

the context of China studies and thus misses the opportunity to connect with a larger comparative literature.

Besides the above-mentioned conceptual problems, I also disagree with the author's understanding of the main mechanisms used to promote formal ideology. In contrast to formal ideology, the author argues that informal ideology is promoted through school education by using pure populist language (p.24). However, mainland Chinese students are required to take "Sixiang Zhengzhi" as part of the core curriculum starting in junior high school and going through college. In the "Sixiang Zhengzhi" classes, the students are taught standardized Chinese political language that includes concepts such as "Socialist Commodity Economy", "Three Represents" which are considered by the author to be formal ideology. This seems to suggest that school education is an important mechanism to promote formal ideology. I think the author's overly sharp distinction between formal and informal ideology obscures a more precise understanding of CCP ideology as a political discourse that permeates Chinese society.

Nevertheless, I would not hesitate to recommend Dr. Zeng's much needed work to scholars of Chinese politics and public administration.

Zhonghua Gu
Book Review: The China Model:
Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy
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Daniel A. Bell, *The China Model: Political Meritocracy and the Limits of Democracy*

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Zhonghua Gu

Reviewed by: Zhonghua Gu, Western Sydney University, Australia. Email: zhonghugu2-c@my.cityu.edu.hk

The crisis of governance in Western democracies has undermined faith in electoral democracy, and the existing democracies in the Western world no longer set a clear-cut positive model for other countries. The crisis opened the normative space for political alternatives such as political meritocracy. The literature regarding political governance in East Asia is not scarce. However, there is a dearth of contemporary political theorizing about political meritocracy.

Bell's *The China Model* is a notable output in this field. This book's central concern is how to maximize the advantages and minimize the disadvantages of a political system that aims to select and promote political leaders of superior virtue and ability, particularly in the contemporary Chinese context.

This book consists of six chapters. The first chapter begins with outlining four major flaws of democracy, which Bell calls "tyrannies". They are: (1) the majority oppressing minorities by enacting bad policies; (2) economic power exerting disproportionate influence at the expense of the majority; (3) voters using the government to exploit non-voters, including future generations; and (4) the publicly competitive political process disrupting society through competition for votes. Bell concludes that electoral democracy can exacerbate rather than alleviate social conflict. In this sense, Bell argues, China's political model has some practical advantages, in terms of reducing social conflicts.

The second and third chapters look into the pros and cons of implementation of political meritocracy in China. Chapter 2 points out the competencies that political leaders should have. It argues that abilities, social skills, and virtues matter most and are used as a standard for evaluating China's existing meritocratic system. Bell then presents several unique and important observations on Chinese-style political meritocracy. Chapter 3 discusses three key problems associated with the implementation of political meritocracy: (1) rulers chosen on the basis of their superior ability are likely to abuse

their power; (2) political hierarchies may hinder and undermine social mobility; (3) the questionable legitimacy of the system to those outside the power structure.

The fourth chapter investigates three different models of “democratic meritocracy”. These models aim to reconcile a meritocratic mechanism with a democratic one. The author argues that a vertical model, with political meritocracy at the level of central government and democracy at the local level, is best.

The concluding chapter sketches out three basic planks of the China model. The author summarizes the principles of the Chinese model of democratic meritocracy as “democracy at the bottom, experimentation in the middle, and meritocracy at the top” (p.180). Bell also tries to illustrate the gap between the ideal and the actual. For example, he points out there is a substantial gap between reality and the ideal in village-level elections. “Bribery situation is grave and seriously harms the impartiality of elections” (p.189). Free and fair elections need to be promoted through the enhanced use of nomination procedures, competitiveness and secret balloting.

It is questionable whether the model would transfer to a country with a different political culture, as the China model can only be implemented by a ruling organization similar to the CCP. Even within the Chinese regime, this model has induced many social conflicts. As social problems such as corruption, the widening gap between the rich and the poor, power abuse by political officials, harsh measures to deal with political dissent, and religious repression become worse, the Chinese are requiring more democratic participation at the middle and top levels.

To sum up, The China Model provides an empirical account of China’s political meritocracy. It does devote much-needed attention to an otherwise overlooked alternative to democracy. But there is no in-depth research into (nor even mention of) party structure and its relationship to economic interests, which is key element when we talk about China’s development. This book is worth reading for those who are interested in understanding China’s political meritocracy and its mechanism in China.