

Study on Development of Public Administrative Participation in Contemporary China

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ABSTRACT

This paper mainly studies the problem about public administrative participation in contemporary China, expounds the research background and significance, analyzes the internal and external driving factors of public administrative participation, elaborates on the development process of public administrative participation, finds out the realistic predicament for the public administrative participation, and puts forward the path and suggestions to resolve the problem on this basis. This paper holds that the biggest impetus for the further development of public administrative participation in China stems from the leading power of the government.

Keywords: China; public administrative participation; development

1. INTRODUCTION

In contemporary China, the public administrative participation has experienced a process of participation from scratch, top-down and bottom-up. At beginning the original intention of the public participation in the field of administration is to meet the needs of some of the public at home, who have growing awareness of participation, to master and understand the public policy, while relieving the contradictions between the government and the public, mitigating the relations between the government and the people, and improving the decision-making quality. In the wake of the public participation in making administrative decisions, managing public affairs, resolving public problems and other measures, which gradually yield certain economic, political and social benefits, the practice has been promoted by the central and local governments at different levels in China, and especially at present, the intensity and scope of public administrative participation in China has reached an unprecedented level. However, the in-depth promotion of citizen participation in our country still faces many difficulties and predicaments, and it is urgent to find a way out. Therefore, it is an undoubtedly worthwhile study to explore the issue of public administrative participation in China at present and actively elaborate on its development context.

2. THE DEVELOPMENT MOTIVATION OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION PARTICIPATION

(I) External driving force. In the international community, the democratic administration is deeply influenced by western democratic political ideas, and it emphasizes the importance of public participation in public administration.

Since the 1970s, governments around the globe have successively started the

process of governance transitions. The transformation of government functions, the return of rights to the people, citizen participation, deregulation, organizational reform and the like continue to strengthen citizen participation in administration and promote the process of democratic administration. Among them, the new public administration and government reconstruction movement, as an important part of governance transitions, emphasizes the reform of traditional public administration system, advocates strengthening the government's direct responsibility for citizens and response to their demands, emphasizes the transparency of public policies, encourages and safeguards citizens' participation, implements delegation of power to lower levels and decentralization, and reconfigures the relation between the government and market, government and society. These ideas fully reflect the tendency of democratization and promote citizens' participation and administration of public affairs. It can be seen that democratic administration, as an emerging administrative mode in the western countries, is becoming the mainstream of public administration reform in the world. Under such circumstances, the public administration in China is bound to be deeply affected by this. ¹

(II) Internal driving force. The construction of Chinese socialist democracy is the internal factor of the emerging democratic administration. The essence and core of socialist democratic politics is that the people are the masters of the country, all power belongs to the people, and the state protects the fundamental rights of the people by establishing the basic political system of the People's Congress, democratic centralism and other specific operating mechanisms. However, a democratic country is not only grounded on democratic principles, but also governed by democratic methods, and the concept of democracy should

be penetrated into the whole administrative machinery. The construction of socialist democratic politics needs to not only build the democratic idea in the political power institutions, but also establish a set of management and operation system compatible with it, which is democratic administration. The concept of democratic administration in China is to guarantee the fundamental rights of citizens to participate in the administration of national and social public affairs directly, to pay attention to the combination of top-level institutional design and grassroots system design.² Regional autonomy of ethnic groups, the high degree of autonomy of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the autonomy of the residents' and villagers' committees are the embodiment of democratic practice in China. At present, the Chinese society is undergoing a transition, the civil society is developing constantly, and the strength of civil political participation is growing constantly, so it is necessary to strengthen the social public participation, realize the equal dialogue, consultation and cooperation between the government and the public, transform all kinds of administration subjects into partnership by means of consultation rather than coercion, and finally establish a good operation mechanism of cooperation and benign interaction, in an attempt to achieve good governance ultimately.

3. DEVELOPMENT HISTORY OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE PARTICIPATION

(I) Embryonic stage. This stage was from the early days of the New China to the early 1990s. In China, the practice of public administrative participation originated in the early days of the New China. The grass-roots mass autonomy was the form, which was different from popular grass-roots mass autonomy mechanism at present. At that time, the grass-roots mass autonomy organization was the grass-roots political power with administrative nature, because in the early days of the People's Republic of China, the organizational construction of the state power extended to the most basic level of the society, and the administrative village level political power and neighborhood committee with the political power nature were set up in rural areas and cities respectively. Administrative villages and neighborhood committees implemented democratic administration of social affairs within their jurisdiction, and occasionally resolved the public problems encountered in the jurisdiction through negotiations. Of course, this democratic administration was more about the implementation of decisions made by the superior political power. Villagers and residents were weak in autonomy, and there were few cases of active participation in administration. In the early 1990s, the formal public participation in administration appeared for the first time in Shenzhen, China, and its manifestation was price hearing.

(II) Exploratory stage. This stage was from the mid-1990s to the beginning of the 21st century. In 1992, at the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the villagers' committee, residents' committee and congress of workers and staffs were included in the scope of grassroots democracy for the first time, so the grass-roots democratic autonomy was recognized and strengthened in policy, which not only gave the grass-roots public the right to participate in public affairs administration, but also opened a door for the implementation of consultation in the administration of grass-roots political power.³ The public autonomy was recognized at the grass-roots level, suggesting that the exploration of public participation in administration found a breakthrough point at the grass-roots level, which made the practice of this form be carried out at the grass-roots level first. Since then, from the 15th National Congress to the 19th National Congress, the central government has continuously expanded grassroots democracy, adjusted the scope of grassroots democracy, and continuously granted and expanded the right of grassroots people to exercise democratic and administrative rights. From the organizational form to institutional design and arrangement, the trend of decentralization and power expansion has emerged. The connotation and extension of grassroots democracy are more reasonable, scientific and perfect.

(III) Expansion stage. This stage started at the beginning of the 21st century and has continued to this day. In this period, after the arduous exploration, public administrative participation gradually rose in the field of practice, which is manifested by the facts below: firstly, both the central and local governments have recognized the importance of public participation in administration and constantly improved their basic institutional design; secondly, the relevant practices from the central to local governments have diversified trends, especially in the decision-making process of local governments; thirdly the public administrative participation in some regions gradually produces its social benefits, which provides good reference for other regions.

4. REALISTIC PREDICAMENTS FOR PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE PARTICIPATION

(I) The development is relatively backward. Compared with other countries that have a strong democratic atmosphere and a long history of autonomy, the practice of public administrative participation in China had its inception nearly one hundred years later. These countries have shown a relatively complete state in the institutional design of public participation. In contrast, the public administrative participation in China is immature due to the lack of strong institutional support in the specific practical operation process. The public fails to participate orderly in accordance with the institutional regulations, and the order of

participation is also quite chaotic. The public's ability to participate in and discuss politics is weak, and the ability of autonomy is insufficient, so the public is unable to provide good constructive suggestions for decision-making. In the meantime, because the government has insufficient awareness of democratic consultation and of the importance and necessity of public participation, public administrative participation in China is lagging behind other countries.

(II) The intensity is relatively weak. The intensity of public participation in administration refers to the degree of influence and restraint of the results of public participation on administrative decision-making. In the case of some local governments in China providing the public with participation in administrative decision-making and public affairs administration, although the social public has participated in the administrative process, their influence on it is very weak. Public participation is only a means for administrative organs to publicize the established policies to the public and obtain public support, rather than actually soliciting public opinions as the decision-making ground. For example, in the hearings held by local governments in China, the public plays mostly the role of "listeners", and even if they put forward opinions and suggestions, few are adopted by the government.⁴

(III) The interaction is relatively insufficient. The behavior of public administrative participation in China is not standardized, and the public has no initiative to collect the information of the affairs to be discussed, which is usually received passively or obtained through second-hand channels. Therefore, the incomplete information, insufficient information support, mostly perceptual recognition and personal experience, and lack of rational thinking and judgment easily lead to the phenomenon of following the herd and absence of definite opinions. The government usually holds the "right of speech" and decision-making power in consultation and discussion, lacks respect and scrutiny for the initiative spirit of the public and their opinions and suggestions, so the public and government are lack of consensus and understanding on the judgment and analysis of issues, and the public participation has not played its due effectiveness and role.

5. WAYS TO PROMOTE DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATIVE PARTICIPATION

(I) Transparency of administrative information. Public participation in administration is helpful to break the monopoly pattern of government information, reduce the trust crisis triggered by the "asymmetric" government information, improve the transparency of administrative information, and facilitate the public administrative participation. In the past, when the government affairs were not open or not open enough, the information held by the government staff was not known by the public, resulting in "asymmetric" information. For the public, the operation of

various organizations and functions within the government is a "black box". Therefore, the government work carried out under the lack of supervision is easy to cause power abuse and personal gains in the decision-making process and finally corruption.

(II) Rational administration. No matter the government, the market or the public, their rationality is limited. They need to make up for their inadequate rationality through multi-party participation, which is conducive to resolving problems and maximizing public interests.⁵ The government administration also has the phenomenon of "malfunction", so it is necessary to overcome the adverse consequences of various deficiencies under the limited rationality. Therefore, the government administration needs to set scientific and appropriate ways to introduce public participation from the system and institutional level, reduce the negative impact of the limited rationality of the government, and carry out the administration with the public rationality.

(III) Skilled public participation. Effective public administrative participation requires the public to have the basic sense of responsibility, legal knowledge, expression skills and other qualities and abilities. In the development process of socialist democracy with Chinese characteristics, the government needs to arouse citizens' awareness of rights and democracy, cultivate their spirit of public cooperation, enhance their political identification, enable them to learn to adapt to public life, improve the skills of administrative participation, accumulate experience in administrative participation, and develop their ability of administrative participation.⁶

6. CONCLUSIONS

Citizen Participation in Administration of current China has experienced the periods of embryonic stage, exploration stage and thriving stage respectively, and can be divide into four types during its evolution: policy-making participation, consultation participation, hearing participation and coordination participation. It is a combination of promotion from top to bottom and participation from bottom to top, indirect participation and direct participation. It tries to both realize the public interest and reconcile different interest relationships, and reflects the principles of respecting common people and democratic centralism. In one word, citizen participation in administration of current China is still practically at a primary stage which behaves in the imperfection of its institution design and few application in the practice of government administration. However, it does not mean that citizen participation in administration can not be carried out in China, the gate of hope will be opened by nurturing the consciousness of democratic deliberation of government, improving the capability of policy-making of citizens, shaping the public reason of different groups, and

legalizing the deliberation institution. While accomplishing results, yielding benefits and reaping fruits, public administrative participation in contemporary China is still confronted against pretty many challenges and difficulties, and there is a need to establish a more scientific, reasonable and operable public administrative participation mechanism to meet realistic needs.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Thanks for Yunnan University of Finance and Economics for supporting this research. After compiling this paper, based mostly on suggestions from friends and colleagues, which is very kind of them.

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