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# Public Participation in Government Performance Measurement in China: A Critical Review and Prospects

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**Abstract:** This paper provides a historical review and critical evaluation of government performance measurement in China in the past 20 years from the perspective of public participation. The first section focuses on theoretical discussion in an attempt to construct a proper conceptual and analytical framework for the review and assessment. The second section gives account to the practice until the end of the last century under the title of “government domination and no citizen participation.” The third section describes the progresses made in recent years and its driving forces. And the last section starts with a critical assessment of the current situation, followed by some prospects on the practice in the foreseeable future. The conclusion is that enhancing public participation in government performance measurement in China is far beyond the reach of instrumental rationality, it requires systematic and fundamental reforms of the political systems.

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Performance measurement in the public sector is one of the important components of the New Public Management. While the efforts to measure performance of governmental departments have a long history (Buck, 1924; Ridley & Simon, 1938; Williams, 2003), the principles of *result-orientation* and *external accountability* can be regarded as the main features differentiating modern practices from the traditional practices. *Result-orientation* requires that the focus of performance measurement be moved away from input, process, and output to outcomes or impact, and from red-tape and compliance to results valued by citizens (National Performance Review, 1993; Office of the Auditor General of Canada, 2000). *External accountability* stresses that performance measurement should not be confined to hierarchical control or internal management improvement. Rather, it should focus on demonstrating efforts and performance so as to gain legitimacy and support and enhance public supervision. Strengthening public accountability through performance management is regarded as a fundamental change in the accountability of government because it shows the public what they can expect for their money. (Rouse, 2001; Winslow, 2002; Jackson, 1995). Result-orientation and external accountability can be further summarized as *citizen-centered* principle in performance measurement. To ensure that the focus of performance measurement is on the results citizens most value and for it to be an effective mechanism to promote accountable government, broad public participation in the process is crucial.

This paper provides a historical review and critical evaluation of public participation in government performance measurement in China in the past 20 years. The first section focuses on theoretical discussion in an attempt to construct a proper conceptual and analytical framework for the review and assessment. The second and third sections describe and analyze the evolution of citizen’s roles in and current status of government performance measurement practices in China by means of historical review and comparison. And the last section starts with a critical assessment of the current situation, followed by some prospects on the practices in the foreseeable future.

## Theories, Conceptual and Analytical Framework

Public participation in government performance measurement has been given intensive attention in practices and academic research in the developed countries (National Partnership for Reinventing Government, 1999; Executive Session on Public Sector Performance Management, JFK School of Government, 2001; National Center for Public Productivity, Rutgers University, 2002). In China however, while government performance measurement of various kinds has more than 20 years history, public participation in the process is still in the initial stage of development. Therefore, in order to describe and analyze the practices in China, we need to build a conceptual and analytical framework suitable for Chinese circumstances.

Citizen’s political participation has diversified forms and levels. Arstein (1969) proposed a ladder of

citizen participation and divided its significant gradations into eight rungs and three sets of levels. Each rung or level corresponds to the extent of citizens' power in determining the end product. Two bottom rungs of the ladder—(1) Manipulation and (2) Therapy—belong to levels of “non-participation,” and their real objective is to enable powerholders to “educate” or “cure” the participants rather than enable citizens to participate in planning or conducting programs. Rungs (3) Informing, (4) Consultation, and (5) Placation progress to levels of “tokenism” that allow citizens to hear, to have a voice, and to have a voice although the continued right to decide is retained for the powerholders. That is, citizens can enter into public policy-making process and have a certain participative opportunity, but government will decide the participation procedures of communities by power distribution to protect its decision-making power. So the initiatives of public participation are not high enough. Finally, three rungs—(6) Partnership, (7) Delegated Power, and (8) Citizen Control—form levels of citizen power where citizens have legitimate, substantial, and procedural power to participate in formulation and implementation of public policies. Similarly, in *Strong Democracy*, Barber (2003) proposed 12 institutional reforms for the revitalization of citizenship: (1) “neighborhood assemblies,” (2) “television town meetings and a civic communications cooperative,” (3) “civic education and equal access to information,” (4) supplementary institutions,” (5) “a national initiative and referendum process,” (6) electronic balloting,” (7) “election by lot,” (8) “vouchers and the market approach to public choice,” (9) “national citizenship and common action,” (10) “neighborhood citizenship and common action,” (11) “democracy in the workplace,” (12) “recreating the neighborhood as a physical public space.” Abramson et al segment the public into three roles in which they interact with government: *as consumers of government information; as customers of government services; and as citizens participating in government decision making and policy making* (Abramson et al., 2006). Marc Holzer and his colleagues examine the potential for “digital” citizen participation beyond the ballot box. Their study highlights three different models to engage citizens, ranging from *static information dissemination to a dynamic model* with extensive interactions between government and citizens (Holzer et al., 2004).

In comparison with the broad scope and multiple forms of political participation, public participation in government performance measurement occurred in a specific arena, and hence has unique features in terms of the scope and forms of participation with special in-

terrelations between participative subjects. From the perspectives of the main actors involved, government and its departments are the objects of performance measurement while citizens are the subjects. In practice, citizen's status as the *subject* is realized through two ways: citizen groups or some third-sector institutions initiate and carry out performance measurement of public organizations independently; or citizens participate in performance measurement activities initiated and organized by governmental departments, and their roles in the process may range from *information receivers, passive information suppliers* (e.g., filling questionnaires or accepting interviews in satisfaction surveys) to the high-level *joint decision-makers* (in the selection of the departments or programs to be evaluated, determining the contents and focuses of measurement, as well as the ways performance information is utilized). In view of this, we can divide public participation in government performance measurement into two basic types: performance measurement of government independently conducted by citizens, and citizen involvement in performance measurement carried out by government.

Performance measurement of government is a dynamic process involving many steps and elements, and citizen's roles in the process decide the scope or extent of public participation. Marc Holzer stresses that a good performance measurement and improvement system includes seven steps. He then puts the role of the public into each step and describes in detail the concrete forms of participation (Holzer, 2000). Table 1 lists the steps and forms. Drawing upon this research, we can generalize the scope of public participation in performance measurement of government as follows:

Measurement is not an end by itself. Using relevant information to improve organizational performance and raise public service quality is the ultimate goal of performance measurement. In either independent evaluation on their own initiative or involvement in government-initiated activities, citizen's status as the subject in performance measurement cannot be truly established unless their appraisals and views have produced relative impact. Hence, *response* of government to citizens' evaluation is crucial and the interactive and interdependent relations between subjects and objects thus become the core features of public participation in performance measurement. To put it another way, while *self-control* and *self-governance* is widely regarded as a high form of political participation, these are not applicable to public participation in performance measurement. As for the levels of influence public expression and participation can make on performance measurement practices, we

**Table 1. Seven Steps of Performance Measurement and Improvement and Scope of Public Participation**

<b>7 Steps for performance measurement and improvement</b>	<b>Concrete forms of public participation</b>
Identifying programs to be evaluated	Jointly decide whether to conduct performance measurement or not; play an important role in selecting programs or departments to be evaluated
Defining objectives and expected results	Work with governmental departments to formulate their mission, vision, strategy, and important goals
Choosing the framework and indicators for performance	Work with public administrators to define performance indicators such as input, capacity, output, outcomes, efficiency and productivity
Setting performance and results standards	Work with administrators to define criteria for objective realization, namely the achievements of described effectiveness and quality standards
Supervising results	Work with administrators to systematically and regularly supervise the program or departmental performance and seek for opportunity to make corrective actions
Performance report	Performance report should be based on citizens and conducive to citizen's supervision
Using performance information	Work with administrators to identify the strengths, weakness and improvement chances so as to improve performance planning, resources allocation and internal management

may consider it as a continuity spectrum, ranging from no influence at all to determinant influence.

The above discussions touch upon three important aspects of public participation in government performance measurement: *two basic types* of participation, namely measurement of government performance independently conducted by citizens, and citizen involvement in measurement activities carried out by governments; *the scope and concrete forms* of public participation in the whole process of performance measurement; and *the actual influence* public participation produced, including the citizen's voice in decision-making as well as the extent to which their expression can promote the performance improvement of relevant departments. To incorporate those three considerations, we can divide public participation in performance measurement into five levels:

**No participation.** Government initiates and organizes performance measurement focusing on hierarchical control and internal management. Such a practice virtually belongs to a kind of internal exercise within the government system, initiated by government and results consumed by government. Citizen cannot play any roles, even in forms of *information receiver* or *passive information supplier*.

**Ineffective participation.** The fact that citizen groups take initiative to measure government per-

formance is a reflection of participation enthusiasm and positivity on the part of citizens, but they may induce no response from the organizations assessed. Citizen-initiated performance measurement then follows the route of self-execution, self-enjoyment, and self-consumption, with no practical influences on government performance.

**Limited participation.** In citizen-initiated performance measurement, limitation mainly refers to the limited influence on government performance. As for citizen involvement in government-conducted performance measurement, limitation may take a variety of forms: public participation only in some steps or elements of the whole process; public involvement in decision-making of many steps but with a limited voice; and citizen's satisfaction expression has limited influence on government departments.

**High-level participation.** Public participation in government-initiated and government-executed performance measurement activities not only has a broad scope (in nearly all steps and elements of performance measurement) but can also create a prominent impact.

**Citizen Dominance.** Citizens initiate measurement activities and enjoy a high-level of autonomy in decision-making in all steps and elements in the process, and their evaluation can produce substantial

Figure 1. Levels of Public Participation in Performance Measurement

		Level of influence produced		
		Lo		Hi
Participation Types	Citizens involved	No participation	Limited participation	High-level participation
	Citizens initiated	Ineffective participation		Citizen Domination

impacts on government decision-making, resources allocation, and management reforms. From the citizen-centered perspective, this is the supreme form or pattern of public participation in government performance measurement. However, there is no practical case either in China or overseas currently.

Levels of public participation and reference factors are shown in Figure 1.

Reference to the conceptual and analytical framework expressed in Figure 1, the next two sections provide a review of performance measurement in the public sector in China from the perspective of public participation. The review and discussions cover only one type of public participation, namely citizen involvement in government-initiated and executed measurement activities. The main reason is that though civil communities like the Horizon Key Group and others have independently conducted performance evaluation of government for years (Yuan *et al.*, 2004) the pattern and practical influence of the evaluation still await further observation

### The Stage of Government Domination with No Public Participation

Public sector performance measurement entered China during the reform and opening-up period. From the prospective of public participation, the practices went through roughly two stages. The period from mid-1980s to the beginning of this century can be named a *stage of government domination with no public participation*. From the beginning of this century until now, it is called the *stage of limited public participation*. It should be made clear that the above division amounts to a description of a general trend and there is no clear time line between the different stages.

Performance measurement was first conducted under the banner and constituted a composing part of

the Objective Responsibility System (ORS) (*mubiao zeren zhi*) in the mid-1980s. The ORS is simply the Chinese version of Management by Objectives (MBO), involving goal and objective setting as well as measurement of performance in achieving the defined objectives, followed by rewards and punishment as well as various measures in order to enhance organizational performance. From the mid-1980s to early 1990s, the ORS was introduced on a voluntary basis and the absence of uniform guidelines or standards from the central authority resulted in variations in practice from place to place. When the Chinese Association for Municipal Objective Responsibility System was founded in 1988, it had a membership of 13 middle and large cities (Hou, 2002), a demonstration that the application of ORS in China was relatively common at that time. Though there was little reference recording the focus and operation of the ORS at that period, judging from a small number of commentary papers (Wu, 1986; Cao, 1990; Ren 1990), it can be concluded that the ORS was a new technique of internal management. Citizens played no role in the process, and were not informed of the practice.

ORS throughout the 1990s had two major characteristics compared with previous practices. First, it was carried out top-down in a centralized manner despite the fact that there was no official document or regulation at the center to guide the practice. From the center down to township-level governments, higher-level authorities set up targets and cascaded down to lower layers of governments, forming a target pyramid. Work performance of chief executives in target fulfillment was internally ranked on collective as well as individual bases, and bonuses were paid or punishments made accordingly. The practice was named by some scholars a 'pressurized system' (*yaxixing tizhi*), in which objectives or targets were imposed by

**Table 2.** Performance Targets for a Township Government in 1999

Dimensions	Targets		Quarterly Assessment			
	Task	Weight	1	2	3	4
1. Agriculture		100				
(1) total value of production (in million <i>yuan</i> )	184	10				
(2) structural adjustment		25				
banana planting (in ha.)	1,050					
(3) fruit production (in ton)	22,200	10				
(4) edible mushroom planting		25				
hectare	110					
volume of production (ton)	11,800					
(5) number of pigs provided (in Thousand)	25.6	20				
(6) aquiculture production (ton)	790	10				
2. Private and small business development		100				
(1) construction of development zone for private and small businesses		40				
Number of new businesses	4					
Total volume of investment (in thousand <i>yuan</i> )	2,000					
(2) Private businesses with investment above 100 thousand <i>yuan</i>		60				
Number of new businesses	16					
Total volume of investment	240					
3. Outside investments		100				
(1) production value by joint ventures (in million <i>yuan</i> )	62	15				
(2) volume of foreign investment in contract (in thousand US Dollars)	7,500	30				
(3) volume of foreign capital invested (in thousand US Dollars)	3,500	20				
(4) number of new enterprises by overseas investors	3	20				
(5) number of new businesses above 500,000 <i>yuan</i> by investors outside the region	2	15				
4. Fixed assets investment		100				
(1) volume of investment (in thousand <i>yuan</i> )	23,000	20				
(2) volume of investment by key projects (in thousand <i>yuan</i> )	5,000	80				
5. Tax revenue		100				
(1) volume of tax revenue		80				
(2) contribution to the County		10				
(3) tax revenue per capita		10				

**Source:** Evaluation Office of Changtai County, Fujian Province (2000).

**Table 3.** Performance Indicators for Municipal Governments in 2006

Dimensions	Performance Indicators	Weight	Dimensions	Performance Indicators	Weight
Sustainable Development (35)	1. GDP growth rate	5	Harmonious Society Construction (25)	19. index of new village construction	3
	2. financial development index	4		20. urban residents income index	3
	3. growth rate of fixed assets investment	4		21. income index for rural residents	2
	4. development index for non-state enterprises	3		22. index of educational development	3
	5. population development index	3		23. development index for public health	3
	6. index of human capital development	3		24. rate of social security coverage	3
	7. environment quality index	4		25. rate of registered unemployment	2
	8. energy consumption index	3		26. index of public safety	3
	9. reduction of government debts overdue	3		27. satisfaction rate for Public safety	3
Progress in Modernization (25)	10. urbanization index	3	Administration By Law (10)	28. index of legality for abstract actions	3
	11. development index for the third industry	3		29. index of legality for concrete actions	3
	12. proportion of industrial increment	4		30. losing rate in lawsuits	2
	13. development of new industry	3		31. rate of rectification in reconsideration	2
	14. ratio of R&D investment to GDP	2		32. efficiency in dealing with complaints and visits	3
	15. proportion of hi-tech industry increment	2		33. completion rate of complaints dealing	2
	16. number of patents	2		34. percentage of staff with misconducts	3
	17. index of export dependence	3			
	18. growth rate of overseas capital investment	3			

**Source:** Office of Effectiveness Building, Fujian Provincial Government (2007).

higher-level authorities and officials at the lower levels were under immense pressure for fulfillment simply because their career and fortune was mainly determined by the higher authorities (Rong *et al.*, 1998; Huang, 1995; Edin, 2003).

Another major feature of the ORS throughout the 1990s was the excessive weight on GDP growth in target setting and performance evaluation. With a few exceptions involving policy areas like family planning and social order (*shehui zhi'an*), which have remained in the priority list from mid-1980s to the present, ORS during this period primarily focused on economic growth and performance indicators were centered on determinant factors leading to GDP growth.

Table 2 expresses the performance targets set by the Changtai County, Fujian Province, for a town-

ship government in 1999. It illustrates well the central focus of performance measurement on economic growth in the context of the 'pressurized system.' The huge differences in terms of industrial structure, development strategy and condition among local governments led to some variations in specific performance indicators, but generally speaking, the central focus and basic structure of performance measurement in the period all over the country were more or less the same.

Zhou summarizes the three main features of the Chinese practices in performance measurement in this period. First is the *closedness* of the whole process: performance measurement was primarily an internal exercise within the government system, initiated, executed, and results consumed by government and relatively

closed to society and citizens. Secondly, public sector performance measurement had a feature of *unilateralism*: with regard to the vertical relationships between different layers of governments, performance measurement was conducted in a top-down manner; as for the relationship between administrative agencies and other public institutions, performance measurement was initiated and conducted by the charging government department with affiliated enterprises or institutions as targets, but not the opposite. The third feature is the *control-orientation*: the performance measurement scheme was designed primarily for internal hierarchical control rather than outward public accountability (Zhou, 2007). Maybe because of this, overseas scholars tend to discuss performance measurement practice under the name of administrative monitoring or local agent control (Huang, 1995; Edin, 2003).

Focusing on public participation in government performance measurement, we can draw a conclusion from above discussions: performance measurement and evaluation in China in this period had an obvious nature of government domination. While it was dynamic and vigorous and led to fierce performance competition among government officials, the public only played the role of observers.

### **The Stage of Limited Public Participation**

China entered the new century with a new generation of top leadership and the mode of governance has been undergoing subtle changes. A consensus has been reached that economic growth is not equivalent to economic development, economic development is not equivalent to social progress, and the growth is not the aim but the means for development. With the promotion of the 'human-centered' principle and 'scientific view of development,' the previous obesity with economic growth gave way to a systematic approach to balance economic and social development, emphasizing public especially human services so as to achieve sustainable development and the construction of 'a society in harmony.' In response to top leaders' appeal for the development of a 'scientific system of government performance measurement' (Hu, 2003), great efforts have been made to construct performance indicators embodying better the principle of 'scientific view of development,' and such indicators as 'Green GDP' (Zhang, 2004) and 'fairly well-off society' (Center for Development Study, 2004) thus moved from a purely academic endeavor into serious efforts by the concerned central ministries. This new and broadened focus under the new mode of governance ushered in a new stage of performance measurement in China.

Table 3 is a set of performance indicators by the Fujian provincial authority for municipal governments in 2006.

Compared to practices in the 1990s, the emphasis of performance measurement has two noticeable changes. First, in accordance with the principle of 'scientific view of development,' a set of new indicators are developed covering rural construction, transformation of the mode of economic growth, contribution rate of science and technology, and energy consumption, indicating that while gross economic growth is still an important goal, greater attention is paid to effectiveness and sustainability. Another noticeable change is the emphasis on social functions and public services reflecting the human-centered principle. Indicators such as employment rate, resident income, education, public health, social security, and public security are added and their relative weight increases. Again, variations exist because of the difference in development strategy and local conditions, but the shift from "GDP Cult" to sustainable development and from obesity with economic growth to social and public services is a general trend of development all over China in government performance measurement in the past decade.

With the changes in performance indicator development to reflect better the needs and concerns of citizens, public involvement in performance measurement has also made some progress in this period. First, the rate of resident satisfaction is included in the evaluation framework and its weight has been increasing. Take the Municipal Government of Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang Province, as an example. According to executive mayor Jingmiao Sun, the city's Comprehensive Performance Assessment Scheme has set four orientations as its core value: strategy-orientation, responsibility-orientation, public-orientation, and performance-orientation. Within a total credit of 100, the areas of assessment and their credits are allocated as follows: attainment of pre-defined objectives or targets (45), appraisal by municipal leadership (5), and public assessment (50). 'Public' here is composed of members of the Municipal People's Congress and Political Consultative Conference, as well as representatives of ordinary residents, known scholars, businessmen, and journalists (Sun, 2007). The case of Hangzhou is radical in that 'public assessment' accounts for half of the total credits.

Qingdao city of Shandong Province also puts the rate of resident satisfaction into the departmental performance measurement system, and satisfaction survey involves enterprises, residents, and focus

groups. The survey focuses on problems that most concern residents and is conducted through questionnaires or computer-aid telephone investigation (CATI). The satisfaction survey in 2006 had more than 10 indicators covering four areas including solving of problems of great public concern, situation of public security, community management and services, and government working style. For instance, questions for the state of public security included 'Do you feel there are many cases of theft or robbery in your neighborhood?' 'Do you feel safe when you go out or on your way home alone at night?' 'Can you see the patrol cars and patrolmen around you?' and 'Are you satisfied with the public security situation in your residential area?' The relative weight of satisfaction rate in performance measurement was 8% in 2006, and rose to 14% in 2007. It is claimed that the practice intensified the citizen-orientation among public officials and effectively made them 'look not only upward but also downward,' pay more attention to people's living conditions and needs, and put into practice the principle of 'fixing affection on the people, excising power, and seeking benefits for the people' (Office of Performance Measurement of Qingdao Municipal Government, 2007).

Another more radical approach is to take public assessment as the sole channel for government performance. The campaign of 'inviting 10,000 people to assess the performance of government' was launched in many cities like Zhuhai, Shenyang, and Nanjing. To take the case of Nanjing, capital city of Jiangsu Province, as an example, public assessment covered three main areas: government working style, integrity and clean government, and some basic work, with a credit of 50, 30, and 20 for each area respectively. As in 2001, the city authority sent out 8,438 assessment forms and received 6,373 responses, a response rate of 76.34 per cent. In addition, a number of simplified questionnaires were sent out to 37,400 residents, and 36,380 suggestions and proposals were received from this survey group. Ninety agencies under the municipal government were ranked in accordance with the results of public assessment. Chief executives of the top 8 agencies received recognition and rewards of different kinds while those of agencies ranked last were punished in forms of forced resign, demotion, and exhortation (Deng & Xiao, 2007).

This discussion shows that government performance measurement in China has two new features or trends of development in the past decade. One can be called 'leaning to citizens' in design of performance indicators as illustrated by the greater emphasis on social functions and public services, and

another is the increased citizen involvement in performance measurement of government, which mainly takes the form of resident satisfaction surveys and public assessment.

### **Critical Assessment and Prospect**

Though public participation in government performance measurement has made progress in recent years, it is nevertheless still at the stage of limited participation. First, high-level public participation means engaging citizens in the whole process of performance measurement and improvement, from the first step of identifying programs to be evaluated down through to the last of using performance information as illustrated in Table 1. The current level of public participation in China belongs to the category of 'partial participation' in only a few steps. In supervising results, the main form of resident participation is to fill in questionnaires or receive interviews. In performance reporting, with greater importance attached to publicity in recent years, the public are better informed of the assessment results. Apart from these, the public play virtually no role in other steps or links. Moreover, owing to the lack of uniform regulation or guidance, development of public participation is quite unbalanced in different regions. Some local governments still adhere to the traditional pattern and left no space for citizens. Another indication of limited participation is the limitation in roles to play and the channel to participate. In both satisfaction survey and public assessment, citizens only play a role of passive 'information provider.' With regard to important issues such as whether or not to conduct performance measurement, the department or project to be evaluated, the relative weight attached to satisfaction rate, etc., all are left to the willingness or self-consciousness of party and government chiefs. Ordinary citizens, by and large, have little voice in the process, let alone the ability to take part in the decision-making.

After years of local experiments, there is a move to institutionalize performance measurement by the central authority. One piece of evidence is that performance measurement, together with organization restructuring, reform of the administrative examination and approval system, administration according to law, and government accountability are listed by the State Council as important issues that should be solved in the near future. In early 2007, the State Council designated the Ministry of Personnel to draft related regulations, rules, and operation guidelines. To this end, the Ministry of Personnel has held a number of consultation meetings and workshops and five regional and local governments have been selected as pilot



sites (Bureau of Personnel of Nantong Municipal Government, 2007). Enhancing public participation is said to be one of important tasks in institutionalizing government performance measurement.

Strengthening public participation implies a transformation from 'partial participation' in some steps to 'full participation' throughout the whole process, and from a unitary role of passive information provider to comprehensive role of information provider as well as co-decision-maker, and at the same time, the influence of citizen's view and assessment should see a steady increase in the development process. Chinese practices have a long way to go before they see high-level public participation. Therefore, limited participation will be a fairly long historic stage and the development of public participation will be a constant and progressive process. In view of the current situation, special attention should be paid to two issues in the efforts to promote public participation in performance measurement. First is to enhance public participation in decision-making. Citizens should have the right of expression in deciding whether to carry out performance measurement or not and which department or program should be involved. For a long time, a characteristic of performance measurement in many local governments is to surround the so-called 'core work,' but whether such core work comes from the public or whether it reflects real needs and demands of the public remains a problem. In practice, the so-called 'personal achievement project,' 'image-enhancing project' and 'project of the chief' (arbitrary decision making on the preference of the top leader) is much more easily to be designated as the core work of local governments. The risk is that in absence of active public participation in decision-making, performance measurement itself may become another type of 'image-enhancing project.'

The second issue relates to enhancing public participation in defining objectives and results, deciding the focus and framework of evaluation, and setting indicators and performance standards. At present, the public mainly plays a role of information provider. Although citizen's satisfaction has great value and is generally recognized by all countries, it is still a kind of subjective appraisal of government performance. Excessive reliance on subjective measures in performance measurement has obvious limits. For public services like fire fighting, first-aid, and many others, most citizens simply have no chance to experience by themselves. With regard to most services, "very few citizens have a strong sense of what a 'public service' is and, without anything to compare it with, find it hard to express a firm opinion as to how satisfied they are"

(HM Treasury, 2007). Peters also points out that for many services, the public may not know what to expect and what constitutes 'quality.'... For more complex services, such as medicine or education, however, is the average citizen capable of determining a high quality of service? Even for the more mundane services, it is still difficult to say what is 'good enough.' Circumstances will inevitably cause some trains to run late. Indeed, if the trains are late for safety reasons, that may signal a high quality of service than if they are on time but taking inordinate risks. Good services for some citizens (travelers wanting to get through customs quickly) may not be good for all citizens (those wanting protection against smuggling) (Peters, 1996). The case in China is much worse because of its closed government or the general lack of transparency and openness. Another point to be stressed is the relativity of satisfaction assessment. Academics generally agree that customer's satisfaction has no objective standards but depends mainly on the gap between expected quality and experienced quality. Under the circumstance of low expectation caused by long-term bad quality of a service, a small improvement will lead to a higher satisfaction rate. However, in another place or service area, relatively higher service quality may fail to gain a higher satisfaction rate, since citizens there have been accustomed to high-quality services and have much higher expectations. In view of this, the British Cabinet Office puts forward some advice: It is best not to rely on these methods in isolation, as customer satisfaction measures tend to be influenced by many drivers (The Cabinet Office, 2007). Strengthening public participation in this regard, therefore, implies a move away from the current excessive dependency on and isolated application of subjective measures like rate of satisfaction. A good citizen-oriented performance measurement system should be a reasonable balance between subjective measures and objective measures.

These discussions clearly fall into the category of normative description of "what it should be." An inevitable core issue is where the driving forces come from in the effort to promote public participation in government performance measurement in China. When comparing administrative reforms in western developed countries to those undertaken in China, Zhou makes the following comments: Public sector reform in the West is of incremental nature whereas China's reform is a radical transformation; Western reform is basically a process of natural adaptation while China's reform is more of human creation; and the driving forces behind Western reforms come mainly from without (namely the society) whereas in China they come largely from within (government itself). The govern-

ment plays multiple roles in the transitional period including reform promoter, institution designer, resource mobilizer, and coordinator. This inevitably leads to a number of contradictions: the government is a principal initiator but also the object of the reform; reversing the "societal atrophy" is one of the major goals of the reform, but this has to be achieved mainly through government self-restraint; market economy is in essence the operation of a "hidden hand," but such a hidden hand has to rely on the government to be created. (Zhou, 1998). These internal contradictions also apply to public participation in government performance measurement. Enhancing public participation means to empower citizens to share decision-making and hold government officials accountable. However, under the current political system, such empowerment to a large extent relies on government officials' self-consciousness, good will, and even bestowment. If citizens do not have the determinant power in deciding the fate and career of government officials, their political participation will lack institutional guarantee. Therefore, concerning the current situation in China, promoting public participation in government performance measurement is not a technical problem that can be solved by instrumental rationality, rather, it requires systematic and fundamental reforms of the political systems.

#### Author

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