A Probe into China’s Public Administration Education and the Construction of the Subject of Public Administration

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China is in transition from its traditional planned economy to a market economy. It has reached a knowledge-economy and information-networks stage. Due to the trends of integration of international economy and market globalization, our public administration education and the construction of the subject of public administration face a lot of opportunities and challenges.

The main task facing the field is to ensure that public administration education is properly conducted and that the field itself is properly defined (Wang, 1988). The following is my personal opinion on this matter, which I hope can serve as a reference for experts and students alike.

The Resumption, Reconstruction and Development of the Study of Public Administration in China

In China, the subject of public administration began to be taught in 1904, but by 1952 the study of public administration was rejected due to prejudice in departmental reshuffling. It was discontinued for the next 30 years. After the policy of reform and opening to the outside in March 1979, it was pointed out by Deng Xiaoping (1994) that the study of political science, law, sociology and world politics have been neglected for many years in the past, and that the missed lessons should be made up as soon as possible. Then began the springtime for public administration education and the construction of the subject.

The resumption, reconstruction and development of the study of public administration owe its reasons to two factors. First, as the study of public administration is a branch of political science, the reconstruction and development of political science helped do the same for public administration.

One of the events that helped ensure public administration’s return is when, in 1982, Professor Xia Shuzhang’s articles appeared in the People’s Daily publicly appealing for putting the study of public administration into the agenda. Also in 1982, China’s Political Science Academy entrusted Fudan University to organize a national political science training class with public administration as its main subject.

Two years later, the general office of State Council and the Ministry of Personnel held a national seminar for the study of public administration — an important event in the establishment of the study of public administration in China. During this meeting, the study of public administration was raised as a comprehensive

Abstract: China is in transition from a traditional planned economy to a market economy. It has reached the knowledge economy and information networks stage. This paper discusses the resumption, reconstruction, and development of the study of public administration in China. It also explores the construction of the subject of administration in China.
subject, which is a breakthrough compared with the traditional mode of separating public administration from administrative law in the West. It is also a breakthrough in widening the area of the study of public administration and opening up a vast prospect for establishing public administration with Chinese characteristics.

Second, the resumption, reconstruction, and development of the study of public administration were prompted by the need to build on a socialism that was particularly Chinese in character. The most fundamental task of socialism is developing productivity. All efforts of reform strive to manage the economy to prompt the progress of productivity (Lin, 1989). It is also the fundamental task for the administrative management of a socialist country.

The practical economic progress of countries throughout the world demonstrates that the most important conditions for developing productivity are advanced science and technologies and advanced and scientific management. Backward administrative management cannot bring forward advanced productivity. Therefore, it is urgent for forces of economic reform to utilize management science consciously and positively and to cultivate administrative management personnel in a planned way. It is under this social background that the study of public administration can become one of the most popular subjects in social science, whether it is a practical question about reform or in the area of public administrative education and the construction of the subject.

The resumption and development of the study of administration has experienced two stages. Each stage lasted ten years and had different emphases and characteristics.

During the 1980s, the study of public administration in China was in a process of resumption. Relevant academic organizations and structures were being reconstructed and relevant academic activities were unfolding. This laid a foundation for the development of the study of administration. During this initial stage, a research group was formed, composed of theoretical and practical researchers. This group established national and regional academic and research organizations. Many colleges and universities have enrolled students into newly established departments of public administration. A large amount of academic work and theses have emerged, and the academic exchange has been unfolding on all levels, including many international academic meetings.

As far as the construction and research of the subject of administration are concerned, the study of the category and system of the administration is the main subject for the resumption and reconstruction of the administration at this stage. The category and the system referred to here are not that of the subject of administration but that of the theory of administration. After its resumption as a subject and its reconstruction as a major, the most urgent task for the study of public administration is to study the object, category, and system of the theory. This study should be done through academic exchange, and by publishing teaching materials, which sort out and standardize academic reports.

Progress and development in this study should be reflected mainly by the following two aspects.

It is argued that administration is a field of science. The establishment of this ideal has changed the incorrect opinion considering administration only as logistic work and administrative management personnel as "Jacks of all trades but masters of none." It has also explored the logical starting point and main content of administration, indicating that the basic categories and principles include administrative environment, functions, organization, personnel administration, leadership, execution, supervision, information, coordination, financial administration, organizational management, efficiency, culture, development, reform and so forth. Thus, it has formed the basic category and framework of the study of administration.

The goal is to establish a theoretical system of administration of Chinese characteristics. Under the general direction of building socialism of a Chinese...
character, many believe that the same can be done for
the field of administration. While absorbing and diges-
ting the theories and experiences of administration from
abroad, China should place emphasis on summing up
its own experience in administrative management.
China should also emphasize studying the practical
issues of administrative reform. It should also study
administrative management thinking and experience of
collective leadership, including its representative fig-
ures, since China’s new democratic revolution has ini-
tially explored the theoretical system of administration
of a Chinese character.

The study of the above two aspects plays an im-
portant role in prompting the resumption and development
of the administrative science of our country.

It should be noted that at this stage of the construc-
tion and study of administration, there are still quite a
few difficult problems that remain to be solved; how-
ever, the target of setting up the theoretical system of
the administration of Chinese characteristics has been
put forward. The existing theoretical system does not
give expression to Chinese characteristics since it has a
striking contrast with actual practice. Also, the system
of administration as a subject remains to be established.

If the 1980s saw the beginning for China’s adminis-
tration science (Wang, 1988), the 1990s was a period of
further development of administrative education and
the construction of its subject. By the end of 2000,
China had made considerable progress toward cultiva-
ing graduate students in this field. During the 90s, three
institutions offered the doctoral degree and 21 offered
the master’s degree. Also, the MPA has been examined
and approved by the appropriate administrative depart-
ment and the recruitment of students will come soon
(Lin, 1989). The Ministry of Education has also
approved the establishment of the administrative man-
agement research center in Zhongshan University, a
training and research base of administrative science
unique to China.

Compared with the 1980s, the study of administra-
tion in the 1990s was characterized by its model trans-
formation. A model can show the theory of a system, a
kind of basic concept, a sort of methodology, a con-
crete means for studying. The model transformation
here is the transformation of the value tropism, method
of analysis, and concept of the administration. Many
new and valuable opinions are put forward, and quite a
few disciplinary theories are extracted. The study of the
basic theories has gone deep into all the special fields
of the administrative management, and the branch sub-
jects of administration have been systematically identi-
fied.

Furthermore, the study of the basic theories and
research methods are closely linked with relevant sci-
cences such as political science, law, sociology, eco-
nomics, management science, psychology, etc. The
system of the subject of administration of Chinese
characteristics and the construction of its subject have
been further developed in the process of process of
such probing.

The Principles of the Construction of the
Subject of Administration in China

Administration is a subject for studying the law of
administrative management, a subject of high utility
(Huntington, 1993). Administration education is car-
ried out with the construction of the administration
subject as its backup force. Therefore, it is especially
important to reinforce the construction of the adminis-
tration subject (Huntington, 1989).

There are various ways to construct the administra-
tion subject. But they should be adopted only when
they are applicable. The main principles include the
following:

The Principle of Directive Function of the Theories

Frank J. Goodnow, the American expert of adminis-
tration science, thinks that politics reflects the will of a
state, and the administration reflects the execution of
the will (Goodnow, 1900). Administration is the execu-
tion of public power by the government in the name of
the state. Therefore, the dominant ideology and theo-
ries in the state restrict the study of administrative sci-
ence. China is a state established and developed on the
basis of Marxism, Mao Zedong thought and Deng
Xiaoping’s theories. Concepts such as the theory of
probity and high efficiency, the theory of the public
servant, the theory of the division and interaction of the
power of the state organs, the theory of the administra-

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tive legal system, the theory of administrative reform and development are bases for structuring the theoretical system of the administration and for constructing the subject of administration.

The Principle of Having the Administration of Chinese Characteristics

Resumption, reconstruction and development of administration as a subject is far from mature in its development. As far as the administrative science itself is concerned (Osborne, and Gaebler, 1996), it has the generality and the important characteristics of mingling with accretion of many other fields of science. Therefore, the system of the administration subject will have to study the administration of other countries, and will have to learn from and absorb the achievements of other countries in the administration field. It is especially necessary to link the administration of China with those of the developed countries in this study. It is a must to emphasize the development mechanism of mingling with and accretion of the system of the subject. It is an important precondition for the development of administration. However, it should also be noted that we cannot find from the models of the outside world all the answers directly relevant to our practice. Even on some issues similar to those in the West, analysis should be made of the theories and research so as to make them adapt to practical conditions in our country.

This analysis should discourage the manner of applying the genres and theories of the administration of the West mechanically to the practice of China. Woodrow Wilson investigated western countries at the end of the 19th century, especially the history of the administrative management of the French and German governments, so as to view the administration of Britain and America from another angle. Much was learned from the advanced experiences of Germany and France, but it was combined with localized experience to adapt it to the specific needs of the United States.

The method most adapted to America is that of comparison in the research. But this comparison must be based on the concrete conditions of the polities in the United States. Namely, it is necessary to adhere to the characteristics of the United States while learning from the other countries. This attitude is worth learning for the research workers of China (Huntington, 1993).

The Principle of Standardization

Administration exists as a subject; it will certainly assume administrative affairs and relevant laws as its object of study. It has its specific category and the system of methods and its relative independence and stability. Therefore, administrative science should have its inherent law of academic research. Actually, all the research activities in administrative science are carried out in its inherent law. It should discard the manner of simplifying and vulgarizing administration. Without academic standardization, it is impossible to have the manner of preciseness and a scientific system of the subject (Noose, 1994).

The Main Content of the Construction of the Administration Subject

In my opinion, the most urgent issue for the administration subject in China is to strengthen the construction of administration research groups, subject construction, and the construction of the teaching materials (Noose, 1994).

On the Construction of the Administration Research Groups

In order to face the government, the society and the need for training of the administrative personnel, the research groups and the teaching groups of the administration should strengthen the links with the administrative departments. For this purpose, it is necessary to invite those who have both practical experience and considerable theoretical knowledge to take the post of advisors or part-time professors in research organizations or in universities and colleges. On the other hand, it should also be encouraged that the research workers in the research organizations and universities go into the administrative departments for actual practice, arranging for them in a planned way to take part-time
posts in administrative departments so that they can work directly as analysts or consultants for policy making.

These two methods will help to allow the theoretical research field, teaching groups, the political field and enterprises to benefit from each other. This is a plus for optimizing administration research groups and for making the public administrative practice more scientific.

On the Construction of the Subject

The courses of administration should be prepared to meet the modern needs of the management of the socialist market economy, prepared for having future administrative personnel equipped with the needed knowledge and prepared to meet the requirements of training personnel of different levels. It should not be limited to only one mode. On this aspect, I think the experience of the West can serve as valuable reference for us. (1) While they have the basic courses in common, each college and university has its own specialty. For example, some universities emphasize the administration of the city, while some others emphasize the administration in the rural areas, and some lay emphasis on the interaction of the courses. (2) All the universities lay emphasis on the study of finance. Public finance has always been a direction of research for administrative science (Ji, 1996). Correspondingly, the courses of economics, public finance, accounting, and auditing have taken a considerable proportion of the courses of administration in the West. (3) The education in western administration lays special importance on the training of public policy. Among the courses, there is a considerable portion for the teaching of public policy and the relevant analysis. (4) The teaching in western administrative science covers a wide range of science and knowledge (Steigrichius, 1988). It is not just limited to the direction of the political sciences or that of administrative science. The western countries regard administrative science as a highly open subject, making administrative science a research realm mingled and infiltrated with many other subjects (Kast, 1985).

In view of the present condition of the construction of the administration subject, it is important to go beyond the dichotomy between politics and administration, mingling administrative science interactively with many other subjects (Web, 1987). Establishing public administration as a sub-discipline of public management in the current Chinese educational system, its system of courses should reflect the mingling and interaction with many other subjects, face the areas related to the public interest, public policy, and public management. This is the issue to be dealt with in strengthening and perfecting the construction of the administration subject under new historical conditions.

It is also important to go beyond the traditional academic prejudice and give attention to practical and technical courses. Under the conditions of the socialist market economy, the micro-administrative function of the government has been weakening, while the public administrative function of the society is increasing (Medbrom, 1995). The society has an increasing demand for the technical personnel in the special administrative areas and department administration. In order to make the students meet the requirements of the social development, it is necessary to increase the proportion of courses, such as administrative result appraisal technique, public policy analysis, and public budgeting (Mephis, 1998), accounting in government departments, auditing in government departments and CIS of public relations of the government departments, while raising the level of practical courses.

It is important to overcome closed thinking, and to establish open courses that both adapt to the Chinese characteristics and yet also agree with international standards. This means going beyond the simplified and uniform mode of training courses. It should be encouraged that each university and college has its own characteristics in the setting of the courses. Meanwhile, the courses of different levels of difficulty should be set for training different levels of administrative personnel, according to the specific length of period of training (Nooze, 1994).

On the construction of the training materials, it is necessary to organize for rewriting the training materials according to the new situations and latest developments. The construction of the training materials reflects the target, specifications and quality of the public administration education. The quality of the training materials reflects the degree of maturity and perfection.
of the subject. The training materials should not only reflect the training and requirements of the quality of the students, but also reflect the training and requirement of the actual ability and skills of the students. The complete content of the administrative science should be the administrative principles and the administrative skills and methods integrated under the administrative principles. It should include both principles and practical methods. Judging from the present training materials, which give rise to teaching at random, the existing training materials are old ones with the knowledge content outdated. Although some materials have undergone rewriting and publishing, there has been no major change. The theories make up a considerably large proportion, while practical operations make up a small proportion. All the materials, more or less, have the same problem in emphasizing theories while neglecting methods and skills. In more detail, the materials emphasize the explanation of the concepts and principles and define the quality of problems, but they are brief on practical issues. We rarely see the highly qualified training materials that are rich in explaining practical examples.

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References


