

Enabling Social Innovation in China

Country Snapshot



POWERED BY 1Family Foundation

Social innovation: "the processes and outcomes of developing novel approaches to address societal challenges facing people and planet." ¹

This snapshot represents a descriptive, non-exhaustive overview of key highlights from China's social innovation ecosystem.

Direct focus on social innovation Connected but indirect focus on social innovation No focus on social innovation

INSTITUTIONAL FRAMEWORK

Official framing of social innovation

China's policy language more often emphasizes community-level participatory governance, public services, and social governance modernization than a dedicated "social innovation" label. This framing can still function as a *de facto* social-innovation enabling environment when it supports experimentation, cross-sector coordination, and scaled delivery. ²

Government bodies shaping the space

Responsibility is distributed, but civil-society service delivery and philanthropy-related systems sit largely within civil affairs administration, including oversight/statistics on **social organizations, charitable trusts, and welfare-lottery public benefit flows.** ³

Strategy and policy direction

The 14th Five-Year Plan outlines a strong **people-centered approach**, and includes sections on public services and **community-level participatory governance**, which can support local service innovation and new delivery models when translated into operational programs and funding. ⁵

Policies, Laws & Regulations

China's charity governance regime is anchored in national charity legislation and subsequent amendments, shaping:

- **Legal pathways** for registered charity activity and public fundraising,
- Compliance expectations,
- The formalization of philanthropy and charitable-service actors. ⁶

Official statistics and system measurement

Civil affairs statistical reporting provides unusually granular "system metrics" relevant to social innovation capacity and demand, including:

- **Social organizations: 882,000** (end-2023), including **372,662 social associations, 9,617 foundations, and 499,295 social-service organizations (民办非企业单位).** ³
- **Employment absorption:** social organizations reported **11.523M jobs** (end-2023). ³
- **Demographic/service pressure signals: 60+ population 296.97M** (21.1% of total) reported in civil affairs statistical reporting (source noted as NBS in the bulletin). ³

ECOSYSTEM

Stakeholders and organizational landscape



China's ecosystem is characterized by **large organizational volume** and differentiated organizational forms:

- Social associations and foundations can convene sectoral networks and philanthropic capital.
- Social-service organizations often deliver frontline services (eldercare, disability support, community services), aligning closely with “social outcome” missions.³

Civil-society engagement and “giving norms”



CAF's World Giving Index (WGI) survey-based indicators (past-month behaviors) point to a measurable base of civic participation relevant to volunteer-driven and community-embedded initiatives:

- **Helped a stranger:** 54%
- **Donated money:** 31%
- **Volunteered time:** 26%²

Collaboration dynamics



- System-change models emphasize the role of “honest brokers” that convene communities, innovators, and government to develop solutions and align rules, incentives, and delivery capacity—an approach that is particularly relevant in complex service domains (eldercare, disability inclusion, rural revitalization, climate adaptation).¹

FINANCE

Financing schemes and flows



- Civil affairs statistical reporting provides direct evidence of large domestic philanthropic and quasi-public benefit flows:
- **Social organization donation income: RMB 136.38B (2023).**³
- **Charitable trusts: 1,226 filed trusts** with **RMB 5.31B** contract scale (end-2023), indicating a formal channel for longer-horizon and potentially outcome-oriented funding.³
- **Welfare lottery: RMB 194.44B** sales and **RMB 58.01B** public welfare fund raised (2023)—a structurally important funding pillar for social programs.³

Financing Inclusivity



From a “social innovation” lens, the most actionable inclusivity signals are the extent to which financing reaches service delivery at scale (eldercare subsidies and cash benefits, disability support, social assistance). Civil affairs reporting includes benefit coverage totals and expenditure aggregates that can be tracked over time to assess whether financing is expanding alongside aging and vulnerability trends.³

SOCIETY

Public awareness and participation



- China's giving and volunteering participation levels (WGI 2024 measures) provide a compact proxy for broad-based engagement capacity—important for community-level delivery models, volunteer networks, and local experimentation.²

Research and evidence base

- Large-scale values and attitudes datasets (e.g., WVS Wave 7 China 2018 fieldwork) can support diagnostic work on trust, civic engagement, and social norms—variables that often condition uptake of “bottom-up” social innovation models.¹¹

Education & Human Capital

China’s national development blueprint targets modernization of governance capacity and a “people-centered” approach, creating policy space for strengthening professional service workforces (social work, eldercare, disability support) and the institutional learning required for scaling new delivery models.⁵

Entrepreneurship and innovation environment



EIU Business Environment:

China’s innovation standing is a relevant enabling condition for tech-enabled social services and hybrid, mission-driven enterprise:



Innovation capacity

China ranks 10th in the Global Innovation Index 2025, with stronger performance in outputs than inputs—consistent with scale-up and deployment capacity.⁷

Global Innovation Index (GII) 2025



GEM Social Entrepreneurship:

Social & Environmental Consciousness

Two compact, internationally comparable indicators frame constraints relevant to social innovation:



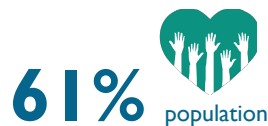
Solidarity



Civic/political participation environment

China’s overall score 2.11/10 with a political participation component score 3.33/10 (expert-assessment-based composite).⁸

EIU Democracy Index (2024)



Volunteering



Sustainability

the Climate Change category is 107/180, suggesting ongoing pressure for mitigation and environmental health improvement.¹⁰

Environmental Performance Index 2024