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Public Participation in Environmental Management from the Perspective of China

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Introduction

Public participation in the environmental issue refers to the public having the right to take part in the environmental decision making and management through certain procedures or ways; they have the right to supervise the government decision and the unit or individual use of environmental resource with the aim to conform to activities concerning the public interest and protection of the environment (Xiong, 2007). It is essential for sustainable development in which the residents are authorized to participate (Tomas, 2006).

Public participation facilitates environmental improvement and cost reduction (Jonathan, 2001). This significance is especially important for developing countries, which are short of resources and urgently need economic progress. Take the current situation of China for example, to better people's livelihood has become the new mentality to deal with the international financial crisis and boost economic development. And strengthening public participation can be regarded as one of the powerful action. Comparatively, foreign scholars started this in field of research earlier and the progress is rather more mature.

The initial research is mainly concentrated on the theory of public participation in environmental management. Vroom and Yetton (1973) firstly put forward the Vroom-Yetton Model, expecting to achieve organizational goals by raising the decision acceptance through staff participation in management. Sample (1993) discussed the adaptation of the Model selection program and application condition in the field of natural resources decision making. Daniels et al (1996) also used the Model to analyze the public participation effect in ecological system management and decisions. Gradually, the public participation in environmental protection is promoted to the political and global altitude (Robert, 1989; Richard, 1999). In the late 1980s, the empirical study of public participation in environmental management process began to emerge. Enterprise participation cases (GyuLa, 1996; Robert and Linda, 1998), selection of participation model (Margerate, 1999), judgment of participation fairness (Lauber and Knuth, 1999; Webler and Tuler, 2000), appraisal principle of participation process (Carnes, et al, 1998; Bond, et al, 2004; Charnley, et al, 2005), international NGO participation (Jacqueline, 2001) and participation in water resources management (Dungumaro and Madulu, 2003) continuously extended the research perspectives and depth. In the late 1990s, attention was focused on the evaluation of the participation effect (Andrew, 1997; Luca and Jane, 2000; John et al, 2004). The conclusion that "policy" is more important for environmental protection than "participation" aroused deeper thinking concerning how to adopt policy support to make the participation more effective.

Although started later, Chinese scholars have made adequate achievement. Firstly, from the viewpoint of law, the Chinese constitution clarifies the validity of public participation. Environmental Protection Law, State Council Decision on the Issues of Environmental Protection, Water Pollution Prevention Law, Ambient Noise Prevention Law and Tentative Method of Public Participation in Environmental Effect Appraisal provide legal protection for public participation. Secondly, from the view of theoretical research, scholars discussed the principles (Chen, 1972), function (Yang, 1990), classification (Ye et al, 1994), main body status (Zhang, 1996), negotiation model (Ma, 2003), utility function (Xu, 2004), system interaction (Chang, 2004), value judgment (Tian, 2004), model (Qu, 2005), system revolution (Zhang, 2005), mechanism construction (Jiang et al, 2005), NGO (Song, 2006), rationale and countermeasure (Liu et al, 2006) of public participation. Thirdly, from the view of empirical study, scholars, such as Wu (1997), Zhao et al (1998), National Environmental Protection Bureau (1999), Zhang (2000), Wang (2003), Tao (2004) and Wang (2006), used the quota method described and analyzed the present status of Chinese public participation

in environmental protection in certain area and certain times. Fourthly, from the view of case study, Li (1998), Li (2001), Gao (2004), Hou (2004), Xiao (2004), Wen (2005) made the experience introduction of related project appraisals.

Relatively speaking, due to the late initiation, Chinese public participation in environmental management research is in the exploring and growing stage and few have made empirical analysis from the perspective of enterprises. Based on the enterprise investigation in a wide range of cases, this paper aims to expound the significance, insufficiency, reason and countermeasure of public participation in environment management. And the policy research will further develop more valuable ideas in this field.

Methodology and Result

Automobile Industry Chain Investigation

At the 9th International Automobile and Manufacturing Technology Exhibition (Auto Beijing 2006), the author took 37 auto enterprises as the interview objects, including auto manufacturers, system suppliers and design companies. The effective questionnaires were found to be 35. Among them, the auto enterprises included Dongnan Auto Company, Dibiya Auto Company, Chongqing Changan Lingmu Auto Company, Shengyang Huacheng Jinsong Auto Ltd, Dongfeng Electric Auto Ltd, Canghe Lingmu Auto Company, Leinuo Company, Beiqi Futian Auto Ltd, Beijing Auto Factory, ect; the auto suppliers included Kuodan-Linyun Auto Tyre Ltd, Panasonic Electric Company, Tangshan Aixin Cogwheel Ltd, etc; the design company was Wuxi Ruifeng Auto Designing Company. The relativity between "the force of government pressing on the investigated companies in environment management" and "the influence of the investigated companies in environmental policy with the government" is analyzed by SPSS (Pearson Correlation). Table 1 is the result.

Table 1 Relativity Analysis Result

Relativity Factors		Force of government	Influence of companies
Force of government	Pearson Correlation	1	0.192
Influence of companies	Pearson Correlation	0.192	1

(Source: the investigation conducted in November, 2006)

A Pearson Correlation coefficient of 0.192 shows that the relation between our government and auto enterprises in environment management remains in a low level, or the government and enterprises maintains a non-cooperation state. The ineffectiveness of the government execution makes our environmental laws and regulations powerless. In fact, government is not the only principal part to press the enterprises, the public also plays an important role in supervision. A more flexible control mode of public participation can promote the enterprise environmental performance. Experience indicates that the combination of government regulation, the public pressure and other methods will have considerable influence to control the pollution emission (Harrison, 2002).

Chinese CSR Investigation

Chinese CSR Investigation officially started from July 2006, and the whole process last 5 months. It concerned the independent legal enterprise or groups which have well operated more than 3 years in China and concentrated on the outstanding state-owned, private and foreign companies in CSR performance during 2005-2006 (Shan, 2007).

On the whole, 75.2% Chinese enterprises have accepted social benefit responsibility; 66.5% have realized the economic responsibility; regrettably, only 35% have noticed the environmental and cultural responsibility. Foreign company environmental responsibility awareness is most obvious, while private enterprise cognition of environmental protection remains rather low. The investigation shows it is legal norm and social supervision that greatly motivate CSR. The investigation which randomly sampled ordinary residents discovered that the public mainly regard the environmental protection, staff rights and interests protection, product quality and post-sale service as CSR, only 17% valued beneficent donations, which almost all the enterprises put on the priority list however. Apart from the agreement on product quality and service, the enterprises and public do have different understanding of CSR: most enterprises craved in donation or even public welfare marketing promotion in order to expand influence and set up a positive image, while the public pays most attention to staff and environment issues which are avoided or neglected consciously or unconsciously by the enterprises.

According to the investigation, the most repugnant event for the public is the insufficiency of CSR, which directly reflects the basic interests of the staff and customers. These problems attract the public attention because they have negative influence on the environment and closely relate to the living quality of the public.

Discussion

To some extent, the above investigation results show that present Chinese public participation in environment protection remain at a low level. Additionally, the Zero Research Consultation Group investigation, which had questioned 3777 ordinary residents in 20 cities, towns and rural areas by the end of September 2005, pointed out "high environmental awareness but weak participation of Chinese public"; the 2006 Chinese Citizen Environmental Awareness Investigation, which was organized by the Chinese Academy of Social Science, indicated that more public environmental awareness are awakening, but their cognition level was still low and their environmental behavior was far from customary. Based on the "attention but not participation" phenomenon, the following reasons are worth pondering:

First of all, the law has not been expressly granted the public environmental right, the right to know and the right to participate, the scope and depth of public participation in environmental protection has been limited. To be more specific, first, present Chinese environmental legislation overemphasized the obligation of public participation in environmental protection but neglected their right; it overemphasized the right of environmental supervision and management sectors but neglected their obligation and responsibility. Thus the legal procedure to introduce public participation is hampered. Secondly, the principle and procedure to open the administration have not been set up and the legal regulation for the environmental administrative management sectors to deal with environmental information failed to be made. Thus the public cannot obtain the information of daily environment quality and pollutant emission through legal channel and procedure. Thirdly, in the important practice aspect of public participation in environmental executive policy making, such as environmental planning, environmental standards and permit system, the regulation of public participation scope, extent and procedure is still lacking.

Secondly, the public hardly can access to the enterprise environmental information. Usually, they just depend on intuition to make judgment and are unable to obtain the specific information about pollutant hazards and hazards extent. However, the profit-oriented enterprises, who know much more about the production process, technology and sewage situation status, tend to conceal the information. And the public often must pay greater cost

in order to investigate the responsibility of polluters and protect their legitimate environmental rights and interests.

Thirdly, citizen responsibility and sense of participation is insufficient. Because of the long-term government leading working pattern, most public participation follows the top down form. To a great extent, the scope and effect of participation is decided by the main administrative department, and the people fail to really recognize that environment protection is their obligation. The 2005 Chinese Public Environmental Protection Index Report showed that over 40% of the public didn't know how to participate in concrete environmental protection activities. They would adopt the "wait and see" policy, and their "following the majority" mentality is prominent.

Suggestion

The above discussion indicates that the effective public participation calls for the interaction and cooperation of the trinity of government, enterprise and the public (Figure 1). The environmental management pattern of trinity constitutes the overall image of contemporary Rational Ecological Man (REM): government, as the representative of the public interests, is responsible for the law, policy and system making; enterprise, as main creator of material wealth, should take up social responsibility; the public, as the foundation of REM, should enhance environmental awareness and participation capability (Hong, 2006).

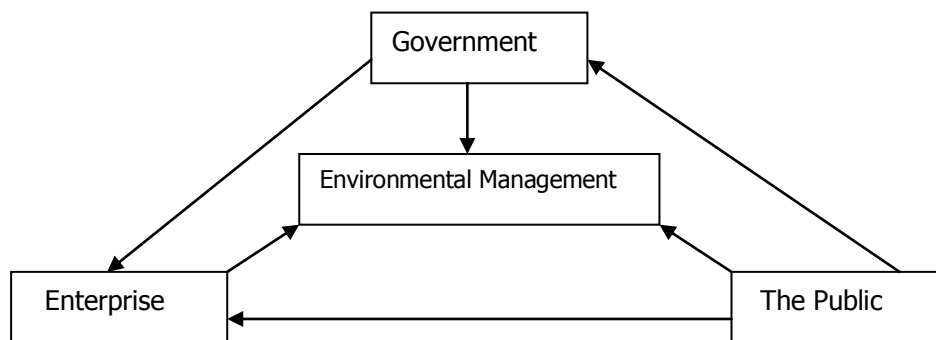


Fig 1 Pattern of Trinity Management

Firstly, improve the legal mechanism of public participation. Through legislation the public are stipulated explicitly to have the right to voluntarily establish environmental protection community, through which they can participate in environmental management; public organizations are authorized to have inquiry activities on the environmental issues; a citizen has the right to supervise and report the enterprise or individual illegal behavior and ask for administrative reconsideration, proceedings, civil action and attend criminal prosecution; citizen has the right to audit legitimate sector meeting of environmental issues, the people's court public trial of environmental case and take part in the law enforcement public hearing by all levels of government environmental management departments, etc. Additionally, a citizen has the right to make environmental influence evaluation for the important planning, policy, legislation, region development, construction items, concerning the environmental quality, and participate in environment law enforcement inspection etc.

Secondly, we need a perfect information disclosure system for a better foundation of public participation. The government should regularly announce some important environmental standard, such as environmental quality standard, environmental pollution discharge standard, environmental primary standard and environmental method standard, etc;

promptly and completely issue environmental concerning monitor information and technical standard in order to inform the public of relevant information and material; provide opportunities for the public to understand environmental decisions to increase the transparency of decision making; offer them opportunities, such as environmental related visit and inspect, testimony and examination, study materials, knowledge training or getting the environmental influence appraisal report, etc. to ensure the information obtained quickly and correctly; Enterprises should promulgate the environmental governance, relevant working and adverse effect behavior by environmental information disclosing. Enterprises, especially those put on the list of pollutant over-emission and over-standard, should announce the information in details, such as pollution governance, environmental compliance, government management execution, etc.

Thirdly, enhance CSR. CSR is not to beautify itself by charitable activities. If the production process recklessly pollutes the environment or neglect staff rights and interests, much more "purchasing beneficence" money can not recover the environmental destruction, not to mention the positive image of enterprise. Non-technological superiority refers to the key competitiveness of modern enterprises. Volunteer activities, such as donation for elementary education, reduction of product energy consumption, resources conservation, pollution decrease, etc, can gain the government and public support (Shan, 2007). Honda, BASF, Amway and many other multinational companies have shouldered CSR in strategic management in which ISO140001 systems are implemented. It comprehensively solves the possible externalities during product life-cycle, save the internal energy consumption and achieved sustained growth in economic benefits. The mature experience of multinational companies in environmental responsibility provides good reference to Chinese private companies.

Fourthly, raise the public environmental sense of responsibility. First, special laws and regulations should be made to ensure the environmental education, make it clear about the public rights, obligation of environmental education and the investment use of environmental education fund, the affiliation of each department and monitor sector with respective responsibilities for environmental education and execution. Second, carry out corresponding environmental education according to different regions and groups. In order to increase the public environmental protection awareness, educational methods of multi-objectives and multi-forms should be used. For example, on the one hand, in the developed area, the environmental education aim can be set higher: promoting environmental friendly consuming behavior, selecting green product and promoting the whole regional environmental awareness. On the other hand, the environmental education for the developing area should be highlighted for feasibility: solving the practical problem and firstly raising the environmental awareness of government and enterprise leaders. As far as different social groups, environmental education can be multi-level comprehensive system of school, society and in-service education trinity. Interesting and vivid forms of education will be more effective to make environmental protection to be important social morality standard (Xiong, 2007).

Conclusion and Future Work

Practice in developed countries proves that public participation is one of the important forces to impel the sustainable development of environmental protection and "the large-scale constructive weapon" to contain the illegal environmental behavior. Recently, the policies which enable the public participation more effective have become the hot spot of scholars' attention.

Statistics indicated that the developing countries consumption occupies 50% of GDP, while for the United States it is 70%. Therefore, there remains a quite big potential for the developing countries to expand domestic demand and reduce foreign economic dependence. If the government issues related policy promptly to ensure the public benefit and environmental protection, the green consumption can be effectively drawn, the CSR correspondingly promoted, the people's living quality consequently guaranteed and they will move away from the financial crisis finally. The environment friendly expending attitude initiated by the government can inform the public to avoid the following product: the products which will endanger the consumer's or other people's health; the products which will obviously harm the environment in manufacturing, using and abandoning, over-packed products, excessive-trait-products, short-life-products; products made from the material of the declining species and natural resources; products which will cause the adverse effect to the environment of other countries, etc (Hong, 2006:35).

As a developing country, with the increasing environmental awareness, the public participation is growing to be the propelling force of the harmonious society of "democracy and rule of law, fairness and justice, sincerity and friendship, being energetic, steadiness and order, harmony of man and nature" (Hu, 2005). This paper strives for the effect of public participation by means of policy guidance and REM construction. Due to the late initiation, how to improve the Environmental Non-Government Organization with Chinese characteristics remains for further research.

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