

Administrative System Innovation and Building a Public Service-Oriented Government

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Edited by

Marc Holzer,
Mengzhong Zhang
and Wei Hu

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THE PROGRESS ON THE THEORY AND PRACTICE OF PUBLIC SERVICE QUALITY IMPROVEMENT IN CHINA: A BRIEF REVIEW

ZHENMING CHEN AND XU GENG

Abstract

With close observation and study of western countries' theories and practices in the management of public service quality improvement, this article aims to illustrate the current state of research and practical development of public service quality management in China as well as propose suggestions for future work. The authors conclude that public service quality improvement has already become the core content of government reform and governance, and research in this field is gradually becoming a new area in the study of public administration in China. In the future, focus should be placed on strengthening theoretical innovation through promoting knowledge growth, setting up the concept of "quality first" through fostering the culture of quality management in public sectors, improving a public service quality management system by implementing data strategy, and constructing a participatory and collaborative quality improvement mechanism by conducting citizen surveys and citizen-driven evaluation.

Keywords: public service, quality improvement, China

It is a contemporary trend of global public service to improve service quality and meet the higher demands of the citizens. Marc Holzer, Etienne Charbonneau and Younhee Kim (2009) held that "Driven by citizen concerns for improved government performance since the 1970s, public organizations have increasingly turned their attention to producing better services. A fundamental ongoing task of contemporary public administration reform is then to improve the quality and performance of public services". This trend is no exception in China. Over these years, to help people lead a better life, China has called for building a service-

oriented government, establishing a basic public service system, and promoting public service equalization. This is the exact response to answer the higher needs and demands of the citizens, and it has become an essential task in social governance and reform from central government to local government. At the same time, the research of public service management and quality improvement has gradually become a new field in the study of Chinese public administration. With close observation and study of western countries' theories and practices in the management of public service quality improvement, this paper aims to illustrate the current state of research and practical development of public service quality management in China, as well as propose suggestions for future work.

The Rise and Themes of Public Service Quality Improvement Study

Since the 1970s, scholars in western countries such as Ostrom (1976) have begun to acknowledge the importance of citizens' perception and citizen evaluation in the field of public service. However, at that time the idea of quality management which centered on citizen's perception was mainly applied to corporate management. In the 1980s, with the rise and development of New Public Management, experiences from corporate management were widely introduced to the public sector. The efficiency and quality of public service delivery were enhanced by generating service charters, introducing international quality management systems, and promoting contracting out of services, etc. Moreover, the development of New Public Service theory has furthered government reform concentrated on how to provide high quality public service to citizens. Centering on this core goal, western countries have conducted a series of reforms and practices, and have gradually formed the "push-feedback" mode of public service quality improvement.

Experience from foreign countries has shown that establishing standards of public service is the foundation for continuous improvements of every country. Developed countries in the western world mainly establish public service criteria in two ways. One is to make a commitment to the public and provide reference and benchmarking for public service delivery by service charters. For example, the American federal government has published "Customers First: Standards for Serving the American People". In 1995, the British government confirmed nine principles for public service and the Canadian government has issued the "Public Service 2000". Another practice is to set standards to regulate and improve the process of public service by introducing international quality assurance

standards published by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO), such as ISO9000 quality management system.

Evaluation potentially provides the key to improved effectiveness at both organizational and policy levels as defined in terms of capacity to satisfy needs and improve the quality of life of citizens (Ian Sanderson, 1996). In the 1990s, some models and methods of public service performance evaluation have emerged and been applied to specific public service quality measurement systems. These common models and methods include customer satisfaction indices, data envelopment analysis, the balanced scorecard, and the public service improvement framework. However, scholars hold different views on citizen survey and citizen evaluation. Some scholars took citizen-driven government performance as a way to strengthen the entire performance improvement system in the future (Holzer and Yang, 2004), while other scholars argued that citizens' comments on public service would be influenced by various factors like race, income, provincial characteristics and familiarity with public service, etc., which make it hard to reflect the real situation of public service objectively. Hence, different factors should be taken into consideration when a citizen survey is conducted. Setting up awards on public service quality is an important incentive mechanism to promote continuous quality improvement in many countries. "Quality awards models incorporating critical dimensions of quality and techniques offer valuable lessons to those who are looking to promote institutional effectiveness, develop excellent standards, and focus customer satisfaction on delivering the most effective means of quality improvement by diagnosing the implementation of quality efforts" (Holzer, Charbonneau, and Kim, 2009). Many countries, regions, and international organizations encourage improvement and innovation on public service by setting up public service quality awards, such as the "United Nations Public Service Awards", "European Public Sector Award", "Innovations in American Government Awards", "National Awards for Local Government in Australia", "Canada Public Service Award of Excellence", "Taiwan Government Service Quality Award", etc.

In the view of practice, the process of public service quality improvement can be illustrated by the following framework:

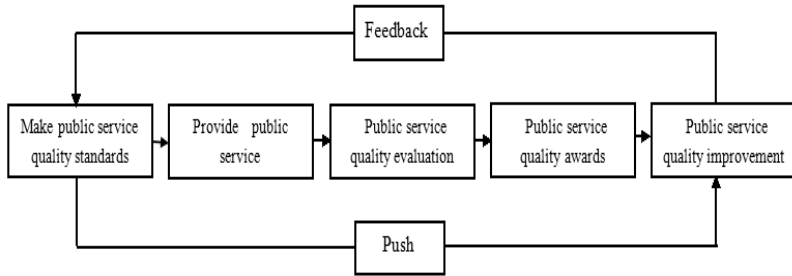


Figure 1 The Process of Public Service Quality Improvement

With the development of practical exploration, theoretical research is also gradually deepened. The first question scholars face is the dimensions of public service quality, namely, what standards should be used to measure “quality”? It has prompted two different kinds of views: democratic quality view and commercial quality view (Halachmi Arie, 1999). According to the democratic quality view, government quality should be defined by its capacity to meet the citizens’ needs rather than customers’, and government service quality will be improved as long as the government can increase transparency and enlarge citizen engagement. In contrast, according to commercial quality view, public organizations are just service businesses and citizens become pure customers correspondingly.

Different dimensions and criteria are formed under these two quality views. The democratic quality view emphasized more on democracy, responsiveness and transparency, while the commercial quality view is more based on economy and efficiency. Boyne (2002) summarized seven public service performance criteria from the literature: (1) quantity of outputs (e.g., number of operations performed in hospitals, hours of teaching delivered in schools, number of houses built); (2) quality of outputs (e.g., speed and reliability of service, courtesy of staff); (3) efficiency (ratio of outputs to financial inputs); (4) equity (fairness of the distribution of service costs and benefits between different groups); (5) outcomes (e.g., percentage of pupils passing exams, percent of hospital patients treated successfully); (6) value for money (cost per unit of outcome); and (7) consumer satisfaction (which may be a proxy for some or all of the above, depending on the questions posed to service users). It can be seen that these seven criteria almost contain the value dimensions from both the democratic quality view and commercial quality view.

The corresponding problem of values is the technical problem, which is another research theme on public service quality improvement that catches scholars' attention. In general, the main technology and mechanisms of public service quality improvement include bench-marking management, market management, total quality management, ISO9000 quality management, user involvement in quality management (quality circle), and reshaping the business process for quality management. To explore and find mechanisms, methods, and ways that help achieve continuous improvement in public service quality, the scholars have approached this problem from many different angles. Boyne (2003) summed up the five conceptual models for public service quality improvement: (1) goal model (emphasis on changes in the substantive standards of services); (2) system-resource model (focuses on the capacity of service providers to acquire technical inputs from their environment); (3) internal processes model (suggests that most attention should be paid to how such inputs are used within organizations); (4) competing values model (attempts to combine all of these perspectives into a universally applicable set of evaluative criteria); and (5) multiple constituency model (implies that improvement exists only in the eyes of organizational stakeholders). These five conceptual models not only clarify the concept of public service quality improvement, but also provide a new way to understand public service improvement.

The opinions of scholars from different schools on public service quality improvements vary and each has its own focus. For example, scholars of the New Public Management school pay more attention to the ways of marketization and socialization to improve public service quality. David Osborne and Ted Gaebler (1992) have identified twelve "management tools" to improve public service quality. Savas has listed ten kinds of forms of public-private partnership in public service delivery. Scholars of the public value school advocate that the public value concept can provide a framework for public sector managers to collect public opinions to improve the quality of public decision-making and public service quality (David Coats, and Eleanor Passmore, 2008). Therefore, the government should establish effective decision-making mechanisms, incentivize mechanism and evaluate performance based on results and outputs; implement a new public service delivery model and encourage citizens to participate; change service concepts and develop service culture in departments; and transfer citizens' expectations into specific goals and public service standards which should be used to measure service performance. Scholars of collaborative governance school focus on how to balance different personal needs and expectations, how to treat community and society as a whole, and how to use social resources, the capacity of departments and the citizen's responsibility to achieve the goal of public

service quality improvement (Špaček and Svatava, 2009). Therefore, it should focus on the mechanisms' construction to improve public service quality, including networking and information sharing mechanism, democratization and citizen participation mechanism, transparency and trust mechanism, strategic management and policy implementation mechanism. Negotiation governance theory of trust and cooperation among different stakeholders is the premise and guarantee of improving the quality of public service. Collaborative governance theory takes the trust and collaboration of different stakeholders as the prerequisite for and guarantee of improving public service quality.

Research Progress on Public Service Quality Improvement in China

Currently, the academic research on public service quality improvement in China is still at the initial stage. Related literature not only directly focuses on public service quality improvement but also includes themes of public sector quality management, public service performance evaluation, service-oriented government, quality government, government performance evaluation and so on. On the document retrieval system, the China Journal Full-text Database (CJFD), Chen (2012) consulted all concerned literatures from 1991 to 2011 on “service quality”, and the number of the articles identified was 8975. When using both “service quality” and “public service” as the search terms, the number reduced to 196. Similarly, when using “public administration” instead of “public service”, the number was reduced to 111. In contrast, there were only 77 articles when searched by title using the key words “public service” and “service quality” (see table 1).

Table 1 CJFD Database Search Results on Public Service Quality (1991-2011)

Keyword	Search item	Time span	Results
Service quality	Title	1991-2011	8975
Service quality+Public service	Title+Topic	1991-2011	196
Service quality+Public administration	Title+Topic	1991-2011	111
Service quality+Public service	Title+Title	1991-2011	77

Source: Chen, Wenbo. 2012. Research Progress on Evaluation and Improvement of Public Service Quality. China Public Administration, 3: 39-43.

From the 1990s to the beginning of this century, scholars in China began to combine quality management with public service. They have either conducted empirical researches on public services of local government based on the citizens' awareness oriented quality evaluation model (Lv, 2008; Zhang, Niu and He, 2008), or tried to introduce the concept of public service quality into the country, and thus the concept has gradually become familiar in the research field. At the same time, the National Natural Science Foundation of China (NSFC) and the National Social Science Foundation of China (SSFC) began to support the research on public service and quality management. For example, Chen Zhenming, professor in the public affairs school of Xiamen University, and his team took on a major project, "Study on Public Service Mechanism and Means", supported by NSFC in 2006; and in 2012, they again received a grant for their project "Study on Continuous Mechanism of Public Service Quality Improvement" supported by NSFC. Chen and his team sought to turn the public service quality management and improvement field into a relatively independent research area and systematically construct a theory framework of public service quality improvement. They have also published a series of articles about public service quality improvement. Reviewing the articles on this field, we divide them into three broad categories: (1) basic theory study; (2) experience and lessons learned from practice in China and abroad; and (3) process of public service quality improvement.

Basic Theory Study on Public Service Quality Management

The first aspect is the concept of public service quality. Zhang and Dang (2001) believed that government service quality refers to public service that can meet citizens' expectations and requirements every time they receive service. Lv (2010) demonstrated that public service quality, actually is the excellent performance of public service and the citizens' satisfaction, which can be divided into objective quality and subjective quality. The former is mainly measured by citizens' satisfaction and perception, while the latter is measured by service output quality. But Chen, and Li (2012) pointed out that public service quality is the actual level, availability, timeliness, efficiency, accuracy and responsiveness of public service achieved and enjoyed by terminal users. Wang (2011) argued that public service quality management of local government is a series of activities that local government carry out to provide satisfactory service for citizens and manage public affairs efficiently, and these activities should take quality as the core content and promote citizen participation. Although the statements on public service quality of domestic scholars are not consistent, they all agree that it is very important

to take citizen perception and citizen evaluation into consideration.

The second aspect that scholars in China focus on is the theory source of public service quality management. Public service quality management theory is the combination of public service theory and quality management theory, and the emergence and formation of this theory are mainly affected by ideas and methods of private sector management. The new public service theory calls for attention on citizens' requirements, to continuously improve the quality of public service and timely response to citizens' demand for public services, and that is what public service quality management pursues (Zhang, Niu, and He, 2008; Chen, Li, 2012; Chen, 2012). Quality management is the effective way of improving the quality of public service, and the public service management based on the concept of quality management can make government focus on "citizen satisfaction", promote citizen participation, carry out civil surveys, control the whole management process and set out goals for continuous improvement (Wang, 2010).

The third aspect is the framework of public service quality management. Different scholars in China have built theory framework from different perspectives. Chen (2012) has organized and summarized the theoretical researches on public service quality improvement, and then proposed that public service quality improvement theory contain improvement mechanisms, the influence factors of quality improvement, index systems of public service evaluation and technologies for public service quality evaluation. Chen and Li (2012) constructed the framework from the perspective of the improvement method, including the measurement of service quality, total quality management and service quality certification through service charter, service standardization and service quality award. Chen and Geng (2014) considered public service quality management as a systemic process, which is made of a series of mutual promotion phases, including service standards making, public service delivery, quality evaluation, quality award and quality improvement.

The Experience and Lessons from Practice on Public Service Quality Improvement

Currently, scholars in China study or review on experience and lessons from practice on public service quality improvement from four aspects.

The method to improve public service quality. Chen, and Li (2012) analyzed the government reform of Asian countries and found that Korea, Japan, Singapore and India have carried out a series of reform practices

under guidance of public service quality management theory, such as introducing public service scarification system, constructing complaint and feedback mechanisms, setting up service chapter institutions, service criteria and quality awards, building public service quality control systems, introducing government process re-engineering, promoting e-government, etc. They also identified the common characteristics of public service quality improvement of Asian countries, which includes paying more attention to the affinity of public service, focusing on public service evaluation, promoting online public service and encouraging citizen participation in public service.

The mechanism of public service quality improvement. Wang (2007) made a systemic review of the public sector quality management and improvement mechanisms of foreign countries, and found that public service improvement mechanisms are the combination of relatively independent management procedures, technologies and methods, all aiming to improve the quality of public service. Chen (2012) examined the medical and health service as an example, summarizing its mechanisms, including setting up quality standards, carrying out quality evaluations, publishing evaluation results and rewarding best practices. Moreover, Chen found that Britain has designed a complete and strict process to set up quality standards, including information screening, standards reviewing of committee, standards priority ranking, index building, decision making and standards releasing. Chen particularly analyzed the relevance of British experience to China, and suggested that the establishment of a comprehensive and general public service evaluation system, setting up a unified public service quality management department, and paying more attention to citizen satisfaction surveys in the process of public service quality evaluation.

The public service quality awards. Scholars in China gradually realize the importance of public service quality awards in stimulating public service quality improvement and begin to take service quality awards as a crucial tool to promote public service. Chen and Yang (2014) found that public service quality awards have changed focus from business management to government innovation, and then gradually developed into the stage of professional public service awards. In addition, they analyzed the design, practice and experience of four typical foreign public service awards, including “The United Nations Public Service Awards”, “The European Public Sector Award”, “The Innovations in American Government Awards” and “The Public Service Award of Excellence”. Lastly, they put forward the suggestions and countermeasures for designing and implementing public service quality awards in China, including putting

emphasis on setting up different types of service awards to give competitors more choices, making full use of mass media to advertise the international service awards, making self-promotion and achievements diffuse, building internal incentive mechanisms, publishing results, holding an awards ceremony and establishing norms.

China's experience on public service standardization. Chen and Geng (2014) took administrative service standardization of Zhangzhou city in Fujian province to demonstrate the achievements in China on public service quality improvement. Zhangzhou, which is one of the birthplaces of China's local government effectiveness building and the earliest place to establish an administrative service center in Fujian province, began to explore administrative service standardization in 2011. It has achieved success and accumulated experience, including developing a comprehensive service standard system to lay foundation for service quality improvement; promoting government functions transformation to strengthen organizational safeguards for service quality improvement; standardizing service process to realize the goal of "efficiency" in service quality improvement; promoting administrative service mode to realize horizontal equity of public service quality; constructing e-government to enhance government responsiveness in service improvement; pursuing high quality service to improve the accessibility of the administrative service; and strengthening administrative service supervision to ensure implementation of administration service standards.

Study on the process of public service quality management

From the perspective of process and stage of public service quality management, the current domestic research mainly focuses on public service standardization, public service quality evaluation and the countermeasures to improve public service quality.

Study on public service standardization. The necessity and possibility to introduce public service standardization into public sectors have been discussed by many scholars in China. Hu and Xu (2009) analyzed the values with which Chinese governments implements public service standardization from seven aspects, including theory value, technology value, management value, performance evaluation value, social value, ethical value and application value. In addition, as a technical tool, public service standardization is a useful means for the local governments in China to solve the contradiction between demand and delivery of public service and promote the equalization of public service (Yang, 2012; Hu, and Chen, 2014). Scholars in China all agree that the documents for

guiding public service standards system construction range across three levels. The first-level documents are GB/T15496, GB/T15497, GB/T15498 and GB/T19273. The second-level document is “Work Instructions for Service Standardization”. The third-level documents are other related laws and regulations of local governments. At present, the research of public service standardization in China is still at an exploratory stage, and is also at the initial stage for governments’ application and promotion. Therefore, China faces many problems on public service standardization: the limited understanding and support from citizens, the inapplicability and inoperability of some service standards, the irregularity of supervision mechanism (Hu, and Chen, 2014); the disunity of standards in different local governments and implementation levels (Yang, 2012), and that the unsolved publicity problem and government-guidance problem will trigger extra problems (Zhuo, Zhang, and Lan, 2014).

Study on public service quality evaluation. Some scholars concentrated on designing evaluation systems. Zhang, Niu, and He (2008) established an evaluation system consisting of four dimensions based on citizen value, including functional value, feeling value, social value and perceived sacrifices. Using this evaluation system and Analytic Hierarchy Process method, they also designed 45 indicators and evaluated the public service quality of 48 local governments in Zhejiang province. After analyzing the factors that can influence the public service quality, Ding (2012) argued that the first level evaluation indicators of public service quality should contain public service quantity, public service structure, and service attitude and production quality. Other scholars focused on evaluation models and technology. In order to evaluate service quality scientifically and comprehensively, scholars have used different kinds of models and technologies, such as TQM, six sigma, customer orientation model, and SERVQUAL model (Cai, 2003; Cui, 2005; Zhang, and lv, 2008). Among them, the SERVQUAL model has been widely used to evaluate service quality of local government. Li and Zhang (2009) carried out a public service quality survey of six counties in Jiangxi province under the SERVQUAL model and found a gap between service delivery and citizens’ needs. Zhu, and Liu (2010) took the SERVQUAL model as a practical model for service quality evaluation and introduced its dimensions, principles and calculation methods in detail.

Study on countermeasures to improve public service quality. Different scholars proposed countermeasures for different aspects. We summarize their opinions as the following: (1) emphasize the importance of institution design. Seen from the component, character and function of public service quality management, it is in fact a kind of institution innovation (Wang,

2011). The institutions should include quality management accountability, quality control, quality evaluation, service complaints and continuous improvement (Xiao, 2008; Li, and Zhang, 2009); (2) set up the concept of “citizen orientation” on public service. Local governments should change the concept of “official orientation” in the first place then strengthen the consciousness on public service to improve citizen satisfaction (Li, and Zhang, 2009; Wang, 2010; Chen, and Li, 2012; Chen, and Geng, 2014); (3) strengthen organization construction of public service quality management. Local governments should build the leadership agency for public service quality management. This agency is responsible for service quality audit, work supervision and evaluation. In addition, it is also important to improve management capacity of the quality team through training (Xiao, 2008). Wang (2010) suggested designing the overall plan for public service quality management to guide the specific work; (4) promote citizen participation. Government should encourage citizens to take part in the process of policy decision, service production and quality evaluation, and also build the platforms for citizens to express their expectations and requirements, carry out citizen surveys and listen to citizens’ suggestions. (Li, and Zhang, 2009; Chen, 2012; Ding, 2010; Chen, and Geng, 2014); (5) promote government process re-engineering to improve efficiency and perfect e-government construction (Chen, and Geng, 2014); (6) establish a public service quality standard system and evaluation system. Formulate public service quality standards to regulate the behavior of public service providers. Design scientific evaluation system based on quality standards, and provide better service through the feedback mechanism. (Xiao, 2008; Li, and Zhang, 2009; Chen, 2012; Chen, and Geng, 2014).

Moreover, scholars in China have conducted many empirical researches and many case studies on public service quality evaluation and improvement, especially on urban public service. Chen Zhenming’s research team alone, around 2010, undertook several projects, including “China Urban Public Service Quality Index Survey” (joint research project with Nanyang Technological University), “Development Quality Evaluation of Public Service in Fujian Province” (project supported by Fujian province), “Study on Public Service Improvement in Fujian Province” (project supported by Fujian province), “Public service quality evaluation and improvement in Xiamen City” (project supported by Xiamen City), “The Comparative Study on Public Service Quality between Xiamen City and Phoenix in America” (project supported by Xiamen City), “Study on Establishing Public Service Mechanism in Xiamen City that Appropriate to the Level of Economy Development” (project supported by Xiamen City), etc.

Progress of Practices on Public Service Quality Improvement in China

Since the mid-90s of the last century, China had begun new exploration to improve the quality of public services. At first, Service Charters or Citizen Charters of western countries were studied and applied by local governments. In June 1994, the construction committee of Yantai City in Shandong Province decided to apply lessons from Service Chapter and introduced a social service commitment system. Ten departments related to gas heating, housing demolition and public transport have made service commitments to society, which include service objectives, service content, service standards, complaints procedure, complaints phone number, and penalty and compensation in case they cannot achieve the commitments. In May 1995, all the departments of Yantai government implemented a commitment system and fixed the service commitments in the form of contracts for conveniently accepting supervision from citizens. In May 1996, the State Council Office for Rectifying and Ministry of Construction held an on-the-spot meeting in Yantai to promote the service commitment system. In the same year in July, the CPC Propaganda Department and State Council Office for Rectifying held a meeting in Beijing to report and share the experience of the social service commitments system from Yantai. By the end of 1997, departments and institutions applying a social service commitments system have covered 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions in China.

In recent decades, the practice of public service quality evaluation and improvement in China has been unfolding. In addition to the earlier service commitment system, there emerged new practices such as the government performance evaluation, White Paper of Public Service, public service award, the standardization of public service, etc. The citizen satisfaction survey, happiness or happiness index survey, life quality survey, public service quality survey and other evaluations are widely popular in China. The White Paper of Public Service is more specific and standardized than social service commitments. In 2009, Shenzhen renamed the “White Paper of Responsibility Objects” of different departments as the “White Paper of Public Service” and all the districts and departments have made commitments of public service to the society.

In recent years, guided by the goal of constructing a service-oriented government and their situations, the local governments have made progress on mechanism, technology, method, content and mode of public service improvement. For example, they drew lessons from international quality management systems and implement public services

standardization, carried out E-government, introduced a contract system to improve the efficiency and quality of public service, and set up public service awards to stimulate public service quality reform. All these practices have been major steps on the localization of public service improvement.

Public Services Standardization

In recent years, public service standardization, the combination of public sector management and quality management, has been applied in many local governments in China. Public service standardization is taken as an important technology and method for improving the quality of public service, and is also the biggest reform of public service both in breadth and depth in local governments. The exploration of “standardization on government management and public service” of Shangcheng district of Hangzhou city in Zhejiang province in 2007 is the starting point of the long construction on public service standardization in China. For government departments, public service standardization can promote government function transition, process re-engineering and ensure the efficiency and quality of public services; for citizens, public service standardization is a kind of service commitment, and can improve the accessibility and equity of public service. According to the practices on public service standardization of local governments in China, we generally classify them into basic public service standardization and administrative service standardization. The following are the differences between these two types:

- On the service’s nature, basic public service is comprehensive and covers many more services, while administrative service is only produced in the process of administrative examination and approval.
- On the service content, the current basic public service standardization involves legal aid, social security, community service, public places and public facilities, talent services, population and family planning, public health, public education, pensions, housing, etc. Administrative service standardization involves the examination and approval of investment construction project, the enterprise registration, real estate transaction registration, the examination and approval of advertisement, etc.
- On the platform they rely on, basic public services standardization mainly depends on the relevant departments that offer public service, while administrative service standardization mainly depends on administrative service centers of municipals, districts

and counties, and convenient service centers of sub-district (township) and neighborhood associations (village).

- On the typical practice, the former includes “standardization on government management and public service” of Shangcheng district of Hangzhou city in Zhejiang province, “national-level demonstration zone of public service standardization” of Dongcheng district in Beijing, “community service standardization center” and “community service standardization on home-based care for the aged” in Shanghai, and “national-level demonstration zone of public service standardization” of Jiangning district in Nanjing. The latter includes administrative service standardization of Liaocheng city and Xintai city in Shandong province, government service standardization of Anhui province, and administrative service standardization of Zhangzhou city in Fujian province.
- On the standards system, administrative service standardization is more mature than basic service standardization. In general, different local governments have something in common on administrative service standardization such as standardization principle, goal, applicable laws and regulations, etc. However, they also have their own features and share differences. For example, standards systems of Xintai contain a system of general basic service standards, a system of service security standards and a system of service supply standards. In contrast, standards systems of Anhui province include a system of basic service standards, a system of service supply standards, a system of service security standards and a system of service evaluation and improvement standards. Zhangzhou city takes the lead to implement administrative service standardization in Fujian province, as illustrated in figure 2, and has formed a relatively scientific standardization system.

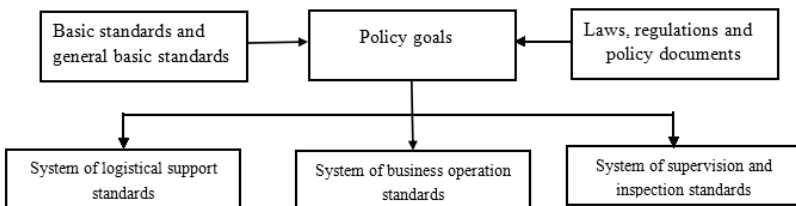


Figure 2 A System of Administrative Service Standards of Zhangzhou in Fujian Province

E-Public Service

Since the implementation of the “government online” project in 1999 in China, local governments have actively created innovation strategies to broaden the use of e-government, particularly in public service delivery. Developed from the information disclosure to limited interaction, and more recently, the integrated electronic service platforms (one-stop online), which have greatly increased the information transparency, improved administrative efficiency, and enhanced the responsiveness between government and citizens, local governments have made a breakthrough in e-government by using different information and communication technologies (ICTs), such as telephone, Internet and self-service computer terminals.

Overall, local governments in China have made the following progress on e-public service:

- Built an electronic service platform and provided seamless public service. Currently, the electronic service platform has been used in a number of government departments and fields, including government service, administrative service, tax service, etc. There are three types of electronic service platforms. One is the comprehensive service platform integrated with government Web portals, which can provide a wide range of online information and services to their citizens; the typical examples are “Capital Window” Web portals of Beijing and “Web Affairs Hall” of Guangdong province. The second type of electronic service platform is separated from government Web portals and provides more independent and professional services; the typical example is the “12345-government service platform” of Fujian province. This platform makes response to the service requirements of citizens its core task. Finally, the administrative service electronic platform that was built by the administrative service center has been more widely used in China. The typical examples are “Little-doctor intelligent navigation for administrative examination and approval” of Pudong district in Shanghai and “96123-administrative service platform” of Zhangzhou in Fujian province. Citizens can apply, transact, pay fees, consult, supervise and check in through these online systems.
- Adopted diversified technologies to meet requirements of multiple subjects. In order to enhance the service availability and convenience, as well as to adapt to the characteristics of different groups, local governments have tried their best to make full use of

advanced information technology and new media to achieve comprehensive coverage of service in the process of providing public services. First, local governments have utilized hot-lines to provide 24-hour service. For example, the “12345 non-emergency service hot-line” of Beijing and the “12345 government service hot-line” of Qingdao have a complete service process, from requirements acceptance, auto-classification, implementation, linkage supervision, results feedback, accountability tracing, and comprehensive analysis to release information, and these hot-lines can solve problems of citizens by combining the automatic voice service, artificial service and information processing. Second, local governments have utilized new media, for example, QQ, MicroBlog and WeChat, to establish interactive platforms between government and citizens. Citizens can get the latest service information and have a real-time conversation with government by adding QQ accounts, following official MicroBlog and scanning QR code of WeChat.

- Collected big data to realize intelligent service management. Intelligent management based on databases and advanced ICTs such as Internet of Things (IOT), Cloud Computing and Mobile Internet is becoming the hot topic in China. The construction of “Intelligent city” and “Intelligent community” has been placed on the reform agenda in local governments. There are more than 400 cities which have announced plans to build an “Intelligent city” in China. Shanghai has issued the “Shanghai Action Plan on Intelligent City construction of 2014-2016” and will build a “Government, enterprises and public organizations” collective public service system. By 2016, the intelligent service system will cover all citizens. In addition, Shanghai will transform the existing electronic service platform into integrated e-public service. This plan will change public service delivery mode, management process, and thus provide safe, efficient and convenient e-service to citizens.

Public Service Purchase from Social Organizations

Even though purchasing public service from social organizations is still at its beginning stage is still at its beginning in China, central government attaches great importance to the mechanism construction of public services purchase. In September 2013, the State Council published the “Instructional Advice on Government Purchase of Public Services from Social Forces” and clearly pointed out the goals and tasks of this reform by 2020. At the same time, local governments are actively exploring the

ways to purchase public service from social organizations. For example, in 2008, the government of Guangdong province took the lead in publishing the “Instructional Advice on Experimental Work of Public Service Purchase from Social Organizations”. In March 2013, the Civil Affairs Bureau and Finance Bureau of Xiamen city published “Implementation Measures on Purchase and Support Service from Social Organizations of Xiamen city (on trial)”, which clearly regulated the two ways to purchase service from social organizations, including service jobs purchase and service projects purchase. Gansu province made 6 classes and 50 items service for purchase in the “Implementation Advice on Government Purchase of Public Services from Social Forces” issued in January 2014. the government of Shi Jiazhuang city in Hebei province issued the “Implementation Advice on Government Purchase of Public Services from Social Forces” in June, 2014, and announced to take experimental work in the whole city. In addition, the government of Shi jiazhuang city has put forward short-term, medium-term and long-term goals, regulated the purchase subjects and objects and set 19 classes and 154 items of service for purchase.

Guangdong province has been at the forefront of the country in public service purchase. The practice, developing from noting, from small to large, and from scattered and passive purchases to normal and systematic purchases, has made some achievements and provided great experience for governments whose public service purchase is still at the exploration stage. Guangdong province has taken the following measures:

- Established relevant institutions. Guangdong government has issued the “Instructional Advice on Government Purchase of Public Services from Social Forces”, the” Notification on Interim Measures for Government Purchase of Public Services from Social Organizations”, “Public Service Catalog for Provincial Government Purchase from Social Organizations in 2012 (first batch)” and “Management Measures on Competitive Review Between Suppliers During Service Purchase from Social Organizations”. These documents explain service principal, service scope, service procedures fund safeguarding mechanisms, and standardize the responsibilities, procedures and management requirements of competitive review.
- Regulated purchase procedures. Financial departments should entrust a third party to choose service suppliers through public bidding to undertake major projects, people's livelihood issues and other important issues determined by party committee or government. As for the rest of the projects, the ones related to

purchase service should be implemented through public bidding in accordance with related regulations; those out of the range of purchase service, in addition to the small deals, can also be taken through public bidding. In practice, different departments should first work out a service purchase plan, which includes the requirements, quantity and quality of service purchase, and then publicize the plan online after it is approved by financial departments. The last step is to undertake public bidding to choose an appropriate supplier to deliver the public service.

- Expanded purchase scale gradually. Viewed from the perspective of purchase scope, government purchase of service has gradually developed from urban areas to rural areas, from developed areas to poor areas, from traditional fields, such as pension services, to emerging fields such as immigrant workers service and volunteer service, and from Civil Affairs Departments and the Disabled Federation to other departments and organizations such as Judicial Departments, Education Departments, Health Departments, Labor Unions and Communist Youth Leagues. Government purchase of service has now formed a new pattern with multi-departments, multi-organizations and multi-fields.
- Promoted diversity of purchase means. Currently, there are three kinds of purchase means: (1) non-competition purchase - the related departments of government will launch a new social service organization, from which departments can purchase service through commissioned processing rather than public competition; (2) limited competition purchase - the government of Dongguan city, for example, has chosen and developed non-governmental social service agencies step by step to provide service according to the requirements of local citizens and service scale; and (3) complete competition purchase, where, for example, the government of Shenzhen city gives all the qualified social service organizations a chance via the survival of the fittest doctrine through public bidding. In addition, other governments have also explored new ways to purchase service, such as job purchase, project purchase and full payment, cost payment, economic subsidies, replacement of subsidies with awards, etc.

Public Services Awards

At present, the awards for encouraging public service quality improvement are mainly set up by institutions for academic research and local governments in China. In order to stimulate government reforms and innovations, and summarize the advanced experience and best practice,

some institutions for academic research in China began to establish a series of non-governmental awards in 2000. Among all these awards, the China Local Government Innovation Award and China Social Innovation Award initiated by China Center for Comparative Politics and Economics and Center for Chinese Government Innovations of Peking University have a great influence. Though these awards are not directly named as “Public Service Quality Awards”, they have actually stimulated local governments to improve public service. Taking the 7th China Local Government Innovation Award in 2014 for an example, the majority of programs comprising the 10 winner awards and 10 nomination awards were related to public service, such as disabled service, basic medical services, administrative service, service standardization and convenient service center.

As for local government, the first and only “Public Service Quality Award of District Mayor” in China was set up by Longgang district of Shenzhen in 2009. This award is designed to help public service sectors to propel the excellent performance management model and improve the overall level of public service quality in this area. Under the guidance of “Administrative Measures for Public Service Quality Award of District Mayor Evaluation of Longgang District”, this evaluation was started in 2010 and is held once every two years. Based on the “Common Assessment Framework of Europe”, Longgang District established an “Evaluation Criteria of excellent public service”. The evaluation objects cover both government organizations and non-governmental organizations. The former includes the district government departments, directly affiliated institutions and resident agencies, while the latter includes medical and health institutions, education institutions, water and power supply enterprises, public transportation enterprises and other public services delivery agencies invested by government. As for evaluation subjects, Longgang District has organized a working committee, which is made up of famous scholars, experts, industry veterans and officials of relevant government departments. To keep evaluation fair and scientific, Longgang district has utilized external evaluation methods and given chances to enterprises, media and citizens to grade every object.

Looking Forward

It is acknowledged that much work, from theory and practice, remains to be done on public service quality improvement in China. The future work should pay more attention to the following points: even though it has been accumulated in recent years, public service quality improvement in China

is still relatively weak. Therefore, the first step is to promote knowledge growth through strengthening theoretical construction and innovation. Clearly, the existing practices to improve public service quality have created a good environment for theory construction and innovation, and provided a lot of vivid cases and experience for theoretical research, while the practices in turn require the guidance and support from theories; practices then provide the inexhaustible power for theoretical innovation. At the same time, with the rapid development of research teams of public service quality improvement in China, there will be more and more scholars who focus on this field, which will no doubt promote knowledge growth.

The second step is to establish the philosophy of “quality first” through cultivating a culture of quality management in public sectors. Even though China has put forward a “national strategy of quality”, a “provincial strategy of quality” and a “city strategy of quality” for several years, and the practices from central government and local governments have already begun to improve public service quality, the philosophy of “quality first” has not really been set up in public sectors. However, when practitioners in public sectors gradually realize that the traditional public service delivery models cannot adapt to the needs of a diversified society, they will focus on how to provide high quality public services according to the requirements of citizens, and try to seek theory to support their practice. At this time, public service quality management, as a new concept, will enter their vision, and the culture of quality will become the mainstream in public sectors. These changes will help practitioners to further practices of public service quality improvement and deepen the reform of governance.

The third step is to perfect a public service quality management system through implementing a data strategy. Using big data for public service quality management is gradually becoming the main approach in developed countries. There are advanced databases for recording, tracking and assessing feedback and citizens' demands for public services, monitoring and evaluating the performance of public organizations in America's 311 systems, one-stop service centers, and civil service systems. These databases, which have integrated different processes into complex systems, can not only greatly reduce the cost of public service quality management, but also ensure continuous quality improvement of public services. The construction of E-government in China has achieved initial progress. With the development of science and technology and the innovation of management methods, China will inevitably adapt to the trends of the times to make full use of big data in the public service quality management, and build a comprehensive quality management system of

public service.

The last step is to construct a participatory and collaborative quality improvement mechanism through conducting citizen surveys and citizen-driven evaluations. Civil awareness is the core element in public service quality management, and this means that government needs to fully grasp the willingness of citizens during the process of service improvement. Thus, government should actively respond to citizen requirements. Furthermore, government should motivate the enthusiasm of citizens and other organizations to participate in the improvement of public service, including the process of opinions collection, the process of implementation and supervision, the process of performance evaluation and the process of quality feedback. Consequently, government can form a participatory and collaborative quality improvement mechanism by building the interaction network between different engagement bodies.

In conclusion, quality management research, which has been neglected by scholars for a long time in China, is a critical approach of public administration. Public service quality improvement has already become the core content of government reform and governance in China, and research on public service management and quality improvement is gradually becoming a new area in the study of public administration in China. At present, we must strive to promote both the theory and practice development of public service quality improvement.

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