The Development of the Chinese Public Administration Society

Ji Guo, Chinese Public Administration Society

Mengzhong Zhang (trans.), Rutgers University — Newark

It has been 13 years since the Chinese Public Administration Society (CPAS) was founded in October of 1988. The path of development of CPAS has been closely associated with the new era of China’s opening and reform policy. It has furthered the practice of public administration and its development as an emerging academic discipline. A review of the history and present situation of CPAS will not only help readers understand CPAS better, but also understand better the development of administrative science in contemporary China.

The development of CPAS mirrors the development of the Chinese public administration community.

The Establishment and Influence of the Preparation Committee of CPAS

Public administration originated at the end of 19th century in the West and was introduced to China in the 1930s. After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, public administration as an academic discipline was eliminated from university programs because of ideological bias in 1952. As a subject of learning, the study and development of public administration ceased (Guo, 2000).

In order to meet the demands of China’s reform and opening to the outside world, as well as modernization and socialist construction, Deng Xiaoping pointed out in 1980 that “We have overlooked the study of political science, law, sociology, and world politics, and we need to catch up.” His words opened the door to recovering and developing public administration. Hence scholars and related government agencies actively worked to recover and develop public administration as an independent discipline. The Chinese Society for Political Science held workshops to teach public administration and personnel management in Shanghai (1982) and Beijing (1983). Another conference, “The Academic Seminar on Administrative Science,” sponsored by the Chinese Society for Political Science and the Chinese Society for Law, was held in the City of Tianjin in July of 1984, advocating the study of administrative science.

In August of 1984, the General Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Labor and Personnel held a seminar on public administration. The conference lasted seven days and more than 70 scholars and officials from the Chinese Communist Party and various departments at the central and provincial governments participated in the discussion. “This is the first conference of such a nature, and has obtained the attention from all sides” (Investigation Institute of the General Office of the State Council, 1984). The participants agreed that “public administration is a discipline oriented towards practical applications. Such studies will be significant for improving administrative efficiency and social benefits, as well as facilitating the four modernizations,” and indicated that “the study of public administration in our country should absorb related accomplishments, and gradually establish a socialist public administration system with Chinese characteristics.” These comments built the foundation for the direction of public administration in the development in China. The conference had profound influence on the recovery, development, and application of Chinese public administration.

Several suggestions of the 1984 conference were
adopted and implemented afterwards. For example: “Creating a favorable environment to establish a nationwide association of public administration. Motivating researchers across the country to conduct scientific research on public administration. It is high time to form a preparatory committee which should become a nationwide association next year” (Memo of the 1984 Seminar on Public Administration). Soon after, The Preparatory Committee of the Chinese Public Administration Society (CPAS) was established in Beijing on December 31, 1984, approved by the leaders of the State Council. The major tasks of the Preparatory Committee of the CPAS were four fold: (1) Preparing for the founding academic conference of the (CPAS); (2) launching the journal, Chinese Public Administration; (3) organizing the editing of the publication Outlines of Chinese Public Administration; (4) participating in the preparation of a civil service conference to be held in Beijing under the support of United Nations (General Office of The State Council of PRC, 1985).

Looking back, the conference held jointly by the General Office of the State Council and the Ministry of Labor and Personnel, combined with the preparatory committee of CPAS, led to a new stage of the recovery and development of Chinese public administration as an independent discipline. Henceforth, the preparatory committee of CPAS conducted comprehensive preparations over the span of four years. That pioneering work greatly contributed to the recovery and development of public administration in China. These contributions included the following aspects.

Under the influence and guidance of the preparatory committee of CPAS, 14 provincial-level (including the autonomous regions and the municipalities directly under the State Council) branch societies of public administration were founded. In addition, various preparatory committees of local societies of public administration were formed. These activities provided a forceful institutional guarantee for the recovery and development of public administration across the whole country and built a wide network for the founding of the CPAS.

In July of 1985, the first issue of the academic journal Chinese Public Administration was published. Li Xiannian, the President of the PRC at the time, wrote the inscription “Realize a scientific public administration, serve the needs of socialist modernization” (CPA, 1985). From then on, the journal has been like a raised flag, assuming the responsibility of publicizing the science and development of public administration as well as calling people to give recognition and attention to public administration as a science. In its inaugural issue, Chinese Public Administration included some discussion of concepts such as “administration,” “administrative science” and a series of articles on basic knowledge of public administration, and so forth (Lectures on Basic Knowledge of Public Administration, 1985). Sixteen years later, when we look again at the inaugural issue, which had only 28 pages, the originality and significance of the pioneering job done by the preparatory committee of CPAS are readily apparent.

Facilitating the recovery and development of public administration teaching and research was one of the primary missions of the preparatory committee of CPAS. Beginning in 1986, universities such as Wuhan University re-introduced the major of public administration. In July of 1987, the Teaching and Research Association of CPAS was founded. It was designed to be a mass organization that unites teachers, researchers, and practitioners of public administration (Memo of the founding Conference of the Teaching and Research Association of CPAS, 1987). After the founding of CPAS, the Teaching and Research Association became one of the five branch associations of CPAS. The establishment of the Teaching and Research Association forcefully propelled the rapid development of public administration teaching and research. Moreover, the preparatory committee participated in the civil service reform conference that was
sponsored by the United Nations and held in Beijing in 1985. The preparatory committee of CPAS organized a series of training classes, seminars and workshops. In short, the organizing and leadership activities of the preparatory committee took a comprehensive approach and achieved great results. The various activities of the preparatory committee of CPAS paved the way for the formal foundation of CPAS and opened the channels of CPAS activities. When everything was ready, CPAS was founded in October of 1988.

The Establishment of the Chinese Public Administration Society and Related Issues

On October 13 and 14, 1988, the founding conference of CPAS was held in Beijing. Premier Li Peng wrote the inscription for the society: “Government administration must focus on science, pursue efficiency, follow the law and emphasize uprightness.” Wang Bingqian, a member of the State Council, expressed congratulations at the ceremony. Bai Meiqing, the deputy general secretary of the State Council, addressed the ceremony. Chen Junsheng, the general secretary of the State Council, was elected as the first president of CPAS. About 200 delegates, coming from 30 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities directly under the leadership of the State Council, participated in the conference and passed the charter of the CPAS. They elected 181 council members and 26 standing council members. The fact that a great many important government leaders participated in the founding conference of CPAS suggests the importance attached by the Chinese government to the development and application of administrative science in China. The general secretary of the State Council also addressed the second (Luo Gan) and third (Wang Zhongyu) national conferences of the association, in 1993 and 1998 respectively.

CPAS is affiliated with the State Council and CPAS is guided, managed and supervised by the General Office of the State Council. A new governing council is elected every 5 years. Although it underwent minor revisions several times, the CPAS charter remains basically the same.

Some key aspects of CPAS, as stated in the charter, are as follows:

1) The nature of CPAS: “CPAS is an academic organization formed to study the theories and practices of public administration and foster the improvement of government administration.”
2) The tasks of CPAS: (1) study practical problems of administration, summarize the experience of administration, provide suggestions for administrative reform, provide advice and consultation; (2) study the theories of public administration, explore how to establish a public administration system with Chinese characteristics and propel forward the development of public administration as an academic discipline; (3) communicate the knowledge of public administration and related law to the public, improve the quality of public employees and strengthen the concept of administration by law; (4) gather and train talented people through diverse academic activities; facilitate the construction of teaching and research groups in public administration; facilitate the development of public administration education and the enhancement of research quality; (5) organize the academic activities, conduct academic research, publish research journals and edit works and materials on public administration; facilitate academic communication, exchange, and development; (6) on behalf of the Chinese public administration community, establish academic exchange and friendship relations with relevant international organizations.
3) The Organizational Structure of CPAS: the National Member’s Congress is the supreme authority and elected Council members have a term of five years. The Council Member Conference elects Standing Council members and a president, deputy vice president and general secretary. The Standing Council Conference is in charge of routine work, and these are working offices in charge of every day work.

The early organization included a general office, a department of academic affairs, and a liaison department. The number of personnel at the time was 16. Later on, a department of business development and training was added, and the number of personnel was increased to eighteen. The journal “Chinese Public Administration” is published directly by CPAS. In
addition, the charter of CPAS was revised by the Third National Members’ Congress, adding the clause, “Depending on what is deemed necessary, the Standing Council Conference may decide that new research associations are to be founded under CPAS, and should follow the related procedures for approvals” (The Statutes of CPAS, 1988). So far, there are five branch associations under CPAS: the National Teaching and Research Association; The National Association for County Administration; The National Association for Policy Science Research; The National Association for Logistics Administration; and the National Association for the Management of Correspondence and Complaint (xinfang).

Members are the foundation of CPAS. The Statutes passed by three National Members’ Congress regulated that (under the third clause of Chapter one): “CPAS devotes itself to uniting and organizing nationwide research personnel, academic groups, institutes, colleges and universities, promoting joint efforts to develop public administration.” (Statutes of Chinese Public Administration Society, 1988, 1993, 1998). At present, we have 26 provincial level branch associations and 6 vice-provincial level branch associations. These branch associations are all group members of CPAS, and their organizational structure and working procedures are similar to CPAS. In addition, the CPAS has more than 100 group members coming from professional public administration associations affiliated to the departments and committees of central government, as well as departments and institutes of universities and research organizations. The CPAS has more than 10,000 individual members.

The Development of CPAS and Its Accomplishments

In the October of 1998, a conference was held in Beijing to celebrate the 10th anniversary of the founding of CPAS. The participants of the conference highly valued CPAS for its accomplishments and the significance of the work carried out by CPAS. The conference summarized the accomplishments in six areas. Chen Junsheng, the Vice President of the National People’s Political Consultive Conference and the honorary president of CPAS, wrote some congratulatory words: “CPAS has done a lot in recovering and reconstructing public administration for our country over the last ten years. CPAS has propelled forward the great enterprise of reform and opening to the outside. In particular, CPAS has actively contributed to the reform of the public administration system and the improvement of government administration. The work of CPAS has been appreciated by both domestic and international scholars in the public administration community.”

In recent years, the review and study of the work of CPAS have been increasing. I think this is not only beneficial for us to understand how it currently operates, but also beneficial for us to predict the future development of CPAS. Over the last 13 years, we have been mainly focusing our work on the following areas:

1. Actively studying the real-world problems of public administration; providing our services to help improve government administration; offering advice on policy matters.

CPAS creates an annual plan that indicates the main tasks for the coming year. After passing the Standing Council, the plan is sent to leaders in the General Office of the State Council and is disseminated to the members of CPAS. The primary task is always to study the topical and difficult areas of administrative reform, utilizing the channels of an annual conference, seminars and project teams. Over the past 13 years, the CPAS has discussed broadly the concrete framework and content of administrative reform. The actual work of CPAS has included the following research topics: reform of the administrative management system; the division of personnel and general duties between central and local governments; administration at the county level; the division of functions and establishing a law on the Bianzhi (the ceiling of personnel for each government agency); the transformation of government functions and macro-coordination and control; and how to improve administrative efficiency. CPAS has offered a larger number of comments and suggestions regarding these topics. Through these activities, the coordinating and consulting role of CPAS has been demonstrated. For example, in December of 1991, CPAS, in cooperation with the System Reform Com-
Over the last two years, CPAS has adjusted its work to suit the rapid development of teaching and research in public administration.

To explore how to build an administrative system with Chinese characteristics is an enduring fundamental task of CPAS. Many efforts have been devoted in this direction. First and foremost, CPAS has organized the scholars and practitioners to be involved with the task. CPAS held the first and second National Excellent Research Accomplishment in Public Administration Awards in 1993 and 1999. This activity not only examined the accomplishments of public administration research over time, but also promoted the development of public administration research. The branch associations of CPAS have conducted similar activities in their specialized fields. For example, the National Association for Logistics Administration has held three awards for excellent papers on the reform and development of logistics administration published up until 2000. The CPAS has edited or written a number of influential works and research reports. Prior to 1998, about 30 works had been published. In the past three years, CPAS has published about ten books and paper collections such as The Intellectual Thoughts of Zhou Enlai on Public Administration and An Introduction to the Thoughts of Deng Xiaoping on Public Administration. CPAS also organized scholars and experts in writing a book The Short History of Public Administration in PR China, which will fill gaps in that area. This research project obtained a grant from the Chinese National Social Science Foundation.

Over the last two years, CPAS has adjusted its work to suit the rapid development of teaching and research in public administration. In March of 2000, the academic committee of CPAS was established. The committee is playing an authoritative and consultative role in judging the academic quality of related works. The committee will play an important role (Guo Ji, 2000). From 2001, CPAS is introducing a pilot program to institute a system of bidding for research topics. Those who win a bid will get financial support (Announcement for Distributing Research fund for 2001 on the Discipline of Public Administration, 2001). In recent years, the teaching and research of public administration in higher education has seen unprecedented development. At present, more than 42 universities offer public administration degrees at the
bachelors and masters degree. A National School of Administration was founded in 1994, and there are now 46 local Schools of Administration at the provincial level. CPAS has played an active role in developing, organizing and coordinating related works, and in responding to changes in China's situation. Among the new members of CPAS that were accepted in the second group of 2000 and the first season of 2001, there are seven group members, all of which are universities. There are 36 individual members from universities, accounting for 92 percent of the new recruiters (CPAS accept new members, 2001). After about three years preparation, the pilot MPA degree program will start this year, aiming at training civil servants and public employees in non-governmental sectors. There are 24 universities that have been authorized to take part in this opportunity. Registration was conducted in July of 2001 and the unified national entrance exams were conducted in October of 2001. This is not only a big event for higher education in the People's Republic of China, but also a big turning point for public administration and public affairs in our country. Moreover, it is an eye-catching event for the public administration community in China. In responding to this development, the journal Chinese Public Administration, in cooperation with the Secretariat of the National Master of Public Administration (MPA) Directing Committee, publish a forum on China's MPA from July of 2001. In early August of 2001, CPAS and the National Master of Public Administration (MPA) Directing Committee jointly sponsored the “Conference on the Demand for 21st century Public Administration talents and MPA Education.” Scholars and practitioners gathered together to discuss how to develop MPA education in China.

**Populating the Knowledge of Administrative Science and Related Knowledge of Law**

Over the last ten years or so, though public administration as a science gradually obtained much progress, we still regard it as an academic discipline that is in its early stage of development in China. There are only 1,000 or so personnel involved with teaching and research in this field. The work of popularizing public administration as an independent discipline is far from finished. Therefore, the Charter of CPAS states that one of the tasks of CPAS is to popularize the knowledge of administrative science and related knowledge of law. For example, in 1993, CPAS, the journal Chinese Public Administration and the Economic Daily newspaper jointly sponsored a competition of “National Competition on Administrative Knowledge” in 1993 (Zhang Wenshou, 1993). In 1994, CPAS held the “National Competition on Civil Service.” In 1997, CPAS, with the Law committee of the National People's Congress and the Law Bureau of the State Council, organized the “National Competition on knowledge of Administrative Penalties in the People's Republic of China” (Guo Ji, 1998).

**Conducting International Academic Exchange and Communication, Improving Cooperation with Overseas Public Administration Communities**

From its establishment, CPAS has enthusiastically participated in international academic exchanges and communication. In December of 1989, the Eastern Region Public Administration Organization accepted CPAS as a group member. In March of 1990, the 66th Conference of the Executive Committee of the International Administration Society accepted CPAS as a national branch society. From then on, CPAS has sent delegates to attend the annual conference and specific conferences held by the International Administration Society. For example, in 1998, CPAS attended the Annual Conference of International Administration Society in Paris (Song and Gao, 1998). CPAS attended the First Special International Conference in London in 1999 (Bao, 1999) and an international conference in
Italy in 2000 (Zhou and Yang, 2000). Meanwhile, CPAS has actively sponsored and organized international conferences and seminars. For example, the Third Conference of the International Administration Society was held in Beijing in October of 1996, the seminar on “Asian Administrative Reforms” was held in Beijing in July of 2000 (Zhang, 2000). CPAS was one of the sponsors of those conferences or seminars. Over the past ten years, CPAS has strengthened the academic exchange and visiting systems with a number of countries and regions. At present, the CPAS has a regular visiting system with its counterparts from Japan, the United States, France, Germany, South Korea, and Austria. CPAS also has visiting systems with some regions of Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macao.

Those activities of CPAS, as part of China’s opening to the outside, help introduce into China the advanced management theories and experiences from abroad, and have forcefully propelled the development of public administration. Indeed, these activities have enhanced the development of CPAS itself.

Looking back on the history of CPAS over the last 13 years, we find that public administration as a discipline has developed quickly in China. The influence of CPAS is substantial and can be regarded as a model for other academic associations. Apart from the collective effort of colleagues from all over the country, the primary reason for this is the desire and demand for modern scientific management theories and technologies in an era of rapid development in the pursuit of reform and opening to the outside. This accomplishment can also be attributed to the concern and support of the Chinese Communist Party and Government. Compared with the research and application of public administration of western developed countries, and with the growing demand accompanied by the continuing change of public administration practice in our country, we realize that CPAS is still in its early development stage. CPAS will continue to develop and adjust to changes in China. We can say that CPAS has a long journey ahead of it.

Ji Guo is president of the Chinese Public Administration Society. He is also the guest professor at Peking University and Renmin University of China.

Mengzhong Zhang is a visiting professor at a number of Universities in China. He is a senior research fellow at the National Center for Public Productivity and serves as associate director at the U.S./China Public Administration Secretariat (affiliated with ASPA and NASPPA).

References


Addressing the readers. Chinese Public Administration. 1985 (1): end cover


Holding the flag for the future — tenth anniversary conference was held in Beijing for the honor of Founding the CPAS. Chinese Public Administration. 1998 (11): 3-4.


Materials Collection of Memorializing CPAS for Its Tenth Anniversary. 1998:44.


