

The Study on Public Participation in China's Government Crisis Management

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Abstract – Crisis management is an important part of the government's public administration. In recent years, with the increase of crises, China's government crisis management capability has improved greatly, but the awareness of mobilizing public participation in the crisis management is still weak, while the disorder of public participation is still more obvious. The author thinks that there are three main reasons. Firstly, the awareness of public participation is weak. Secondly, because of the lack of mature social organizations, public have no way to participate effectively. Thirdly, there is no perfect legal system to protect the status and rights of public participation. Improving public participation in government crisis management requires a multifaceted approach: The first is to make sure the information publication of the crisis event; The second is to improve the ability of public participation in crisis management; The third is to develop civil social organizations; Furthermore, to establish mechanisms for cooperation of government and social organizations; The final is to improve the legal system in public participation.

Keywords – Government; Crisis management; Public participation

In recent years, a variety of public crisis occur frequently in China, from snowstorm in South China in early 2008 to Wenchuan earthquake, and then the H1N1 flu, and then Shanghai Jiaozhou Road fire, and frequent railway accidents, all is to remind people the crisis on the way. According to statistics, the problem of security incidents, natural disasters and public security claimed the lives of more than 20 million people each year in China. The past proved that the Chinese government crisis management capability has been greatly improved. However, the effectiveness of the government crisis management depends not only on the role of government, and subject to effective public participation. With the development of the theory of multi-center governance, the public as one of the main social and public affairs are increasingly involved in the process of government crisis management. Whether it is in a crisis early warning stage, or in the recovery phase after the crisis occurs, the rescue phase of its crisis, it is inseparable from public participation. The public's role in crisis management could not be ignored. To improve the public's sense and ability of responding to the crisis is necessary through a variety of ways, and to standardize the behavior of orderly public participation is an important aspect to enhance the government's crisis management capability.

1. The significance of public participation in government crisis management

Since the 2003 SARS incident, crisis management has become an important part of the government's social management of public affairs. With the development of the theory of multi-center governance, the public as one subject of the society's public affairs participate in the government crisis management more and more. After May 2008 Wenchuan earthquake, for example, more than

three million volunteers involved in earthquake relief work, more than 300 NGO went to Sichuan for disaster relief. Public play an important role of government forces supplement and social self-rescue in the crisis. Reasonable and appropriate public participation in government crisis management is of great significance.

1.1. Enhancing the public's sense of crisis and improving the public's capability of self-rescue

In recent years, public crisis occur frequently, which causes great casualties and property losses. Many crises indicated that the weak sense of crisis and capability of response to crisis is the direct cause of the losses. Therefore, guiding public participation in government crisis management is essential. Through participation citizens can enhance the sense of crisis. When deeply feeling the responsibility of their participation in government crisis management, the public will take the initiative of improving the self-rescue capability. For example, the public may be initiative to learn some first aid knowledge and fire escape knowledge and so on.

1.2. Guiding to the rational decision-making and reducing cost of government crisis management

Through active participation the public will help the government and social organizations to fully understand the difficulties, interests and aspirations of the masses, and to choose objectives and measures of emergency management policy on the basis of interests and aspirations, it is conducive for the government to develop a scientific, reasonable and fair decision-making. On the other hand, public participation in crisis management can reduce the cost of government crisis management. In the crisis management process, it will take high financial

costs only relying on the power of the government's response to crisis events. Orderly public participation can provide a variety of material and human resources in time, which reduces significantly the cost of crisis management.^[1]

1.3. Deepening the public's sense of belonging and strengthening national cohesion

The crisis can be simply divided into "natural disasters" and "man-made disasters", and many natural disasters are inevitable. As the most populous country, China government should take advantage of the public force in crisis management. When there's a disaster somewhere, people there will get help from everywhere. This spirit of mutual assistance is the traditional virtues of the Chinese nation. Mobilizing the public to participate in government crisis management can enhance the public a sense of belonging and improve the cohesion of the nation effectively.

2. The current problems and reasons of public participation in China's government crisis management

Overall, in recent years, public mobilization capacity of the Chinese government in crisis management has great improvement, and the effect of public participation in the events of the crisis has been greatly improved. For example, common forms of public participation in the events of the crisis include the capital participation, material participation, labor force participation and information participation and so on. Divided by common forms of public participation, the Ministry of Civil Affairs statistics show that the affected areas of Wenchuan earthquake received cash donations 65.3 billion and goods donations 10.7 billion, hundreds of thousands of people involved in the scene relief, and the vast majority of the public through television, newspapers and networks pay close attention to the situation of the disaster area and actively involved in earthquake disaster relief. In addition, the data show that the annual amount of social donations in 2008 were equal to the donation sum of the decade before, the Chinese public's sense of participation and enthusiasm show a blowout situation in the face of great natural disasters in 2008.

The improvement of public participation in awareness is gratifying. However, we must be soberly aware of many problems of public participation in government crisis management. For a long time, the Chinese government is accustomed to top-down command-style management, very strong sense of obedience in the political culture. It is easy to control and limit the power of the public in the governance and decision-making. Therefore, there are a lot of problems in public participation in China's government crisis management.

2.1. The poor sense and low capacity of public participation in government crisis management

In China, by the influence of "official standard", the citizens are accustomed to as a bystander or crisis management object in the government crisis management. After the crisis, the public are accustomed to rely on the government. The majority of the public are lack of aspirations and demands of participation in the government crisis management and they have no initiative and self-consciousness. In addition, the capacity of public participation in the government's crisis management is at a very low level. The reason for the public lack of knowledge of the response to the crisis is that the crisis education is nearly blank in China. The public have not received the crisis knowledge, and then it can never achieve the orderly participation. Meanwhile, the awareness of the government of mobilizing public participation involving in crisis management is still weak, and the government does not think highly of public participation in crisis management.

2.2. Lack of mature social organizations and cooperation between organizations and government

In the government crisis management, the public separate actions only cause disorder. American scholar Thomas pointed out that Citizen participation in policy-making process can help to improve the degree of understanding and awareness of citizens on public policy, but there is a logical premise of an effective citizen participation in decision-making model, from the abstract sense, citizen participation is no good or bad. It may be the development of democratic values, and create a useful practice on community management action. However, citizen participation have not brought positive results resolved all aspects of policy issues.^[2]

If individual participates under certain conditions, it will become barriers to decision-making and action, and thus highlight the positive role of organized citizen participation. This view is equally applicable in public participation in public crisis. In order to achieve an orderly participation in government crisis management, the public should join in an organization to form a collective, which could give full play of the strength of the public. At present, there are a number of nonprofit organizations such as charitable organizations, voluntary organizations, play a supporting and complementary role in response to public crisis. However, professional organizations are mostly top-down government-run social organizations, too thick administrative colors, the number of flexible and innovative organizations which are involved in the crisis management is small and the energy is so limited. At the same time, lack of institutionalized linkages and communication between government and some social organizations, it is difficult for social organizations to participate in crisis management effectively.

2.3. Lack of legal system to protect the status and rights of public participation in government crisis management

Public disorder participation is also related to the lack of relevant laws and regulations about public participation in crisis management. However, the legal system on crisis management in China is in the initial stage of establishment and improvement. On the one hand, most of relevant laws and regulations about crisis management is independent and highly targeted, such as Fire Control Law of the People's Republic of China and Law of the People's Republic of China on Protecting Against and Mitigating Earthquake Disasters, there is less space which the public can participate in; On the other hand, in the series of legal documents for crisis management announced, there is no explicit legal recognition and support on public participation in government crisis management, and there is no law on the duties and means of public participation. Lack of institutionalized protection, public and various social organizations are ignored in government crisis management, public who are willingness to participate also worried about their rights in crisis management.

3. The strategy of improving the level of public participation in crisis management

In front of the huge disaster, even if the government force is so strong, there are sometimes beyond the reach of government. Therefore, the social relief system should be open, and people and organizations as many as possible should be mobilized to join. In this participatory process, the burden on the government could be reduced, meanwhile, civil society organizations as a useful supplement to the government can use their voluntary, flexibility and other advantages to play a role in disaster relief. In addition, establishing smooth communication channels will help improve public consciousness of participation in the crisis, which is beneficial to support the government. On this basis, the public trust in government and the state, and the government can promote public participation in public affairs, which will form a virtuous circle. Strengthening public participation, integration of social forces to enhance the government crisis response and processing capabilities and reducing the negative impact of crisis, our government should proceed from the following aspects:

3.1. Make sure public crisis information

Opening crisis information is conducive to public understanding of government action and effective coordination, which improve the efficiency of government crisis management. In the moment of public crisis, the government must promptly and accurately report information to the public, only with full respect for citizens' right of information, citizens and the whole community will be possible to actively participate in response to the crisis. Crisis information disclosure can take many forms: first, government is initiative to publish information, for example, held a press conference, spokesman report crisis information; second, media reported timely and impartial. Media is a bridge of communication between government and citizens, which is able to reassure the public, to convey the instructions

of the government to the public in time, to lead the public to choose the correct behavior; Third, citizens consult initiatives, such as crisis management office which should include a special reception for citizens to provide information in a timely manner. Moreover, in respect of the characteristic of public crisis, the public-oriented communication in public crisis management bears three features, mutual linkage, contingency and complexity. In crisis management, with the good communication, it is probable to guide social and public opinion in a reasonable way, to support crisis decision-making effectively and to actively improve the image of the government, and so that the government could mobilize the public force to a great extent.

3.2. Improving the ability of public participation

Many types of crises except natural disasters can be prevented and even avoided. In fact, the outbreak of technological accidents and man-made disasters is closely related to their own weak security awareness and security capacity of the related people. Therefore, when the crisis occurred, good safety awareness and crisis response capability of the public will help to improve the social self-rescue capability, greatly reducing confusion and loss of the crisis. Therefore, the developed western countries have attached great importance to safety education, and often use a variety of channels to educate the public about the crisis of knowledge and training of emergency response, and improving the social self-help capabilities as a basic project of the government crisis management system.^[3]

Learning from the advanced experience of foreign countries, there are many ways to improve the ability of citizens to participate in crisis management. First, strengthen the crisis management education. Crisis management knowledge and skills education should include into the national education system, and related courses should be opened at all level schools. In other word, the education of basic knowledge and skills response to the crisis should be treated as an important part of quality education. Second, recurrent crisis training should be set up, and the public could learn how to save themselves, mutual aid and meet the rescue in crisis situations. Third, conduct crisis drills. Crisis drills demonstrate of the occurrence of the crisis based on hypothetical real world, the government crisis plan for implementation of the response. Regular crisis drills can improve the psychological ability of citizens to respond to crises, and enhance citizens' ability to respond to the crisis, so that citizens can actively cooperate during the crisis and be prompted to be rational, participatory citizens.

3.3. Developing civil social organizations

Benjamin R. Barber who is an American political scientist believes that in the United States there are two kinds of democracy, one is national democracy reflected in the bipartisan conflict and the presidential election and so on, while the other is local democracy embodied in the various community action groups.^[4] Besides, Alexis de Tocqueville wrote in his book "Democracy in America":

different ages, different identities, different tendencies of the Americans are always in constant association, there are not only thousands of different types of social organization but also commercial and industrial organizations which are closely linked with the lives of everyone. America's most noteworthy is social combination based on personal voluntary and moral foundation.^[5]

Civil social organizations provide a convenient channel for the public to participate orderly. Through social groups and organizations, especially nonprofit civil social organizations, achieving public participation in crisis management is an inevitable trend. Therefore, Cultivation and development of civil social organizations is very important. Actively promoting the participation of civil social organizations in the process of government crisis management should first accelerate the transformation of government functions to provide a more favorable development of space and resources for the growth of civil social organizations. China should give appropriate concessions or grants of civil social organizations in the finance and taxation, and give appropriate technical support in the operation of non-governmental organizations, to help and promote the civil social organizations to become a rational, cooperative, mature society in the public domain which is a solid foundation for democratic politics. Second, guide non-governmental organizations to involve in the process of government crisis management. The question now is to institutionally strengthen the actual influence of civil social organizations in the governance of the public affairs.

In addition, it is important to maintain the necessary balance between participation and control. In any case, when the crisis occurs, the government is the main manager, logistics, law enforcement agencies. In order to ensure the participation of civil social organizations in line with the national, social and public interests, and maintain coordination with the government's behavior in crisis management, it is necessary to establish the appropriate control and oversight mechanisms to ensure the participation of civil social organizations and code of conduct within the legal system.

3.4. Improving the cooperation of government and social organizations

Establishing the mechanism of the good cooperation of the government and social organizations can enhance citizens' understanding of the crisis policies, and stimulate the enthusiasm and initiative of citizens, and realize the effective integration of social forces to jointly cope with the crisis. In crisis management, government and social organizations should be a relationship of mutual cooperation. The government should strengthen the sense of service for the community focusing on guidance, and weaken a variety of non-proper control of the community, and improve the satisfaction of the community to the government crisis management. For example, in response to the crisis event, the Government clearly stipulates the responsibility of the social organization and division of labor, it is helpful for the government to overall schedule the forces to deal with

crisis, and it is more conducive for their own social organizations to play an important role. Another example is the arrangement of important social organization representatives in the deliberative bodies of the government crisis decision-making and coordinating, which not only helps social organizations to understand the government's intention and to assist the government to carry out the work more actively, but also conducive for the government to full listen to the views of social organization in the crisis decision-making. Another example is to set up a special department to establish channels for dialogue and enhance communication links with the social organization. Through the special department it can ensure that the government gets timely and reliable public opinion, and the social organizations convey information of the Government in solving the crisis to the public.

3.5. Perfecting the legal system of public participation

Institutionalized participation mechanisms is bound to be established, and it is a trend that the rights and means of public participation in crisis management are determined and protected in the form of law which gives public participation a good road to go in government crisis management. First of all, in the legal system of China's crisis management, the approaches and content of public and social organizations to participate in government crisis management should be defined clearly and detailed, so that the citizens' right of participation obtains the recognition and protection of the law. Secondly, in order to control the order of crisis restore, to some extent, the Government may restrict certain rights and freedoms of citizens to participate, which may affects the enthusiasm and behavior of citizen participation in government crisis management. Therefore, when making the decision to restrict civil rights of participation, the related legal department must be careful to ensure that the advantages outweigh the disadvantages. Finally, the new requirements for the participation of civil crisis develop into more scientific and predictable laws in a timely manner.

4. Conclusions

In short, the crisis could not be completely avoided, and facing up to the crisis and effectively dealing with the crisis is the right choice. Crisis management is not only the responsibility of the government itself, but also need the active cooperation of the public. Public participation in government crisis management is of great significance, and the public can play an important role in the government's crisis management with the reasonable and appropriate government guidance. Therefore, the government should adopt various methods to improve the orderly and effectiveness of public participation in response to the crisis. Making full use of the advantages of China's most populous country, the Chinese government's crisis management capabilities will be further improved. Future work will focus on using data mining method^[10-18] to take a more scientific approach.

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Vitae



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