

## Research Article

### Evolution of Governments' Governance Models of National Top 100 Counties

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**Abstract:** In this study, we give the evolution of governments' governance models of national top 100 counties. From a highly centralized administrative system to cooperation governance with participation of multiple subjects, governance models of our county governments have been in continuous evolution and economic, social, political and other factors have exerted an important effect on the evolution of governance models. In theory, studying the evolution path and evolution mechanisms of governance models of Top 100 Counties and further exploring the evolution law of the governments' governance models of the Top 100 Counties, will help enrich advanced experience of county governance models, while in reality, will help improve and enhance the county governance level and governance capability in China, which is beneficial to people.

**Keywords:** Evolution, governance models, top 100 counties

#### INTRODUCTION

In China, county system has a history of 2,000 years; from ancient counties to current counties, county system, as China's primary administrative system, is basically in a stable state and most of the county's administrative divisions and boundary inherits the original pattern from history, which has an important influence on the long-term stability of the country. However, as an administrative system, county system is always banded together with the country's political system. With the changes of dynasties and history, the county government governance models are inevitably marked by the imprint of the times in the historical process from feudalism to socialism. Under the big background of China's political system and market economy development, it is of practical significance for the improvement of county governance level to explore the evolution path of the government governance models of the National Top 100 Counties, to analyze the evolution mechanisms and to further grasp the evolution law.

He (2009) has a study of the exploration into current local government governance models in china. Li (2005) have a research of the exploration into government governance model transformation in china. Huang (2009) study the local government governance reform in the process of establishing and perfecting market economy system-review and outlook of local administrative system reform after reform and opening up. Li (2009) study the path transformation and reality selection of government governance models. Wang (2009) study the system foundation of county governance capability: an attempt towards analysis

framework. Shang (2006) analyzes the county economy's harmonious development from the experience of "top 100 counties". Xiao (2006) give a research of the harmonious society construction and local government governance model innovation. Wu (2006) study the reform and function transformation of local government governance structure-an analysis from an economic view. Kang (2007) analyze the path selection of social governance innovation and local government governance.

This study gives the evolution of governments' governance models of national top 100 counties. The main functions of county governments are promoting the development of county economy, governing social affairs, providing public services and safeguarding social fairness. The evolution of the governance models of the Top 100 Counties is the re-positioning of the various functions of county governments to achieve the system and type transformation of the county governments and to establish service-oriented, limited, transparent, efficient, legal and responsible government, thus further promoting economic and social development and social harmony.

#### THE EVOLUTION PATH GOVERNMENTS' GOVERNANCE MODELS OF NATIONAL TOP 100 COUNTIES

The development of county governments' governance models history since the founding of new China can be broadly divided into 4 stages: highly centralized administrative system (1949-1978), combination of centralization and decentralization

system under the reform and opening up (1979-1992), flat governance under system reform (1993-2003), cooperation governance with participation of multiple subjects (since 2004).

**Highly centralized administrative system:** In the early stage since the founding of new China, China's counties basically inherited the historical pattern. In order to rapidly stabilize the society, the central government implemented highly centralized top-down administrative system on government administration and implemented a strict planned economy system on economic operation. Under these dual governance systems, the central government became the monopolistic allocator of social resources and undertook all affairs within macro and micro fields in the whole society. Therefore, the county government itself didn't possess the power to allocate social resources, instead, it could only passively implement the policies from the central government and governments of higher levels, which showed a top-down one-way flow; its governance model was all-round dominant type government, which bore typical characteristics of the times, that is, county governments are the only power subject, while market and civil society power was yet to be developed.

Specifically, from the early days of new China to reform and opening up, Top 100 Counties' governance models have experienced 3 stages including region and township governance mode, people's commune governance model and township politics and village governance model. In the region and township governance model stage, the historical mission of county governments was to complete regional land reform and to recover and develop war-torn county economy; the realization of governance of county governments was mainly through the direct election of peasant associations, township people's representatives and village cadres. With the deepening of socialist transformation, region and township governance model was gradually replaced by people's commune governance mode. Through transforming individual farming into socialist collective ownership economy, the governance model established a highly centralized governance system and economy was governed by state unified plan and unified policy. Government got involved into every aspect of society, economy and politics, all resources are completely allocated in accordance with government mandatory plan. In the context of collective economy's development and growth, the strength of village governance continued to expand; the county government decentralized part of the allocation right of resources into the village collective and implemented township politics and village

governance mode. This governance model was essentially still a top-down government regulation, except that the governance subject was shifted from county governments to village collective committees.

**Combination of centralization and decentralization system under the reform and opening up:** In 1978, China began to implement reform and opening up and the planned economy system was gradually transformed into market economy. In this context, county government governance model began to transform from highly centralized administrative system to combination of centralization and decentralization governance mode. Firstly came the complete termination of people's commune system that integrated government administration with commune management, then raised the system of transformation of government dispatched regional government offices into prefecture-level cities and municipally affiliated counties and the governance system innovation of special economic zones and economic and technological development zones. The emergence of these new situations had a great impact on the Top 100 Counties' governance models. In terms of social governance structure, the modern social governance structure of state-social organizations (such as associations, community autonomy, etc.) -enterprises and natural persons was shaped out from the past structure of country-urban units, or people's communes-family after the reforms of separating government administration from commune management, separating government administration from capital management, separating government functions from enterprise management and separating administrative unit from public institution, thus a modern harmonious civil society was gradually taken shape. The changes of county governance Models expanded local and enterprise autonomy, strengthened market regulation degree, improved the drawbacks of previous excessive control and tight control, which laid a solid foundation for the county's rapid economic growth.

**Flat governance under system reform:** The 14th National Congress of CPC in 1992 put forward the idea of establishing socialist market economy system and made the market play a fundamental role in the allocation of resources under the national macro-control. In this context, the county governance models corresponding to the traditional economic system greatly hindered the development of the emerging economic system; hence the role of government in economic life must be transformed. Because of the free flow of production factors, technology and human resources, county governments were forced to adopt new policies and new measures, change governance

models, conduct system reforms to promote economic development; they must figure out the relations between governments and markets through the system innovation of property rights and promote transformation of the county government into service-oriented government through the innovation of administrative examination and approval system. Therefore, Top 100 Counties began to implement the all-round flat governance mode and the county governments were transformed from a previous subordinate of governments of higher levels to a behavioral subject with relatively independent interests, while the relations between governments of lower and higher levels gradually developed the nature of contracts. With the deepening of economic marketization, some developed county governments began to explore the economic model of "province administrating county", namely the flat governance mode and to decentralize economic administration authority of the prefecture-level city directly to Top 100 Counties by way of expanding powers of strong counties. Flat governance model made the county government obtain power of controlling local interests and resources and gradually become "First Action Group" of regional economic development. Because of development hysteresis of market and civil society, the county government played a role of market alternative and social alternative to a certain extent and it played a leading role in the economic and social development; this, combined with the "complete internally-public-externally-private property rights" the county governments got due to decentralization reform and the relatively weakened institutional environment, made the county government-led economic development become inevitable, which, to some extent, adapted to the law of economic development and promoted the steady development of economy and society.

**Cooperation governance with multiple subjects participation:** Since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC, China has accelerated the pace of administrative system reform, NGO and civil society and other non-governmental forces have also gradually grown up, thus the traditional government-led governance model was unable to meet the needs of socialist modernization. In this context, the Top 100 Counties took the lead to absorb enterprises, NGO, citizens and other folk force on government governance and began to explore cooperation governance model with multiple subject's participation.

In cooperation governance model with multiple subjects participation, the responsibility of county public administration are shared by the county governments, NGO and citizens and non-governmental sectors, private

sectors and even citizens can provide public services. The authority of government will therefore shift below, to the side and to the outside and ultimately a network-like governance system are formed, forming governance structure and operating characteristics that are different from those of the traditional single authoritative subject. At the same time, the county governments are no longer the only provider of public goods and public service; the governance with multiple subjects' interaction, participation and cooperation is bound to lead to a multi-level and multi-subject public service system with participation, coordination and cooperation of multiple subjects. The governments' social responsibilities are to provide satisfactory services to citizens based on public demand, to give citizens more service options and comment rights, so that citizens can have the opportunity to evaluate the effectiveness of governments' work, which will be based on whether or not the works are in conformity with public interests. After the 17<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC proposed to explore the establishment of "big department system" administrative system, some Top 100 Counties set up big culture and education, big transportation, big economy, big health and other organizations by following the model of mutual check and coordination among decision-making power, executive power and supervision power and according to the principle of big industry and big system, which objectively promoted the development and maturity of cooperation governance model with multiple subjects participation.

#### **THE EVOLUTION MECHANISMS OF GOVERNMENTS' GOVERNANCE MODELS OF THE NATIONAL TOP 100 COUNTIES**

**Influence factors on evolution of governments' governance models of the national top 100 counties:** Process and strength of national administrative system reform. As an integral part of superstructure, county government governance model will inevitably be affected by the economic base and in the transformation process from planned economy to market economy; China conducted a number of relatively vigorous reforms towards the administrative system. Although the background and mission of each reform were different, each reform adapted to the periodic needs of productivity development and exerted a direct and huge impact on the county government's governance models. The administrative system reform carried out in 1982 mainly involved streamlining government organs, downsizing, changing overlapping leadership, governing decentralized situation, abolishing the system of lifelong tenure in leading posts. Top 100 Counties' governments also carried out corresponding reforms;

and government administration departments and staff were compressed. The administrative reforms carried out in 1988 vigorously promoted the transformation of government functions; the government's economic governance departments transformed their main functions from direct governance to indirect governance; macro-governance functions were strengthened, while micro-governance functions were diluted. In a step-by-step implementation process, Top 100 Counties' governments improved administrative efficiency and perfected operating mechanism through rationally allocating functions, scientifically dividing responsibilities and division of labor, adjusting institutional setup, transforming functions and changing ways of working. The goal of administrative system reform conducted in 1993 was to build an administrative system that would adapt to the socialist market economic development and it focused on dealing with the recurring illness of integration of government administration with enterprise. In this context, Top 100 Counties of Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Guangdong and other developed areas conducted bold exploration and private economy showed a rapid development, which laid a solid foundation for county economy to take off. The goal of administrative system reform conducted in 1998 was to establish a highly efficient, coordinated operation, regulated government administrative system; and it improved the state civil servant system, constructed high-quality professional administrative team and gradually established government administrative system with Chinese characteristics that would adapt to the socialist market economy system. Top 100 Counties' governments began to try public-private integration, introducing market competition and guiding citizens to participate in county governance. With the deepening of economic system reform, China joined the WTO. The administrative system reform carried out in 2003 was to adjust government organizations; State Development Planning Commission was reconstructed into National Development and Reform Commission and State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission and Commerce Department were newly established. Top 100 Counties' governments began to incorporate NGO, enterprises, citizens and other social forces into governance subjects and implemented pluralistic cooperation governance mode. The 2008 administrative system reform conducted some serious reforms in a big way, whether streamlining organizations, laying off personnel, resolving overlapping functions or rationalizing the system; this administrative reform conducted top-level design and long-term planning for the first time, made adjustments about government organizations and functions with big

department system as the leader and proposed requirements of strict legal constraints on the construction and operation of governmental organizations. Among the Top 100 Counties, Shunde, Guangdong was chosen as a national comprehensive reform pilot area, which aimed to further go first and test first, to reasonably adjust the decision-making functions and executive functions within the department and to build government organization structure and operating model of decision-making, implementation and supervision of mutual restraint and mutual coordination.

**The perfection degree of democratic and legal construction:** The realization of democracy and justice is the core objectives of county government governance and only when citizens have truly equal participation in public life and thus actively participate in the county governance process, it will be possible to realize. The rule of law is the cornerstone of democracy and institutional safeguard and a lack of and damage of rule of law means that the society could get access to order and the environment of effective governance. Although as a basic level of political power, the county governments only enjoy a small amount of formulation rights of local laws and regulations, more often, what they do is implementing guidelines and policies from higher level government, while administrative regulations and implementing democracy are well within the limits of power of county government. In the evolution process of county governments' governance models, the county government governance model would continue to mature with the continuous improvement of the democratic and legal construction. What's more, through the implementation of measures and methods that reflect the spirit of modern governance, such as social services promise system, the government procurement system, opening of the mayor hotline, top 100 county governments actively seek the interaction between government and citizens in order to achieve the goal of "good governance".

**Governance philosophy of county governments:** What Chinese local governments implement is leading cadre accountability system and the county government leadership, especially the governance philosophy of leading cadre has an important influence on county government governance models. In the planned economy era, the county governments' main task is to allocate resources and to govern county public affairs in accordance to higher authorities' plans, so they can only implement the highly centralized administrative system. With the deepening of reform and opening up and the development of market economy, the governance

philosophy of the county governments is also changing. Most of the Top 100 Counties' governmental leaders are open-minded governors and they have mastered modern governance philosophy and their goal is to achieve "good governance"; on the governance mode, they are inclined to cooperation governance and they will actively attract multiple subjects to participate in government county governance through power decentralization, public-private partnerships and making government affairs public. The evolution speed of these counties' governance models is more rapid. However, there are some leaders of top 100 county governments who are sticking to old rules and what they implement is still the old trick of planned economy and they still hold county governance right tightly in their hands; the evolution speed of the governance model of these counties will be inevitably slow and it will be difficult for them to keep up with the development of the times.

**County economic development level:** One of the goals of county governance is to promote development of county economy and county economic development level then reflects the county governance capability in return. The continuous development of county economy raised new requirements and tasks for county government governance. In the early days of new China, the gap between the counties' economy is not large because of the trauma of war, but due to differences in geographical location and resource endowments of each county, the gap of economic development level between counties is more and more obvious. In the developed eastern coastal regions, the county economic development is faster and they always occupy the majority of the top 100 county seats and play a front runner role on county government governance models. From being the first to break the highly centralized administrative system and actively promoting flat governance of "province directly governing county", to constantly improving cooperation governance with multiple subjects' participation, Top 100 Counties played an important role. The counties with more developed economic development level have a faster evolution speed of governance models.

**Development degree of citizens, NGO and other social forces:** With the deepening of reform and opening up and continuous improvement of democratic and legal construction, the democratic consciousness of our citizens and enthusiasm of participating in government and political affairs got a full release and development; NGO, communities and other social forces were also about to get the climax of development. Compared with other counties, citizens, non-governmental organizations and other social forces of

Top 100 Counties developed earlier and now they have become an important force in county government governance. In the counties with developed social forces, it was necessarily to give full consideration to the proposals of citizens and NGOs in the government governance process. Governments would transfer public affairs that they don't want to govern, couldn't govern well and couldn't govern to social forces for governance; the evolution of its governance model is rather rapid. But in the Top 100 Counties where citizens and non-governmental organizations and other social forces are not yet developed, the county governments continue to play the main governance role, so government-leading governance model must be implemented and the evolution of its governance model is relatively slow.

**The dynamic model of the evolution of governance models of the national top 100 counties:** The dynamic model of the evolution of evolution of governance Models of the National Top 100 Counties reveals the main dynamic factors and their interaction mechanism that influence and determine county government governance evolution path, evolution model and evolution law by way of systematology. System dynamics theory suggests that cause and effect connection exists in numerous variables' interaction feedback loop in a complex system. Mutual connection among the feedback loops constitutes the structure of this dynamic model and this structure is the fundamental decisive factor for the system's operation. The evolution power, speed and model formation of county government governance models are the results of comprehensive action of various endogenous and exogenous factors; they not only depend on the interaction of county endogenous dynamic factors and on the influence and interaction of the non-economic factors and exogenous factors but also the restriction impact that endogenous dynamic factors and non-economic factors have on exogenous dynamic factors.

In dynamic model of the evolution of evolution of governance models of the National Top 100 Counties, endogenous dynamic factors determine the evolution basis and speed of the county governance models. The interaction of environmental factors and exogenous dynamic factors, as well as the restriction impact that endogenous dynamic factors, environmental factors exert on exogenous dynamic factors, determine the evolution path of county government governance mode. If the result of these 3's comprehensive action is conducive to the evolution of county governance mode, then the "trickle down" effect is strong and the "infiltration" impact is big; conversely, the "polarization" effect is strong and the "dry up" impact is big.

Function mechanism of internal government governing structure subsystem towards evolution dynamics of the governance models of Top 100 Counties' governments. Internal government governance structure subsystem is mainly composed of county government governance philosophy, governance pattern, county government organization setup, study efficiency and other factors. Governance philosophy is associated with the entire administrative system and is also connected with leaders' styles. Some leaders of Top 100 Counties' governments have innovative thinking, have the courage to explore and are good at trying different governance styles; therefore, the evolution of governments' governance models is faster. Under vertical governance mode, government organizations are large, slow and inefficient and the evolution of governments' governance models has bigger resistance; while under flat governance mode, there are few government organizations and they have high efficiency and the evolution of governments' governance models has smaller resistance, which is conducive to promoting development of county economy.

Function mechanism of external conditions supporting structure subsystem towards evolution dynamics of the governance models of Top 100 Counties' governments. External conditions supporting internal government governance structure subsystem is mainly composed of NGO, enterprises, communities, civil society and other factors. In the evolution process of governance models of Top 100 Counties' governments, NGO, enterprises, communities, civil society and other folk forces have always played a greater role. In the period of highly centralized administrative system, the government possessed all the powers and social resources and folk social forces could not fully play their roles. However, with the deepening of reform and opening up and continuous development of market economy, the increasingly complex social and public affairs presented more serious challenges to government governance, which required urgent needs for folk social forces' participation in governance. In this context, NGO, enterprises, communities, civil society and other folk forces began to rapidly develop and play an important role in the governance and Top 100 Counties' governments are gradually moving towards co-operation governance model with multiple subjects' participation.

Function mechanism of environmental factors affecting subsystem towards evolution dynamics of the governance models of Top 100 Counties' governments. Environmental factors that affect subsystem include county location, economic development level, process of administrative system reform and democracy

construction and perfection degree and other factors. County's geographic location and economic development level will directly affect the evolution of county governments' governance models. Overall, the Top 100 Counties in the eastern coastal region have geographical advantages and high level of economic development; they always portrait themselves as front runners in the evolution process of governments' governance models and they are always the first to adopt the latest governance models. However, the county governments' governance models are closely connected with national administrative system. In the six administrative system reforms, China has conducted after reform and opening up and the county governments' governance models are also changing; with the constant improvement of democratic and legal construction, open and service-oriented governments have gradually become the goal that county government governance pursues.

## CONCLUSION

The main functions of county governments are promoting the development of county economy, governing social affairs, providing public services and safeguarding social fairness. The evolution of the governance models of the Top 100 Counties is the re-positioning of the various functions of county governments to achieve the system and type transformation of the county governments and to establish service-oriented, limited, transparent, efficient, legal and responsible government, thus further promoting economic and social development and social harmony. From the perspective of evolution path and evolution mechanism summed up above, the evolution law of National Top 100 Counties' government governance models can be summarized as follows: transforming from control-oriented government to service-oriented government, transforming from vertical governance to flat governance, transforming from closed-end governance to open governance, transforming from power-oriented government to responsibility-oriented government, transforming from all-round government to limited-oriented government, transforming from singleness governance to pluralistic governance, etc.

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