

Study on the Internal Mechanism of Collaborative Governance of Community Cultural Services in China

Yanlei Hu

School of Politics and Law, University of Jinan, Jinan, Shandong, China

sss_huyl@ujn.edu.cn

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Abstract: With accelerating urbanization, China's urban population is increasing rapidly. As such, how to improve the supply of cultural services has become an important subject. Recently, collaborative governance came to be one of the important instruments used in supplying cultural services to urban communities in many countries. This article analyzes the collaborative system of the cultural services of 107 communities of six Jie Dao Ban in China. This was done via face-to-face interviews with the officials of Jie Dao Ban and community committees, residents, and the workers of social organizations and cultural enterprises. Some kinds of collaborative inertia problems are found, including policy dependence, information dependence, power dependence and ability dependence, particularly with regard to public agencies, cultural enterprises, and social organizations, as well as the residents who rely on the collaborative governance of cultural services in urban communities. This decreases the effectiveness and efficiency of the collaborative governance of community cultural services.

1. Introduction

Community cultural service is an important component of urban public service in modern society. Collaborative arrangements and partnerships are increasingly being used by local governments, due to their "networked polity"^[1,2], and the cross-sector nature of culture policy^[3]. As such, collaborative governance has been an important approach in the field of urban cultural service supply since 2000. However, collaborative governance is increasingly faced with many new contradictions and problems, such as collaborative inertia in the collaborative governance process of cultural services in urban communities in China. In addition, with those contradictions and problems, the efficiency and effectiveness of collaborative governance is weakened.

By reviewing the public policies and actions of urban cultural service in Chinese mainland, from 2005 to the present, this study finds that central and local governments are playing a leading role. This year, the Communist Party of China adopted the proposal of the Eleventh Five Year Plan for the development of the national economy and society in the fifth Plenary Session of the 16th CPC Central Committee. The government stated the aim is "to establish a relatively complete public cultural service system" (CPC, 2005). As a consequence, the supply of urban cultural services increased sharply in China. The question of how to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of cultural services through various supply measures is also increasingly drawing the attention of researchers and scholars. Currently, central and local governments are examining the subject of the supply of public cultural services. This focus is also affecting the efficiency of cultural service supply. The supply model of cultural service needs to be changed from the current single-subject governance form to one of multiple-subject governance. In 2015, Suggestions on Public Cultural Service of Government Purchasing of Social Forces was issued by the Cultural Department of the Central Government of China (GOSCC, 2015). However, local governments are still playing a leading role in the supply of urban cultural services. In addition, many problems are being encountered, such as the low satisfaction of citizens with those cultural services, the relatively low utilization rate of urban cultural services and the severe lack of urban cultural services for low-

income classes, such as migrant workers or citizens who live in marginalized communities. For instance, the Liangnan community is one of the typical groups confronted with the abovementioned collaborative problems in Jinan City, China.

This paper presents a case study of the roles played by central government, the local governments, Jie Dao Ban (Jie Dao Ban is a dispatched agency of a district in China), and non-government organizations in the collaborative governance of cultural services (CGCS) in 107 communities of six Jie Dao Ban in Shandong Province, China. Through interviews with citizens, social workers, members of the NGOs of the 107 communities and officials of Jie Dao Ban, this study addresses how dependence is the collaborative inertia of public cultural services supply in China. Dependence also results in the low efficiency and effectiveness of CGCS. Then, this study discusses the characteristics and causes of the dependence inertia with regard to the CGCS of communities in China.

The remainder of this paper is organized as follows: First, the related work of collaborative governance and collaborative inertia is reviewed, and the research method and research questions of this study are clarified. Next, those CGCS communities are briefly reviewed. The internal relationship of each CGCS stakeholder of those communities is then presented, and the collaborative structure is outlined. Finally, the patterns and causes of the dependence inertia of the CGCS of communities in China are discussed.

2. Related Work

Since the 1950s, most public cultural services in developed countries have been supplied by the respective national governments. For instance, the Culture Department of France was established in 1959. This was the first public management agency to be established and controlled by a central government. However, “government failure” emerged in the early 1960s, with the rise of intellectual and political criticism of government regulations. This criticism was advocated by economists, who argued that government interventions in markets were costly and tended to fail^[4]. Collaborative governance then came to be an important approach in the field of urban cultural service supply at the beginning of the 2000s. The definition of collaborative governance was first proposed by D. C. Wood and B. Gray. Specifically, the study defined collaborative governance as a governance model in which multiple stakeholders come to an agreement in accordance with the same topic with regard to public institutions^[5]. Since then, collaborative governance has been widely applied in the fields of air pollution governance^[6], the governance of ecological systems^[7] and other fields of public affairs governance. For instance, Rosemary O’Leary et al. argued that collaborative governance was a brand new concept in the twenty-first century, and defined collaborative governance as a tool used to control the impacts of joint decision making and behavior processes among the private sector, public sector and citizens’ groups. Ansell and Gash (2008) proposed a comprehensive and widely applicable collaborative governance model^[8]. The study distilled by 137 empirical cases in different policy domains, and defined collaborative governance as “a governing arrangement where one or more public agencies directly engage non-state stakeholders in a collective decision-making process that is formal, consensus-oriented, and deliberative, and that aims to make or implement public policy or manage public programs or assets”. This model is well accepted as a theoretical framework of collaborative governance. For example, Silvia Gugu and Martina Dal Mollin (2016) studied the function system and inter-relations of collaborative local cultural governance, using the above model, based on the case of cultural districts in Italy. The paper’s aim was to understand how actor diversity affects governance dimensions in a cultural district in Italy. The study found that there are “two types of partnerships responsible for decision making and goal implementation” in the case of Italy. Two sources of actor diversity were highlighted, namely within-sector diversity and cross-sector diversity, and each of which was shown to have different effects on collaborative governance. Therefore, collaborative governance is tending to become an important governance tool in the field of the supply of cultural services from a city to a community. In recent years, collaborative governance has progressively been used in practices of the provision system of public cultural services in Chinese mainland.

Collaborative inertia originates from the description of the conflict tension between collaborative advantage and collaborative inertia in the construction of collaborative advantage theory. Collaborative inertia refers to the tendency that collaborative activities have extremely inefficient output results, or those activities create a large number of intolerable conflicts^[9]. The collaborative inertia of public services is also known as collaborative conflict^[10,11] or collaborative paradox^[12,13]. The term usually refers to the collaboration dilemma in the process of multi-agent discussions on how to build a problem-solving mechanism with multi-agent participation through dialogue and negotiation. Most previous literature reviews have focused on the latter two kinds of collaborative inertia.

Some literature focused on those collaborative inertia problems that were evident in the results of co-production, or those which emerged in the efficiency (or lack of efficiency) of collaboration. For instance, Ricardo B. Duque et al. (2005) found that the social environment in the field of knowledge production caused the problem of collaboration paradox among scientists in developing countries. David Noble et al. (2018) did a comparative study on the inertia of industrial university research policy collaboration, based on the Cooperative Research Centre (CRC) in Australia.

Other studies have focused on collaborative inertia or examples of collaborative paradox in the process of collaborative governance. For instance, Bing Ran et al. (2018) proposed seven theoretical propositions by establishing a theoretical analysis framework of the interaction between power and trust in collaborative governance. For example, the blind trust between participants may cause the loss of some collaborative advantages and collaborative risks. On this basis, the study analyzed the impacts of power imbalance, blindness or lack of trust and other interactions on collaborative governance, including both the effective collaboration and the paradox of collaboration. Maurits Waardenburg et al. (2019), in a quasi-experimental study on the collaboration of eight departments dealing with criminal acts in the Netherlands, found that conflicts of collaborative needs exist in the three types of challenges. Examples include the substantive problems that need to be solved, the collaborative process, and the responsibility of multilateral relations. In addition, the study found that, only by taking an inclusive attitude towards contradictory needs, rather than an either-or attitude, can we promote the progress of collaborative behavior.

Collaborative governance theory is commonly acknowledged to provide a new theoretical perspective and action strategy for modern national public affairs management. This new strategy is conducive to solving the problem of public service fragmentation caused by the new public management reform movement. However, multiple governance goals of equal participation and negotiation of multiple subjects are advocated by the theory to reach a consensus and jointly promote the fairness, justice, efficiency and effectiveness of public service governance. These goals are faced with different degrees and types of collaborative inertia in some developing countries. For example, in China, a positive incentive mechanism for collaborative governance among multiple subjects has been established. This was achieved by strengthening the construction of policy guidance, system design, organizational structure, social environment and other aspects of the collaborative governance of public services. Meanwhile, due to the collaborative relationship between those subjects based on dependence (rather than trust), negotiation dialogue and collaborative participation cannot be truly and effectively realized. Many studies have reported on the wider domains of collaborative governance and collaborative inertia. However, to our knowledge, no study has yet been conducted on the expression of collaborative inertia in the process of implementing collaborative governance reform and its collaborative mechanism in developing countries with an insufficient concentration of public power, insufficient independence of social organizations, and an increasing awareness of citizen participation. One example of such countries is China.

Based on the analysis of relevant academic research literature, and in connection with the problems faced in the practice of collaborative governance reformation in China, this study argues that the collaborative inertia of CGCS is a kind of collaborative governance relationship. This relationship, however, is not based on equality, mutual trust, dialogue and negotiation, but rather is

based on dependence that is caused by asymmetric information, unequal power, the lack of a trust mechanism, an imperfect collaborative system and other factors in the reforming process of CGCS. This results in unequal and ineffective information communication, negotiation dialogue and collaborative behavior among those subjects of CGCS. Other problems also arise, such as ineffective policy communication, information asymmetry, power imbalance, trust dilemma and insufficient leadership. Finally, collaborative inertia emerges, including policy dependence, information dependence, power dependence, and ability dependence.

3. Method

This section briefly summarizes the study's research approach and data collection method. The research is designed as an embedded case study, with qualitative data collected both from primary and secondary data sources^[14]. Also, an embedded case study design occurs when many multiple units of analysis are contained within the same case study^[15]. Existing literature on the collaborative governance of community cultural services in China is very sparse. A notable exception, however, is Lei Liu (2017). He analyzed a collaborative model between a community office and a non-government organization of cultural service supply, based on a case of the Aijia international community. The study argued that the proposed model was a brand-new type of cultural service supply model, one which compels the diversity of the community's cultural services. Conversely, however, the model has numerous limitations. For example, community culture resources tend to be reliant on NGO or community offices, in such a way that their independence is lost^[16]. There are no systematically organized data pertaining to the role of local governments of Chinese communities, compared to the role of NGO in the mechanism of CGCS of those communities. Hence, the secondary-sourced data were obtained via extensive archival research, including yearbooks, Internet news and internal reports regarding the supply of cultural services to those communities, as well as former research literature.

Based on the secondary-sourced data, this study identified came up with semi-structured interview questions and visited 12 officials of the six Jie Dao Ban, 107 officials of those community neighborhood committees, as well as 36 managers and social workers of a cultural NGO, and more than 200 residents who live in those 107 communities. For Jie Dao Ban, interviews were conducted with the manager or the vice-manager and one staff member in charge of community cultural services. For those 107 community neighborhood committees (a community neighborhood committee is a self-governance office of the community in China), interviews were again conducted with the manager or the vice-manager, and one staff member. In addition, for the community's cultural NGOs, the managers of 36 such cultural NGOs were interviewed. These NGOs included, for example, the Cultural Performance Association, Arts Group, Paper-cut Association, and the Calligraphy and Painting Lovers Association. The interviews were conducted with a sufficient variety of knowledgeable informants in those agencies and associations, in order to ensure the provision of multiple perspectives^[17]. The citizens were interviewed randomly. In the interviews, the actual roles and the ideal roles of the communities in CGCS of those 107 communities were analyzed, according to the respondents' perspectives. Interviewees were asked how they perceive the current problems of CGCS and the reason for those problems, as well as the different roles of local governments and NGOs in CGCS. In particular, they were asked about the role of the Social Workers Organization, and what types of incentives and limitations they saw as being related to CGCS. The interview material provided a subjective account of developments, which could then be compared with the initial "objective" data obtained from the secondary sources (such as news reports from the Internet). Subsequently, some of the stories about the CGCS of those 107 communities were shared with and checked by the interviewees. During this study's primary data collection process, the Chief Manager or the vice-manager of the six Jie Dao Ban were interviewed, which provided a comprehensive introduction of the mechanism of cultural service supply. Some key issues related to the collaborative governance mechanism between NGOs and Jie Dao Ban were interpreted and discussed. The innovations of CGCS in those 107 communities were also covered, as well as the various cultural projects and the current situation of CGCS in those 107 communities.

Based on the qualitative data, the key problems and explanations of CGCS in those 107 communities were identified, as well as their countermeasures. More specifically, the key issues examined in this study are as follows: (1) What kind of roles can Jie Dao Ban or the community neighborhood committee play in terms of the CGCS in the community? (2) What do you think about the current cultural services of the community? Also, do you have some suggestions on how those services could be improved? (3) What do you think are some advantages or limitations of NGO participation in CGCS? (4) What incentives, in terms of enhancing NGO participation in CGCS, should be established by the local government? In Table 1, some selected excerpts from the interviews are presented.

4. Results: Dependence Inertia of CGCS

4.1. Policy dependence

Policy dependence refers to the collaborative inertia between the central or local government and grassroots government caused by a policy implementation gap^[18], such as the air transmission policy. The term air transmission policy usually refers to the symbolic implementation of a policy's text, without this text being translated into actual action in the process of policy implementation. Since 2015, China's central and local governments have vigorously promoted the socialization and marketization policies of community public cultural service supply, in order to compel the reformation of collaborative governance. However, obvious gaps exist in the development speed and governance efficiency of the CGCS of each community. Due to the unbalanced development of regional economies and cultures, the grass roots governments have policy implementation gaps, such as with air transmission policy, policy flexibility, implementation and obstruction. In addition, people are more inclined to rely on the strategic planning of the grass roots governments, rather than on the policy planning of the central and local governments. This, therefore, leads to the collaborative inertia between the central and local governments and grass roots governments. For instance, Community A is located in District S, which is the center of the city. Seven famous colleges and universities and 66 schools are located in the district. In 2017, the GDP of this district ranked 12th among all districts and counties of the province, and third among all districts and counties of the city (90.75 billion RMB). Therefore, the district not only has good economic strength but also has profound cultural heritage and cultural resources. "To Establish A Strong Cultural District" has been the basis of an important development strategy of the district government since 2016. Therefore, the government of District S pays close attention to public cultural services and collaborative governance. The corresponding policies and measures were issued earlier, with many financial subsidies, enabling a quick response to the relevant national policy requirements of CGCS. However, the CGCS situation is not so healthy in Community B, which is subordinated to District T, located at the north edge of the city. In 2017, the GDP of District T was 47.93 billion RMB, meaning the district ranked sixth among the eight districts and two counties of the city. Numerous old industrial enterprises are located in the area. However, with the development of the market economy, a large number of these old industrial enterprises have gone bankrupt. As a result, a large number of workers lost their jobs, and a large number of migrants are looking for lower housing rents, compared with other developing districts. Hence, the main problems faced by the government of District T are economic development, poverty control and the management of the floating migrant population. District T's grass-roots government pays little attention to CGCS in the process of policy formulation and implementation; their motivation is obviously insufficient. In addition, the grass roots government is beginning to engage in policy option behavior, due to financial pressure; that is, the selective implementation of the public CGCS policy. For instance, the grass roots government has focused on the policies involved in implementing economic transformation and growing GDP, while neglecting CGCS policies. Therefore, there is a strong policy attachment to the grass roots government, with the air transmission policy of the central and local governments. This has resulted in collaborative inertia between the central and local government and the grass roots government in the process of CGCS.

4.2. Information dependence

Information dependence refers to the inertia of negotiation and consensus with regard to CGCS, specifically due to information asymmetry problems, such as information “black boxes” among stakeholders. In 1948, W. Ross Ashby put forward the concept of a “black box”, based on the concept of “closed box” introduced by Norbert Wiener. The phrase is used to describe the internal mechanism of organisms that are difficult to observe. Through the survey of six Jie Dao Ban or counties of Shandong Province, “information black boxes” and asymmetric information problems of CGCS were found among the governance participants. These included grass roots governments, grass roots autonomous organizations (such as community neighborhood committees), grass roots party organizations, resident social organizations, cultural enterprises, community voluntary organizations and community residents. That is to say, the policy information of the higher-level government and the public resources of the community are mainly overseen by the core members of the grass roots government, the grass roots autonomous organizations and the grass roots Party group. Meanwhile, the external social organizations, cultural enterprises, community voluntary organizations and community residents face the problem of “information black boxes”, due to being outside the administrative system. On the other hand, the grass roots governments, grass roots autonomous organizations and grass roots party organizations have a relatively singular approach to acquiring the information of those organizations outside the system. Evidently, the grass roots governments, grass roots autonomous organizations and grass roots party organizations face the problem of an “information black box” with regard to the organizational background, governance ability and participation motivation of those outside system organizations. Finally, there is a highly-independent relationship of information communication among inside system organizations and outside system organizations, especially between community neighborhood committees and private sectors. This relationship also leads to the inertia of consensus negotiation among the subjects of CGCS. Compared with other organizations, the private sector usually has additional organizational advantages in the management of cultural projects, given the private sector’s abundant resources of personnel, investment and management skills. However, this study found that the participation of the private sector is the weak link of CGCS in China. Fewer communities have established long-term collaborative relations with private sector cultural enterprises. The inertia of consultation and consensus among the enterprises, grass roots autonomous organizations and social residents, specifically due to the lack of effective communication and asymmetric information, is a widespread problem. There are two concrete aspects of this phenomenon. Firstly, the alternative negotiation behavior of the higher-level government has been initiated. Consequently, there are some problems of information asymmetry and ineffective communication between the grass roots autonomous organizations, community residents and cultural enterprises. For example, in rural Community C, the local government purchases a large number of cultural performance projects from cultural enterprises every year. However, due to the operation mode of “the government arranges the program, the community and Jie Dao Ban are responsible for the accommodation and performance venues of the performers, and the people are responsible for attending and watching”, the cultural service supply is repeatedly locked in a strange circle of “the people are unwilling to watch, the community is unwilling to receive, and the government actively buys”. Secondly, an “information black box” in the negotiation between the two parties is caused by overemphasis on “public welfare”, while the profitable characteristics of enterprises are ignored. For example, in Community A, cultural enterprises are forced to provide public welfare services and not to engage in any profit-making activities. It seems that the two sides have reached a consensus on this at present. However, the problem of the sustainability of those collaborative activities continues to exist, since a consensus has not been reached on the basis of full communication and equal dialogue. In addition, the “information black box” can very easily cause distrust or betrayal among collaborative subjects.

4.3. Power dependence

Power dependence refers to the inertia of collaborative actions among subjects that is due to the

imbalance of power status. Power and trust are the two most critical elements of collaborative governance; they directly affect the effect and sustainability of collaborative governance. There is also a kind of "entangled twins" growth relationship between them. That is, the relationship between the two is one of mutual influence and mutual restriction, rather than being a causal relationship (Bing Ran, Huiting Qi, 2018). In the field survey of CGCS in China, an imbalance of power status was found among the subjects, which in turn led to the inertia of collaborative governance among those subjects. Firstly, the power status of each subject of CGCS is unbalanced. Specifically, grass roots governments and autonomous organizations usually enjoy rich political, financial and human resources. In addition, constrained by the traditional "official-based" ideology, such governance subjects can very easily position themselves as "leaders" or "controllers" in the process of CGCS. Conversely, NGOs, cultural enterprises, community volunteer organizations and community residents tend to be "the dependent", due to a lack of political and financial resources. In particular, the investment made by some NGOs comes mainly from the grass roots government. For instance, a government purchase fund is the only financial source of the Qunyi social service organization. Obviously, due to the high dependence of the latter on government departments and public power, the power status of each subject of CGCS is unbalanced. This also leads to the formalization and even "pseudo collaboration" phenomenon of negotiation and collaboration among each subject. As a result, some of the supply of community public cultural services has become a hidden act of transmission; social organizations face the risk of "being administrated" and "being rolled in". Secondly, due to the imbalance of power status among the subjects of CGCS, there is a crisis of trust or blind trust. This ultimately leads to the inertia of collaborative governance. Through in-depth interviews with some staff of those NGOs providing services in the surveyed communities, this study found that most of those NGOs have a high psychological dependence on the grass roots government and grass roots autonomous organizations. This dependence leads to a natural imbalance of power in the process of CGCS. For example, in the survey, a large number of social workers in China were found to have chosen to be admitted to the administrative posts of community neighborhood committees, or to be transferred to other industries every year. In addition, NGOs are on the edge of "being administrated". As a result, on the one hand, NGOs have serious brain drain problems, due to poor treatment and heavy workloads. On the other hand, the managers of those NGOs always feel there is nothing they can do about the problem, due to their long-term dependence on grass roots governments and their agencies.

4.4. Ability dependence

Ability dependence refers to the inertia of collaborative governance caused by the insufficient governance ability of grass roots leaders. Ansell and Gash (2008) pointed out that leadership (including licensing and authorization) and other factors are important factors affecting the efficiency of collaborative governance. Their research was based on a comprehensive analysis of 137 regional research studies of collaborative governance in the fields of public health, education, social welfare and international relations. As the most important participants of CGCS, grass roots leaders have an important impact on CGCS in China. The efficiency of CGCS also has strong dependence on the governance ability of grass roots leaders, especially their innovation ability. The inertia of collaboration takes many forms, such as the behavior of collaboration becoming a mere formality, the passive participation or low participation of community residents, and the passive collaboration or low participation of social forces. This type of inertia is initiated due to the lack of the governance ability of grass roots leaders. Take Community A, Community B and Community C as examples. The main leader of Community A has a strong sense of innovation, and an ability to mobilize and to obtain public resources. As a result, the efficiency of the CGCS of Community A is much higher than the other two communities. Zhang is the main leader of Community A. She has been engaged in community management for more than 10 years since graduating from college. Through the survey of six Jie Dao Ban, Zhang was found to have a relatively high education; she is also a younger director of the community neighborhood committee. She was also found through face-to-face interviews to be very enthusiastic about innovating the current community public

cultural service supply mechanism, strengthening cooperation with social organizations and enterprises, and actively applying for grass roots governments. The ultimate aim is to help create a community cooperative production mechanism. The participants of CGCS in Community A are becoming more and more diverse. They not only collaborate with NGOs, cultural enterprises and community volunteer organizations, but they also collaborate with provincial literature and art broadcasting, as well as other news media. The content and influence of community public cultural service projects is being expanded, and the initiative in terms of participating in CGCS has greatly improved. Conversely, the main leaders of Community B and Community C both have low education levels and are older than Zhang. They also have a low level of acceptance and understanding of government purchases, collaborative governance and other grass roots governance innovation matters. They have high enthusiasm for their work, but their working methods are much more traditional and stereotyped. They generally hold strong attitudes regarding the exclusion of CGCS. Their ability to access and mobilize public resources is also weak. Consequently, the inertia of collaboration between community and grass roots government has occurred.

In addition, the fragmented housing pattern has led to a growing alienation of neighborhood relations among community residents, as well as a declining sense of community identity. Especially in communities with large floating populations, community residents have a low sense of participation and community identity. This makes mobilizing and organizing community public affairs extremely difficult. The result is a lack of awareness and participation of community residents, which will also lead to the inertia of CGCS.

5. Conclusion

This paper finds that developing countries with relatively centralized power, an insufficient independence of social forces, but a rising awareness of citizen participation (such as China) are prone to face the problem of collaboration inertia in the process of promoting the reform of CGCS. This finding is specifically shown in four types, including policy dependence, information dependence, power dependence and ability dependence. Thus, this study suggests that the current unequal negotiated collaborative system should be improved by supplementing the existing system with an attitude change of local governments, formal CGCS regulations or rules, trust reconstruction among each of the collaborative sectors, and an incentive system with social work organization and cultural NGOs. Such a collaborative governance system of cultural services might also provide some lessons to those developing countries with relatively centralized power and an insufficient independence of social forces, but a rising awareness of citizen participation.

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