

International Journal of Social Research (ISSN:2576-5531)



The Role of Public Participation in Local Government Public Decision-making --taking Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project in Guangdong Province as an Example

Zhou zhiwu

Academy of Marxism, Guangdong University of Foreign Studies, Guangzhou, China

ABSTRACT

Public participation in public decision-making is of great significance for speeding up the transformation of government functions and embodying people's ownership. Therefore, in the process of local decision-making, expanding public participation and attaching importance to the important value of public participation are of far-reaching significance to the formulation of local decision-making in China. For various reasons, the role of public participation in local government decision-making has not been well reflected. To achieve effective public participation in local government decision-making, we need to improve the quality of public political participation and cultivate good political participants; we need to improve the public participation mechanism in government public decision-making, expand the channels for public participation in decision-making; strengthen the guidance and supervision of the media, and purify the media environment for public participation in government decision-making.


Keywords: public participation; local government; government decision-making; role

*Correspondence to Author:

Zhou zhiwu
Academy of Marxism, Guangdong
University of Foreign Studies,
Guangzhou, China

How to cite this article:

Zhou zhiwu,.The Role of Public Participation in Local Government Public Decision-making --taking Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project in Guangdong Province as an Example. International Journal of Social Research, 2019; 3:36.

 eSciPub
eSciPub LLC, Houston, TX USA.
Website: <https://escipub.com/>

Public decision-making refers to the decision made by public organizations in the process of managing social public affairs. It is the first link of public management and runs through the whole process of public management. Public participation in public decision-making is an important way for citizens to supervise the constitutional rights of the government and accelerate the transformation of government domination into governance, which reflects the significance of the people as masters of the country. In recent years, with the further implementation of administrative openness, the public in China has made some achievements in participating in local government public decision-making, but there are still some shortcomings, such as unclear participants, lack of legalization of public participation in administrative decision-making and so on. Therefore, examining the public participation in administrative decision-making in China and improving the mechanism of public participation in administrative decision-making as soon as possible is an important part of the current construction of democracy and the rule of law in China. Taking Heshan nuclear fuel project in Jiangmen City of Guangdong Province as an example, this paper discusses the role of the public in the public decision-making of local governments.

1. Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project

In July 2013, the Heshan Municipal Government had planned to introduce a nuclear fuel processing project, which focused on the construction of facilities such as uranium conversion, uranium enrichment, nuclear fuel element manufacturing and a "one-stop" nuclear fuel processing industry chain. By 2020, it was planned to build an annual production of

1000 tons of metallic uranium with advanced pressurized water reactor nuclear fuel to form manufacturing energy's industrial park. If this project is implemented, it can stimulate the economic development of Heshan City and promote its economic and industrial upgrading. "The completion of nuclear fuel projects can promote domestic electricity consumption, solve the current situation that other fuels are in short supply and demand, solve the unreasonable situation of energy structure, and bring enormous economic benefits." ¹On July 4, 2013, the announcement that the Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project will be completed in Heshan City aroused strong opposition in society. Some people even held up the slogan "Want Life Not GDP", and many protests appeared on Sina Weibo. On July 12, a large-scale anti-nuclear campaign broke out in Jiangmen. Nearly 1,000 people gathered in the streets and held up banners such as "Return My Green Home" to protest the establishment of the project, which attracted media attention. The main reasons for the public's opposition are four aspects: fear of taking risks, lack of in-depth knowledge of nuclear technology and industry, and fear that people with low health safety and knowledge level will be affected by rumors. Under a series of public pressure and a large number of public strong opposition, the Heshan Municipal Government finally announced that the project will not be applied for.

2. Problems of Public Participation in Local Government Decision-making

In the process of democratization of social politics, Heshan Municipal Government's practice of expanding public participation in political life is commendable. However, for various reasons, the government finally left a

bad impression on the public. Throughout the process of Heshan public participation in local government decision-making, there are the following problems:

2.1 The level of public awareness is not high, and the level of understanding of decision-making is not deep.

After the reform and opening-up, with the continuous strengthening of China's economic strength and the continuous progress of democratic political construction, China's public participation in political consciousness has made great progress, and the number and types of public decision-making projects have been increasing, but there are still serious imbalances in many places. Because of the higher education level of the citizens in the economically developed areas, the public's awareness of rights will be stronger and the measures taken will be more rational. On the contrary, the public's awareness of rights in the rural areas will be weaker and the actions taken may go to extremes. At the same time, for the majority of the public, because they can not fully grasp the information, know less about the policy, and lack of the possibility of realizing the policy and other factors, leading to public dissatisfaction with government decision-making, especially public decision-making endangering their own interests. In Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project, the majority of farmers in Jiangmen area are not well educated, easy to take extreme ways, coupled with imperfect government decision-making, and so on, which eventually aroused the mass's scale opposition.

2.2 The motivation of public participation is selfish and the government's decision-making is not long-term.

The public is likely to be affected by the coverage of welfare and its widespread coverage. They participate in political life and are very concerned about their own vital interests. Therefore, when making public decisions, most of the decision-making actors are more concerned about their own interests, such as nuclear power plants, the location of nuclear waste disposal facilities, resulting in the impact of local residents' lives, and so on. These are more specific lives. For the sake of private interests, the public may take unreasonable actions, such as going to extremes to vent their discontent, rather than adopting a procedural and standardized way, mainly because the public only sees their own interests and does not realize their social responsibility. Of course, the government's decision-making does not take into account the interests of the masses and the long-term interests, which is also an important reason for the strong opposition of the masses. Throughout the Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project, it is precisely because the government departments see their immediate interests and do not fully consider the public's wishes. The preparation of the public announcement project is very inadequate, which leads to the failure of the government's public decision-making.

2.3 The government decision-making system is imperfect and public participation in politics is immature.

Around the theme of whether public participation in government decision-making projects can fully exercise the right to participate in projects, some research institutes designed and issued questionnaires. There are more than 40 questions related to the current situation and problems of public participation in government

decision-making projects. Results In reality, 81% they do not like to mention it in advance. Take of the respondents thought that the system of participation in decision-making projects was not perfect; 84% of the respondents thought that the public was in the "symbolic participation stage" and "basically no participation stage" in the process of government decision-making."Influenced by the traditional history and culture of our country, the public has a strong dependence on government decision-making and feels that everything should be handled by the government, thus fostering inertia in political life." ²One of the important reasons for the low level of public participation in Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project is that the government failed to improve the publicity system and public opinion survey when making decisions on nuclear fuel projects.

2.4 Government's awareness of public participation is inadequate

The government neglects the importance of public participation in the process of public decision-making, which often leads to the impartiality of public policy. "Although the government has made great efforts to implement laws and regulations concerning public participation, such as the Price Law and the Hearing Measures for Government Price Decision-Making, the regulations on public participation in specific management actions are still unclear and have not been really implemented, so they have become constraints on the public. So it is one of the reasons for the serious obstacles to participation. ³Affected by the positive system of traditional plans and imperfect laws, the mass consciousness of the government has not been changed, and the willingness of the masses to participate in government decision-making is not strong, and

the opinions of the masses. If the government can pay attention to the public's will, listen carefully to the public's voice and make the government people-oriented in the process of implementation of Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project, there will be no failure in project decision-making.

3. Reasons for the Problems of Public Participation in Local Government Decision-making

3.1 The immature political psychology of public participation in government decision-making

Influenced by our country's strong traditional political culture, our public participation consciousness is very weak, and the ability of public participation is limited, which restricts the enthusiasm of public participation in political life. The decision of value orientation of traditional culture is crucial to the influence of right consciousness. In Chinese traditional culture, the lack of civic cultural content has directly affected the development of civic rights awareness. The traditional political culture of our country keeps the public's enthusiasm for participating in government's decision-making in check. It holds that even if public decision-making is related to its own interests, under the government's ruling power, its supervision and participation in decision-making are in vain. Even if it does not actively participate in political life, the government can arrange all political students. So we can rely on government departments to make all decisions. The government is influenced by the idea of "official standard". It feels that the traditional government has the final say of implementing the concept of governance, so that the enthusiasm of the public to participate in

government decision-making is greatly suppressed. This makes the public unable to relax their mentality and worry about the political rights, which leads to the decline of the scientific nature of decision-making.

“Under the planned economy system, compared with the state and units, the public's political status is not concerned, and the public individual does not even have the opportunity and possibility to put forward their own demands and rights to the state and units, so the public's consciousness of the subject of rights is greatly suppressed.”⁴ “Because of the deep influence of the planned economic system, the state power is unimpeded. Under such a historical background, the public generally lacks awareness of rights and forms a dependent personality.”⁵ The imagination of passively exercising the right to supervise decision-making can be seen everywhere in life: “The cost of time, spirit and material is very high, and it is not compatible with the actual effect of seeing one's own opinions, etc. The phenomenon of hitchhiking is also one of the reasons for the low enthusiasm of public participation in public decision-making process.”⁶

In the decision-making process of Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project, the enthusiasm of public participation in the public announcement system is not high. One of the important reasons is that the public participation consciousness is not strong, and the public's dependence on government decision-making is very strong. Therefore, the enthusiasm of public political participation is not high at the beginning without being familiar with the situation of the project. After knowing the safety of the project, many voices of opposition began to appear,

because they have been concerned about their own interests, which is an important manifestation of the immaturity of public participation in political psychology.

3.2. The Public's Political Participation System is Imperfect

To realize the right of public participation, the key is to improve the incentive mechanism. “Unfortunately, there is no incentive mechanism for public participation in our country. There are many problems in public participation. At present, we urgently need to take practical measures to develop incentive mechanism for interests that can fully mobilize public participation. Through legislation, we also need to constantly improve the legal system to encourage public participation. The ways of participation, the perfection of participation procedures, the increase of participation methods and channels, etc., should be implemented to cultivate the consciousness of public participation objectives, form correct guidance of social values, and fully mobilize and give play to the enthusiasm of public participation.”⁷

Even though the Constitution and laws stipulate more subjects and rights to participate in decision-making, incompatible laws and regulations make these rights and obligations impossible to further specify. People are not familiar with the power to participate in public policies and the implementation process, which will lead to two consequences: first, citizens can not get specific legal protection when exercising their rights; second, citizens can not be subject to specific legal restrictions when exercising their rights to participate, and illegal participation can not be timely punished by law.

Because of the imperfection of legal safeguard

measures in our country, the law can not protect the individual political participation of the public at many times, or there are unrestricted forms of participation beyond the legal norms, which lead to the indifference of a large part of people to politics and the possible confusion of the political situation. Some even non-institutionalized participation appears, which makes it more difficult for the public to participate effectively in government decision-making. Therefore, in the process of decision-making and implementation of Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project, because there is no perfect public participation mechanism, the public can not express their real willingness to participate in the decision-making process. Therefore, in order to express their willingness, they have to demonstrate and sit in front of the government to express their real willingness. Political voice.

3.3 Low degree of openness and lack of transparency of government information

The information asymmetry between the government and the public, the lack of transparency of government information and the low degree of openness have always been prominent problems. Local governments often hold too much information that is not public, but only a certain degree and a certain range of information disclosure also has a great randomness. Formalism may also appear, resulting in serious waste and waste of social resources, so that the scope and degree of public participation in policy-making are restricted and constantly restricted. It restricts the rapid development of economy and the advancement of democratic politics. For example, the government's covert operation not only damages the image of the government, but

also damages the legitimate rights of the public, making it more difficult for the public to participate in decision-making. In the event that Jiangmen nuclear fuel project was cancelled due to public opposition, the government was transparent about the benefits of the project, did not strengthen the public's knowledge of nuclear fuel, and plunged the public into panic about their own health and safety. In order to enable the public to participate in the formulation of local government policies and realize the interaction of rights in the process of formulating policies, the public must first be "informed". Only when the public has a certain understanding of the procedures and circumstances in the process of formulating public policies, can they participate in them better and play a role in promoting the democratization of public policies, which is the most basic premise for the interaction of rights. Therefore, it is necessary to strengthen the construction of local government information openness as soon as possible, increase transparency of work, and implement government affairs openness. Only in this way can Jiangmen government reduce public resistance in the process of implementing public decision-making, enhance its prestige and facilitate the smooth implementation of decision-making.

3.4 The Government's Interest Orientation Affects Decision-making

In China's political life, because of the deep-rooted privilege mentality, the phenomenon of specialization and privilege often appears. The most concentrated expression is the idea of "official standard". Because the hierarchical privilege in the form of "official standard" has brought great special

benefits to most people in real life, the constantly strengthening consciousness of "official standard" has distorted many people's psychology. For example, some leading cadres use politics as a tool to seek the interests of small groups and individuals, and try their best to obtain the privileges of public resources so that they can obtain special interests. A large number of facts in real life have proved that the existence of hierarchical privileges has a very bad impact, which not only hinders the development of social political civilization, but also greatly hampers the enthusiasm of the public to participate in politics, and is not conducive to the harmonious development of society. "The government's self-interest is manifested in the following aspects: first, it will seek benefits for local governments, that is, public policy is seriously affected by localism. The second is to seek the interests of the administrative departments, which reflects the characteristics of the interests of the public decision-making departments. Thirdly, Leaders' own interests, including Leaders' abuse of power, will lead to deliberate implementation of wrong decisions."⁸

Since the government considers public decision-making more from the personal interests and achievements of the region, the department or the leaders, it is likely to cause damage to national policies and harm to the public. Self-interest will not restrict the administrative power, and the internal restraints of the administrative agencies are not perfect, coupled with the effectiveness of the external mechanism is not enough, leading to administrative behavior can not be standardized and orderly, making effective public participation difficult to form. From the 10-day

announcement of Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project to the failure of government decision-making examples, we should reflect on the government's unsound evaluation mechanism, and more importantly, the government's serious self-interest psychology. The nuclear fuel project can indeed bring huge economic benefits to Jiangmen City, but the risk assessment of the construction project is carried out under the pressure of mass demonstrations and public opinion, not before the decision-making of the government, which leads to the loss of the value of public participation in the decision-making of government investment projects.

Construction started in April and began to be announced in July. The voice of public query came from the construction projects already started in April, which had a huge suspicion of "walking procedure". After the project was announced, it attracted the attention of many citizens and caused great panic to the masses. However, the actions taken by the government did not solve the public's problem. All kinds of doubts and worries brought about by the government's decision-making. The government itself knows little about the project and insists on carrying out the project of public decision-making despite the opposition of the masses, so it finally leads to the failure of decision-making. If the government fully respects the opinions of the public, the public decision-making process will tend to be institutionalized and scientific, so that the possibility of successful implementation of the policy will be higher. "In the market economy, the self-interest of local governments leads to a trade-off between their own interests and public interests in the process of formulating policies.

However, this leads to the dilemma of the government's choice between itself and the public"⁹

4. Path Choice to Achieve Effective Public Participation in Local Government Decision-making

Over the years, due to the awareness of public rights and the continuous expansion of public participation channels, decision-making and implementation activities in public management are increasingly related to public life, and in many practices, the government has finally made concessions and compromises to the public. How to enable the public to participate effectively in the environment of public decision-making is a problem that the government has to face. To solve these problems, we need to promote public participation in government decision-making from the following aspects:

4.1 Improve the Quality of Public Political Participation and Cultivate Excellent Subjects of Political Participation

The citizen's consciousness education should be raised to an important position, and the citizen's political participation ability should be constantly studied and improved by himself. Because the traditional Chinese culture is deeply rooted in the subordinate culture and the official-based ideology, the formation and development of civic consciousness is largely inhibited. The lack of civic consciousness, independent personality and the concept of rule of law makes citizens lack political responsibility and the spirit of ownership in political life. Only by eliminating people's passive participation in political life, absolutely obeying the government's decision-making and depending on political consciousness, and constantly

improving the enthusiasm of the public to participate in political life, can we cultivate qualified citizens required in the good political and cultural environment of our country. Therefore, it is necessary for citizens to establish the correct sense of the people as masters of the country. At the same time, it is necessary to increase investment in education funds for citizens' political life and enhance their sense of identity for political life, so as to enhance their determination and confidence in participating in political life and promote better implementation of policies.

4.2 Improve the mechanism of public participation in government public decision-making and expand the channels of public participation in decision-making

"Listening to public opinions, testing technology and decision-making by public authorities have become an important part of modern scientific decision-making. In particular, the decision of the public authority is an important basis for the former two."¹⁰In order to ensure that the public can participate in political life extensively, and to increase the publicity, transparency and fairness of the administrative process, citizens' right to participate can not be ensured until it is implemented. They are also divorced from practice and from the masses. Only when the public's right to know, participate and supervise is fully guaranteed, can the scientific decision-making be promoted. Only by widely listening to public opinion can the government actively engage the public in the process of public decision-making and form a good communication bridge between the government and the The need for public participation in all public decision-making does not mean that public participation can enter all public

decision-making indiscriminately. Only by actively mobilizing the enthusiasm of public participation and implementing effective decision-making mechanism can the government properly handle public participation. Therefore, the government should also pay attention to the quality of decision-making in the process of decision-making, not just the quantity. At the same time, we should pay attention to the acceptability of public decision-making. More importantly, we need to build a platform for the effective participation of the public in government decision-making, and constantly develop the channel construction of public participation, so as to enable the public opinion to be fully expressed.

To ensure and improve the democratization of public decision-making through the publicity of public information. To ensure that information can be released and released in a timely and accurate manner, the transparency of decision-making can be improved, and the public's right to know in the decision-making process can be guaranteed, the most important thing is the responsibility of the government. "Establish a long-term mechanism for accountability in project decision-making. Accountability requires a long-term mechanism to ensure the implementation of decision-making. ¹¹ With an accountability mechanism, public participation can be highly valued by decision makers in the decision-making process. In real life, the practice of holding hearings, opening mayor's hotline and holding open day activities in the process of public decision-making can promote the improvement of public participation mechanism in decision-making.

4.3 Strengthen the guidance and supervision of

the media and purify the media environment for public participation in government decision-making

As a product of modernization, mass media has been widely embodied in all aspects of social life in the context of economic globalization and integration, and has become an important part of people's lives, and its influence is also increasing. Moreover, the mass media can disseminate information and provide a good cultural environment for the government's decision-making. Only in this way can the government listen to the public's voice, and the public can get a deeper understanding of the government's decision-making, facilitate the public to participate in the government's decision-making, enhance the enthusiasm of participating in the government's public decision-making, and also facilitate the public to have a better understanding of it. The government supervises the process of implementing public policy, and ultimately makes the public decision-making of local government more democratic, scientific and procedural.

Mass media can call on the public to participate actively in the government's public decision-making, and is a good information medium. But at the same time, it has certain constraints. For example, it will be impacted by the socialist market economic system and then lose its own objectivity; imperfect laws and systems will also affect the full play of the media function. Therefore, the government should rely on the policy means of macro-control, strengthen the harmony between the public and the mass media, and promote a win-win situation between the government and the mass media.

5. Concluding

In order to improve the feasibility of decision-making, we must strengthen public supervision over government departments, so as to make the public more confident in government decision-making and establish good government prestige. Four major problems of public participation in local government decision-making must be solved: disjointed awareness of public participation behavior, weak awareness of public participation, diverse public motivations and unscientific and inadequate awareness of public participation. On the one hand, the government should cultivate the political psychology of public participation in government decision-making, improve the public's political participation system, improve the degree of government informatization and increase transparency. On the other hand, the public should improve the quality of political participation and cultivate good political participants. Only by enhancing public participation in government decision-making can government decision-making be better implemented.

References

1. Jiangmen Nuclear Fuel Project Grounded in Public Opinion [N]. China Youth News, July-14,2013.
2. Cai Dingjian. From Public Participation to Good Governance of the Government [J].China Reform,2010(11).
3. Chen Gehan,Zeng Wei. On the double contradictions faced by the protection of human rights in China [J].Journal of Hubei Commercial College,2000(12).
4. Hu Yongqin.Orderly participation of citizens: scientific public decision-making The cornerstone

of democratization [J].Academic Exchange, 2005(12).

5. Guo Tao, Li Liying. Analysis of the dilemma of public participation in public policy-making [J]. Economic Forum, 2005(12).
6. Perfecting the public participation mechanism of major projects [N]. China Construction Daily, July-1,2010.
7. Chen Ping, Liang Zhongming. On the Effective Implementation of Citizen Participation in Public Decision-making [J].Journal of Lanzhou University (Social Science Edition). 2007(11).
8. Jin Taijun, Zhang Jinsong. Government Self-interest and Its Control [J]. Jianghai Journal, 2002 (2).
9. Liao Zhide. On the public participation in administrative decision-making: a case study of Panyu waste incineration power plant project in Guangzhou [J]. Legal system and society. 2010 (13).
10. Hu Benchun. Reflections on perfecting the hearing system of administrative decision-making in China [J]. Journal of Shanxi Provincial Party School of the Communist Party of China. 2009 (05).
11. Liu Ming. Briefly on Citizen Participation in Administrative Decision-making --- Taking the construction of Xiamen PX Project as an example [J]. Journal of Sichuan Institute of Technology (Social Science Edition). 2008 (04).]

