RESEARCH ON INNOVATIVE PRACTICE OF GRASSROOTS SOCIAL GOVERNANCE

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Abstract: In the context of China's economy stepping into the “New Normal”, the problems concerning awareness, system and methods can be found in today's grassroots social governance, no matter in the subjects to govern or the objects to be governed. In a bid to address these problems, all primary-level organizations are on the way to actively explore the concept for the social administration at the basic level, which has won initial success. The paper analyzes the pattern of “Wuzhen Steward” in the manner of field investigation and has commands of its work content, form and function, thus providing ideas for maximizing the current grassroots social governance level from the aspects of communication channels, incentives mechanism and management philosophy.

Key words: Grassroots Government; Social Governance; Wuzhen Steward

1. Introduction

In the 16th National Congress of the CPC, both social administration and social management innovation perceived as an important content in social construction were highlighted strategically in the course of building a harmonious socialist society and also put on the agenda of the Party and the country. In November 2013, the concept of social governance was firstly used in the Several Important Issues Decision of the Central Committee of CPC on Deepening the Reforms in An All-round Way made by the Third Plenary Session of the 18th National Congress of the CPC, in which it proposed to accelerate the social governance reform, innovate social administration system and change the way to social governance.[1] The building of social governance landscape of co-construction, co-governance and sharing was repeatedly pointed out by the reports of the 19th National Congress of the CPC on October 18th, 2017. Extra efforts shall be made to strengthen social system construction, improve the social
governance system of Party Committee leadership, government responsibility, social coordination, public participation and legal protection, and enhance the social administration which is socialized, legalized, intelligentized and professionalized. Based on this goal and requirements, “Wuzhen Steward” is designed as practice program.

In the pattern of “Wuzhen Steward”, the grass-root social governance departments mobilize people at the primary level to participate in the grassroots social governance to maintain local social order and ensure the orderly local production and living. It is made up of two parts which are basic network information clerks and company industry messengers who are allocated based on the requirement of “One for ten households, one for a ladder”. And the Wuzhen Steward” management teams divided into several workstations are established in each village and community, and several contact groups are set under the guidance of workstations, thus shaping the unique grid management mode.

The mode of “Wuzhen Steward” is innovative in the way of exerting the influence of grassroots masses to the full, changing the single subject governance structure, optimizing the traditional government management mode, broadening the channels of participation and interest demand and dynamically grasping the basic situation of objects to be managed. Such kind of pattern plays a role in mobilizing the grass-roots mass’s participation in social governance and developing the structure of benign interaction and co-governance between grassroots and local governments, so that we can draw upon the helpful experience in the settlement of problems concerning grassroots social governance.

2. Status Quo of Grassroots Social Governance

In the context of China’s flourishing economy and the accelerating urbanization process, people are affected by the complicated social contradictions which make the social governance at the grassroots level more difficult while reaping the fruits brought by economic construction. And the existing forms of social governance fail to fit the needs of reality.

At the grassroots level, the Village Committee (Neighborhood Committee) is perceived as the grass-roots social governance organization which exists most widely. We are provided with the channel to participate in social governance and it works to address or respond to the demands of grassroots people to a certain extent. However, some existing defects can be found. First of all, the actual status of the Village Committee (Neighborhood Committee) prescribed by laws and regulations is impacted. For one thing, the Village Committee shall be given the autonomous function.

for the “village public affairs and public welfare”. For another, it serving as a grass-roots organization in rural areas shall function to assist the township government and complete the statutory administrative tasks. However, it is the fact that the township government is in the name of guiding, supporting and helping the Village Committee, and it has gradually become the executive organization of the township government and has lost its due autonomy function. Secondly, the grassroots leadership is backward ideologically. Under the circumstance of China’s great social changes, the grass-roots cadres are still closed-minded by the old ideas formed in the times of planned economy so as to obstruct the exertion of the actual function of the Village Committee (Neighborhood Committee), which is undeniable. Moreover, the leaders at the primary level fail to keep up with the times. In the process of grassroots autonomy, it is also to keep development and innovation in practice, but the social governance at the grassroots level is hindered on the way to development owing to the incompetent leaders’ failure in falling into the trends. Eventually, parts of people at grassroots are found unenlightened. Nowadays, those living at the primary level are bounded by the feudal traditional cultural thought like “authority worship” and “hierarchy concept”, and some of them are not conscious of the rights of their own. In this regard, we shall ponder and research the existing problems of the Village Committee (Neighborhood Committee) as a grass-roots social governance organization while acknowledging its role to play.

The government also plays an important role in the grass-roots social governance, including the formulation of standardized social laws and regulations for the content of grassroots social governance, the coordination of interests of grassroots social groups and the conciliation of social contradictions at the grassroots level. In the basic social management, it works to supervise, serve, safeguard and coordinate the society. However, it also has disadvantages. First of all, it fails to position the government management subject. Influenced by the idea of “bureaucracy-oriented” in the long term, the government has always been stressing the authority of the government in the social governance and thinking little of the importance of the grassroots. Government’s weak consciousness of power decentralization makes the government superior and looked up to. Secondly, the positioning of government role comes to nothing. Under the impact of the traditional authoritative thought, the government has always been addressing the problems in the thinking of administrators during the process of society management, with its role of service provider neglected. In this case, it not merely dampens the people’s enthusiasm about
joining social governance and affects the achievements to be made, but also burdens the government in this course, resulting in low efficiency. Finally, the governance in the extensive form is adopted. In social governance, the grassroots people are under the extensive management like forced demolitions and violent law enforcement by the administrators who work on their weak sides such as weak legal consciousness and the absence of channel for interest demand, thus bringing the contradiction between the masses and the government\(^3\), which makes against the social governance at the primary level.

For the building of a harmonious society, it is urgent for the government to change the manager’s thinking of taking on all things and to govern the society by serving the grassroots.

3. Problems in Basic-level Social Governance

3.1 Shortage of Grassroots Social Administrator

The large quantity of complicated grassroots people makes social governance at the grassroots level less likely.\(^4\) In S Village located in the Economic Development Zone of Jinhua of Zhejiang Province where migrant populations in quantity work, there are frequent quarrel occurring between workers, external population and natives, ultimately triggering group conflicts. “There are many matters like this especially in the evening, we can't manage all”, as said the local police.

3.2 Single Subject Involved in Grassroots Social Governance

Affected by the thought of bureaucracy-oriented” in the long run, the government inures to tackle all problems at once regardless of their relative importance. In the process of grass-roots social governance, it pays too much attention to its own authority and manages the grassroots issues by standing at a higher position, which makes the governance tougher on the one hand and is also divorced from the important content of grass-roots practice for another.

3.3 Poor Two-way Communication between Basic-level Government and Masses

Many villagers in T Village of Ling'an told that they knew nothing about the way to participate, with the limited letters, visits and telephone report known by few of them. In this regard, there are two problems, including the missing participation channel provided for grassroots people and the effective feedback to be accepted after participation. It keeps cycling as shown in the following Figure 1:
4. Analysis of Reasons to the Problems Existing in Grassroots Social Governance

4.1 Migrant Population Makes Primary-level Social Governance less likely

The increase of the migrant population is the main embodiment of China’s mushrooming economy and society, the transformed economic structure and changing demographic structure. According to the data published by National Bureau of Statistics, there were a total of 281.71 million migrant workers nationwide in 2016, consisting of 169.34 million of migrant workers going out and 112.37 million of local ones.¹ The disordered community is brought by the large quantities of unsettling migrant workers. Firstly, the interests of domestic floating populations are not safeguarded absolutely, and illegal means as the last option will be chosen by some migrant workers who are less aware of social responsibility in the case of their violated rights and interests. Secondly, there are few grass-roots administrators chasing the needs of management at the basic level. And the increasing migrant populations and relatively fixed grass-roots managers make the effective control on the people at the grass-roots level unlikely.

¹ Data Sources: Investigation Report of Migrant Workers Monitoring in 2016 provided by National Bureau of Statistics
4.2 Unchanged Government Management Thinking

Government has long been the main part of social administration in China. Relying on the allocation of social resources by law, the architecture of “big government” has made up for the defects of the market in the way of public service in a certain period. Nevertheless, the booming economy renders its failure in fitting the development of society in the round. Actually, the government administration means to take on all things. The government to repel the social organizations and citizens’ participation in social management under the thinking of “omnipotent government” leads to the unsatisfied public demands for participation on the one hand. For another, it will burden the government and increase the cost to governance.

4.3 Delayed Communication between Grassroots Government and the Public

For a long time, the government has been communicating with the public in the manner of top-down transmission. Owing to the limited exchange channels between both parties, the government may be informed after dashing through various barriers, making it harder for the citizens to transmit information to the government at higher level. Additionally, there will be a response until there is a call, vice versa. People at grassroots will be less passionate about involvement and unconfident about its capabilities in the face of problems because they are not informed of the problem settlement timely, eventually making the grassroots social governance less likely.

5. Countermeasures to Improve the Capabilities of Grassroots Social Governance

The practice of “Wuzhen Steward” as the valuable experience that can be drawn upon to promote grassroots people’s participation in grassroots social governance has provided the public involvement in social administration at the primary level with an effective sample. As the combination between the current situation of its own and the experience of other places, it has greatly contributed to the social grassroots governance of Wuzhen. The author believes that “Wuzhen Steward” working to encourage the people at the basic level to be part of grassroots social governance shall be learned by all grassroots. Meanwhile, the writer keeps exploring on the basis of “Wuzhen Steward” innovative practice, striving for the solutions to govern the primary-level society.

1. To provide the grass-root masses with channels to participation by the effective media. The new media technology has made the space-time information and thought dissemination likely, and the public may be brought into the public space almost anytime and anywhere. And people are
accessible to different public spaces as their wishes, keeping reverberant the public voice and strengthening the government’s responsibility for policies and measures. In the context of progressing media technology, citizens are allowed to join in an effective way. For example, the We-Media like Micro-blog and WeChat are perceived as the means that are widely used by the public in the social contact, and WeChat public platform as well as Micro-blog for government affairs launched by the departments affiliated to grassroots social governance enable people’s participation through mobile terminal. The departments will be reported and fed back by the WeChat public platform.

2. To establish the reward mechanism to mobilize enthusiasm. Behaviorism motivation theory argues that the process of management is about motivation essentially and to stimulate people’s behavior by means of encouragement. The public participation is internally driven by the corresponding incentives and rewards measures. In this regard, the formulation of appropriate incentive programs to promote public participation shall be considered by the grass-roots social governance departments. For example, those who discover the unattended public garbage and report to the public platform in a timely manner or who reflect timely and help the rectification of grassroots social governance departments shall be rewarded materially or spiritually in the way of telephone subsidy, service subsidy and the like to satisfy their needs and motivate their actions, thus creating a virtuous cycle. In other words, it is about Grassroots Participation→Information Command Center→Problems Solved by All Departments→Feedback to Grassroots Masses→Reward→Repeatedly Participated by Grassroots

3. To transform the government management concepts and models. As the proverb goes, “A man implementing disciplines shall be self-disciplined and a man managing others shall be self-managed. The shifting of government concept and management mode is of vital importance in the new context. First of all, it shall adhere to the positioning of service-oriented government. The government of people shall be the purpose of serving the people. It is primary accountability for the service-oriented government to safeguard the public health physically and psychologically and never cease to meet the needs of people. Secondly, both strengthened and innovative social governance shall be included in the comprehensive evaluation system of the targets for the Party Committees at all levels and the government. It shall further define the responsibilities of relevant functional departments and enhance the awareness of leading cadres at all levels of social management innovation and service for the masses.
6. Conclusion

Accompanying with China’s economy and society keeping progressing, grassroots social governance appears more important for the government in a critical period of the social transformation. And the governance pattern during this period fails to fit the intricate social contradictions completely before building a harmonious socialist society. “Wuzhen Steward” has also provided the good experience for grassroots governance in other areas and is of practical significance while exerting great influences on the social management at basic level of Wuzhen with its unique operating mode. However, further investigation and improvement shall be made for the certain missing supporting data in the paper.