(REVIEW ARTICLE)

A review of research literature related to the modernization of social governance

Yuzhong Sun *

School of Economics and Management, Heilongjiang Bayi Agricultural University, Daqing city, Heilongjiang Province, China.

Abstract

With the emergence of new situations in China's economic development, the overall domestic and international situation has become complex and volatile. The risks and contradictions affecting social harmony and stability are increasing, making the task of social governance more arduous and onerous. The modernization of social governance at the municipal level is not only an inherent part of the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity, but also a positive response to economic development and social changes during the social transformation period. This article systematically reviews relevant literature on the modernization of social governance, laying a foundation for in-depth research on the modernization of social governance.

Keywords: Social Governance; Modernization; Literature Review; Social Management; Collaborative Governance

1. Introduction

The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China made a more systematic deployment for strengthening and innovating social governance from six aspects: guiding ideology, basic pattern, institutional system, development level, mechanism tasks, and strategic objectives, forming a systematic viewpoint and relatively complete ideological system on the modernization of social governance under the overall framework of comprehensively deepening reform. The report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China even clearly put forward the ultimate goal of improving the social governance system, perfecting the social governance system of joint construction, joint governance, and shared benefits, enhancing the efficiency of social governance, smoothing and standardizing the channels for the expression of mass demands, interest coordination, and rights and interests protection, and building a social governance community where everyone is responsible, everyone fulfills their responsibilities, and everyone enjoys. To achieve these goals, we must constantly innovate and improve in the practice of social governance. Since the concept of "social governance" was proposed, scholars at home and abroad have conducted a large number of studies. Sorting out these results is conducive to conducting more in-depth research on the issue of "social governance" on this basis.

2. Current research status

Since the reform and opening up, the unprecedented economic system transition and social structure transformation have brought unprecedented vitality to China's social development. At the same time, the diversification of interests and social diversity have also put forward new requirements for the social governance system. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China first replaced "social management" with "social governance", which marks the transformation of the government's governance philosophy. In recent years, academic research on issues related to social governance has mainly focused on the connotation, subject, mode, and modernization of social governance.

---

* Corresponding author: Yuzhong Sun

2.1. Research on the connotation of social governance

The rise of neoclassical economics has propelled the rapid development of the market economy, compelling the government to relinquish more authority and allow the market to regulate the economy. However, public demand and electoral politics have not weakened the government's social management functions, and the "welfare state" remains the government's primary choice. The substantial public welfare expenditures have made the government struggle, making it inevitable for the government to procure public services and goods from the market. Simultaneously, technological advancements, economic growth, and the accelerated pace of globalization have led to significant changes in the social demographic structure, with "almost all industrialized countries experiencing rapid population aging" (Peters, 2013)[1]. The government must reform management methods, enhance efficiency, and reduce the cost of social management. The "governance" trend is flourishing. "Social governance is not simply catering to a certain theoretical trend or a set of new slogans artificially created, but a theoretical and practical response of governments to changes in economy, politics, and ideology." (Sun, 2005)[2]

According to the definition of the Commission on Global Governance, "governance" refers to the sum of ways in which multiple subjects jointly manage public affairs. This definition emphasizes the management model of non-governmental organizations and social forces. It underscores that this kind of governance is inevitably a form of "collaborative governance" (Ansell and Gash, 2008)[3.] Among them, the public crosses the boundaries between public and private in a "collaborative governance" manner (Emerson et al., 2012)[4].

Obviously, the purpose of social governance is to realize and safeguard the rights of the masses, improve social welfare, and maximize public interests. In terms of methods, it inevitably emphasizes the participation of multiple subjects, that is, advocating the participation of the entire society (Jiang, 2014; Yu, 2014) [5]-[6]. The "Decision" of the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China pointed out that the main key points of social governance in China lie in "four adherences", namely "adhering to systematic governance, adhering to governance according to law, adhering to comprehensive governance, and adhering to source governance". The "four adherences" guide scholars to explore the connotation of social governance.

2.2. Research on social governance models

The social governance model is the traditional core content of social governance research. Many scholars have proposed various social governance models from innovative perspectives. Some scholars have proposed five governance subject participation paths, including negotiation, civil society, information exchange, voter, and confrontation, while proposing six inherent collaborative variables such as strengthening government legitimacy, enhancing government responsiveness, improving citizen capabilities, enhancing government credibility, increasing government trust in citizens, and strengthening citizen effectiveness. The core of this collaborative governance model is to adhere to a citizen-centered approach (Cooper et al., 2006) [7]. Other scholars have proposed that non-governmental organizations (NGOs) can participate in social governance through four ways: integration of leaders with the government, expanding the diversity of decision-making suggestions in the government decision-making process, government imitation of NGOs, and NGO lobbying (Brass, 2012) [8].

Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, the governance approach in the social field has undergone three evolutionary stages: "social control - social management - social governance" (Guo, 2019)[9]. In the "social control" stage, the social governance model was characterized by the government's "unit system" and "registered residence system" for "unified management"; while in the "social management" stage, the social governance model was a "government-led" combined with "limited participation of other organizations" (Zhang, 2018)[10]. With the development of the economy and society and the transformation of government functions, the social governance model is bound to shift from the "unified management" model to the "diversified governance" model (Chen, 2020)[11]. However, in the interactive pattern of government-led and social organization-coordinated co-governance, the relationship between various subject positions and the ways they play their roles are different, leading to different social governance models (Feng and Ye, 2023)[12]. Scholars have conducted various discussions on social governance models from the perspectives of organizational structure setting, power operation mechanism, and functional relationships (Chen, 2023)[13].

2.3. Research on modernization of social governance

Social governance needs to adapt to the rapid changes in society and the rapid development of the market economy, achieving alignment between governance models, governance effects, and modernization development. This is the modernization of social governance. The modernization of social governance includes two aspects: the modernization of the social governance system and the modernization of governance capabilities. It encompasses the institutionalization, scientification, standardization, proceduralization, and refinement of the social governance system.

At the same time, social governors should be adept at using legal thinking, legal methods, and legal systems to govern society, transforming the advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics into the effectiveness of governing society. The scientific connotation of the modernization of social governance includes four aspects: improving social governance methods, stimulating the vitality of social organizations, innovating effective systems for preventing and resolving social conflicts, and improving the public safety system (Xu, 2014) [14]. After the proposal of the Chinese path to modernization, the connotation of the modernization of social governance has evolved with the times, which can be summarized as: a people-centered social governance concept, a social governance system of "co-construction, co-governance, and sharing", a social governance mechanism of "integration of three types of governance", a social governance system of "one axis with multiple co-governance", and a social governance form of bidirectional interaction between "top-down" and "bottom-up". Based on existing research, the elements of the modernization of social governance include at least six aspects: people-oriented principles, multiple subjects, a sound legal system, system integration, consultative co-governance, and efficiency orientation (Chen et al., 2020) [15].

2.4. Case study on social governance

Regional differences in natural endowments pose challenges to the implementation of social governance. Apart from focusing on the connotation, models, and value orientations of social governance, existing research often delves into analyzing and summarizing the successes and failures of social governance practices across different regions. For instance, the application of "grid management" in social governance in Nanjing City (Liu, 2015) [16], the unique role of trade union organizations in social governance in Yiwu City, Zhejiang Province (Lang, 2008) [17], and the practice of the "trinity" governance model involving party organizations, public service centers, and consultative organizations (Zhan, 2017) [18]. These case studies provide specific practical observation windows for the research on social governance, while also laying a realistic foundation for theoretical evolution.

3. Research review

Strengthening social governance is an inevitable result of the transformation of government functions, and the modernization of social governance is an essential requirement of the Chinese path to modernization. Previous research has primarily focused on theoretical discussions about the connotation and extension of social governance and its modernization, while case studies have been more based on observations of the structure and operation of social governance within administrative regions, lacking systematic observations centered around public events.

4. Research Prospects

Future research on the modernization of social governance may focus on the following aspects:

- Integration of macro strategic layout and micro governance practices. The research will simultaneously focus on the macro strategic layout at the national level and specific governance practices at the grassroots level, exploring how to combine top-level design with grassroots innovation to achieve the goal of modernizing social governance.
- Rational selection and value-oriented return of governance tools. The research will focus on the scientific selection of governance tools, while emphasizing the value of governance themes, and paying attention to how to embody humanistic care and enhance risk resilience in social governance.
- Construction of social governance theory and discourse system with Chinese characteristics: Research will place greater emphasis on constructing and developing social governance theory and discourse system with Chinese characteristics, reflecting China's unique political background, economic level, social development, and cultural concepts.
- Application of digitalization and information technology: With the rapid development of digitalization and information technology, future research will explore how to utilize these technologies to enhance the efficiency and quality of social governance, encompassing the application of big data, cloud computing, artificial intelligence, and more in social governance.
- Social organizations and social participation: The research will focus on the role and function of social organizations in social governance, as well as how to enhance the democracy and effectiveness of social governance through social participation.
- Coordination between social governance and economic development: The research will explore how to achieve modernization of social governance in economic development, encompassing topics such as rural revitalization, common prosperity, and social risk management.

- Application of interdisciplinary research methods: Future research may adopt more interdisciplinary methods, integrating theories and methods from multiple disciplines such as politics, sociology, management, and law, to comprehensively analyze and address issues in the modernization of social governance.
- International comparison and cooperation: The research may enhance international cooperation in international comparison and social governance, learn from the experience of other countries in modernizing social governance, and share China's experience.
- Sustainability of social governance: The research will focus on the long-term sustainability of social governance, encompassing aspects such as environmental protection, resource management, and social equity, in order to achieve comprehensive economic and social development.
- Addressing emerging challenges: As society evolves, new challenges such as cybersecurity and public health emergencies are constantly emerging. Future research will focus on how to effectively tackle these emerging challenges to ensure social stability and development.
- These research directions will help promote the modernization of social governance and achieve social harmony, stability, and sustainable development.

5. Conclusion

The essence of social governance lies in the process of achieving and safeguarding the rights of the masses, enhancing social welfare, and maximizing public interests, emphasizing the joint participation of multiple stakeholders in social management. The study of social governance models primarily focuses on exploring the status of various governance stakeholders. The distinctions in the relationships between the government and other governance entities serve as the basis for differentiating between various governance models. The modernization of social governance is an inevitable requirement in the process of modernizing the economy, society, and technology. It places greater emphasis on the "people-oriented" approach to social governance. The study of individual cases in social governance reflects the heterogeneity of social governance and is a key focus for future research. Future research on social governance will be manifested in the integration of macro and micro perspectives, the combination of instrumental rationality and value orientation, the fusion of tradition and technology, and the integration of local and international perspectives.

Compliance with ethical standards

Disclosure of conflict of interest

No conflict of interest to be disclosed.

References

[1] B. Guy Peters. The Future Governance Model of Government [M]. Translated by Wu Aimin et al. Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2013:16

[2] Sun Xiaoli. The Concept of Social Governance in Western Countries and Its Enlightenment [J]. Social Science Research, 2005, (02): 7-11

[3] Ansell C. and Gash A. Collaborative Governance in Theory and Practice. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory. 2008, 18(4): 543-571.

[4] Emerson K., Nabatchi T. and Balogh S. An Integrative Framework for Collaborative Governance. Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory. 2012, 22(1): 1-29.

[5] Jiang Xiaoping. Innovation in the Social Governance System in the Process of Modernizing National Governance [J]. Chinese Public Administration, 2014, (02): 24-28

[6] Yu Keping. Some Thoughts on National Governance Evaluation [J]. Journal of Huazhong University of Science and Technology (Social Sciences Edition), 2014, 28(03): 1-2

[7]   Cooper T. L., Bryer T. A. and Meek J. W. Citizen-centered Collaborative Public Management. Public Administration Review. 2006, 66(s1): 76-88.

[8]   Brass J. N. Blurring Boundaries: The Integration of NGOs into Governance in Kenya. Governance. 2012, 25(2): 209‒235.

[9]   Guo Ye. Legal Speculation on the Modernization of Social Governance in the New Era - A Review of the Academic Seminar on "Legal and Jurisprudential Thinking in Social Governance" [J]. Governance Research, 2019, 35(02): 98-106

[10]   Zhang Wenxian. 40 Years of Rule of Law in China: Journey, Trajectory, and Experience [J]. Journal of Social Sciences, Jilin University, 2018, Vol. 5.

[11]   Chen Baifeng. The Evolution and Challenges of Grassroots Social Governance Models [J]. Learning and Exploration, 2020, (09): 46-53+2

[12]   Feng Ziwen, Ye Guiping. Structural Construction of Modern Social Governance Forms in China [J]. Journal of Shanxi University of Finance and Economics, 2023, 45(S1): 13-15

[13]   Chen Yusheng. Practical Models, Fundamental Attributes, and Operational Definitions of Social Governance [J]. Sociological Review, 2023, 11(02): 5-25

[14]   Xu Meng. The Scientific Connotation, Value Orientation, and Implementation Path of Modernization of Social Governance [J]. Academic Exploration, 2014, (05): 9-17

[15]   Chen Chengwen, Chen Jing, Chen Jianping. Modernization of Social Governance in Urban Areas: Theoretical Construction and Practical Paths [J]. Jiangsu Social Sciences, 2020, (01): 41-50+8

[16]   Liu An. Grid Management: The Operational Logic and Practical Features of Urban Grassroots Social Governance System - A Case Study Based on Q District, N City [J]. Journal of Jianghai, 2015(02): 99-107+238-239

[17]   Lang Xiaobo. Research on the Transformation of Trade Unions and the Role of Government from the Perspective of Social Governance: A Case Study of the Trade Union Rights Protection Model in YW City, Zhejiang Province [J]. Journal of Beijing Institute of Administration, 2008, (06): 34-39

[18]   Zhan Guobin. Structural transformation, power interaction, and grassroots social governance innovation: An analysis of the "three-in-one" model in Beilun District, Ningbo City [J]. Comparative Economic and Social Systems, 2017(02): 167-177