

# **What is governance? Has the governance concept added to our understanding of Chinese public administration?**

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## **Abstract**

‘Governance’, as a concept, has been prevalent in the western academic literatures, and also is influencing the way we understand the Chinese public administration. In this article, I will first and foremost outline all types of ‘governance’ defined by different scholars, then focus on finding out which one is more applicable in china. The first part introduces three modes of governance critically, and creates a new model called ‘governance with Chinese characteristics’ to understand Chinese public administration. The second part describes the Chinese model combining with case studies to illustrate the transformation and changes of Chinese public administration. .

**Key words:** Governance, Chinese public administration.

## I. Introduction

It is reasonable to say that “governance” which was ignited a large debate on, when World Bank identified bad governance as a cause of economic crisis in many Third World countries, is a “buzzword”. Its theoretical roots are various: institutional economics, international relations, organizational studies, public administration and foucauldian-inspired theorists. (Gerry, 1998, p2) From “the minimal state” to “corporate governance”, “good governance” to “self-organizing networks”, “new public management” to “public value management”, governance has been applied and operated in both developed countries and developing countries. Without any exception, the Chinese government has launched positively and actively a series of reforms in its governmental institutions, designed to promote economic development and social progress. This has been termed the “reform and open door” policy. (Chai, 2004, p67). This essay is divided into two parts and primarily focuses on the significance and influence of governance to understanding of Chinese public administration, and endeavors to find out which kind of ‘governance’ is more viable to the current circumstance of china. The first part introduces three modes of governance critically, and creates a new model called ‘governance with Chinese characteristics’ to understand Chinese public administration. The second part describes the Chinese model combining with case studies to illustrate the transformation and changes of Chinese public administration

## II. What is governance?

In public administration, Weberian principles of hierarchy, neutrality and career civil servants are traditional model of public administration, which assume that:

‘modern public servants, according to Weber, should be career bureaucrats, recruited on the basis of ability rather than ascription’; ‘public moneys and equipment are divorced from the private property of the official’,.....(Kjaer, 2004,p20)

however, in 1980s this ideal-type model had been criticized for the reason that the hierarchical structures functioned in a rigid manner because of standard operating procedures and bureaucratic rules. The increasing debate and criticism of the traditional model of public administration led to a new wave of reforms during the 1980s and 1990s. Since then, the word of ‘governance’ began to become a popular word and debate about the changes that have taken place in the public sector. reforms and innovations in public sector can be defined in many ways, such as, NPM (New Public Management), good governance, and self-organizing networks. Flocks of literatures about governance have come out, in which the key

and kernel discussion is more closely related to the role of government and the relationship between it and democracy, market, civil society, transnational organizations, corporate interests, and non-governmental organizations (NGO), and their standpoints are also distinct. The main discrepancies among them are:

‘To what extent the role of government should be played, which kind of method would be better and efficient to enhance the capabilities of state adaptation to its external environment, and also denotes a conceptual or theoretical representation of co-ordination of social systems and, for the most part, the role of the state in that process’. (Jon Pierre, 2000, p3)

However, a consensus can be reached, that is, governance is not identical with government. The role that government plays in governance is a variable and not a constant, and, as we will point out, government is only playing one of actors in governance.

### ‘Governance as hierarchies’ (Pierre and peters, 2000)

Build on the criticism of the model of traditional public administration and ‘failure of the state’, politicians and scholars began to more or less disappoint the state, and tried to create new modes to grapple with ‘governance crisis’. Hence, it brings the new public management (NPM) method, which is more concerned with competition, markets, customers and outcomes. Advocators of NPM are conceiving that interventions and regulations to the economy by public sector are seen as a potential threat to efficiency because it distorts prices and incentives mechanisms, meanwhile, undermines the equal environment and conditions for fair competition. New public management was first introduced by the Thatcher government in Britain, but also in the United States under Reagan, and countries like Australia and New Zealand followed suit, and also. (Pierre and Peters, 2000) and some principles has become necessities as a condition for loans required by the international financial institutions. According to Pierre, the ‘new public management’ had two meanings: (Pierre, 2000)

..... ‘Corporate management and marketization. Corporate management refers to introducing private sector management methods to the public sector through performance measures, managing by results, value for money, and closeness to the customer. Marketization refers to introducing incentive structures into public service provision through contracting-out, quasi-markets, and consumer choice.’.....

the essence of the new public management is actually as managerialism. and it is also referred to as the three Es of Economy, Efficiency and Effectiveness. (Rhodes, 1997a: 93) from this focus, it reflects the criticisms that there was too much ‘slack’ or waste as

the public institutions proceed the public affairs. Privatisation, agencification and devolution are three 'good ways' to enhance the three Es from the perspective of advocates of the new public management. Privatisation simply means the selling or transferral of public sector enterprises to private ownership (Kjaer, 2004) in order to increase efficiency and reduce the costs to consumers and public sector expenditure. And another version of privatisation is the system of contracting out, which means that the state remains the buyer of the service, but the service is undertaken by a private agency. For instance, in Britain, Thatcher government was the forerunner, introducing far-reaching privatisation programmes that resulted in the privatisation of nationally owned coalmines, the postal services, the national railways and other large organizations. (Kjaer, 2004) agencification refers to the establishment of semi-autonomous agencies responsible for operational management. (Kjaer, 2004) And their underlying logic is that by separating agencies from political pressure, it can be run more efficiently.

Although the new public management has been extolled by many its supporters, indeed there are some lessons and defects to be learnt from private management. According to Rhode's account, there are four disadvantages for NPM: (Rhodes, 1997, p55-56)

‘.....Firstly, managerialism adopts an intra-organizational focus, say, 3Es, value for money, and measures of performance, and hardly pays attention to managing inter-organizational links.

.....Secondly, managerialism is obsessed with objectives, neglecting the maintenance of the relationship between public services department and private sector.

.....Thirdly, NPM focus on results, in an inter-organizational network, no one actor is responsible for an outcome; there may be no agreement on either the desired outcome or how to measure it; and the centre has no means of enforcing its preferences.

.....Fourthly, there is a contradiction between competition and steering at the heart of NPM.’

The application and emphasis on managerialism in the developed countries derived from a long-standing critique of how the public sector had worked, however, NPM in the developing countries to some extent is imposed on by the international organizations, such as, World Bank, IMF, without prudent considerations whether it could be adapted to another cultural, social and economic setting.

### **Governance as self-organizing and inter-organizational networks (Rhodes, 1997, p53)**

Networks are the analytical heart of the notion of

governance in the study of Public Administration. In network theory explanations given for the rise and existence of networks are as a rule of a functional interdependent nature: needs for resources, combating common environmental uncertainties, strategic considerations etc. (Jan, 2003,p104) and networks are also a common form of social coordination, and managing inter-organizational links is just as important for private sector management as for public sector. (Pierre, 2000,p61) Further networks are an alternative to, not a hybrid of markets and hierarchies and they span the boundaries of the public, private and voluntary sectors: (Rhodes, 1997, p52)

.....If it is price competition that is the central co-ordinating mechanism of the market and administrative orders that of hierarchy, then it is trust and cooperation that centrally articulate networks.....

More important, this use of governance also suggests that networks are self-organizing. At its simplest, self-organizing means a network is autonomous and self-governing. (Pierre, 2000,p61) according to Pierre's perspective: these networks can be characterized:

‘First, by interdependence between organizations. Governance is broader than government, covering non-state actors. Changing the boundaries of the state meant that the boundaries between public, private, and voluntary sectors became shifting and opaque.

Second, there are continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes.

Third, these interactions are game-like, rooted in trust and regulated by rules of the game negotiated and agreed by network participants.

Finally, the networks have a significant degree of autonomy from the state’.....(Pierre, 2000,p61)

For example, in a UK analysis network development as a new governance mode is closely linked to ideas about ‘hollow-out of the state’, the argument being that, especially under the influence of New Public Management, the state has become ‘a collection of inter-organizational networks made up of governmental and societal actors with no sovereign actor able to steer or regulate.’ (Jan, 2003, p105)

However, although there are lots of good points of Networks, we cannot lose sight of its defects. Such as, the obscurity of accountability. During the process of cooperation of all actors in networks, it is hard to discern who is accountable to whom for what. Secondly, supporters of ‘Networks’ would argue that trust and cooperation would be the basis of ‘good cooperation’, but there are almost many doubts about how can the institutions trust and cooperate with each other without any caution. According to the theory of ‘rational choice’, the mainstream variant of rational

choice assumes that individuals all have the rational capacity, time and emotional detachment necessary to choose a best course of action, no matter how complex the choice, (Marsh and Stoker, 1988, p79) no one can promise that institutions in networks could cooperate by making full use of resources without any considerations for themselves, even cooperation is better than without collaboration. Thirdly, Hollowing-out erodes the capacity of the state to coordinate and plan. For example, with networks multiplying, the ability of the state to steer is decreasing.

Overall, there can be hardly any doubt that the emergence of mixed networks of public and private actors is an important complement to or change of more traditional governance structures.

### **Governance with Chinese characteristics**

It seems that there are a large number of meanings and models about 'governance', but by virtue of the Chinese special conditions no any single model could explain the phenomena emerged in china from the foundation of People's Republic of China to now. Although elements of 'governance' outlined by me probably are not complete and full-covered, it incorporates significant factors of the other uses, most notably governance as hierarchies, as the New Public Management, as the self-organizing and networks. I conclude that elements listed below could help us to have a further understanding to Chinese public administration

1, governance as a top-down structure, typical bureaucratically organizational forms, central government dominated by Communist Party is at the core of the state, and retain the ultimate leadership in the process of policy-making.

2, proper-sized government, decreasing the numbers of governmental institutions, transferring state-owned enterprises to private forms, privatization, and input competition mechanism to public sector, and marketization.

3, continuing interactions between network members, caused by the need to exchange resources and negotiate shared purposes. (Rhodes, 1997,p53) and the process of hollowing-out occurs at the centre of Chinese government.

4, with the influence of globalization, global governance also influences the Chinese public administration, cooperation with international financial institutions, say, WTO, IMF, is becoming more popular than that of before 'reform open' policy.

These key points clearly demonstrate the common ground between special Chinese governance and other definitions of 'governance', and would assist us to understand the transformation and current situations of Chinese governance. However, there is still one point I want to emphasize. In all these factors

listed above, governance in the current Chinese situation is a hybrid of several models of 'governance', and during the transformation process of Chinese public administration, it is essential to explore new ways to establish a new model of 'governance' with Chinese characteristics. Presumably amazed the miracles of western economic progress, Chinese reformists groups began to apply 'market mechanism' into Chinese public sector so as to maintain the legitimacy of Chinese Communist Party and societal stability. But as early as in 1981, Deng XiaoPing warned: 'without Party leadership there definitely will be nationwide disorder and China would fall apart.' (Zheng, 1997,p5) moreover, organizing China has never been easy because of the sheer of size of its land and population. Therefore, centralized form of governance probably would be the best way for the development of China. But, one thing is certain, due to the advantages of market mechanism, networks, and cooperation with all sorts of organizations, Chinese central government is taking incremental reforming measures to contribute to Chinese economic growth, societal progress and improving living standard of Chinese citizens.

In all, there are two points I am trying to clarify:

First, making the most of good points of other models of 'governance' to enhance the continuing growth of Chinese economics and stability of Chinese society.

Second, continued importance of the state and hierarchy for current Chinese developmental needs.

### **III. Has the governance concept added to our understanding of Chinese public administration?**

The collapse of Communist regimes in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union forms the considerably contrast with china. Against this background, China seems to be doing very well: At an average of 9 percent per year over the past sixteen years, (Zheng, 1997,p3) the Chinese economy was the fastest growing in the world; market reform had been deepening, despite or perhaps because of the tragedy in Tiananmen Square in 1989; foreign investments poured in and Chinese products rushed out to all over the world. And China has experienced profound and historic social change due to a process of incremental reform that has transformed the country from a command to a market socialist economy. (Chai, 2004,) and why Chinese economic development increases so quickly since the 'Reform and Open Door' policy? Can china keep the continuous growth of economics? The concepts of 'governance' do provide us a sort of criterion to understand Chinese public administration, and changes of Chinese central governmental institutions.

They are (1) the fallacy of ruling perlocution out of

the meaning of an utterance and out of the scope of pragmatics in general, (2) the dismissal of the role that the structure of locutions plays in the success of perlocutionary acts, (3) the fallacy of considering perlocutionary acts to be simple consequences of locutionary acts, (4) the fallacy of attaching little or no importance to the role of the speaker in the perlocutionary act, (5) the fallacy of attaching little or no importance to the role of the hearer in the perlocutionary act, (6) the fallacy of taking no consideration of the actually achieved effects in a hearer.

### **Traditional Chinese public administration**

#### **--- Governance by hierarchy (complete control)**

In the sense of economism, determinism, materialism and structuralism in classical Marxism, Marx thought that the mode of production of material life determines consciousness and the economic 'basis' determines the 'superstructure'. (Marsh and Stoker, 2002, 2st, p154) and, historically, the traditional Chinese economy 'basis' was rooted in small-scale peasant agriculture; productive materials and power were controlled by the minority--- feudalists. Consequently, the foundation of the traditional Chinese political order was the national bureaucracy, with its origins in the Han dynasty, and with a history of nearly 2,000 years. (Harry, 1987, p24) with its profound influence, the structure of traditional administration is typically hierarchy, and operates by setting and enforcing top-down policies, rules and regulations, and is characterized by: unitary organization, shared norms and values, perfect obedience, full information and all the time needed to do the job properly. (Larmour, 1997, p2) Since the establishment of Chinese new polity in 1949, highly-centralized government, emulated largely from soviet-style system, master and control almost everything, for its mistrust and suspicion of the private sector and enterprise. Even though some economic achievements have been reached, such as, revival of steel industry, highly-centralized form still straight contributes to the lag ten years to twenty years of plenty of spheres behind world levels overall, such as, technology. (Harry, 1987, p33). By the time of Mao's death, china's bureaucratic structure was ill qualified to administer a programme of sustained economic modernization. Especially during the period between 1966 and 1976 (cultural revolution), a severe crisis of Chinese government is produced and its legitimacy was challenged greatly. Hence, the pressure and necessities for reform are inevitable and will be a 'good medicine' to get China out of crisis.

### **Modern Chinese public administration (post-Mao's period)**

#### **---The transforming governance**

P In Chinese politics, 1970s, reformers realized clearly that highly centralized model, to some extent, have impeded the development of Chinese economy

and the improvement of living standard of people, and they proposed to restructure and revise the institutions in Mao's presidency. However, everything is never possible to break with the past heritage completely. Although innovators were in favor of professionalization of policy-making and administration, as well as permitting the existence, and exercising the role of market, they also believed that CCP (Chinese communist party) should retain ultimate leadership. In this special context, Chinese society was experiencing a period of rapid socio-economic changes; transformations of the design and functions of china's administrative institutions, decentralization, devolution, human-oriented management and cooperation between government and market, civil society, and government have emerged, called "market socialist economy". And the Chinese government has taken major steps to open up domestic markets and promote the development of commerce. During this period, 'governance' of Chinese government is transforming from 'complete control of hierarchy' to 'flexible forms of governance'.

#### **Institutional Reform:**

According to Hongxia Chai, There have been four main institutional reforms in China's 'Reform and Open Door' policy since 1978.

##### **The 1982 Institutional Reforms**

The 1982 institutional reforms: in December 1981, in the process of downsizing the state bureaucracy, the total number of ministries or agencies directly under the control of the State Council was cut from 100 to 61, with regard to staff, State Councils were reduced from 51,000 to 30,000.

##### **The 1988 Reform of the State Council**

This new initiative focused on transforming administrative functions with a particular emphasis on the redesign of departments of economic management. The plan's long-term objective was to establish an administrative system that integrated the qualities of modern management with traditional characteristics of Chinese administration. In short-term goal was to balance relationship, transform functions, streamline staff, improve efficiency, overcome bureaucratization and increase the vitality and flexibility of central state organizations.

##### **The 1993 Institutional Reforms**

This phase of institutional reform focused on establishing an administrative system, which would underpin the socialist-oriented market economy. And the process of decentralization allowed for a process of 'hollowing-out' to occur at the centre.

##### **The 1998 Institutional Reforms**

Significant improvements have been made during this period with regard to separating administration from

enterprise management, through the successful privatization of state-owned enterprises, and improving public management and the style of service delivery. (Chai, 2004)

It is considerably obvious from above that the content of the reforms in China varies with time and place, but its principles span several models of 'governance'. Such as, New Public Management, Networks and so forth. In the process of 'marketization', the first step for Chinese government is that more state-owned factories have been privatized, some being sold to domestic investors, and others to foreigners. Following the Western model, and sometimes with the help of foreign brokerage houses, increasing numbers of companies are being listed on domestic or foreign stock exchanges. (Jean and Thomas) As a consequence, those enterprises, which have been marketized successfully from state-owned industries, are undertaking the pillars and core of market economic systems. The purpose of this action is to make the most of 'market machine' to distribute resources efficiently and flexibly, disclosure and openness of information, and a clearly allocated accountability, combined with 'steering', 'goal setting' and 'action coherence' from government. Even though the Chinese government has met some troubles and obstacles, at least it is seeking opportunities to incorporate 'privatization', which is a branch of 'market mechanism', to the Chinese government innovations. Certainly, it is not just saying that 'privatization' is always a good thing. It is merely applied as an auxiliary means to enhance the capabilities of Chinese public administration.

### **Decentralizations:**

Decentralization is one of the most important principles in the governance as Networks. It means 'hollowing-out of the state' and pools power of central government to local government by international interdependencies and multiplying internal networks.

Before the term of reformists, the relationship between central government and local government was experiencing the vicious cycles of Centralization, Decentralization, and Recentralization. In the 1950s and 1960s, the CCP (Chinese Communist Party)'s failed decentralization mainly decentralized power from Central Ministries to provincial Party Committees; therefore power was still concentrated in the hands of the government. (Zheng, 1997,p99) In January 1961, the Ninth Plenum of the Eighth Central Committee discussed the administrative system and concluded that too much power had been transferred to the localities; a new round of centralization was initiated.

In the process of State-building under a Reformist Party, The CCP's decentralization policies can be broadly grouped as fiscal and administrative. Fiscal decentralization began in 1980, which permitted each

provincial government and to retain profits above the contracted amount for local purposes. Known as 'eating in separate kitchens' this fiscal reform was aimed at making provinces financially self-sufficient. (Zheng, 1997,p216) Provinces especially for the coastal regions have particularly benefited from this administrative reform, for example, four Special Economic Zones were set up in Guangdong and Fujian provinces, which have enjoyed customs exemptions and preferential policy treatment to attract foreign capital. (Zheng, 1997,p216) afterwards even the central government tends to recentralize again, however provincial government officials insisted that further decentralization would lead to more reforms. Even through decentralization, local government have had more autonomy than ever before, the leaders in Beijing often resorted to the last organizational tool that the Party centre still has, namely, the centrally controlled nomenclature system, especially by reshuffling provincial leaders. (Zheng, 1997, p220) anyway in Deng's regime, when China's social, economic and international environment has been changing so dramatically, a new framework was designed for balancing the needs for central control and local autonomy, such as, greater authority in investment and resource-allocation decisions.

The consequences of decentralization are fairly apparent; politically Deng's regime won supports due to people's improvement of living standard, economically for the past sixteen years from 1988, there was a national sustained an average growth rate of 9 percent and great boost of the local economy. But during the process of this new reform-'decentralization', there were still some bad points that are needed to be addressed here. In the first place, it is weakening macroeconomic control. Decentralization indeed created some incentives to accelerate local industrial growth, but sometimes ignoring warnings and guidance from the central government. Secondly, it is the rising local protectionism. By virtue of the fragile local market, local governments would intend to take protective steps for the competitions imposed by other local administrative areas.

Even though there are plenty of defects of reforms on decentralization from 1980s to now, the achievements it attained could illuminate the effects brought by the transition of 'governance with Chinese characteristic'. From the phenomena mentioned above, we can use the conceptions of governance as networks to make sense of the changing and transformation, or tendency of Chinese public administration.

### **The continued importance of the state and hierarchy in current Chinese situation**

In the literatures of 'governance', the emphasis on networks, New Public Management etc is becoming very popular; it tends to ignore the continued importance of hierarchy. For example, if interactions

within the network become more frequent than interaction with the mother-organization, hierarchical accountability may suffer. (Kjaer, 2004,p203) therefore, when benefactors from a policy are highly concentrated, interests may be skewed in one direction, with the result that a network could be dominated by these interests. Hierarchy would be needed to ensure that the outcome was in the interest of the majority.

Profoundly influenced by Chinese long-term hierarchical structure of the state, new regime of China certainly cannot break the tie with the history easily either politically or culturally. Secondly, in the context of globalization, in order to alleviate the pressure from the global economy and commercialization, it should strengthen a state rather than hollowing out of the state. Thirdly, according to the law 'supply and demand', sometimes the state would suffer from 'market failure', which probably result in the devastation of the entirely economic development and bring the state into 'economic crisis'. Finally, for developing countries, because of the fragile competitive capabilities with developed countries, the state should use its power to control and protect the weak fields, say, agricultural field.

In agricultural commerce of China, it also has opened the way for extensive change in the rural economy, under the establishment of institutions and infrastructure necessary for continued commercial development. (Terry, 1995, p37) with the coming of 'marketization', agriculture is also forced into 'open market' to accept the challenge from other competitors, the price of 'agricultural procurement' and 'retail sales' are all determined by market, instead of 'planned price', in the meantime, the quota of produces is not enforced and compulsory. In the food sector, government planning has given way to markets and private enterprises intent on satisfying increasingly discerning and sophisticated tastes of Chinese citizens. However, because Chinese agricultural is based on small-scale and labor-intensive production, so compared with high-tech and large-scale agricultural productions in developed countries, protection and control from Chinese government is necessary and in the interest of farmers. In domestic market, governmental control also played considerably key actor in maintaining equality of competition, and provision of transportation, storage of products, tools of communication, and prevention of monopoly and control of price. To further understanding of continued significance of the government, I will take the case of SARS as another example, from the year of 2003 to 2004; SARS hit many countries all over the world. Especially in china, with the guidance and organization of government, all kinds of institutions, such as hospitals, cooperated closely and had a quick response to this disease. It demonstrates the high efficiency and effectiveness of government, which

overtakes the advantages of 'mechanism of market' in this situation.

#### IV. Conclusions

Ideas about 'governance' come from a widely range of theoretical traditions, and are not necessarily consistent with each other. (Larmour, 1998, p5). Anyone who tries to come up with a definition is like the blind men who tried to describe an elephant—one feeling the tail and calling it a snake, one feeling the leg and calling it a tree, one feeling the side and calling it a wall. (Robert and Minow, 2003,p8) similarly, some scholars consider 'governance' as 'self-organizing and inter-organizational networks' that more stress the role of 'networks'; some argues that 'governance' should be as 'the new public management', others think that 'governance' still should be 'governance with hierarchies'. In Chinese case, no any single model can be applied to the current Chinese situation straight. And in this background, the model of governance, which demonstrates the transformation of Chinese public administration, is a hybrid of several models blending and absorbing some factors from others. There is no doubt that 'conceptions of governance' have added to our understanding to Chinese public administration.

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