Thoughts on flexible governance in environmental mass incidents

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Abstract. The occurrence of environmental group events often brings harm to public interests. According to the traditional thinking, many local governments deal with mass incidents simply and roughly, and lack of effective communication, consultation and persuasion, which fully exposes the loopholes in government public management. In view of environmental mass incidents, we should not only be aware of citizens' dissatisfaction with the government, but also realize that citizens' awareness of environmental rights is revived. The government can communicate and negotiate with the public through flexible governance, so as to promote the good solution of environmental mass incidents.

1. Questions raised
With the rapid development of social economy and science and technology, the construction projects with environmental protection nature such as nuclear power plant and waste incineration plant bring convenience to the majority of the public. At the same time, they will inevitably have a certain negative impact on the surrounding ecological environment and residential environment. Because of the particularity of environmental problems, once the environment is damaged, the pollution can not be reversed. It will directly affect the local life and the health of residents. Therefore, the public around the project has a certain psychological resistance to the construction of such projects. If the government does not give full play to the role of the government at this time, environmental mass incidents will occur. In essence, environmental mass incidents are the embodiment of conflicts between the decision makers of construction projects and the maintenance of public environmental rights in the process of urban construction expansion, which also reflects the awakening of public self-protection and environmental rights awareness. The development and progress of cities should not be at the cost of damaging public rights and interests, but should try to find a win-win solution as far as possible. Damage to public rights and interests leads to the occurrence of environmental mass incidents, and the consequences are not worth the loss.

After the occurrence of environmental group events, the government should take a positive attitude to deal with it. All departments should actively coordinate and cooperate with the public in ideological work and publicity, effectively communicate and negotiate with the public, adopt flexible governance to deal with environmental group incidents, and improve the governance mode of environmental group events under the condition of ensuring public rights and interests, so as to achieve high efficiency and speed to promote the benign solution of environmental mass incidents.
2. Case description

Taking the environmental mass incident against the construction of waste incineration plant in Xiantao City of Hubei Province in 2016 as an example, it is referred to as the "anti incineration" event in Xiantao City. Xiantao City has experienced the whole process from opposition to suspension of construction; but the most special thing is that two years after the end of the opposition, the project was rebuilt with public support and officially put into operation in 2018.

At present, China mainly uses waste incineration and landfill for waste treatment, among which landfill is the most common method. However, with the continuous improvement and promotion of waste incineration technology, the construction of waste incineration plant has become the priority policy choice of governments at all levels. Since 2011, China's municipal solid waste sanitary landfill treatment rate has been declining, from 76.88% in 2011 to 60.32% in 2016, while the proportion of incineration treatment almost doubled. (Figure 1)

![Figure 1. harmless treatment of domestic waste in China (data source National Bureau of Statistics)](image)

According to the public opinion monitoring data of Xiantao residents' boycott of the waste incineration incident (Figure 2), the netizens' neutral emotions on the topic of "waste incineration plant" accounted for the largest proportion (48%), and the negative emotions were more than the positive ones. The negative emotions mainly include worrying about environmental pollution and the level of self-discipline of enterprises, questioning the strength of government supervision and dissatisfaction with the tough attitude of the government.
3. Cause analysis

3.1. The waste incineration project itself has negative externalities
With the awakening of environmental protection consciousness, people pay more and more attention to ecological environment. They are worried about the failure of waste incineration technology, the harmfulness of waste incineration projects, the self-discipline level of enterprises and the supervision of the government. This project will not only cause long-term pollution to the environment, but also cause pollution to the surrounding environment.

3.2. Government decision-making is closed and citizen participation is low
In the whole process of site selection and planning, the government acted behind closed doors. Before decision-making, information was not open and transparent, and public opinions were not solicited and public consultation and communication were not conducted, resulting in closed decision-making. However, citizens' awareness of safeguarding their rights is becoming more and more clear, and they have the right to question the decision-making that they have not yet participated in. The investors and government departments of the project should first make it known to the public, encourage the public to understand and listen to the opinions of the public.

3.3. The government ignores the demands of citizens, which reduces its credibility
The government did not give timely and effective answers to the public's questions about environmental risks, but passively responded and tried to suppress them. The reasonable demands of Xiantao citizens were ignored and the legitimacy of the government's decision-making was questioned. Not only did the doubts in the hearts of the masses get a trace of elimination, but also deepened people's speculation on the government and confirmed that the project will be held. The cognition of environmental pollution will lead to the loss of trust in the government, which will lead to the decline of government credibility and the escalation of contradictions.

3.4. Citizens lack of professional knowledge of the waste incineration project
Most of the public's cognition of waste incineration comes from subjective feeling and life experience, without scientific basis. Experts believe that the risks brought by waste incineration can be controlled, and lack of professional knowledge and effective communication. As the stakeholders lack correct
understanding of the project, most people are resistant. They think that their environmental rights have been violated, and the benefits generated by the project are shared by all citizens, but the negative effects are borne by the nearby residents.

3.5. Network communication accelerated the deterioration of the "anti incineration" incident
The spread of Internet rumors provides a combustion promoter for herd behavior. Citizens express comments and opinions on garbage incineration projects through post bars, microblogs and wechat, and pay close attention to them from time to time. Citizens can't judge whether the information is true or not. They prefer to believe that they have the psychology of being untrustworthy. As a result, the situation worsens and loses control. When the government is unprepared, tens of millions of people take to the streets Protest led to the outbreak of mass incidents.

4. Flexible governance

4.1. "Communicate" and "Exploring": establishing flexible governance mechanism based on dialogue and communication
The reason why the waste incineration project has been opposed is that the public are worried about its pollution and the infringement of their own rights and interests. The fundamental reason is that the communication between the government and the public is not timely and the information is asymmetric. The scientific basis issued by experts after environmental protection assessment of the project is not necessarily acceptable to the public. The trust degree of the assessment report among the public is very low. The public will only think that this is the government's response, not the real assessment report. "Communicate" —with dialogue and communication as the starting point, the government should make information transparent and open in all aspects of project site selection, examination and approval, expert evaluation and establishment and operation of waste incineration project, so as to let more public participate in it; "Exploration" —the government should widely listen to the opinions of relevant stakeholders, and projects that the public disagreed with should not be implemented as long as the public has doubts Challenge at any stage.

4.2. "Contradiction" and "Solution": establishing flexible governance mechanism guided by the fundamental interests of the people
The start-up of the waste incineration project should have been a tripartite interaction of "government, enterprise and citizen". However, due to the lag of government response and the negative attitude of blocking news, citizens have become "bystanders", and even become the undertaker of negative externalities of waste incineration project. With the rapid development of society, citizens' awareness of environmental protection begins to wake up. When they express their demands to the government, if the government does not handle it properly, it will cause immeasurable consequences. "Contradiction" —if the public's march is regarded as a "disturbance", put it on the opposite side and use force to suppress the public, once it is solved by force, an insurmountable gap will be dug between the government and the public. "Solution" — the government has started the waste incineration project again. At present, it is necessary to organize local residents to inspect the waste incineration projects in various places, so that the public can truly understand the principles of the waste incineration project and solve the problem from the source.

4.3. "Suppress" and "Government": establishing flexible governance mechanism based on the transformation of government governance mode
The establishment of waste incineration projects is basically the decision-making of the government, but the relevant interest groups do not participate in the decision-making. When the public finds that the waste incineration project involves their own interests, there will be corresponding reasonable demands. If the demands can not be reasonably solved, extreme behaviors similar to demonstrations may occur. The government has not responded in a timely and effective manner, Instead, they suppressed and
suppressed the public. "Suppress" —the government not only passively responded, but also tried to suppress it, which led to the situation out of control and developed in an uncontrollable direction, and improper handling methods and means in the process of handling. "Government" —before the recovery and start of the waste incineration project, the government should set up a working group to convey the scientific principles of waste incineration to the public through household publicity, playing propaganda films and popularizing the knowledge of waste incineration, so that the public can have a deep understanding of the waste incineration and solve the problem fundamentally.

5. Conclusion
If a country wants to be rich and powerful and the society wants to develop, it can't do without economic growth. With the economic growth, many industrial projects related to environmental safety will continue to appear, which makes environmental risk an insurmountable problem in the period of transformation. For environmental problems, if properly handled, not only can the implementation of the project get the understanding and support of the masses, but also promote the harmonious development of society; if not properly handled, it will lead to dissatisfaction and excessive worry of the masses, and easily lead to environmental mass incidents, which poses a threat to the improvement of the governance ability and credibility of the government. The establishment of flexible governance mechanism increases the public's participation in projects related to vital interests, shortens the distance between the government and the public, promotes the harmonious development of the relationship between cadres and the masses, improves the governance ability of the government in environmental group events, and increases the credibility of the government in the public mind. More importantly, it can improve and protect the environment and form a harmonious coexistence between human and environment.

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