

E-Government Development in Nanhai City, China

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INTRODUCTION

Nanhai is a small city which belongs to Foshan City (a district can also be called a city in some cities of China) and lies in the central part of Guangdong province. It is in the hinterland of Pearl River Delta, close to Hong Kong and Macau. It was in 1995 that the city began to develop e-government. In September of 1996, it became one of the first cities that started to operate the Internet in China. Since 1999, the city had transferred into the period of Internet application. It became the national experimental field of an informalization process in 2000 and of an e-government application project and national information security project in 2001. However, since 2002, lots of problems have been appearing due to overemphasis on the construction of an information infrastructure and noticeable projects. Chinese e-government has been at the stage of a realistic period, with data shared among departments since 2000. Some weaknesses of the appraised projects have been appearing because of short service for urban development and the requirements from the city administration. Therefore, this case is just a description of the periodical success and would be a problematic case of the process of Chinese e-government.

BACKGROUND: E-GOVERNMENT IN CHINA

E-government can be described as being divided into three periods since the 1980s in China: that is, office automation (OA), sector administration with IT, and e-service of government. Each period is marked by the following.

Office Automation (1980s)

The primary computer system used by the government was designed to work for economic statistic data analysis before 1980. Since the 1980s, the government had started

to set up OA systems, which were also used at the provincial level. Most of the systems were organized by the secretariats in provincial governments. During that period, the systems were popularly used in the inner governments; the staffs of the systems were either full time or part time. Many governmental departments, such as industrial, commercial, revenue, financial, police departments and so on, had begun to establish their own systems since that time.

Sector Administration with IT (1990s)

With more users of OA, there were some special IT branches in the governments (Technical Division, Information Centers, etc.). Commercial departments, revenues, financial bureaus, and police bureaus built their special application systems. Three “Gold” projects had been started since 1993: Gold-Bridge, Gold-Gate, and Gold-Card. The projects were invested by the central government. The main parts of the projects were basic infrastructure, which would provide data transferring (Gao, 2004). This period was the primary stage of e-governance.

E-Service of Government (2000-Present)

When the Internet became popular, governance-online was promptly carried out in China. The Chinese government carried out the Governance-Online Project in 1999. Going with the project, the number of Web sites whose domain names were ended up with “gov.cn” had reached 11,764 by December 31, 2003. The number of governmental home pages was more than 10,051. The ministries (26 of 29) and commissions of the state council have set up their own Web sites. Among them, nine of the home pages had an English version, 12 Web sites could provide services online, and 90% of the home pages had either an information board or querying database service. Additionally, 70% of prefecture cities’ home pages had service windows for public affairs (Xue & Huang, 2004). Since

that time, some integrated e-governance projects have started to be planned and implemented. The projects were composed of e-service for social insurance in which five types of insurances were integrated into one. There was an official approving process on one Web site, city smart cards on one, integrated economic database, population database, urban geography information system, urban emergency commanding system, and so forth.

The development of e-government has a close relationship with the rapid growth of the economy in China. The characteristics can be represented as the following: Among basic infrastructure, information releasing, and data exchanging, the two former have been done better than the last one.

When the segmentation of e-government is divided into vertical and horizontal categories, the sector special service in the vertical segmentation is much better than the local e-governance in the horizontal one.

- The force to use IT comes mainly from the administrative command of government.
- The adopted IT techniques in China are almost on the same schedule with developed countries.
- The levels of e-government are obviously different among different regions and different departments.

The city of Nanhai just started OA systems earlier than other counties. It happened at the same time of national and provincial experiences. Therefore, there were some pioneer projects which got praise from the state.

THE MAIN STRATEGY AND SITUATION OF NANHAI E-GOVERNMENT

Nanhai e-government is a typical example of local e-government in China. It has started the stage of sector administration with IT since 1995, which was the leading one with good infrastructure and good vertical and horizontal links in China. The features of Nanhai e-government were the connections of networks both in vertical and horizontal links. This created the fundamental framework of e-government. Through e-governance and e-finance management, a lot of sectors were also encouraged to use IT. These were successful strategies for Nanhai e-government.

Vertical Link

A vertical link has been achieved at the city, town, and village levels. All the administrative organizations have

built up the office local area network (LAN). Eighteen towns (or districts) of the city have established finance and account centers to manage their affairs online. On the other hand, other cities' information could not be encouraged by the government because the e-governance lagged behind the city information.

Horizontal Link

At the same time with vertical links, all the departments have also been connected with the Internet in Nanhai. The governmental information network center and data exchange center have been set up. Some projects about management systems, such as family planning, land management, court register judgment, social insurant services, health system, and so forth, have become the typical ones all around the province and the country. For example, the application of GIS and GPS with the map of scale 1:500 provided the digital tools to optimize the allocation of land resources. On the other hand, horizontal links seldom happened in other cities, even in some metropolises. This will be the future situation of e-government in China.

Using E-Government to Deal with Governance and Financial Affairs

An office automation system and finance management system had been established in Nanhai when the e-government program started. The financial settlement center was built in 2001. It could centrally manage the administrative organizations which let the local account open to the public. Public bidding was carried out on the network with some projects like pharmacy purchasing, engineering projects and land auction, and so forth, in Nanhai. In 2002, Nanhai first used "public assets management information system" to manage the public assets on the Internet in China.

E-Governance Promoted the Informalization Process of the Whole City

E-governance promoted the civilian information in Nanhai city. Up to now, e-government had covered both city and town levels. Following this progress, all the 250 villages in the city had been connected by optical fibers; all the families could connect to each other through the Internet; the IT penetration rate to traditional industries had reached 65%; and all the schools have built computer rooms (Liang, 2002). As a result, long-distance education, e-hospital, selecting radio or TV channel by Internet, e-

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