

A Brief Analysis of Social Governance in China and Its Implications: Lessons from the United States

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Abstract

How to make social governance in a country is a complex problem that need to study and explore the realistic conditions, especially in the development process of China's social governance is not long, practical experience is insufficient, especially the need for further research in theory, management mode and method. Based on the current situation of American transportation, social assistance, social security, city riots in new situation and other on-the-spot investigation and thinking, and fully understand the concept and requirement of social governance of Chinese characteristics, and then comparing the different with the differences in development history, culture and governance model, tries to combine the American social governance experience in order to provides some reference and basis for exploring the method of social governance under the new situation in China.

Keywords

Social governance; China; The United States; Difference compariso.

1. Introduction

The concept of social governance in China was introduced relatively recently, with a more systematic proposal first made in 2013. In a document of 981 words, the idea of "innovating the social governance system" was discussed, presenting a new governing concept—social governance. Social governance refers to the process in which various entities, including the government, social organizations, enterprises, communities, and individuals, collaborate equally through methods such as cooperation, dialogue, consultation, and communication. By following legal principles, these entities guide and regulate social affairs, social organizations, and social life, ultimately aiming to maximize the public interest. In China, governance has traditionally been carried out mainly through the form of social management [1]. The primary distinction between social management and social governance is that the former emphasizes the government as the central entity responsible for managing society as a whole. This includes the governance of not only the political, economic, ideological, and cultural subsystems, but also the broader social system, which encompasses all aspects of social life. In practice, "social management" is often all-encompassing and covers a wide range of fields and issues [2]. As a result, the government faces significant management challenges. Particularly with the rapid development of society and the economy, the areas that require governance are increasing, and the demands of society and the public are becoming more specific. Continuing with the old model of social management is clearly inadequate to meet the needs of the current society [3]. Therefore, future social management must not only fully leverage the government's macro-management capabilities but also actively coordinate and mobilize the broad social forces to assist the main governing entities in effectively and accurately addressing the problems present

in society. This is also the underlying intention and primary reason behind the recent introduction of the new concept of "social governance" in China.

As the development of social governance in China is relatively recent, with limited practical experience, it differs significantly from the theories, methods, and approaches used in the previous model of social management. This requires continuous innovation and adaptation to find a new model of social governance that aligns with China's unique characteristics. However, the transition from social management to social governance will take time and may be a lengthy process. To achieve effective social governance, a comprehensive body of theoretical knowledge and related expertise is required. Moreover, with the rapidly changing social and economic landscape—such as the fast development of industries, which inevitably leads to a high turnover of practitioners—social governance faces significant challenges and demands higher standards. Therefore, research and exploration into social governance theory, principles, and specific methods have become increasingly urgent [4]. Based on this, this paper draws on the governance experiences of countries with more developed social governance systems, studying their characteristics and advantages in order to improve social governance in China. Using the United States as a case study, this paper aims to clarify the differences and disparities between China and the United States in terms of current social governance practices, development history, governance models, and cultural philosophies. By referencing the U.S. experience, this study seeks to provide insights and a foundation for exploring new methods of social governance in China under current circumstances.

2. Field Study and Reflections on the Current State of American Society and Its Governance

To better compare and analyze the similarities and differences in social governance between China and the United States, this paper first examines the current state of social security and governance in both countries [5]. In today's digital age, information is highly developed, and it is possible to easily access a wealth of information from both domestic and international sources. However, in order to gain a more comprehensive understanding of the current situation in the United States, the author conducted an in-depth field study on American social security and governance from 2014 to 2015. The study covered three main routes: the Central, Eastern, and Western lines. The Central route primarily includes cities in the Midwest and South, such as Oklahoma City, Orlando, Miami, and Houston. These cities are characterized by a relatively high number of inbound tourists and have unique management features. The Eastern route covers major cities such as New York, Washington D.C., Philadelphia, and Baltimore, which are the political and economic centers of the United States. These cities, especially New York and Washington, have large populations, with some areas being densely populated. Their traffic and security management bear some resemblance to China's. The Western route includes cities such as San Francisco, Salt Lake City, Las Vegas, and San Diego, which have significant Chinese populations and, like China, face complex management challenges. This paper primarily focuses on analyzing and discussing aspects of American governance that are particularly well-managed, including traffic management, social assistance, public safety, and responses to urban unrest in the new social context.

2.1. Current State and Analysis of Traffic Management in the United States

Given that traffic and its management have been a major focus of attention in China, this paper will first address this issue.

(1) Traffic Regulations

Traffic regulations in the United States vary slightly from state to state, but when it comes to traffic rights of way, requirements for drivers, and police enforcement, they are generally consistent across the country [6].

A detailed analysis of U.S. traffic regulations reveals certain differences, or at least notable distinctions, compared to China, especially in terms of practical traffic management. For instance, in the U.S., vehicles are required to yield to pedestrians unconditionally at all times, and the rules surrounding "STOP" signs (such as stopping at intersections with a "Stop" sign) are more strictly enforced.

(2) Vehicles Must Yield Unconditionally to Pedestrians

In general, pedestrians in the United States follow traffic signals just like vehicles. However, when driving through an intersection, if there are pedestrians crossing the street, all vehicles must stop and yield to the pedestrians, regardless of whether there is a designated crosswalk. U.S. law grants pedestrians absolute right of way, and this rule applies even in busy areas like Fifth Avenue in Manhattan. During a nearly three-hour stay in Times Square, the author observed that even when pedestrians jaywalked, vehicles in the green light direction would stop about 3 meters away from the pedestrians and wait for them to pass before continuing. Of course, this is also related to the overall quality of drivers and society, but legal provisions play a crucial role as well. In the U.S., it is always the vehicle that must yield to pedestrians, never the other way around. If a driver dares to challenge this legal principle, they not only face heavy fines but may also be subject to imprisonment. Therefore, the clarity of traffic regulations and their enforcement are key factors in governance. While China also has similar laws, the enforcement is often lacking.

(3) Red "STOP" Sign

Traffic regulations in the United States stipulate that when encountering a red "STOP" sign, vehicles must come to a complete stop under all circumstances, even if there are no pedestrians or other vehicles present. The vehicle must remain stationary for approximately 3 seconds before proceeding. If there is a crosswalk ahead, even without a marked line, vehicles must stop completely—whether or not there is a "STOP" sign—and only proceed once it is safe to do so, ensuring that no pedestrians or other vehicles are in the way.

It is important to note that any actions such as momentarily tapping the brakes, failing to come to a complete stop, or rolling through the stop sign will result in financial penalties or even legal consequences. In contrast, in China, "STOP" signs are often visible at intersections or on roadways, but many drivers either ignore these signs or are unaware of their meaning, treating them as mere decorations. This lack of adherence to the law is often the cause of traffic accidents.

(4) Emergency Vehicles and Police Enforcement

According to U.S. law, whether on the same or opposite side of the road, if a social ambulance, fire truck, or police vehicle is sounding its siren, all vehicles must immediately pull to the right and come to a complete stop, allowing the emergency vehicle to pass before proceeding. Failure to comply with this regulation results in severe consequences.

U.S. law enforcement is strict and unyielding, and misunderstandings cannot be easily rectified. For instance, in North Carolina, a tragic incident occurred in which a deaf-mute young man named Harris was driving when he was pulled over by the police. Due to his hearing impairment, Harris did not hear the siren, and he failed to stop when the police attempted to pull him over. While attempting to communicate with the police officer using sign language, his gestures were misunderstood as an aggressive threat, and the officer immediately shot him, tragically resulting in Harris's death.

In contrast, while China also has strict traffic regulations, the absolute enforcement of these laws can be challenging. Many drivers in China do not have a deep awareness of yielding to

emergency vehicles, which can hinder the progress of emergency operations. This is an area where China could learn from the U.S., by strengthening the awareness of drivers to yield to emergency vehicles, thus ensuring more effective governance. However, it is important to note that China's traffic management approach is more human-centered and prioritizes safety, which is more in line with the social realities of the country.

2.2. Current State and Analysis of Social Assistance in the United States

The United States has a well-established social assistance system, which is primarily divided into public assistance and welfare benefits. The construction of its social security system began as early as the 1930s, and nearly 90 years later, it can be divided into three stages of development

(1) The Establishment Stage (1930s-1960s)

The foundation of the U.S. social assistance system began in the 1930s. In 1933, President Roosevelt implemented the "New Deal" and signed the Federal Emergency Relief Act. In 1935, the U.S. Congress passed the Social Security Act, marking the first time the federal government became involved in addressing issues of unemployment and poverty.

(2) The Development Stage (1960s-1980s)

During this phase, the U.S. social assistance system expanded. President Kennedy enacted the Public Welfare Amendments, shifting the focus of welfare policy from direct financial assistance to the poor to providing services and skills training for low-income individuals.

(3) The Reform Stage (1980s-Present)

Since the 1980s, the U.S. has reformed its social assistance system, expanding the range of services to over 70 types of social assistance programs. These include aid for families with dependent children (AFDC), Supplemental Security Income (SSI), Medicaid, housing assistance, food assistance, educational grants, and general welfare assistance.

From the perspective of the process and methods of assistance, the U.S. social assistance system plays a significant role in regulating income distribution, supporting low-income families, resolving social conflicts, promoting social equity, and maintaining social stability and security. It is a critical component of the government's social welfare framework. The U.S. has a long history of establishing and improving its social assistance system, and successive administrations have been able to effectively implement these programs within their capacities. The experience and practices of the U.S. in this regard offer valuable lessons for China to consider and learn from.

2.3. Public Safety in the United States and Emerging Trends

Certainly, as societies progress, new situations continually emerge in every country. The United States is no exception, and its public safety and law enforcement have increasingly become more difficult to control.

(1) Frequent Riots and Unrest

The United States has experienced numerous riots throughout its history. On September 30, 1962, the government forced schools to desegregate, which led to violent protests by white students. On July 23, 1967, a large-scale Black riot broke out in Detroit. On April 9, 1968, Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was assassinated during a speech, which triggered widespread Black riots and arson across the nation. On March 3, 1991, racial tensions over law enforcement in South-Central Los Angeles sparked protests among African Americans and Latinos, eventually escalating into a multi-day riot. From April 29 to May 2, 1992, Los Angeles experienced one of the largest and most devastating riots of the 20th century, which shocked the world. The riot resulted in 58 deaths, over 2,300 injuries, 11,900 arrests, and the destruction of more than 5,000 buildings. On April 9, 2001, in the southwestern city of Cincinnati, Ohio, the shooting

death of 19-year-old African American Thomas by a white police officer led to large-scale riots in the city.

In recent years, similar incidents have occurred. For example, in Baltimore, Maryland, the largest city in the state, a young African American man, Freddie Gray, died under "unnatural" circumstances while in police custody. This led to protests from April 25 to 26, 2015. The protests eventually escalated into a full-scale riot, including acts of looting, vandalism, and arson. From a social perspective, about 80% of Baltimore's population is Black, and the racial divide between Blacks and Whites likely played a significant role in the unrest. When social security and governance are seen as key factors in these events, the situation becomes even more complicated. Further investigation revealed that the three most dangerous gangs in Baltimore had also joined the protests, using the opportunity to exact revenge on police actions and declare a united front against law enforcement. This not only severely impacted the safety and security of local residents but also posed a significant challenge to police authority.

(2) The severe social security situation.

Due to changes in the social landscape, issues with laws and their enforcement have gradually emerged. What was once seen as a "paradise" by some foreign visitors has now become bewildering. Even in what should be the safest places, such as university campuses, security vulnerabilities have surfaced. For instance, in 2017, media reports highlighted the case of a missing Chinese student, Zhang Yingying. Zhang, a student from China, had traveled to the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign to study. On June 9, around 1:00 p.m. local time, she disappeared while leaving the campus to meet someone about signing a lease for an apartment. Tragically, she was later found to have been abused and killed.

(3) Severe Gun Control Issues

Gun control is also a hot topic in the United States. For example, on the evening of October 1, 2017, around 10 p.m. local time, the world was shocked by one of the deadliest mass shootings in U.S. history, which took place outside the Mandalay Bay Hotel in Las Vegas during a music festival. The 64-year-old white gunman, Stephen Paddock, opened fire from the 32nd floor of the Mandalay Bay hotel at the crowd below, which included several country music artists and approximately 30,000 spectators. The attack resulted in at least 59 deaths and over 527 injuries. This was not an isolated incident; there have been multiple shooting cases, especially school shootings, such as those at Virginia Tech, Oregon University, the University of Southern California, Sandy Hook Elementary, MIT, Santa Monica College, Purdue University, Marysville Pilchuck High School, Umpqua Community College, and Northern Illinois University, among others.

In terms of social security, China has a more effective approach to handling such issues, which is why many people, both domestic and international, claim that "China is the safest country in the world." However, we should not become complacent. There are still areas where improvement is needed, such as pedestrians jaywalking, vehicles not yielding to pedestrians in time, delays in yielding to ambulances, and the lack of a systematic social assistance program. These issues require substantial improvements and should be gradually addressed through research on social governance theory and practical implementation.

3. Development of Social Governance in China and the United States

In the second half of the 20th century, with the rise of new public management theory, the concept of "Governance" gained favor in both academic and political circles. In the 1990s, the United Nations Global Governance Commission defined "governance" as "the totality of the many ways in which individuals and various public or private institutions manage their affairs." The Commission listed four characteristics of governance: 1) Governance is not a set of rules or regulations, nor is it a singular activity, but rather a process. 2) The foundation of governance is

not domination, but rather coordination.3) Governance involves both the public and private sectors.4) Governance does not necessarily refer to a formal institution, but it does rely on continuous interaction. It is noteworthy that in this description of the characteristics of governance, four key concepts can be distilled: "process," "coordination," "pluralism," and "interaction."

3.1. Development of Social Governance in the United States

Initially, Western countries, including the United States, did not consciously discuss or address the topic of social governance. Instead, Western sociologists focused on researching social work and the implementation of social welfare policies provided by the government. It was only later that the concept gradually expanded into the theoretical domain [7].

The American War of Independence (1775–1783) liberated the U.S. from British colonial rule, but after gaining independence, it established a loose confederation with most of the power remaining at the state level. At the time, a unified and effective national governance system had not yet been formed. The main phase of social governance in the U.S. began in the late 19th century. During this period, the country underwent significant social transformation, which gave rise to a host of social challenges. These included rapid population growth, the increasing population ratio between Black and White Americans, rising racial tensions, inadequate urban infrastructure, overcrowded housing, severe environmental pollution, and other living conditions problems. In addition, issues such as imperfect laws, moral decay, and widespread political corruption exacerbated social conflicts. These problems greatly hindered the progress of the country and society, and it became essential to find effective control measures. As a result, many scholars proposed a range of corresponding topics for social governance.

3.2. Development of Social Governance in China

Understanding the history of social governance in Western countries, such as the United States, mainly serves as a reference for China in its future efforts to improve social governance. Therefore, it is also necessary to analyze the development of social governance in China.

(1) State-Controlled Social Governance

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country faced a multitude of challenges and the government exercised comprehensive control over all social issues, establishing a highly centralized planned economy system. At the grassroots level, social management was primarily organized around the "unit" system, which managed workers and handled various social affairs and management tasks. The urban social management system was based on "neighborhoods" or "residential committees," which managed social workers, civil welfare, and social relief or preferential treatment for various groups through a street-residential committee structure.

(2) Adjustments and Reforms in Social Management during the Reform and Opening-Up Period

After 1992, the focus of China's work shifted to the economic sector. During the reform process, there was a structural division in the services and governance related to social management, with governance responsibilities gradually moving down to local levels.

(3) Innovation of the Social Governance System

In November 2013, China dedicated a special chapter to the "Innovation of the Social Governance System." The concept of "social governance" became a crucial part of the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities.

4. Social Governance Models in China and the United States

Overall, social governance in various countries generally aims to manage at the community level. The management models typically include government-led, community self-governance, and hybrid governance models.

4.1. Governance Model in the United States

The United States primarily follows a "strong government, strong society" model for social governance modernization, using the rule of law as the fundamental governance tool. It coordinates and balances the relationship between the state and society through institutionalized political participation. Beyond the government, it is important to note the active role of citizens in community governance. Since citizens are directly impacted by the outcomes of social governance, community members play a significant role in shaping the governance process. For example, in many neighborhoods, citizens are not only concerned with public safety but also with improvements to the community environment, such as the appearance of buildings, exterior wall colors, and even landscaping. If a property differs from others, neighbors have the right to request changes to align with the community standards.

Additionally, it is interesting to note that in the United States, ideological and political education contributes to social governance, particularly in areas like civic education and moral education, generally aligning with the country's cultural and traditional values [8].

4.2. Governance Model in China

Based on past experiences, China's national governance was primarily based on a model of social management. However, since 2013, there has been a focus on stimulating the vitality of social organizations, with an emphasis on correctly handling the relationship between the government and society. The goal is to accelerate the separation of government and society, promote clear rights and responsibilities for social organizations, encourage self-governance according to the law, and enable these organizations to play an active role. This means that more responsibility for social governance must be delegated to social organizations and individuals. For example, public services and issues that are more suitable for social organizations to manage should be entrusted to them. Support and development of volunteer organizations are encouraged. The goal is to decouple industry associations and chambers of commerce from government bodies, prioritize the cultivation and development of industry associations, technology organizations, public welfare charities, and urban-rural community service organizations. These organizations are to be established and directly registered according to the law. Additionally, the government has strengthened its management of social organizations and foreign non-governmental organizations (NGOs) operating in China, guiding them to conduct activities according to the law.

As a result, new forms of social governance have emerged. For instance, the NGO participation model in community governance in Shenzhen is a notable example. In this model, NGOs are extensively involved in community governance, taking on a large number of public services, which has effectively improved the level of community governance and enhanced the quality of life for community residents.

5. Reference and Innovation

After comparing the current status, development history, and governance models of social governance in China and the United States, it is clear that although there are areas in which the U.S. and other Western countries still need to improve, there are aspects of their governance that China, as a latecomer, can learn from. China should continue to leverage its institutional advantages and, in the context of rapid social and economic development, combine these with

the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. This will help enhance the capacity for social governance, particularly by fully mobilizing the power of social organizations and individuals, while utilizing the most advanced and reasonable technological methods for governance. Based on this, the following actions are recommended.

(1) Fully Utilize Institutional Advantages to Enhance Public Awareness

Leverage China's unique institutional advantages to increase public awareness of social governance and the role of legal frameworks in fostering a harmonious society.

(2) Establish and Improve Legal Systems for Social Governance

Social governance methods must shift from control and regulation to a law-based approach. Strengthen the concept of governance by law, using legal thinking and legal methods to manage society. This will help promote a legal environment where actions are governed by law, problems are solved through legal means, and conflicts are resolved through legal mechanisms.

(3) Focus on Preventative Measures and Shift Governance Focus

In governance, the focus should shift from reactive measures to proactive, preventive strategies. This includes moving from quick fixes to addressing root causes, and from post-crisis management to prevention at the source. Greater attention should be paid to people's livelihoods and institutional development, advancing governance early on to prevent social conflicts and tensions from escalating. It is also essential to build and improve the mechanisms for protecting the rights of the people, led by the Party and the government, to effectively prevent and resolve social conflicts.

(4) Strengthen Legal Penalties and Innovate Punishment Systems

On the basis of law-based governance, increase the severity of penalties and innovate the punishment system. For example, during traffic law enforcement, implement strict penalties for vehicles failing to yield to pedestrians or emergency vehicles. Also, introduce penalties for corruption within social welfare systems, such as banning corrupt individuals or organizations from engaging in certain industries.

(5) Utilize Advanced Technological Tools such as WeChat Governance

Utilize modern communication tools, especially WeChat and similar platforms, to explore new methods of social governance under China's current circumstances. This includes developing integrated governance systems and building interactive networks between social and community governance, ensuring a more efficient and responsive governance model.

6. Conclusion

After comparing the current status, development history, and governance models of social governance in China and the United States, it is clear that although the social realities, as well as the social and economic development in both countries, differ, their governance models and methods also show certain differences. Both systems have their own strengths and weaknesses. However, given that China's social governance is still in its early stages of development, it is important for China to accelerate the exploration of key theories and methods suitable for its own social governance. This process should be based on the principle of absorbing and learning from the advanced experiences of other countries, in order to meet the needs of China's rapidly developing society and economy.

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