here, we take up the key challenge of adapting our Western models to the particular Chinese context. In particular, to understand volunteering in the Chinese context, we propose the perspective of “postrevolutionary mobilization” in the post-Mao era (White 1990). Party-led mobilization remained an integral part of the postrevolutionary political process; however it had a more narrow scope and focused on target populations (White 1990). In this case, it concentrated on the student population, encouraging them to volunteer during their student careers in an attempt to build a harmonious society and reduce social tension.

Our empirical findings come from a survey of university students in three top ranked universities in Beijing and in Toronto where questionnaires were administered to examine their habits of volunteering and their perceived benefits of volunteering. Although volunteering is important for service provision, building civic society, and enhancing the community, it is especially important among university and college students who are perceived as the future backbone of society. Volunteering by students is essential to perpetuate the future civic society, as these students assume the roles of future leaders and take positions as politicians, lawyers, physicians, educators, and residents in the community.

COMPARATIVE FRAMEWORK

To understand the nature of volunteering in China, and the particular ways in which it diverges from volunteering in the West (i.e., Canada), we present a comparative framework of state, civil society, NGOs, and volunteering (Table 1). We divide our discussion in two parts, first focusing on the institutional and organizational context in which volunteer participation takes place, and next, discussing the particular nature of volunteering in a cross-cultural perspective. Regardless of context, however, we define volunteering as institutional behaviour that takes place in formal organizations and involves no coercion or remuneration.

Table 1: Comparative Framework of State, Civil Society, NGOs, and Volunteering in Canada and China

	<i>Canada</i>	<i>China</i>
State-society relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Liberal democracy • Western civil society • Intermediate sphere separate from the state • Grassroots association • Facilitative legislation • Societal corporatism 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One-party system • Dual civil society • State-led civil society (dominant) • Grassroots association (marginal) • Restrictive legislation • State corporatism
Moral foundations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Neo-Tocquevillian ideal of voluntary association among free and equal citizens 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moral authority of the leadership • Moral superiority through service for the collective and the building of a harmonious society
Characteristics and dominant role of NGOs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Private, self-governing organizations based on voluntary participation • Political and nonpolitical 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuum from GONGOs to unregistered grassroots • Cooptation and dual-registration system • Nonadversarial (service dominated)
Volunteering	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Volunteering as a free act • Individual recruitment by non-profits • Ongoing service • Collective and private benefits 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'State-led' volunteering • Institutionalized mobilization by the state • Project-oriented • Communist party objectives, collective benefits, morally superior behaviour

As already indicated in the introduction, our main point of departure is an ideal-typical description of civil society and volunteering as fundamentally rooted in the West. Western conceptions of civil society, generally inspired by a neo-Tocquevillian view, suggest that the strength of liberal democracy depends on an intermediary sphere of voluntary association among free and equal citizens, separate from the state, in which democratic values are nourished, collective interests are channelled, and public opinion is formed (Calhoun 1993; Eberly 2000; Seligman 2002). Furthermore, Western civil society is populated by nonprofit organizations, which are distinct in that they are private, which means that they are not part of the apparatus of the state, even though they may receive support from governmental sources, and are self-governing. In addition, membership or participation is entirely voluntary, which means that it is not legally required or otherwise compulsory. And to perform their activities, civil society organizations rely on the efforts and expertise of volunteers (Salamon 2010; Salamon et al. 2004).

While we portray Canada as a typical Western country, it is important to note that across Western societies, there exist important variations in welfare regimes and civil society models. The social origins theory (Salamon and Anheier 1998; Salamon and Sokolowski 2003) explains variations in the size and development of the civil society as an outcome

of broadly defined power relations among social classes and social institutions. In brief, social origins theory identifies four different regimes: liberal, social-democratic, corporatist, and statist with corresponding levels of government social welfare spending and the size of the civil society or nonprofit sector size ranging from high to low. In addition, the social origins theory examines the role of civil society organizations in a society. Depending on the regime, civil society organizations are more likely to provide some services that have an instrumental value to society or expressive services that are the actualization of political, social, or recreational values and interests.

At one end, in the liberal model or regime, low government spending on social welfare services is associated with a relatively large civil society sector mainly focused on service provision. At the opposite end is the social-democratic model, in which high government spending on social welfare results in a limited role for service provision by civil society organizations, but it does provide a larger role for expressive nonprofits. In addition, corporatist and statist models also exist, both characterized by strong states, with the state and civil society organizations partnering in the corporatist model, while the state retains the upper hand in many social policies in the statist model. In both models, the service role is dominant.

Scholars studying Canadian civil society have characterized it as a “hybrid liberal-corporatist regime” (Hall et al. 2005). On the one hand, it resembles the welfare partnership of corporatist continental European welfare regimes, with a similarly high level of government funding, a predominance of service activities and a moderate share of volunteers in the civil society workforce. On the other hand, Canada’s civil society has higher levels of private philanthropic support and a higher absolute amount of volunteer effort, which is more in line with the liberal regime type (see Hall et al., 2005).

While China has not been analyzed as part of existing cross-national analysis of the civil society sector, it could be characterized as a statist regime. In China, the relationship between the state and civil society remains a heavily state-dominated one (Brook and Frolic 1997b; Ma 2006; Simon 2009), and some of the common characteristics of civil society organizations as self-governing and private entities in which participation is noncompulsory have to be relaxed to understand the Chinese case (Chen 2009; Ma 2002a; Simon 2009). Frolic (1997) has conceptualized the case of China as a “dual civil society,” indicating that two kinds of civil society exist in today’s China. While, on the one hand, there are manifestations of an emerging civil society in the more familiar Western “democratic” sense, such grassroots and community organizations are

still poorly developed, depend heavily upon the tolerance of the authorities, and lack the power and legitimacy to organize and mobilize residents (Frolic 1997; Li 2011; Ma 2006; Simon 2009; Xu 2007). On the other hand, an authoritarian “state-led civil society” is predominant. It includes a range of social organizations and quasi-administrative units that are created from the top down or co-opted by the state as a support mechanism to help it manage pressing economic and social problems. Indeed, faced with a “daunting social agenda” (Ma 2006), the state has pushed for a “de-monopolization of social welfare,” and is increasingly harnessing social organizations to provide human services (Xu and Ngai 2011). For example, in this context, the government came up with the slogan of “small government, big society” (Ma 2006), which echoes Western conceptions of partnerships between the state and the voluntary sector in the provision of welfare (Ma 2006; Leung and Wong 1999).

It is important to emphasize the nonadversarial role that NGOs play in China. While the government in China has turned to NGOs to shoulder social and economic responsibilities, at the same time, it remains keenly aware of potential political risks:

For the CCP [Chinese Communist Party] and the government, NGOs should not be the fruit of people exercising their rights of association. Rather, they are subject to official approval and regulation, and are desirable only in so far as they deliver what the party-state needs. (Ma 2006:47–48)

The most contested manifestation of the increasingly strict NGO regulation is the “dual registration system,” which requires NGOs to register with the local or national level office of the Ministry of Civil Affairs. To do so they must have the approval of a supervisory unit — usually a governmental institution or a government-organized or quasi-governmental organization (commonly referred to as GONGO — Government-Organized Non-Governmental Organization) (Ma 2006; Simon 2009; Xu and Ngai 2011). NGOs refer to these units as “mothers-in-law” because they exercise day-to-day oversight, which helps the government to control NGOs politically and legally (Ma 2006:64).

There are a multitude of unregistered grassroots organizations. It is estimated that their number is about 10 times greater than the number of those registered (Wang and Jia 2002, in Xu and Ngai 2009), and they are only tolerated as long as they do not oppose the party-state (Simon 2009). State control also extends to NGOs outside the regulatory system; in order to obtain “performance legitimacy,” these grassroots organizations must demonstrate “moral superiority” (Xu and Ngai 2011), that is, their mission should include transcendent moral values for the public

good. As long as they are involved in (nonadversarial) service for the collective, the government's guiding principle is not to contact, recognize, or ban these organizations (Xu and Ngai 2011).

In sum, scholars propose to understand China's newly prominent organizations as the product of a particular form of "state corporatism" (Ma 2002a), which refers to a system in which the state determines which organizations are legitimate and forms an unequal partnership with them. Thus, while they enjoy some degree of autonomy, the weight of the decision-making power lies very heavily on the side of the state. State corporatism differs noticeably from the "societal corporatism" present in the West (Chan 1993; Esping-Andersen 1990; Salamon 2010). The latter is a form of interest group politics based on bargaining among equal partners, rather than the dominance of the state. Societal corporatism is common among Western European countries like Germany, France, and Belgium, and Canada has also been characterized as a "hybrid" regime combining liberal and corporatist welfare characteristics, as indicated above (Hall et al. 2005). This hybrid constellation makes Canada an interesting case for comparison. Both the Canadian and Chinese regimes are service dominant, with a high level of state involvement — yet of a different sort. While in Canada, the state performs an "enabling role," with high social spending and a facilitative legislation, in China, state support is low and NGOs have to operate within a highly restrictive legal framework.

Against the background of these contrasting institutional configurations, a differentiated, culturally adapted understanding of volunteering is warranted. In the West, Canada included, volunteering is typically understood in a relatively strict manner, namely as a free act for which the volunteer receives no remuneration, and which is conducted for the benefit of others or society at large in formal and self-governing organizations (Cnaan et al. 1996; Handy et al. 2000; Hustinx et al. 2010; Musick and Wilson 2008; Salamon et al. 2004). This definition is standard in the international literature on volunteering. However, volunteering in China fundamentally differs from this standard definition in that much of the impetus comes from the state. Indeed, most volunteer activities in China are initiated and controlled by the government. While in the West, volunteers are generally recruited by nonprofits, in China, this is done by the government, and for some categories of citizens, volunteering can even be compulsory (i.e., members of the Chinese Communist Party) (Xu and Ngai 2011). In addition, "state-led volunteering" is channeled through quasi-governmental organization (GONGOs) and registered NGOs, and volunteering in China is essentially not an adversarial or confrontational act towards government policies. Instead, the government promotes vol-

untary service as morally superior behaviour aimed at contributing to the collective, casting volunteers in a service function (Xu and Ngai 2011). While in Canada, the collective benefits of volunteering are also part of the public discourse, and government (provincial and federal) promotes volunteerism, it is also very common to emphasize the private benefits; most volunteers tend to be motivated by a combination of both.

These differences are fundamental, but to our knowledge, no studies have taken up the challenge of conceptualizing volunteering within this particular Chinese constellation. We propose to look at Chinese volunteering through the lens of theories of postrevolutionary mass mobilization, which argue that postrevolutionary regimes, despite formal repudiation of mass movements, continue to use mobilization as an instrument of political and social engineering (White 1990). In her study of the one-child policy in China, White (1990) suggests two key characteristics of the mass campaign: First, its goal was to advance socialism by targeting a particular obstacle or by supporting a specific ideal. Second, mass movements are initiated and led by the party; people are mobilized outside of their normal routines. Campaigning tools are three-fold: informational (e.g., newspaper articles, slogans, mobilization meetings, pamphlets); organizational (e.g., sending in outside cadres, creating work teams, curtailment of other programs or activities, disruption of work routines or reorganization of the unit), and mass participation (e.g., participating after regular work hours; mobilization of minority, youth, or other special groups and organizations; study groups; local, regional, and national rallies) (White 1990:59). In comparison to Maoist mass mobilization, however, the post-Maoist language is softened, since it is no longer used as a populist instrument of permanent revolution to “smash” the party/state apparatus, but is focused on “engineering” through party-controlled mobilization from above in pursuit of specific and practical goals (White 1990:56). Post-Maoist institutionalized mobilization focuses on changing behaviour and obtaining practical results towards a harmonious society² while maintaining economic growth and social development. Volunteering in China is an essential part of this effort; hence it should be understood as a state-sponsored effort to achieve political goals through intensive and targeted mobilization of active personal commitment (adapted from Bennett 1976, quoted in White 1990). In the next section, we discuss in more detail the participation by youth (and students more specifically) in China and Canada.

2. In the face of escalating social and economic challenges resulting from China's unprecedented economic growth, the building of a socialist “harmonious society” was introduced by Chinese President Hu Jintao, at the National Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (2005). It included a variety of initiatives that would ensure steady social development with no social turbulence (Geis and Holt 2009).

YOUTH VOLUNTEERING IN CHINA AND CANADA

Both in China and Canada, volunteering rates among youth are high and there is a public policy towards youth participation. A key difference is that in Canada, the state promotes volunteering among youth but plays a minimal role in recruitment or in directing the field of volunteering; in China, as we have argued above, most volunteering is part of a state-led institutionalized mobilization. First, we will briefly sketch the differential landscape of youth (student) volunteering in both countries, and, next, develop our research hypotheses based on key contextual difference between the two countries.

Youth Volunteering in China

In general, in China, youth, and in particular university students, who are seen as future leaders of society, have received increasing attention from the government, which has set up a variety of volunteering programs to promote its agenda of a harmonious society. Not surprisingly, youth volunteering is a popular phenomenon in China. The Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Youth League (CCYL) reported 29.5 million registered youth volunteers in China in 2008, and in the last 15 years — since CCYL initiated youth volunteer programs — 380 million youngsters have given nearly 8 trillion hours of volunteer work (Chinaview 2008).

Although youth are highly involved in volunteering, university students participate in much larger numbers. In 1999 university students constituted a small fraction (1%) of youth in China but represented 53% of youth volunteers (Yuanzhu 2005). The Chinese government has taken (top-down) initiatives to directly promote volunteering among students, and universities often receive money to support campus-based initiatives and student organizations that mobilize student volunteers and address issues of stability, poverty, education, and environmental protection. “Green Clubs” on university campuses are an example of such organizing; started by students in 1996, they popularized the cause of environmental protection and grew into a network linking 270 environmental groups on university campuses throughout China (Lu 2003; Pulver 2009). The biggest thrust to endorse volunteering, especially in Beijing where our study is based, came through a government initiative to promote volunteerism at the 2008 Olympic and Paralympics Games, resulting in events that involved the largest number of volunteers in one venue in history. Estimates range from 350,000 to 500,000 volunteers. According to Xinhua News (2008) the number of applicants from Bei-

ing alone was 256,000 of which 181,500 (71%) were university and college students.

The burgeoning volunteer involvement of youth and students in China can be understood against the background of the government's continuing political and cultural hegemony. After the tragic consequences of Tiananmen Square in 1989, Chinese youth eschewed politics and participation in the political life of China (Wanxue and Hanwei 2004). Mostly, they focused their attention on more pragmatic and nonpolitical issues such as university education and lucrative careers (Gang 2005; Johnson et al. 2007; Wanxue and Hanwei 2004). Gang (2005) suggested that the only way to participate in the public sphere was through relatively innocuous volunteering activities that were directly or indirectly sponsored by the state and promoted by their schools and universities. Co-opting students into doing voluntary work for the collective was an effective strategy to regain political legitimacy, build civic morale, and give youth a stake in building a better society using direct action. Recent initiatives and programs are also increasingly focused on countering the perceived trend of rising levels of individualism and materialism, and the decline of traditional values among contemporary Chinese youth. With increasing exposure to Western culture and growing competition at home for educational and labour market opportunities, China's youth faced traditional values promoting collectivist orientations and respect for authority on the one hand, while on the other hand, they were expected to compete for individually oriented materialistic opportunities. A marked move towards trends of individualism and materialism arising from the single-child policy and economic liberalization has led to the loss of collective interests and traditional values (Pei 1998; Wanxue and Hanwei 2004; Johnson et al. 2007). To counter these trends, many initiatives and programs aimed at exposing youth to a variety of societal needs and issues and providing them training in leadership and organization to meet the overarching goals of a "harmonious society."

Youth Volunteering in Canada

Volunteering is a familiar feature of life in Canada and takes place primarily in nonprofit organizations. Unlike China, voluntary service in Canada developed spontaneously as a grassroots initiative while the impetus in China was the government (Xu and Ngai 2011). Although some key nonprofits in Canada (hospitals, other healthcare organizations, universities, museums, historical sites, etc.) operate in partnership with the government, volunteer programs are not initiated or supervised by the government, with one exception — those in high school, as dis-

cussed below. As shown in the national survey of Canadian volunteers, most volunteers (68%) were either recruited by the organizations or by individuals (Hall et al. 2009). Thus, in Canada, private nonprofits initiate most of the demand for volunteering, providing ample volunteer opportunities. There are an estimated 161,000 nonprofits in Canada and half of these (54%) are run entirely by volunteers (Hall et al. 2004). Collectively, in 2007, nonprofit organizations drew on 46% of all Canadians (over the age of 15) who donated over 2 billion volunteer hours. Young people participated at higher rates than any other age group; large national surveys in Canada show that 58% of those aged 15–24 reported volunteer activities in 2007 (Hall et al. 2009).

In addition, mandatory community service is relatively common among high school students in Canada since 1999 and it is often promoted by the government (Meinhard et al. 2006). Much like other programs, the purpose of the community service component is to encourage students to develop a greater awareness and understanding of civic responsibility and the role they can play in supporting and strengthening their communities. Although the requirement benefits communities, the primary purpose is to contribute to students' development through opportunities to learn about the contributions they can make to the community (Ontario Ministry of Education 2009). It includes doing the type of work usually done by volunteers, and thus students often work alongside volunteers. In this respect they are exposed to volunteering, although their own work is mandatory and cannot be classified as volunteering in a strict sense (Meinhard et al. 2006). As students move on to university, there are no such mandatory community service programs across the board, but may in rare exceptions exist to meet a course requirement. In general, students are directly recruited by nonprofit organizations who in turn incur costs of recruiting, screening, and training volunteers. To offset these costs they often expect them to have some ongoing commitment in the form of ongoing service (weekly or monthly) for a period of at least six months or one year (Meinhard et al. 2006).

In summary, in China, student volunteers are mobilized under the party-state's agenda of a harmonious society, in which voluntary service for the collective is given a status of moral superiority. In Canada, as in other Western countries, the collective benefits of volunteering are also highly valued, however, volunteering is very commonly linked to a variety of private benefits to the volunteers themselves — such as enhancing one's social capital or building leadership skills. Thus, both collective and private benefits are present (Hall et al. 2009). In the context of student volunteering, we further note that in Canada, volunteering plays an important “signaling role” in the labour market and in admission into

institutions of higher learning. In an environment characterized by competition, volunteering signals to the (potential) employer or admission officer that the candidate possesses desired qualities (Handy et al. 2010; Katz and Rosenberg 2005). This may affect students' perception of the benefits of volunteering, with private benefits to a considerable extent being "institution driven."

HYPOTHESES

The context in which university students in China and Canada volunteer differs significantly, in that students in China are responding to government mobilization. Furthermore, there exist numerous opportunities to volunteers through programs initiated at their universities. This will make it easier for Chinese students to find and engage in volunteering than their counterparts in Canada. Canadian university students are more likely to be responding to private nonprofits or calls to volunteer from individuals. It requires relatively more effort to find volunteering opportunities, and there are no government expectations for students to do so. Given these differences and the proclivity of Chinese to take instruction from governments in general in China, we expect *volunteering levels among Chinese students will be higher relative to Canadian students* (H1). On the other hand, government initiatives in China are largely project-oriented, whereas private nonprofits have a structural need and are mainly looking for ongoing involvement. Hence we expect *volunteering done by Chinese students to be less likely on an ongoing basis (monthly or weekly basis) than the volunteering done by Canadian students* (H2).

Furthermore, volunteering in China and Canada should be situated in different normative frameworks. In China, the collective benefits are emphasized, with volunteering being a morally superior act that contributes to the building of a harmonious society; in Canada's liberal regime, there is more emphasis on the private benefits, and volunteering plays an important signaling role for students entering the labour market. Thus, we expect that the perceived benefits of volunteering will differ for both countries, and hypothesize that *private benefits of volunteering will dominate perceived benefits among Canadian students, whereas Chinese students are more likely to emphasize collective benefits of volunteering* (H3).

Finally, we look at the determinants of student volunteering in China and Canada. In the literature, relevant to countries where volunteerism is initiated by the private nonprofit sector, and where individualism is valued, as in Canada, the conventional determinants of volunteering include

individual characteristics such as gender, socioeconomic status, vocational choice, and personal values and beliefs. These individual level determinants are consistently found to influence volunteer participation (Musick and Wilson 2008). However, if volunteer initiatives are led by government, we assume these individual differences might be less influential as determinants of volunteering. As the Chinese government-led initiatives to volunteer are intended to promote a harmonious society and supported by government through various funds and directives regarding the projects where students can volunteer, we expect Chinese students will be less influenced in their decision to volunteer by individual values and sociodemographic characteristics than their counterparts in Canada. We expect significant differences in the determinants to volunteer in both these countries. *Canadian students' volunteering is more likely to be influenced by individual characteristics than their counterparts in China* (H4).

METHODS

Procedures

We use data collected from university students in Canada and China. The instrument used was designed for this study. The questionnaire was developed in English, and we used a research team of three native Chinese speakers to transliterate the questionnaire into Chinese, thus adapting for cultural differences between China and Canada. It was then reviewed by a panel of experts, pretested in both countries, and fine-tuned to ensure clarity and consistency. The surveys were then distributed among university students in three top ranked universities in Beijing (China) and three top ranked universities in Toronto (Canada) using a sample of convenience which was stratified along academic disciplines (social sciences, humanities, business/economics, natural sciences, and engineering).³ Questionnaires were distributed in class and took 10–15 minutes to complete. Student participation was entirely voluntary, and there were no reports of students declining to take part, thus reducing the risk of respondent self-selection. Data were collected in the 2006–07 academic year.

3. Unfortunately, due to legal and privacy restrictions, we were not able to ask about race or the ethnic composition of the students. Since we chose three universities in Toronto, the most multiethnic city in the world, we are aware of this data restriction. It is highly likely that the student population reflects the ethnicity of the city as all three universities have a largely commuter student population. The Chinese students in our sample, on the contrary, will be more ethnically homogeneous. To remedy this limitation, we control for SES, values, and religiosity — background variables that are closely related to race and ethnicity.

Measures

A questionnaire was designed for this study. Here we define volunteering by stating right at the beginning: "Giving freely of your time to help others through organizations." We underscored the element of "free" participation to distinguish it from "volunteering or community service as a requirement for graduation," and ask a separate question about it: "Does your university [high school] have [had] a volunteering or community service requirement for graduation" and ask them to distinguish if this is [was] "compulsory" or "optional." Further, in our multivariate analysis we control for this type of volunteering. In the sample we find that compulsion volunteer to fulfill education requirements at university only affected a small percentage of the students: 7.7 % in Canada and 4.6% in China.

In addition to participation in volunteering in general, we also included a number of measures to map students' frequency and intensity of volunteering, and the focus of volunteering. We inquired whether students participated in volunteering in formal organizations in the 12 months preceding the survey (yes=1, no=0), and their frequency of volunteering (none, occasionally, monthly, or weekly — the latter two categories recoded into "ongoing volunteering"), and the average number of hours of volunteering per month. We also asked students to identify the field(s) of volunteering (religious, human services, sports/culture, university, and youth; yes=1, no=0).

Next, students were asked to rate a set of 5-point Likert-type statements regarding benefits of volunteering. The question was framed as follows: "In addition to helping others, what do you think the benefits of volunteering are for the volunteer?" with a list of ten 5-point Likert-type statements ("strongly disagree" to "strongly agree"). The items were subjected to an exploratory factor analysis based on a maximum-likelihood extraction with orthogonal (varimax) rotation. Eight items with factor loadings above .40 were retained and a simple structure was obtained. Perceived benefits of volunteering could be divided into two factors. The first factor grouped six statements that referred to individual benefits derived from volunteering (Cronbach's alpha .84): "making social contacts," "self satisfaction," "job/career experience," "opportunity to learn new things," "professional networking," and "leadership skills." The second factor (Cronbach's alpha .76) combined two statements that expressed the benefits resulting from meeting institutional requirements: "providing references required by employers or for admission to university," and "fulfilling requisites for government or school program." These two factors both refer to private benefits; however, we distinguish

these benefits into those that are individual benefits (Factor 1) as identified in the discussion above. The benefits in Factor 2 are those that are especially cogent to the university student population and are primarily a result of what institutions initiate and confer. We refer to these as institution-driven private benefits (Factor 2). Thus the benefits in Factor 1 are the social and material returns to the individual volunteer regardless of any institutional interface; whereas the benefits in Factor 2 are a direct response to institutional expectations that may differ in China and Canada. The importance of collective benefits is especially salient in the Chinese context; although the instrument contains one such item, it was not retained in the factor analysis. We opted to treat this item as a separate type of benefit: "building harmony and trust among people in society."

The survey furthermore included a number of background characteristics: gender (women coded 1; men treated as reference category), age in years, and household income (with lower income class treated as reference category, versus middle and high income class). In addition, we accounted for individuals' personal values by means of an additive 5-point Likert-type scale (Cronbach's alpha .75) that assessed the importance of self-oriented values. Individuals who score high on self-oriented values attach high importance to: making a lot of money; being successful in one's studies or work; living a happy, comfortable life; and being able to do what you want. We measured students' religiosity by the importance attached to having a religious faith (important to very important coded as 1; less important treated as reference category). We also control for the study program (business/economics, social sciences, and humanities coded 1; all other programs treated as reference category). Finally, we account for whether students were required or expected to do some community service in high school or in university (yes=1, no=0).

Sample Characteristics

In total, 1,892 students took part in the survey; 919 were Chinese students, and 973 were Canadian students. Of the total sample, 41.4% were male, and 58.6% female. In China, 51.4% were male, and 48.6% female. In Canada, 41.4% were male, and 58.6% female. The mean age in the sample was 21.74 years old, with a median of 21 years. The mean age in China was 20.84 years (SD 1.64), with 37.9% of the sample between 16 and 20 years old, and 99.4% younger than 26 years old. In Canada, the mean age was 22.64 years (SD 6.06), with 47.2% of the sample being between 17 and 20 years old, and 82.5% younger than 26 years old. One-fifth or 19.6% of the sample was from a lower-class family background, 71.9% from a middle-class family, and 8.5% from a high-class family.

In China, more students indicated a lower-class background (25.9%), with 70.2% from a middle-class family and a minority of 3.8% from a high-class family. In Canada, 13.4% had a low-class family background, 73.3% a middle-class, and 13.1% a high-class family background.

In terms of study discipline, the largest group of students were in business and economics (31.1% in total sample; 35.4% in China, and 26.9% in Canada). The remaining students were from engineering, humanities, natural sciences, and social sciences with percentages ranging between 20% and 10%, with the exception of engineering students (0.4%) and other study disciplines (30.8%) in Canada. Overall, 35% of the sample reported compulsory service requirements in high school, but significant differences between the countries existed. Whereas only 6.8% of Chinese students reported compulsory services requirements in high school, 62.2% of Canadian students did so. Chinese students were more likely to be exposed to optional service requirements in high school than Canadian students (18.3% and 6.9% respectively). At university, compulsory service requirements are relatively rare both in China and Canada (4.6% and 7.7% respectively). Optional service requirements in university were reported more frequently (15.3% in China and 20.5% in Canada).

RESULTS

Student Volunteering in China and Canada

The first part of our analysis compares statistics of volunteer participation in China and Canada. We look at students' rates and frequency of volunteering, their fields of volunteering, and their perceived benefits of volunteering. First, with respect to participation rates, we note high levels of volunteering among university students in both countries. The difference in the participation rates of Chinese (84.5%) and Canadian students (79.7%) is statistically significant ($X^2=7.691$; $df=1$; $p<.01$), but not substantial. However, Chinese students (16.8%), in comparison to Canadian students (31.7%), report significantly less participation on an ongoing basis ($X^2=55.917$; $df=1$; $p<.001$). This is also reflected in the average number of hours of volunteering per month: Chinese students estimate investing an average of 2.4 monthly hours, while Canadian students estimate an average of 15.6 hours. Regarding our first set of hypotheses (H1 and H2), these findings suggest that the government-led, large-scale organization of volunteering in China induces a large majority of students to volunteer. However, the contrast with Canadian students who are generally recruited by nonprofits without government intervention is not pronounced. As in China, most of the government initiatives are project-based, demanding little ongoing time investment from students.

Thus we find students in China are significantly less involved in ongoing (weekly or monthly) volunteering than Canadian students, and devote substantially less time to their volunteer activities. The specific context of student volunteering in China is further demonstrated by the fields in which they volunteer. As seen in Table 2, in comparison to Canadian students, Chinese students are significantly more likely to be involved in university student clubs or other university-based organizations, and in sport or cultural organizations — which are precisely the areas in which the state, in collaboration with universities, has stimulated student participation. Canadian students are most likely to be engaged in mentoring or counseling activities for youth, followed by sports and culture, and university-based volunteering. Furthermore, Canadian students volunteer substantially more for religious and human service organizations.

Table 2. Student Volunteering in China and Canada.

	<i>China</i>	<i>Canada</i>
Volunteering (%)	84.5	79.7
Ongoing volunteering (%)	16.8	31.7
Average number of hours of volunteering per month	2.44 (SD 15.11)	15.58 (SD 59.01)
Field of volunteering (%)		
University	66.8	33.0
Sport and culture	53.5	35.6
Youth mentoring	32.4	47.0
Religious volunteering	4.0	24.2
Human services	9.0	30.4

We also investigated what students perceive as the benefits of volunteering, and how this differs depending on the institutional and cultural context. As discussed above, volunteers can derive collective and private benefits from their volunteer activities, and we hypothesized that private benefits will dominate among Canadian students, while collective benefits will prevail among Chinese students. Comparing the mean scores on the three measures of private and collective benefits, Canadian students on average value both types of private benefits significantly higher than Chinese students (respectively 4.06 and 3.93 for the individual benefits, and 3.91 and 3.31 for the institution-driven private benefits). Chinese students, on the other hand, are significantly more likely to emphasize the collective benefits of volunteering, that is, the important contribution volunteers pay to building harmony and trust among people in society, in comparison to Canadian students (respectively 4.06 vs. 3.87).

In Table 3, we present the results of a multivariate regression in which we examine the country effects, taking into account students' background characteristics and study-related variables, while controlling for volun-

teer participation. Table 3 shows that the country context indeed has a major impact on students' perceptions of the benefits of volunteering. As hypothesized, students in China are more prone to emphasize the collective benefits, whereas Canadian students are significantly more likely to see the private benefits of volunteering. However, this is only the case for the institution-driven private benefits. Surprisingly, there is no country difference in relation to students' perception of the individual benefits of volunteering. We further note that female students tend to stress all three types of benefits much stronger than male students, and that attachment to self-oriented values has a positive effect on recognizing the individual benefits derived from volunteering. In addition, a number of variables generate marginally significant effects. Students from higher income families are less likely to emphasize individual benefits, while age has a negative effect on the perception of institution-driven private benefits. Students in business/economics, as compared to students in other programs, also tend to put less emphasis on the institution-driven private benefits of volunteering. When students are exposed to service requirements at the university, they are slightly more likely to see the institution-driven private benefits and the collective benefits of volunteering.

Table 3. Perceived Benefits of Volunteering in China and Canada (OLS Regression, Standardized Regression Coefficients), Controlled for Participation in Volunteering.

	<i>Individual benefits</i>	<i>Institution-driven private benefits</i>	<i>Collective benefits</i>
Country (Ref = China)			
Canada	.03	.31***	-.16***
Gender (Ref = Male)	.12***	.09***	.08***
Age	.03	-.06*	.04
Family income (Ref = Lower-class)			
Middle-class	.004	.01	.000
Higher-class	-.06*	.01	-.05
Self-oriented values	.14***	.03	.02
Religiosity (Ref = No or weak)	-.05	-.03	.02
Program (Ref = Other programs)			
Business/Economics	-.03	-.06*	.02
Social Sciences	.01	-.02	.01
Humanities	.01	.01	.02
Service requirements			
High school (Ref = No)	-.001	.05	.04
University (Ref = No)	.01	.05*	.05*
Adj. R-Square	.04	.14	.03

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Determinants of Student Volunteering in China and Canada

To understand if and how the determinants of student volunteering in China and Canada differ, in Table 4, we present two logistic regression

models for each country to explain participation in volunteering and in ongoing volunteering using the same set of independent variables.

Looking at participation in volunteering in the first model, individual background characteristics do not differentiate between volunteers and nonvolunteers in China, as predicted. However, there is a strong positive effect of exposure to service requirements (optional or mandatory) at university on the likelihood of volunteering, suggesting that volunteering may be a response to institutional factors. Turning to benefits, we find that the collective benefit of volunteering significantly affects Chinese students' volunteering. The positive effect of public benefits echoes the discourse of the Chinese government's efforts to promote volunteering. What is of further interest is that institution-driven private benefits do not influence student volunteer participation at all. This suggests that while Chinese students are likely to volunteer due to service requirements, they do not see this as a benefit of volunteering. Thus Chinese students see volunteering as providing few private benefits and they have, to a significant extent, adopted the publicly endorsed discourse promoting collective benefits of volunteering.

The particularity of Chinese student volunteering becomes more pronounced when compared with the determinants of student volunteering in Canada. Canadian students who are likely to volunteer are distinguished from those who do not by particular individual characteristics. Students with stronger religious values are significantly more likely to volunteer. The program of study also influences volunteering — business/economics students are significantly less likely to volunteer than students in other programs. Service requirements in high school have a significant positive effect on the likelihood of Canadian students' volunteering, suggesting a socialization effect of exposure to volunteering on future volunteering.

As hypothesized, we find that private benefits are important predictors of volunteering by Canadian students, while collective benefits do not affect their rates of volunteering. Given the strong signaling function of volunteering in Canada (discussed above), it is not surprising that perceived individual benefits are the most important predictor of student volunteering. However, for the institution-driven private benefits (providing references required by employers or for admission to university and fulfilling requisites for government or school program) students are significantly less likely to volunteer, a puzzling finding, and contrary to our expectations. It might suggest that many of the university students responding to the questionnaire are already pursuing a terminal degree with no plans for further studies and it may be too early to be thinking of employment. Hence these benefits do not provide an incentive to volunteer at this stage for such students, and are underreported.

Table 4. Determinants of Participation in Volunteering and Ongoing Volunteering (*) in China and Canada, Binary Logistic Regression, Odds Ratios (Exp.(B)).

	<i>Volunteering</i>		<i>Ongoing volunteering</i>	
	<i>China</i>	<i>Canada</i>	<i>China</i>	<i>Canada</i>
Gender (Ref = Male)	1.45	.68	1.15	1.56*
Age	1.01	.99	1.03	.99
Family income (Ref=Lower-class)				
Middle-class	.97	.61	1.52	.76
Higher-class	1.21	.71	2.42*	.96
Self-oriented values	1.16	.97	.75*	.68***
Religiosity (Ref = No or weak)	1.33	1.65*	1.05	1.80***
Program (Ref = Other programs)				
Business/Economics	.89	.56**	.60*	.52***
Service requirements				
High school (Ref = No)	.84	1.60*	.88	.85
University (Ref = No)	2.03**	1.54	1.46	1.21
Individual benefits	.72	2.77***	.67*	2.50***
Institution-driven private benefits	.90	.46***	.92	.57***
Collective benefits	1.41*	.96	1.36*	1.07
Constant	2.75	2.73	.36	.41
R-Square	.04	.12	.05	.15

(*) Volunteering: participation versus no participation; ongoing volunteering: monthly or weekly versus less frequent or no volunteering.

Note: * $p < .05$ ** $p < .01$ *** $p < .001$

Looking at the determinants of ongoing volunteering in our regression models (models 3 and 4), the individual characteristics of Chinese students play a role. This finding suggests that when students elect to perform ongoing volunteering, the choice is more likely to be individual and hence sociodemographic characteristics are of importance. However, this is not the case for the ad-hoc government-initiated projects. Students who come from higher income homes are significantly more likely to volunteer on an ongoing basis than those from the lowest income homes — supporting the dominant status approach (Smith 1994). We find those students who attach importance to self-oriented values and who are studying business/economics are significantly less likely to volunteer. There is no effect of service requirements at university on ongoing volunteering. This finding seems to support our assertion that many of the government-sponsored volunteer initiatives in China are project-based and hence short-term by nature and do not seem to foster longer term involvement. Collective benefits increase the likelihood of ongoing volunteering, a similar finding as in the first regression model. However, surprisingly, those students who emphasize the individual benefits of volunteering are significantly less likely to participate in volunteering on an ongoing basis.

The latter effect may be the most striking contrast with the Canadian case, where perceived individual benefits are the most significant predictor of ongoing volunteering. Among Canadian students, two other variables are significant predictors of volunteering: gender, with females being more likely to volunteer regularly than males, and religion, as those emphasizing the importance of a religious faith also show a higher probability of volunteering. At the individual level, self-oriented values and studying business/economics have a negative effect, and the effect of service requirements in high school disappears in this model. Finally, among Canadian students, those students emphasizing the institution-driven private benefits are less likely to volunteer on an ongoing basis. This is a reasonable finding as such students would volunteer for a shorter term, which would allow them to achieve private institution benefits such as using the volunteer experience to enhance future employment opportunities.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

We set out to understand whether prevalent theories on volunteering, based on volunteering in Western countries, are applicable to other countries, in particular China. Given the different political and social systems in China as compared to the West, does volunteering differ? Or is the spirit of volunteering ubiquitous and unaffected by the cultural and political context under which it occurs? To answer these questions, we focused on volunteering by university students in China and contrasted our findings with a cohort of university students in Canada. As we have argued, Canada and China provide intriguing contrasting cases in terms of the respectively enabling versus restrictive relations between state and civil society, and grassroots versus state mobilized nature of volunteering participation.

Our findings, based on the responses to questionnaires answered by 1,892 university students in China and Canada, show expected differences in the rates and frequency of volunteering, the perceived benefits of volunteering, and the determinants of participation. Chinese students are less likely to be involved in ongoing volunteering than Canadian students. This finding is congruent with project-based government initiatives in China that stimulate short-term involvement by volunteers rather than an ongoing commitment. In addition, multivariate analysis, shows significant country effects on perceived benefits of volunteering. Chinese student volunteers perceive greater collective benefits, as hypothesized, while Canadian students favour institution-driven private

benefits from their volunteer activities. No country differences occurred with respect to the individual level benefits derived from volunteering. The literature suggests that volunteers receive multiple benefits from volunteering, and our results certainly validate these findings. However, it appears that private benefits are important predictors of (ongoing) volunteering by Canadian students, while collective benefits do not affect their rates of volunteering. In China, we find a reverse pattern. In addition, in Canada, while institution-driven benefits are generally perceived as more important than in China, students who stress these benefits are significantly less likely to engage in (ongoing) volunteering. It thus appears that in Canada, the main drivers are individual benefits, and institutionalized efforts to govern students' participation have a negative effect. In China, in contrast, students tend to internalize the publicly endorsed discourse promoting collective benefits of volunteering, as it appears to be a significant driving force for their volunteer participation, while students who emphasize individual benefits are less prone to be involved on an ongoing basis. This confirms our third hypothesis.

Finally, our findings show that individual characteristics do not influence Chinese students' volunteering, which confirms our next hypothesis. Student volunteer participation in China is a direct response to institutional factors — opportunity structures and cultural framing; that is, government-sponsored volunteer projects and the collective spirit expressed by the State. In Canada, the influence of individual characteristics as well as individual and institutional benefits suggests that volunteering is undertaken in response to students' private opportunities in conjunction with institutional factors (the signaling value of volunteering and demand for volunteers).

When we examine the determinants of volunteering on an ongoing basis, we find that individual characteristics in both countries matter. Chinese students are less likely to volunteer on an ongoing basis, but for those that do, individual characteristics may also explain volunteering. One explanation for this finding is that ongoing volunteering requires a greater commitment than short-term volunteering that is occasional or project driven. It is likely that students involved in ongoing volunteering are not only doing the project-based government-initiated volunteering type discussed earlier, but may volunteer out of their personal volition.

To conclude, volunteering among university students in Canada and China is ubiquitous; at first glance one may think that university students everywhere have a proclivity to volunteer, and that volunteering is an age related effect and not influenced by the social or political context. However, this is not so. Students are responding to opportunities as shaped by the institutional and organizational context. If opportu-

ity structures and normative frameworks differ, so does the nature of volunteer participation. Volunteer participation is found to be a function of the locus of demand — project-based government initiatives specifically directed towards youth and students in China versus a structural and long-term demand from civil society organizations in Canada. Indeed, we see different intensities of participation that are a reflection of these institutional differences. Furthermore, as hypothesized, students also respond to the cultural context and the political discourse, which lead them to perceive the benefits of volunteering differently. Indeed, the perceived benefits of volunteering dominant in Canada are private, whereas collective benefits prevail in China.

What are the implications of our findings for both countries? At first, it may seem that in both countries, institutional efforts to mobilize students may not generate longer term effects. In China, students are the cohort most involved in volunteering (Yuanzhu 2005), a result of institutionalized mobilization targeted towards students. However, the large majority of students are not involved in ongoing volunteering, hence it is not clear if they will continue doing so post graduation. Based on the findings from our study we would posit that Chinese students' response to official calls for volunteering may not give rise to volunteering in the future or inculcate habits of ongoing volunteering. Our findings suggest that students have successfully internalized political discourse on building a harmonious society, since the collective benefits of volunteering are a chief driver for both episodic and ongoing student volunteers, and ongoing volunteers are less likely to emphasize individual benefits. While individual characteristics seem to take over from state-led mobilization efforts in the case of the ongoing volunteering of Chinese students, these students nevertheless seem to be driven by mainstream political goals — which could be considered a successful outcome of the party-state's policy.

In Canada, while there is no direct state intervention, we also found institution-driven reasons for volunteering, such as getting admission to university or providing references for employers, to have a negative impact on (ongoing) volunteering. Canadian students volunteered mostly of their own volition and more often on an ongoing basis. They were generally driven by private benefits, with the collective benefits of volunteering playing no role. These findings may reflect the broader society's values, which are much more individualistic than in China. Interestingly, it seems that Chinese volunteering — in spite of its highly state-led nature — in practice seems to come closer to the classic Tocquevillian ideal of civic participation and community building, while in Canada, where

the spirit of individualism thrives, such benefits seem to be a “spill-over” or “by-product” of students’ volunteering at best.

As we have noted, policy makers are particularly interested in university students as they are the future leaders of society. Our findings seem to suggest, however, that the volunteering activities of Chinese and Canadian students have little potential to stir students’ political and civic leadership/activism. While Chinese students seem to take the role of “caring citizens,” Canadian students are mainly seeking individual returns through service and religious activities. However, to study the longer term effects of student volunteering requires a longitudinal research design.

On a final note, some caveats on our findings and conclusions. Like any social science survey research, our findings are limited to our sample, which in this case are university students in two major cities, Beijing and Toronto, and thus care should be taken to not to generalize the findings to the whole population of Canada or China. Our findings also reflect the values and habits of students in big cities and do not reflect life in rural China or Canada where distinct patterns of private and public life may give rise to different findings. While we point to the need of understanding the political and social context, our findings need to be replicated in other distinct societies to understand the degree to which the context influences volunteer participation. Our study, we hope, gives rise to the study of volunteer participation from different cultural contexts and moves away from the Western-based individualistic theories prevalent in the literature today.

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