

The Nationwide Mechanism—China’s Institutional Strengths in Responding to Serious Public Emergencies

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Abstract: The nationwide mechanism is an administrative system distinct from the traditional bureaucracy in dealing with major tasks in China. Through the literature analysis method, it has been revealed that the nationwide mechanism consists of participants, relationship design, and regulations, and that the mechanism exerts its institutional advantages in the face of serious public emergencies. Specifically, its advantages mainly include leadership, organizational, resource, and value advantages.

Keywords: Nationwide Mechanism; Serious Public Emergencies; System

Introduction

In the post-epidemic era, China has shown amazing governance capabilities in responding to serious public crises, which reflects a national effort. In the literature, scholars have referred to this system of mobilizing national power to respond to major tasks as the nationwide mechanism. It has been proven that the nationwide mechanism has shown great advantages in China’s response to serious public crises. However, few studies have been conducted to summarize the role of the nationwide mechanism in serious public emergencies, which is the aim of this article.

1. Literature review

1.1 The nationwide mechanism

At present, there are two main views on the origin of the nationwide mechanism among Chinese scholars: one is the migration theory, in which some scholars argue that the “nationwide mechanism” is not a product of China, but an imported one^[1]; the second is the indigenous theory, in which some scholars believe that the “nationwide mechanism” already existed in China’s agricultural society, but was only practiced in the construction of some major projects due to the private ownership of the means of production^[2]. Chinese scholars in the 1980s and 1990s tended to define it as a system of carrying out economic activities under the unified arrangement of the government. In the early 21st century, Chinese scholars tended to define it as an administrative system in which the government with legal authority uses administrative means to accomplish its goals. Currently, Chinese scholars generally define it as a system in which the central government mobilizes the government and society to accomplish major tasks with a high degree of cohesion during a specific period.

1.2 Serious public emergencies

Some scholars point out that public emergencies are events that occur suddenly, seriously endanger the safety of public life and property, and bring challenges and pressure to the government^[3]. Regarding the substantive difference between public emergencies and public crises, public crises are commonly used in academia, while public emergencies in practice. In

order to be consistent with the practice custom, the term of public emergencies is advocated. The Emergency Response Law of the People's Republic of China defines emergencies as natural disasters, calamitous accidents, public health accidents, and public security incidents that occur suddenly, may cause social harm, and require measures. It is widely believed in Chinese academic and practical circles that emergencies can be classified into four levels: especially serious, serious, relatively serious and common. Among them, serious emergencies are commanded and coordinated by provincial governments, while especially serious emergencies are decided and deployed by the State Council. Some scholars emphasize that serious public emergencies are characterized by two aspects: first, strong relevance to public interest and second, large number of people involved. In summary, serious emergencies in this study also include especially serious emergencies, the affected areas of which beyond one provincial government and require central guidance and regulation^[4].

2. Explanation of the nationwide mechanism

The institutional design theory holds that participant, relationship design, and regulation are the three major elements of a system. Based on this, we deconstruct the nationwide mechanism into participants, relationship design, and regulations.

2.1 Participants

The central government and local governments are the main participatory subject of the nationwide mechanism, and the public as a whole is the participatory object, which consists of both internal and external staff of the administrative system. Internal staff of the administrative system include civil servants, institutional workers and other government officials, while external staff of the administrative system include informal organizations, families, private companies and individual citizens. As analyzed above, the nationwide mechanism is a universal system that integrates the forces within and outside the administrative system. It provides the basic human resources for the management of serious public emergencies through cohesion.

2.2 Relationship design

In terms of relationship design of the nationwide mechanism, it is mainly reflected in vertical and horizontal relationships. From the perspective of vertical relationships, the nationwide mechanism is a hierarchical system dominated by the central government, and there is a strict hierarchical relationship between the central government and local governments, which is determined by the administrative authority of the central government over the local governments, and the local governments strictly carry out the administrative orders of the central government. From the perspective of horizontal relationships, the relationship between the government and society under the nationwide mechanism can no longer be summarized by governance or service. In terms of horizontal relationship, the relationship between government and society can no longer be summarized in terms of governance or service, but the government and society form a cooperative relationship within a short period of time; and this cooperation is led by the government with administrative authority, who guides and stimulates the flow of social forces by setting a series of rules.

2.3 Regulations

In terms of regulations of the nationwide mechanism, there are two main components: constraint regulations and power regulations. From the perspective of constraint regulations, the nationwide mechanism is usually a response system in which the interests of the people are seriously damaged, the number of affected people is large, and the scope of the accident is extensive. It is urgent, requiring the completion of tasks as soon as possible; the space is extensive, requiring powerful intervention; and it covers multiple regions, requiring several local governments to cooperate. As for the power regulations, the operating power of the nationwide mechanism comes from within and outside the administrative system. In terms of the internal administrative system, policies and opinions of the central government are usually conveyed to the local governments, while sometimes some are made public directly to officials and people. The practice proves that attention

attached by local governments depends largely on the supervision and intervention of the higher level of government. Administrative intervention from high to low like this is administrative control. As far as the external administrative system is concerned, the power is different from that of the internal administrative organizations, which mainly originates from the society. The process of the government issuing policies, guiding and integrating spontaneous, loose and powerful civil forces is social mobilization.

3. Advantages of the nationwide mechanism in responding to serious public emergencies

3.1 Leadership advantages

Serious public emergencies test the government's ability to lead itself and the people. The Communist Party of China (CPC) is the strong leader of China's nationwide mechanism, and it has shown great advantages in responding to serious public emergencies. First, the breadth of the areas involved in the leadership of the CPC ensures that it has accumulated rich leadership experience in various fields such as politics, economy, culture, society, and ecology, and has achieved fruitful governance results. Some scholars point out that primary party organizations under the leadership of the CPC play a crucial role in protecting and serving the people in serious emergencies^[5]. Secondly, the CPC is a political party established by Chinese law and supported by the people, with strong and powerful legitimacy, which is an important prerequisite for effective leadership. Finally, the leadership philosophy of the CPC is always closely combined with working for the happiness of the people and serving the people, which is an important guarantee for safeguarding the interests of the people.

3.2 Organizational advantages

The occurrence of serious public emergencies often causes a large impact on the established administrative organization and social order. The institutional design theory suggests that all systems have a certain lag, and the original governance system, despite its great effectiveness, has been cumbersome, slow to respond and lacks of professional in the face of serious public emergencies to a certain extent. The government and society under the leadership of the CPC form the organizational basis of the nationwide mechanism, which has the advantages of stability, flexibility and professionalism in responding to serious public emergencies. In terms of stability, the government is the dominant organization in the nationwide mechanism, integrating companies, families and individuals in social organizations, avoiding the possible confusion of order and waste of resources caused by social governance. In terms of flexibility, organizations under the nationwide mechanism are not rigid, but can make timely adjustments according to the actual situation, with a "problem-handling-feedback" logic. Some scholars have pointed out that organizations under the nationwide mechanism achieve a dynamic balance of democracy and centralization, not only preserving democracy but also avoiding the excessive democratic input, which may lead to missing the time to deal with serious public emergencies^[6]. In terms of professionalism, organizations under the nationwide mechanism take into account the role of experts, respect science in responding to specific problems, and think tanks help them analyze these problems, thus solving them effectively.

3.3 Resource advantages

One of the characteristics of serious public emergencies is the large number of people involved and the great public damage. People in serious public emergencies usually face shortage of food, insufficient medical supplies, traffic jams, communication interruptions, housing collapse, panic and other problems, which can be summarized as the lack of various resources. Therefore, when responding to serious public emergencies, the primary need is to mobilize enough resources to restore normal social order; secondly, it is necessary to timely and precisely deliver resources to the areas and citizens damaged by the emergencies, so as to effectively meet the needs and safeguard the interests of the people. In responding to

serious public emergencies, the nationwide mechanism lays the foundation with its resources from the government and society, and is the core advantage of responding to serious public emergencies. On the one hand, the nationwide mechanism represents the effective integration of the resources of the government and society. On the other hand, the mechanism is able to quickly pool resources and deliver them precisely to the areas of need through government guidance.

3.4 Value advantages

The occurrence of serious public emergencies is a major test for both the government and society. From the perspective of the government, government staff need to do a good job of responding to serious public emergencies in a timely manner, which involves a lot of work such as collecting information, dividing authority and responsibility, collecting and allocating resources, counting the number of affected people and housing them, etc. From the perspective of the society, especially the people who are greatly affected by serious public emergencies, most of them are physically and mentally injured and suffer loss of properties. The nationwide mechanism unites the strength of the government and society, and on this basis, groups such as party members, volunteers, medical and nursing staff, rescue officers and soldiers, and teachers, band together to form a strong spiritual force and cope with difficulties. On the one hand, the staff dealing with serious public emergencies are inspired, and on the other hand the affected people are given more confidence in being helped, and it can also promote the formation of the value advantages of “standing together through thick and thin” in the whole society.

4. Conclusion

Serious public emergencies greatly damage and threaten people’s interests, are sudden and destructive in nature, and have a huge impact on the stable social order and administrative system. The nationwide mechanism is an important system in China for responding to serious public emergencies, which provides a strong response through vertical administrative control and horizontal social mobilization. The leadership, organizational, resource, and value advantages of the nationwide mechanism lay a solid leadership foundation, and provide strong organization, sufficient resources, and good values for responding to serious public emergencies, and offer a useful way to the government to handle serious public emergencies.

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