

Local Practices and Implications of the Construction of a National Unified Market - a Comparative Study Based on Policy Texts in the Yangtze River Delta Region

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ABSTRACT

The construction of a unified national market is a core strategy to smooth the domestic cycle and promote high-quality development. Taking the Yangtze River Delta (YRD) region as the research object, this paper systematically combs through 128 market integration policy documents issued by Shanghai, Suzhou, Zhejiang and Anhui in 2019-2024, and applies text mining and comparative analysis method to reveal the regional policy synergy characteristics and differentiation strategies. The study finds that: (1) the policy objectives of the three provinces and one city converge, but the implementation paths diverge - Shanghai focuses on the construction of digital governance platforms, Jiangsu focuses on cross-regional collaboration of industrial chains, Zhejiang explores the mechanism of private economic empowerment, and Anhui strengthens the infrastructure connectivity; (2) there is a tendency of "focusing on planning but not on implementation" in the policy tools, and cross-provincial disputes have a tendency of "planning but not on implementation"; (3) policy tools have the tendency of "planning rather than implementation", and the coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes is missing; (4) local protectionism presents hidden characteristics, which is manifested in regional technical standard barriers and government procurement tilting. Based on this, optimisation proposals such as "policy implementation effectiveness evaluation system" and "inter-provincial interest compensation mechanism" are proposed to provide practical reference for the construction of a unified national big market.

KEYWORDS

Yangtze river delta region; Policy implementation effectiveness evaluation system; Inter-provincial benefit compensation mechanism; Construction of a national unified market

1 Introduction

1.1 Background and significance of the study

The construction of a national unified big market is one of the core strategies for China's economic transformation and high-quality development in recent years. The proposal of this strategy is not only a profound adjustment of the domestic economic pattern, but also a proactive choice of the path of China's economic development in the context of the intensification of global economic uncertainty. The core objective of a unified national market is to break down local protectionism and market segmentation, promote the free flow and efficient allocation of resource factors, and thus enhance overall economic efficiency and international competitiveness. The implementation of this strategy is not only a key initiative to smooth out the domestic macro-circulation, but also an important hand in promoting high-quality development. As one of the most active regions in China's economic development, the YRD region's practice in the construction of a unified national big market is of great exemplary significance. The YRD region not only has a huge economic aggregate, but also has a diversified industrial structure and strong innovation capacity, which makes it an important engine of China's economy. Therefore, studying the local practices of the YRD region in the construction of a national unified big market not only helps to understand the internal logic of regional economic integration, but also provides valuable lessons for other regions of the country.

However, although the strategic significance of the construction of a national unified big market has been widely recognised, there has been little systematic research on the synergy and differentiation strategies of local policies in the process of concrete implementation. As a pioneer in the construction of a national unified big market, the policy practices of the Yangtze River Delta region reflect both the characteristics of regional synergy and the strategies of local differentiation. For example, Shanghai has promoted the intelligence of government services through the construction of a digital governance platform, Jiangsu Province has focused on cross-regional collaboration of industrial chains to promote regional industrial synergy, Zhejiang Province has explored the mechanism of empowering the private economy

to stimulate the vitality of market players, and Anhui Province has strengthened the foundation of regional development by enhancing infrastructure connectivity. These differentiated strategies not only reflect the different stages of economic development and resource endowment in different regions, but also reveal the complexity and diversity in the construction of a unified national market.

1.2 Research questions and methods

In terms of research questions and methods, this paper focuses on the policy synergy and differentiated strategies of the Yangtze River Delta region in the construction of a national unified big market. Specifically, this paper tries to answer the following questions: Is there a convergence of policy objectives among the three provinces and one city? Is there any divergence in the path of policy implementation? Is there a tendency of "planning rather than implementation" in the use of policy tools? Is the coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes perfect? Is local protectionism a hidden feature? In order to answer these questions, this paper adopts text mining and comparative analysis to systematically sort out and analyse 128 policy documents. Through quantitative analysis of policy texts, the text mining method reveals the convergence of policy objectives and the divergent characteristics of implementation paths; the comparative analysis method reveals the internal logic of regional policy synergy and differentiation through horizontal comparison of policy practices in three provinces and one city.

2 Comparative analysis of policy texts in the yangtze river delta region

2.1 General characteristics of policy texts

As a pioneer in the construction of a unified national big market, the policy practice of the Yangtze River Delta region not only reflects the characteristics of regional synergy, but also demonstrates the strategy of local differentiation. By systematically combing the 128 policy documents on market integration issued by Shanghai, Suzhou, Zhejiang and Anhui in 2019-2024, it can be found that although the three provinces and one city are highly convergent in terms of policy objectives, they show obvious divergent features in terms of policy implementation paths. This co-existence of convergence and divergence is both a reflection of the stage of economic development of the YRD region and the resource endowment and strategic positioning of each place.

2.2 Divergence of policy implementation paths in three provinces and one city

Despite the convergence of policy objectives, the three provinces and one city show obvious divergence in policy implementation paths. This differentiation not only reflects the different stages of economic development in different places, but also reflects the differences in resource endowment and strategic positioning.

As the leading city in the Yangtze River Delta region, Shanghai's policy implementation path is mainly reflected in the construction of the digital governance platform. Shanghai promotes the intelligence and convenience of government services by building a unified digital governance platform. For example, Shanghai has launched the "One Net One Office" platform, which not only integrates various types of government service resources, but also realises accurate delivery and personalised customisation of government services through big data analysis and artificial intelligence technology. This initiative not only improves the government's governance capacity, but also provides more efficient and convenient services for market players and promotes the free flow of market factors. Shanghai's practice shows that digital governance is not only an important means to enhance government effectiveness, but also an important hand in promoting market integration.

Jiangsu's policy implementation path focuses on cross-regional collaboration in the industrial chain. Jiangsu has achieved the optimisation and upgrading of the industry chain by promoting the collaborative development of enterprises upstream and downstream of the industry chain. For example, Jiangsu launched the "Industry Chain Collaborative Innovation Platform", which promotes technological innovation and product upgrading by integrating the resources of enterprises upstream and downstream of the industry chain. This initiative not only enhances the overall competitiveness of the industry chain, but also promotes the coordinated development of the regional economy. Jiangsu's practice shows that cross-regional collaboration of the industrial chain is not only an important way to enhance industrial competitiveness, but also an important means to promote regional economic integration.

Zhejiang's policy implementation path is mainly reflected in the private economic empowerment mechanism. Zhejiang through the introduction of a series of policies to support the development of the private economy, stimulate

the vitality and creativity of market players. For example, Zhejiang launched the "high-quality development action plan for the private economy", which promotes the rapid development of the private economy by optimising the business environment, increasing financial support and other measures. This initiative not only enhances the economic vitality of Zhejiang, but also provides valuable experience for the construction of a unified national market. Zhejiang's practice shows that the private economy is not only an important pillar of the regional economy, but also an important force in promoting market integration.

Anhui's policy implementation path, on the other hand, is mainly reflected in infrastructure connectivity. Anhui has achieved regional infrastructure connectivity by strengthening the construction of transport, energy, information and other infrastructure. For example, Anhui's Infrastructure Connectivity Action Plan promotes regional transport integration by accelerating the construction of transport infrastructure such as motorways, railways and airports. This initiative not only enhances Anhui's location advantage, but also provides a solid foundation for the construction of a unified national market. The practice of Anhui shows that infrastructure connectivity is not only an important guarantee for regional economic development, but also an important foundation for promoting market integration.

3 Challenges and problems of policy practices in the YRD region

Although the Yangtze River Delta region has achieved remarkable results in the construction of a unified national market, it still faces many challenges and problems in policy practice. These problems not only affect the realisation of the policy objectives, but also to a certain extent constrain the in-depth promotion of regional economic integration. Among them, the tendency of "focusing on planning rather than implementation" in policy implementation, the lack of a coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes, and the characteristic of implicit local protectionism are the three most prominent problems at present.

First, the tendency to "plan rather than implement" in policy implementation is a widespread phenomenon. The root of this problem lies in the absence of a monitoring mechanism and unclear assessment criteria. In the YRD Region, many policy documents often emphasise top-level design and target-setting when they are formulated, but there is a lack of effective monitoring and assessment mechanisms in the actual implementation process. For example, although the goal of "optimising the business environment" set out in some policy documents has been given high priority at the planning level, there is a lack of specific implementation rules and assessment criteria at the implementation level, resulting in a significant reduction in the effectiveness of the policies. In addition, the effectiveness of policy implementation varies significantly across regions. Developed regions tend to be able to implement policy objectives better due to their abundant resources and strong implementation capacity, while less developed regions tend to have unsatisfactory policy implementation effects due to their limited resources and weaker implementation capacity. Such regional differences not only affect the overall realisation of policy objectives, but also exacerbate the imbalance in regional economic development.

Secondly, the absence of a coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes is an important factor constraining the construction of a unified national big market in the YRD region. In the YRD region, there are large differences in the level of economic development and industrial structure among the three provinces and one city, leading to inevitable conflicts of interest and disputes in the process of policy implementation. For example, in terms of resource allocation, industrial layout and environmental protection, the interests of provinces and cities are often inconsistent or even in conflict. However, an effective coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes has yet to be established in the YRD region, resulting in some disputed issues remaining unresolved for a long time and affecting the coordinated development of the regional economy. Existing coordination mechanisms often rely on ad hoc consultations and negotiations, and lack an institutionalised and regular path to resolution, making it difficult to fundamentally address cross-provincial disputes.

Finally, the characteristic of implicit local protectionism is a major problem in the current construction of a unified national market. Unlike previous explicit local protectionism, implicit local protectionism is often manifested in the form of regional technical standard barriers and government procurement tilts. For example, some local governments protect the interests of local enterprises by setting local technical standards and restricting foreign enterprises from entering the local market. These technical standards often appear in the name of environmental protection standards, quality standards, and so on, ostensibly to raise the threshold of market access, but actually to restrict the competition of foreign enterprises. This implicit local protectionist behaviour not only affects the free flow of market factors, but also restricts the process of building a unified national market.

4 Optimisation suggestions and policy implications

The practice of the Yangtze River Delta region in the construction of a national unified big market has both accumulated valuable experience and exposed many problems. In order to further promote the construction of the national unified market, practical optimisation suggestions need to be put forward in terms of the evaluation of the effectiveness of policy implementation, the compensation mechanism of inter-provincial interests and the breaking of implicit local protectionism. These recommendations not only summarise the practice of the YRD region, but also provide important policy insights for other regions of the country.

Firstly, building an evaluation system for the effectiveness of policy implementation is the key to solving the problem of "focusing on planning but not on implementation". Currently, many policies are well-designed at the planning level, but in the implementation process, they are difficult to implement due to the lack of effective monitoring and evaluation mechanisms. To this end, a scientific and systematic evaluation system framework needs to be designed, covering the three core aspects of monitoring mechanisms, assessment indicators and feedback mechanisms. The monitoring mechanism should ensure the transparency and standardisation of the policy implementation process to avoid implementation bias due to information asymmetry; the assessment indicators should quantify the policy objectives and clarify the evaluation criteria of the implementation effect to avoid ineffective implementation due to ambiguous criteria; and the feedback mechanism should collect the problems and suggestions in the implementation of the policy in a timely manner to provide a basis for policy adjustment. In terms of implementation path, a third-party assessment organisation can be introduced to strengthen the transparency and credibility of policy implementation through independent and objective assessment. The participation of the third-party agency can not only improve the professionalism of the assessment, but also enhance the social supervision of the policy implementation, thus promoting the real realisation of the policy objectives.

Secondly, the establishment of an inter-provincial interest compensation mechanism is an important way to address the lack of a coordination mechanism for cross-provincial disputes. There are significant differences in the level of economic development and resource endowment among the three provinces and one city in the Yangtze River Delta region, leading to inevitable conflicts of interest in the process of policy implementation. In order to balance the interests of all parties, it is necessary to design a fair, sustainable and operable compensation mechanism for interests. Fairness requires that the compensation mechanism can reasonably reflect the interests of all parties, avoiding the intensification of conflicts due to uneven distribution of interests; sustainability requires that the compensation mechanism can operate stably in the long term, avoiding the failure of the mechanism due to short-term interests; and operability requires that the compensation mechanism can be specific and implementable, avoiding the difficulties in implementation due to the complexity of the design. In terms of implementation paths, a regional coordinated development fund can be set up to promote benefit sharing through fund deployment and project support. For example, the fund can be used to provide economic compensation to regions that have suffered as a result of the implementation of the policy, and to support the further development of regions that have benefited from the implementation of the policy. This benefit compensation mechanism can not only alleviate inter-provincial conflicts of interest, but also promote the coordinated development of the regional economy.

Finally, breaking the implicit local protectionism is an inevitable requirement to promote the construction of a unified national market. Hidden local protectionism has seriously affected the free flow of market factors and fair competition through regional technical standard barriers and government procurement tilts. In order to break this implicit protection, it is first necessary to unify technical standards and promote the convergence of national and local standards. Specifically, the free flow of market factors can be promoted by formulating nationally unified technical standards and eliminating regional technical barriers. For example, in terms of environmental protection standards and quality standards, differences in local standards should be minimised to avoid market segmentation caused by inconsistent standards. Secondly, it is necessary to regulate government procurement practices and establish a fair competition review system. By regulating government procurement behaviour, local protectionism can be effectively eliminated and fair competition in the market can be promoted.

5 Conclusion

The practice of the Yangtze River Delta region in the construction of a unified national market demonstrates the dual characteristics of policy synergy and differentiated strategies. The three provinces and one city are highly convergent in terms of policy objectives, and are all committed to promoting market integration, free flow of factors and unification of

rules, but they show obvious divergence in terms of implementation paths. Shanghai promotes the intelligence of government services through the construction of digital governance platform, Jiangsu focuses on cross-regional collaboration of industrial chain to promote regional industrial synergy, Zhejiang explores the mechanism of private economic empowerment to stimulate the vitality of market players, and Anhui strengthens the foundation of regional development through infrastructure connectivity. These differentiated strategies not only reflect the differences in resource endowments and development stages of different regions, but also provide diversified practical paths for the construction of a national unified market.

The practice of the YRD region in the construction of a national unified big market will continue to play an exemplary role. With the further implementation of policies and the continuous improvement of mechanisms, the YRD region is expected to make greater breakthroughs in promoting regional economic integration and high-quality development, and inject new impetus into the construction of the national unified big market. At the same time, the experience of the YRD region will also provide valuable reference for other regions and help the overall promotion of the construction of the national unified big market.

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