

## Research Article

### Importance of Food Safety Management in the Perspective of Public Management

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**Abstract:** It is said that, food is the basic of the people. Based on this, food safety becomes one of the importance factors relating to social harmony. As food safety events happen frequently at home and abroad in recent years, people concern more about food safety. Traditional food safety monitoring system can not work effectively. In order to find out a new monitoring pattern, this study analyzed the importance of public management to the improvement of traditional food safety monitoring system and made initial discussion over the food safety problems in China in the perspective of public governance.

**Keywords:** Food safety, public management, third sector

#### INTRODUCTION

As the saying goes, people is the basic of a country, food is the basic of the people, security is the basic of the food. Food as one of the material conditions maintaining basic development and survival of human being concern national stability and social harmony; its importance is undisputed (Wang, 2011). In recent years, China faces increasingly serious food safety problem. Such as production, management and consumption are all found with unsafe problems, which have been reported for many times. As to Sanlu milk powder event and news of “dirty” jelly are still horrible now. Today, food safety has become one of the problems closely focused both at home and abroad and food safety guarantee is urgent (Chen and Zhang, 2012). Thus, China contributes a lot to the establishment of food safety guarantee system, but it appears to have little effect. That is because food safety monitoring system involves government-led multi-sectoral management and every subject only measures their own benefits; as a result, the regulating functions between different subjects become conflictive, influencing the effective monitoring of government to food safety and producing negative influence among people (Zhang, 2011). Therefore, it is necessary to solve this problem fundamentally by introducing new guide theory, in order to strengthen the effectiveness of food safety management. This study introduced public governance theory into food safety monitoring system, made an analysis on the defects of food safety monitoring system in China in the perspective of public management (Li, 2011) and proposed some solutions and suggestions based on these existing problems accordingly, in order to make more people realize the importance of food safety management and meanwhile

encourage more people to make more comprehensive studies on the food safety problem in China from the perspective of public management.

#### MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Analysis of public governance theory:** Public governance theory newly emerged evolves from introducing governance concept into public management field and to develop and transform on the basis of adapting to the characteristics of public management (Li, 2009). That marks the development of Public management to a new stage. Instead of the “Rule”, it is not only the updating of academic vocabulary but also people have thought reform in public management idea. It can more effectively solve the dilemma faced by the current world public management field. Public governance theory mainly includes the following three points:

**Diversity of subject:** Traditional public management pattern regards government as the unique legal subject managing public matters. That is to say, individual and other organizations have no right to take part in public matter management. But public governance theory believes that, government failure is existing in monitoring, therefore it is necessary to make other subjects to join in the management of public matters.

**Partnership between subjects:** Public governance theory suggests that, there is partnership existing in the subjects commonly joining in the management of public matters. That is, government, social organizations and even individuals have right complementary relationships.

**Networked cooperation of operation system:** Public governance theory believes that, multi-subjects is bound to negotiate, organize and act when jointly participating in the management of public matters. Finally these processes form an autonomous cooperation network.

**Necessity of inducing public governance theory into reform of food safety monitoring system:** Traditional food safety monitoring system exists problems of government failure and market failure and what is worse, defects which can not be overcome by market and government themselves aggravates the monitoring failure of food safety. As a result, it is of great importance to induce public governance theory. Necessity is as follows:

**Further reform of executive management system:** The current executive management system is established adapting to the development of planned economic system.

Although executive management system have been reformed for many times since reform and open up, it still can not adapt to the development of social economy, such as inadequate government functions, unreasonable organizational structure of government and low executive management efficiency (Ma, 2009). Public governance theory advocates breaking the monopoly position of government in public matters and proposes cooperation between society and government, in order governance theory and the executive management system of China are complementary.

**Requirements of food safety monitoring system:** Facts prove that, traditional food safety monitoring system has not been able to fully ensure the safety of food due to many problems existing in it, while the beneficial concept and method of public governance theory can inspire traditional food safety monitoring and meet the requirements of traditional food safety monitoring system reform. It performs as follows: firstly, traditional food safety monitoring system reform is in urgent need of participation of various subjects; secondly, traditional food safety monitoring system reform needs the leading role of government; thirdly, traditional food safety monitoring system reform needs whole-process governance based on public-private cooperation.

**Development and maturity of the third sector:** The concept of the third sector first proposed by Levit from America refers to the third social organization independent from government and society. It emerges due to the existence of government failure and market failure. Currently, the development and maturity of the third sector in China presents in the following three aspects: firstly, the amount and functions of social

organizations greatly improve; secondly, right-protection awareness of citizens generally enhances; thirdly, media plays stronger functions in social monitoring.

**Analysis of food safety monitoring system in the perspective of public governance:**

**Food safety monitoring system in China and its characteristics:** To date, food safety is defined as that, food have no toxicity and harm, conform to nutrient requirements and have no acute, subacute or chronic harm to people's health (Liu, 2009). Food safety monitoring implemented based on this concept is diverse. The existing system includes food safety laws and regulation system, food safety management institute, food safety management system, etc. But in general, these systems all involve multiple sectors. Risk evaluation function and risk management function of food safety in China are not actually separated, the right of these two functions are respectively belonging to agricultural sector, business sector and quality supervision sector. As a result, China Food Safety Regulatory System would have such defects, such as, overlay of function, difficult definition of responsibilities, difficult coordination between departments and low efficiency.

**Internal defects existing in the current food safety monitoring system:** Big-head infant, tainted steamed buns, poisoned bean sprout are all relating to disappointing food safety events. From the previous lessons, it can not hard to see that, the current food safety monitoring system have many defects, which results in the food safety crisis now. The main defects are as follows:

**Single governmental monitoring system:** The current food safety monitoring system is a single segmented supervision pattern of government. This pattern segments complete food supply chain in a simple way; as a results, all segments can not be considered at the same time. Government only can not supervise all procedures in all direction as a complete food supply chain involves production, processing, circulation and sale. Some procedures will be the loopholes of monitoring.

**Weak power of consumer:** Making a general survey of previous food safety events, we can find that, the reason why the rights and interests of consumers are harmed is because of the weak power of consumers. For example, in the event of Sanlu powder, Sanlu Group received many reflections from consumers in March, 2008, but it just denied unilaterally and consumers have nothing to do but wait. This kind of negotiation undoubtedly exposes the inferior position of consumers. In addition, protecting the legal rights and interests by legal way is

caught in a dilemma due to the the principle of civil suit “he who asserts must prove” (Zhang, 2011). According to that principle of suit, only the victim give evidence of consumption for related test can he applies for compensation or protect his rights legally. Economical cost and time cost spent during the period can not be shouldered by most consumers.

**Dilemma faced by the supervision of media:** In the current environment in China, media supervision plays a decisive role in the supervision by public opinions for its wide influence. Many important events do not get timely and effective solution until widespread media attention. To some extent, media concerns the benefits of public. But multiple food safety events which happened recently, media does not play its function and several traditional official media report nothing collectively. From this point, we can see that, media has been fuzzy in standpoint and even controlled by Black Hand, let alone effectively performing supervision.

**Analyzing the reasons for the defective food safety monitoring system in the perspective of public governance:** It is believed that there are reasons why traditional food safety monitoring system is hard to comprehensively and effectively prevent food safety hidden danger and accidents. There are two views if the reasons for the defective food safety monitoring system are analyzed applying public governance theory.

**Market failure of food safety monitoring field:** Braun and Jefferson once said that, market failure is the conflict produced for implementing market efficiency. In real market economy, existence of such kind of conflict is necessary. It may be because external effect of production leads to market failure, asymmetric information of buyer and seller results in vicious cheating of seller to consumer, or production operators pursue for benefits regardless of harming the benefits of consumers. These phenomenons are the entire source leading to market failure in food safety monitoring field.

**Government failure of food safety monitoring field:** In the current government monitoring system in China, food safety monitoring is defective field. Main reasons are as follows. First is the unreasonable setting of food safety monitoring organization? Too many food safety monitoring organization in China have conflict in dividing rights, leading to the ineffective operation of food safety monitoring system, as they all concerns their own benefits. Second is imperfect regulation and lag of monitoring means. A huge gap lies in the regulations and laws in food safety monitoring field between China and developed countries. For instance, before June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2009, China exerted Food Hygiene Law all the time, but food hygiene is only a small part in concept of the food safety and many food safety

procedures was not effectively managed based on corresponding regulations. Third is moral hazard and game in the relationship of commission-agency. Public choice theory holds that, government is also a broker as the enterprise; as a profitable group, corrupt officials hide inside. This allows unscrupulous being protected by government officials for their illegitimate production operations.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

### **Suggestions for perfection of food safety monitoring system based on public governance theory:**

**Perfecting government governance system:** The government is a manager in food safety monitoring, which is the most important. Therefore, government should take the lead, perfect the system from the level of management and implement effective reform. It should achieve the following points.

**Food safety legislation:** Proper food safety system should base on legislation. Only such food monitoring pattern can be authoritative and meanwhile its regulation can be strictly followed by and implemented. Therefore, Chinese government should perfect the regulation considering to provide enough guarantee and protection for the health and benefits of consumers, perform legislation reform referring to the advanced pattern in other developed countries and conforming to the situation of China, play the functions of monitoring, inspection and investigation, provide information and make all stakeholder participate in.

**Food safety monitoring:** Throughout the world, manufacturing technique and processing technique is updating day by day and the food circulates between different countries frequently. Under such a big trend, the risks of food safety constantly become worse. Thus, China performs food safety monitoring taking “expanding supervision and strengthen monitoring” as criterion. Corresponding database should be equipped when inspection laboratory with wide coverage area and high technical level is established, in order to obtain the disease data produced from food safety events.

**Food safety information communication:** Information about food safety and quality is indispensable for consumers. Only when the information is clear can consumers’ benefits can be ensured. In this aspect, government should exert itself to establish related official communication channels, in order to ensure consumer obtain related data about food in first time, improve the transparency of market information and solve the problem of asymmetric information between consumers and business operators. Meanwhile, the government should advertise Food Safety Law to regulate and manage food practitioners in the law level,

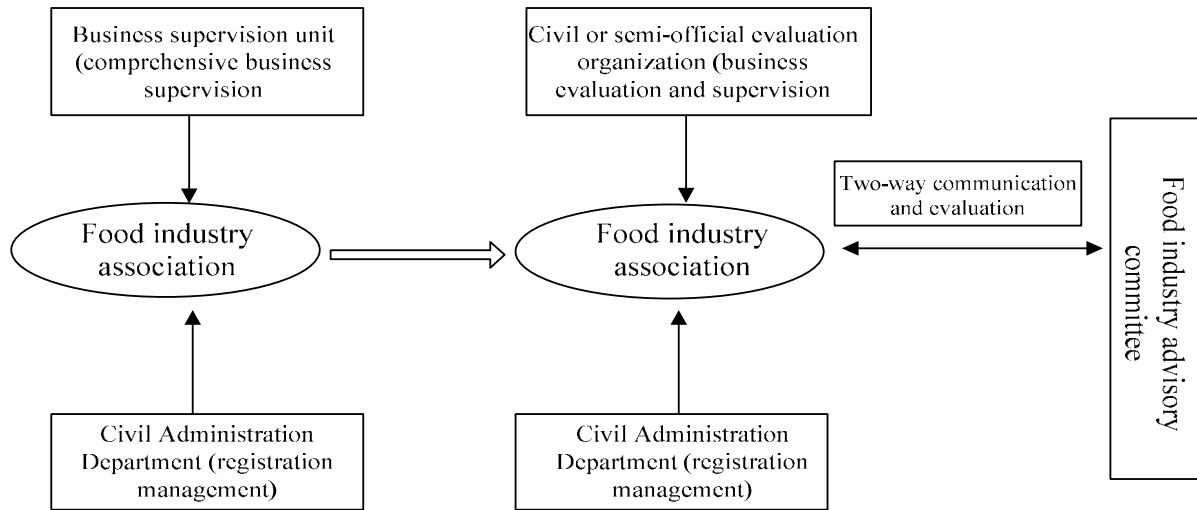


Fig. 1: Performance evaluation of food industry association

strengthen law enforcement to law breaker and establish more perfect approaches to safeguard for consumers.

**Fully performing the advantage of internal monitoring of line organization:** Governance force from industry organizations is an important complementary force for the government governance. From the perspective of cost saving, governance of autonomous social organizations has more development potential and possibilities as the asymmetric degree is relatively small. More mature is the market economy, the executive power of the government is more likely to gradually withdraw from all the areas of economy and social life. Then, function of autonomous social organizations will be more prominent. When the self-management activities of industry associations become conscious actions and are beneficial to oneself and others, the cost of government supervision and law enforcement will be sharply reduced.

In the level of government, government should positively create a policy environment suitable for the development of industry association. In the view of food safety monitoring function, internal requirements of food safety governance network efficiency should be strengthened and cultivating food industry association is an important measure. Though government is the monitoring subject, it can not do everything well in the same time. Thus the results can be twice with half effort if government delegates food safety monitoring right to industry associations. Government should support food industry association to some extent and meanwhile implement necessary supervision to make these industry associations perform supervision responsibility. Detailed operation follows the procedures in Fig. 1.

In the level of associations, industry associations should improve their own establishment: Social intermediate organization is one of the three subjects of

food safety monitoring in China. Industry associations are a very important intermediate subject. Enterprises is indispensable in food safety monitoring, especially food industry. The government also positively encourages food industry associations to perform self-discipline. Therefore, self-discipline system should be vigorously established. To date, industry associations in China are developed under the encouragement and support from government from top to bottom; as a result, they depend on the government to some extent. But over years of development, industry associations experience huge progress in scale, amount and dependence. Therefore, industry self-discipline system should be established from passive to positive, in order to make associations better participate in food safety monitoring.

**Motivating consumers to participate in food safety governance:** In food safety governance, the consumer is the direct market subject and also the direct victim of right. Therefore, consumers should be aware of participating in food safety governance, to reveal illegal behaviors in first time. In addition, compared to government and autonomous social organizations, the possibility of occurrence of moral hazard in consumers in the lowest and positive appeal will produce great promotion function on two forces above. Thus, government should actively put works about this aspect into practice, strengthen consumption education, improve consumption awareness, expand information channels for consumers, construct benefit expression mechanism, enhance the power of consumers' association and guide food safety behavior, in order to promote consumers to participate in food safety monitoring.

## CONCLUSION

Scholars at home and abroad are all studying and exploring food safety monitoring problem in China.

People constantly attempt to solve the problems existing in food safety monitoring by various ideas and theories (He, 2009). But public governance theory as the new emerging theory in public management field, exceeds the limitation of traditional government and market dichotomy and believes that, market and government are both possible to be out of order and when market and government are out of order in the same time, the third sector is required to participate in the management of public matters. Once participating in the management of public matters, it can not only fully mobilize social resources and reduce burden of government and market but also can effectively make up the defects occurred when government and market are both out of order (Li, 2011). The innovation of this study is to introduce public governance theory into food safety supervision field to get rid of the limitation of the traditional government and market dichotomy and to tentatively make new design for food safety monitoring system in the perspective of public governance.

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