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Title:
Challenges and Responses: Practical Path to the Public Administration Reform of Chinese government

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Challenges and Responses:

Practical Path to the Public Administration Reform of Chinese Government

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Abstracts: Since 1979, China had undertaken several reforms in public administration, we made many achievements and many problems. The paper makes a deep analysis of characteristics of and problems with public administration reform in contemporary China. It holds that by looking back at the history of the People's Republic of China, in the position of modern and postmodern public administration reform, and with the fact that modernity and post-modernity exist side by side in contemporary China, we can still find that the Chinese government's practice of public administration is confronting following six challenges such as in the idea of government's public administration, of power distribution, of government institutions and so on. And the paper put forth five measures to resolve those challenges.

Regardless of the various critics to the research of Chinese public administration, which may ignored such a reality: when we were going after the Western public administration in the process of which may appear a phenomenon of “Non-China” and a phenomenon of “Over-China”. Therefore, in the process of pursuing political reform with Chinese characteristic, the scientific researching-method is that we must take the link between the own particularity and the universality of the public administration in the world.
1. The Problems Confronting to China’s public administration practice

Looking back at the history of the People’s Republic of China, in the position of modern and postmodern public administration reform, with the fact that modernity and post-modernity existing side by side in contemporary China, we can indeed find that the Chinese government's practice of public administration is confronting following challenges:

First, from the perspective of the whole idea of the government's public administration, the ideas of service administration and rule of law, which are required by the modern market economy and democratic politics, have not been formed yet.

We still emphasize and abide by that the government as companion of the state is a kind of power above the masses of people and the society, that insisted on what Marxism had said “The essential feature of the state is the public power separated from of the mass”, the “power” should be used to mitigate the conflict and maintain the order. The idea resulted in the following ideas of public administration of state that (1) the function of Public Administration is directly the tool to maintain the political rule ignoring the serving function of providing public service of it; (2) the relation between the subject of administrative management and the social public is unequal ignoring the participation of social public and the guiding role of the need of the social public to the administrative activity of the government; (3) the function of “Administrative Management” is to take rein the society ignoring the restriction and supervision by the social public to the subject
and its activity of “Administrative Management”; consequently ignoring the construction and the development of the mechanism of public responsibility in the process of administrative activities. The whole “Administrative Management” is growing above and going beyond the masses of people and the society day by day.

Secondly, because the whole concept bias of public administration, the government institutions has not been scientifically set up, the institutional absence and the overstuffed organization both exist; the government sectors are seriously self-interest oriented. Since 1982, the Chinese government had taken five reforms: in 1982, proposed to improve the efficiency of the government; in 1988, proposed “the key to the reform of institutions is to change the function of government”; in 1993, proposed the reform of governmental institutions is the needs of market economy; in 1998, reformed the organizational basement of the mixed functions of the government and enterprises; in 2003, was to build a governmental institutions with code of conduct, coordinated operation, fairness and transparency, honesty and high efficiency. Though made great progress all the five reforms, that didn’t basically change the defects and shortcomings that the power of government was still to maintain and realize the government authority not to serve the society. The good news was that in 2007 the government the reform of “Big-Department-System” taken by the government corrected the defects.

Thirdly, from the perspective of power distribution, the power borders between the central government and the local governments, the Party(CPC) Committee and the government have not been divided clearly, that resulted in the public power exercised with blurred boundaries. In fact, we had taken several reforms of “delegating power”, but
always ended with centralization of state power. What the most fundamental is that the absolutely ruling of the CPC in the power system of China which may produce positive effect one hand, and negative effect that is the over-centralization of power because of the integration of party-government relation. Although we emphasized that the government must carry out legal administration, the CPC Committee is the real leader not the government. Under such circumstances, there will result in the phenomena of failure to observe the law and power over the law, such as the corruption of power of lower-level authorities having their own ways in dealing with policies from higher-level authorities.

**Fourthly,** the co-operation between the government and the citizens is far from sufficient, and the government still play superior roles in the formulation and implementation of public policies. The government is the performer of the public power transferred by people so all the legal citizens have the right to know—the information handling by the government, the right to participate—the activity of important policy decision, the right to select—the representative and the leader according the citizen’s will; the right to supervise—the full activity of the government in order to avoiding the abusing of power by government. But obviously, the government didn’t consciously be aware of itself responsibilities and obligations, and the citizens also didn’t have the recognition of the four rights to themselves. So the “serving the people” performed and propagated by the CPC Committee and the government is poorly practiced. We could find many good policies produced by the government but the people don’t accept them. The reason of which is that the government is the representative of people’s interests but not a class or group of interests of itself. However, there have been appeared different interest groups in
politics, economy over past 30 years of Chinese reforming that are influencing the process of decision making.

Fifthly, there has been serious official-oriented thoughts which is characterized by the highlight of regulation but not service. As a kind of system arrangement, official-oriented system had been taken thousands of years in China. All the people and the organizations and departments, were placed in the sequence of classified administration and obeyed to the unified administrative control, that was so-called “all over the world belongs to the king”. Under the feudal system, the bureaucratic system and social power structure were strict and systematic, highly centralization of state power and strictly hierarchy, the whole society is like a pyramid built with administrative power on the top of which was the emperor, in which, everyone must not take denial for the order system and go against superior. It was ruled by individual not by the rule of law and order; it was controlled by superior’s will not by legal procedure; it was “rule of man” not “rule of law”. Even in the modern China, the official-oriented thoughts is still overwhelming in the bureaucratic system although that is belonged to the pre-modernity.

Sixthly, the citizens are lack of public spirit, the civil society develops slowly. The public spirit as an important symbol of modernization and democracy of a country that means the citizens has the consciousness of right, democracy, justness, participation, responsibility, cooperation, legality to the public affairs, but the citizens in China usually are lack of concern and participation to the public affairs. Why that? There are three important reasons: the first is the federal tradition of “Family-Governed Monarchic Country” in China, the second is the deteriorated phenomenon of polarization between the
rich and the poor in the social and economical transformation, the third is the systematic reform of legality and democracy according to the market economy was slowly.

At the same time, the civil society as the foundation of the public spirit and public life is not fully developed in China. Without the civil society couldn’t the citizens express their minds and will and realize their independence fully. As a different organization from the government, the civil society is the necessary social capital maintaining the democracy and the development by its own efforts and voice affecting the political space. However, the civil society (such NGO,)in China became somewhat appendage of government because of longtime ruling idea of administration management, under such idea, all the people’s life of national economy and people ’s daily livelihood was clearly arranged by the state. The civil society didn’t have the space to fully develop because of omnipotent government in China.

2. Practical Path to the Public Administration Reform

Facing the challenges confronting in public administration practice in contemporary China, and according to the internal logic of theoretical and practical transition of public administration worldwide, Chinese government could adopt the following path to take reform.

First, abandon the role of rule of man which is the fundamental drawback in contemporary China’s public administration system. Relying on the moral to govern the state that is the characteristics of contemporary Chinese public administration, although it
is the mode of pre-modern governance. The past 30 years of reforming and opening up didn’t improve the level of morality of the bureaucrat stratum, on the contrary could we only found more and more corruption phenomenon among the officials. Under such circumstances, we must break out the thought of official standard and belief to the charismatic officials.

Secondly, inherit and improve the modern public administration system: constitutionalism and good governance featured by rule of law and legal system.

Modern administration means that the integration of ruling by law and legal system and achieving good governance and constitutionalism. Good governance of government seeks the good politics, constitutionalism seeks the justice and fairness of the rule by law. But we are lack of them in reality. In future we should take more measures to practice them in the process of public administration.

Thirdly, learn from the Western models of modern government management to seek the real transformation of government power.

Since 1949 years, the Chinese government system has experienced several major reform, either streamlined government department or expanded government departments; or divided power between the central and the local although the local never independently gained much power from the central authority; or made multiple reforms to the civil service system , and so on. But none of them had fundamentally changed the “almighty” function structure of Chinese public administration. When the western countries were constantly constructing the mode of “small government, big society” in their reform so that the society could have more public power, Chinese government is still a paradigm of
“big government” which controls all the social life. Some observers may say that the Chinese government model could not be suitable for “small government, big society”. But in this era, such a government is needed which actively transits the role to be “steersman” from “paddle player”, the bureaucratic management is replaced by the commune self-governing, the unnecessary and over-elaborate formalities are replaced by the missions of the organizations, the providing way of public goods is transited from monopolization to free market competition, the government motivated by bureaucracy is transited to the one motivated by customers, and the centralized power management is divided by decentralized organization. Chinese government must do some changes.

The reform of big department system beginning from the 2007, which could be seen a signal of constructing service government in China.

**Fourthly**, change from government regulation to a comprehensive approach of political governance combined with social governance.

Regulation represents and reflects the centralized power, but the governance means the public power returning to society. So the governance is the process of public power institutionally demisability as well as the process of returning the state power to civilians and the co-governance with the civics. In China, the government adopting the co-governance mode should includes the following aspects:(1) the institutional design of government and the behavior of governance should pursue “people-oriented” value target; (2) the structure and performance of governance should build harmonious relation between them; (3) co-governance emphasize that the government and the multiple subjects should share rights, responsibilities and obligations; (4) the co-governance
should construct such administrative culture emphasized service with universality, immediacy and effectiveness; (5) the public policy should be agreed generally by society. In fact, the local autonomy and the community governance in present China are becoming a good mode in future.

*Fifthly,* to foster and develop the spirit of public administration and civil society as soon as possible: efficiency and fairness, equality and freedom, modern confirmation of citizenship and rights.

Public administrative spirit in H.George Frederickson's opinion is just the efficiency and justice, equality, democracy and freedom, but the spirit is very poor in Chinese administration and bureaucratic class, so does the civil society. The reason of which is that the civil rights is not sufficient in social life. People who want to become a citizen must have four kinds of rights (obligations): legal rights, political rights, social rights, participation rights, so if Chinese citizens have the enough rights that the civil society and the spirit of public administration could be fostered and developed.