

Status of Decision-making Advisory Committee in the Innovation of Social Governance and Its Significance

Based on an Investigation of Zhuhai “Advisory Committee”

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Abstract—Under the background of increasingly complex social transformation and public management, public decision-making activities must change government's unitary leading mode in the past, actively absorb social forces and public participation, and reach consensus through “rational analysis” and “interest game”. As an important measure to innovate social governance mode and seek “good governance”, Zhuhai “Advisory Committee” has gradually formed its own characteristics in practice, and played an active role in promoting scientific and democratic decision-making of the government and in increasing the legitimacy and policy recognition of decision-making. The elements that “Advisory Committee own including rule of law, openness, transparency, participation, response and effectiveness embodies the core value of governance and good governance and belongs to important power source of social governance innovation. The “Advisory Committee” makes great efforts in integrating multi-party resources and building multiple cooperative governance patterns, which provides useful reference for the construction of social governance mode “leadership of Party committee, government taking charge, social coordination and public participation”.

Keywords—innovation of social governance; decision-making advisory committee; good governance

I. INTRODUCTION

The third plenary session of the 18th CPC central committee put forward that innovate social governance and promote the modernization of the national governance system and governance capacity. The report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that we should enhance the guarantee and improve the level of people's livelihood, and strengthen and innovate social

governance. We should perfect the social governance system of leadership of Party committee, government taking charge, social coordination, public participation and law guarantee, and create a co-construction, co-governance and sharing social governance structure.

From the perspective of government administration, the government's core means to achieve social governance is public policy and its implementation, and public decision-making and its institutional issues are the primary link. Therefore, as required by governance, we must reform the public decision-making system (Li Shaohui, and Zuo Xia, 2007). Among which, the most essential factor is to change government's unitary leading decision-making mode, actively absorb social forces and public participation, reach a consensus through “rational analysis” and “interest game”, make high-quality public decisions, and maximize the public interest by monitoring and evaluating the decision-making process and the effectiveness of decision-making.

In the public decision-making activities of urban management, the public decision-making advisory committee is usually regarded as that it not only can scientifically design and rationally analyze public issues, but also provide relatively neutral game and compromise platforms for the public, especially the stakeholders of the issues. (Yu hui, 2015). Through the carrier of the decision advisory committee, we can not only improve the scientificity and rationality of public decision and improve the effectiveness of government social governance, but also help to improve the openness and transparency of government administration, and establish an open image of the government, which is an important way for the government to effectively manage society.

Based on these considerations, the establishment of a public decision advisory system and the improvement of the public decision advisory institution have become one of the common attempts and efforts of local governments to explore new social governance models and seek “good governance” in recent years. Guangdong, Guangzhou, Shunde of Foshan, Zhuhai and other places all try to establish and operate a decision advisory committee¹, looking forward to finding a suitable path to promote the innovation of social governance model and modernize social governance.

Based on the perspective of social governance innovation, this study takes the system practice of Zhuhai Public Decision Advisory Committee (“Advisory Committee” for short) as the object of investigation, analyzes its development status, institutional features and governance effect and perfect ideas, and discusses its implications for promoting the innovation of social governance model.

II. THE EXPLORATION OF ZHUHAI “ADVISORY COMMITTEE”: CURRENT SITUATION AND FEATURES

A. Current Situation of Zhuhai “Advisory Committee”

1) *The background of “Advisory Committee”*: Zhuhai is one of the earliest special economic zones in China. Benefiting from its policy advantages and unique geographical conditions, Zhuhai has achieved rapid development in all areas of the economy and society. However, along with the deepening of reforms and the acceleration of social transformation, various underlying questions and contradictions have gradually emerged. In the meantime, a social stratum is becoming increasingly polarized, and the interest body is becoming increasingly diverse, and people’s rights awareness and concept of democracy and rule of law are constantly increasing.

On the one hand, in the face of this situation of rapid social transformation, diversified interest bodies and diverse public needs, the government needs to broaden the channels of public opinion expression, innovate the mode of public opinion appeal, and improve the mechanism of decision-making system, so as to better understand public opinions and respond to public opinions. On the other hand, the complex situation of economic and social development also tests the government’s scientific decision-making capabilities, institutional innovation capabilities, problem response capabilities, and crisis response capabilities. Therefore, in addition to the existing platform for participating in and discussing political affairs, it is necessary for Zhuhai to establish a decision-making consultation structure with sufficient public opinion absorption and response capabilities and to give advice and suggestions on coping with the complex situation of urban management.

Draw on the experience of Hong Kong, the establishment of Decision-making Advisory Committee is a major measure for Zhuhai to deal with the above problems and public appeals. The Advisory Committee is regarded as a major feature of

Hongkong’s political system, and almost all government agencies in Hongkong have various types of advisory organizations. These organizations not only have promoted the scientific decision-making of government departments, but also, as a mode of consultative democracy and a social integration mechanism, have enhanced the recognition of public opinion foundation and policy under the government administration and played an irreplaceable role in harmonizing the interests of all social strata and maintaining social stability (Deng Jianguang, 2013). This unique advisory system has become the institutional basis for the effective governance of the Hong Kong government.

2) *Development status of “Advisory Committee”*: In 2008, Zhuhai was identified as the first pilot demonstration area of social management system reform by Guangdong Province. In 2009, based on the reality of the deepening market level, the rapid population flow and the more prominent people’s livelihood, Zhuhai City set up three advisory bodies in the areas of people’s livelihood, namely, employment promotion advisory committee, medical and health advisory committee and community management advisory committee. In 2010, the advisory organization extended from the people’s livelihood area to the administrative area, and the women’s affairs advisory committee, advisory committee on the promotion of Zhuhai-Macao cooperative inspection and quarantine policy, administrative accountability advisory committee and emergency management advisory committee were established successively. Since then, Zhuhai City’s decision-making consulting organization has developed rapidly.

Based on rough statistics, at present, there are nearly 20 advisory committees set up by government departments in Zhuhai, and there are more than 600 various advisory committee members. As can be seen from the table above, Zhuhai’s “Decision-making Advisory Committee” mainly concentrates on municipal-level decision-making departments and municipal government departments, which are generally divided into the fields of people’s livelihood, administrative management, industrial development, and macro strategic planning. Among them, the number of advisory committees in the area of people’s livelihood dominates. In addition to the advisory committee for employment promotion, medical and health and community management, the advisory committee for public opinion collection on housing security is also included. The advisory organizations in the field of administration include the administrative accountability advisory committee, emergency management advisory committee and advisory committee on the promotion of Zhuhai-Macao cooperative inspection and quarantine policy. The advisory organizations in the field of industry development include taxi development advisory committee, convention and exhibition bureau advisory committee, intelligent manufacturing development advisory committee, etc. The most typical one in the field of macro strategic planning is Hengqin New Area Development Advisory Committee in Zhuhai.

¹ There is a slight difference in the expressions in various places. Some place name it as decision-making advisory committee, and others call it as decision-making advisory committee. However, it generally belongs to a platform for public participation and public decision-making.

B. Characteristics of Zhuhai "Advisory Committee"

Differing from traditional government experts advisory organization, Zhuhai "Advisory Committee" has some distinctive characteristics since its establishment: first, Zhuhai has placed the institutional improvement of "Advisory Committee" at an important position, so as to make the operation of "Advisory Committee" have laws to abide by and have rules to follow; second, from staff composition, "Advisory Committee" has broken the pattern of traditional advisory organizations led by experts, and actively absorbed different representatives of interest groups and the public to participate in; third, the consultation mode of "Advisory Committee" is flexible and diverse and pursues actual effect.

1) *Institutionalized decision-making advisory*: Since the establishment of "Advisory Committee", it has placed working out rules and regulations at an important position. All "Advisory Committee" have formulated relevant rules and regulations (mostly embodied in the form of the Charter of the Committee), which regulates the nature of the committee, the responsibilities of the work, the organization, the appointment and term of office of the personnel, the rights and obligations of the members, the way of consultation, and organizational guarantee.

In 2012, Zhuhai Major Executive Decision Expert Consultation Argumentation Method (hereinafter referred to as Method) issued and marked that the consultation work of Zhuhai major executive decision entered legalized and standardized track. Method requires the administrative organs to conduct expert consultation and argumentation before making decisions involving the city's economic and social development and closely related to the public interests. Method stipulates the scope of the major administrative decisions, the guidance and coordination of the expert consultation and argumentation work, the selection and employment conditions, rights and duties, supervision and management, and the working procedure of the consultation and argumentation. The introduction of Method is an important progress for the construction of policy consultation system in Zhuhai.

2) *Pluralistic staff composition*: Unlike traditional decision-making advisory committee led by experts and intellectual elite, the staff composition of various advisory committees in Zhuhai presents the characteristics of diversification. For example, the first environmental livable committee consists of 48 representatives, including representatives of public officials, representatives of professional and technical personnel and public representatives, each of them accounting for 1/3 of the members. The public representatives are composed of NPC members, CPPCC members, the people from social organization and enterprises, community and the public. Hengqin Development Advisory Committee consists of many famous experts and authorities at home and abroad, which highlights staff's high-end orientation and internationalization (Luo Wenfan, and Chen Xiangli, 2013). It can be seen that different "Advisory Committees" have different arrangements in the staff composition because of the differences in their

nature and specific functions. Some put emphasis on specialty but others focus on representativeness of staff.

3) *Diversified counseling channels*: The consultation mode of Zhuhai "Advisory Committee" is flexible and diverse, mainly including: (1) carry out consultations for the decided topics in advance in the form of symposiums, seminars, netmeeting, e-mail, etc. (2) take part in the on-the-spot investigation and special research activities organized by the functional departments, conduct investigation and study on the hot and difficult issues in the related fields, and put forward suggestions and advice. (3) according to the unified arrangement of functional departments, we should determine a number of important projects and policies to carry out project research or argumentation. (4) through communication meetings, hearings, thematic forums and other ways to communicate with the relevant personnel and the public, discuss the relevant issues in the region and put up with solutions.

III. FUNCTION AND ROLE OF "ADVISORY COMMITTEE" IN PROMOTING SOCIAL GOVERNANCE

Zhuhai city regards the Advisory Committee as "an institution which is set up by the various functional departments of the government and exists outside the administrative organization system of the government and exerts the function of information collection, opinion transmission, decision consultation and policy interpretation to assist the administration of the government". This positioning endows the important tasks for Zhuhai "Advisory Committee" to promote the transformation of urban management in Zhuhai and achieve the modernization of governance system and governance capacity. The effect of operation and practice in several years shows that the "Advisory Committee" not only promotes the scientization and democratization of public decision-making, but also is an important part of the social governance system, and it is a beneficial attempt to innovate the system of social governance model.

A. The "Advisory Committee" Has Surpassed the Functional Orientation of Traditional Consulting Organizations

Based on the positioning of Zhuhai City, each "Advisory Committee" should play a role of information collection, opinion transmission, decision consulting, and policy interpretation: information collection includes the collection of professional information in the field, and opinions of the public or stakeholders on government decision-making or related engineering projects. The opinion transmission includes "the information transmission between the government and grass roots", that is, convey the voices and opinions of all social strata to the government in a timely manner, and at the same time, publicize the government's policies and decisions to the public. Decision-making consulting refers to conduct scientific argumentation based on the needs of government decision-making, and put forward feasible solutions or related countermeasures and suggestions. The policy explanation is to convey policy information to the public, answer questions and dispel doubts, and complete the persuasion and conciliatory work, so as to resolve conflicts and contradictions. The functions above give the advisory committee a new

connotation. It not only requires the “Advisory Committee” to make recommendations for the government decision-making, but also requires members to make a good bridge between the government and the public and to exert the role of “liaison men” and “buffer zones”, surpassing traditional advisory organization’s simple functional positioning of “information collection and decision-making consultation”.

B. The “Advisory Committee” Has Become a New Subject of Social Governance

The “Advisory Committee” has become a new subject and active promoter of social governance in Zhuhai. First, the “Advisory Committee” has effectively influenced the government’s decision-making through its linkage with the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference. Most “Advisory Committees” have a certain proportion of NPC deputies and CPPCC members. In the process of fulfilling their responsibilities, they actively promoted the interaction between the “Advisory Committees” and the National People’s Congress and the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference at all levels to form a linkage effect. For example, under the support of Zhuhai Municipal Human Resources and Social Security Bureau, in the process of formation of policy initiative of employment of difficulty employment groups, industry transformation and upgrading and vocational training, employment promotion advisory committee unites the representatives of the municipal and district People’s Congress and the members of the CPPCC to jointly carry out the investigation and discussion on the related topics and puts a series of solutions, even some suggestions have been converted into government decision-making.² Second, the “Advisory Committee” has actively cooperated with social organizations and appropriate authorities to promote the formation of a diversified collaborative governance structure. For example, Zhuhai Environmental Livability Committee has cooperated with Peking University Ecological Civilization Zhuhai Research Institute and local universities in Zhuhai to jointly carry out planning and research on ecological environment livability construction; Through cooperation and sharing, the social innovation expert advisory committee, public condition observer team, research base of colleges and universities have given full play to the participation and synergy of experts, scholars and the public in social governance (Luo Wenfan, and Chen Xiangli, 2013). Third, the “Advisory Committee” is an important platform for the public to participate in social governance. In line with the provisions of the constitution or system, the public representatives are an important part of the majority of the “Advisory Committee”. This institutional arrangement has broadened the channels for the public’s participation in urban public affairs and public decision-making. Not only that, in view of the issues the public concern, some “Advisory Committees” can also attract public attention, follow-up, and supervision through different channels.

C. The “Advisory Committee” Has Enhanced the Government’s Social Governance Capacity

Rule of law, fairness, openness, transparency, responsiveness, interaction, and effectiveness and other elements are the proper meanings of the issues of governance and good governance (Yu Keping, 2002). The system construction and operation practice of the “Advisory Committee” show that it has initially possessed the essential characteristics of governance and good governance: firstly, it has facilitated the legalization of public decision-making consultation, and promoted the standardization and normalization of advisory activities before important decision-making through laws and regulations, regulations or systems. Next, the “Advisory Committee” has increased the openness and transparency of government administration through public opinion collection, feedback and policy interpretation and activities propaganda on some policy issues. As Zhuhai Environmental Protection Bureau personnel said when evaluating the environmental livability committee, “public feelings and popular will are the important reference for government decision-making ... the environmental livability committee is like a bridge between government decision-making and public opinion feedback, which strengthens communication among all sectors of society and increases transparency in government decision-making (Luo Wenfan, and Chen Xiangli, 2013)”. Thirdly, the “Advisory Committee” is a major platform for the public participation in social governance to promote the public’s institutional participation in public affairs. As the cornerstone of democracy, public participation is the source of vitality for social governance innovation (Yin Shao cheng, 2016). Finally, the “Advisory Committee” has enhanced the government’s ability to respond to the interactive dialogue with the public. For example, during the forming of the distribution plan for Dajingshan Project, the first security housing project in Zhuhai, the advisory committee for public opinion collection on housing security collects interest correlation groups’ opinions on project allocation, rent standard and draw lots by means of telephone, mail, QQ, network questionnaire, etc, and feedbacks the comments to Zhuhai Housing Security Office, eventually forming a distribution plan acceptable to all parties (Luo Wenfan, and Chen Xiangli, 2013). The characteristics of the “Advisory Committee” above provide a referable sample for constructing the social governance mode of “leadership of Party committee, government taking charge, social coordination and public participation”. The “Advisory Committee” has effectively promoted the government’s social governance abilities.

D. The “Advisory Committee” Has Enhanced the Quality and Legitimacy of Public Decision-making

From the final governance effect, the “Advisory Committee” has facilitated scientific and democratic public decision-making, and has played an active role in resolving social contradictions, embodying social consensus, and enhancing the legitimacy and recognition of policies.

The first is to raise the scientific level of public decision-making. The key link of governance is decision-making, and scientific decision-making can guarantee the effectiveness of government governance. The “Advisory Committee” gathers

² See the Work Summary of the Second Employment Promotion Advisory Committee in Zhuhai (2015) (Internal document)

rich decision-making information and integrates opinions and suggestions of all parties, which is conducive to the formation of scientific decisions and enhancement of public interests. For example, Zhuhai environmental livability committee released the national first “ecological environment index” in March 2015. The release of this index has exerted a positive role in governments at all levels timely finding the weak links in ecological environment protection within their respective jurisdictions, timely warning prominent problems affecting public health and human settlement environment, and improving relevant management systems in accordance with laws and regulations (China new network, 2015).

The second is to facilitate the democratization of public decision-making. During the formation, introduction and implementation of contemporary public policies, the public is increasingly eager to make their voices. By introducing public representatives, the Advisory Committee has made it easier that the opinions and appeals of all sectors of society can be heard and respected, and reflected to the decision-making of the government. For example, the Constitute of Zhuhai Environmental Livability Committee stipulates that when the committee holds a meeting, the number of professional technicians and public representatives attending the meeting should exceed one half of the representative presenting at the meeting, and the resolutions made by the meeting can be passed after the approval by more than 2/3 of the number of participants.

The third is to enhance the legitimacy of policies and public’s recognition of the government. The legitimacy of the modern regime depends on the consent of the people and the consensus of society (Bai gang, and Lin guanghua, 2002). The Advisory Committee provides the community with channels and platforms for expressing different interest demands and policy debates, helps to balance and harmonize the conflicts of interests of all classes, gains recognition from the public in a wider context, and enhances the legality and legitimacy of government decisions, so as to pave the way for the smooth implementation of the policy. For example, during the formation of the distribution plan for Dajingshan security housing project, the government has fully listened to the opinions of the Advisory Committee and repeatedly consulted the general public’s opinions on project allocation, draw lots and rent quota adjustments, and constantly optimized and adjusted the plan, so as to ensure that the plan is “grounded” and highly recognized by the ordinary people (Luo wenfan, and Chen xiangli, 2013).

IV. THE ENLIGHTENMENT AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON SOCIAL GOVERNANCE INNOVATION

Zhuhai Advisory Committee has started with solving economic and social issues that people concern, and reached consensus through participation, consultation and dialogue in a peaceful, rational and orderly way, so as to improve government’s social governance capacity and enhance the public’s recognition for the government. The practice of Zhuhai “Advisory Committee” system has a certain significance and inspiration for promoting the innovation of

social governance system and the modernization of governance capability.

A. *“Advisory Committee” Is a Rational Choice for Social Governance Innovation*

On the one hand, the economic and social changes in our country have promoted the differentiation of social structure. Some new social strata have emerged, such as private enterprise owners, managers and technicians, and they have strong rights consciousness and politics participation consciousness. Meanwhile, more and more disadvantaged groups such as the poor and the unemployed are increasing, and they hope that their basic rights and interests will be protected. On the other hand, along with the acceleration of urbanization and increasing urban population, the demand for public services including public security, public transport, education, medical care and old-age security is increasing. The surge of social network has posed a challenge to the traditional government management mode.

All these aspects highly require the government’s governance ability and level. The decision-making advisory committee is conducive to easing the government’s governance pressure and pushing the government to make scientific and reasonable decisions. As a platform for all sectors of society to participate in public affairs and public decision-making, the decision-making advisory committee has provided channels for expression of interest appeals and policy debates, which helps to balance and coordinate the contradictions and interests of all parties and to reach a “consensus” in peaceful, rational and orderly way. Therefore, the “Advisory Committee” system has enhanced the government’s ability to deal with various social needs and complex problems. As a new model for dealing with social problems, the decision-making advisory committee is a rational choice for promoting the innovation of social governance and enhancing government social governance.

B. *“Advisory Committee” Has Promoted the Transformation of the Public Decision-making Mode and Is a Driving Force for the Innovation of Social Governance*

The traditional decision-making mode has the defects, including single decision-making subject, closed decision-making process, and decision information based on experience judgment. The establishment and operation of the “Advisory Committee” have changed this situation to certain extent. Differing from the traditional decision-making mode, the “Advisory Committee” has diversified participation subjects, relatively transparent operation process and more interaction between the subjects. From the point of effect, the “Advisory Committee” has facilitated the scientific and democratic process of public decision-making, raised the legitimacy and recognition of public policies, and improved the public image of the government. It can be said that “Advisory Committee” has promoted the transformation of public decision-making mode.

Not only that, the elements that “Advisory Committee’s” own, including rule of law, openness, transparency, participation, response and effectiveness, have embodied the core value of governance and good governance. Through the

institutionalized channels, the “Advisory Committee” has promoted government administration from the closed to the open, from the unitary leading to diversified participation, and from negative response to active communication, which is not only conducive to the cultivation of the public’s civic awareness and the ability to participate in and discuss the political affairs, but also to facilitating the reform of the government itself and promoting the formation of service-oriented government, open government, and responsible government. In this sense, the “Advisory Committee” is a major driving force for the innovation of social governance.

C. *The Road to Realize Effective Urban Governance Is Institutionalized Public Opinion Absorption and Response Mechanism*

For a long time, the channels for public opinion expression and public opinion appeal in China are relatively limited. In terms of the needs of the general public, the government’s response is mostly expedient. Expedient response is characterized by hindsight, passivity and uncontrollability. [27] This kind of response often occurs when the policy produces seriously adverse consequences and causes severe reactions from the public. This may exacerbate the opposition of officials and civilians, trigger a crisis of confidence in the government, and even endanger social stability.

In evaluating Hong Kong’s advisory system, Jin Yaoji has put forward the concept of “administrative absorption of politics”. “The administration refers to the government management system, and politics refers to the democratic participation of the masses”. “The politics that the administration has to absorb is the consultation politics.” (Mai Yanwei, 2010). This institutionalized public opinion absorption and response mechanisms satisfy the need of people’s participation in public affairs, can alleviate social conflicts, and promote social stability. In essence, the decision-making advisory committee on the mainland in recent years is also a method of “administrative absorption of politics” (Qiang Shigong, 2007). Compared with the expedient response in the past, the “administrative absorption of politics” has the advantages of pre-decision consulting, active consulting, open consulting and institutionalized consulting, and exerts an important role in improving the quality and legitimacy of decision-making and promoting the smooth implementation of decision-making. At present, although all local advisory committees are still in the exploratory stage and have some problems, the advisory committee, as an institutionalized mechanism for public opinion absorption and appeal, should be an inevitable choice for effective urban governance in the future.

D. *The Major Guarantee for Effective Urban Governance Is to Integrate Many Resources and Form a New Pattern of Diversified Collaborative Governance*

Diversified participation and collaborative governance are important signs that modern governance differs from traditional government management (He Zengke, 2017). In contemporary times, urban government faces with increasingly complex public affairs. Along with the deepen institutional reform, the government has changed from the “all-round government” to the “limited government”, which means that

effective governance practices in the past have been difficult to adapt to current governance situations.

To avoid the behavior of “dislocation”, “vacancy” and “offside” and make correct decisions, the integration of multiple resources and the construction of multiple cooperative governance is also a major guarantee for the government to realize its effective governance, apart from strengthening its own capacity building. Through institutionalized design, we promote the social organizations, experts and scholars, industry elites and common people to participate in public decision-making and public affairs in an orderly way, and reach a consensus in interaction, consultation and dialogue, which is the core of governance, as well as a major prerequisite for the realization of good governance (Wei Zhixun, 2014). Similar to democratic talks, hearings, etc, the “Advisory Committee” is also a system innovation of the mode of multiple cooperative governance. By absorbing the participation of multiple forces, the “Advisory Committee” not only has enhanced the understanding and trust of different groups, reduced conflicts of interest and improved the quality of decision-making, but also has relieved the pressure of government governance and improved its governance capacity. It can be seen that the operation of the “Advisory Committee” has provided a useful reference for the construction of a social governance mode of “leadership of Party committee, government taking charge, social coordination, and public participation”.

V. CONCLUSION

At present, there are still many problems in the public participation, operation transparency and responsiveness of Zhuhai “Advisory Committee” system. However, as an innovation of social governance mode, the “Advisory Committee” has promoted the transformation of the public decision-making mode and enhanced the government’s ability to deal with various social needs and complex problems. Not only that, the elements that “Advisory Committee’s” own, including rule of law, openness, transparency, participation, response and effectiveness, are the core values of “Advisory Committee”, as well as a major power source for the innovation of social governance. As a method of “administrative absorption of politics”, the “Advisory Committee” has the advantages of pre-decision consulting, active consulting and procedural institutionalized consulting, which plays an important role in improving the quality and legality of decision-making and promoting the smooth implementation of decision-making. The “Advisory Committee’s” beneficial attempts to integrate many resources and build a multiple cooperative governance structure provide references for building a social governance mode of “leadership of Party committee, government taking charge, social coordination and public participation”. The experience of the “Advisory Committee” deserves a further improvement and promotion.

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