

## Major Models and Experience of American and British County Governance

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**Abstract:** This study proposes the major models and experience of American and British county governance. We choose America and Britain, developed countries where county governance is relatively mature, as samples for reference to summarize their major county governance models. Though the two countries don't have many counties, the standard of their county governance is relatively high, which can provide beneficial reference for China's selection and improvement of county governance models.

**Key words:** America, Britain, county governance, experience, model

### INTRODUCTION

Despite its already several thousand years history of county governance, China is still immature in its county governance model, and there is still a long way for the country to go in order to achieve a modern, democratic and scientific one. Though the administrative systems of foreign countries differ a lot from those in China, yet county governments, which as a kind of basic-level government are much closer to the daily life of residents, are also important components of the former. The local governance campaigns in foreign countries have witnessed hundreds of years history, moreover, these campaigns focused on county governance and have accumulated rich experience, forming a governance model featuring combination of diversification and individualization. Even if individual governments may be organized in hierarchical structure, most governmental organizations feature mutual dependence, which is the motive of resource exchange. American scholar Stone (Stone and Miner, 1989) brought up the concept of urban Regime in his research conducted in Atlanta, America. According to him, in (Gao, 2005) urban regime is an informal yet relatively stable group with easy access to institutional resources which has a significant impact on urban policy and management. (Li, 2009) proposed that the county government is a component of American local government with the largest scale.

The author chooses America and Britain, developed countries where county governance is relatively mature, as samples for reference to summarize their major county governance models. Though the two countries don't have many counties, the standard of their county governance is relatively high, which can provide beneficial reference for China's selection and improvement of county governance models.

### RESEARCH ON GOVERNANCE THEORIES

**Power-dependence in central-local relations:** The representative of Power-dependence in Central-local Relations Theory is Rhodes from UK. As one of the local governance theories, Power-dependence in Central-local Relations Theory assumes that both the central government and the local government have their ways to cope with each other and with other organizations. However, the ways specified here refer to all kinds of countermeasures apart from Constitution, laws, organizations and finance, such as countermeasures in aspects of politics, information, task execution, etc. Both the central and local government attempt to mobilize the resources under its control to maximize its influence and minimize its dependence on the other, yet neither of the two has the capacity to achieve a complete mastery of Constitution, laws, organizations, finance, politics and information resources required to realize its objectives.

**Regime theory:** The notion of Regime Theory is inclined to New Pluralism and it emphasizes the importance of economic strength and takes note of the political process of other conflicts and compromises that the growth machine hasn't been able to note. However, Regime Theory has been criticized since it pays more attention to the economic level of urban development, adopts the regional orientation and neglects the more wide-ranging social and economic process and the connection between local economy and foreign strength.

**Regulation theory:** In the end of 1980s, some scholars began to bring the Regulation Theory into the field of urban politics from discussions in the economic field and introduce the view of social regulation, trying to find out the relations among economic, political and social

transformation. Regulation Theory originates itself from Marxism, and it believes that capital accumulation is a contradicting and conflicting process and that a political, social and cultural regulation model, namely, the so-called model of social regulation, shall be established so as to support the reproduction of capital accumulation.

### **BACK TRACE OF GOVERNANCE THEORIES**

**Local governance theory:** Legitimacy crisis of contemporary governments is the root cause that generates governance theories. The word governance in English originates itself from Latin and ancient Greek, and it originally means control, guidance and steering. In 1989, the World Bank summarized the then development situation in Africa by the word governance crisis and from then on, the word governance began to be widely used in social science fields such as politics, economics, etc. and gradually developed into a new theoretical paradigm and analytical framework in the Science of Public Management. In 1995, the Commission on Global Governance put out the definition of governance as follows: governance is the sum of a good many ways in which various public or private individuals and organizations manage their common affairs as well as an ongoing process that harmonizes the conflicting or diverse interests and procures joint efforts. It has four characteristics: firstly, governance is neither rules nor a kind of activity, instead, it is a process; secondly, the basis of the governance process is coordination instead of control; thirdly, governance involves both public departments and private departments; finally, governance is not a kind of formal system but continuous interaction. As it is, governance is a process of social cooperation targeting at public interests in which the governments play a key but not dominating role. So, in this sense, governance is a kind of cooperative management in essence.

Local governance mainly refers to how the local governments, under the guidance of governance theories, improve their ability through reforms like decentralization of authority, reorganization, etc., to cope with the challenge of uncertain factors, how the local governments encourage citizens to participate in, how they stimulate the establishment and development of multi-center network, how they play core roles in the multi-center cooperation so as to deal better with the local public affairs and provide better public service for the local residents.

**Good governance theory:** In Manila Governance Declaration (1999), good governance is defined as a kind of system, which is transparent, responsible, fair, just, democratic and of participation property and which can respond to the need of people. The EU White Paper brings

forth five principles related to good governance and proposals on its reform: transparency, property of participation, responsibility, effectiveness and consistence. Governance can be concluded as the return of state power to the society and the interaction between the political state and the civil society, while the governance in good governance means that the definition of domination has changed, that a new process of domination comes into being and that the conditions for orderly domination has become different from those before, or that a new method is adopted to dominate the society. Hence, good governance is a process of social management that maximizes the public benefits. In fact, good governance is the return of state power to the society and the process of good governance is one that returns the power of governments to the hands of people. The substantive characteristics of good governance lie in that it is the cooperative public life management of governments and citizens; good governance depends on the governments and also the citizens to a larger extent, and it indicates a new and unique relation between the political country and citizens. The model of good governance is actually the process of establishing a public service system of responsibility, responsiveness, transparency, participation property, law-based feature and effectiveness.

Governance and good governance are two different concepts in the modern government reform theoretical paradigm which are distinguished from and related with each other at the same time. Governance and good governance are the core models through which the governmental and public departments relate with the society. Since governance shall depend on many other interest parties to mobilize, it is far from enough to only depend on governments. However, good governance in the social and political system always requires good governments. If we take the legitimacy crisis as the root cause for the rising of governance theories, the rationality crisis of government forms can be considered as the powerful driving force that impels the government transformation from good governments to good governance. The transformation from good governments to good governance stresses the return of modern democratic value and system justice.

### **MAJOR MODELS OF AMERICAN COUNTY GOVERNANCE**

The administrative system of our country governments can be divided into five levels, while America implements a three-level government system, i.e., federal government, state government and local government. All governments under the state government, not matter small or big, are local governments (Luo, 2005). Local governments can be classified into three

categories: County Government (including Municipal Government and Township Government within the counties) and two kinds of governments specially established, namely School District Government and Special District Government. Among these, the county government is a component of American local government with the largest scale (Li, 2009).

County governance in America features no uniform model and is adjusted based on the actual situation of each place, and the county government doesn't have much relation with governments of higher levels. Both the county government and municipal government in America are local governments, however, there isn't any administrative affiliation relation between the two, which is the greatest difference from Chinese administrative system. For this reason, the governance model of American county governments is relatively free, barely interfered by governments of higher levels. All in all, the major governance models of American county governments can be divided into three categories including committee co-governance model, labor division & cooperation co-existing governance model and county government independent governance model.

**Committee co-governance model:** Committee co-governance model is common in the governance model of county governments in America, with the county governance in Massachusetts and New England Area as typical representatives. Since the towns in the counties of these regions connect with each other geographically, there aren't any targets for county governance. Thus in these places, there aren't any traditional administrative organizations like county governments, etc., instead, regional council of governments, i.e., county government co-governance committees, are established to conduct co-governance of the social and public affairs within the counties, which are composed of representatives from all local governments and bear consultative meaning and cooperation function. For example, Franklin Regional Council of Governments, formed by representatives from 26 towns within the country, is set up in Franklin county of Massachusetts; Hampshire Council of Governments, formed by representatives from 20 towns within the county, is set up in Hampshire county. These organizations don't have any substantial power and they only play limited role in coordinating the relations among the towns of certain county in aspects like fire-fighting, school, low-income residential constructions, communications, water supply, gas supply, etc. (Gao, 2005).

Committee co-governance model practices the combination of legislative power and administrative power, which is executed in a unified and concentrated way by the committee elected. The committee members, while undertaking the legislative function, also assume

the posts of directors of each governmental departments at the same time. This kind of county governance model mainly has the advantages like simplification, high-efficiency, transparency of government affairs, nonpartisan election, check and balance among the committee members which can avoid abuse of power, etc. However, the combination of legislative and administrative power is on the other hand not conducive to the mutual check and restriction of legislative and administrative power, while committee members undertake certain task separately and none of them assume full administrative responsibilities, which no doubt will lead to the lack of unified and effective leadership (Li, 2009).

**Labor division and cooperation co-existing governance model:** Within the range of many counties, there are some large cities besides the vast rural districts, therefore, two governments exist. Though the two governments have no affiliation relations with each other, many social affairs may involve the interests of both parties, for which the labor division and cooperation co-existing governance model is introduced, that is, the county government and the municipal government administrate the affairs within their own fields respectively. For example, the relation between Seattle and King County and that between the city of Durham and the county of Durham are just like this. In these regions, the municipal government administrates the public affairs within the area of the city and the vast rural area apart from the city is under the administration of the county government, while at the same time, the public affairs including the appraisal of property tax base, issue of various licenses and certificates, election-related and local court affairs, etc. are also under the unified management of the county government, which is just the reflection of the labor division of the two governments. Cooperation refers to the joint management of the committee and the council formed by both parties in the common fields that involve the bilateral relations between the city and the county. For example, the city of Corpus Christi, Texas establishes the Nueces county government which has 28 affiliated specialized committees, and the members in these committees are jointly assigned by the Municipal Government of Corpus Christi and the County Government of Nueces. Though most of these members are volunteers with neither salary nor the power of administrative law enforcement, they play vital important promoting role in coordinating and communicating the relations between the city and the county (Gao, 2005).

In the aspect of labor division governance, these county governments mainly adopt the governance model of council manager system. Council manager system can avoid the contradiction between the administrative organizations and the legislative organizations, weaken

the influence of the party politics on the routine administration and effectively facilitate the specialization of county governance, thus it is an effective kind of county governance model. In the case of council manager system, the county council is always composed of 5-9 members, who are mostly elected in nonpartisan general election and whose terms of office are usually four years, sometimes 2 years. The chief of the county administrative department is the county manager, who takes charge of the routine administrative affairs and budget compilation of the county, directs the work of all governmental departments and handles the appointment and dismissal as well as other relevant affairs in the county. The county council has legislative power and its members are democratically elected, who are responsible for legislation, budget approval and the strategic decisions with respect to vital issues as well as in charge of appointing a county manager and the members of committees including county civil service commission, city planning committee, etc., (Li, 2009).

**County government independent governance model:**

In some American counties, there is only one local government, namely the county government, and there are no other local governments of other categories, hence, the county governance can only be independently undertaken by the county government, and in another words, these counties implement the county government independent governance model, of which the representative is the county government of Howard. In the actual process of governance, these counties also emphasize the function of the magistrate very much, which resembles the chief's responsibility system model in China. Under this model, the county's democratically elected head commissioner is not only the person in charge of the county council-the highest policy-making organization in the county, but also the highest official of the administrative execution body, always in control of budgets and the core departments of police bureaus and being entitled to directly assign the persons in charge of certain departments to intervene and participate in the routine management work in the county and to exercise valid veto power on the proposals of the council. This model of county governance is superior in that the policy making and implementation is relatively centralized by the same group of leaders and the efforts in policy implementation are stronger; while it is inferior in that if the political support is unstable and the democratically elected political leaders change frequently, the stability and longevity of the local management policies will be influenced and no long and peaceful reign can be achieved, or the political officials will be unable to cope with complicated modern handle machines and professional work division due to their low quality. Therefore, this model is always adopted by small counties

with small population, small management field and relatively simple management content (Lan, 2005).

It has been proved by fact that this type of governance model works perfectly in the local area. For example, in 2005, the county of Howard was awarded the City Award of America and became one of the ten star cities in America, and there is only one thing, that is, it was the only county, not city, that won this award. America is a country where local autonomy system prevails and it is the democratic right of the massive voters to choose the model of county governance. In a county with a population of not more than 260,000 and an area of only 650 km<sup>2</sup> where the transportation is developed and convenient, this model of county governance can not only reduce the government operation cost but also make it possible to provide excellent public service for the residents (Gao, 2005).

**MAJOR MODELS OF BRITISH COUNTY GOVERNANCE**

The Britain is a country that implements single administrative system. It has no statutory constitution and instead, its constitution is only a collective concept, including statute laws, common laws, judicial practices, etc. These constitutional documents have not provided any special provisions and guarantee on local system, therefore, the keynote of the relation between the central government and local government in Britain is determined by the most important characteristics of the British constitution-the council sovereignty. Since the council sovereignty executing power is centralized by the central government, the central government has the power to fix the local policies through council legislation and to stipulate the council scope of authority. Even though the Britain has a long history in its local autonomy tradition, compared with the council superiority, the reason for current devolution of local administrative system based on prefectures and autonomous cities is not sufficient enough at all (Yang, 2008), which makes the composition of British local government very complicated and in continuous change. Based on the result of the elected local government in Britain in 2009, the first level includes the local governments of prefectures, large cities and the Greater London, the total number of which is 66; the second level including the local governments of districts and cities, the number of which is 848; while the third level includes the councils of parishes and towns, the total number of which is about 10000. Apart from these formal government entities, there are also a large number of joint groups, quasi-government entities and special entities, which together constitute the complicated local government system. The second level in the British local government is actually equivalent to the county governments in China, however, in the case of local

autonomy, local governments of all levels are autonomous bodies of equal status in terms of their relations and no affiliation relations exist among them, each being only responsible for the voters within its own regions, which is also the prominent difference from Chinese county governments. Since the functions of British local governments are authorized by the congress instead of being specified by the constitution, the administration authority and the status of the local governments may change continuously with the constant adjustment of the power entrusted to local government by the congress (Hu, 2008). Generally speaking, the British county governments have two kinds of governance models: magistrate cabinet system governance model and collective leader cabinet system governance model.

**Magistrate cabinet system governance model:** Counties where magistrate cabinet system governance model is implemented elect a highest county-level chief executive (equivalent to the prefectural governor) separately and simultaneously equip itself with a cabinet that executes the will of the magistrate. The magistrate and the officials in the cabinet jointly share the implementing power. Besides the magistrate and the cabinet, there is also a cabinet composed of extensive senators. The magistrate can invite some of the senators to be the members of his/her cabinet or the leaders of lower-level governments as well as dismiss certain cabinet members. What makes this model different from that of other countries is that the magistrates of British counties don't have the power to manage council affairs at all and the council is still independent, while as the leader of council, the president (equivalent to the Secretary of CPC in County Committee in China) is still elected by all the senators. The most prominent feature of this county governance model is that within the policy framework and budget specified by the council, the magistrate still has the administrative power on routine policy-making and can exert extremely great influence.

**Collective leader cabinet system governance model:** Collective leader cabinet system governance model is the most commonly seen governance model in the British county government and its prominent feature is that an individual cabinet is established based on the right of execution and decision-making and this cabinet is taken charge of by a leader while the cabinet shall also cooperate closely with officials and management elite group. Compared with the magistrate cabinet system governance model, this model is more complicated and the greatest difference between the two is that in this model, the political administrative power is granted to a group (cabinet) instead of an individual. The collective leader cabinet is elected by the council, or the council elects a leader and authorizes the leader to choose members of the cabinet. Seen from the aspect of forms, all

the arrangements shall be carried out in accordance with the will of council, however, under this system, the definite and independent power of decision is granted to the leader and individual cabinet members. All in all, the major difference between the collective leader cabinet system governance model and the magistrate cabinet system governance model is the occupation of political administrative power. For the latter, both the formal and informal power belongs to the magistrate directly elected, while the former stresses the collective responsibility of the cabinet (Gerry, 2007). In the view of the practical effect of the British county governance, collective leader cabinet system governance model is proved more likely to win the support from most council members than the magistrate cabinet system governance model, therefore, many county government (more than 4/5) choose the collective leader cabinet system governance model by council voting and only a few county governments choose the magistrate cabinet system governance model.

**Experience from American and British county governance models:** It can be seen from the major models of American and British county governance that the implementation of whatever models has close relation with the actual national situation. The common point of these models lies in five aspects: the county government is given full independent governance right; there is no administrative affiliation relation among local governments; the basic-level democratic politics is highly developed; the political participating rate of citizens is very high; and so is the public service capability of county government. This is the main experience learnt from the county governance model in foreign countries and it is worth learning and borrowing by China.

**The allocation of county government functions centers on public service:** Seen from the allocation of county government functions in foreign countries, the county governments are only responsible for local voters instead of being directly responsible for the central government, and there isn't any affiliation relation between the county governments and all-level local administrative organizations of cities, districts, etc., each performing its own function. The county government doesn't undertake political function directly and its major responsibility is to provide public administration and service for social affairs that are closely related to the everyday life of residents. For example, over 90% of the British county government function is to provide public service and to place the improvement of services for citizens in a vital place. These county governments only assume a little economic functions and they mainly create the required environment for the sustainable development of the local economic society by providing good public administration and infrastructure and forming stable social order (Liu, 2009).

**Market competitive mechanism is introduced to improve the efficiency of public product provision:**

During the process of governance, the British county governments attach great importance to the introduction of market competition system, and their major practice is to allow social groups or individuals to set foot in public service field apart from government monopoly, thus giving the public chances of choice. In the concrete operation, governments continue to invest in and support public service affairs, while those social groups or individuals who have obtained the access to public service field can also get investment and support from the governments. By exercising this, the Britain doesn't mean to push public services completely to the market, instead, it introduces market element purposefully. The governments always believe that to provide public service is their liability, thus they still retain their strong intervention ability. If the governmental supervision finds service failures, it can take many countermeasures, including re-set or close the breaking-down service organizations (Lei, 2006). The Britain, by introducing market competition system during its county governance process, has greatly improved its efficiency of public product supply.

**There shall be diversified ways of participating in county governance by citizens:** The most important criteria to measure the democratic status of a county government is whether citizens have the right of access to resources of public domain and the right of direct participation in management of public resources. With the power devolution of the central government and the power decentralization of counties, the county governments of France change their superior-subordinate policy model, begin to focus on the community orientation in policy design, involve the citizens in the policy-making process by ways of information publication, public consultation, public negotiation, voting, claim exercising, etc. and cultivate citizens of sense of empowerment, making them not only the customers consuming service but citizens providing suggestions and supervising the administration. Citizen participation also makes the establishment and development of county service industry and infrastructure more suitable for the demand of county public, makes the governmental policies gain more legitimacy and become easier to be accepted and recognized by the public and improves the validity of administration (Yu and Lei, 2005).

**CONCLUSION**

In this study, we propose the major models and experience of American & British county governance. We choose America and Britain, developed countries where county governance is relatively mature, as samples for reference to summarize their major county governance models. Though the two countries don't have many counties, the standard of their county governance is relatively high, which can provide beneficial reference for China selection and improvement of county governance models.

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