Integrating Citizens and Technology in China's Smart Cities
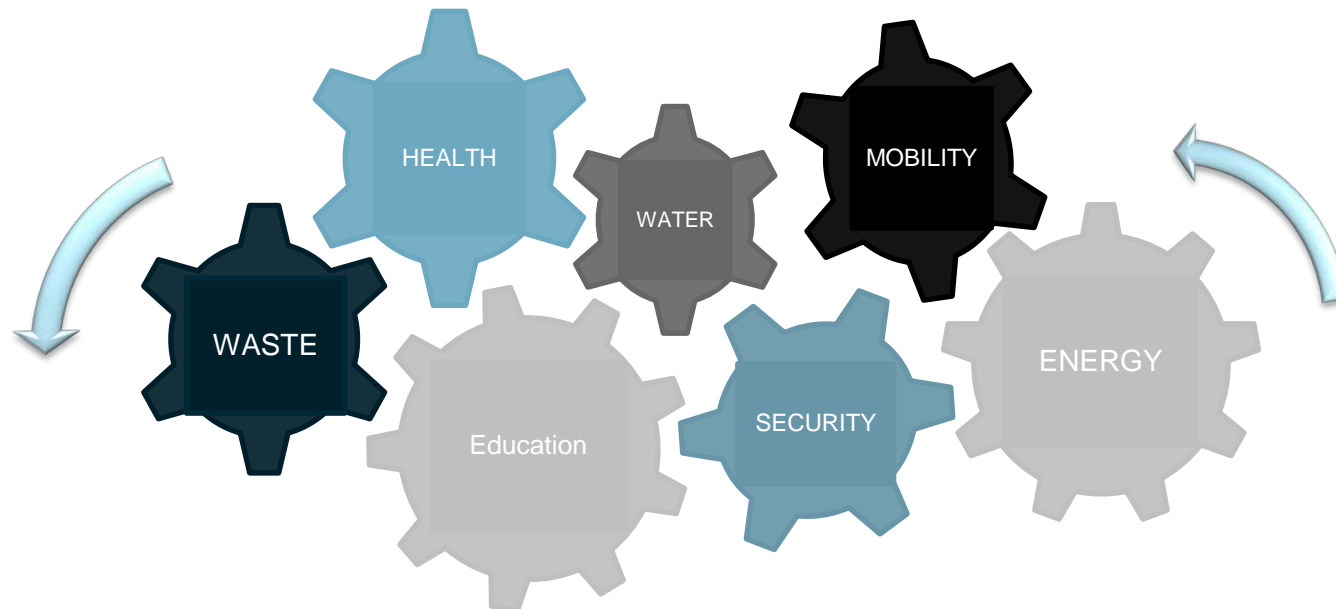
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A Systemic Project Needs Central Coordination

- A capable and neutral central coordinator is indispensable for the success of smart city projects.

- In China, that role has been taken mostly by governments of different levels, or SoEs that represent governments.

Ambitious plans for the development of smart cities in China

Up to end of 2015:

- China's Ministry of Construction has chosen 290 cities and districts as pilot smart cities;

- More than 500 cities or districts have planned or start to implement smart city project;

- Total investment in the coming 10 years is estimated to be trillions.

Why so keen on developing smart cities?

Rapid urbanization:
From 56.1% in 2015 to 60% in 2020;
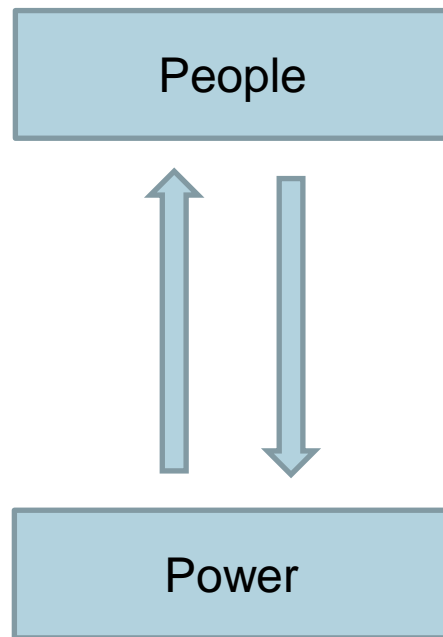More than 10 million migrants per year.

Need for new growth point:
Bottleneck of extensive growth mode;
Demographic change.

Political Legitimacy:
In the coming five years,
China aims to pursue innovative,
coordinated, green, open
and shared developments.

The Peculiarities of China's Political System

People

↑ ↓

Power

- Confucius: Governing is not exerting power but showing "ren" 仁 to the people;

- People are the ultimate source of sovereignty but "governing for the people" is more emphasized;

- Political legitimacy of the state is not based on procedural justice, but the provision of basic welfare for the general public.

Greater citizen participation is enabled by smart technologies
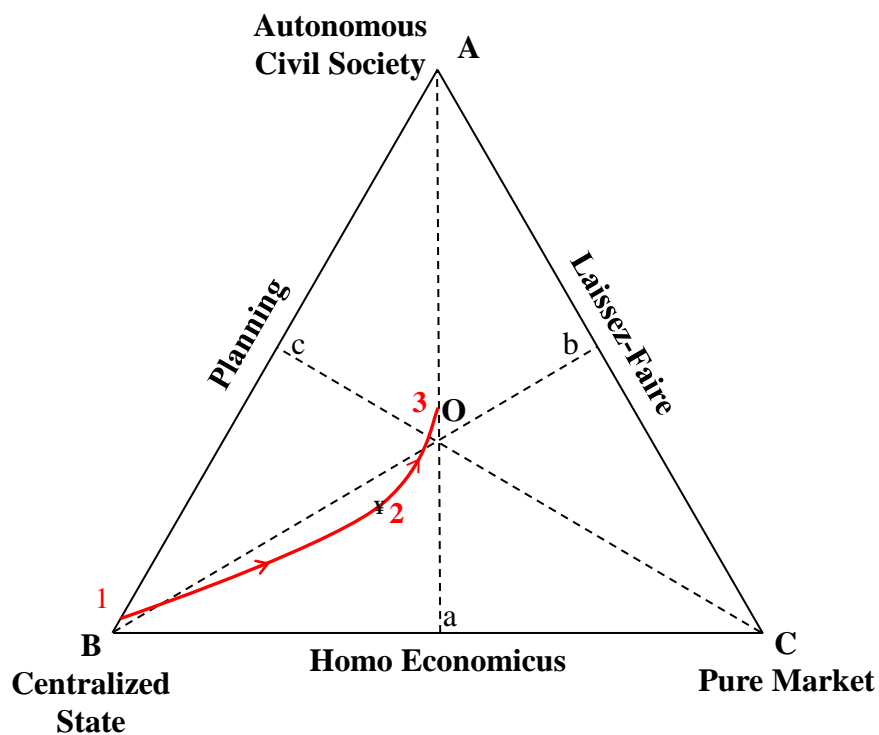
Real Democracy:

- Public goods have to be integrated with citizens' aspiration;

- Direct intervention of citizens through interactions with local bureaucrats;

- Timely responses and adjustment from local bureaucrats;

- Real-time supervision of bureaucratic performance by civil society.

What have been done to realize such ambition?

Digital Infrastructure

**Innovation
&
Entrepreneurship**

Internet+

State Council on mobile phones

Smart governance applications in Hangzhou

Internet companies are fighting for market share

Vs.

Alibaba
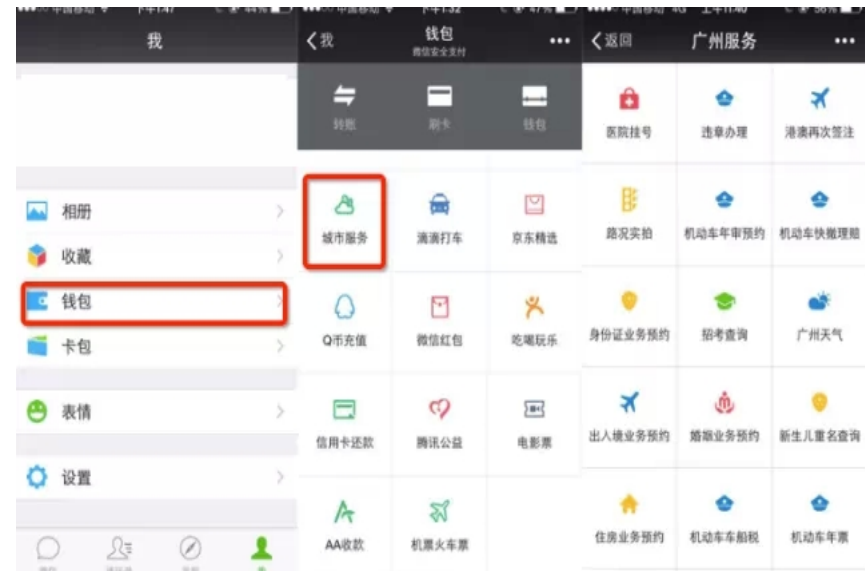
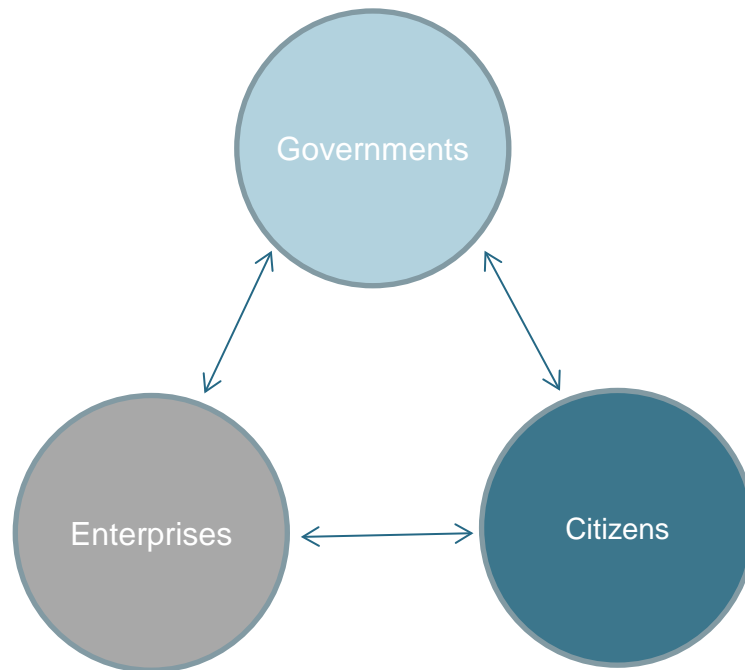**Tencent**

Better local governance relies on the collaborations among governments, enterprises, and citizens

What need to be done:

- Theoretical guidelines for developing "real democracy";

- Better organizational framework for developing inter-organizational, inter-sectorial collaborations;

- Trainings on local bureaucrats technical and more importantly, "human" skills in leveraging smart technologies to interact with citizens and address their needs in everyday life.

Thank you!

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