

Analysis on the Changes of China's Food Safety Policy from the Perspective of Discontinuous Equilibrium

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Abstract: Based on the intermittent equilibrium model, this paper divides the evolution of China's food safety policy from 1978 to now into two policy equilibrium periods and one intermittent period. After verification, the change of China's food safety policy presents a non-linear feature with accidental mutation. Under the transformation of policy landscape, it has experienced the process from “one department supervision” to “segmented supervision + comprehensive coordination” to “unified supervision”. The outbreak of focus events and the improvement of industrial base lead to the change of policy field by moving the attention of the public and the government, so as to form intermittent policy innovation or maintain policy balance. This paper makes a localization revision of the discontinuous balanced development model based on the Chinese situation, hoping to give some inspiration to the policy changes in other fields.

1. Introduction

Food is the basic material basis of human existence. Food safety is a comprehensive conceptual system. At present, in most cases, food safety mainly refers to the quality and safety of food. As a major livelihood, economic and political issue, food safety has always attracted the attention of all sectors of society. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's food safety problem has experienced ups and downs for more than 70 years, especially since the reform and opening up, China's food safety policy has made great progress. Although there have been major problems, the overall progress and development are tortuous. In 1982, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated the Food Hygiene Law of the People's Republic of China (for Trial Implementation), which was the first law in the field of food hygiene in China. In 1995, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress deliberated and adopted the food hygiene law of the people's Republic of China, which marked the formal legalization of China's food hygiene management. In 2015, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress revised and adopted the food safety law of the people's Republic of China, known as the “strictest” food safety legal system in history. How did the introduction, repeal and amendment of one law after another evolve the food safety policy associated with it? What is the internal logic of the change of China's food safety policy? This paper will review the evolution of China's food safety policy since the reform and opening up, and analyze its generation and exchange mechanism to understand the changes of food safety policy.

Discontinuous equilibrium theory is one of the important theories in the process of public policy, which was put forward by Frank baumgartner and Brian Jones in 1990s. It focuses on explaining the gradual and abrupt change in the process of policy change. Progressiveness refers to the long-term stable change in the process of policy change, while mutation refers to the short-term drastic change. In intermittent equilibrium theory, the former corresponds to the policy state of policy equilibrium, while the latter corresponds to the policy state of policy discontinuity. The theory includes a series of core elements: Policy picture, policy field, negative feedback, positive feedback, focus events and attention shift. Based on the core elements of the above discontinuous equilibrium theoretical model, this paper investigates the change process of China's food safety policy since 1978, verifies the nonlinear characteristics of the discontinuous equilibrium of food safety policy, and tries to explain the internal logic of the change of China's food safety policy.

2. Discontinuous Equilibrium Interpretation of Food Safety Policy Change

The development of China's food safety policy in the early days of the People's Republic of China was very slow, mainly focusing on industrial hygiene and disease prevention. However, from the overall point of view, the food safety policy in the early days of New China has made some achievements. On November 1st, 1949, the central government established the Ministry of Health. In the same year, Changchun Railway Bureau established the earliest sanitation and epidemic prevention station. In 1953, the Ministry of Health promulgated the Interim Measures for the Management of Refreshing Foods, which was the first food hygiene regulation in China after the founding of New China. At this stage, most of the relevant legal responsibilities of food safety policies for illegal activities are clearly defined, but there is no guarantee of national coercive power. 1966-1976 was a difficult period in the history of New China, and China's food hygiene work failed to escape this catastrophe. Therefore, during this period of time, food hygiene legislation, health supervision system construction, health quarantine and epidemic prevention work were almost completely stopped, with little progress.

(1) Policy balance: 1978-2002

1978 is a special year, which is the starting point of this paper. The Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee held this year was a turning point in the history of New China, and China's food safety policy also developed rapidly during this period. The development of China's food safety policy is first to improve various laws and regulations. In 1978, the Ministry of health and other relevant ministries entrusted to form a “national food hygiene leading group” to control food pollution. Significant progress has been made in food hygiene supervision in the early stage of reform and opening up.

However, the Trial Regulations on Food Hygiene Management and the Regulations on Food Hygiene Management promulgated in 1979 only listed collectively-owned enterprises as the objects of food hygiene supervision and management, resulting in a large number of food producers and operators being outside the scope of laws and regulations. The food hygiene supervision system has lagged behind the economic situation, thus restricting the healthy development of the food industry. On November 19th, 1982, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress promulgated the Food Hygiene Law of the People's Republic of China (for Trial Implementation), which is the first law in the field of food hygiene in China. The chapter structure is overall complete, the content system is relatively complete, and the basic framework of modern food hygiene legal system is initially established.

In October 1992, the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China established the socialist market economic system, and proposed “separating government from enterprises and gradually expanding the autonomy of enterprises in production and operation”. After the break of the government-enterprise integration system, which lasted for more than 40 years, the market participants were greatly encouraged to develop the food industry, and the food industry also achieved unprecedented development. However, due to the fierce market competition and the competition for the interests of departments, the Food Hygiene Law (Trial) has not been seriously implemented, and even obstructed the normal law enforcement of food hygiene supervision departments. With the conflict between the two major policy objectives of economic development and ensuring food hygiene becoming more and more intense, and with the strong promotion of the Legislative Affairs Bureau of the State Council and the Ministry of health, the Standing Committee of the Eighth National People's Congress deliberated and adopted the food hygiene law of the people's Republic of China on October 30, 1995, marking the formal legalization of China's food hygiene management.

Generally speaking, China's food safety policy showed a gradual change during this period, and it was mainly the change of the CPC Central Committee's cognition combined with the change of the big environmental economic system at that time that decided the policy change. Although there are food hygiene problems, the behavior of the CPC Central Committee's constant debugging and rectification under the negative feedback makes the overall policy picture positive and maintains the policy monopoly.

(2) Policy discontinuity: 2003-2011

China joined the WTO in 2001, which brought profound changes to the development of domestic food safety. First of all, a large number of imported foods have entered the domestic market, which not only brings fierce competition to the domestic food industry, but also gradually improves the food safety awareness of consumers. Secondly, a large amount of domestic food is exported to foreign countries, which makes the issue of food safety policy rise to the height of transnational trade and even diplomatic relations. This also makes the food safety incidents that broke out later quickly rise from the public agenda to the government agenda.

With the development of social economy, consumers' awareness of food safety is constantly improving, and the requirements for food quality, safety and green health are also increasing. However, during this period, a series of global food safety incidents broke out one after another, such as the “Inferior Milk Powder Incident” in Fuyang, Anhui Province in 2003 and the “Sudan Red Incident” in 2005, which not only threatened people's health, but also gradually evolved into vicious public incidents with great social influence. At this time, the outbreak of focus events has brought about a negative policy picture, and the public is pressing for reform. Food safety events have risen from the public agenda to the government agenda. As a result, the outside world is increasingly calling for a higher-level Food Safety Law. The Food Safety Law (Draft) was submitted to the State Council executive meeting for discussion in 2006 and the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress for discussion in 2007. After the “Sanlu infant milk powder incident” broke out in 2008, the public attention and discussion reached a new round of climax, which led to the direct abolition of the exemption system and accelerated the deliberation for nearly two years. On February 28th, 2009, the 7th meeting of the 11th National People's Congress Standing Committee passed the Food Safety Law of the People's Republic of China, and the original Food Hygiene Law was abolished at the same time. Comparatively speaking, the Food Safety Law, known as the basic law of China's food safety supervision, has made breakthroughs in the aspects of supervision mode, scope and standards.

In addition, during this period, the State Council has successively carried out two institutional reforms, and for the first time put forward the food safety supervision mode of “segment supervision as the mainstay, supplemented by variety supervision”. The second time, under the background of the large-scale system reform in 2008, the State Council merged the former food and drug supervision department into the health department. However, the two reforms have not really solved the problems existing in the process of food supervision, such as unclear responsibilities and overlapping functions. Until February 2010, when the National Food Safety Committee of the State Council was established, in December of the same year, the Food Safety Committee of the State Council set up an office, which replaced the Ministry of Health as a higher-level comprehensive coordination organization for food safety, increased the supervision of food safety work, actively handled hot issues of food safety, and started the era of comprehensive coordination under the segmented supervision mode.

(3) Policy balance: from 2012 to now

After the sudden change of policy from 2003 to 2011 caused by the focus events, with the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China and the modernization of national governance, China's food safety has also entered a new policy equilibrium period. The 18th CPC Central Committee, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee and the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee further focused on improving the public safety system, and put forward the task of reforming the food and drug safety system and mechanism and the requirement of legalization. Because the Food Safety Law promulgated and implemented in 2009 clearly pointed out that the local people's governments at or above the county level should unify and coordinate the food safety supervision and management work in their own administrative areas, it is in conflict with the system design of territorial responsibility in reality, and the call for system reform is getting louder and louder. As a result, in March 2013, the Plan for Institutional Reform and Functional Transformation of the State Council was reviewed and approved. The goal of the reform is to integrate functions, sink resources, strengthen supervision, and improve unified and

authoritative food and drug regulatory agencies at all levels of government. China food and drug administration was born, and formed a trinity food safety supervision mechanism, integrating the food safety supervision responsibilities of various departments and being fixed in legal form.

With the further development of social economy, modern food safety risks begin to appear. After experiencing new food safety risks such as “Hungry Black Workshop Incident”, food safety supervision is facing new challenges. In order to deal with these problems and adapt to the new system of food safety supervision, on April 24th, 2015, the Food Safety Law was revised and passed by the Standing Committee of the 12th National People's Congress, and was officially implemented in October of the same year. This law is called “the strictest food safety code in history”.

Subsequently, the Institutional Reform Plan of the State Council adopted by the 13th National People's Congress in 2018 proposed the establishment of the State Administration of Market Supervision. As an institution directly under the State Council, it specifically undertakes the duties of the State Food Safety Committee of the State Council and is responsible for comprehensive market supervision and management in food safety. At this point, the era of unified supervision of food safety has officially arrived.

To sum up, China's food safety policy changes are characterized by non-linearity, occasional mutation and high uncertainty. From this, we can summarize the characteristics of China's food safety policy changes: 1978-2002 was the basic policy equilibrium stage of “single department supervision” by the health department; 2003-2011 is the turning point of “segmented supervision+comprehensive coordination”. Since 2012, it has been a stable policy equilibrium period of “unified supervision”.

3. Internal Mechanism of Food Safety Policy Change in China

The change of food safety policy is characterized by intermittent equilibrium change, which brings fuzziness and instability to the implementation of public policy. How does the intermittent equilibrium change of food safety policy happen, change and evolve? To a certain extent, this problem can be explained by investigating the driving factors behind the intermittent equilibrium change of food safety policy in China. By studying the changes of food safety policy in three stages, we can find that the shift of attention is the premise of the change of policy field, while the outbreak of focus events and the promotion of industrial base are the basic variables that promote the change of policy field caused by the shift of government attention.

(1) Focus event outbreak

Under China's special decision-making system, once the top leaders of the central government pay close attention to a certain social problem, it means that the public agenda is about to rise to the government agenda, so breaking the “attention bottleneck” of the central government is a necessary condition to realize policy interruption. The occurrence of focus events plays a key role in shifting the government's attention, and focus events are the incentive factors to promote agenda setting and policy changes. Since the 21st century, a large number of food safety hazards have been exposed one after another. These food safety incidents not only damage public health, but also challenge the government's governance ability and credibility. These focus events not only caused protests from the public and the media, but also focused the government's attention on food safety. The result is that public opinion forces the opening of the policy field, paves the way for problems to enter the government agenda, and then catalyzes the process of policy change. The frequent occurrence of food safety incidents has prompted the introduction of food safety related policies and regulations. One of the most important policy objectives of food safety policy is to reduce food safety incidents, which is also the most direct goal of the policy.

(2) Upgrading of industrial base

The change of China's food safety policy has gone through three stages, and the introduction of policies in each stage is based on the background of the times and environmental changes. The relationship between food field and productivity is closely related. People's attention to food has changed from “food hygiene” to “food safety”, all of which are due to the development of

productivity. In the early days of reform and opening up, the productivity level was low, and the government and the public were concerned about food and clothing and food security. With the improvement of productivity level, we began to pay attention to the hygiene problems in the food field. The shift from food hygiene to food safety is the requirement of consumers for food quality after the industry develops to a certain level. Looking back at the evolution history of attention shift of food safety issues in China, it has experienced the transformation from food safety-food hygiene-food safety-food quality. This process changes with time. The reason is that the level of social development is getting higher and higher, and the level of productive forces is constantly developing. The industrial base is constantly improving, and on the industrial basis, it presents a process of overall backwardness of food industry-rapid development of food industry-"many, small, scattered and chaotic" food enterprises-continuous optimization of food industrial structure.

Based on the above analysis, we can sum up the internal logic of China's food safety policy changes on the basis of the modified intermittent equilibrium model (as shown in Figure 1). The focus of events and the promotion of industrial base have shifted the government's attention, thus leading to changes in the policy field. However, the mechanism of these two forces is different. The change of policy field caused by the outbreak of focus events is often accompanied by negative policy picture and positive feedback mechanism, which makes the policy suddenly change. The improvement of industrial base brought about by the development of productivity mainly plays a negative feedback mechanism, which makes the policy change gradually. The shift of attention and the change of policy field are the premise of the change of food policy. After the outbreak of focus events or the change of attention brought about by the promotion of industrial base, it often leads to the change of policy objectives and policy tool settings, and finally either the policy monopoly is maintained or the policy monopoly is broken, and the policy breaks are formed.

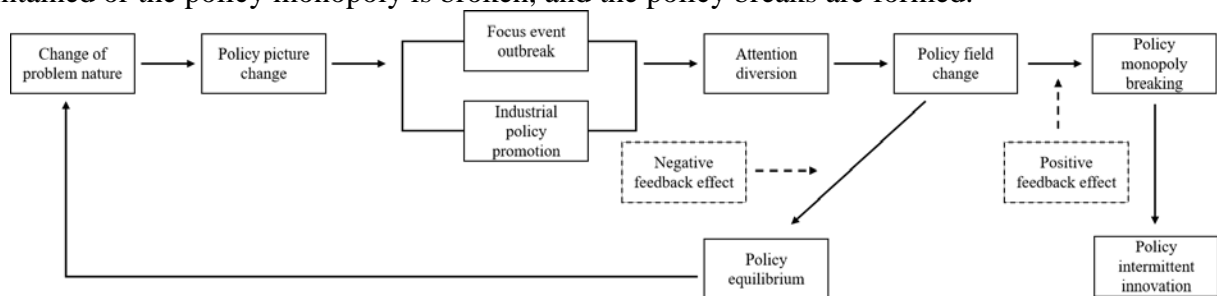


Fig.1 Modified Discontinuous Equilibrium Model of Food Safety Policy

4. Conclusions

Generally speaking, the intermittent equilibrium model has a strong explanatory power and a high degree of fit for the changes of China's food safety policies, but at the same time, it can be found that the model has its explanatory limits, and the two models are not completely fit. The above analysis framework based on the discontinuous equilibrium model explained the changes of China's food safety policy in a more specific way, and revised it on the basis of the original model, showing the internal logic behind it.

China's food safety policy changes reflect some characteristics of China's policy changes to a certain extent. First of all, the shift of government attention leads to the change of policy field, which is the premise of policy change. In China, the outbreak of focus events usually makes the public agenda rapidly rise to the government agenda, and focus events cause heated discussion among the public, media and all sectors of society. Driven by external forces, the central government will abolish the old policies or introduce new ones. At this time, the policy field has both top-down and bottom-up transfer, the policy field is relatively open, and the subject of policy agreement is relatively diverse. In the process of China's food safety policy changes, besides the outbreak of focus events, there is also the continuous improvement of industrial base, which leads to the constant shift of focus of public and government attention. After the attention changes, the original policies can't keep up with the actual changes. When this defect is exposed, it will lead to

policy changes, and at this time, the subject of policy agreement is relatively single and closed. Secondly, the unified decision-making body has a decisive influence on policy changes. The political basis of the discontinuous equilibrium model originates from the “iron triangle” of western countries. In the process of policy, policy changes become the product of triangular compromise. Different from western countries, China's unified political system determines its decisive influence on policy changes. Therefore, due to the differences between Chinese and western political systems, when revising the discontinuous equilibrium model based on the changes of China's food safety policies, subsystem politics and macro politics and their interaction are excluded. When attention shifts and the policy field changes, if the negative feedback system is dominant, it will induce the policy to be stable and gradual, and make the policy move towards equilibrium. If positive feedback is mainly used, the policy monopoly will be broken, the policy will suddenly change and the policy will be interrupted. However, due to the limitation of the discontinuous equilibrium model, it can't predict the future trend of China's food safety policy, and it needs to be further discussed in this aspect in the future.

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