

The Role of Government Procurement in the Development of SMEs Based on the Purchasing Data in G Province from 2015 to 2019

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Abstract: As an important procurement expenditure, government procurement is bound to become an economic lever to support the development of SMEs. The Interim Measures for Promoting the Development of SMEs by Government Procurement issued by the Ministry of Finance supports SMEs by means of reserved share and price discount. In 2019, the scale of government procurement in China reached 3,306.70 billion yuan, accounting for 10% and 3.3% of the national fiscal expenditure and GDP respectively, indicating that it has become an important tool for implementing national industrial support policies. Is the current government procurement policy effective for the development of SMEs? Based on the five-year contract data of G Province from 2015 to 2019, this paper analyzes the effect of government procurement in supporting the development of SMEs, and concludes that government procurement has promoted the development of SMEs, and SMEs occupy a large market share in the government procurement market. However, there are still some problems, such as the instability of the supporting effect, the failure to implement the supporting measures such as the reserved share, etc. For this reason, this paper puts forward some suggestions such as optimizing the way of identifying SMEs, refining the supporting measures, providing all-round public services, and strengthening the supervision of policy implementation.

Keywords: government procurement; SMEs; development

1. Introduction

Since small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are the most dynamic market subjects of our country's economy, and also the groups with the weakest ability to resist market risks, governments at all levels are required to provide corresponding preferential policy support system for SMEs (especially start-up enterprises) to provide a good environment for their development. Government procurement is one of the important policy tools for government intervention in market economy countries. In 2011, China promulgated the Interim

Measures for Government Procurement to Promote the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises (C.K. [2011] No.181) to support SMEs by means of reserved shares and price discounts, which indicates that government procurement has become an important tool for implementing national industrial support policies. In 2019, The Chinese government has issued the "guidance on promoting the healthy development of small and medium-sized enterprises", proposing to improve the policy of supporting SMEs by government procurement, and to favor specialized and new SMEs in government procurement activities. Whether the current government procurement support measures are accurate and how to optimize the policies in the next step are issues worthy of attention.

2. The Theoretical Basis of Government Procurement to Support the Development of SMEs

2.1. The Macro-Control Attribute of Government Procurement Determines that it becomes a Lever to Support the Development of SMEs.

Government procurement is a form of procurement [1], in which the government, as the first party of government procurement, decides the key issues such as when to purchase, how much to purchase, from whom to purchase and the purchase price, etc., which has a certain impact on the overall demand of society. As a result, government procurement has become an important means for finance to guide the healthy and stable development of the national economy. It is precisely because of this macro-control attribute that government procurement has become an important means to promote the development of SMEs.

2.2. SMEs have an Indispensable Position in the National Economy.

SMEs can make a difference [2]. At present, SMEs as the basic forces to promote the development of the national economy, construct the main body of the market economy and promote social stability have playing the roles of making special contributions in promoting the development of the whole national economy owing to their sensitive market response, guaranteeing the social stability as the main force to relieve employment pressure (In 1998,

6.1 million people were laid off from state-owned enterprises, and 4.18 million were reemployed in non-state-owned enterprises, accounting for 68.5% of the total number of laid-off workers from state-owned enterprises), increasing local fiscal revenue, stimulating local GDP and activating the market as a huge social enterprise group, and making more effective and convenient use of local resources due to their small scales and high flexibility.

2.3. Government Procurement to Support the Development of SMEs Conforms to International Practice

Internationally, the United States and developed countries in the European Union have issued government procurement policies to support SMEs. The U.S. Federal Government Procurement Act, which targets ethnic minorities and historically underdeveloped areas, establishes preferential government procurement policies to support ethnic minority businesses and underdeveloped areas [3]. The Act provides access to government resources for disadvantaged businesses, such as ethnic minorities, by reserving a certain percentage for women's businesses and small minority business owners [4]. The EU Public Procurement Regulation (2016) encourages bidding enterprises to promise to help the vulnerable groups by offering preferential prices, and the public goods procurement department can select those bidders who are likely to bring more social benefits. Scotland's government procurement policy has also strengthened the government procurement to actively assume corporate social responsibility and is conducive to the coordinated and sustainable development of the regional economy. Italian government procurement supports its economic development by reserving a certain share for backward southern regions.

3. Current Policies and Measures of Government Procurement to Support the Development of SMEs in China

To stimulate the vitality of SMEs in the government procurement market and enhance their competitiveness, a series of policies have been issued from central to local, which can be divided into direct and indirect support policies.

3.1. Direct Support Policies

The Interim Measures for Government Procurement to Promote the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises issued by the Ministry of Finance comprehensively defines the direct support policies to help SMEs enhance their competitiveness from many aspects. In 2020, the Ministry of Finance, Industry and Information Technology promulgated the Administrative Measures for Government Procurement to Promote the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, which revised and refined the original support policies, and stipulated the situation that the reserved shares are exclusively for SMEs' procurement, including the reservation of procurement shares, the setting of special procurement packages, consortium bidding, etc., and the non-special price deduction ratio and price bonus ratio in project evaluation.

3.2. Indirect Support Policies

They mainly stimulate the enthusiasm of SMEs to participate in the government procurement market competition from credit, cooperation, technology and other aspects [5]. In terms of credit, at the central policy level, the financial department is encouraged to provide procurement contract guarantee services for SMEs in terms of financing and performance bond [6]. In terms of cooperation, at the central policy level, purchasers are encouraged to allow large enterprises that have obtained government procurement contracts to subcontract to SMEs according to law [7]. In terms of procurement technology optimization, the central policy encourages purchasers to give appropriate support to SMEs in terms of payment terms and payment methods [7]. According to the spirit of the central government, local governments have introduced specific support measures in terms of credit. For example, in 2018, the Shandong Provincial Department of Finance issued the Measures for Financing Management of Government Procurement Contracts in Shandong Province, Chongqing Municipal Finance Bureau and China Everbright Bank jointly launched "Chain Financing Loan for Government Procurement Winning Suppliers", and in 2020, the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region Department of Finance and Nanning Central Sub-branch of the People's Bank of China promoted "Government Procurement Loan" to promote the financing development of SMEs.

4. Analysis on the Effect of Government Procurement on Promoting the Development of SMEs – Based on the Procurement Data of G Province from 2015 to 2019

In this paper, the data of government procurement bidding contracts in G Province from 2015 to 2019 were collected at www.ccg.gov.cn and compared with the directory of SMEs obtained from the industry and commerce department of G Province to analyze whether the government procurement policies to support SMEs have been implemented and have played an effective role in terms of the procurement market size, the market share of SMEs in government procurement and the attributes of participating projects.

4.1. Analysis on the Competitiveness of SMEs in the Government Procurement Market

Enterprise competitiveness refers to the ability of enterprises to comprehensively use their own capabilities to obtain the resources they need in the market competition, and effectively use resources to create new values [8]. In the field of government procurement, whether an enterprise is competitive or not can be reflected by its market share in government procurement.

4.1.1. Market size of government procurement in G province

The pilot project of government procurement in G Province first started in 1998. After 20 years of development, it showed the characteristics of procurement scale from small to large, and the scope from point to area, and achieved considerable results. As shown in Table 1

(Market size of government procurement in G Province). Although the absolute procurement scale is unstable to some extent, it generally shows an increasing trend, from 106.052 billion yuan in 2015 to 129.065 billion yuan in 2019. The relative scale showed a downward trend in 2019, which was mainly due to the local government's efforts to

reduce general expenditures and to focus financial resources on rigid expenditures such as the "Three Guarantees". The proportion of government procurement in GDP has remained stable at more than 6%, and government procurement has played a positive role in the economic and social development of G Province.

Table 1. Market size of government procurement in G Province

Years	Actual purchase amount (100 million yuan)	Proportion in fiscal expenditure (%)	Proportion in GDP of the whole region (%)
2015	1060.52	26.02	6.3
2016	1109.76	24.99	6.1
2017	1381.9	28.13	6.7
2018	1511.48	28.46	7.4
2019	1290.65	22.07	6.1

Data source: compiled from final accounts report of G Province from 2015 to 2019

4.1.2. Benefit rate of SMEs in government procurement market

The benefit rate of SMEs in the government procurement market refers to the ratio of SMEs participating in the government procurement market competition and winning the bid. The contract data (Table 2: Government procurement contracts awarded in G Province) show that SMEs have strong competitiveness in the government procurement market of G Province from 2015 to 2019, with winning bids exceeding 63%,

indicating that government procurement plays a significant role in supporting the development of SMEs. However, with the steady growth of government procurement, the proportion of successful bidding rate of SMEs in the government procurement market is rather unstable. The benefit rate of SME government procurement market shows an increasing trend in 2015-2017, from 73.5% in 2015 to 74.5% in 2017, and shows a decreasing trend in 2017-2019, from 74.5% in 2017 to 63.83% in 2019.

Table 2. Government procurement contracts awarded in G Province from 2015 to 2019 (unit: 100 million yuan)

Years	Accepted amount of medium-sized enterprises	Benefit rate of medium-sized enterprises	Accepted amount of small and micro businesses	Benefit rate of small and micro businesses
2015	427.81	40.33%	352.82	33.27%
2016	478.09	41.82%	371.52	32.5%
2017	589.24	42.64%	440.29	31.86%
2018	751.98	49.75%	353.2	23.37%
2019	377.65	30.83%	404.51	33%

Data source: collated according to the contracts awarded at www.ccg.gov.cn

4.1.3. Bid-winning rate of SMEs from the perspective of project attributes

Analyzing the bid-winning rate of SMEs from the project attribute helps to judge which field the SMEs are more competitive in. According to the contract data (Table 3: The bid-winning rate of SMEs in different fields), the support effect of government procurement for SMEs in

engineering and service field is better than that in goods field. The bid-winning rate of SMEs in engineering field has remained above 76% and that in goods field has remained above 67% in recent five years. However, the support effect in engineering, service and goods field is unstable to some extent, especially in engineering and service field.

Table 3. The bid-winning rate of SMEs in different fields

Project properties	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Engineering	86.51%	82.76%	86.06%	85.27%	76.9%
Service	78.87%	88.82%	88.87%	67.26%	83.37%
Goods	53.12%	56.79%	48.8%	47.59%	42.02%

Data source: collated according to the contracts awarded at www.ccg.gov.cn

4.2 Conclusions

According to the awarding of government procurement contracts in G Province in 2015-2019, government procurement has played a certain role in promoting the development of SMEs that have become more active subjects in the government procurement market. However, the policies of government procurement to support the development of SMEs are unstable to some extent, and

differ in different fields. The promotion effect is optimal and somewhat stable in the engineering field, needs to be improved in the field of goods and fluctuates greatly in the service sector.

5. Difficulties Faced by Government Procurement in Supporting the Development of SMEs

5.1. Difficulties Faced by Supporting Policies

The way to identify SMEs is inappropriate. Self-declaration is adopted to identify the identity of SMEs participating in government procurement activities in China, and a "letter of application for SMEs" is provided. In order to implement the government procurement law's stipulation that SMEs should not be discriminated and treated differently based on their operating scale, information related to their operating scale is often not required in procurement documents, which makes it difficult for evaluation experts to accurately judge whether the enterprise is a SME in a short time, what preferential measures should be given to the enterprise, or even whether a large enterprise will falsely use the qualification of a SME.

The operability of regulations is not strong. The Interim Measures for Promoting the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises by Government Procurement promulgated in 2011 is not detailed enough in terms of dividing the scope of SMEs and specific support measures, and lacks enforceability and operability. Although the Administrative Measures for Promoting the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises in Government Procurement promulgated in 2020 has refined the provisions on the reserved shares and improved the preferential price evaluation methods for government procurement projects, the language expression is still mainly for encouragement and guidance and lacks the legal consequences for the procurement parties failing to implement the supporting policies in accordance with the regulations, which makes it difficult for some supporting measures to be effectively implemented.

The key to support the development of SMEs is not clear. According to the data from official website of the State Administration for Industry and Commerce, the number of SMEs in China has exceeded 30 million by the end of 2019, with the proportion of small and micro enterprises reaching 68.2%, indicating a large number of small and micro enterprises. However, from the perspective of the current government procurement policies to support the development of SMEs, on the one hand, there are few supporting measures specifically for small and micro enterprises. In the Administrative Measures for Government Procurement to Promote the Development of Small and Medium-sized Enterprises, only "... the proportion reserved for small and micro enterprises shall not be less than 60%" and the provisions on price deduction are not strong in supporting. Judging from the procurement situation of G Province in the past five years, the bid-winning rate of small and micro enterprises in the government procurement market is only between 23% and 34%. On the other hand, targeted support is not given according to the types of SMEs, for example, according to factors such as region, nationality, enterprise innovation ability and enterprise development stage.

Support policies emphasize the survival of enterprises and neglect independent innovation. For a long time, government procurement support policies in China have focused on how to help SMEs to obtain government procurement contracts, only focusing on the survival of

enterprises, but ignored the cultivation of independent innovation ability of enterprises. Although the Ministry of Finance has successively issued some normative documents to promote independent innovation of enterprises, such as Administrative Measures for Government Procurement Budget of Subsidized Innovative Products and Evaluation Measures for Government Procurement of Independent Innovative Products, they were recognized by European and American countries as excluding foreign enterprises in the GPA negotiation process. In order to balance the interests of all parties and fulfill foreign commitments, the State Council issued documents in 2011 and 2016 to clean up the normative documents linking the independent innovation policy with providing preferential government procurement, which greatly impacted the policy of promoting independent innovation of SMEs by government procurement.

The cognitive deviation of the purchaser leads to the weak willingness to implement the policy. Buyers often have cognitive bias that the products of SMEs are not as good as those of well-known enterprises, and they are unwilling to implement government procurement support policies, or even restrict the participation of SMEs in competition [9]. For example, no procurement unit in Province G from 2015 to 2019 implemented the supporting measure of reserving procurement shares specifically for SMEs. Therefore, how the government procurement supervision department makes the budget unit implement the reserved procurement share for SMEs has become an urgent problem to be solved.

5.2. The Difficulties of SMEs

The development of SMEs has been greatly constrained due to their own inadequate conditions. SMEs do not have an advantage in the competition of government procurement market due to the widespread objective conditions such as small scale, weak production and viability. Especially there is a big gap between the products and information of goods projects and large enterprises, so SMEs can only participate in the competition of projects with small procurement scale, low technical content and low economic returns.

They are not familiar with procurement rules and procedures. Some enterprises, because they have no idea of government procurement, think that government procurement procedures are cumbersome, restrictive and slow to withdraw funds, and voluntarily give up the government procurement market. Some enterprises are not familiar with the government procurement rules, leading to the annulment of bids, and even wasting energy on invalid challenge complaints. In 2019, the proportion of complaints about ineffective government procurement of SMEs in G Province reached 44%.

6. Countermeasures and Suggestions to Further Improve the Government Procurement Policies to Support the Development of SMEs

6.1. Optimizing the Identification of SMEs

Establish a national unified supplier base for SMEs. As

the current way of identifying SMEs' self-declaration is easy to cause disputes [10], we can explore to build an information management platform for SMEs together with the industry and commerce department, to simultaneously authenticate SMEs and put them on the list when the enterprise applies for. When submitting the annual industrial and commercial report, the enterprise will go through the annual inspection of the qualifications of SMEs simultaneously, so as to repel those who do not meet the requirements in time. When an enterprise participates in the government procurement competition, it shall submit the enterprise qualification inquiry results of the SME information management platform as the SME qualification certificate. In addition, the listing standards and procedures should be unified nationwide, so as to realize listing in one place and universal use in the whole country, and the query can be made without geographical restrictions.

Strengthen the credit management of SMEs after listing. The SMEs credit management module should be set up on the SMEs information management platform. Through exploring the use of Internet big data+ credit technology, the SMEs should cooperate with third-party credit service institutions, collect all-round external information of government procurement participating enterprises and internal information of government procurement activities, evaluate the credit rating of warehousing enterprises regularly, and make the SMEs credit information available. On the one hand, the module can ensure that the supplier base of SMEs is under dynamic management, and enterprises with serious dishonesty behaviors can be cancelled in a timely manner; on the other hand, the module can be combined with contract financing to solve the problems of difficult customer demand identification and difficult post-loan risk control of financial institutions.

6.2. Refining Specific Support Measures

Refine the reserved share. The first is to clarify the appropriate circumstances for purchasing exclusively for SMEs. Article 7 of the Measures for the Administration of Government Procurement to Promote the Development of SMEs stipulates that "those that are suitable for being provided by SMEs shall be purchased exclusively by the purchaser for SMEs". However, the "suitable" situation is not clearly specified. If the "suitable" situation is not clearly guided, it is easy to cause the reserved share support measures to become mere words. Therefore, the financial department should formulate a "suitable" guidance list, and make clear the scope of projects suitable for purchasing for SMEs. The second is to reserve different purchasing shares according to the types of SMEs. Internationally, many countries focus on supporting different types of SMEs. For example, the United States reserves different government procurement shares for different types of small enterprises such as minority enterprises and small businesses with disabilities. China can also shift the reserved share to the local key industries according to the differences in the economic development levels of the central, eastern and western regions, and on the basis of full investigation, and according to the types

of enterprises and the differences in regional economic development. The third is to strengthen the review of reserved shares. Focus should be put on reviewing the budget and final accounts of the reserved share of government procurement, and refusing to approve the budget that fails to reserve the share as required, regularly evaluating the performance of support policies, and using the evaluation results as an important basis for budget funding arrangements.

Shift the supporting policies to innovative enterprises. First of all, make it clear at the legislative level. It is a common practice in European and American countries to focus on government procurement to promote the independent innovation function of SMEs. For example, the EU directly sets up special funds for procurement for SMEs engaged in innovation and R&D. However, there is no provision to promote independent innovation of SMEs in the Government Procurement Law of our country. Therefore, under the principle of GPA, the functional provisions of relevant government procurement policies should be revised to clarify the legal function of government procurement in promoting independent innovation of enterprises. Secondly, make full use of GPA exception principle to build supporting policies to promote independent innovation of SMEs. At the central level, the standard system for purchasing innovative products should be established, and the guiding scheme for government procurement to promote SMEs' innovation should be clarified. At the local government level, specific implementation rules should be formulated in combination with local industrial development plans, types of SMEs, development stages, etc., to form a comprehensive policy guarantee for government procurement to promote independent innovation of SMEs.

6.3. Providing a Full Range of Public Services

Clarify the specialized agencies of government procurement services for SMEs. Judging from international experience, many developed countries provide services for SMEs to participate in government procurement through specialized agencies. For example, in the United States, the Small Business Administration, which aims to encourage and support SMEs to get more government orders, mainly takes the following three measures to help small enterprises: First, the investigate the performance ability. The Small Business Administration specially accepts the investigation on the performance ability of small businesses entrusted by the purchaser. If it is found that small businesses do have the ability to perform the contract after investigation, the Small Business Administration will issue a letter of competency, and the purchaser may not refuse it. Second, provide help for small enterprises to undertake subcontracting. Experts are stationed in various states to recommend qualified small enterprises to the general contractor to undertake subcontracting tasks and help SMEs obtain subcontracting opportunities. Third, information such as the list of relevant small businesses and their capabilities is regularly pushed to government procurement officials through the network system. The

Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, as a comprehensive service organization for SMEs in China, is unable to give consideration to various support work for SMEs due to its wide service scope. Therefore, it is necessary to optimize the internal structure of SMEs service organizations, clarify their responsibilities, and give specialized agencies the authority to take the lead in organizing the joint action of relevant departments such as development and reform, finance, taxation, industry and commerce, banking, insurance, etc., so as to fully concentrate scattered information, and make all parties support policies to form synergy. The implementation and enforcement of various supporting measures should be followed and monitored, and professional training and consulting services in the field of government procurement should be provided for SMEs.

Improve information transparency. The government procurement work should be publicized through various forms such as government procurement information publicity portal and propaganda, so as to improve the awareness rate of policies. In addition, in order to increase the convenience of information acquisition, a "procurement information column for SMEs" should be set up on the government procurement information announcement portal website to announce the procurement intention, reserved shares and other information.

Improve the institutional environment of financing for SMEs in China. Although China has issued a series of important documents to solve the financing problem of SMEs, generally speaking, the legal and policy system has not been systematically formed and needs to be further improved. It should be further established from the legal level to protect SMEs' access to fair financing and development opportunities, improve the legal and institutional framework of loan mortgage guarantee, regulate industry behavior, motivate financial institutions to provide guarantee services for SMEs in the process of government procurement contract performance, and solve the financing difficulties of SMEs in the process of government procurement project performance.

6.4. Establishing a System of Accountability and Improving the Relief System

Establish a system of accountability. Firstly, to clarify the responsibilities of the procurement executive department: If the budget department fails to arrange the reserved share in the budget without justifiable reasons or the reserved share is insufficient, which damages the reputation of government procurement policies to promote the development of SMEs, the relevant responsible persons shall be investigated for administrative responsibility. In the final accounts, if the actual share of SMEs is lower than the budget reserved share, and there are no justifiable reasons such as insufficient capacity of SMEs to participate in government procurement projects, the relevant responsible persons shall be investigated for administrative responsibility. Secondly, to the administrative responsibility of discriminating or restricting SMEs from participating in competition: The

procurement items with unreserved shares specially for SMEs after overall planning by the competent budget unit, as well as the procurement packages with unreserved shares in the projects, should follow the principle of fair competition, and no artificial threshold should be set to restrict SMEs from participating in the competition. At the same time, in the evaluation, the evaluation experts should implement the price deduction or price bonus measures given to small and micro enterprises. If the SMEs are restricted from participating in the project competition in the process of government procurement or the bid evaluation is not conducted according to the standards in the evaluation, the relevant responsible persons shall be held accountable. Thirdly, to clarify the subcontracting responsibility of SMEs: The policy of government procurement to support SMEs aims to enhance the market competitiveness of SMEs and improve their market benefit rate through a series of policies. The support policy explicitly prohibits small and micro enterprises from subcontracting government procurement contracts obtained by the support policy to large and medium-sized enterprises, and prohibits medium-sized enterprises from subcontracting contracts to large enterprises. If a small and micro enterprise subcontracts the contract to a large and medium-sized enterprise after winning the bid, or a medium-sized enterprise subcontracts the contract to a large enterprise, the government procurement supervision department shall determine the winning bid and transaction of the SME to be invalid and impose penalties according to relevant laws and regulations of government procurement, and include the illegal acts in the record of serious illegal and untrustworthy behaviors.

Improve the relief system. The right relief system of government procurement is a specific operation method to ensure that the interests of the damaged parties get relief in the procurement process, which can effectively restrict the behavior of the procurement subject and maintain the market order by means of administrative litigation, administrative reconsideration, complaints and doubts. Relief procedures to follow the "question-complaints-administrative reconsideration-administrative litigation", the formers are the prerequisite for the latter. Such a long relief period, although to a certain extent, saving judicial resources, but may not be able to fully protect the rights and interests of SME suppliers. Therefore, in this paper, it is suggested to abolish the requirement of questioning as a prerequisite for relief, because the questioning judge is the procurement executive, the purchaser or the procurement agency, and it is often difficult for him to exercise the relief system objectively and fairly from his own interests. However, taking questioning as a free choice of relief can speed up the settlement of disputes and guarantee the rights and interests of SME suppliers in time.

7. Conclusions

In this paper, through literature review and case study, it is verified that government procurement has played a certain role in promoting the development of SMEs, but the supporting policies are unstable to some extent. As the case selected in the literature is from G Province, which is

relatively backward in economy in western China, whether the research conclusion has universal applicability still needs to be further tested. In the future, data at the national level can be used to further verify the supporting effect of government procurement on the development of SMEs.

Acknowledgments

This paper was financially supported by Basic Competence Improvement Program for Young and Middle-aged Teachers in Universities of Guangxi in 2018 "Research on Performance Evaluation of Government Purchasing Supporting SMEs Development Policy" (2018KY0508).

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