E–Government in Shanghai

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INTRODUCTION

Chinese e-government was launched at the beginning of 1990s. It is necessary to develop e-government not only for the appeal of information technology and the government's reform in the social and economic transition, but also for the demand of joining WTO (Wu & Zhang, 2003). Due to the developments in social organization, economy, and information infrastructure in China, e-government still remains at the initial stage (China E-government Research Center, 2002). Shanghai, as the largest and most flourishing city in China, is superior to other areas of China in hardware (information infrastructure, etc.) and software (e.g., "citizens' concept") (Qiao, 2004). Shanghai's experiences may be the example for other provinces and cities, for (1) the e-government of Shanghai was named as a model by National Informatization Commission (NIC) in 2001; and (2) Shanghai leads the development of e-government in China. For example, Shanghai is the first local government to construct governmental Web portal, to provide online services and to make legal rules about open public information. This article describes the development of e-government in Shanghai, analyzes its predicament, and probes into its future trends.

BACKGROUND

The Special Goal of Chinese E-Government

Governments around the world are embracing electronic government. From industrialized countries to developing ones, national and local governments are moving online (Improvement & Development Agency, 2002; Taylor, 2002). China is one of the countries following this trend even though its goals might not be exactly the same as Western countries who are promoting E-government as a way of realizing e-democracy (Bonham, Seifert, & Thorson, 2001; Phil Noble & Associates, Inc., 2001). Liu Yadong

made it clear that Shanghai is focusing on IT as it leads to More Effective and Efficient Public Services (Liu, 2004). Therefore, e-government is broadly seen as the use of information and communication to promote more efficient and effective government.

How E-Government is Generally Defined in China

According to citation review, the most popular definition of e-government in China is the following given by the World Bank:

E-government refers to the use by government agencies of information technologies (such as Wide Area Networks, the Internet, and mobile computing) that have the ability to transform relations with citizens, businesses, and other arms of government. These technologies can serve a variety of different ends: better delivery of government services to citizens, improved interactions with business and industry, citizen empowerment through access to information, or more efficient government management. The resulting benefits can be less corruption, increased transparency, greater convenience, revenue growth, and/or cost reductions. (The World Bank Group, 2003)

Research Review of the E-Government of Shanghai

Despite this rapid growth of e-government in China, no studies were found that explored the content of either national or provincial Chinese e-government systematically (Xiang, 2004). Besides some speeches and official documents, research about the e-government of Shanghai is practically non-existent.

Our discussion is based on a study of e-government projects in which three primary categories were identified: e-governance, e-service, and e-knowledge. E-governance refers to linking citizens, stakeholders, and elected representatives to participate in governance of communities.

Figure 1. Illustration of labor and social security system of Shanghai
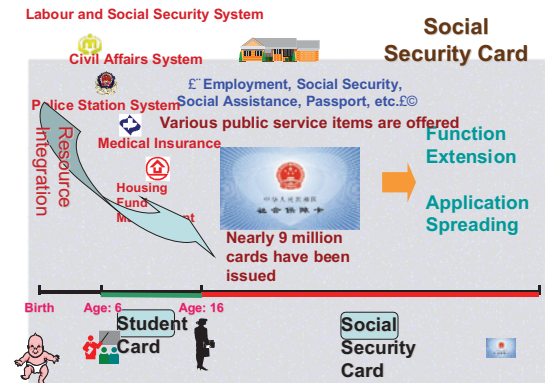
E-service involves securing and providing government services by electronic means. E-knowledge means using communication technologies to gain knowledge (Improvement & Development Agency, 2002). This text will analyze the e-government of Shanghai regarding these three respects as the frame combining with the reality of Shanghai.

THE DEVELOPMENT OF E-GOVERNMENT IN SHANGHAI

In order to build the metropolis as the international economic center, the financial center, trading center and shipping center, Shanghai should play the role of the bellwether in the urban informatization. It will be the new theme of Shanghai development and the new motive power of social development as well. Although the building of Shanghai e-government is in its infancy, some achievements can be demonstrated, such as:

- Shanghai has accomplished the connection between official portal Web site (www.shanghai.gov.cn) and 47 municipal bureaus, 19 county's or district's governments, and 140 Web sites such as the People's Congress, CPPCC, public groups and so on (Gu, 2003).
- By the end of 2003, there were more than 1.421 million times that people visited the Web sites (Shanghai Municipal Informatization Commission, 2004).
- The design of government service base has changed according to the citizens' demands rather than administrative section's function. For example, Social

Security Card (SSC) enables citizens to enjoy convenient public services (Shanghai Labor and Social Security Bureau, 2003). SSC, an IC card, is a key to operate more than 20 public services for citizens, such as medical care, unemployment benefit, and others. An information system, base of SSC, integrates a number of social services with public information.
- The online service way of dealing government affairs has been changed from only one section to joint sections (Shanghai Municipal Informatization Commission, 2004).
- The procedures of form downloaded and online registration have changed from one-way transmission into bilateral interaction by multi-alternative Internet (He, 2004).

THE CURRENT SITUATION OF SHANGHAI E-GOVERNMENT

Strengths of E-Government in Shanghai

Fairly Good Infrastructure

In Shanghai, several indexes (such as quantities of regular telephones, cellular telephones, libraries, and GDP per capita, etc.) are much better than those of other cities in China. Table 1 lists some indexes between Shanghai and Beijing. So, Shanghai's relatively perfect infrastructure has laid good foundations for the building of Shanghai informatization. It is one of the prerequisites for Shanghai ranking in a leading position among domestic cities.

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