

# *The Construction of a Modernized "Good Government" in China*

Yibo Wang

*School of Law and Politics, Liaoning Normal University, Dalian, Liaoning, 116000, China*

**Keywords:** Locke; Treatise of government; Chinese-style modernization; “good government”

**Abstract:** With the development of society, the modern government governance model which has achieved certain reform results still cannot meet the needs of social progress, and the Chinese-style modernization also puts forward a higher standard for government governance, under which the construction of “good government” has become an important content that needs to be realized at present. Locke's concept of government is still an important reference value for the construction of modern government, and the analysis of Locke's governmental thought can help to further clarify what is a “good government”. At present, there are challenges in China's governmental governance, such as lack of clarity in the division of functions, homogenization of governmental governing bodies and governance methods, fragmentation of governmental powers, and the need to improve the construction of a democratic government. A modernized Chinese “good government” should be democratic, rule of law and transparent, accountable and efficient.

## 1. Introduction

The transformation of government functions is an important initiative to accelerate the building of a government satisfactory to the people since China's reform and opening up. Since 1988, when the transformation of government functions was first proposed, three reforms of government functions have taken place in China. The Fifth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee has once again made arrangements for accelerating the transformation of government functions and promoting the modernization of the country's governance capacity and system. The construction of a modernized Chinese-style “good government” is of great significance to the modernization of national governance.

## 2. What is “good government”?

The origin of government and the legitimacy of government have been analyzed and discussed from different angles by many thinkers. Aristotle once clearly stated, “It is clear that the state is a product of nature, while man is a political animal.”<sup>[1]</sup> This does not necessarily mean that man is a politician, but that he can only have a good life if he lives in a city-state or country. This statement means that man inevitably has to live in society. In support of this idea, Aristotle further suggests that “those who cannot live in society, or those who have no needs because they are strong enough, are either beasts or gods.”<sup>[2]</sup> For thousands of years people have never given up the quest for what makes good government, and in response different schools of thought have proposed a wide variety of

systems of government, ranging from monarchies, oligarchies, autocracies, aristocracies and democracies. All of these schools of thought actually work on the question of how to minimize the risks of government in order to protect human life and other rights of human beings as well as property, and therefore, people come together to reduce human excesses. Thus Russell argued that “every society is exposed to two dangers, anarchy and despotism.”

### **3. Challenges to government governance in the process of Chinese-style modernization**

The improvement of government effectiveness is an important part of realizing the modernization of national governance. Although, after undergoing reforms and adjustments over and over again, China's governmental governance capacity and level of governance have improved markedly, they still lag behind the developmental needs of the modernization of national governance to a certain extent, and the challenges faced by governmental governance have still not been eliminated.

#### **3.1 Lack of clarity in the division of governmental functions**

The economic development of the country requires the vitality and enthusiasm of both the Government and society, and any restriction of one party on the other will not be conducive to the stimulation of the potential for social development. Therefore, the State and society should give full play to their own strengths, and work together in synergy and in their respective roles in order to provide better services for the country's economic development. After the reform and opening up, the government's functions have been gradually simplified, decentralization has achieved certain results, and the implementation of the market economy has brought dividends to China's economic development, but there are still many shortcomings in the division of governmental functions, and the constraints imposed by the government on the society still exist.

In the process of economic development, there is still inappropriate interference in social affairs by government functionaries, and misplaced and overstepped government functions occur from time to time. As the Government has long been in a dominant position in the social power structure, it has taken the initiative in demarcating the boundaries of its relations with other actors in dealing with the multiple relationships between the Government and society, and between the Government and the market, which has exacerbated the phenomenon of the Government making irrational choices in order to realize its own interests, and placing the setting of its governance style under its own value preferences.

#### **3.2 Homogenization of the main body and mode of governance of the Government**

The effectiveness of government governance has a significant impact. From the current situation, there are deficiencies in the way our country's government is governed, which are mainly reflected in the homogenization of the main body of government governance and the content of governance, a deficiency that has had a serious impact on the process of modernizing the country's governance.

On the one hand, it is difficult to realize the diversified needs of pluralistic subjects of interest through a single management body, the government. Along with the social and economic development, multiple interest subjects have emerged, and these interest subjects are becoming more and more aware of the subject, and their awareness of political participation is increasing, and their ability to participate in politics has been improved through learning and accumulation. In addition, with the service-oriented government and the vigorous implementation of e-government for the main body of interests in the era of big data political participation provides a more diversified and convenient participation channels and methods, their expression of their own political aspirations and the ability and desire to participate in politics make the government departments can not easily ignore

this group of demands, but at the same time the government as a single management body to meet a variety of interests in the behavior of this demand is beyond the scope of its own capacity. The government as a single management body to fulfill multiple interests is beyond its capacity. Therefore, from this point of view, the government has not met the needs of social groups.

### **3.3 Fragmentation of authority in government departments**

Enhancing the efficiency of government work is an inevitable requirement for a modernized Chinese-style government. After the reform and opening up, with the continuous development of the market economy, the reform of the administrative system has also been promoted, and the construction of a service-oriented government has become an important initiative to change the functions of the government and enhance the efficiency of the government, although this initiative has achieved certain results and the effectiveness of government work has been improved, the phenomenon of fragmentation of government departments still exists and seriously affects the efficiency of the government's work.

The phenomenon of fragmentation of governmental power is particularly evident in grass-roots governmental governance. In grass-roots societies, the government is the main body, while social organizations, autonomous organizations, enterprises and social elites are also the main participants. However, due to the poor economic development of the grassroots society, the development of social organizations and elite talents is subject to many restrictions. Although there are many participating bodies, the overall situation shows a fragmented state, and has not yet succeeded in moving from monocentric governance to polycentric governance. In addition, the governance mechanism is also characterized by fragmentation. On the one hand, the hierarchical system enhances the execution capacity of each department, on the other hand, the fragmentation of governmental functions has led to the creation of divisions between departments, which reduces the efficiency of inter-departmental coordination. Excessive hierarchy has also led to a further increase in the number of subjects involved in governance, and the convergence of interests has increased the possibility of policy alienation among departments in the course of policy implementation, greatly affecting the realization of the effectiveness of government governance.

### **3.4 Democratization of government needs to be improved**

Democracy and the rule of law have been further developed and improved since the reform and opening up of China, but the bureaucratic style of work of the past has not yet been completely eliminated. In the eyes of the public, the image of the government is still predominantly one of authority, coldness and seriousness, and the influence of the old model of an all-powerful government is still present in the exercise of government functions today. The government itself does not seem to reject the image of ruling and educating the people, and is still happy to play this role. In addition, due to historical factors, the government has been in a powerful position for a long time, and under the influence of this position, it is very easy for government workers to form a special hierarchical consciousness beyond the ordinary people. Government workers with this hierarchical mindset find it difficult to mingle with the masses and provide good services to the people sincerely, and they tend to live above the ordinary people with a kind of condescending stance. In addition, in the transparency of government work there is also greater room for improvement. Transparent government construction is the inevitable requirement of modern government. As an ordinary citizen, he or she has the right to participate in government activities of immediate interest and the right to know. For the main body of the government, the government will inform the public of government activities is the responsibility of the government. However, from the current reality, our government has an absolute advantage over the control of information resources, and the active participation of citizens

in the decision-making process shows an attitude of exclusion, the interaction between the government and the public is reduced, which lowers the degree of cooperation of citizens in the process of the implementation of government policies, and affects the enhancement of the credibility of the government.

#### **4. Concept of building a modernized “good government” in China**

Building a good government is the common aspiration of human society, but building a “good government” often requires great efforts. The process of political civilization in human society is essentially the pursuit of good government. In the process of Chinese-style modernization, what kind of government is recognized by the public as “good government”?

##### **4.1 Good government should be democratic**

“It seems self-evident that the relation of all members of the State to the State is to their real affairs.”<sup>[4]</sup> This is a demonstration of the value of democratic participation in Marxism. In governmental governance in modern society, governmental rationality is an important source of rationality in governmental governance. Citizen participation is an important step in maintaining governmental rationality, and what reflects governmental rationality is precisely the procedural propriety of citizen participation.

The value of citizen participation can be realized in many ways. First of all, citizen participation can play a reasonable role in monitoring the implementation and use of government power, and keep the power within reasonable limits. Ordinary people often know more about the grassroots situation than the government agencies, so citizen participation can, to some extent, make up for the information error between the government departments and the reality, minimize the occurrence of decision-making errors, and formulate more targeted and accurate social policies, effectively enhance the public's acceptance of the policies implemented by the government departments and the degree of cooperation. Secondly, citizen participation can effectively enhance the people's sense of ownership. Citizen participation is the people's rights and freedoms, in the process of participation, forced by the people's pressure on the government departments to fulfill their duties in a negative sense, to further safeguard this right and freedom of the citizens, in the positive feedback, the citizen's sense of national consciousness and sense of public responsibility will be further enhanced.

##### **4.2 “Good government” should be transparent and based on the rule of law**

History teaches us that unchecked government becomes an uncontrollable force for evil. The aggressive and expansive nature of power itself makes anyone who acquires it subject to uncontrollable temptations, best exemplified by the reality of corruption. The best way to restrain power is to make it public. In modern society, the diversity of people's production activities has led to changes in the structure of the demand for information. Information disclosure is not only a demand of the people, but also a right of the people. Transparent government is the basic requirement of modern government governance, and it is also the inevitable requirement for the development of our country, and it is the important foundation for the realization of Chinese-style modernization<sup>[5]</sup>.

The public has the right to know not only government information, but also the process of government work. In addition, financial transparency and information transparency are important elements of government information disclosure. On the basis of not involving national security and citizens' privacy, government departments should make full disclosure of policy information. Government disclosure is also an important means of forcing itself to improve government performance. Modern government should put the law at the center, the government administration in

accordance with the law, the government staff should also be in the legal framework to exercise law enforcement power. The rule of law government requires the protection of equal rights of citizens; the rule of law government expresses its opposition to unreasonable discretionary power; the rule of law government requires the government to bear certain social responsibilities. The law is not a passive restriction of government power; it should also guarantee the independence and autonomy of the Government and the proper use of discretionary power.

#### **4.3 “Good government” should be responsible government**

The modern government plays an important role in all aspects of social life and plays an important leading role in the political, economic, cultural and educational fields. Modern governments need to take the initiative to pay attention to the people and identify social problems, rather than passively solving them. First of all, as a department enjoying public power, the government should not only solve problems for the people, but also have foresight. Government functionaries are often aware of important national decisions earlier than the general public. Therefore, the government has the responsibility to anticipate changes in the environment in advance and to predict the consequences of upcoming policies.<sup>[6]</sup>

In addition, the Government needs to step out of the office building and see things from the standpoint of ordinary people, listen to their voices and demands, and strive to realize their reasonable and lawful expectations in reality. It is part of the government's duty to respond to the voices and needs of the people and an important element in building a modern government. The government should allow different voices to emerge, remain open and receptive, and understand the real needs of the people through dialog with them. In addition, the government also shoulders public responsibility. From the perspective of political responsibility, the formulation and implementation of government policies must be in line with public opinion and be accountable to the political parties that represent public opinion. From the perspective of legal responsibility, government employees who violate the law must be sanctioned by the law, and the government should provide reasonable compensation for the mistakes of government policies that harm the legitimate interests of citizens, while corruption caused by the abuse of power by government employees should be subject to criminal penalties. From the point of view of moral responsibility, government workers should consciously fulfill their work tasks in quality and quantity, not seek private illegal interests for themselves, exercise their powers reasonably and lawfully, adhere to the basic morals of social life, have good personal qualities, and be a role model for citizens.<sup>[7]</sup> In addition to this, the Government is accountable for the performance of its policies, and governance is for the better realization of the fundamental interests of the people and for serving the people; therefore, a certain system of accountability and constraints is an important step in forcing the construction of an accountable government.

#### **4.4 Good government should be synergistic and efficient**

Effective synergy among the Government, the market and society is an important means of realizing efficient social governance and managing public affairs, with each of the three having different characteristics and advantages. Government governance faces numerous challenges. And the multi-subject synergy is not to deprive the government of its governance role, but to share the right to operate under the leadership of the government, which is a mutually beneficial and interdependent relationship, and its ultimate goal is to maximize the use of social resources. Under the synergistic governance system, the role of the government will undergo a series of changes, with more emphasis on cooperation and in-depth understanding of the root causes of problems, and more emphasis on external supervision.<sup>[8]</sup> Under the sectional system of governance, the Government is prone to fragmentation, which leads to a reduction in the effectiveness of government governance.

The establishment of a modernized government should strive to overcome this shortcoming and enhance the building of a holistic government.

The progress and development of modern digital technology has provided favorable conditions for the collaborative governance body of multiple subjects. Through the development and cooperation of digital technology, big data and artificial intelligence effectively improve the efficiency of government work, accurately capture the needs of the people, and bring more convenient services to the masses. At the same time, the government also needs to develop multiple paths to improve work efficiency. From the current point of view, the government can carry out multi-line integration through the following paths, as follows (see Table 1):

Table 1: Table of multiple governance paths and their strategies<sup>[3]</sup>.

Trails	Governance Approach
Leading Path	Binary integration, ternary interlocking, value guidance, institutional design, guidance on specific matters
multi-track path	Politics: unified leadership of the Party. Autonomy: mass self-governance. Intellectual governance: intelligence. Moral governance: moral discipline, benchmarking and sensitization. Rule of law: good laws for good governance
Symbiotic pathways	Public engagement platforms; cross-border cooperation
Platform pathway	Infrastructure Designed for the Cloud, Business Online, Financial Points Digitized
Resilience Path	Two-line integration of comprehensive and social governance, multi-directional resilience governance mechanism

High-quality government governance needs to be supported by top-level design and promoted through institutionalized and systematic thinking, while at the same time taking into account the real conditions, identifying problems, and combining and supporting multiple paths of governance with each other.

## 5. Conclusion

The process of building a modernized “good government” in China is also a process of self-revolution of the government itself, which is a long and arduous process. The process is long and arduous. It requires the government staff to dare to face their own “shadow”, and at the same time, it needs the government to take the self as the “enemy”, and constantly conduct self-analysis. The government's over-emphasis on the realization of its own interests will lead to more serious government failure. The construction of a “good government” requires not only the correct leadership from the top, but also the support of a wide range of people in the society. It requires firm and efficient execution, as well as a resolute spirit of struggle and revolution.

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