

# Co-creating Diversified Models, the First Year of China's Giving Circles?



In this day and age, when individuals are increasingly isolated, what is worth your time, overcoming social fears, and inviting others to participate?

Public welfare is perhaps one of the few things that gather the public and their energy. It is much happier for everyone to give together than to participate in public welfare activities alone, and indeed it may be more effective. The Giving Circles counteracts the wave of social atomization and the declining spirit of the public participation—a group of people, for a shared vision, collectively promote social change through donations and funding, and at the same time reap friendship and growth.

Recently, supported by the Narada Foundation, Shanghai United Foundation, and Dominos Philanthropy Academy held the "The Spark" More Than Kindness Giving Circle Exhibition and Giving Circle Conference in Shanghai. As if a single spark can start a prairie fire, these pioneers in the Chinese Giving Circles spark the change in the hope of building philanthropic culture in China.



## Walk Together to Go Far: The first Giving Circles Exhibition in China

The Giving Circle is not something new. One of the earliest Giving Circles is the United Way Tocqueville Society, established in the U.S. in 1984, honoring individuals who annually give \$10,000 or more to the United Way Campaign, meanwhile devoting spirit and action for the public good. In the 1990s, the Giving Circles ushered in a new period of attention and development in the United States. Women's growth in financial power and increased independence were the most important driving forces. More and more women hope that philanthropy could reflect their values, exerting more significant social influence.

China has a long-standing tradition of charity culture, but the realization of the Giving Circle originated after 2000. According to research by Social Venture Group, the earliest Giving Circle that can be traced back to now was initiated by Beijing netizen Grace, with backpackers as the prominent members at the Green Field Outdoor Forum in 2006. In addition, "Xinxing Sunflower" sponsored by teachers and students from Guizhou University,

"SVP" of Beijing Leping Foundation, and Yizhong Charity Fund of Shanghai United Foundation are well-established pioneers of Giving Circles in China. Rob Johnson from The University of Singapore stated in the Asian Donation Circles report that in 2017 there were only two Giving Circles in China in a strict sense.

Shanghai United Foundation began to explore the realization of a localized Giving Circle in 2014 and started to develop the localized practice of the Donor Advice Fund ("DAF") in 2018. **The most distinctive characteristic is the combination of the Giving Circle and DAF.** Since 2019, 15 Giving Circles have achieved beyond 13,000 donations, held 120 more offline activities, donated more than 8 million yuan, and funded areas include more than 19 provinces and 60 counties and cities, covering 11 public welfare fields and over 25,000 people are direct beneficiaries.

These Giving Circles include diverse members. For instance, urban women interested in mountain climbing, traditional cultural communities formed out of money etiquette, China's first youth-funded community, meat wholesaler clubs and company leaders, university professors and EMBA students, together create the diverse ecology of the Chinese Giving Circles.



The Giving Circle provides people with opportunities to socialize, participate in charitable activities and education, and closely connect donors with their communities. It gathers scattered philanthropic resources, funding through democratic decision-making to amplify the influence of philanthropy. The slogan of Yizhong Charity Fund comes from a famous proverb in China: **if you want to go fast, walk alone; and if you're going to go far, walk together**, which perfectly illustrates the charm of the Giving Circles.

***"The Spark" More Than Kindness Giving Circle Exhibition***



**Debate Competition of Public Welfare: Do we donate for the sake of ourselves, or others?**

At the event, participants used different markers to "occupy territory" on the map. The Giving Circle covers almost all country regions and has received more attention in the Yangtze River Delta region and the central and western regions. In terms of funding direction, the age group of 0-65 years old accounted for most beneficiaries.

***The collective impact of Giving Circles***



At the event, the participants had a heated debate on "Do we make donations to help ourselves or others?" The affirmative believes that participating in public welfare is to help oneself. Such as gaining the feeling of being needed in the donation process, knowing oneself better, understanding one's social value, obtaining happiness and developing the potential to

create positive energy to influence others. **Only when you are strong can you help others continuously is their central belief.**

The negative believes that engaging in public welfare is to assist others. **The final goal of public welfare is to help people in need and solve other people's problems,** which only altruism can achieve public welfare. Positive psychologists at Harvard University mentioned that there are many levels of happiness, and the highest level is the happiness of helping others. But it is not done for the sake of high-level happiness. Joy is one of the results of doing charity.

### **Debate Competition**



After the debate, He Shigang, the Strength of Snow Charity Fund founder, and Wang Zhiyun, the chairman of the Shanghai United Foundation, shared their views as experts. "Everyone has expressed their opinions. There is no answer to this question. Although we are discussing perceptual content here, indeed, it is also supported by analytical data. There are also a great number of studies on philanthropic culture abroad, and the highest-ranking of donation motivation is the care for the needs of others."

### **Exchange of Comments on the Debate**



Helen, the founder of Dominos Philanthropy Academy, shared with participants the development history of the Giving Circles and the status quo of the domestic Giving Circles. The internationally proven Giving Circle first came into view in the 1980s, but the term "Giving Circles" did not appear until the 1990s. China is also in a similar situation. The practice of the Giving Circles has been around for a few years, but the people who are doing it may not know the exact term. Today, this situation has changed.

With the help of the Giving Circle global summit, Shanghai United Foundation participated in the We Give Summit and co-organized a Giving Circle exhibition and conference with Dominos Philanthropy Academy. For the first time, more than 10 partners in the Giving Circles gathered together.

**This is the first year of the development of China's Giving Circles. All of you here are witnesses of history and are also creating the "Chinese model" of the Giving Circles in different ways.**

After the event, the participants expressed that they had a deeper understanding of the power brought by the Giving Circles through this event and hoped to unite more people in the future to form a Giving Circle, so that the power of the group can create more sparks in the field of public welfare, and together, become the power of *More Than Kindness*.

### ***Photos of the Event***



