

Chapter 6

On “Social Management Innovations”

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Since 2011, “social management innovations” have become one of the most awesome concepts in China’s political life. From the central to the local level, consensus has been reached on the concept of “civil society”. Besides, a series of practices in reform and innovation have been carried out vigorously, Party and government reform in particular. A powerful current of reform has been formed from the bottom to the top to boost social construction. At the same time, the emergence of such new network media as microblog and public accountability by online citizens and other social forces have increasingly become important factors influencing public processes, bringing about a wave of bottom-up social construction forces or a civil society. These two steams of massive energy, which are surging across China, are being fermented and drawn nearer and nearer. Thus, it is worthwhile to show some concern for and make some in-depth research on this aspect.

After the “Two Sessions” [the National People’s Congress and the Chinese Political Consultative Conference (NPC&CPPCC)] of 2011, the author spent one year visiting seventeen cities, and had in-depth interviews with five administration officials in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Xinyang (in Henan Province) and Wuxi (in Chongqing Municipality). We can see that the consensus for lashing a powerful current of reform of social management innovation has at least been reached at the local governments. Though still at their initial stage, distinctive local reforms have begun to touch upon the core link of social construction: Party and government institutional reform, adjustment of the Party’s governing idea and creation of conditions for the growth of the society.

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1 Social Management Innovations to Start with Party and Government Institutional Reform

Reform must, first of all, start from the institutions of the Party and government themselves, which has always been the first proposition for reform. Seen from the course of social management reform by local governments at all levels, all regions invariably start with institutional reform to adjust structures of the Party and government, thus initiating readjustment of government-society relationship.

The existing system with divided departments has already found itself ill-afforded to meet the needs for social development at present. It is necessary to build a new system for reallocating resources and powers so as to solve the problem with insufficient institutional supplies in social construction. Furthermore, once reform becomes the work of only one department, the driving force for reform will be greatly weakened. For other departments, reform has become the business of this department, which has nothing to do with their own departments. Moreover, they would set up all kinds of obstacles, hence, the objectives of reform have become departmental objectives, and “reform” has become the pretext for some departments to seek departmental gains.

In 2007, Beijing established the Social Work Committee of Beijing Municipal Party Committee, an agency of Beijing Municipal Party Committee, and Beijing Municipal Social Construction Work Office, a constituent department of the government of Beijing, both of which work in the same office. In 2008, Beijing set up the Social Construction Work Leading Group and its Office, and Beijing Municipal Party Committee takes the lead in planning and deploying the work of social construction. In this case, the driving force for reform is strong, and requirements in terms of organization, mobilization and coordination are to some extent compulsive. Moreover, it also avoids the possibility that reform has become oriented to departmental interests.

The practice in Beijing serves as a reference to a dozen of cities nationwide. In 2011, Guangdong Province set up the Social Work Committee, in which the Party and government bodies also work in the same office. This committee is of very high standard, with Zhu Mingguo, deputy secretary of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, acting as its director, Liang Weifa, member of the standing committee of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, secretary of Guangdong Provincial Politics and Law Committee and director of Guangdong Provincial Department of Public Security, and Liu Kun, vice governor of Guangdong Province, as its deputy directors and Liu Runhua as its full-time deputy director. However, unlike in Beijing, the Social Work Committee in Guangdong Province does not have any “special functions” in respect of economic, social and personnel affairs such as registration and service purchasing, but only has coordinating functions among different departments. This has avoided the risk of running into conflicts with other departments.

In other places, like Wuxi in Chongqing Municipality, the Masses Work Committee led by the Party Committee was also established, headed by top leaders

as well. In Xinyang, Henan Province, the Masses Work Committee was also set up. In Suning, Hebei Province, the Organization Department was tasked with the promotion of social management innovation and a special office was designated to push the reform.

So to speak, it has become a widespread phenomenon that top leaders of the local Party Committee takes the lead to push on with social management innovations. Only in this way, can social construction be truly put onto the center of the agenda of the Party and the government. Otherwise, there will be no ways to push forward with social management innovations, since they are always on the sideline topics.

To be honest, though “the phenomenon of top leaders” has many advantages in consolidating resources, resolving conflicts and coordinating powers, it has one critical defect, that is, “policies may cease to be implemented once the responsible top leaders leave their office”. Currently, it remains a difficult issue how to turn these top leaders-promoted reforms into institutions.

2 The CPC Represents Interests of the Whole People

Social management innovations are meant to solve one extremely pressing and grim problem: strained relations between the Party and the masses, and between the cadres and the masses. Various forms of petitions, forced demolitions due to land requisition and other issues are causing strained relations between the Party and the masses, and between the cadres and the masses. The first problem encountered in social management innovations is how to properly solve these problems. The view that some problems are provoked by “a handful of” hostile people will only further aggravate the case. In fact, in many regions, such approaches to analyzing and addressing problems have turned out to bring about just the opposite of their wishes. In preliminarily dealing with the problem in Wukan, the same thinking was also adopted, which turned out to make the situation even more acute. What does this prove? It proves that the practice of treating part of the people as hostile forces is no longer working.

Xinyang in Henan Province used to be a “major source of petitions” across the country, where the Party and government are compelled to passively dealing with petitions. Therefore, Xinyang started to transform its mindsets. Wang Tie, the then secretary of Xinyang Municipal Party Committee, put forward “the working methods of four family-related issues” (take the masses as family members, take each letter from the masses as a letter from their family, take affairs of the masses as home affairs, and take work related to the masses as a family undertaking), the core of which lies with the mindset that “the masses are our family members”. This attempts to change the previous thinking methods and solution approaches of class-based analysis, which helps alleviate to some extent the existing situation of “separation of the Party and the masses”, “separation of officials and civilians” as

well as “civilians subordinate to officials”. Once such a concept becomes institutions, all problems related to petitions in Xinyang are resolved all of a sudden.

Behind the transformation of mindsets, there underlies a question: who on earth does the Communist Party represent, a part of a class or the whole people? Even if it represents a great majority of the people, there are still 1% of enemies who remains to be eradicated. In the whole country, it would be quite a large group.

I think we should raise such a question: whether in time of peace the ruling Communist Party can represent the whole people? The thought of “Three Represents” has been pushed one step forward. With one step further forward, it will be a “Party for the Whole People”.

That the government is to deliver service or to conduct management is also a critical question. Should a service-oriented government focus on “management” or “service”? Does it represent departmental interests, or interests of interest groups, or interests of a region, or interests of the whole society? At present, reform is not merely confronted with problems with interest groups, but also the danger of national interests being taken advantage by departments and even the government and the Party to seek their own benefits. These problems, which are to be solved in the next step of reform, have been made clear in social management innovations in different regions. When Guangdong Social Work Committee was founded, Wang Yang, secretary of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, has expressly stated that the Social Work Committee should not have its own departmental interests, and its interests shall represent the interests of the whole society.

3 Allow the Society to Get Developed

To truly solve problems with social management innovations, it will be not enough to merely resolve conflicts between the Party and the masses, the cadres and the masses through reform, since no fundamental problems can be solved this way. The most fundamental problem lies with allowing the society to get developed.

The term of social management innovations indicates that the major task for China’s social development at the current stage is structural reform. Next, at certain stages and under certain conditions, social construction will become the priority. This implies the necessity for the society to get developed. Society is a whole set of systems, which includes various NGOs and mechanisms for participation. It is a holistic system in which citizens try to reach consensus by getting themselves involved and expressing their views.

Seen from experience in Wukan, there is indeed a whole set of self-organized systems in place, so that the government does not need to worry that the elected might stand on its opposite side, nor do the masses need to worry that the elected does not represent their interests. The masses should be allowed to makes decisions on issues concerning themselves, although the results are not that satisfactory in the first place, they prove to be quite well-done in a span of several months. This is the self-development of the society. As Secretary Wang Yang often puts it, if entrusted

with the work, the society may not do quite well at the beginning, but this conforms to the general trend. The government may do quite a good job in taking charge of everything, but this does not conform to the general trend. Given time and space, the society will definitely deliver a good job, better than that delivered by the government. We should provide opportunities for the society to trial errors.

Wang Yang, Secretary of Guangdong Provincial Party Committee, often says that, the government needs to make an exit and how much the government exits, how much the society will grow. It's true. If the government does not exit, it will be impossible for the society to get developed. Guangdong is making explorations in this respect. In Dongguan, some counties and districts are expressly required to give over space by reforming the Party committee structure and cutting government functions, an exploration made to create the first condition for the subsequent development of the society. In addition, a series of conditions such as reform of registration system, construction of guarantee capability will also be gradually put onto the agenda. This will be a slow process.

4 The Advance of State Sector and Retreat of Private Sector in Social Field Is not a Big Deal

We have also noticed that, during reform in some regions, some state-run organizations are directly converted into public welfare institutions, and some local governments set up some subordinate organizations in the name of social management organizations and purchase services from these organizations established by them themselves. Such a phenomenon is retrogressive, but cannot simply be regarded as an advance of the state sector and a retreat of the private sector. It is not clearly defined which is the “state sector” and which is the “private sector” in social field, welfare and charity in particular. Nevertheless, in any case, such a phenomenon will not become the mainstream in the on-going process of social management innovations. This shows that, similar to the dual price system at the beginning of the reform and opening up, those inside the system still get hold of a great deal of resources in the current stage of reform. But as the reform goes to deeper, it would be the same inside or outside the system, and such a phenomenon will also fade away. Besides, during the first round of service purchasing, it may be possible that the government hands over as many resources as possible to its familiar organizations, but it is a question whether it will be the same for the second round. This is because when the government purchases services from NGOs, the beneficiaries are the masses, who will finally lay the blame on the government if they find the services are poorly rendered. Therefore, such a phenomenon is nothing to be feared with.

5 Give Space to Unregistered Organizations

Recently, during an interview with a journalist from *caixin.com*, Li Liguo, Minister of Civil Affairs, expressed that we should draw on experience in Guangdong, and change the dual management system into direct registration, that is to say, unless otherwise specified or in case of special fields, a NGO does not need a competent business unit for its establishment, instead, it may be directly registered with the Department of Civil Affairs.

This step of reform is quite a major adjustment. This has reversed the previous mindset that “NGOs are unreliable”. Now NGOs have become collaborators of the government. In the past, some local governments would take it as their work achievement that “not a single NGO has been registered during the recent three years”. Now, after the shift from dual management to unified direct registration, the threshold for social development has been greatly lowered, and the problem with no channels for the registration of NGOs will accordingly be addressed. Soon afterwards, support for NGOs in terms of fund, policy and taxation will also be put onto the agenda.

We further suggest that, new regulations should contain institutional arrangements for the filing of the organizations that do not meet conditions for registration, and also recognize the legality of their conducting activities. Frequent references to the concept of “illegal organizations” are against the law, since the current Constitution of China expressly specifies that citizens have the freedom to form an association. To this end, first of all, we should weaken the concept of “illegal organizations” and specifically define those anti-socialism, anti-state, anti-humanity and other terrorist organizations that should be banned; second, NGOs of public benefit, especially those ordinary ones established for the purpose of serving society, should be given space even if not registered yet. Actually, there was a concept of “unregistered NGOs” before 1989, which means that unregistered lawful NGOs are not illegal. We hope that this concept will continue to be picked up. In the long run, it is equivalent to the concept of “arbitrary NGOs” in Japan.

The reform of the unified direct registration system has played a key role in releasing legality. However, legality is not the entire resources. NGOs may next be beset with such bottlenecks as inadequate capabilities, such as low social credibility, unbalanced allocation of resources and many other problems.

The development of NGOs will take as long as thirty years or so. We are currently at such a stage in which top-down social management innovations on one side and bottom-up civil society or social construction on the other side are yet to be fully docked. “One side is not willing to listen to what is claimed as “social management innovations” by the other side while the other side cannot understand what is claimed as “civil society” by one side. However, to our delights, forces on both sides have moved up and are slowly approaching each other. In some regions,

like Guangdong, such docking has been on the way. For example, in dealing with the Wukan incident, the society gets developed and the government is also undergoing reforms. But there is much to expect whether Wukan can subsequently establish a new governance agency.