### **International Journal of Social Science and Human Research**

ISSN (print): 2644-0679, ISSN (online): 2644-0695

Volume 06 Issue 12 December 2023 DOI: 10.47191/ijsshr/v6-i12-77, Impact factor- 6.686 Page No: 7785-7792

# Research on the Logic of Local Government Policy Implementation-Case Analysis Based on the Performance of the New Coronavirus Pneumonia Policy



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**ABSTRACT:** Realizing public policy objectives requires cooperation between the higher and lower levels of government or different departments of the same level of government. However, in the process of public policy implementation, it often occurs that some implementing entities adopt the method of " policy on the top, countermeasure on the bottom " to selectively implement or flexibly implement the policy, which eventually leads to " collective action difficulties " and the implementation effect deviates from the original intention of the policy. This paper takes the implementation effect of epidemic prevention policies in various places since the outbreak of COVID-19 as a case to study and analyze the logic of policy implementation of some implementing entities. Research has found that the behaviour of various entities in policy implementation is influenced by multiple logic, which ultimately points to the maintenance of departmental interests. In the implementation of public policy to prevent the implementation of public policy from falling into the departmental interest, relevant means such as coordination, trust, cooperation, integration, etc., can be used to solve the problem of policy implementation deviation.

**KEYWORDS:** Policy implementation, logic analysis, Epidemic prevention policy

### **1. INTRODUCTION**

China is a socialist country under the people's democratic dictatorship. The starting point and foothold of all our policies, laws and regulations are people-centred. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's comprehensive national strength has been continuously improved, and people's living standards have continued to improve. All this has benefited from a series of high-quality policies issued by the state under the leadership of the Party and also benefited from the strong policy execution of our Party. The vitality of policies lies in their execution. If there is a lack of efficient and accurate execution, the best policy is still a 'flower in the mirror, moon in the water'. Although we have the most powerful system in the world - Democratic centralism, and we have also achieved rapid development under the framework of this system, we also have the problem of inconsistency between the original intention of policy formulation and the effect of policy implementation in policy implementation.

Implementing a public policy usually involves multiple departments and levels and requires the joint efforts of people from different organizations to achieve collective goals. Implementing public policies is essentially the collective action of various executing entities. The difficulty of collective action lies in how to unify the actions of each subject and how to make each subject work unreservedly to realize collective goals. In the process of public policy implementation, the ideal state is to achieve all the goals to the greatest extent according to the policy objectives, but in the actual implementation, the problem of " collective action difficulties " often occurs. In the implementation process, the policy is intentionally or unintentionally replaced with goals, selected implementation, and flexible implementation, and the original goals of policy formulation cannot be effectively achieved.

At the end of 2019, a sudden outbreak of COVID-19 occurred in China. As the most severe area of the epidemic, Wuhan has adopted the strictest measures to seal the city. From the closure of the city on January 23rd,2020, to the ' unsealing ' on April 8th,2020, Wuhan has experienced a total of 76 days of fighting the epidemic. Undoubtedly, from monitoring the COVID-19 epidemic to the rapid spread of the epidemic throughout the city, the relevant departments of Wuhan and even Hubei Province have an unshirkable responsibility. China's national system always requires us to prioritize people's lives and health. However, Wuhan is contrary to the policy's original intention in dealing with this incident. Subsequently, the Party and the state imposed strict accountability on relevant officials and punished some important leading cadres. Strong accountability made officials nationwide aware of the importance of implementing the COVID-19 epidemic prevention policy. However, the excessive implementation of policies follows it, and there has been a layer-by-layer increase in epidemic prevention and control and layer-by-layer efforts to avoid responsibility. A typical case is that during the outbreak of the epidemic in Xi 'an at the end of 2021, a critically ill pregnant woman was pushed out by different units because she did not meet the conditions of nucleic acid detection, which eventually led to an abortion.

Moreover, in March 2022, the leaders of a university in Jilin were held accountable for fear of poor epidemic prevention, and they chose to conceal the report, resulting in the isolation of thousands of students. Since the outbreak of the epidemic, the cadres who have been held accountable for inadequate policy implementation throughout the country have ranged from provincial and ministerial levels to village and community levels. However, policy implementation deviating from policy objectives is still happening, which shows that solid accountability cannot wholly solve the problem of inadequate policy implementation. To completely solve this problem, we must study the logic of policy implementation.

China has set off a wave of policy implementation research since the 1990s and has formed many research results, but unfortunately, the research results mainly focus on the importance of policy implementation and academic discussion. Since the beginning of the new century, research on policy implementation has entered a new stage of development. Scholars have begun to pay attention to the deep-seated problems of policy implementation. For example, Xueguang Zhou studied the ' collusion phenomenon' of policy implementation in grassroots government departments. Ping Zhang and Qichao Liu studied the collective action dilemma of heterogeneous groups through endogenous punishment. Yusheng Wang studied the game of horizontal intergovernmental public policy implementation from the perspective of collective action logic. The research results of the above scholars have great reference significance for analyzing the implementation logic of the grassroots government in the implementation of the epidemic policy.

For the same policy, different implementation motives will lead to different implementation methods, leading to different implementation effects. In the past, the dilemma we encountered in implementing the policy was 'formalism ', layers of flexibility; the prominent phenomenon is "implementing meetings through meetings, implementing documents through documents. Once the meeting has been held and the documents have been distributed, the spirit has been implemented even if the work has been done' (Zhou, 2011: pp109). But this time, the problem we encountered is just the opposite, policy implementers at every level are all looking for ways to work in terms of policy that are clear of their responsibilities, and they are all working in the strictest way to avoid the risk of being held accountable. If this phenomenon is only studied and solved from the perspective of administrative accountability rather than from the perspective of policy implementation, then this kind of problem will appear as' change the vest and play' again. In implementing the COVID-19 epidemic prevention policy, the root cause of adopting the ' transitional implementation ' behaviour is worth pondering. Only by deeply analyzing and studying the logic of policy implementation of government departments can we solve the recurrence of similar events entirely.

### 2. CASE ANALYSIS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT POLICY IMPLEMENTATION LOGIC

### 2.1 The scarcity of resources determines the government's 'do and do not do all the content.'

The interest analysis method is a widely accepted analytical framework for analyzing policy adaptation behaviour in policy

implementation. Policy implementation is a process of interest game. Each executive subject chooses behaviour under the condition of fully considering their gains and losses. Yueyue Zhang and other researchers believed that policy implementation is a policy measure for stakeholders to maximize their interests (Zhang et al., 2020). The behaviour of policy implementation subjects is essentially motivated and purposeful. The root of this motivation is interesting; that is, individual behaviour is driven by interest. However, the objective inevitability of the contradiction or conflict of the main interests determines the possibility that the policy implementation results deviate from the policy objectives.

In the process of policy implementation, policy implementers tend to act in favour of their interests. The basis of its behavioural logic is "who gets the policy, who has a certain amount of resources". In China, policy implementation has a typical feature of "high-level promotion"; for policy directives from higher-level governments, lower-level governments must implement them. However, from the perspective of departmental interests, lower-level governments are reluctant to give up their original interests or powers. Of course, they are also reluctant to assume more responsibilities. Under the ambivalence of such conflicts of interest, the governments and departments at all levels that we see in the case are trying their best to avoid being held accountable so that they forget that 'serving the people' is their job. Since the policy implementation activities are carried out by the executive subject in an environment of scarce resources, the scarcity of resources is naturally regarded as the logical starting point of policy implementation. Therefore, the separation of power and responsibility in the policy implementation mechanism must be solved in order to solve the flexible behaviour of the implementation subject.

#### 2.2 'Economic rationality' leads to distortion of policy implementation

Distortion of policy implementation refers to the deviation of policy implementation effect from the original intention of policy formulation in the policy implementation process; that is, policy content is replaced, policy standards are changed, and policy spirit is distorted. Each subject of policy implementation has relatively independent interest demands. Even the subordinates who accept the superior leadership interest demands are not wholly consistent with the superiors. The subordinates are not passive actors in policy implementation. They have the preference and motivation to adjust the direction and space of policy implementation according to their interests. Especially in the pressure-based policy implementation environment, in the face of policy directives from superiors, subordinate governments have to play two roles, namely,' perfect administration' and 'local interest representative' (He et al., 2011). These are two kinds of policy implementation logic,' perfect administration' requires the subordinate to stand in the perspective of the interests of the superior, in full accordance with the policy intention of the superior; the 'local interest representative' requires subordinates to maximize their profits from the perspective of their interests. Under the combined effect of the two logics, the policy is often distorted in the implementation. The distortion of policy implementation includes replacement, boycott, perfunctory, overhead, interception, loss, and additional policies.

The root cause of the distortion of policy implementation lies in the objective existence of the "economic rationality" of the executive subject. The hypothesis of "economic man" was originally the basic assumption used by Western economics to study the logic of human behaviour and motivation. The hypothesis regards "egoism" as the nature of "economic man," and all economic and social behaviours of human beings are driven by "economic rationality. "In the final analysis, all the behaviours in implementing the policy against the COVID-19 epidemic are personified. Therefore, the logic of policy implementation can be based on the hypothesis of "economic man. "The higher-level policymakers pursue the overall interests, but the lower-level policy implementers represent the local interests of regions, departments and even individuals, which leads to the inconsistency of interest demands between policymakers and policy implementers. Lower-level governments will' filter 'higher-level policies in policy implementation, retain their interests, and modify or even abandon policies contrary to their interests. The standard for selectively implementing superior policies by subordinate executives is the profit and loss value of their interests.

In the policy implementation process, the executive subject will unconsciously take economic benefits as the highest pursuit and even sacrifice the public interest, eventually leading to "flexibility" and deviation in policy implementation. The abortion of pregnant women in Xi' is also an event in which policy implementers prioritize the department's interests. Hospitals without

instructions to treat critical or particular patients were unwilling to bear additional risks. In this case, the relevant departments at the same level of horizontal cooperation did not have the right to supervise and restrain each other, thus ignoring the coordination of departmental interests and the overall interests of policy implementation. Therefore, in implementing policies,' government behaviour must not be over-idealized, and the government also has the 'economic man 'defect (Wang et al., 2017).

The government and government officials have the attribute of 'economic man '. Before implementing the policy, cost-benefit considerations will be carried out, and the benefits brought by the implementation of the policy will be compared with the costs paid to ensure that the expectations of the policy implementation are within a reasonable range. In recent years, under the governance concept of "power must be responsible, responsibility must be assumed, and responsibility must be investigated," national governance is committed to putting "power into the cage of the system. "Under this "high-pressure" system, local government departments tend to choose to proceed from the interests of their departments, from personal interests, and in line with the wrong concept of "as long as there is nothing wrong, they would rather not do anything," and respond to superior policy directives with risk-minimized avoidance behaviour.

#### 2.3' Island phenomenon' leads to difficulties in cooperation

Island phenomenon' refers to the phenomenon that government agencies cannot fully integrate multiple organizational entities, timely communicate, and efficiently use their functions, resources, information, and interests (Ma, 2008: pp2). The dilemma of cooperation lies in the reasonable positioning of the "island phenomenon. "In the implementation of public policies, relevant government departments often face the problem of differences between the goals of one department and the goals of another department. The implementation of public policy usually requires the coordination and cooperation of multiple departments. However, due to the inconsistency of departmental objectives, there will be a problem that an organization does not want to cooperate with other organizations to complete specific projects, which leads to the 'island phenomenon' and cooperation dilemma in the implementation of public policy. One of the reasons for this phenomenon is that in the process of policy implementation, the primary entity of policy implementation is unwilling to promote the realization of policy objectives from a holistic perspective due to the lack of unified coordination ability or coordination desire. They only start from their own business, focusing on what they can do, what they are good at, and what is beneficial to their interests.

The most significant difference between China's public policy implementation and Western countries is the formation of a public policy implementation mechanism under the leadership of the Party, which shows the characteristics of the Party's "high promotion" in policy implementation. If there is a unified superior government leadership and coordination in implementing the policy, the policy can be better implemented. However, if cooperation between the departments is at the same level, the policy implementation will occur 'island phenomenon '. Governance modernization requires diversifying governance participants, so the primary entity of policy implementation presents diversification characteristics. Due to the differences in the interests, goals and expectations of multiple participants, there may be differences or even conflicts in policy implementation. The central entity of policy implementation modifies the policy objectives according to their interests, abilities and preferences to make the effect of policy implementation more precise and specific and more in line with the interests of the executors. The defence of COVID-19 requires the coordinated participation of multiple departments, such as health commissions, hospitals, urban management, transportation, police, communities, and social organizations. These organizations are not in a relationship of leadership and being led. This collaborative relationship will inevitably lead to conflicts of interest and a game of rights among different departments in policy implementation.

There is an "isolated island phenomenon" in the epidemic prevention of various departments in Xi' an. On the one hand, in order to avoid being severely held accountable for the ineffective implementation of epidemic prevention policies, the most stringent policy implementation method of "one size fits all "was selected, that is, to avoid the uncertain risks caused by poor consideration of exceptional circumstances, to minimize the risk of accountability and accountability of the department. On the other hand, because each unit implements the policy to protect its interests from being damaged, it ultimately leads to 'collective action difficulties '. On January 4th,2022, the pregnant woman arrived at the hospital at 8 p.m. but could not be admitted due to nucleic

acid problems. After waiting for more than 2 hours, the 8-month-old baby was aborted. Before this, the patient's family had repeatedly contacted some relevant units, including several hospitals. However, they strictly followed the division of epidemic prevention responsibilities, were unwilling to bear too much risk, and refused to treat patients. Because of the super-transmission of the new coronavirus epidemic, in order to avoid cross-transmission infection in epidemic prevention, the epidemic prevention department has divided the epidemic prevention responsibilities of each hospital. Some hospitals specially receive severe patients, and some hospitals receive mild patients. This division of responsibilities gave the relevant units the basis for avoiding responsibilities. This policy implementation logic has caused a systematic impact on governance, which ultimately leads to 'collective action difficulties' and seriously damages the public interest.

#### 2.4 Policy flexibility leads to Policy 'Deformation'

From the completion of policy formulation to the final implementation, there are often deviations between policy objectives and policy implementation results. Scholars use policy adaptation or selective policy implementation to describe such phenomena. Policy flexibility refers to the behaviour in that in the process of policy implementation, the policy executor modifies part of the original policy without the permission of the policymaker, and the procedure of modifying the original policy does not conform to the formal procedure and implements the modified policy. From this point of view, policy flexibility is a neutral word which is not good or bad. For example,' production to the household' results from the perfect combination of principle and flexibility in the implementation process. There is a specific relationship between the form of policy flexibility and the effect of policy flexibility. Zhenming Chen summarized this relationship into three types: ' seeking spiritual similarity, removing form similarity ',' not seeking spiritual similarity, only seeking form similarity ', and' neither seeking spiritual similarity nor seeking form similarity '. Among the three modifications, only the first one is correct and in line with the policy objectives, and the other two are policy distortions, which are harmful and wrong modifications. In short, policies will be flexible in the implementation process, and the direction of flexibility can be positive or negative.

Xi' an 'pregnant women abortion' was a negative error adaptation. The involved hospital, Xi' an emergency centre, and Xi 'a health commission must bear the primary responsibility for this adaptation behaviour. There were obvious flaws in the treatment arrangements for unique patients in Xi' an's epidemic prevention and control policy. Based on two years of experience in national epidemic prevention and control, policymakers and policy implementers have rich experience, which can judge the enforceability and loopholes of the policy. However, stakeholders such as higher-level regulatory authorities, peers, and lower-level departments had not raised objections on time, which indicates the lack of adequate supervision and guidance mechanisms in policy adaptation.

In national governance, government departments, as defenders of public utilities and public interests, are taken for granted that they will implement policies from the perspective of "serving the people wholeheartedly. "However, many studies have found that members of the organization bring their ideas, emotions and interests into implementing superior policies. Therefore, in policy implementation, if there is a reasonable mechanism to guide, policy implementation will develop in a positive direction; if there is a lack of a positive guidance mechanism, policy implementation will be flexible in the direction of benefiting implementers.

#### 2.5' Target Replacement' Leads to policy omissions

Objective Replacement refers to the government departments in the implementation of policy documents in the process, due to various reasons, did not focus on the implementation of the relevant policies but take fraud to cope with the implementation of the superior policy, embodied in the maintenance of self-interest to replace the realization of organizational goals. An essential aspect of the administrative system reform is to strengthen the performance evaluation, improve the incentive intensity, and induce the occurrence of expected behaviour to keep the effect of implementing the policy consistent with the purpose of policy formulation. The purpose of organizational motivation is to induce the organization to produce the expected behaviour, but if the incentive method is improper, it will lead to the phenomenon of inaction, slow action, false action and disorderly action. Government incentives should consider the relationship between the level of effort and the performance of lower-level government departments. If the performance appraisal of officials adopts a comprehensive 'one-vote veto' system, it can only induce officials

to "better not to do something than to do something wrong" to avoid the risk of career. January 2022 is the time node of the national fight against the new coronavirus epidemic for two years. For two years, the Party and the state pursued the epidemic prevention policy based on the principle of "life first," in this process, the officials who had lost their duties and responsibilities in epidemic prevention were held most strictly accountable. In this context, to avoid the risk of being held accountable, Xi 'a units have adopted an informal mechanism of target replacement to deal with epidemic prevention and control. The performance of this mechanism is that the policy stipulates that the unit's responsibilities are strictly implemented, which belongs to the non-active commitment of multi-sectoral coordination and responsibility. The work of the central entity of responsibility is ignored. The contradiction between organizational incentives and target replacement is one of the fundamental reasons for the continuous occurrence of similar incidents. If the system and mechanism are not reformed, such problems will not be eliminated by punishing the relevant responsible persons.

#### 2.6 Summary of case analysis

With the advancement of governance modernization, the original single policy implementation model has gradually withdrawn from the paradigm of policy implementation. Multi-attribute policy has received more and more attention in the field of public policy and has been applied more and more in practice. Multi-attribute policy implementation breaks through the logic that single policy implementation mainly depends on a single functional department. The multi-attribute policy has multiple objectives, and the implementation process requires the cooperation of multiple departments to achieve the overall goal. The successful realization of multi-attribute policy objectives depends on the trust, cooperation, integration and linkage between departments. Trust, collaboration, integration and linkage are the underlying logic of successful policy implementation, in which trust is the premise of cooperation. Lack of trust will lead to opportunistic behavior, which will destroy the basis of collaboration. Each subject ostensibly abides by the propositions and rules of the alliance, but behind the scenes, it does its own thing, and always puts the interests of the department in the first place.

In the above cases, in the implementation of epidemic prevention and control policies, the relevant subjects are affected by factors such as resource scarcity, ' economic rationality ', ' island phenomenon ', ' policy flexibility ', ' target replacement ', etc., resulting in a lack of full trust between each other, which eventually leads to fragmented and fragmented policies. The results of policy implementation have developed in two extreme directions, or nobody cares, and there are gaps in policy implementation ; either layer upon layer, there is excessive execution. Trust is the primary coping strategy of multi-attribute governance. Relevant departments need to build a trust mechanism and risk sharing mechanism based on the basic requirements of the central epidemic prevention and control, so as to reduce the cost of cooperation and avoid the negative impact of various logics in policy implementation. Cooperation and integration is another coping strategy in the implementation of multi-attribute policy, which can overcome the narrow interest view of interest departmentalization and departmental interest, and prevent the fragmentation of policy implementation. Linkage is a strategy to enhance the effectiveness of a single department and increase the joint force.

#### **3. RECOMMENDATIONS**

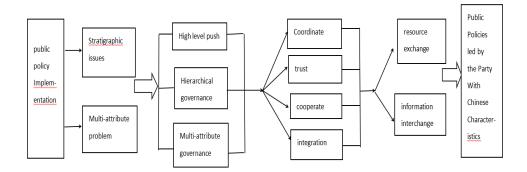
The Communist Party of China is the leader of all work in our country. All policies are put forward by the Party and then implemented by the administrative department. Implementing a policy requires multi-sectoral joint action, but in the process of policy implementation, there will often be a game between different executive entities and the dilemma of multi-sectoral cooperation. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China pointed out that it is necessary to transform government functions, deepen decentralization, innovate supervision methods, enhance government credibility and execution, and build a service-oriented government that the people are satisfied with. Therefore, the comprehensive governance methods of " hierarchical governance " and " multi-attribute governance " can be adopted to solve the problems of different organizations, levels, departments and actors in implementing public policies through various strategies and governance tools. The implementation of public policy is carried out in a specific field of practice. Therefore, in the policy implementation process, it is necessary to consider the environment of policy implementation, including the natural environment and human environment, such as regional resource endowment, economic and social development, population size, population quality, group characteristics of

policy implementation objects, etc.

In the process of combining policy with a specific implementation environment, it is a process of further refinement and re-planning of policy. This process is a process that policy implementation must go through. In this process, there is both the possibility of policy being strengthened and the possibility of policy being weakened. That is to say, and policy implementers will adjust policies according to local objective conditions and their interests to form specific policies with different characteristics. Because of the above problems, Donghang He and Fanbin Kong put forward the holistic governance model of " hierarchical governance " and " multi-attribute governance " under the " high-level promotion. " As shown in the following figure :

This model can be applied to solve the negative impact of policy implementation subjects based on multiple behavioural logics on policy implementation effects. In the case analysis of the logic of policy implementation in the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, we found that the behaviour of policy implementers is affected by the logic of resource scarcity, economic rationality, island phenomenon, policy flexibility and target replacement. From a deeper level of excavation, we will find that the root cause behind these logics is the difficulty of behaviour coordination, the lack of trust, the lack of cooperation motivation, and the imperfect interest integration mechanism among various actors. Coordination is the adhesive of policy implementation. Through the overall planning of the interests of each subject, the interests of each subject are maximized within a reasonable range so that the overall effect of policy implementation is greater than the sum of the parts. Trust is the cornerstone of all behaviours. Lack of trust will lead to unreasonable policy implementation behaviours, which will destroy the synergy between policy implementation subjects. Cooperation is the primary coping strategy to solve multi-attribute problems. Under the framework of the modern governance system, no policy can be effectively implemented without cooperation. The multi-attribute policy implementation logic can only accurately achieve policy objectives with the cooperation of multiple departments. Consolidation is a process of redistributing different groups' interests through mechanisms that can solve the challenges brought by multiple attributes.

Therefore, the research suggests that we should first establish a coordination mechanism in policy implementation. On the premise of fully considering the interests of all subjects, we should make the rights and responsibilities of all subjects consistent so that all subjects can share risks in policy implementation to avoid the problem of interest departmentalization and responsibility hollowing out in policy implementation. Secondly, we should increase the trust of each subject to reduce opportunism and free-riding behaviour in action. In the whole process of policy implementation, a convenient channel for resource exchange and information communication is established to ensure the openness and transparency of information. Third, optimize the cooperation system. Our current problem is not cooperation but the problem of poor cooperation. Strengthening cooperation can enhance the collective action of each executor in the policy network and reduce the harmful effects of action. Finally, through the integration mechanism, the negative impact of the narrow interests of the department is alleviated, and the policy content is prevented from falling into ' fragmentation ' and 'centralization '.



(Source: Donghang He, Fanbin Kong, "Chinese Experience in Public Policy Implementation," Chinese Social Sciences, Issue 5, 2011)

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