

Analysis on the Demand and Challenge of Participatory Social Governance in China

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Keywords: Participatory governance, Public administration, Environmental protection, Social reform

Abstract: Participatory governance includes various problems related to poverty alleviation, environment, development and so on. Therefore, poverty alleviation, participation and empowerment have become popular words in countries all over the world in the past two decades. What is the real governance of “co-construction, co-governance and sharing”, and in what way should we face the reform of this governance mode; At present, there are three main problems in the traditional governance model: the elimination of information asymmetry, the management department being responsible for the superior management organization rather than the public, and the contradiction between the local pursuit of political achievements and the central government's demand for overall development being hard to eliminate. Where should the path of China's governance capacity modernization go? The modern governance model with Chinese characteristics needs further exploration and discovery.

1. Introduction

With the development of economy and society, especially the popularity of Internet and social media, China's traditional top-down governance model has gradually become inadequate in some major issues concerning the public's right to subsistence and development, and it is urgent to reform. There are three main problems in the current traditional governance model: The elimination of information asymmetry, the fact that management departments are responsible for superior management agencies rather than the public, and the contradiction between local pursuit of political achievements and central demand for overall development are hard to eliminate. After these three problems are gradually sharpened, the public will be dissatisfied with the government and reduce the credibility of the government. Then, through social media, it gradually becomes a crisis of public trust, which intensifies social contradictions and causes opposition between the public and the government. These three problems are different before and after the emergence of Internet media.

2. Information Asymmetry

Before the popularity of social media, information asymmetry was very obvious in environmental, municipal and development issues, and it was also the key to maintain the top-down governance system. Take environmental issues as an example. In Olson's and Hardin's view, environmental issues are essentially public goods issues requiring collective action. However, the information asymmetry has always been an important action factor that causes problems in collective action. Genia Kostka believes that in the discussion of environmental monitoring and governance, the undisputed important aspect in any system and context is the issue of information [1]. Before 2000, the main management strategy of China's environmental problems was a top-down management method. According to relevant reports, early environmental governance is mainly decided by direct government orders and administrative control mechanisms. In this dual structure, not only information and data are scarce, but also distributed asymmetrically between the

supervisor and the supervised. It is very difficult for the government to know exactly whether and to what extent the target actors comply with the relevant laws. In this case of asymmetric information, both top-down and bottom-up problems may be temporarily covered up. Top-down policy making and project planning, The government can carry out environmental assessment according to a certain project and have more comprehensive information about the project; However, individual citizens have one-sided personal information. Without the participation of social organizations, it is difficult for the public to have a comprehensive grasp of a certain topic, and there is also a lack of rapid information exchange and communication mode. Therefore, the government can approve some projects or formulate policies under the condition that the public is not well informed, without considering the resistance from the people too much. At the same time, in the process of monitoring the environment, it is difficult for the government to fully grasp the implementation of local specific environmental protection policies. However, when scattered people discover the pollution behavior of enterprises, Due to the limitations of individual actors' ability and the imperfect development of Chinese social organizations, there is an impassability channel for upward reflection of opinions. Therefore, individual citizens can't play an influential game in governance. Since the development of Chinese social organizations has not been perfect all the time, There is no buffer zone between the government and the public that western countries have. Because of the existence of information hegemony of the governors, the government's coercive power is likely to overwhelm the voice of public dissatisfaction.

3. Pressure on Government Agencies

The problem of local government's "right or wrong" seems to be contrary to the contradiction between the local government and the central government, but it is not. The local government's policy choices usually come more from the superior government than from the local residents. If the interests of local residents are damaged, if the risk of conflict is very small, Under the traditional governance mode, local governments often adopt the method of suppressing or finding residents to distribute subsidies alone. Although it is easy to cause greater dissatisfaction, this method of the government sometimes works in the period of asymmetric information and weak individual behavior ability. Because managers only need to be responsible for their superiors. After the rise of social media, the public's dissatisfaction with this way of handling is gradually revealed; as a saying of netizens expresses dissatisfaction: [After a problem occurs, what the government should do at the first time is not to solve the problem quickly, but to solve the person who raised the problem quickly. However, due to the spreading power and mobility of social media, the biggest challenge to this model in recent years is the tendency of radical action caused by online media [2]. The reform of governance mode forced by social media is still in a top-down state at present. For example, the environmental governance in Guangdong Province and Jilin Province in recent years, even under the forced mechanism of social media, have completely different policy orientations and behaviors [3]. The research in 2019 shows that in Guangdong Province, which has a high degree of openness and a strong sense of civil rights, the government of Guangdong Province, which pays close attention to public participation, has a relatively open governance model.

Compared with inland provinces, Guangdong Province has a large floating population, a relatively developed economy and society, and has experienced many environmental disputes in the pre-social media era and developed a series of social organizations. The substantive policy reform on public participation of big data information and social supervision is the focus of environmental governance in Guangdong Province in recent years. But it should be noted that even today, The reason for Guangdong's "pioneer-style" reform is not only the pressure from the local public and netizens' doubts about the environmental policy, but also the more important reason is that Guangdong's reform pilot position for the central government and even the whole country makes Guangdong have to shoulder the mission of policy innovation. At the same time, the huge population pressure and the mass environmental conflicts that have happened before make the central government demand that Guangdong Province put stability in an important position while boldly reforming and innovating. This is another embodiment of the top-down model. Jilin Province,

as an “old industrial base” in the traditional sense, is more conservative and introverted. Relevant departments in Jilin continue to adhere to the traditional policies, show the behavior of avoiding risks, and take opportunistic actions to ensure as many pilot small-scale reforms as possible without changing the long-term governance model. This is related to the tradition of big government, planned economy and indifference to public opinions in Northeast China. At the same time, in the local government's view, the central government's interest in revitalizing Northeast China is obviously higher than that in environmental governance in Northeast China. At the same time, the small population and the local public with low awareness of rights conflicts also make local governments reluctant to choose the fundamental reform plan of governance mode, instead, they may adopt the step-by-step approach of enriching the people. According to the 2010 study, Although there is a set of unified standards, monitoring and evaluation (not to mention measuring and evaluating the improved technologies of these technologies), there is still considerable information asymmetry among Chinese governments at all levels due to the top-down closed management system[4]. Lo believes that in environmental governance, the three more critical local factors are the consistency of interests, leadership support and community practice. Whether these factors can play a role needs further investigation.

4. Different Pursuits of Local and Central Government

In addition to the above two problems, in the traditional governance model, the contradiction between the local pursuit of political achievements and the central demand for overall development is also noteworthy. Although the management is top-down, the interests of local governments sometimes do not completely coincide with their superiors. This is especially true in terms of economic benefits. In the first decade of this century, many pollution projects designed in environmental conflicts were initially caused by the blind instructions of local governments that ignored environmental evaluation and public interests because of the consideration of economic indicators and fiscal and tax levels. This problem is most obvious in the heavy chemical industry. Coal, steel and xylene projects are also the hardest hit areas of environmental conflicts. But for the central government, the more fiscal revenue, the better, even for provincial governance. Laws and regulations related to public interest and environment are constantly improving. However, there is a very important problem here. Under the interest of local interests, the constraints of environmental laws and regulations sometimes don't work. Under the traditional governance mode, environmental departments are often closely related to government departments at the same level in terms of personnel and interest concerns, and it is difficult to achieve the goal of fully implementing superior environmental governance policies. Especially before 2008, because the Ministry of Environmental Protection had not yet been established, the State's highest environmental protection department is the State Environmental Protection Administration, and the 1989 version of the Environmental Protection Law is not perfect for many local environmental problems and the punishment measures of enterprises. Under the guiding ideology of taking economic development and fiscal revenue as remarkable achievements, it is easy to have obvious environmental disputes. For example, the protest of the PX project in Dalian and the protest of the paper industry in Qidong, Jiangsu Province, the environmental evaluation made by the local government at the beginning of the project for enterprises showed the limitations of the ability of the environmental protection department as a local governance institution. Therefore, before the emergence of social media, the traditional governance model was not without contradictions. But the weak connection mechanism makes this contradiction appear in a low-risk way.

5. New Trends Brought by Social Media

But when social media intervened, China's top-down environmental governance system in the pre-social media era changed. The high linking power, spreading power and penetrating power of Internet media make the barriers of information communication between users broken, The links between individual users with related topics and interests through the Internet can make fragmented

individual information shared among users, and finally the information will be combined into a relatively large system network. This is a subversive challenge to the traditional environmental governance model. In the traditional governance mode, the higher-level government's mastery of information integrity has been eliminated, and the "information hegemony" of policy makers is challenged by the aggregation of users in the network, so the formulation process of regulations has to refer to public opinions. At the same time, at the individual level, once the closely concerned problems are found, due to the social media attribute of personal portal, the threshold for individuals to release information is lowered, and they will have their own release and subjective expectation of attention for the issues that are closely followed but not responded to. Once this kind of expectation is brewed, it will easily lead to the conflict tendency of radicalism and even spontaneous unorganized conflict, which is also the importance of participatory governance and supervision in new technologies. Therefore, the traditional governance model is being impacted vertically and horizontally. The reform of management mode promoted by new technology requires the reform of legal management system and the revision of supervision level; At present, the rule of law system and management system have been perfected, but there is still much room for improvement at the supervision level. Now, track the environmental conditions, Mobile applications of factory pollution emissions or even a single carbon footprint have appeared in the range of most people. At the same time, new information technology enables local communities to participate more in the local regulatory space [5]. This provides the technical basis and possibility for the participatory and deep reform of China's governance model at present.

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