Under The “Golden Shine”:

China’s Efforts to Bridge Government and Citizens

A Joint Project on CAPACITY BUILDING OF ASIA PACIFIC
E-GOVERNMENT INITIATIVES for the

United Nations Centre for Regional Development

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About the Author

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Executive Summary

In recent years, both central and local Chinese governments have paid increased attention to e-governance, defined as using Information and Communication Technology (ICT) to enhance government administration and management. The infrastructure includes "Three Networks and One Database," comprising internal networks, special networks, and external networks, and a database system. The three stages in building this comprehensive network include "Office Automation," the "Twelve Golden Projects," and "Government Online."

With huge budgets, the infrastructures in most government agencies are relatively complete. However, there has been insufficient research on these comprehensive networks, due to access difficulties, especially with respect to the Intranet, as well as lack of funding.

There have been 23,752 domain names registered under gov.cn, but less than half of these domain names (11,995) have been used to build government websites since the beginning of 2006. About 4 percent of the total websites in China are government websites.

Partly because the concept of e-governance/e-government is different in China from that in the developed countries, the entire system in China is more like a government-centered network instead of a "people-centered network." The online contents on the government websites are less than satisfactory, and about 5 percent of the government websites do not even have their own content. Only about 60 percent provide laws or other policy documents; 50 percent update their news everyday; and more than one-third of the websites update their news less than once a month. Only 53.8 percent of the websites provide tools to search key words. Because the websites are not well maintained, not many people access them. Only15.2 percent of the e-government websites have more than 1,000 page views each day.

The e-services provided by the government websites are also insufficient. Only 26.3 percent provide forms to be downloaded or printed, less than 40 percent can answer inquiries about office affairs, less than 40 percent allow users a vehicle to voice complaints, 30.2 percent have online opinion polls, and only 13.8 percent have online applications.

The lack of access to government websites is partly due to a lack of public awareness. Even among the Internet users, less than 15 percent report having sufficient knowledge of e-government, and 62.4 percent report that they know little or nothing about e-government websites. Among the Internet users, 9.5 percent "sometimes" use the government websites and only 3.3 percent "often" use them.

According to the *UN 2005 E-government Report*, China ranked 67th on the E-government Readiness Index in 2004 and ranked 57th in 2005 (0.9062), a little better than the world's average (0.4267). China's ranks 43rd on the world's Government E-service Index, and ranks 32nd on the world's E-participation Index.

To improve e-government in China, governments need to realize that purpose is not only to serve the government, but also to serve the people. More awareness and training needs to be provided to reach this goal.

Introduction

E-government has developed over the past twenty years in China. The construction of infrastructure for IT applications at all levels of governmental agencies has generally been completed. With the promotion of the "Government Online Project," government portal websites have made great progress, and most government departments, such as treasury, industry and commerce, customs, and the police, have built comprehensive special networks.

The concept of e-government, according to the *UN Global E-Government Readiness Report*, mainly involves government websites, the goal of which is to build "…a people-centred and inclusive information society, putting the potential of information and communication technologies at the service of development and addressing new challenges of the information society" (Preface, *UN 2005 Global E-government Report*).

Under the centralized political system in China, a Chinglish (Chinese-English) "informatization" was invented, meaning to promote information and communication technology (ICT). Thus, discussions about e-government in China mainly focus on promoting government use of ICT, or "informized governance," which is usually regarded as e-governance (*dianzi zhengwu*), including the entire infrastructure of governmental networks. Greater attention has been paid to e-governance than to e-government. The latter is limited to "government online" or "government websites" (*zhengfu shangwang*). Thus e-governance/e-government in China has followed a government-directed from-top-to-bottom course of development, and its goals, as stated by former general secretary of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), Jiang Zemin, are "to deepen administration system reform, further transform government functions, improve management style, promote e-government, enhance administrative efficiency, reduce administrative costs, and form a standardized, harmonious, fair, transparent, clean, and effective administrative system."

To have a full picture of "e-governance" in China, we not only need to examine the government websites, but also to examine the entire infrastructure and the citizen usage. In general, Chinese governments, from the central to the local levels, have built a comprehensive ITC-supported network. Yet the network is mainly for presentation and government use, instead for "serving the people." Thus, the development of e-government in China is still at a preliminary stage.

Government: Three Stages in Building a Comprehensive Network

Proposed by the General Office of the State Council the entire structure of e-governance in China is composed of "Three Networks and One Database"(*san wang yi ku*), meaning internal, special, and external networks, plus a database system. The "internal network" is an Intranet, which handles confidential information and runs agency operations. The "special network" is an Extranet, according to agency functions, which conditionally connects to the Intranet within the scope of these functions, and based on which office automation and sharing of confidential information among local governments are realized. The "external network" is the Internet, which provides information to the public. The database system supports the "Three Networks," and offers the various users different services in accordance with the classification levels and usage requirements.

In recent years, both central and local governments have paid increased attention to e-government. According to data from CCID (http://english.ccidnet.com), in 2004 the Chinese

government invested US$ 5 billion in e-government projects, which accounted for 10 percent of all IT spending. Analysts projected that total spending in 2005 in the IT industry would increase to US$ 6 billion and by 2009 this amount would reach US$ 10 billion. This translates into a 15.9 percent compound annual growth.

Originally, the goals of e-government were slated to be fulfilled in three stages: the first stage is "Office Automation in Agencies," the second stage is "Twelve Golden Projects", and the third stage is known as "Government Online."

Office Automation

From the beginning of the 1980s to the beginning of the 1990s, the Chinese government launched an Office Automation (OA) Project, and built diversified transverse and longitudinal internal information office networks. Thus far, an e-government network platform, consisting of central city networks, wide area networks (WAN) from the central to the provincial levels, and local city networks of forty-seven vice-provincial WAN, have been constructed. Most city-level governments manage their office affairs with a minimum of paper, or even no paper.

This was intended to be the first stage of e-government in China. More progress was made when the "Twelve Golden Projects" were launched.

Twelve Golden Projects

Led by former Premier Zhu Rongji, the China Informatization Office came into existence in December 2001. Eight months later, State Council Document No.17 was released, declaring the infrastructure for China's e-government procedures: the first phase of e-government in China focuses on twelve networks, widely known as the "Twelve Golden Projects," including (a) core systems designed to strengthen supervision and enhance efficiency (i.e., the Administrative Resources System and the Golden Macro Project), (b) projects designed to safeguard government revenue and rationalize government spending (i.e., the Golden Tax Project, the Golden Customs Project, the Golden Audit Project, the Golden Finance Project, and the Golden Card Project), and (c) systems designed to ensure basic order in the national economy and social development (i.e. Golden Shield, Golden Quality, Golden Agriculture, Golden Water Conservancy, and Golden Social Security). While some of these projects include front-office applications on the external network, most operate on the e-government internal network with direct links to the main databases.

The twelve golden projects are as follows:

1. **Administrative Resources System** (*bangong yewu ziyuan xitong*) is a comprehensive system that underlies e-governance operations in all divisions of government work, including five components: (1) a desktop video-conferencing system; (2) an electronic meeting announcement and registration system; (3) a State Council supervision management system; (4) an electronic document transmission system; and (5) a government crisis management system.
2. **The Golden Macro Project** (*jinhong*), also known as the Macro Economic Management Information System, aims at increasing connectivity and information sharing among government

bodies in charge of macroeconomic management so that national economic policymaking will be more efficient, accurate, and transparent.

3. **The Golden Tax Project** (*jinshui*) is designed to prevent tax evasion using counterfeit receipts and invoices. As one of the most successful golden projects in promoting efficiency and accountability, the Golden Tax Project since 2002 has covered approximately 600,000 units, i.e., about 45 percent of taxpayers nationwide.

4. **The Golden Customs Project** (*jinguan*), also known as the Golden Gate Project, was formally launched in 2001. The Project's current emphasis is on four application systems for (1) the management of quotas and licenses, (2) import/export statistics, (3) tax returns for exporting companies, and (4) international trade currency transactions. The long-term objective is to facilitate the modernization of China's international trade and economic transaction system by using computer network technologies.

5. **The Golden Finance Project** (*jincai*) began in 1999. As the main effort to modernize financial management within the Chinese government, the Golden Finance Project has two main objectives: first, to integrate the eleven existing sub-systems at the national level from income and budgeting management to procurement and debt control, and; second, to establish vertical networks that include provincial and municipal bureaus of finance.

6. **The Golden Card Project** (*jinka*) is a project that promotes electronic currency in Chinese society. The central government calculates that the spread of electronic currency will not only enhance e-commerce, but also will allow government to improve the regulation of financial markets based on a unified payment clearance system. Effective supervision of financial exchanges will enable public authorities at different levels to track and monitor transactions in public and private sectors, which will also enhance anti-corruption efforts. After several years' effort, the number of bank cards has grown from 380 million at the end of 2001 to 920 million in September 2005.

7. **The Golden Audit Project** (*jinshen*) aims to establish a centrally organized electronic auditing system for government entities in China.

8. **The Golden Shield Project** (*jindun*) aims at "the adoption of advanced ICTs to strengthen central police control, responsiveness, and crime combating capacity, so as to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of public security work."

9. **The Golden Social Security Project** (*jinbao*) aims to set up a unified national information system for labor protection and social security, monitoring changes in the labor market and providing policy recommendations to government offices at the national, provincial, and city levels.

10. **The Golden Quality Project** (*jinzhi*) aims at transforming quality supervision authorities into public service providers, enhancing transparency in administration, and establishing a standardized national network.

11. **The Golden Agriculture Project** (*jinnong*) is a project that promotes the utilization of ICT in agriculture. The Project has three major applications: (1) a monitoring and alert system that provides warnings regarding agricultural production and animal diseases; (2) an information

system supervising the market for production materials, and; (3) a service system that provides science and technology information for agricultural production.

12. **The Golden Water Conservancy Project** (*jinshui*) was designed to build basic infrastructures, increasing the supply of information, and enhancing the capacity of data-sharing for water conservancy, including a National Flood-Control and Draught-Relief Command System, as well as a National Supervision Network for Water and Soil Conservation.

There are some other "golden projects" that were launched thereafter, such as the Golden Bridge Project (*jinqiao*) run by China Jitong Telecom Inc., the Golden Hygiene Project, the Golden Travel Project, the Golden Wisdom Project, and the Golden Trade Project, etc. But the entire infrastructure is still known as the "Twelve Golden Projects."

Government Online

China began to promote its Government Online Project in about 1999, when all levels of governments were encouraged to build websites on the Internet. However, current operations are still less than optimal.

Number of Domain Names and Websites

According to China's official domain name registration agency, the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by the end of 2005, there were 1,096,924 domain names registered under .cn, including 23,752 domain names under gov.cn (http://www.cnnic.cn). The following table shows the number and percentage of domain names registered under .cn:

Table 1: Domain Names under .cn

	ac.cn	com.cn	edu.cn	gov.cn	net.cn	org.cn	**.cn	.cn
Number	1,602	385,847	2,454	23,752	41,603	15,752	37,167	588,748
Percentage	0.1%	35.2%	0.2%	2.2%	3.8%	1.4%	3.4%	53.7%

**Names of Administrative region or city Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Yet less than half of the registered government domain names have set up websites. The following table shows the existing websites under the .cn registered domain names:

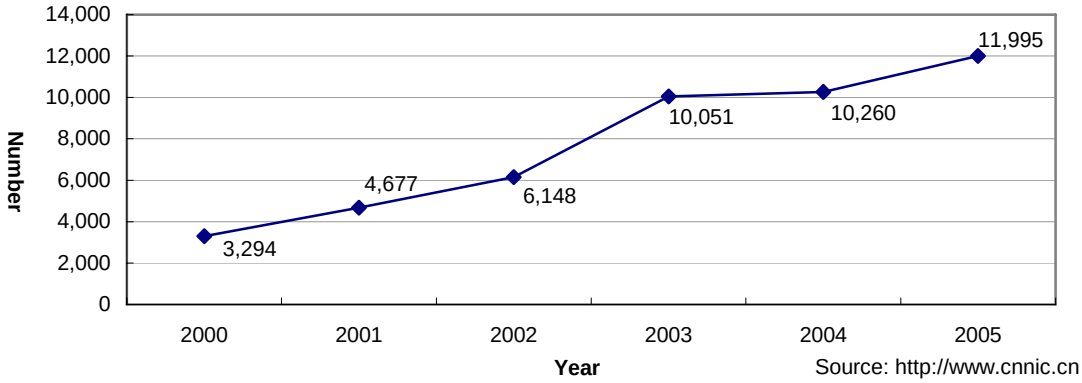
Table 2: Websites under the cn. Domain Name

	ac.cn	com.cn	edu.cn	gov.cn	net.cn	org.cn	**.cn	.cn
Number	416	119,256	N/A	11,995	13,121	6,164	4,786	143,792
Percentage	0.1%	39.8%	N/A	4%	4.4%	2.1%	1.6%	48%

**Names of Administrative region or city Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

The number of government websites has grown rapidly since 2000, except for in 2004.

Figure 1: Growth in the Number of Government Websites



Source: http://www.cnnic.cn

According to the 2004 Survey Report on China Internet Network Information Resources (released on April 14, 2005), about 3.6 percent of the websites in China were government websites.

Table 3: Distribution of Different Types of Websites

Companies	Commerce	Education	Personal	Welfare	Government	Other
60.7%	11.4%	4.6%	13.5%	4.6%	3.6%	1.6%

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

The *UN Global E-government Readiness Report* defines three characteristics of government websites: online presentation, e-service delivery, and e-participation. Based on the data in the *2004 Survey Report on China Internet Network Information Resources*, Chinese government websites will be evaluated according to these three characteristics.

Online Presentation

There are many ways to examine government website presentation, such as the source of the information on the website, the number of languages are used, whether information can be searched on the website, whether there are links to other information sources, how frequently the website is updated, and how many citizens actually accessed the information on the website.

Information Sources

The sources of the information on the website show how the website is organized. Strangely, more than 5 percent of the government websites do not provide any information of their own. In addition to their own information, 19.1 percent of the government websites also provide information from the traditional media, 10.2 percent of the government websites provide information from commercial companies, and 26.7 percent of the government websites provide information from other websites.

Table 4: Information Sources on Government Websites

Information Sources	On its own	Traditional media	Other Websites	Commercial Companies
Percentage	94.6	19.1	26.7	10.2

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Languages

Local citizens should only read simplified Chinese. But there are many factories owned by Taiwanese, especially in Guangdong province and Shanghai, where the website users may prefer to read traditional Chinese. Some foreigners who work in China also prefer to read in their native languages. It seems that most government websites do not provide a variety of languages. Among the government websites, 6 percent provide content in traditional Chinese, 16.6 percent provide English content, and 5.3 percent provide Japanese content.

Table 5: Languages Provided on Government Websites

Languages	Simplified Chinese	Traditional Chinese	English	Japanese	Other
Percentage	98.9	6	16.6	5.3	4.2

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Searches within the Websites

A local search engine is needed if users want to seek information inside the website. But only about half of the government websites provide such a local search engine. Still, this percentage is higher than that for other types of websites. Technically, if a website does not provide a local search engine, most likely it does not have a database system. Users will have difficulties seeking the information they need.

Table 6: Search Engines provided by Different Websites, by percentage

Government	Companies	Commerce	Education/Research	Personal	Welfare
53.8%	28.7%	41.3%	41.6%	29.4%	29.4%

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Contacts

It is very important to provide contacts on the government websites to allow the users to ask questions or to leave comments. Yet 5 percent of the government websites do not provide contact information. In general, fewer government websites provide contact information than other kinds of websites, with the exception of personal websites.

Table 7: Distribution of Different Types of Websites

Government	Companies	Commerce	Education/Research	Personal	Welfare
95%	97.5%	98.8%	97%	87.2%	94%

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Links to Other Websites

The number of links to other websites shows how much the website shares information with other websites. As a government website, there should be some links because users may need some information that is only provided elsewhere. Yet, a government website should not provide too many links to other websites because the major purpose of the website is to provide information on its own. The CNNIC Report on China Internet Network Information Resources shows that 14.3 percent of the government websites do not provide any links to other websites, and 25.7 percent of the government websites provide links to one to five other websites.

Table 8: Number of links on Government Websites

Links to other Websites	None	1-5	6-10	11-20	21-50	more than 50
Percentage	14.3	25.7	18.6	22.8	10	8.6

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Updates

The information on government websites needs to be updated, especially the daily news. Yet only half of the government websites update their news every day, and more than one-third of the government websites update their news less than once a month.

Table 9: Daily Updates of Different Contents on Government Websites

	Daily	Every 3 days	Weekly	Every 2 weeks	Monthly	Every 3 months	Every half a year	Less than every half a year	Irregularly
Government news	50.0	2.4	10.2	4.2	7.1	0.6	0.6	1.5	23.5
Introduction to the departments	15.0	0.7	12.7	1.6	5.0	6.5	5.0	17.1	36.3
Introduction to governmental functions and services	14.0	-	15.1	2.1	4.9	6.6	1.9	20.8	34.7
Statistics and data inquiries	28.4	3.4	10.2	1.9	11.8	3.0	2.9	3.4	35.1
Laws, policies, documents	17.1	2.4	-	4.4	5.0	8.8	5.5	19.1	37.7
Guides to services	11.5	-	3.8	0.7	5.4	2.2	6.4	28.6	41.5
Office affairs	18.9	-	2.2	4.8	10.6	6.6	1.3	16.5	39.2
Governmental notices	17.5	2.4	2.8	0.7	14.6	0.4	1.1	8.7	51.7

Procedural follow-ups	21.9	3.0	4.2	0.8	9.4	0.8	-	12.9	46.9
Business, industry information	22.8	4.9	3.7	7.4	11.3	6.8	0.6	13.2	29.4
Livelihood information	24.1	1.5	2.9	2.6	5.4	0.7	0.7	22.4	39.7
Forms to be downloaded	4.6	-	5.6	0.6	5.2	1.3	11.6	23.2	47.9
Surveillance of services	24.2	1.9	5.3	7.1	9.9	1.0	-	16.6	34.1
Complaints	22.6	5.0	4.3	0.4	6.0	0.4	-	20.1	41.2
Links	3.7	-	4.3	0.4	3.1	8.9	0.7	33.2	45.7
Others	30.3	-	7.7	-	29.3	1.5	-	14.4	16.8

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

Page Views

The number of page views shows the frequency of how many pages are viewed on the website (based on the website structure, some pages may be viewed once but have several "hits"). Statistics show that only 15.2 percent of e-government websites have more than 1,000 daily page views; 21.2 percent of e-government websites have 201-1,000 daily page views; 30.3 percent of e-government websites have 51-200 daily page views; and 33.3 percent of e-government websites have fewer than 50 page views per day. The average daily page views on the government websites is less than that of the commonweal websites.

Table 10: Number of Daily Page Views on Different Websites

Number of Page Views	Less than 50	51-200	201-1,000	1,001-5,000	More than 5,000
Government	33.3	30.3	21.2	15.2	-
Companies	45.8	26.9	17.1	7.1	3.1
Commercial Websites	33.7	17.9	25.3	14.7	8.4
Education or Research	26.8	31.7	24.5	14.6	2.4
Personal Websites	45.5	23.5	19.6	6.1	5.3
Welfare	22.7	27.3	18.2	22.7	9.1

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

E-Services

One of the most important functions of government websites is to provide services. According to the *UN Global E-government Readiness Report*, there are five stages in online services: emergence, enhancement (archived/current information, database, etc.), interactive (download/print forms, etc.), transactions, and networks (online polls, feedback, etc.). Statistics show that none of the services are fully provided on government websites in China; 43.7 percent of the government websites do not introduce their departments, 38.8 percent of the government websites do not introduce governmental functions and services, nearly 40 percent of the government websites do not provide related laws, regulations, policies, and documents, and 40 percent of the government websites do not even provide governmental news. Fewer than 50 percent of the government websites provide each of the following services: guides to services, links to other websites, notices, complaints, office affairs inquiries, statistics and data inquiries, surveillance of services, industry information, forms to be downloaded, livelihood information, and so on.

Table 11: Services Provided on Government Websites

Laws, regulations, policies, documents	60.4%
Governmental news	59.4%
Statistics and data inquiries	37.1%
Introduction to government departments	66.3%
Introduction to governmental functions and services	61.2%
Guides to services	49.0%
Livelihood information	22.5%
Links to other websites	44.5%
Governmental notices	44.1%
Business, industry information	27.0%
Forms to be downloaded	26.3%
Procedural follow-ups	19.4%
Complaints	39.2%
Office affairs inquiries	38.0%
Surveillance of services	34.3%
Others	10.7%

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

E-participation

Government services need to be improved based on citizens' feedback. But the survey data show that the government websites do not provide effective interactive functions. Less than half of the government websites provide mailboxes to allow citizens to send e-mails. Less than 20 percent of the government websites provide basic interactive services, like online jobs, online applications, online procurement, and online examinations and approvals, etc.

Table 12: Interactive Functions on Government Websites

Governmental mailboxes	45.8%
Message boards	40.0%
Online complaints, reports, appeals	38.0%
Opinion polls	30.2%
Online forum/BBS	18.8%
Online applications	13.8%
Online jobs, online applications	12%
Online governmental biddings	11.9%
Online governmental procurements	8.4%
Online examinations and approvals	7.5%
Others	19.9%

Source: http://www.cnnic.cn/

According to the CCID "Evaluation of the Performance of Chinese Government Portal Websites," the performance of Chinese government portal websites was quite low, especially with respect to publicity regarding political affairs, public services, and public participation. The "government website divide" was significant among the provinces, cities, and counties, with the performance of provincial portal websites heading the list, and the performance of county government websites last on the list. In terms of area distribution, gaps existed among government websites in the eastern, middle, and western regions, with portal websites exhibiting superior performance in the developed regions or cities, such as Shanghai, Beijing, Jiangsu, Shandong, Zhejiang, and Guangdong.

The central government launched its portal website (http://www.gov.cn) on January 2, 2006. It has been reported that traffic to the website ranked 744th in the world, and its performancethe second best after the Canadian government website. At the end of January 2006 it maintained a ranking within the top 1,000 after twenty days, with 3.3 page views per user, according to the authoritative Alexa Ranking Index (http://www.alexa.com/data/details/main?q=&url=www.gov.cn).

Position in the World

According to United Nations *Global E-government Readiness Report 2005: From E-government to E-Inclusion* (http://www.unpan.org/egovernment5.asp), which assesses more than 50,000 features of the e-government websites of the 191 UN Member States, China ranks 57th (0.5078) on the

E-government Readiness Index, far behind the world leader, the United States (0.9062), but little better than the world's average (0.4267). Compared to the other countries in the past two years, China's position in the world has improved from the 74th in 2003 and the 67th in 2004 on the Index.

E-government readiness consists of three factors: Web measure, infrastructure and human capital. Partly because most Chinese e-government websites mainly serve as a platform of online presence, the web measure assessment is 0.5692, ranking the 43rd in the world, better than the position in the e-government readiness index. The following table shows the comparison of e-government readiness data between China and the US:

Table 13: Comparison between China and the United States on e-government readiness data

	Web Measure Index	Infrastructure Index	Human Capital Index	E-government Readiness
U.S.A.	1.0000	0.7486	0.9700	0.9062
China	0.5692	0.1241	0.8300	0.5078

Source: UN E-government Report 2005 p. 200

The importance of e-government websites is to provide services. According to the UN E-government Report's definition, there are five stages to achieve good e-government service. China's index is 54, which is little better than e-government readiness, ranking the 43rd in the world. The following table compares the differences between China and the US on the service delivery by stages.

Table 14: Comparison between China and the United States on service delivery by stages

	Emerging	Enhance	Interactive	Transactional	Networked	Total
U.S.A.	100	99	100	100	76	95
China	100	75	71	5	24	54

Source: UN E-government Report 2005 p. 235

China's e-participation index is 0.1905, ranking the 32nd in the world.

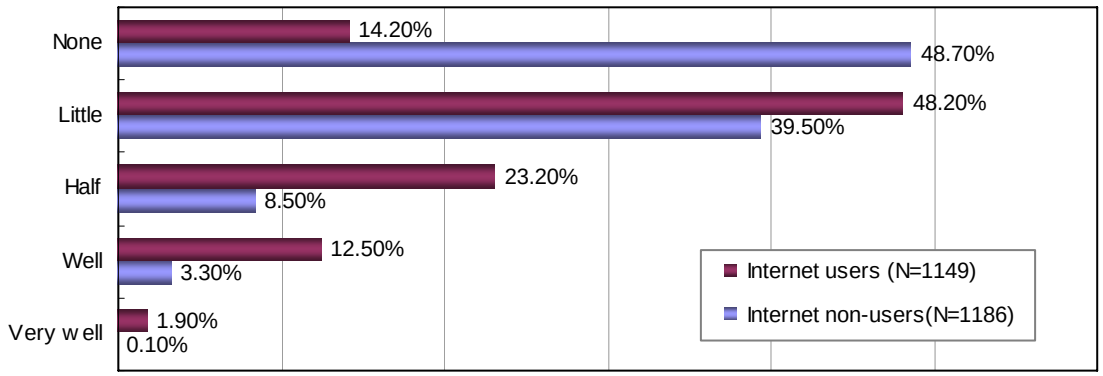
Citizens: Lack of Awareness and Usage of E-government Websites

Directed by Guo Liang, CASS Center for Social Development conducted its third Internet survey in January and February 2005. The survey covered five major cities, including Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Chengdu, and Changsha. 2,376 respondents answered the questionnaires, including 1,169 Internet users and 1,207 Internet non-users. The survey results showed that not many people really know the e-government projects, not to say actually to use them.

Citizen's Awareness about E-government

Despite heavy investment from governments at all levels, the public knows little about e-government: only 1 percent know it "very well," 7.8 percent "well," 15.7 percent "half," and as many as 43.8 percent "a little" and 31.7 percent "not at all" (N=2,335). Even among Internet users, more than half said they know little or nothing at all about e-government.

Figure 2: The public's knowledge of e-government



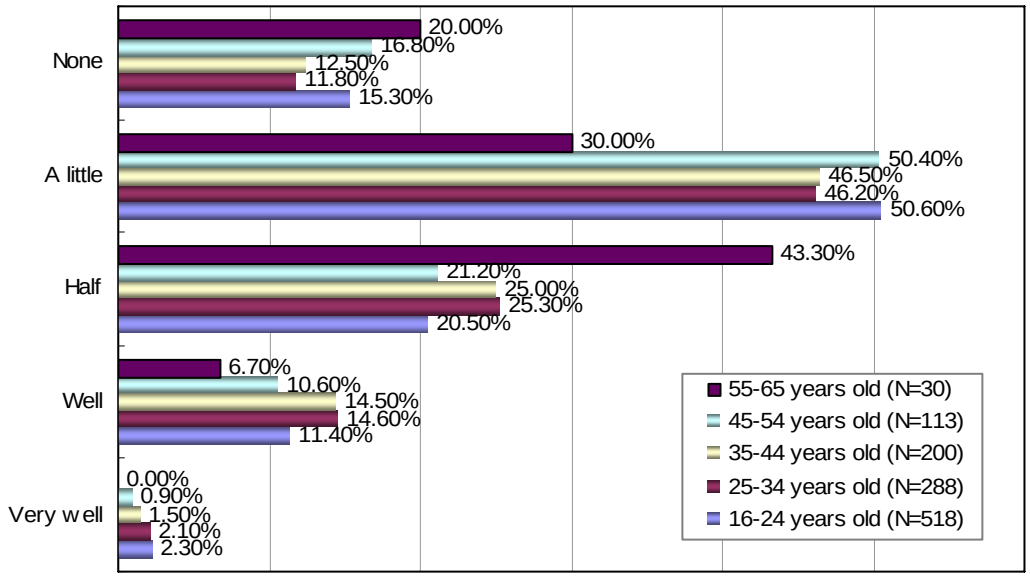
Source: http://www.wipchina.org

Among Internet users, there is no significant difference among the different age groups, marital statuses, or occupational groups. However, there is a discernable gap between genders, whether employed or not, and among income, education, and length of Internet experience.

Male Internet users are more likely to know about e-government than female users; 2.6 percent of male users claim to know e-government "very well," and 25 percent know e-government "well," whereas among the female users, the percentages are 1.1 percent and 9.7 percent, respectively.

Similar discrepancies also exist among people with different educational backgrounds. Better-educated people may know more about e-government. And the survey revealed a significant age difference, whereby younger respondents are more likely to know about e-government than older respondents.

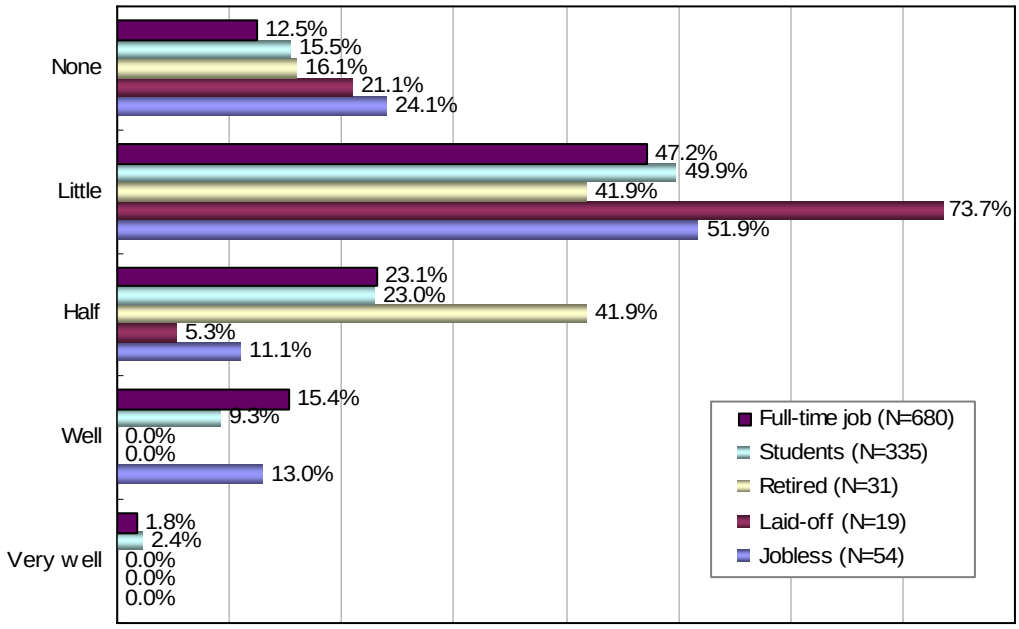
Figure 3: Age differences regarding knowledge of e-government



Source: http://www.wipchina.org

Employment status is another distinguishing factor. Among those not employed, for example, the retired and the jobless, there is little knowledge about e-government, whereas among students or people who are working knowledge about e-government is more than "well."

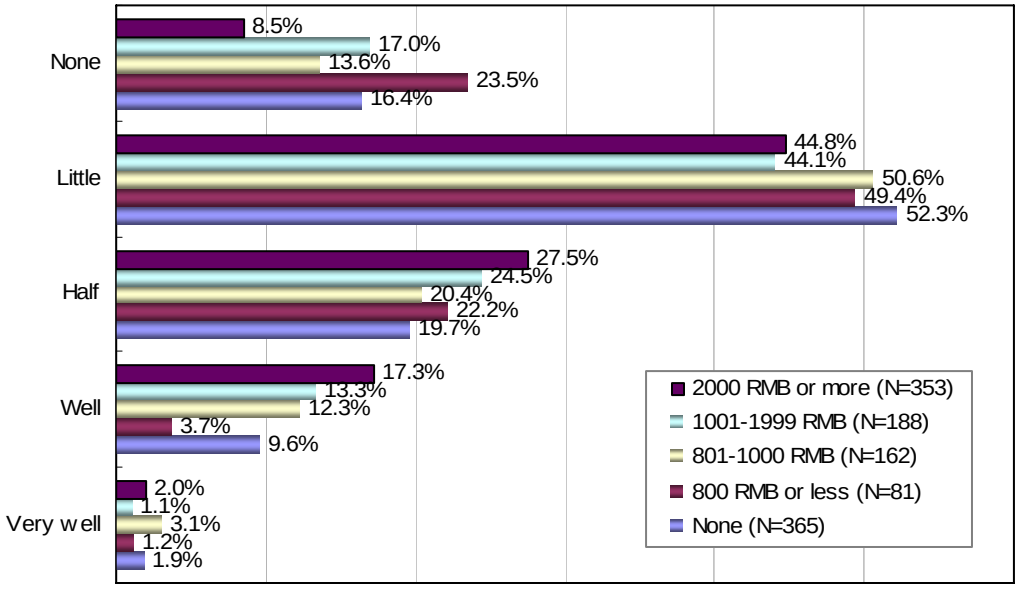
Figure 4: Employment status differences in the knowledge of e-government



Source: http://www.wipchina.org

Internet users with higher incomes are more likely to have heard of e-government. Among those with monthly incomes of over 2000 RMB, 20 percent know about the concept "well" or "very well." But only 5 percent of Internet users with monthly incomes below 800 RMB can make the same claim.

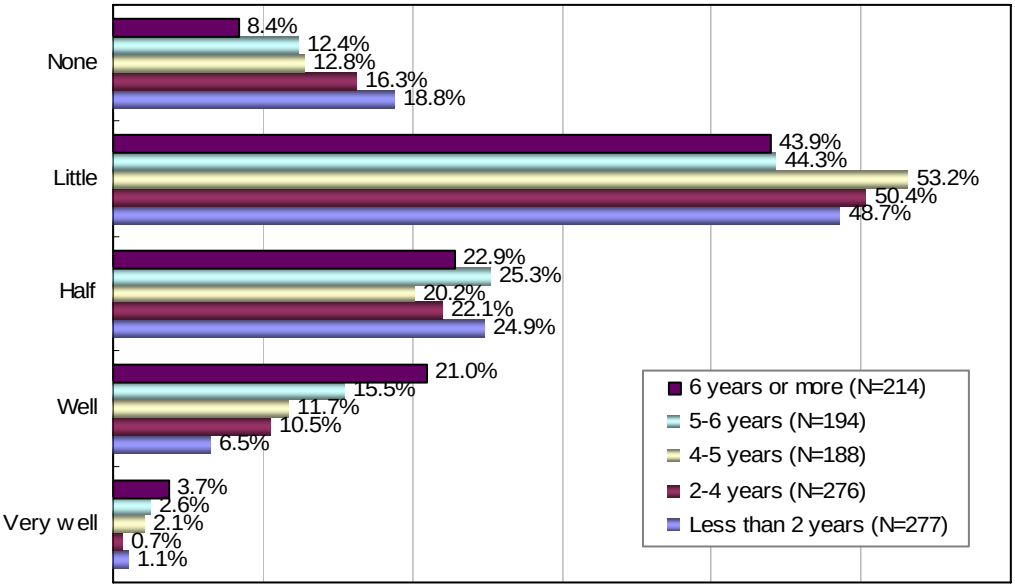
Figure 5: Personal income differences regarding knowledge of e-government



Source: http://www.wipchina.org

Familiarity with e-government also rises with individual experience on the Internet. Among Internet users with six or more years of Internet usage, 24.7 percent say they know e-government "well" or "very well." This contrasts with a mere 7.6 percent of Internet users with less than two years of usage.

Figure 6: Internet experience differences regarding knowledge of e-government

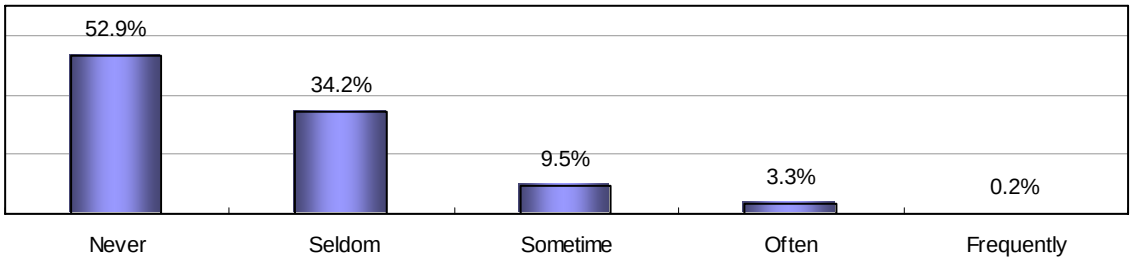


One may argue that, in addition to investing heavily in building Websites, the governments should spend more to promote e-government. In reality, some projects were carried out more for propaganda purposes than for improved governance. As a result, public engagement did not improve. The abysmal state of public appreciation of e-government, as shown in our survey, is additional proof of this. Without sufficient understanding, citizens are not likely to take advantage of the new services. This reality is clearly demonstrated from the results of our survey, which show a very low rate of adoption of e-government among the general public.

The Use of E-government Websites

The CASS survey polled 1,169 Internet users, among whom only 3.5 percent are "frequent" or "often" e-government users, 9.5 percent "sometimes," and 34.2 percent "seldom." As many as 52.9 percent of Internet users have never visited any e-government sites. This calls into question the efficiency of the huge public investments in this area.

Figure 7: Frequency of visiting government Websites



Source: http://www.wipchina.org

When further looking into the demographic make-up of e-government usage, it appears that there are significant differences with the exception of gender among various groups. Younger Internet users are much more likely to visit e-government sites than older users; Internet users with higher education levels are much more likely to visit than the others, as are married users. Students and employed users, as a group, are much more likely to visit than those not employed (excluding students). Internet users with higher incomes are much more likely to visit such sites than those with lower incomes. Internet users with longer online experience are much more likely to visit such sites than those with less experience.

As we discussed on the page 10 in this report, the CNNIC report also proved that China's e-government websites are not well used. According to 2004 Survey Report on China Internet Network Information Resource (released on April 14, 2005), only 15.2% e-government Websites have more than 1,000 daily page views; 21.2% e-government Websites have 201-1,000 daily page views; 30.3% e-government websites have 51-200 daily page views; and 33.3% e-government websites have less than 50 page views per day.

Conclusions and Recommendations

China's e-governance is largely pushed by governments. Believing in that "the purpose of informatization is to enhance the administrative transparence, enhance the management efficiency and promote the diligence and incorruption in administration." (Said President Hu Jintao), central government constantly and strongly promote e-governance. Yet local governments had not equally paid enough attention on it until early years in 20th century. For those local governments that realized the importance of e-governance, large amount of money was paid on the project.

The concept of e-governance in China is wider than the UN "e-government readiness". It is not only about the governments' website but also about the comprehensive infrastructure of intranet for government administration and management. In most cases, the intranets in most cities have already completed and come into use. But there are some problems on many of the government websites: first, most local government websites are more like to perform the achievements, instead of "serving the people". Secondly, few efforts have made to let citizens aware and use these websites. So, according to the survey results by Center for Social Development of Chinese Academy of Social Scineces, most citizens do not know the government websites, not to say really use them.

Although there are several reports on the e-governance in China, none of them has covered all of the necessary aspects and none of them has used widely accepted method and standard. To have a full picture of e-governance in China before any policy suggestions, a comprehensive research is needed.

According to the limited data that we have, both government and citizens need to improve. On the one hand, government officials need to be trained to have a better understanding of e-governance and to have better service on the government websites. On the other hand, government should not only just spend money on building the websites but also try to let citizens know the advantages of using them.

Appendix 1: Index of Tables

Appendix 2: Index of Figures