The analysis of the function and orientation of NGOs in China’s environmental policy networks

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Abstract This article analyses the relationship of stakeholders in China’s environmental policy networks though policy networks approach. NGOs, which can promote the public participation in policy-making and facilitate a more effective coordination mechanism to resolve environmental problems. This article argues that the relationship between markets, governments and NGOs are complementary and interactive-complementation of advantages and positive interaction, especially when market and government failure has driven the reforms of government functions. NGOs will force government change environmental policy from administrative management to a system based on legislation, regulation and procedure, it will provide a brand new governance model to solve environmental problems with its role change from the costar to the leading actor.

Key words Environment, Policy networks, NGOs, Function, Orientation

1 Introduction

China has seen rapid economic growth since the start of the reform era, an achievement that attracted global attention. However, over this period the population has grown sharply; huge quantities of resources have been consumed; environmental pollution has worsened; ecosystems have been wrecked; and vast areas of land have been lost. This has given rise to all manner of environmental problems.

Faced with the inconsistent situation between development and environmental protection, we can’t only depend on the morality of enterprises and supervision of government, without the restriction and balance of civil society. NGOs are increasingly seen as public participants and vehicles which cannot be neglected in modern societies. According to multi-level demands of society, it plays a tremendous role in improving the efficiency of rationing of the environmental resources. NGOs, with government and enterprises, constitute the environmental policy networks.

This article begins with a section discussing the status of NGO in China. This is followed by the review of the related theories and theoretic frame of policy networks and the western fundamental research has proven environmental NGOs could become another important main body of supplying environmental public goods. Based on this review, we analyses the relationship of stakeholders in China’s environmental policy networks though policy networks approach. We argue that China’s NGOs will force government change environmental policy from administrative management to a system based on legislation, regulation and procedure, it will provide a brand new governance model to solve environmental problems with its role change from the costar to the leading actor.

2 NGO in China

NGO refers to non-governmental social organizations, with formal organizational forms, not aimed at seeking profit, with certain autonomy, voluntary, and for public good or to mutual advantage. As transitional social organizations in the period of economic transition, China’s NGO include, in the broad sense, the following forms: organizations with members and to public good, organizations of operation type (fund associates), entitative service institutions (non-governmental non-business organizations), economic and social bodies to mutual benefit, a lot of unregistered or indirectly registered groups or circles, public undertakings in transition and mass organizations.

If we regard the government as the first sector of society, and the commercial organization of the market as the second one, so the third one is that which lies between the government and market sector, with devoting to the management of public goods and public services. The third sector is used as a institutional choice for curing Government failure and Market failure when it has been rising since the end of last century. In China, the essence of the third sector is the same with NGO.

There are two-way relations between the fast growing of NGOs and the global government's reform. The growth of NGOs brings a lot of pressure to government and promote government reform as well. On
the other hand, the government reform could open up a road for the development of NGOs in return. Nowadays, most of the important countries are paying close attention to the NGOs, not only studying them in science, but also fostering them, they regard NGOs as a strategic choice of promoting the reform of government and national competitiveness in practice. China joins the trend as well and makes great efforts to keep up with it.

3 Review of the related theories and theoretic frame of policy networks

Ever since traditional ‘Westminster model’, with its emphasis on the sovereignty of parliament, has become an inadequate description of British polity, policy network is regarded to be a popular tool for analyzing decision making and interest group influence in government (Rhodes, 1995).

Nowadays, the analysis of networks has proven useful for studying policy developments on environmental in Europe and international politics and network analysis is applied across social science disciplines to study complex relations between actors that may span public, private, and civil society sectors (Börzel, 1998; Dowding, 1995). In the public policy literature, Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith use an advocacy coalition framework to analyze how groups of public, private, and non-governmental actors develop, interact, and shape policy within issue-based policy processes (Sabatier, 1988; Sabatier & Jenkins-Smith, 1993). In the international relations literature, Keck and Sikkink likewise define networks as groups of activists motivated by shared values who seek to change policy through their advocacy work (Keck & Sikkink, 1998). Applying their analysis to issues of human rights, Keck and Sikkink demonstrate that activist networks linking public, private, and civil society actors across border can be a powerful force of change. In all the disciplines, network analysis examines how participants move information and ideas and build coalitions to shape policy processes and outcomes. That is, actors seek to channel data and policy innovations and expand their influence through their institutionalized networks.

Policy networks may be distinguished by different characteristics. A large number of literature adheres to the ‘Rhods model’. An updated version of this model is provided by Marsh and Rhodes (Marsh, 1992). In this model, Marsh and Rhodes identified five types of policy network in a continuum from highly integrated ‘policy communities’ through professional, inter-governmental and producer networks to loosely integrated ‘issue networks’. They also postulated four dimensions to the typology: membership, level of integration, resources and power. Rhods model has break open the Westminster model, the advantage of this approach is that it is able to acknowledge and reveal the complexities of policy making.

Of course, there is a lively debate in the policy literature on whether policy networks affect policy outcomes. The debate centres on the degree to which policy networks are a new phenomenon rather than whether a shift in degree has taken place. The ability of policy network theory to tell us anything meaningful about policy making has been questioned (Dowding, 1995). And it has been criticized for failing to adopt a sufficiently dynamic approach to the study of policy-making processes.

As the development of ‘Marsh and Rhodes model’, Marsh and Smith’s ‘Dialectical Approach’ try to confront the problem of particularly acute in the case of policy network analysis, they put forward a dialectical model (Marsh, 2000). They identify three dialectical relationship, those are interactive and iterative, relationships. They point out that before we understand the relationship between policy network and policy outcomes, we should examine each of these dialectical relationships. Rather they argue that using there model, we can assess what role the policy net work played in affecting policy outcome s and policy change in any particular case.

4 the analysis of China’s environmental policy networks

4.1 Public Sector

Traditionally, when come to the environmental protection, people usually think that it is the business of the government, especially in China.

Since China is a so large and diverse country, it will always be difficult to make the central government’s writ reach every corner of the land. That is why the role of the environmental activists, the media, the NGOs and the civil suits will be a key to future improvement. With government, they may form a large environmental policy networks, each of them will play an important part in China’s environment policy making.

The construction of environmental management in public sector in China has its own character. Under the State Environmental Protection Agency, there a multitude of local Pollution Prevention Boards at provincial, municipal and county levels that would appear to meet normal requirements for enforcement of laws. These three levels are governed directly by their corresponding authorities in terms of both finance and personnel management, while the State Environmental Protection Agency is only technically
responsible for their operation.

As local authorities tend to prioritize economic growth and investments above the progressive development of environmental policies and the stringent enforcement of environmental regulation and standards. It is no surprise that local level environmental protection agency respond more to the demands of their local government than to the requirements of SEPA or the strict interpretation of central rules. For this reason, environmental protection needs vertical management: local environment officials should be managed by their superiors, not by local government.

4.2 Private Sector

With the development of China’s reform and opening, the social stratum conditions have taken place the great changes in our country. New social stratum and interest groups surface up gradually, especially those private economy and private enterprise owners characterized by their status and interest grow rapidly, which play a key role not only in the economic and political fields, but in the public policy process. Being a product of China’s reform and opening, the proprietor’s stratum of private enterprises refer to those who have certain amount of private capital or fixed assets and invest to gain the profit. They make up the deficiency of the traditional democratic institutions, reflect the characteristics of modern democratic diversified competition and promote the process of economy and democracy development.

Moreover, during the period of 20 years of the reform and opening up, for the producing, developing and growing of private economy and private enterprise owners, the CPC (Communist Party of China) and the masses have experienced a changing process of thought which is from objection to recognition, support and promotion. As a result, private sectors have to face with their status and interest, and gradually penetrate the public policy process.

In recent years, private economy has more and more representatives in various people congresses and political consultative conference as their members and has more power in the public policy process. By making full use of the chance to participate in the important decision process, they raise their favorable proposals, induct the policy making going toward their expected direction and make their interest demands absorbed by the political decision and the public policy. So we can usually hear the private interest groups’ voice in the decision process of some grand policies and laws.

4.3 Civil Society

(1) public participation and emergence of environmental NGOs in China

In China, with the improvement of market economy system and the political democracy, public policy has been becoming a main channel public administration. Meanwhile, the request of public participating the process of policy to guarantee the legal interests is more and more urgent. It reflects the reinforcement of public consciousness and improvement of democratic training. On the other hand, it brings challenges to our government institution. The public's participating the process of policy is an important way to express individual preference and also a symbol of the awareness of self-consciousness.

Along with development of economy, problems of ecological environment, as a kind of problems of public administration, become a focal point for which people pay attention to increasingly. For the failure of traditional environmental management pattern, the modern governance pattern which based on public participation becomes what the time needs day by day. In this kind of modern government pattern, the public qua the trustees, the supervisors, the objects of government, and the usual weak colony, take up a center and essential station. Thus the public's participation possesses the intrinsic value and the implemental value which can improve the environmental management and promote a harmonious society.

It was noticed that the scope and degree of participation are being enhanced unceasingly because of the public’s awakened thought about the environment and the government’s powerful impetus, but the public's awareness and participation in the environment in China is still at the low level in comparison to developed countries or areas.

Since the ecological environment is a public good and there are flaws in relation to the consciousness of social environmental ethics of the public, the general public in China lacks the positive drive in participating in the city ecological environment, which therefore causes the fact that public participation of China is leaded by the government. The sticking point of ‘government-leading type’ public participation in environment is that at the same time the government promotes public participation, it is afraid of this participation and even hinders it, so the public participation leaded by the government faces the dilemma and springing up of NGOs seems to be the certain result of common choice.
**The function and the orientation of China’s environmental NGOs**

NGOs are very active various social, economic, cultural and political lines in China in transition, particularly in sections of social service, environmental protection, supporting the poor by economic development, industrial coordination and policy initiating.

In the Chinese context, NGO includes green NGOs, as well as the ‘government-organized’ NGOs or GONGOs. GONGOs refer to the organizations under strict government control, created as the state’s outposts in society. Generally speaking, environmental NGO can work as an aid to government, a supplementary public benefit, and a useful social control medium contributing to social stability and development.

The Beijing Environmental Protection Foundation was regarded as a typical GONGO with strong connections to the government. One attractive initiative by the Beijing Environmental Protection Foundation is its effort to stimulate legal reform in Beijing’s environmental legislation, instead of depending on command-and-control policies and end-of-pipe technologies.

The foundation also regularly engages in activities of community and volunteer actions, such as encouraging consumers to bring their own cloth bags to the supermarket instead of getting a plastic bag for virtually each article they buy. As a result, government put forward a new regulation which forbid supermarket to provide free plastic bag for consumers. The policy was implemented since June in 2008.

In China, NGOs have different status. An organization that appears to be a government-organized NGO can sometimes make successful use of civic participation and community action to achieve its aims. Contrarily, grassroots organizations, in particular in the Chinese political context, are often neglected by government, and therefore try to strengthen their contacts with government officials. If it doesn't the case, the grassroots environmental NGOs usually have to face some problems of living and development, which include the crisis of society’s approval, institutional barrier, insufficient beneficence, voluntary failure and so on. Solving this Problems need us admitting NGOs’ independence and having cognizance of governmental administration method and administer with law.

In fact, environmental NGOs as an important force of environmental policy networks. Besides market, government and public sector, NGOs can complement market failure and government failure to a certain degree, with some restrictions. In order to obtain this aim, a cooperating relationship should be established between Chinese environment NGOs and the government, which will be advantageous to its healthy development.

For Chinese environmental NGOs, rebuilding social support is very important. Social support is not only a kind of framework but also a kind of social Psychology. From the macroscopical angle, the development of environmental NGOs is a accompanied by the advancement of civil society. Both the role of the government and the role of people need to be altered. Moreover, with the rising of environment NGOs strength, environment NGOs may play the critical role in China's environment protection, not a supplement of government.

**5 conclusion**

In conclusion, the stakeholders and the relationship between them affect the policy process and policy outcome greatly. The relationship between markets, governments and NGOs are complementary and interactive-complementation of advantages and positive interaction, especially when market and government failure has driven the reforms of government functions. In order to solve China’s environmental problems, all level of stakeholders should enter the environmental policy networks. In this process, both the role of the government and the role of people need to be altered. NGOs will force government change environmental policy from administrative management to a system based on legislation, regulation and procedure, we predict that it will provide a brand new governance model to solve environmental problems with its role change from the costar to the leading actor in the future.

**References**


