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The Way to realize public administrative responsibility in a changing society

Shen Shiguang
shanghai administration institution
CHINA
Abstract:
In tradition social the government was charged with infinite responsibility to people, so the government power is excessively mightiness, but the social power is very small, this usually namely “the powerful government, the weak social”. Especially like China, the Confucianism occupied dominant status in long time. Responsibility was infinite in namely, but was absented in nature. The governments function become normative with game of the social power, but the conventional habit so severity.

Author:
Shen Shiguang, male, associate professor of the department of administration, shanghai administration institution

1. The characteristics of public administrative responsibility
Administrative responsibility has been seriously studied since the study of public administration began. Wilson thought that a good way to achieve administrative responsibility was to find an arrangement in which constitutional power was properly distributed. "In order to gain working efficiency, a simple arrangement must be found. Through this arrangement, the officials must bear responsibility. The best style of distributing power without hurting administrative function must be found. We must also find a suitable way which will not lead to an indistinction of responsibility. When this problem of distributing power is led into the high rank of the government and basic function, it is obviously a very important constitutional question.” In 1980’s, in the clamor for “Ending big government”, another dispute arose about the function of government. The two characters who advocated the end of big government were Mrs. Thatcher, who was the prime minister of UK, and the American president Regan. In his inauguration, President Regan issued a declaration which was thought of as a “Jefferson’s early philosophy of administration without government’s interference”: Government is not the solution to our problem. Government is the problem. In a bid to find the ways and channels in which governments bear responsibility, Anthony Gedons, the founder of the third way in UK, thought it necessary to reaffirm the function of the government. He pointed out eleven aims for the existence of government. If we induce and synthesize Gedons’ words, we can see that the function of the government is to: provide goods, coordinate benefits, cultivate rules and laws for market competition, keep social order and carry out education. The government bears its responsibilities in the aspects mentioned above.

Administration scholar Grover Starling described six characteristics of government’s public administrative responsibility. They are responsiveness, flexibility, competence, due-process, accountability and honesty. In China, the public administrative responsibility which the government should bear is: responsiveness, honesty, accountability, competence, fairness and justice.
(1) responsiveness: facing the request of the people for public policy and safety, the government should respond in a timely and rapid fashion and adopt active measures to solve the problems. Government’s responsiveness is the inevitable outcome of the development of modern society. Under the condition of a market economy, the public put forward a higher demand for services and the way to provide it. Government’s responsiveness is a link in the process of public administration. Administration is at first the principal part of public service. Its public service policy should accord and follow with people’s interest. More importantly the government must listen to people’s opinions, suggestions and criticism for the provision of public services. Government should also make vigorous and sensitive reactions to the public and offer them satisfying replies and solve the problems the public wish them to.

Influenced by Chinese traditional bureaucratic systems, the government usually appears as a closed structure. The reaction within the government itself is timely and responsible but this is not perceived outside the government.

(2) honesty: government should give honest and unconcealed replies to people’s questions and puzzles. People have the right to know. The honesty of government demonstrates the transparency principle in modern public administration. There are two aspects to honesty. The first is government’s honesty as an organization. The second one is the personal moral integrity of the government staff. An honest government is sure to request its staff to be honest. The most important component part of an honest government is firstly that it be a democratic one. Government officials are elected by people and thus they will be responsible for the people. People have the right to recall dishonest government officials. In recent years, with the advancement of basic democracy in China, it’s not rare that government officials are recalled.

(3) accountability: When crises appears in the course of carrying out public policy or public safety is threatened and even if some degree of harm is done to the public, government should bear appropriate public administrative responsibility. A responsible government is a very important sign of modern democratic government. It’s also a sign to measure the administrative morality of a government.

Marks Weber thinks that in modern times the integration of conviction and reason has become a past. He put forward the distinction between the famous “responsibility ethics” and “conviction ethics”. According to him, these two are incompatible as fire and water. In a world full of conflict of interest, he thought that only “responsibility ethics” can judge the hour and size up the situation. It not only helps the decision-making process but also dares to bear responsibility for the results of action. Weber
emphasized the priority of responsibility ethics in the field of action. His intention is clear. He wanted to warn people of the trap hidden in romanticism and idealism. But in order to create a tense dramatic effect, he looked on “conviction ethics” as a public philosophy. In Chinese government departments conviction ethics has always been emphasized, while responsibility ethics have only been put forward in recent years.

(4) competence: the action taken by the government should be prudent not careless or in haste. Government’s responsibility is to constantly improve the building of itself and to raise administrative efficiency and efficacy. It should pay close attention to results. It shouldn’t neglect its duty. The national competence can be summarized by the following four aspects: the first is the competence of deriving, it means the central government’s competence in deriving finance. The second one is the competence of controlling, meaning the central government’s competence of guiding the development of a social economy. The third is the competence of legitimizing, referring to the central government’s competence of using political symbols in its people to produce common knowledge so as to solidify its ruling position. The fourth one is the competence of compelling. It means the nation’s competence of wielding ways, organs and threatening to uphold its ruling position.

(5) fairness and justice: government may not neglect different groups in the course of making and carrying out public policies. It should keep to fair standards and goal to people in different areas. In his “On new Public Administration”, Fredrixon pointed out that “administration is not neutral. Government should be instructed to bear responsibility and regard excellent management and social justice as social norms. He emphasized that “the new public administration is trying to change those policies and structures which hinder social justice.”

A government in a changing period should pay special attention to the mobile state of the whole society. This means not only the floating agricultural population to cities but the shift between social strata as well. The government plays a part in the overall trend of redistribution of a whole society. In a stable social formation, the moving from lower social strata to higher strata is increasing. That is, judged by the general population, the lower strata are more active in changing to the higher while the higher strata are less active. An olive-shaped structure of the society guarantees stabilization. Gedans thought that in a society which is completely ruled by people of outstanding ability, serious inequality of income will appear and therefore threaten social cohesion. He also thought that “the downwards moving which affects a large scale will produce inestimable results, and make those who suffer from them have the feeling of being estranged. He emphasized, “the
downwards moving which affects a large scale threatens social cohesion. It is more than the threat of the existence of an excluded class that is full of hostility.

2. the puzzles and obstacles of social public administration in a changing period---- China as an example

The government in a changing society faces many contradictions and obstacles from society and from within, especially in a country like China, which has a very long history. In the area of social political change and traditional administrative culture I’m going to discuss government’s puzzles and contradictions in public administrative responsibility.

(1) contradictions in social political change: In traditional society, government’s administrative responsibility and political responsibility were tied together. Administrative responsibility obeyed political responsibility. In a period of social and political change, the public increasingly seek a government’s public policy, but traditional government system are not quick enough for government to make a timely response.

The responsibility of traditional government was very limited. The first responsibility was to maintain public order. Ancient Chinese government became more and more specialized after the Tang Dynasty. The division of labor between government departments was clearer. But the economic system of self-sufficiency made the government’s economic function seemingly innately inadequate. The government, especially basic government showed strong conducting consciousness to maintain public order. Judicial settling lawsuits became a very important part of administration. The second responsibility was the responsibility to relieve the people in stricken areas with food. In ancient China, productive forces were very weak. In the years when there were natural calamities, local government had to do this duty. The third was the responsibility to suppress. There were constant natural and man-made calamities in ancient China. Social upheavals made the government think it its duty to suppress. Because traditional China was a society administered by man, government’s responsibility fell to government officials. The officials’ responsibilities were divided as follows: firstly as emperor’s officials, they should be boundlessly loyal to the emperor. The higher their ranks were, the more important it was to be loyal. Secondly, officials should bear in mind their responsibility to their superiors. They had to do the duty according to their superiors’ wish because whether they could get a promotion was decided by their superiors. There was a Chinese story about an official in Han Dynasty: Emperor Guangwu promoted Ren Yan, Suiyang county magistrate, to be the head of Wuxian Shire and the emperor himself received Ren Yan. Emperor Guangwu earnestly said to him: “You should treat your superiors
well, otherwise you’ll lose your fame and position.” But Ren Yan replied, “I hear that officials who are loyal to his sovereign should not echo the views of others. Those who do that are not loyal. To take an honest road and to handle matters impartially is an official’s integrity. It’s not your Majesty’s good fortune that all your officials speak with one voice. So to your Majesty’s request to serve my superiors I’m sorry to say no.” Emperor Guangwu heard this and was lost in thought. Then he said, “what you said sounds reasonable.” Thirdly, the responsibility of traditional government was to their own family, their relatives and friends, and to themselves. The implementation of ancient Chinese imperial examination system helped quite a lot of government officials to move into high-officialdom from the people. Some of them assiduously studied until they had hoary heads. Their life-time objective was to become famous and bring honor to their ancestors through reading and imperial examination. Once they got the chance to enter officialdom all the people related to them would be taken care of. Finally, the responsibility of traditional government was to the common people. Chinese Confucian culture advocated an active plunge-into-society spirit. To back up people, to regard people as the most precious and to show humanist solicitude was the pursuit of traditional Chinese government officials, especially those honest and upright ones.

In one sense, the so-called administrative responsibility is related to the people’s interest. People benefit from the supply of public goods because a citizen’s own behavior of paying taxes makes him realize that it has something to do with government’s consumption and meanwhile he should participate in the drawing up of the government’s public policy. After 1949, China carried out planned economy. Government bore an unlimited responsibility to the society and its effect in politics, economy, social culture and all other fields. Chairman Mao Tsetung once talked about the three factors of planning, two of which were: the common people, not to lose the common aspiration of the people and the third was famine due to crop failures. This was an administrative style of strong government but a weak society. On one hand, everything changes according to government’s will. Though government also calls its people to give counsel, it’s just a kind of making good will whilst maintaining prerequisite obedience. On the other hand, people have been manipulated to obey and respond to the government. The government serves the people heart and soul in a unique way. Though the service is inefficient, the unselfish devoting spirit of the government and its officials wins people’s acceptance of the government’s legalization. Therefore, firstly, in time of planned economy when productive forces were low, production and consumption were both in a low level because people’s demands were also low. Secondly, government’s public spending was very limited, and people didn’t contribute much to the public coffers. Public policy was on the decline.
Let’s go back to Wilson. He thought that the administrative organizer’s task lay in making administration fit into clearly-demarcated lines of responsibility. This ensures that people have a sense of trust. Though Wilson said that as long as the right was not irresponsible, it was not at all dangerous. He advocated that right consist with responsibility. “Tremendous force and uncontrolled free right to deal with things seems to me the indispensable conditions to bear responsibility. ...If right is separated and many people has got one part of it, then it will be made into irresponsibleness. But, if right is in the hands of the department heads, it will be very easy to supervise and address inquiries to. ...While the smaller his right is, the more he will feel that his position is confused and inconspicuous, and the more likely he will degenerate into a state of being irresponsible.”

(2) the continuing and bringing forth new ideas of traditional administrative culture: On one hand, traditional Confucianist cultural influence makes administrative culture continue the consciousness of “official departmental selfishness”. It also makes administrative power not match its responsibility. Government functionaries’ acting on their own in public administrative morality conflicts with the contradiction of the dependence for existence.

Firstly, in the administrative culture, Chinese administrators act as an: “administrative individual”. He looks upon himself as a very small potato in the whole of the administration rank. He will touch lightly on the harmful consequences done to the society through the execution of lawful right. In other words, he reduces and obscures his own responsibility. We can see this in the following three administrative characteristics:

A: administrative individuals try their best to control their own emotion. In stead, they will use indirect, implicit and inner-controlled way of expression, trying hard not to hurt the fellow administrative staff, especially their bosses. They will treat lightly the abnormal administrative behavior of his colleagues’ and their superiors’, or they will simply preserve their own morality. When the same situation comes again, more people will choose to do the same, which makes it a persistent ailment for administrative department to cure because the rules are an empty shell.

B: another characteristic of Chinese administrative culture is that administrative staff are prudent, modest, and restrained. The administrative staffer who has a strong character is looked upon as abnormal, though he may be welcomed by non-administrative people and secretly esteemed by most administrative staff. Everybody agrees that the administrative staffers who have strong characteristics will not gain a foothold in the administrative ranks. Generally speaking, they are officials in charge of an area, but they are not approved by the whole administrative culture.

C: administrative individuals in the ranks are often mean, compromising and worldly. There are few people in administrative
staff who stick to principles because these kind of people are regarded as lacking in flexibility, one-track-minded and rigid. Among administrative staff, those who can flexibly deal with relationships between high and low administrative ranks have a much better opportunity to get important positions and promotions than those who stick to principles and dare to confront the tough with toughness.

Secondly, in their relationships, administrative staff may display their characteristics in the following three ways:

A: Chinese society can be described as an “other oriented society”. In it, the other’s opinion has a very important bearing on the behavior of administrative staff. That is to say, the behavior of an individual is influenced by others and he is very sensitive to opinions from others. Thus we have a shame oriented society or culture. This produces two effects. On one hand, the administrative staff are afraid that the comments of others may lower their prestige and bring hinder to their chances of promotion. So it is quite common that they tell lies or compromise their integrity. It is because that it’s very difficult to introspect your own wrong doings. If administrative staff do something wrong or violate regulations, they will feel ashamed of other’s comments or criticism. Vanity makes it difficult for them to face their mistakes honestly.

B: Chinese society is also a family oriented one. Family relations are the model for all kinds of relationships. The restraining of moral principles make the relationship in China harmonious, orderly, friendly and warm. It creates the sense of security and stability and also a lasting and continuing attitude. This style of relationship also influences administrative staff and creates an administrative phenomenon of “being intent on nothing but family sentiments”. Those who are not related may be treated coldly and neglected while those who are related are shielded as much as possible, without thinking about rules and laws. Therefore, the crisis of administrative staff’s lack of social morality appears very serious, especially in time of public administration.

C: the enlargement of Confucian ethics of father-guiding-son

Chinese people have a strong authoritative nature. They often unconditionally accept and obey authorities and therefore they are inclined to think highly of power and influence. “For bureaucratic style of work, we should realize not only its harmfulness but also why it is there. Bureaucracy, to a great extent, originated from the consciousness of “official departmental selfishness” which formed in Chinese feudal society. The official departmental selfishness means to do everything unscrupulously for the purpose of securing an official position. Once you are an official you can have anything you want. Lu Xun said, "Chinese people really have a strong interest in being officials. In a word, they want to be officials in the depth of their souls----speak in a bureaucratic tone and put on
bureaucratic airs.” A national sampling investigation made by Chinese Academy of Social Sciences shows that among 69 professions, to be officials is the most favorite one for Chinese city dwellers.

But as a whole, Confucian administrative culture is different from Protestant ethics, which lays stress on personal right. It makes demands on both individuals and government. What it attaches importance to is the social unity and seeking our position in an organization. On one hand, to an individual, “it means the understanding of his responsibility in the society.” An individual has the responsibility to cultivate his moral character and restrain himself. Then he goes a step further to bigger and longer-lasting objectives, beliefs and promises. On the other hand, “the leading class in government are supported and regarded as crucial to society. At the same time, these ethics insist that only a moral, vigorous and creative government lead the people. Inoguchi made full elaboration on it in his essay “Asian Style Democracy”. He thought in east Asian countries, “the society has partiality for the relationship based on trust but not contract or law. The governments which are initiative and have strong sense of social responsibility are all extensions of the past.” “Officials here always looked upon themselves as the guardians of people.”

3. **Chinese experience and practice in accomplishing public administrative responsibility**

   (1) Strengthening reaction and responsibility. Hyerk thinks that the most important moral basis of the market economy is the sense of responsibility. It originates from the sense of morality that each person should be responsible for the results of his behavior. The mechanism of responsibility is essentially a democratic system. In the final analysis, any government action is looked upon as the people’s own which is taken through their representatives. The seeking of public interest needs a carefully-designed responsible structure to make sure that those who do things in the name of people act in the best interests of people.

   In April of 2001, this concept began to enter Chinese political life as a system in which officials bear the blame and reproach themselves and resign. In the beginning it was Chongqing City that took the lead in promulgating related regulations and ordered the officials to resign if major security accidents happen in the area under their jurisdiction. Then in April the State Council promulgated “the State Council’s stipulation about how to find out who is to blame administratively after extraordinarily major security accidents”. This style of finding blame has been established as a national system and goes up to very high ranks. According to the stipulation, “If an extraordinarily major security accidents happens and causes very bad social impression and the nature of the accident or incident is
especially serious, the State Council will give administrative disciplinary measures to people who are responsible, such as the governor of the province, the chairman of the autonomous region, the mayor of the municipality directly under the Central Government or the first head of related State Council ministry. A month later, Cheng An-dong, Governor of Shan’xi Province, received an administrative disciplinary measure-- recording a demerit from the State Council because three extraordinarily major security accidents occurred in Shan’xi Province. In China it is obviously rare that the first administrative head of a province received disciplinary measure and the news was announced to the public.

(2) The changing of government’s function and reform of administrative structures. Using the experience of public administrative reform, the central government is trying the system of employing government functionaries and tripartite administration. Since Chinese economic reform and “opening up”, the central government has made six reforms in administrative structures. Generally, these worked on simplifying the administrative structure and staff, changing government’ function, conforming government action to standards and downsizing government. The reform of the administrative system is an important part of the push for political reform. Administrative reform aims at forming an administrative system which is well behaved and coordinated, fair and transparent, honest and efficient.

Local governments are also active in seeking government reform. Jilin Province and Wuhan City have adopted a flexible employment system. Employees can choose lifelong, contract, and project employment to their wish and the nature of the job. These employees get different pays and conditions.

The government of Shenzhen City sees the changing of government function as the core of administrative reform. They have established new mechanism to build an administrative system in which the making, executing and supervising of policies are not only separate but also coordinated and efficient. They practice “tripartite administration”. That it, they set up a bureau of making policy, a bureau of executing policy and one supervising bureau. The bureau of making policy has the right to make but not to execute policy. The executing bureau can only execute but not make it. As the department of supervision, the supervising bureau and the auditing bureau are directly under the leadership of the mayor. The bureau of making policy also has non-government consultative departments which provide opinions for the bureau and collect public opinions.

(3) The coming of electronic administration. We build up a transparent, public and fair platform to raise government’s
achievement, supervise government’s administrative actions and strengthen supervision by the masses.

In traditional administration, government functionaries used to go to the grass-roots units to investigate and collect public opinion. They also compiled statistics through related departments and got to know the state of the administrative service and the practical effect of government public policy. The government promulgated its public policy through TV, newspapers, magazines and other media. By writing letters, telephoning, offering suggestions and consulting higher authorities for help, people could express their personal opinions and suggestions, raise problems, put forward their requests about the administrative service and make suggestions to administration. The government got to know public opinion through these channels.

With the rapid development of information technology, the internet has brought change and unprecedented influence to public opinion. These developments challenge the limit of time and space, and create revolutionary change to our way of producing, living and thinking. It even affects government’s action. In 1999, Chinese government started its net project. In 2002, Chinese government invested 30 billion RMB yuan on the building of electronic administration. More will be spent in 2003. In all these years, with the building of golden tax, golden gates and golden cards, and also with the construction of automatic offices for all the departments, China has owned highly advanced information systems. The coming of electronic administration makes government bodies no longer mysterious to the public. The administration is now more transparent. Everything can be taken in at a glance: the heads of government departments, its duties and working procedures. If people have any suggestions or opinions on public service policies or laws, or if they are not satisfied with a government functionary’s manner or attitude, their criticism goes directly to a related department. What’s more important is that it also helps the government to pool the wisdom of the masses and make policy. It enhances government’s response effectiveness.

In 2002, the government of Nanjing City, Jiangsu Province, launched a movement called “ten thousand people discussing government organizations”. They listened widely to the opinions of deputies to the National People’s Congress, CPPCC commissars, people from six districts, industrialists and businessmen and also government officials. They solicited opinions through daily and evening papers and the internet. They asked people not only to fill in the forms but also to give concrete views. On the basis of these views, they formed a forum discuss to 88 organizations in the city. Afterwards, they held a meeting called “a year to change working style” and
circulated the results of this movement. They praised the 10 best organizations and punished the 5 heads of the organizations which got the poorest comments. For example, the main head of Real Estate Bureau was removed from his post in the party. They also submitted to the Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress of the city that they should remove him from his administrative post and reduce him to a lower rank. The 1800 high-positioned officials who attended the meeting were greatly shocked. Li Yuan-chao, the Municipal Party Committee Secretary, made a speech titled “Let people judge”. He said, the movement was a real public opinion poll and the 6.4 million residents of Nanjing City were the judges of the poll.