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*Roles of Trust in Policy Process*

*The Governmental Governance and Trust in Government in the  
Process of Chinese State Governance — Investigation based on  
the Perspective of Policy Process*

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**Abstract:** Trust in government is the emotional tie to uphold the mutual cooperation and co-governance of state between the government and citizens. Building the trust in government is also the inevitable requirement of comprehensively deepen reform under the condition of Chinese socialist market economy. In the practice of the governmental governance, the publicity nature of government and its maintenance of public interest are reflected in the process of public policy. In the transition period of China, public policies can't always meet the citizens' expectations of the government due to the deviation, to some extent, of publicity nature of public policies, which in turn leading to the pessimistic situation of the governmental credibility. Specifically, the randomness of elite decision-making and the weakness of public opinion aggregation, the disadvantages of cross-use of the bureaucratic pattern and mobilization pattern in the process of policy implementation, as well as performance tournament under "Pressure-type System", constitute the policy logics behind the current pessimistic situation of trust in Chinese government.

**Key words:** Governmental Governance; Trust in Government; Credibility; Public Policy; Policy Process; Publicity

## I .Introduction

*"The decision of central committee of CPC on several major issues of comprehensively deepen reform"* passed by the Third Plenary Session of the 18<sup>th</sup> CPC Central Committee on November 9-12<sup>th</sup>, 2013 has put forward the total goal: promoting the modernization of state governance system and governance ability. Throughout the full text of *"decision"*, it can be found that the concept of *governance* was highly frequently used, which involves multiple different levels such as state governance, governmental governance and social governance etc. In the praxis of

governance, the task of state governance is more dependent on the government. Governmental governance, therefore, constitutes the key part of state governance. Governmental governance refers to the public administration activities carried out by administrative system as the governance subject towards the market, the society and itself.<sup>[1]</sup> To some extent, the realization of such public administration activities is mainly achieved through public policy formulation and implementation, as Herbert A. Simon puts it: In the broadest sense, the meaning of “*decision-making*” is nearly synonymous with “*management*”.<sup>[2]</sup> To put it another way, management is decision-making. The nature of publicity and public interest will be reflected in the process of public policy.

Under the condition of socialist market economy, the ideal target of governmental governance is cooperative governance between government and citizens, which requires a good trust relationship between government and citizens. The public input their interest demands toward the government in the interest expression activities, and the government in turn meets the demands of public interest through interests’ synthesis and the corresponding output of public policy. The people’s trust in government has been constructed in the process of “input-output”. The trust in government, therefore, is the two-way relationship between government and citizens. According to Russell Hardin, trust in government is a kind of “expression with implicit interests”.<sup>[3]</sup> In other words, it is citizens’ expectations (implied with citizens’ interests) for possible action of government in the future, which is the emotional bonds maintaining the cooperative governance between government and citizens. In recent years, however, the citizens’ trust in government, especially in local government in China is not satisfactory, and the phenomena of losing trust from public citizens have frequently occurred. An undeniable fact is that the construction of governmental credibility has faced with severe challenges. In 2006, the journal of *Insight China* carried out a survey of the occupational group with minimum credibility associated with *sina.com*. Statistic reveals that the government officials were selected in the first place with the percentage of 75.36%. 63.68% of interviewees replied that they deeply distrust government officials and 25% didn’t quite trust government officials. <sup>①</sup>

Therefore, this article attempts to analyze and investigate the issue of trust in government in contemporary China from the perspective of the policy process under

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<sup>①</sup> The statistic comes from the website: <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/8198/71979/71980/4910531.html>.

the realistic background of social transformation. Specifically, the analyses will around three indispensable procedures: policy making, policy implementation and policy evaluation.

## **II. Policy-making: The Randomness of Elite Decision-making and the Weakness of Public Opinion Aggregation**

Decision-making needs to follow certain rules and procedures. In the process of construction of policy issues, policy agenda setting and design of policy options, the inputs of public interests and demands enter into the political system, and then the ruling party and government should interact with publics and make corresponding policies to satisfy the public's demands. Whether the public policies can reflect public opinions and realize the maximization of public interests, therefore, determine whether it can achieve publics' support and trust.

In Chinese political life, the Communist party of China, as the ruling party, is in dominant position in the process of public policy-making. In fact, any ruling party has two functions: governing and administering. These two functions constitute a succession of different eras in the process of political development. After the emergence of the modern government, the governing function of the ruling party was mainly achieved through the government, while the ruling party mainly maintained its policy positions through guidance and control.

In real political life, however, due to the difference in the status of these two functions, two models of party politics have been formed: "empowerment" model revolved around function of administering and "control" model revolved around function of governing.<sup>[4]</sup> Currently China belongs to the party "control" model. The CPC plays a decisive role in the process of policy-making, while the governments mainly undertake the implemental function. The decision space of the governments is consequently narrow, while as the administrative subject who interacted directly with the publics, the governments often bear the moral responsibility of the success or failure of public policy.

Over the past decades, with the deepening of the reform of market economic system in China, although reform of the administrative system has been carried out for several times, it has achieved limited effect. The ruling party (CPC) is still in the core position of public power in Chinese political life. From the perspective of public

policy process, decision-making follows a set of complete rules of procedures. However, the personified factors in the era of planned economy system still exist in the current political life, and produce certain effects on the process of public policy, which were specifically reflected through power elite's impacts on decision-making. Under Chinese decision-making model, the decision-making power concentrated in the hands of the leadership of the CPC elites. They play a decisive role in the process of decision-making, while the social forces and publics' influence on the public policy process is relatively limited. Under the unified leadership of the CPC, power elites represent the fundamental interests of the publics through their own understanding of the publics' interests, and then make a decision. In the political practice, however, the power elites tend to be deviated from the interests of the people, so as to harm the public interests, due to its dual role as executor of public power and pursuer of personal interests. Specific analyses are as follows:

*i. The randomness of elite decision-making.* Elite decision-making is especially significant in China. Because of the power elites' decisive role in the process of decision-making, the political interaction between different power elites among the CPC policymakers is more abundant than the interaction between the government and society. So the power elites, especially the major leaders, tend to integrate their personal values, will of the officialdom and forms of behavior into the process of decision-making, which shows a trend of more complex decision-making process. <sup>[5]</sup> Compared with the support from people relying on leader's charisma before the reform and opening up, such influence has suffered a major setback as the advancement of the concept of civil rights and consciousness of legal system since 1978. However, the existence of such decision-making thinking relying on leader's charisma makes the people's interests and demands cannot enter into the decision-making system effectively as the lack of sufficient institutional channels. For example, some local government leaders, for the achievements in their own official career, often integrate the one-sided interests and individual will into the decision-making process. Consequently, such randomness of elite decision-making often is at the expense of ignorance of people's fundamental interests.

*ii. "Withinput" and its negative effective.* Because of the weaker influence of society and citizens on decision-making in the process of public policy in contemporary China, social and citizens' interests expression and aggregation are generally completed by the power elites in the form of affirmed public interests after

their investigation, analysis and research. David Easton (1917-2014), an American political scientist at the University of Chicago, described such “input” as “*withinput*”. It is mainly because that these demands are not produced from those who play role in social non-political field, but directly from the political role within the political system. Such an input of demands (*withinput*) is different from the “input” which we have always discussed.<sup>[6]</sup> Under the background of social transformation, the diversified development of interests asks the government to play the role of interest coordination in the process of decision-making. But as the impact of interests’ *withinput* in the process of decision-making, the public interests recognized by the power elites are not necessarily consistent with the publics’ fundamental interests in the case of lack of adequate social interaction. In the process of Chinese social transformation, some stakeholders have become the resistance to further advancement of reform. They could, to some extent, exert certain impacts on public policy combined with the power elites so as to make their special interests to be the public interests recognized by the power elites, and put them into public policy process. Thus the public interests have been greatly harmed.

As a consequence, Chinese elite decision-making model has lead to the government’s weakness of public opinion aggregation in many cases as its randomness and negative influence of “*withinput*” of demands. In such condition, public policies could not well satisfy the publics’ interests and demands, and realize the maximization of public interests. In doing so, it is often easy to cause the tension between people and the government so as to erode public trust in government.

### **III. Policy Implementation: the Cross-use of the Bureaucratic Model and the Mobilization Model and Its Disadvantages**

Policy implementation refers to the process of putting the policy options into practice and solving the public problems, of turning policy ideals into policy reality. Taking scientific and effective way of execution is essential to the effective implementation of a policy. In China, the government’s efficiency and ability of implementing policies in some areas is very high thanks to the combination of two kinds of executive way: bureaucratic pattern and mobilization pattern.<sup>[7]</sup>

*i. Bureaucratic pattern.* The bureaucratic pattern of policy implementation relies on bureaucracy and the effective execution of administrative officials at all

levels from top to bottom, which is the conventional way of policy implementation. Bureaucratic pattern is almost the ideal choice currently among modern governmental governance in the world. As the American political scientist Gabriel A. Almond (1911-2002) puts it: “In modern political system, bureaucracy is indispensable. It is impossible for people to invent a method to carry out social works on a large scale without organization, specialization and professionalization provided by the bureaucracy.”<sup>[8]</sup> Bureaucracy is a specific form of organization system and administration on the basis of legal-rational authority in modern society, which is characteristic of impersonality, professionalization, hierarchy, political-administrative dichotomy and etc. It can be said, therefore, that the effectiveness of rational bureaucracy in modern state governance is irreplaceable. The rational spirit reflected in the bureaucracy is expected to be advocated and encouraged by any social organizations. However, Chinese government has not fully exerted its due efficiency in the policy implementation. There are two reasons:

On the one hand, there are some inborn defects in rational bureaucracy. Even though bureaucracy has avoided the capricious and arbitrary behavior under the condition of rule of man with its characteristics of impersonality, professionalization and the spirit of rule of law, the lack of internal incentive mechanism is not conducive to improving effectiveness of public policy implementation. Moreover, it is easy for the bureaucracy to be deviated from public opinion as its rationality, opacity, organizational rigidity and hierarchical nature.

On the other hand, the realistic logic of Chinese political operation is another important factor. Logically, the operational mechanism of a modern rational bureaucratic organization embodies not only an external form of hierarchy, but also some inherent characteristics. Under the vast territory of China, the organizational form of state governance system is typically bureaucratic one, but its internal operational mechanism is far away from the modern rational bureaucracy. It is known that the rational bureaucratic organization is based on the principle of political-administrative dichotomy, in which politicians and civil servants played different role. Civil servants should keep the position of “political neutrality”. Under the leadership of the CPC, however, there is no clear role distinction between politicians and civil servants. All politicians are bureaucrats who are not asked to keep the position of “political neutrality”. The mixture of political and administrative services runs through all level of bureaucratic organization from top to bottom.<sup>[9]</sup> For

the bureaucratic hierarchy in China, an important problem is the overlap of administrative organizations and its functions. Obviously, bureaucrats tend to obey the personified authority as the lack of mature legal-rational authority. Therefore, bureaucrats are responsible to their superiors rather than to the publics in the process of public policy implementation. It is inevitable that the cost of the policy implementation would be increased. As a result, bureaucratism and inefficiency decrease the government's credibility.

*ii. Mobilization pattern.* Political mobilization pattern is commonly used by Chinese government as alternative one to make up for the defects of bureaucratic pattern, due to it often leads to low efficiency of policy implementation. Political mobilization mainly refers to a kind of manipulation of citizens' behavior by the government authorities in order to achieve specific political goals. It was usually launched around a specific public policy.

In China, policy implementation is generally organized by high-level power elites of ruling party and government authorities. For the purpose of making a major public policy be implemented by local governments, the ruling party and central government will widely mobilize the masses through the use of propaganda channels. In the process of mobilization, subtle political rhetoric is often used by power elites to make policy consistent with the interests of the people, and raise it ideologically to the high-level position of the nation-state building. By doing so, it can not only make the people to be able to release the dissatisfaction and resentment in real life, but also arouse people's emotional identification by taking advantage of their national identification, so as to support government's public policies.

However, as for local governments which are responsible for implementing public policies of central government, high-level power elites usually assign tasks to them through the "*Pressure-type System*", and evaluate their performances by using the measures of promotion or punishment. In the process of public policy implementation, the local governments tend to strictly implement the central government's policies regardless of the specific circumstances of local development for the sake of their own political achievements; or implement policies flexibly in order to achieve immediate interests quickly. In practice, both of them have ignored the publics' interests and decreased the credibility of local governments.

Visibly, the bureaucratic pattern and the mobilization pattern coexist in the process of public policy implementation in China. As a conventional pattern,

bureaucratic one is often inefficient. Simultaneously, the central government also makes local governments in the awkward position when it takes corrective strategy of political mobilization to obtain the publics' support and trust. Therefore, the gap has been emerged between the "good image" shaped by the central government for the people and the "real picture" brought by the local governments. That has triggered publics' emotion of mistrust in local governments, so as to lead to the current situation of "strong trust in central government and weak trust in local governments".

#### **IV. Policy Evaluation: The Performance Tournament under "Pressure-type System"**

Policy evaluation is an activity of judging the effectiveness, efficiency and quality of public policy implementation according to a certain set of standards and procedures. It is aimed at summarizing the experiences of success, or causes and lessons of failure. Public policy is fundamentally public interest-oriented, so it should be responsible to the general public interests. Put it another way, the key criterion of judging the success or failure of public policy implementation is whether it has realized the maximization of public interests and highlighted the value of publicity. In the process of public policy in China, however, policy evaluation is not so much responsible to the public interests as to the superior leaders. It has something to do with the "*Pressure-type System*" in China.

"Pressure-type System" refers to a way of quantitative management for task allocation and digital evaluation system taken by various levels of bureaucratic organizations in order to accomplish the assigned tasks of economic development from superior leaders. In order to complete the assigned economic tasks and objectives, bureaucratic organizations at all levels will reallocate these tasks and then assign the incremental amount of tasks to their subordinate organizations and bureaucrats. Then the political and economic rewards and punishments would be pursued according to their work is good or bad. Because of an important way of evaluation is "one vote veto" mechanism, bureaucratic organizations at all levels is, in fact, implementing public policy under the pressure of such evaluation system.<sup>[10]</sup>

"Pressure-type System" is a continuation of mobilization pattern in the transformation period of market economy system, and it works around the quantitative economic index and assigned tasks. In order to achieve rapid economic

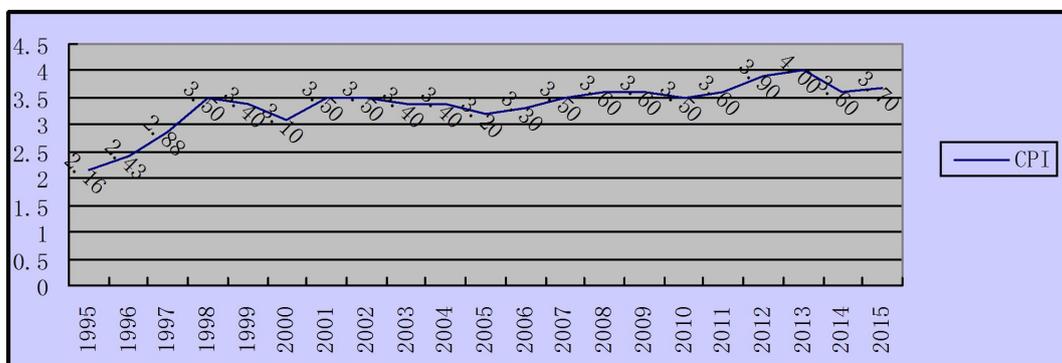
growth and promote the modernization, economic growth is usually on the top agenda of local governments at all levels. In the policy evaluation period, the economic performance of local governments is directly related to the resource allocation for development from their superiors and opportunities to be promoted. Why the “Pressure-type System” could work smoothly in China? It has close relations with “the vertically decentralized authoritarianism”. Professor Cao Zhenghan of Zhejiang University argues that the basic characteristic of the Chinese political system is the separation of the power to govern officials from the power to govern people. The central government controls the power to govern officials which includes appointment, supervision, rewards and punishment of the officials. With regard to governing people, it is the responsibility of local government. As long as the local officials do not violate the principles of the central government, they can decide how to govern people under its jurisdiction.<sup>[11]</sup> Under “the vertically decentralized authoritarianism”, the central government can assign economic tasks to local governments by using centralized power of staffing and resource allocation, thus their political risk and governance pressure has been dispersed.

Under “Pressure-type System”, local governments launched fierce performance tournaments for the purpose of getting more policy supports and promotion opportunities from their superior leaders. Promotion tournaments, as an incentive system governing Chinese local officials, are a critical source of China miraculous growth, but in the meantime, due to its internal limitations, especially the serious conflict between objectives of incentives to officials and design of governmental functions, it is also the root of many profound and pressing problems challenging China’s policy makers in the period of economic and social transformation.<sup>[12]</sup> In the performance tournaments, local government officials tend to concentrate on those developmental projects which can bring them outstanding achievements in the short term in order to compete for limited resources and promotion opportunities. For example, a large number of vanity projects, those for political career, can be witnessed in many local governments. A GDP-oriented view of achievements is general among local government officials. Even though this has to some extent stimulated the rapid advancement of China’s economy, there are also some potential risks. Among other things, local governments have paid more attention to the development of economic field, but less to the development of other areas, such as social livelihood of the people. Many urgent concerns which have nothing to do with short-term economic

goals, say, the environmental protection, education, healthcare and Medicare in villages, etc have not been coped with effectively. Some local governments even allied with some interest groups for the sake of gaining their supports to complete the assigned economic tasks. As a consequence, alliance between administrative power and interest groups has made some public policies deviating from the value of publicity so as to hinder the realization of public interests. Also it is an important root of corruption in local government officials, which in turn decrease the credibility of government. According to the survey launched by the journal of *People's Tribune* in 2009, among the 10 severest challenges faced by China in coming 10 years, “*people will be weighed down by corruption*” has been regarded as the first one with percent of 82.3%. In other words, corruption of government officials is a key driving-force which leading to the decline of governmental credibility.

Over the past two decades, Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI) issued by Transparency International, an international well-known NGO researching corruption problems, has highlighted the challenges and risks of Chinese governmental credibility. The CPI is based on 10-point scale, and the highest score of 10 means the most uncorrupt, the lowest score of 0 means the most corrupt. The score from 2.5 to 5 means severe corrupt, and the score from 0 to 2.5 means extreme corrupt. According to the CPI from 1995 to 2015 (*see graph 1*), the numbers of CPI in China are all under 4.0, which means that China belongs to the level of severe corrupt. So local governments should avoid alliance between administrative power and interest groups in the process of public policy and say no to corruption for achieving trust and support from general public.

Graph 1: The CPI of China from 1995 to 2015



(Source: <http://www.transparency.org/>)

Furthermore, street-level bureaucracy is an important factor influencing local government's credibility. According to Michael Lipsky (1940- ), a professor of political science at MIT, street-level bureaucracy refers to those "front-line civil servants who have a direct contact with citizens at works, and they have a great deal of discretionary power in the process of policy implementation".<sup>[13]</sup> Duo to such reasons as the overruling of power objectives, the mismatch of power responsibilities and the lack of power monitoring, many street-level bureaucracies even take a disguised way like collecting fees, apportion and fines illegally from private enterprises and individuals to fulfill the assigned tasks. They have hugely hurt people's sentiment and eroded public trust in government instead of promoting the scientific and sustainable development of local economy.

## **V. Concluding Remarks**

Given the analyses above, in the process of governmental governance, whether the public policy could maximize public interests determines whether the government could acquire the trust and support from citizens. In the public policy process of China, however, the randomness of elite decision-making and the weakness of public opinion aggregation, the disadvantages of cross-use of the bureaucratic pattern and mobilization pattern in the process of policy implementation, as well as performance tournament under "Pressure-type System" have lead to the non-optimistic situation of the governmental credibility. Therefore, governments at all level should make every effort and take concrete measures to turn back this trend.

From the perspective of public policy process, governments should promote the optimization of public policy information system to absorb public opinion. For example, public deliberation should be widely launched to cope with problems which are closely related to public interests so as to promote the scientific and democratic policymaking. In the stage of policy implementation, the procedures and system of policy implementation should be optimized to improve the autonomy of governments at all level, as well as to improve the efficiency of policy implementation. Then in the evaluation stage, the subjects of policy evaluation should be diversified, especially the social organizations and pubic citizens should be encouraged to play an important part in policy evaluation. In addition, and the evaluation results should be taken as the essential criterion of administrative accountability. Only in this way, can a good trust relationship between governments and citizens be built.

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