

Towards Civil Society–Centralized Governance: Value Issues in Chinese Government Reform

Zhang, Cheng Fu
(China)

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1. Foreword

In the society we are living, we inevitably facing with choice and determination on value because of a certain standard bared by human being in judging right and wrong. Given that we have to make a choice concerning value issues, we must put into account the base of the value, upon which these choices are made. The fact that pubic administration exists and develops in a certain cultural circumstances determines that pubic administration and governance are an action of pursuing value. In other words, value issue is one of the important fields in pubic affair administration.

The definition on value varies in different disciplines . In this study I define value as a framework of beliefs and convictions that motivated behaviors and provide guidance for making choice among possible course of action. Value functions in several ways, such as:

- Value helps us set up aim and ideal of life.
- Value impels us working to reach these aims.
- As a standard, value helps us measure the progress we have made and make reasonable choice from a bulk of action plans.
- To the society governance, the most important function of value is that it influences the legitimacy of the governance and the reasonality of action .

In view of the pubic administration reform world wide, the reform has different dimensions, some in structure, some in technology, some in instrument and some in policy. But the nature of their reforms is more or less the same. pubic administration reform is perception, explanation and manifestation of a certain value.

This study aims to make an analysis on the value consideration of Chinese government reform before 1990s and probe into the defect and predicament of this

consideration in hope of providing the next stage of Chinese government reform with reference on possible value alternatives.

2. The development and leading value of Chinese government administration reform

Public administration reform to some extent is a process of adjustment and adaptation made by the government to suit the change of its internal and external environment. Public administration reform is also a constant course of change, innovation and evolution. Once the rules and system of the government are lagging behind the expectation of the society, government reform is imminent.

As it is known to all, since 1980s the ideology, politics, economy and social structure of China have witnessed some significant changes. I ever put the above changes in the following category:

- Ideology: Shift from class struggle to economic development.
- Economic structure: Shift from planed economy to the market oriented economy.
- Social structure: Shift from closed society to open society.
- Social pattern: Shift from traditional agricultural society to modern industrial society.

Meanwhile, Chinese governmental system is also facing with a lot of pressure, problems even crisis. These crises can be summarized as:

- Crises of administration state. The scale of the public were too large, consuming too many scarce resources.
- Crises of state-owned enterprises. State owned enterprises are low in productivity, almost of which are running at lost, moreover some of them are

going bankrupt.

- Bureaucracy and all kinds of maladministration .
- Corruption and confidence crisis .
- Crisis of the methods of government ,becoming a highly unpopular of social organizations.

These crises and problems are extensively exist in the administration system of central and local government, which not only damage the ability and effectiveness of the governance, but also considerably lead to crisis on its legitimacy.

To adapt to the changing environment and deal with its own crises, Chinese government has conducted 4 large-scale administration reforms since 1980s, which respectively were in 1982, 1988, 1992 and 1998. According to the government reform plan, the 4 reforms at both the central and local level aimed to establish a functional-integration, highly efficient, flexible and harmonized administration system with Chinese characteristic.

To be specific, the main measures of the administration reform are manifested in the following aspects:

- The adjustment of government function and scope. Shifting the government function to that of macro-adjustment and control, public affairs management and public service.
- Re-adjustment of the relation between government and enterprises. lifting up restriction on enterprises and separating enterprises from government.
- Re-organization of government institutions, simplification of government and strengthening out relations among various government departments.
- Downsizing
- Stress the value of efficiency.
- Establishing and improving civic servants system
- Establishing and improving administrative laws.

But upon the analysis of the previous government reform, especially those of the first 3 rounds, we have found that there are many defects and errors in government reform, which mainly go as follows:

1) The passive adaptation in the reform far exceeds initiative foresight.

From point of view of development administration, facing the constantly changing politics, economy, society, culture and international environment, government should response actively. To do this, government should not only eliminate the unreasonable elements in government organization and its operation, but also push ahead the social development by administrative development with foresight and creation. Only in this way, government can manage the challenge of society. All of the previous reforms were forced by the pressure from finance, institutions, staff and bureaucracy so they are passive reforms. They always took place when reform was the only way out. This kind of reforms lacks of initiation, foresight and automation.

2) The partial vision on government reform

For so many years, once talking about government reform, we presumably take it as organization reconstructing and staff trimming. As matter of fact, government reform involves many aspects and dimensions. In short, government reforms at least touches upon changes in the following aspects:

- Structure reform, such as, organization restructuring, layers simplification and staff trimming.
- Instrument reform. It relates to the government management methods and the way in which civic servants are working.
- Change in value. It involves the changes in the soul of the civil servants.

Obviously changes confined in the government structure can not achieve the goal of government reform.

3) *Lack of introspection on the theory of government reform*

All of the previous reforms reflect that our theoretical preparation and introspection on government reform are considerably insufficient. We are lacking profound insight in a series of theoretical issues such as: government's duty, the relation between government and enterprises, the relation between government and society, the relation between central government and localities, and governance methods including the aim of the reform.

4) *Government reform is isolated from the network of politics and society.*

Government reform can not be and is impossible to be carried out beyond the social network. Caiden, an administration reform expert once used "Good apples can't perform in a rot barrel" to describe the relation between social environment and government. To be more extensive, legislation, administration, law enforcement, social organization, party and economic organization are one Co-manager of the society. Any one of the above organizations can not exist if isolated from others, thus administrative issues can not be observed and managed isolately. Problems of administration departments are the manifestation of the elements of politics, economy, culture and law, therefore government restructuring should not be confined within governmental organization, furthermore, it should be in line with the reform of politics, economy, law enforcement, legislation and social organizations. In consideration of the highly centralized administration system integrating party and governmental administration, administration and enterprises, government and society established in the old planed economy, the government restructuring is surely a large scale, comprehensive and thorough project relating the systematic reform of party, legislation, law enforcement and social organization. The close relation among the above elements is one of the important reasons why Chinese government reform is

so difficult.

In view of the government reform before 1990s, there are some effects but it is not obvious. Traditionally people use a closed cycle of "Staff Trimming—Expansion—Re-trimming", " Power centralization—Ditribution—Recentralization" to show the ineffectiveness of this reform. From my point of view, the limitation on the effect of the government reform embodies in that the new system has not really established. This fact is reflected in the relation between government and party, government and market, government and enterprises, government and society. Chinese governmental system are facing with many fundamental problems, such as politicization of administration, corruption of government officials, social fairness, government's inefficiency and low productivity of state owned enterprises.

3. The defects of the value of state centralism

The unsatisfactory result and problems of Chinese government reform has various reasons, such as limitation of social environment, resistance from bureaucrats and current system's beneficiaries, but as I see it, the most important reason is the fundamental value which guides the reform.

Traditionally China is a state with strong government and weak society. After founding of the People's Republic of China, the adoption of Soviet Union's government pattern and planed economy make this feature more obvious. On the basis of that government pattern and economic system, China has developed a set of governance value that can be called state centralism, which demonstrates in the following aspects:

- Take government as a autocratic institution

- Intent to build a strong government
- Highlight the power of governance and limited power sharing
- Total-government
- Highly think of order and law, monism and obedience
- Government acts as patriarch and try to take care of everything
- In ideology, the antagonism between leftist and rightist
- Highlight and rigid planning
- Stress the external and forced reform from top to bottom
- Elite policy making
- Particularism in public service system

It is obvious that the governance guided by the value of state centralism has many contradictions, which can not be overcome by the government itself. These contradictions manifest as follows:

- The contradiction between centralized power of the government and control of its obligation
- The contradiction between government's control and social creation and vigor
- The contradiction between instrument reason and substantial reason
- The contradiction between the comprehensive and unified plan and particularity
- The contradiction between human governance and law governance
- The contradiction between closed bureaucracy and open democracy

In fact, the administration reform guided by state centralism can not resolve the key problem of Chinese governmental administrative system, such as, the relation between government and market, the relation between government and state owned enterprises, the relation between central government and local government, the relation between government and society. The reason is that this kind of reform has not broken through the limitation of the old administrative system established in the

traditional planed system. At most this reform is a partial improvement instead of a thorough resolution. Therefore it is not difficult for us to understand the reason why the 20 years' Chinese government reform has not resolved the problems needed to be resolved.

4. Civil society centralized governance

It is no doubt that Chinese society is experiencing a profound reform. This reform, as Marilyn Ferguson pointed out, is a social paradigm change, which includes the change of fundamental belief and value taking form in China's old-planed economic system. Surely we need to dismantle the old social model and construct a new social model in line with the advancing new era.

It is verified by history that once a government loses its legitimacy in its people, any external force can not safeguard its permanent existence. From my point of view, the crisis of modern bureaucracy stems from a fact that it gave up a great legacy of human being "The people should be the core of matter instead of government", and the fact of the changing social environment. Public affair administration as Gerald E Caiden took it, should be a administration of the public rather than administration for public.

Therefore I conclude that replacing the value of state centered governance with that of civil society centralized governance is the most important choice of our era.

What it is meant by the value of civil society centralized governance? As I see it, it means:

- Take government as an entity founded through institutional dialogue
- Intent to fragmentation of authority

- Highlight the power sharing
- Limited government
- Highlight multi-polarization and creation
- Highlight democracy and fairness
- Government plays a role in promoting growth, creation, shift and integration
- Exceeds polar system
- Plan with foresight, active response and flexibility
- Highlight social design in policy making
- Universalism in public service

The value of civil society centralized governance recognizes and highlights the justice of governance, recognizes the important role government plays in promoting social development and safeguarding the individual rights. It also recognizes the importance of market in public affair administration, but its attitude towards market fundamentalism is cautious. The core of the civil society centralized governance value is its emphasis on sharing of management right of society instead of a hollow government and the mutual trust, inter-depending and interactive relation between society and government.

5. Chinese administration reform under the civil society centralized governance value: Future and Foresight

With the different guiding value, the administration reform has different strategy. The core of public centered value lies in its stress on the importance of democratic administration - that is, strengthen the governance with the democratic principle and mechanism, make the state close to its people and people participate the society. Social management is bound not to ignore the importance of citizenship, civic spirit

and citizen participation. In one word, the future development of governance should return to the recognition, assimilation and vitalization of publics, public domain and public interest.

Guiding by this value I personally holds that the future restructuring of Chinese government focus on relation restructuring. Relation restructuring mainly includes:

- 1) Relation between government and society. The relation between government and society must shake off the "Command - Obey" one and change to "Respect - Cooperation". To achieve this, nongovernmental organizations must be developed and realize an independent, self-decided and active civil society.
- 2) The relation between government and enterprises. Government should put the market's function in adjusting resource distribution into a full play and centers on manage market failure.
- 3) The relation between government and enterprises. Government should be committed to safeguard private properties, encourage and promote the development in private sectors. By means of privatization and enterprises reformation to built dynamic business sector.
- 4) The relation between government and party. Separate party and administration, maintain government's self-decision making power and change the traditional policalization of public administration.
- 5) The relation between government, legislation and law enforcement. Strengthen the function of legislation and law enforcement, and ensure the realization of obligation 'bound government.
- 6) The relation between the central government and the locals. Change the traditional centralized power structure and develop a cooperative and balanced relation with clearly assigned duty.

As I see it, an efficiently administrated society is based upon cooperation of

accountable government, dynamic business sector and independent and vital civil society. To day Chinese government is facing with a complicated, changing and multi-polarity environment, which make the government a co-governance, co-management, co-production, co-allocation and co-liberation mode of governance institution rather than a sole ruler. In this way China will develop into a participatory and dialectic state. I personally hold that this is the inevitable choice of Chinese government restructuring value.

6. Brief conclusion

Chinese administration reform, in its nature, is a social rebuilding with citizenship enhancement, social reorganization and social rebuilding as its core. Neither western entrepreneurship government or Chinese traditional state centralism can adapt the changing Chinese society, the only possible effect of which is the bigger government failure. The effective way out for future reform of Chinese administration reform lies in the establishment of the civil society state centric governance value, co-management structure of central and local governments, market, citizen, civil society and enterprises and multi-organization partnership.

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