

Chinese Solution to Solve the Food Safety Problems: Food Safety Campaign

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ABSTRACT: Food safety concerns people's life and health as well as a nation's wholesome well-being and its stability. With China's increasing engagement in global agricultural markets, food safety is no longer just a domestic issue—it is now a global one. Facing with the repeated food issues, Chinese government have launched the food safety campaign program for many years. By analyzing the development and current implementation situation of Chinese "special campaigns for food safety" in 2004-2014, the paper summarizes its development pattern and regularity, and explores the effective path of solving the food safety issues as a Chinese solution. The positive lessons in solving food safety issue can benefit the food safety management and regulation throughout China and other low or middle income countries.

KEYWORD: China; Food industry; Food safety problems; Food safety Campaign; Chinese solution

1 INTRODUCTION

Food is essential, food safety is closely related to people's life and health and economic development and social harmony (Wheelock, 1989; China Daily, 2010). Globally, food insecurity played a role in political unrest and conflict (Brinkman & Hendrix, 2011; Pinstrip-Andersen & Shimokawa, 2008). Food safety has turned to the main focus of world attention. As a result of eating unsafe food, many people fall ill, disable or die (Miles & Frewer, 2001). According to WHO, there are up to billions of cases of food-caused diseases all over the world annually (WHO, 2014). Especially in recent years, some repeatedly occurring serious food safety affairs, such as BSE's burst-out in England, the dioxin and other food incidents, have raised the public concerns over the food safety to an unprecedented level. As food industry continues to be a global industry (Stewart et al., 2014), unsafety food turns into a world issue. And, in response to an apparent decline in global food safety, numerous public and private regulatory initiatives have emerged to restore public confidence (Lin, 2014).

In China, food safety accidents have been frequently exposed in recent years, especially in 2011. The food safety problem once again becomes a focus of public concern, such as Shuanghui clenbuterol event, "dyeing steamed bread" event appeared in Hualian and many supermarkets in Shanghai, toxic leek event in Nanyang Henan, milk

nitrite poisoning event in Pingliang Gansu, small whitebait soaked by formalin events in Qingdao Shandong, excessive "swollen agent" used in watermelon event, etc (Chen, 2003). Food safety problems seriously threaten people's health, and damage the image of enterprises and even the nation. To improve food safety, in 2012, the State Council of China laid out measures including tighter supervision and harsher punishment for violators and has vowed a "vigorous crackdown" on those who endanger food safety (China Daily, 2012). Chinese government has attached great importance to food safety problems, further by strengthening supervision, and trying to solve the food security problems from the sources, ensuring the people's lives and property safety and vital interests. To be fair, China does not lack the strong political will and commitment needed to tackle food safety problems (The Lancet, 2014).

On the whole, as far as China is concerned, for the last 10 years, its food industry, as crucial pillar industry in economy, which has kept the growth rate of over 10 percent from February to June in 2013 (Figure.1), making it the biggest market globally. With China's increasing engagement in global agricultural markets, food safety is no longer just a domestic issue—it is now a global one (The Lancet, 2014).

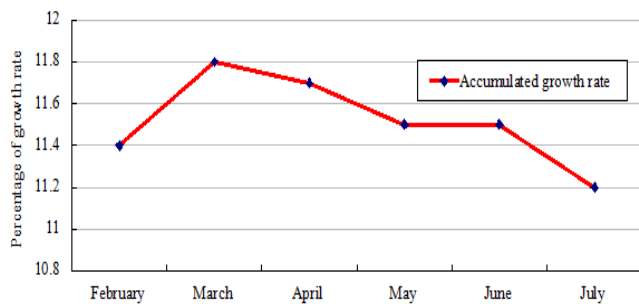


Fig.1. Growth Rate of Value-Added of the Manufacture of Foods (2013.02-07)

<http://www.stats.gov.cn/english/Statisticaldata/MonthlyData/>

2 THE INTRICACIES IN FOOD SAFETY ISSUES IN CHINA

The old Chinese saying “To people, food is heaven” indicates food as the first necessity of man. Each government thus shall take on all its responsibilities to take effective measures to provide quality food and guarantee its citizen’s health (Kate et al., 2014; Weigel & Armijos, 2014). Determined to enforce the food safety and concerned over the public health, recently, both China’s central and local governments have laid out various laws and policies. Among these regulations, the Food Safety Law was issued in 2009 and revised in 2014, which reflect the central government’s determination in strengthening the supervision and administration of food safety (CCTV News, 2014).

2.1 *The rapid development of China's food industry and the complexity of food safety supervision and administration*

Paralleled with its economy boom, China’s food industry has been prospering for late 20 years, with its growth far ahead of that of GDP, especially for the manufacture of foods. Admit it or not, on the other hand, there is still a huge gap between China and some developed countries in the level of the food industry, and the too rapid development of food industry in China attributes to its instability.

Living standards have thus risen across the Chinese population—per-person income has increased by nine times from 1990 to 2008 (Economy Watch, 2010). In 2011, China's Engel's coefficient, which measures the proportion of income spent on food, has improved to 36.3% (urban) and 40.4% (rural) (Ma, 2012).

Now, China is in a very phase, in which, the structure of food consumption is being transferred and the demand for processed food is being accelerated in China. In the future, given this consistent development, the food consumption and demand in China will focus on the food’s quality, safety, nutrition, variety and convenience rather than

quantity. In the meanwhile, the increasingly intensifying food safety problems will affect the stability and harmony of the whole society, especially for the developing country (Akhtar, 2015).

The food safety issue has been a broad and serious subject that so many respects are inevitably involved. It ranges from the plant-based food to animal food, and covers the processes such as food production, processing, planting and breeding, business flow, food consumption etc. It relates to multiple disciplines and technologies including sciences, arts, engineering, medicine, management, horticulture, traditional analysis and latest bio techniques and so on. It involves the large number and diversity of food producers—most being small companies—makes it difficult to maintain high safety standards for all products (The Lancet, 2012). The food safety management system is multilayered, with national, provincial, and local levels and its administrative employment is a very sophisticated operation, through which a series of different departments including that of drug supervision, agriculture, QC, trade and commerce, hygiene are requested to be liaised with each other. Hence, its social influences are closely associated with the public awareness, education, consumptive level, all of which account for the complicatedness, urgency, difficulties underlying in food issues in China.

2.2 *The synchronicity between the social governance capability of Chinese government and the judgment and expectancy of the people*

In recent three decades, China has always developed in the way beyond its inherent capacity. It has overtaken Japan, becoming the second largest economic entity, in 2010. Successfully hosted the Olympic Games and the world expo and the Asian games, a series of international large-scale activities also means the social expectation and the pressure of government governance have been further intensified. As a developing country, China has made great progress in food safety (Wu et al., 2010).

It wasn’t long for China from solving the problem of adequate food and clothing to pursuing the food safety and quality, so was China’s food industry developing from its beginning to regulated situation, as well as market-oriented economy developing from promoting market to regulating its principal part. Rapid industrialisation and modernisation in China are having profound effects on food supply and food safety (Hon-Ming et al., 2013). With time went by, some food safety problems that need to be solved will gradually come out.

The realistic perception and evaluation is always associated with the expectation form society. Chinese food safety problems are continuously exposed by the news media, in some degrees, it

indicates that media inspects the economic development and social civilization in China, which is a representation that Chinese society is making progress, and China longs for the equal standards and more safe food as developed countries. People in China pursue from eating enough to eating well, which is a historical transformation in the process of Chinese development. In recent years, intensive management has been an important method of strengthening food safety. The experience has proved that the method to deal with China's food safety situation is practical and necessary.

3 FOOD SAFETY CAMPAIGN PROGRAM --- THE MANAGEMENT APPROACH FITTING CHINA'S REALITY

Food safety campaign, aiming to solve the repeated food safety problems in China with concentrating the manpower and material resources in a short period, has been launched by Chinese government for many years. The nationwide food safety campaign is aimed at reshaping the entire food industry, and the focus is currently on illegal use of food additives (China Daily, 2011). From 2004, Chinese government had launched many food safety regulation actions, but the food safety campaign truly started in 2009 and continued annually. The food safety campaign mainly focus on promoting food safety awareness among the public, the prominent issues of food additives, edible farm products, food production processing, food circulation and import and export, livestock slaughter, the catering industry and health supplements industry, among others (Xinhuanet, 2012; China Daily, 2010).

In China, in the course of the economic and social transformation, the problems or conflicts underlying a series of procedures all through the food chain and in the food industry tend to get more disclosed. Such procedures include breeding and planting, processing and manufacturing, marketing and consumption. The flaws in food safety supervision system, legislations, relevant standards etc. stand out as well. Some scandals, such as, toxic milk powder in Fuyang, rotten pet food exported to Europe, "sudan red" food poisoning, "melamine milk", and the incident of toxic dumpling exported to Japan etc, reflect the defects in China's food quality control. In addition, increases in food prices have been found to strongly exacerbate the risk of political unrest and conflicts (Arezkiand, 2011; Bellemare 2011; Berazneva & Lee 2013). Targeting against the food problems, starting from 2009, the government has launched the Campaign program nationwide every year (Table 1).

Table 1. Food Safety Campaign Program

Time	Content Issued
2004	The Guidance of Food Safety Campaign Project
2005	The Food and Drugs Control Project
2006	The Conduction Plan on Food Safety Campaign
2007	Food Safety Campaign Program
2007	Product Quality Control and Food Safety Campaign Plan
2008	Crack Down on Illegal Non-edible Substance and Addictive Abuse
2009	Measures to Enforce Food Safety
2010	Improvement on Food Safety
2011	Arrangements for important work on Food Safety
2012	the key work schedule about food safety
2013	the key work schedule about food safety
2014	the key work schedule about food safety

source: <http://www.gov.cn/>

From 2011, Chinese government have continuously required strengthening daily regulation, strengthening food safety regulation, cracking down on the crimes of food safety, eliminating the hidden problems, and perfecting regulation system and have attached more and more importance to food safety (the State Council, 2011; the State Council 2012; the State Council, 2013; the State Council, 2014). The special food safety regulation action opens a new chapter. Tainted by the food scandals, aiming at improving the food safety and standardizing the whole food market, the Campaign strives for resolving food concerns in a great array of fields, covering planting, breeding, manufacturing, processing, consumption, trade etc.

4 RETROSPECT---THE REALISTIC CHOICE OF CHINA'S FOOD SAFETY CAMPAIGN

Historically, food security has played a crucial role in public health in China (Campbell & Campbell, 2006; Kantha, 1990). However, the general social resources, in this currently booming yet developing country, will still have to remain relatively deficient for quite a long time, which will lead to the loss of major resources. Consequently, the physical implementation of the regular administration will necessarily be affected or even failed. To respond to such defects in the realistic construction, more importantly, to carry on the typical "state order" characterizing China's political system, here it comes the so-called Campaign into being.

During the Campaign, the government departments of supervision and administration may take drastic measures within their jurisdiction towards some particular area in food, like planting and breeding, manufacturing and processing, operation flow and consumption, import and export trade. They also focus on maintaining the food

marketing order and cracking down all illegal acts. As a result, some positive immediate effects can be seen, thus the need to guarantee the food safety is met for a certain period. Only at that time, would the above-mentioned departments have to withdraw their intervention from the campaign considering the budget. However, the achieved effects will prompt the relevant administrations to reinforce such approach over and over again. Under the present sociological and economic circumstances in China, the enforcement of the Campaign is definitely placed above all other regular supervision and management so that its ostensible result is attained.

Admittedly, the enhanced performance of the Campaign, with highest priority and most powerful fulfillment, has achieved some noticeable success within a brief stage. However, the effects, with its transience, are not a final or thorough resolution of the whole issue. Once the trial period is over, all the problems will resume or even get worse. Hence, all through the process of the Campaign, some specific plans and measures to guarantee the smooth performance need to be worked out. What's more, the long-term goal and relevant mechanisms also need to be established.

In essence, therefore, to perform the regular administration under state supervision, rather than this tentative form of campaign, the economy needs to be greatly boomed with sufficient administrative resources and well-developed infrastructure. Only by the time China's legal and political system gets perfected, the Campaign will be in the event replaced by another feasible alternative.

5 CONCLUSION

The food safety situation in China remains severe. The vast size of China's food production and consumption enterprises, along with the country's global economic importance, make China's food supply and food safety issues of major interest to international markets and trading partners (Hon-Ming et al., 2013).

To solve the food issues in China radically, firstly, the food safety legal system should be improved. The Chinese Government has made tremendous efforts to reform food safety laws as part of a long evolving process (Song, 2011). We should clear, supplement and improve our existing laws, rules, standards and norms in all aspects from each aspect of legislation, enforcement and observance of the laws. On these bases we can construct a unified and orderly legal chain in order to overcome the defects of relatively dispersive terms caused by sectional legislation and fill the gap of legal supervision.

Secondly, we should integrate and re-layout supervision subjects, enhance the legitimacy and

coordination of enforcement, eliminate the overlap, fill the gap between agencies, improve the food safety regulatory ability, and finally establish and improve the standard system of food safety, the market access rules, authentication system, traceability system and recall system; at the same time, we should strengthen the research and development of core technology, such as risk analysis, the test and detection, food safety pre-warning, etc.

Thirdly, the economic regulation can achieve the market supervision of food safety mainly through some economic tools, such as market price, credit, property, information and the consumer price index (CPI). First, we should devote great efforts to boost the construction of the food enterprise credit mechanism, which can make food companies to consciously abide by Good Manufacturing Practice (GMP), and carry out Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP). Second, the government should play its role in guiding market, defining and protecting enterprise property rights and taking some necessary measures to guide and support food enterprises.

Finally, the social forces include the news media and the third department organizations such as industry organizations, intermediary organizations and autonomous organizations. Give full play to the role of the industry association to guide scientific and rational consumption. Strengthen the industrial self-regulation through the industry associations to enhance the overall industry level. Establish the authoritative third party testing institutions and certification bodies to optimize the social detection resources. Strengthen the food safety education to the public by using the education and consensus supervision functions of news media actively.

Under the special social situation, the special campaign is a sports-style campaign. The campaign of food safety is an effective method to deal with Chinese food safety problems in a short time. But, it should not be used frequently. The final method should be based upon the top-level design, and we should solve the problems by improving the food safety inspection mechanism and building a good social atmosphere. Generally speaking, by respecting history, taking down-to-earth approaches and having faith in future, the effective resolution of food issues in China, though takes efforts as well as time, in the event will be accomplished.

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