

Public Administration Research Issues in China: Evidence from Content Analysis of Leading Chinese Public Administration Journals

JOSEPH Y. S. CHENG AND LUCIA Q. LU

One stream of study proposes that political monism and the monopolization of administrative power are sufficient conditions for the malfunctioning of an administrative system, and China is a case in point. This article offers a supplementary explanation which has been overlooked by researchers: that problematic Chinese public administration (PA) research directed at theory-building and problem-solving has been a critical factor in reinforcing bureaucratic malfunctioning. This article first reviews the development of Chinese PA as an academic discipline, then highlights the

JOSEPH Y. S. CHENG (鄭宇碩) is chair professor of political science and coordinator of the Contemporary China Research Project, City University of Hong Kong. He is the founding editor of *The Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences* and *The Journal of Comparative Asian Development*. He has published widely on political development in China and Hong Kong, Chinese foreign policy, and local government in southern China. His e-mail address is <cccrc@cityu.edu.hk>.

LUCIA Q. LU (盧琴) is a recipient of a national scholarship of China to pursue doctoral study at the School of Public Affairs, Arizona State University. She has already published seven refereed journal articles on public management, public administration education and reform, and NGOs. Her current research interests include local government reform and public management paradoxes. She can be reached at <luciaqlu@yahoo.com.cn>.

*This article is a substantially revised and expanded version of a paper delivered at the conference "Public Administration Research and Education in China Today," jointly organized by Fudan University and the American Society for Public Administration, held in Shanghai, September 14-15, 2007.

©Institute of International Relations, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan (ROC).

most critical issues in Chinese PA research. This is followed by a report of the content analysis of articles published in five leading Chinese PA journals that documents the various defects and shortcomings of Chinese PA research, suggesting that the Chinese PA community lacks the capacity to use sophisticated methodology to develop indigenous theories to account for and inform PA practices. As a result of this insufficient capacity, it has not been possible to modify imported innovations and practices so as to produce desirable reform effects, and this has reinforced the malfunctioning of the bureaucracy.

KEYWORDS: applied research; basic research; bureaucracy; public administration; theory-building.

* * *



China has developed rapidly since Deng Xiaoping (鄧小平) introduced major reforms in 1978. In 2007, its gross domestic product (GDP) reached US\$36,695.59 billion,¹ its foreign exchange reserves amounted to US\$15,282.49 billion,² and its annual government revenue totaled US\$7,809.41 billion,³ while between 1978 and 2007, the number of people living below the poverty line decreased from 250 million to 14.79 million.⁴ However, these and other impressive achievements, such as completing a spacewalk and hosting the Olympics in 2008, and honoring the World Trade Organization (WTO) treaty, are tainted by such problems as corruption, human rights abuses, and ongoing social unrest.

Current research shows that the malfunctioning of the state bureaucracy has been a prime cause of some major economic, political, and social problems in China. For example, a recent report indicates that such local

¹National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China, http://www.219.235.129.54/cx/table/table_sc.jsp?bh=000000000007821&dzm=000000000 (accessed May 3, 2008).

²State Administration of Foreign Exchange of China, http://www.safe.gov.cn/model_safe/tjsj/tjsj_detail.jsp?ID=11040000000000000,18&id=5 (accessed May 3, 2008).

³NBS of China, http://www.219.235.129.54/cx/table/table_sc.jsp?bh=000000000007910&dzm=000000000 (accessed May 3, 2008).

⁴Hao Yalin and Dong Jun, "Zhongguo nongcun juedui pinkun renkou yi jianzhi 1,500 wan yixia" (China's rural absolute poor population has been reduced to less than 15 million), Xinhuanet.com, July 8, 2008, http://www.news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-07/08/content_8510642.htm (accessed July 12, 2008).

governance reforms as "offloading local government enterprises onto private or 'corporate' entities" and the "rationalization of local bureaucracy through downsizing and mergers,"⁵ have only served to create incentives for local officials to engage in rent-seeking and utility-maximizing behaviors. Other reports have documented similar problems: corruption has become endemic due to the unchecked power vested in the bureaucracy, and rent-seeking is observable in every public entity, including schools, hospitals, and social security offices.⁶

Corruption and rent-seeking are also present in Russia,⁷ which, just like China, is a Marxist-Leninist state in reform. One may be tempted to conclude that political monism and the monopolization of administrative power are sufficient conditions for the malfunctioning of a state administrative system.⁸ This article, nonetheless, offers a supplementary explanation which has been overlooked by researchers: the failure of Chinese public administration (PA) research to successfully address theory-building and problem-solving. This has been critical in reinforcing the malfunctioning of the bureaucracy.

This article first reviews the development of Chinese PA as an academic discipline, and then highlights the most critical issues of Chinese PA research. This is followed by an analysis of the content of articles published in five leading Chinese PA journals that documents the various defects and shortcomings of Chinese PA research. The analysis suggests that the Chinese PA community lacks the capacity to use sophisticated

⁵Janice L. Caulfield, "Local Government Reform in China: A Rational Actor Perspective," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 72, no. 2 (June 2006): 254.

⁶See, for example, King W. Chow and Laura Q. Luo, "Contending Approaches and Models for Rationalizing Chinese Public Organizations: The Case of Western China," *Public Organization Review* 7, no. 1 (March 2007): 69-91; and Stephen K. Ma, *Administrative Reform in Post-Mao China* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1996).

⁷Debra W. Stewart, Norman A. Sprinthall, and Jackie D. Kem, "Moral Reasoning in the Context of Reform: A Study of Russian Officials," *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 3 (May/June 2002): 282-97.

⁸See, for example, Fox Butterfield, *China Alive in a Bitter Sea* (New York: Times Book, 1982); and Hon S. Chan and King W. Chow, "Public Management and Policy in Western China: Metapolicy, Tacit Knowledge, and Implications," *American Review of Public Administration* 37, no. 4 (December 2007): 479-98.

methodology to develop indigenous theories to account for and inform PA practices. As a result of this insufficient capacity, it has not been possible to modify imported innovations and practices to produce desirable reform effects, and this has caused bureaucratic malfunctioning.

The Development of Public Administration as an Academic Discipline in China

There are various types of public administration systems.⁹ In the case of China, a Marxist-Leninist state caught in a development stream,¹⁰ the administrative system plays a more critical role in state strategic development and governance than it does in the Western constitutional democracies or in the military regimes of some developing countries. As such, the value and significance of PA theories in the development of China in general and its administrative practices in particular are obvious. The development of PA as an academic discipline in China, however, has been problematic.

Before the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) came to power, American influence was pervasive in Chinese academic life, and American PA inevitably became a legitimate field of study. American-trained Chinese scholars offered courses such as Introductory Public Administration and Organization Theory in major Chinese universities. These courses, reflecting American theories concerning the nature of PA current at the time, were politics-oriented and focused primarily on the society-bureaucracy interface.

After 1949, major universities continued to offer PA courses. In 1952, however, Mao Zedong (毛澤東) and his followers instructed universities to eliminate PA courses from the curriculum, deeming that administrative theories based on capitalist values were irrelevant to the pursuit of socialism. PA as a field of study was nonexistent between 1952 and 1981,

⁹Klaus König, "On the Typology of Public Administration," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 69, no. 4 (December 2003): 449-62.

¹⁰Chan and Chow, "Public Management and Policy," 479-98.

and scholars shifted their teaching and research focus from public administration theories to other areas, such as political economy, Marxism-Leninism, and history.

Since the late 1970s, the shift of policy focus from class struggle to economic development has highlighted the severity of bureaucratic problems. During an enlarged work meeting of the CCP Politburo convened on August 18, 1980, Deng Xiaoping savagely criticized the performance of the state bureaucracy, identifying such problems as authoritarianism, routinism, elitism, corruption, the shirking of responsibilities, deceit, laziness, talentlessness, formalism, red tape, nepotism, and the seeking of special privileges. To Deng, the bureaucracy presented a major obstacle in the development of China, and the country could not be modernized unless bureaucratic problems were overcome.¹¹

As reformers began to look for remedies, PA scholars were eager to salvage their discipline. Xia Shuzhang (夏書章), who received his MPA degree from Harvard University in the 1940s, took the lead in an article in the January 29, 1982, edition of *Remin ribao* (人民日報, People's Daily, the official newspaper of the CCP) in which he called for a systematic study of PA. In December 1983 and January 1984, Xia offered a two-month PA training program in Shanghai for university teachers interested in the subject, attended by close to forty scholars. Subsequent developments indicated the significance and success of Xia's program: its participants openly advocated the establishment of PA as an academic discipline, various cadre training colleges and major universities began to offer PA courses or PA as a major, and many provinces established PA associations.¹²

Chinese scholars are generally pleased with the rapid development of PA in the past two decades.¹³ However, their efforts were directed only at

¹¹King W. Chow, "Public Administration as an Academic Discipline in China," in *Handbook of Comparative and Development Administration*, ed. Ali Farazmand (New York: Marcel Dekker, 1991), 409-20.

¹²For details, see, for example, Cheng F. Zhang, "Public Administration in China," in *Public Administration in China*, ed. Miriam K. Mills and Stuart S. Nagel (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood, 1993), 3-20.

¹³*Ibid.*

the promotion of the discipline in China. Scholars focused on (1) the introduction of PA "theories" imported from Western democracies, particularly the United States; (2) the prescription of institutional and administrative arrangements from the CCP perspective; and (3) the description of officially prescribed practices of management in state organs.¹⁴

The Critical Issues in Chinese Public Administration Research

Since the late 1990s, some Chinese scholars have begun to pay attention to various critical issues in PA. For example, Bo Guili (薄貴利) identified ten major problems in the development of PA as a field of study in China, including lack of concern for theory-building and the application of descriptive analysis;¹⁵ Zhang Mengzhong (張夢中) and Marc Holzer reviewed the causes of the failure to develop research methodology in the field of PA in China, underscoring scholars' lack of training in the use of sophisticated methods;¹⁶ Yuan Dayi (袁達毅) identified six pitfalls in Chinese PA research, among them a bias toward qualitative, macro-level analysis and a lack of interest in trying to understand the real world of administrative practice.¹⁷ The most recent critique was presented by Ma Jun (馬駿) who pinpointed four major problems with research that need to be remedied: a primary focus on the importation of non-Chinese theories, a lack of methodological rigor, the absence of a realistic understanding among researchers of how the real world of PA works, and insufficiently relevant research findings which as a consequence cannot be used to inform practice.¹⁸

¹⁴See note 11 above.

¹⁵Bo Guili, "Chinese Public Administration: Problems, Challenges, and Solutions," *Zhongguo xingzheng guanli* (Chinese Public Administration) (Beijing), 1998, no. 12:4-7.

¹⁶Zhang Mengzhong and Marc Holzer, "Chinese Public Administration Research Methodology: Preface on Special Column," *Zhongguo xingzheng guanli*, 2001, no. 8:40-41.

¹⁷Yuan Dayi, "The Crisis and the Way out of Chinese Public Administration," *Jiangxi xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of the Jiangxi Institute of Administrative Science) (Nanchang), 2002, no. 2:17-19.

¹⁸Ma Jun, "Reflections on Chinese Public Administration Research: The Courage of Facing

These scholars' critiques, however, were based on their personal observations and/or their reviews of the literature. Empirical verification was absent. The work of Dong Jianxin (董建新), Bai Rui (白銳), and Liang Maochun (梁茂春),¹⁹ and that of He Yanling (何豔玲)²⁰ represented attempts to fill the gap. Dong, Bai, and Liang reviewed the content of articles published between January 2000 and June 2004 in five academic journals: *Chinese Public Administration (CPA)* (*Zhongguo xingzheng guanli*, 中國行政管理), *Fudan University Journal* (*Fudan daxue xuebao*, 復旦大學學報), *Peking University Journal* (*Beijing daxue xuebao*, 北京大學學報), *Wuhan University Journal* (*Wuhan daxue xuebao*, 武漢大學學報), and *Zhongshan University Journal* (*Zhongshan daxue xuebao*, 中山大學學報). Their objective was to examine progress in the application of methodology in recent years. A total of 855 PA articles were analyzed. They found that 479 of the articles (56.02 percent) focused on concept clarification, 335 articles (39.2 percent) on problem delineation, and 41 articles (4.78 percent) dealt with research problems, out of which only 5 articles (0.58 percent) used quantitative methods and 35 (4.2 percent) employed qualitative ones. According to their reasoning, given that PA is a basic science and PA as a field of study has a rather short history in China, it is understandable that most scholarly attention has been focused on the clarification of concepts and the delineation of problems.

In comparison, He Yanling analyzed PA articles published (1) in 1995-2005 in *CPA*, *CASS Journal of Political Science* (*Zhengzhixue yanjiu*, 政治學研究), the *Chinese Journal of Management Science* (*Zhongguo guanli kexue*, 中國管理科學), and the *Journal of Management Sciences in China* (*Guanli kexue xuebao*, 管理科學學報); (2) in 2004-05 in the *Journal*

Problems," *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* (Zhongshan University Journal) (Guangzhou), 2006, no. 5:73-76.

¹⁹Dong Jianxin, Bai Rui, and Liang Maochun, "Analysis of the Methodology in Chinese Public Administration: 2000-2004," *Shanghai xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of the Shanghai Administrative Institute) (Shanghai), 2005, no. 2:50-55.

²⁰He Yanling, "Problems and Methods: Assessment of Chinese Public Administration Research (1995-2005)," *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* (CASS Journal of Political Science) (Beijing), 2007, no. 1:93-104.

of *Public Management* (*Gonggong guanli xuebao*, 公共管理學報) and *Public Management Review* (*Gonggong guanli pinglun*, 公共管理評論); and (3) in 1995-2005 in the Public Administration Section of the Renmin University Archive (hereafter *Renda Fuyin*, 人大複印), which in theory selects journal articles for compilation and storage based on their significance and value. A total of 2,729 articles were analyzed, including 1,608 articles from *CPA* (58.9 percent) and 765 articles from *Renda Fuyin* (28 percent). He Yanling adopted a broader scope than the previous scholars, using ten indicators for her examination of the issues and problems of Chinese PA articles. The key indicators included themes and types of research, epistemic requirements in the neopositivist tradition, and data collection and analysis methods.

He's principal findings included the following: (1) 68.3 percent of the 2,729 articles were written by academics; (2) 28.5 percent of the articles were about administrative reform, and 13.2 percent were on themes of administrative philosophy; (3) 2,579 articles (94.5 percent) adopted a normative approach to discussing issues and prescribing solutions, while 2,638 articles (96.7 percent) used non-empirical methods; and (4) 2.6 percent (72) of the articles dealt with concept clarification and 93.4 percent (2,550) with problem delineation, leaving 3.9 percent (107) on causal analysis.²¹ These findings are generally in line with those presented by Dong, Bai, and Liang, but it should be noted that they classified 56.02 percent of their articles as focusing on concept clarification and only 39.2 percent on problem delineation—this incongruence between the two sets of findings indicates that there may be a serious problem of inter-assessor judgment differences.²²

These two empirical studies furnish a basis for suggesting that PA as an academic discipline in China has yet to come of age, despite the efforts expended over the past three decades.

²¹Ibid.

²²These two reports did not supply information concerning inter-assessor judgment differences, nor did they clearly indicate who had performed the content analysis of the articles.

Nonetheless, in-depth analysis of the methodologies used by Dong, Bai, and Liang and by He Yanling indicates that they are problematic. First, the researchers used a neopositivist approach in analyzing the articles to assess their quality, overlooking other available approaches²³ and the fact that research geared toward problem-solving might be guided by a different set of expectations.²⁴ In other words, if we reject the presumption, suggested by Dong, Bai, and Liang and accepted by He, that PA is a basic science, we might have to take a fresh look at Chinese PA research. Recent research²⁵ has argued that PA is an applied science, with problem-solving as its primary mission. This corresponds to Shangraw and Crow's²⁶ thesis that, based on Herbert Simon's²⁷ understanding of human efforts to create, PA could be considered a design science that prescribes PA systems, institutions, and processes. The adoption of a prescriptive approach in Chinese PA research, as criticized by the aforementioned Chinese scholars, is in fact desirable from the design science perspective. In short, there is a need to reassess the quality of Chinese PA research based on three presumptions: that it is a basic science, an applied science, or both.

Secondly, the research designs employed by Dong, Bai, and Liang and by He were defective. For example, Dong, Bai, and Liang misleadingly suggested that empirical analysis is the antithesis of atheoretical study. Their inclusion in their content analysis of articles from university journals created a biased sample as university journals primarily publish work produced by their respective faculty members, which is therefore not representative of scholarship in general. Then, He mistakenly selected *Renda Fuyin* articles for analysis—knowledgeable scholars would be prompt to

²³Jay D. White, "On the Growth of Knowledge in Public Administration Review," *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 1 (January/February 1986): 15-24.

²⁴John Furlong and Alis Oancea, "Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice-Based Educational Research: A Framework for Discussion," Working Paper (London: Department of Educational Studies, Oxford University, 2005).

²⁵King W. Chow, "On the Distinctive Competence in Public Administration as a Field of Study," *Qiusuo* (Explore), 2005, no. 6:87-88.

²⁶Ralph F. Shangraw, Jr. and Michael M. Crow, "Public Administration as a Design Science," *Public Administration Review* 49, no. 2 (March/April 1989): 153-58.

²⁷Herbert A. Simon, *Sciences of the Artificial* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1969).

point out that *Renda Fuyin* does not select articles on the basis of merit as its selectors lack the expertise in individual fields necessary to make such a selection. To rectify these errors, it would be necessary to exclude articles published in *Renda Fuyin* and other university journals.

In sum, these studies highlight various critical issues in Chinese PA research, but they are either impressionistic or lack methodological rigor.

Content Analysis of Leading Chinese PA Journals

The review above suggests that it is necessary to reassess the quality of Chinese PA research based on the presumption that it can be a basic science, an applied science, or both. Such reassessment is the object of the study we report below. The purpose is to find out whether or not basic and applied research in PA in China is up to standard. Being sub-standard in either category has different implications and the remedies are inevitably different. Furthermore, the related goals are: (1) to analyze journal articles in order to map out the profile of theory-building and knowledge advancement in PA in China, (2) to identify some patterns of knowledge advancement from a comparative perspective, and (3) to underscore the current deficiencies and issues in basic and applied research and show how remedying them can benefit the development of China.

Sample Selection

In view of the issues and problems in the studies conducted by Dong, Bai, and Liang and by He, this study eliminates from the sample articles published in *Renda Fuyin* and university journals, and focuses on articles published in five leading PA journals: *Chinese Public Administration* (CPA), *CASS Journal of Political Science* (PS), *Management World* (MW) (*Guanli shijie*, 管理世界), the *Journal of the Beijing Administrative Institute* (JBAI) (*Beijing xingzheng xueyuan xuebao*, 北京行政學院學報), and the *Journal of the China National School of Administration* (JCNSA) (*Guojia xingzheng xueyuan xuebao*, 國家行政學院學報), all of which are Chinese Social Sciences Citation Indexed (CSSCI). The rationale is that

these five journals are considered by the Chinese PA community as major forums for scholars and practitioners, thus making them more representative as outlets for research of a theoretical and/or practical significance. In order to devote more time to quality content analysis and to pondering its implications, the researchers looked at articles published in the period 2002-06.

Codebook Development

Based on previous research,²⁸ a codebook for content analysis was tailored-made for the context of Chinese PA (see Appendix 1). The codebook consists of three sections: Section A on common data, Section B on indicators of basic research, and Section C on indicators of applied research, a total of 53 items. To ensure the validity of the indicators and the reliability of the assessment, the researchers arranged for six graduate students majoring in PA to conduct a pilot study, involving the analysis of around 1,800 articles from *CPA* using the draft version of the codebook. Careful analysis of their findings revealed various validity and reliability problems. Inter-assessor reliability was very low—in the neighborhood of

²⁸Guy B. Adams and Jay D. White, "Dissertation Research in Public Administration and Cognate Fields: An Assessment of Methods and Quality," *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 6 (November/December 1994): 565-76. See also notes 23 and 24 above; Robert E. Cleary, "Revisiting the Doctoral Dissertation in Public Administration: An Examination of the Dissertations of 1990," *Public Administration Review* 52, no. 1 (January/February 1992): 55-61; James W. Douglas, "Faculty, Graduate Student, and Graduate Productivity in Public Administration and Public Affairs Programs," *ibid.* 56, no. 5 (September/October 1996): 433-41; Zhiyong Lan and Kathleen K. Anders, "A Paradigmatic View of Contemporary Public Administration Research: An Empirical Test," *Administration and Society* 32, no. 2 (May 2000): 138-65; Howard E. McCurdy and Robert E. Cleary, "Why Can't We Resolve the Research Issue in Public Administration?" *Public Administration Review* 44, no. 1 (January/February 1984): 49-55; James L. Perry and Kenneth L. Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*, 1975-1984," *ibid.* 46, no. 3 (May/June 1986): 215-26; Larry D. Terry, "Reflections and Assessment," *Public Administration Review*, 2000-05," *ibid.* 65, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 643-45; Jay D. White, "Dissertations in Public Administration," *ibid.* 46, no. 3 (May/June 1986): 227-34; Jay D. White, Guy B. Adams, and John P. Forrester, "Knowledge and Theory Development in Public Administration: The Role of Doctoral Education and Research," *ibid.* 56, no. 5 (September/October 1996): 441-52; and Bradley E. Wright, Lepora J. Manigault, and Tamika R. Black, "Quantitative Research Measurement in Public Administration: An Assessment of Journal Publications," *Administration and Society* 35, no. 6 (January 2004): 747-64.

0.16. The researchers then revised the codebook on the basis of the pilot study, rewording the valid indicators with precision and deleting the items that invited subjective assessment. The application of the revised codebook in the analysis then became straightforward, and inter-assessor reliability was established at .80.

The revised codebook also contains three sections (see Appendix 1). The key features are as follows: Section A serves to collect descriptive data about the articles, focusing on authorship, affiliations, funding, themes, scope of analysis, and types of research, totaling 37 items. While most items are self-explanatory, the items "themes of the articles" and "types of research" require explanation. Regarding the former, which is repeated three times in the codebook (see items A 32-34), the classification is supposed to yield a basis for comparison with Perry and Kraemer's²⁹ and Terry's³⁰ classifications and findings. Regarding the item "types of research," instead of using only the basic and applied research distinction (i.e., theoretical analysis and problem-solving-oriented studies), three additional categories are included: (1) theoretical analysis and problem-solving-oriented studies in combination, which is adopted based on the insights of Cheney, Wilhelmsson, and Zorn;³¹ (2) exemplary cases, which are reports about the administrative practices in government agencies; and (3) research on the history of administration or the reporting of Western theories or experiences. This makes five categories in all.

Section B contains indicators of basic research: research methodology employed, methods of empirical analysis used, sources of data, research approaches employed, and qualitative and quantitative methods used. It should be noted that the typical trio of analysis—*theoretical, interpretive, and critical*³²—was not used in the codebook as a classification

²⁹Perry and Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*," 235-39.

³⁰Terry, "Reflections and Assessment," 643-45.

³¹George Cheney, Morgan Wilhelmsson, and Theodore E. Zorn, Jr., "10 Strategies for Engaged Scholarship," *Management Communication Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (August 2002): 92-100.

³²See note 27 above.

scheme. The sole reason was that the preliminary analysis had suggested that too few articles could be considered critique-oriented, while almost all the articles could be classified as interpretive, and there were too few articles that examined or confirmed causal relationships. It would therefore be meaningless to use that classification scheme. Another point deserving attention concerns the research methodology and specific methods of empirical analysis employed (see B1 & B2 in Appendix 1) and the qualitative and quantitative methods used (see B5 & B6). Regarding the former, the indicators were extracted from the journal article content analysis by Perry and Kraemer,³³ so that there would be a basis for comparison. For the latter, the specific qualitative and quantitative methods listed were extracted from Adams and White's codebook,³⁴ the intention being to compare the current research in China with the population of dissertations reviewed by Adams and White in order to shed light on the methodological rigor of Chinese scholars, most of whom are not doctoral degree holders.

Section C contains items that reflect expectations in applied science. Originally the selection of the items was based on the researchers' review of the peer review guidelines of various applied studies journals in the fields of engineering and education. Indicators were also selected from Furlong and Oancea's³⁵ applied and performance-based research quality assessment framework. A total of 30 indicators were chosen. As mentioned above, the researchers had arranged for six PA graduate students to participate in the pilot study, analyzing around 1,800 articles from *CPA*. The inter-assessor reliability was very low, as many of the items in Section C were vague or were open to subjective interpretation. Twenty defective items were cut, leaving nine items concerning the research approaches employed and the article's relevance to the advancement of theoretical knowledge, as well as practicality, specificity, operationalization, broader application, and practitioner reflection.

³³Perry and Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*," 235-39.

³⁴Adams and White, "Dissertation Research in Public Administration," 565-78.

³⁵See note 24 above.

Principal Descriptive Findings

The population of articles analyzed comprises 2,210 papers published in *CPA* (1,123 articles; 50.8 percent), *PS* (145 articles; 6.6 percent), *MW* (147 articles; 6.7 percent), *JBAI* (300 articles; 13.6 percent), and *JCNBSA* (495 articles; 22.4 percent). The analysis indicates that 1,440 articles (65.2 percent) are related to basic research; 452 articles (20.5 percent) are applied research; 145 (6.6 percent) combine basic and applied research; 56 (2.5 percent) are exemplary cases; and 117 (5.3 percent) are related to history or Western theories or experiences.

These 2,210 articles comprise those prepared by seven organizations (0.3 percent) and 50 research teams (2.3 percent), with the remainder being the work of individuals (97.4 percent). Of the 2,153 articles prepared by individuals, 1,553 (72.1 percent) are sole-authored, 506 (23.5 percent) are written by two authors, 73 (3.4 percent) by three, 17 (0.8 percent) by four, 2 (0.1 percent) by five, and 2 (0.1 percent) by six. The mean is 1.30 authors per article. The mean is low compared with, for example, that of *Strategic Management Journal* (2.19), the fifth-ranked management journal in the world,³⁶ revealing that Chinese PA scholars are less likely to team up to achieve synergy.

When the high percentage of sole-authorship is related to funding sources, which are acknowledged in only 261 articles (12.1 percent), one may hypothesize that individuals are less likely to succeed in getting research funding even though they have the competence to publish in premier journals.

Of the 2,210 articles published in 2002-2006 in the five journals, only 272 articles (12.3 percent) acknowledge funding. When analyzing these funded reports, special attention was paid to their quality in comparison with other articles. Our general impression, based on findings reported below, is that funded research tends to produce more quality reports. This may have to do with the availability of resources to enhance the quality of

³⁶Steven E. Phelan, Manuel Ferreira, and Rommel Salvador, "The First Twenty Years of the *Strategic Management Journal*," *Strategic Management Journal* 23, no. 12 (December 2002): 1161-68.

researchers' work or with the initial screening effect of funding that helps researchers commence their work at a higher quality level.

Of the 1,770 articles (80 percent) that show author affiliation and job status, 51 percent of the authors are shown as affiliated to universities and colleges. These figures serve to substantiate a proposition that academics are the main contributors to the advancement of professional knowledge in the field, be it in China³⁷ or in the United States.³⁸

When the themes of the Chinese PA articles are compared with those of the articles published in 1975-84 in *Public Administration Review* (*PAR*) analyzed by Perry and Kraemer³⁹ (see table 1), it is noted that many themes receive similar attention from Chinese and American researchers in terms of the percentage of coverage. A few, however, differ substantially. For example, the themes of administrative theory and public management receive 21.2 percent and 38.0 percent coverage, respectively, in our sample, as compared with 11.8 percent and 12.5 percent, respectively, in *PAR*—this may have to do with the fact that China has been going through a process of administrative reform since the late 1990s, and thus more articles in Chinese PA journals are devoted to administrative management reform. Then, whereas the themes of public policy, planning, and finance receive 17.8 percent, 12.5 percent, and 10.5 percent coverage, respectively, in the *PAR* sample, they receive only 6.5 percent, 1.4 percent, and 1.5 percent coverage in the Chinese sample. This may be caused by the tradition of specialization in China, modeled on that of the Soviet Union in the 1950s: that is, many substantive policy studies are often reported in specific policy journals, while articles on public budgeting and finance are published in economic and finance journals.

When the themes of the articles are compared with Terry's⁴⁰ editorial report on the distribution of *PAR* articles according to different themes

³⁷See note 20 above.

³⁸Lan and Anders, "A Paradigmatic View of Contemporary Public Administration Research," 138-65.

³⁹Perry and Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*," 235-39.

⁴⁰Terry, "Reflections and Assessment," 643-45.

Table 1
Themes of the Articles in Comparison with PAR Articles in 1975-84

Theme	1975-84 PAR articles*		2002-06 CPA, JBAI, JCNSA, MW, and PS articles	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Administrative Theory	34	11.8	468	21.2
Public Management	36	12.5	839	38.0
Citizen Participation	15	5.2	62	2.8
Public Policy	51	17.8	143	6.5
Planning	36	12.5	31	1.4
Accountability	14	4.9	29	1.3
Personnel	32	11.1	152	6.9
Finance	30	10.5	34	1.5
Intergovernmental Relations	15	5.2	25	1.1
Urban and Regional Government	4	1.4	96	4.3
State/Provincial Government	2	0.7	6	0.3
Federal/Central Government	4	1.4	5	0.2
Other	14	4.9	320	14.5
Total	287	100.0	2,210	100.0

KEY: *PAR*: *Public Administration Review*; *CPA*: *Chinese Public Administration (Zhongguo xingzheng guanli)*; *JBAI*: *Journal of the Beijing Administrative Institute (Beijing xingzheng xueyuan xuebao)*; *JCNSA*: *Journal of the China National School of Administration (Guojia xingzheng xueyuan xuebao)*; *MW*: *Management World (Guanli shijie)*; and *PS*: *CASS Journal of Political Science (Zhengzhixue yanjiu)*.

*The *PAR* data are adopted from James L. Perry and Kenneth L. Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*, 1975-1984," *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 3 (May/June 1986): 215-26.

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

(see table 2), it is obvious that many themes receive similar attention in the *PAR* articles and from the Chinese PA authors, as indicated by the coverage percentages. Nevertheless, there are differences. First, the themes of citizen/public participation and representative bureaucracy/race/gender are revealing: *PAR* records 4.6 percent and 3.4 percent, respectively, while Chinese PA journals record 2.1 percent and 0.5 percent, respectively. These differences may suggest that Chinese researchers are less concerned

Table 2
Themes of the Articles in Comparison with *PAR* Articles in 2000-05

Theme	1975-84 <i>PAR</i> articles*		2002-06 <i>CPA</i> , <i>JBAI</i> , <i>JCNSA</i> , <i>MW</i> , and <i>PS</i> articles	
	Frequency	Percentage	Frequency	Percentage
Public Management/Management	27	7.7	369	16.7
Comparative/International	24	6.9	68	3.1
<i>PAR</i> /Special Reports	20	5.7	87	3.9
Governance/Democracy/Legal	17	4.9	297	13.4
Performance Management	17	4.9	79	3.6
Reflective Practitioner	17	4.9	43	1.9
Citizen/Public Participation	16	4.6	47	2.1
Public Policy	16	4.6	97	4.4
Budgeting	14	4.0	18	0.8
Human Resource Management	13	3.7	125	5.7
Privatization	12	3.4	23	1.0
Representative Bureaucracy/Race/Gender	12	3.4	10	0.5
Accountability	11	3.1	25	1.1
Local Government	11	3.1	76	3.4
Big Questions	10	2.9	28	1.3
Bureaucracy	10	2.9	27	1.2
Reinventing Government	10	2.9	43	1.9
PA Theory	9	2.6	230	10.4
Research Methodology	9	2.6	13	0.6
Environmental Policy	8	2.3	20	0.9
Federal Government	8	2.3	2	0.1
Nonprofit Management	8	2.3	65	2.9
Technology/E-Government	8	2.3	64	2.9
Homeland Security/Terrorism	7	0.2	29	1.3
Organizational Theory	7	0.2	14	0.6
Public Service	6	1.7	73	3.3
Ethics	5	1.4	72	3.3
PA as an Academic Field	5	1.4	32	1.4
Public and Private Sectors	5	1.4	22	1.0
Leadership	4	1.1	32	1.4
Other	4	1.1	80	3.6
Total	350	100.0	2,210	100.0

*The *PAR* data are adopted from Larry D. Terry, "Reflections and Assessment: *Public Administration Review*, 2000-05," *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 6 (November/December 2005): 643-45.

Note: Percentages may not add up exactly to 100% due to rounding.

with the basic values of citizenship and equality in contemporary PA. Furthermore, Chinese researchers are more interested in public management/management (16.7 percent), PA theory (10.4 percent), and human resource management (5.7 percent), and less attentive to, for example, research methodology (0.6 percent), compared to their American counterparts (7.7 percent, 3.7 percent, and 2.6 percent, respectively).

Regarding the other descriptive findings, where the scope of analysis is concerned, 1,625 articles (73.5 percent) focus on PA in mainland China, 144 (6.5 percent) on other countries and the two special administrative regions (SARs) of China (Hong Kong and Macau), 84 (3.8 percent) on cross-country analysis, and 357 (16.2 percent) have no specific country focus—the content analysis shows that these 357 articles discuss, for example, administrative ethics without giving context-specifics. Among the 228 articles that examine developments, issues, and implications in other countries, the countries most focused on are the United States (21.1 percent), the European countries (14 percent), and Japan (7.5 percent).

The content analysis indicates that almost half of the articles are theory-related—not because Chinese PA authors focus on causality or theory-testing in their studies, but because they tend to include at least one or two theories to guide their discussion. These articles are at best pre-theoretical works (see below for details). With 452 articles (20.5 percent) being oriented toward problem-solving, it appears that Chinese PA researchers tend to concentrate on applied research. When those that combine basic and applied research are taken into consideration, the actual figure is 597 articles (27.0 percent). The content analysis indicates that the combined articles do not come up to the Western standard that Adam, Carrier, and Wilholt⁴¹ have suggested—that is, while theory informs practice, practice should in turn shed light on theory-building. Nonetheless, the authors of these 105 articles do note or explicitly discuss the implications for advancing theoretical knowledge. Without these discussions, the

⁴¹Matthias Adam, Martin Carrier, and Torsten Wilholt, "How to Serve the Customer and Still Be Truthful: Methodological Characteristics of Applied Research," *Science and Public Policy* 33, no. 6 (July 2006): 435-44.

Table 3
Type of Research and Type of Authorship Cross-Tabulation

		Type of authorship			Total
		Individual	Research team	Organization	
Type of research	Theoretical analysis	1,415	23	2	1,440
	Count % within	98.3%	1.6%	0.1%	100.0%
	Type of authorship	65.7%	46.0%	28.6%	65.2%
	Problem-solving-oriented studies	432	16	4	452
	Count % within	95.6%	3.5%	0.9%	100.0%
	Type of authorship	20.1%	32.0%	57.1%	20.5%
	Theory-building and problem-solving-oriented studies	137	8	0	145
	Count % within	94.5%	5.5%	0.0%	100.0%
	Type of authorship	6.4%	16.0%	0.0%	6.6%
	Exemplary cases	53	3	0	56
	Count % within	94.6%	5.4%	0.0%	100.0%
	Type of authorship	2.5%	6.0%	0.0%	2.5%
	Research on administration history or reporting of Western theories/experiences	116	0	1	117
	Count % within	99.1%	0.0%	0.9%	100.0%
	Type of authorship	5.4%	0.0%	14.3%	5.3%
	Total	Count % within	2,153	50	7
	Type of authorship	97.4%	2.3%	0.3%	100.0%

articles could have been classified as applied research.

Regarding the type of authorship, it is found that individual authors tend to write articles that are theory-related, while research teams and organizations tend to publish applied research reports, as table 3 shows. The possibility of solving public problems may itself be an incentive for researchers to join teams in order to achieve the necessary synergy, as public problems are complex and thus demand various areas of expertise. Concerning funding, as table 4 shows, the distribution of funded or unfunded research according to the type of research is remarkably similar, with the exception that 24.8 percent of the funded studies are a combination of

Table 4
Type of Research and Funding Cross-Tabulation

		Funding		Total
		Unfunded	Funded	
Type of research	Theoretical analysis	1,289	151	1,440
	Count % within	89.5%	10.5%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	58.3%	6.8%	65.2%
	Problem-solving-oriented studies	389	63	452
	Count % within	86.1%	13.9%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	17.6%	2.9%	20.5%
	Theory-building and problem-solving-oriented studies	109	36	145
	Count % within	75.2%	24.8%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	4.9%	1.6%	6.6%
	Exemplary cases	50	6	56
	Count % within	89.3%	10.7%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	2.3%	0.3%	2.5%
	Research on administration history or reporting of Western theories/experiences	101	16	117
	Count % within	86.3%	13.7%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	4.6%	0.7%	5.3%
	Total	Count % within	1,938	272
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	87.7%	12.3%	100.0%

basic and applied research. This, again, might be due to the availability of resources or the initial funding screening that helps the researchers add value to their studies.

Finally, as mentioned above, 1,440 articles can be classified as theory-related analyses and 145 fall into the combined basic and applied research category. In this population, 6 articles (0.3 percent of the total) adopt an anthropological approach; 62 (2.8 percent), a historical approach; 38 (1.7 percent), a mathematical approach; 106 (4.8 percent), a legal brief approach; 14 (0.6 percent) use empirical analysis; 12 (0.5 percent) employ heuristic analogy; 94 (4.3 percent) are literature reviews; 776 (35.1 percent) adopt a descriptive approach; and 474 (21.4 percent)

use logical argument, with the last two research approaches comprising the bulk (56.5 percent). In comparison, according to Perry and Kraemer,⁴² the most popular general research approaches used in *PAR* articles in 1975-84 were empirical analysis (151 articles/52.6 percent), logical argument (55 articles/19.2 percent), and legal brief (54 articles/18.8 percent).

Considering that the main approach of American scholars in the period 1975-84 was empirical analysis whereas the Chinese PA researchers under consideration here are still relying on the descriptive approach, it is possible to conclude that the Chinese scholars lag behind their American counterparts by more than two decades. Of course, empirical analysis is not and should not be seen as the sole indicator of research sophistication. In the early 1980s, a paper on dominant logic, written by the Harvard management guru C. K. Prahalad was rejected by the *Strategic Management Journal* for the sole reason that it was not an empirical study. Prahalad insisted and the editor relented. It was eventually commended as the best paper published by the journal in the 1980s.⁴³ Indeed, conceptual papers are sometimes too valuable to be marginalized, even though in these days, many leading journals are placing a premium on empirical research, with empirical papers outnumbering non-empirical papers (by seven to one in the case of the *Strategic Management Journal*).⁴⁴

Key Findings with Important Implications

Regarding the method of analysis, of the 1,585 articles classified as theory-related analysis (1,440) or combined basic and applied research (145), 1,296 articles (81.8 percent) are non-empirical, while 116 articles (7.3 percent) use the case study method, 98 (6.2 percent) use cross-sectional or correlation analysis, 28 (1.8 percent) use structural equations, 8 (0.5 percent) longitudinal analysis, and 18 (1.1 percent) controlled field

⁴²Perry and Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*," 235-39.

⁴³Lynn Perry Wooten, Anne Parmigiani, and Nandini Lahiri, "C. K. Prahalad's Passions: Reflections on His Scholarly Journey as a Researcher, Teacher, and Management Guru," *Journal of Management Inquiry* 14, no. 2 (June 2005): 168-75.

⁴⁴See note 36 above.

Table 5
Sources of Data and Funding Cross-Tabulation

		Funding		Total
		Unfunded	Funded	
Sources of data	First-hand	30	11	41
	Count % within	73.2%	26.8%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	1.9%	0.7%	2.6%
	Second-hand	907	99	1,006
	Count % within	90.2%	9.8%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	57.2%	6.2%	63.5%
	None of the above	461	77	538
	Count % within	85.7%	14.3%	100.0%
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	29.1%	4.9%	33.9%
Total	Count % within	1,398	187	1,585
	no. of funded/unfunded articles	88.2%	11.8%	100.0%

or laboratory analysis, with 21 (1.3 percent) in the "other" category. In comparison, 48 percent of Perry and Kraemer's⁴⁵ population were non-empirical, while 27 percent conducted cross-sectional or correlation analysis and 19 percent used case studies. From these figures, one would find it difficult to suggest that Chinese researchers are well-prepared for the building of elegant theories when 81.8 percent of their research is non-empirical. While the case study method can yield findings that confirm or disprove theories, it has not been popular in the Chinese PA research community. This may have to do with the fact that data collection in government agencies has always been difficult, as insiders are unwilling to talk and holders of confidential information are unwilling to write about it.

Regarding sources of data, the analysis indicates that only 41 articles (2.6 percent) use first-hand data and 1,006 (63.5 percent) use second-hand data, while the rest (33.9 percent) consist primarily of non-empirical research. Relating the sources of data to funding (see table 5), while only

⁴⁵Perry and Kraemer, "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*," 235-39.

187 articles (11.8 percent) overall were funded, 26.8 percent of the 41 articles using first-hand sources were funded, while 9.8 percent of the 1,006 articles using second-hand sources were funded. These statistics provide grounds for believing that funding is a major factor in influencing researchers' use of first-hand data for analysis. As such, sufficient research funding may be crucial to improving the quality of Chinese PA research.

As many as 1,433 articles (90.4 percent) use the qualitative approach in their research, only 23 articles (1.5 percent) use the quantitative approach, and 129 (8.1 percent) consist of a blend of the two approaches. Among those articles employing qualitative methods, 715 articles (49.9 percent) use the qualitative logic of inquiry, 2 articles (0.1 percent) use interviews, 36 (2.5 percent) use participate observation, 25 (1.7 percent) use action research, and 751 (52.4 percent) use literature review, with 50 articles in the "other" category. The content analysis indicates that overall, Chinese PA researchers have sound logical minds, and they make impressive use of logical analysis, based on propositions derived from the (largely imported) literature, to draw implications and form hypotheses. However, theoretical propositions must be adequately tested against empirical data before they can become the building blocks of theories. The empirical data need not be quantitative. For example, the use of elite interviews can shed light on the validity of the utility maximization proposition of public choice theory, while action research can generate data about how tacit knowledge is formed and shared and how it influences bureaucratic behavior. Researchers need to consider both diversity and variety in research methods in their future research.

Key Findings about Applied Research

As mentioned above, 452 articles (20.5 percent) fall into the applied research category, and 145 articles (6.6 percent) can be classified as a combination of basic and applied research. These 597 articles constitute the population for analysis here.

We find that the most commonly employed research approach is logical analysis (318 articles/53.3 percent), while reflection studies are included in 115 articles (19.3 percent). It is interesting to note that only 27

articles (4.5 percent) deal with theory application, despite the fact that social engineering, which includes PA, supposedly requires the application of theory. The content analysis indicates that when researchers use logical analysis, they tend to focus on the logical relationships between the causes and solutions of problems while making reference to specific theories that account for the causal relations between problems and solutions. They also tend to overlook the fundamental regularities of the formation of policy and administrative problems. This is problematic, and it means that many applied research reports provide only narrowly-focused, superficial solutions, rather than wholesale reform measures that remove root causes.

Applied research yields solutions which, when put into practice, may be able to generate information about the validity and applicability of the theories that inform the practice. Thus, in assessing the quality of applied research, we need to ask: Does the study contribute to theoretical knowledge? The content analysis of the 597 articles reveals that only 142 (23.8 percent)—with the overwhelming majority of them falling into the combined basic and applied research category—are explicitly concerned with enriching theoretical knowledge, while 455 articles (76.2 percent) make no attempt to shed light on theoretical understanding. Often, researchers make suggestions about changing macro-level factors, for example, laws that prescribe the articulation of agency rules and regulations. They also take into account how individual government officials (micro-level factors) might be motivated to sabotage the proposed amendments of these laws. An understanding of the way that factors at various levels interact is crucial to developing a complex model of law enforcement in a politicized environment. The wisdom of these researchers, however, is unharnessed.

Applied research has the admirable intention of solving a specific problem. Yet, in reality, many public and administrative problems are multi-dimensional while others may be just the tip of an iceberg. Thus, whether or not a study focuses on one specific problem is a prime concern in applied research. The content analysis indicates that 335 articles (56.1 percent) do have such a focus, while 262 (43.9 percent) do not. One problem is that some Chinese PA scholars try to address too many problems simultaneously, such as administrative capacity building and governance

at the local government level (without specifying the locality or region). Another problem is that some scholars confuse organizational levels, such as those that examine the performance management of an agency and the performance assessment and reinforcement of individual government officials. Due attention to these problems will help raise the overall quality of applied research.

Related to the above is the issue of effectiveness. In applied research, some researchers may fail to devise the necessary remedies in a rational way. High quality applied research needs to have the potential to solve the targeted problem. The content analysis indicates that whereas 271 articles (45.4 percent) have such potential, the majority (326 articles/54.6 percent) do not. It should be noted from the analysis that it is rather common for Chinese PA scholars to provide prescriptions based on certain successful experiences without paying due attention to the necessary and sufficient conditions for the success of those experiences. Researchers need to recognize the difficulties involved in the transfer of innovation or exemplary practices.

The timeliness of applied research is of significance for obvious reasons. In the study, the general analysis reveals that 453 articles (75.9 percent) may be considered timely. In-depth analysis, focusing on the socioeconomic, political, and administrative developments in the period in question and their relationship to problem identification and solution formulation, indicates that some of these applied research reports were published within just one year of the central leadership expressing its concern about the problems they dealt with. Being too ready to respond to the leadership's agenda could be more of a curse than a blessing. After all, if researchers are overly inclined to focus on what the leadership is concerned about, they might overlook many real and potential problems that have a more salient impact on society.

Applied research needs to generate not only promising but also practical solutions. So the operability of a proposed solution is important. The analysis indicates that only 19.9 percent (119 articles) of the applied research articles provide solutions that could be put into operation, while the rest (478 articles/80.1 percent) do not. It is interesting that according

to the analysis, many authors consider the solution to lie in implementing new policy principles. For example, one study suggests that the faithful implementation of the person-centered principle could solve the problem of lack of motivation among civil servants.⁴⁶ This kind of solution is hardly operational.

In the age of reductionism, specific problems call for specific solutions derived from the application of specific theories (also within specific fields of study). The proposed solutions then yield evidence that may in turn enrich these theories. Transdisciplinary studies, however, demand cross-fertilization. Thus, in these days, to assess the value of applied research, one needs to ask: Is the study relevant to issues in other areas? The analysis indicates that only 17.8 percent of the studies (106 articles) have such relevance while the remaining 82.2 percent (491 articles) do not. These figures point to a problem of conceptual narrowness in the field of PA in China, in that researchers focus on the issues on hand without considering the complex relationships among issues and the effects of those relationships on the solving of specific problems. One question of great practical significance is how to encourage researchers to adopt a holistic approach.

Problems in society are often context-specific, in that particular forces within a particular milieu shape and reshape the essence of specific problems even when the problems are widespread. Good quality applied research generates not only solutions that are valid in a specific context but also the logical inquiry necessary to understand the nature, causes, and consequences of the problems on hand, as well as the reasoning necessary to select and apply theories that can inform problem-solving. Such logical inquiry and reasoning is as valuable as the formulation of specific solutions, as although it is tacit, it is the essence of professional knowledge. Thus, in this study the question is asked: Does the research help the practitioner(s) reflect on their current thinking in coping with the problem under

⁴⁶Cheng Zhen, "Improving the Incentive Mechanism for Civil Servants," *Gansu xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (Journal of the Gansu Administrative Institute) (Lanzhou), no. 3 (2004): 24-26.

inquiry? The analysis indicates that 54.1 percent of the articles (323) have such a merit while the remaining 45.9 percent (274 articles) do not. These figures indicate that Chinese PA researchers are, as mentioned above, skilled in logical analysis, and can therefore express the mode of thinking and specific pattern of reasoning in articulating solutions. This may be connected with the fact, as noted by Bo,⁴⁷ that many Chinese PA scholars were trained in philosophy or legal studies before entering the field of PA.

Related to this is another important question: Does the study help the practitioner(s) critically examine the current measures used to solve the problem under examination? Solutions suggested by applied research are always in competition with each other for a place on the policymakers' reform agenda. Some fail to make it for reasons other than quality. Indeed, quality research, for various reasons, may not exert an impact for years after it is produced.⁴⁸ The present value that applied research can add to the enterprise of public problem-solving therefore depends on, among other things, the subtle influence it exerts on users. The way it helps practitioners to assess critically the usage of current measures is part of this present value, particularly when this critical assessment may eventually trigger drastic reform. This study finds that only 37.2 percent of the articles (222) have such a potential value while the remaining 62.8 percent (375) do not. In-depth analysis indicates that most of these applied research reports are not explicitly critical in the way they examine the reasoning employed by practitioners in coping with specific problems, or in highlighting the fundamental pitfalls of the problem-solving measures already in place. Thus, the research reports do not provide practitioners with a basis from which to critically reflect and assess. This problem may stem from a deep-felt reluctance on the part of Chinese PA authors to be critical or from a wish among journal editors to avoid confrontation. This tendency does not serve the interests of practitioners or those of the public at large.

⁴⁷See note 15 above.

⁴⁸See note 28 above.

Concluding Remarks

The empirical findings reported above form the basis for drawing two principal conclusions: that theory-building and knowledge advancement in PA in China are rather problematic, but that many valuable applied research studies have been published in the five PA journals, despite a number of defects and shortcomings. In the main, of course, Chinese PA research has serious problems that need to be resolved. More importantly, the empirical findings of this study support current scholarly critiques of Chinese PA research, suggesting that the Chinese PA community lacks the capacity to use sophisticated methodology to develop indigenous theories to account for and inform PA practice.

As a result of this insufficient capacity, imported innovations and practices cannot be modified to produce desirable effects. For example, Worthley and Tsao⁴⁹ have reported that China is in the process of reinventing its government. Rigorous analyses by Chow⁵⁰ and Lam and Chan,⁵¹ however, have highlighted that reforms in China have built on and reflect the substance and processes of Chinese politics and governance, and thus the reforms may look similar to those in the West but they are different in nature and essence. Chan and Chow have shown that Chinese government reinvention is indeed more of a mirage than a reality.⁵² For instance, their analysis of the new public management (NPM) reform in China indicates that there is little substance to the privatization and downsizing that have taken place there. Privatization is considered by Worthley and Tsao⁵³ as an indicator of NPM reform, but they find that private sector investors are only

⁴⁹John A. Worthley and King K. Tsao, "Reinventing Government in China: A Comparative Analysis," *Administration and Society* 31, no. 5 (November 1999): 571-87.

⁵⁰King W. Chow, "Reform of the Chinese Cadre System: Pitfalls, Issues, and Implications of the Proposed Civil Service System," *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 57, no. 1 (March 1991): 25-44.

⁵¹Tao C. Lam and Hon S. Chan, "China's New Civil Service: What the Emperor Is Wearing and Why," *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 3 (May/June 1996): 479-85.

⁵²Chan and Chow, "Public Management and Policy," 479-98.

⁵³See note 49 above.

nominal shareholders of privatized state-owned enterprises, and many of them are in fact former state cadres who have been handed generous shareholdings in the newly "privatized" firms. In other cases, outright corruption led to the transfer of ownership to former state cadres or the trustees of cadres still in power. All these, in theory, are inevitable. After all, the so-called Western theories, as Lijphart underscored in 1977, are merely an analytic summation of Anglo-American parochial experiences and hence not universally applicable.⁵⁴ As such, application without modification is bound to invite trouble and lead to malfunctioning of the bureaucracy.

There are examples of the adaptation of Western theory in modern Chinese history, however. Lenin's success in establishing a revolutionary state in 1917 triggered some Chinese revolutionaries, such as Mao Zedong and Zhou Enlai (周恩來), to place emphasis on the power of the proletariat to transform China. The CCP was formed in 1921 in order to organize the proletariat to build a new nation-state on the Marxist-Leninist model. Support for the CCP was minimal, particularly after it was suppressed by the Nationalist regime in April 1927, and its membership was reduced from about sixty thousand to ten thousand. Mao had conducted enough field research in the 1920s to conclude that the revolution in China would have to be a poor people's revolution rather than one that relied simply on the proletariat. He therefore advocated a rural-based revolutionary strategy, establishing bases in rural areas and recruiting poor peasants to serve in the Red Army. This strategy enabled the CCP to establish military bases and develop further. While political monism and the monopolization of administrative power were observed in areas under the CCP's jurisdiction, the Party was able to flourish and eventually build up the capacity to defeat its opponents and establish a new republic. Mao's approach was based on research that gave him a realistic understanding of the fundamental causes of various problems in China in the early twentieth century. He did not simply import Marxist-Leninist theory. He refined it according to field research

⁵⁴Arend Lijphart, *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1977).

findings and further refined it as he put it into practice. By doing this, he developed a powerful China-specific theory of revolution and the CCP under his leadership was successful.

In short, PA theories are indeed indispensable in the process of developing China and its governance, and so scholars need to work out strategies to speed up the advancement of PA knowledge and the development of China-specific theories. What is essential to the effective development of the state is not the simple importation of theories and practices, but the process of modification that tailors them to a particular context. What PA scholarship in China should be doing today is adapting theories in accordance with field research and continuously refining these adapted theories. What works in China is not "good governance" as practiced in developed countries but a modified version—what Merilee Grindle of Harvard University has called "good enough governance."⁵⁵ Likewise, privatization as a policy instrument only works in the West because it is accompanied by constitutional democracy, valid and reliable asset quantification, and the effective enforcement of contract law. In the absence of these, privatization can result in the loss of state assets due to embezzlement and corruption, as in the case of China.⁵⁶

While this process of adaptation and refinement of theories is necessary in China, the question is: Are Chinese scholars actually trying to do this, and if so, do they have the capacity and inclination to make a success of it? The findings of our empirical study, as reported above, suggest that the answer is no. This is unfortunate for a number of reasons. Recent studies have shown that many government officials in, for example, Shanghai have accepted the reform notion of instrumental rationality imported from the West merely because government performance is vital for sustaining economic development during which insider information can be legally (though unethically) used by them to generate millions of dollars

⁵⁵Merilee S. Grindle, "Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries," *Governance* 17, no. 4 (October 2004): 525-48.

⁵⁶Chow and Luo, "Rationalizing Public Organizations," 69-91.

worth of profits from such activities as investment in the property and equity markets. Furthermore, government officials try to achieve high standards of performance so that they can hold onto their jobs (or even get promoted), thereby ensuring that they can continue to receive material benefits accruing to members of the elite.⁵⁷ In short, they have already been transformed from the vanguard of the proletariat into hybrids who use a different frame of reference—a composite of instrumental rationality, utilitarianism, and individualism—to decide what they should do, now and in the future. If these officials are no longer protectors of the public interest and if government agencies—individual officials in aggregate—fail to adhere to public values, popular disobedience and uprisings could result. Chinese PA theories are needed to change current government practices in order to avoid popular uprisings on a massive scale or even revolution, but Chinese PA researchers' inability to address the issues of theory-building and problem-solving is a critical factor that reinforces the malfunctioning of the bureaucracy.

⁵⁷Chan and Chow, "Public Management and Policy," 479-98.



Appendix 1

Codebook for Analyzing Chinese PA Articles

A. Common Data	A15: Institution name of the first author
A1: Title of the journal	A16: Gender of the first author
A2: Year	1. Male
A3: Volume number	2. Female
A4: Issue number	3. Unknown
A5: Title of the article	A17: Degree held by the first author
A6: Type of authorship	1. Doctorate
1. Individual	2. Doctoral student
2. Research team	3. None of the above
3. Organization	4. Unknown
A7: Number of authors	A18: Professional status of the first author
A8: Name of author(s)	1. Government employee
A9: Name of research team/organization	2. Educational professional
A10: Name of institution of the sole author	3. Researcher
A11: Gender of the sole author	4. Full-time student
1. Male	5. Other
2. Female	6. Unknown
3. Unknown	A19: Job title of the first author
A12: Degree held by the sole author	1. Professor
1. Doctorate	2. Associate professor
2. Doctoral student	3. Lecturer
3. None of the above	4. Researcher
4. Unknown	5. Associate researcher
A13: Professional status of the sole author	6. Other
1. Government employee	7. Unknown
2. Educational professional	A20: Institution name of the second author
3. Researcher	A21: Gender of the second author
4. Full-time student	1. Male
5. Other	2. Female
6. Unknown	3. Unknown
A14: Job title of the sole author	A22: Degree held by the second author
1. Professor	1. Doctorate
2. Associate professor	2. Doctoral student
3. Lecturer	3. None of the above
4. Researcher	4. Unknown
5. Associate researcher	A23: Professional status of the second author
6. Other	1. Government employee
7. Unknown	

Appendix 1 (Continued)

2. Educational professional	1. Unfunded (go to A32)
3. Researcher	2. Funded
4. Full-time student	A31: Source of funding
5. Other	1. State Council ministry, commission, or bureau
6. Unknown	2. Provincial
A24: Job title of the second author	3. Municipal
1. Professor	4. Enterprise
2. Associate professor	5. Foundation
3. Lecturer	6. Association
4. Researcher	7. Other
5. Associate researcher	A32: Theme of the article for comparing with PAR in the 1980s
6. Other	1. Administrative theory
7. Unknown	2. Public management
A25: Institution name of the third author	3. Citizen participation
A26: Gender of the third author	4. Public policy
1. Male	5. Planning
2. Female	6. Accountability
3. Unknown	7. Personnel
A27: Degree held by the third author	8. Finance
1. Doctorate	9. Intergovernmental relations
2. Doctoral student	10. Urban and regional government
3. None of the above	11. State/provincial government
4. Unknown	12. Federal/central government
A28: Professional status of the third author	13. Other
1. Government employee	A33: Theme of the article for comparing with PAR in 2004
2. Educational professional	1. Public management/management
3. Researcher	2. Comparative/international
4. Full-time student	3. PAR/Special reports
5. Other	4. Government/democracy/legal
6. Unknown	5. Performance management
A29: Job title of the third author	6. Reflective practitioner
1. Professor	7. Citizen/public participation
2. Associate professor	8. Public policy
3. Lecturer	9. Budgeting
4. Researcher	10. Human resource management
5. Associate researcher	11. Privatization
6. Other	
7. Unknown	
A30: Funding	

Appendix 1 (Continued)

12. Representative bureaucracy/race/ gender	9. Administrative philosophy and ethics
13. Accountability	10. NGOs
14. Local government	11. Development of PA as a field of study
15. Big questions	12. Research methods
16. Bureaucracy	13. Administrative law
17. Reinventing government	14. Anti-corruption
18. PA theory	15. Other
19. Research methodology	A35: Scope of analysis
20. Environmental policy	1. Mainland China
21. Federal government	2. Other countries and Special Administrative Regions of China
22. Nonprofit management	3. Cross-countries analysis
23. Technology/e-government	4. No specific country focus
24. Homeland security/terrorism	A36: The country being focused on: _____
25. Organizational theory	A37: Type of research
26. Public service	1. Theory-related analysis (only B)
27. Ethics	2. Problem-solving-oriented studies (only C)
28. PA as an academic field	3. Theory-building and problem- solving-oriented studies (B & C)
29. Public and private sectors	4. Exemplary cases
30. Leadership	5. Reporting of history of administration or Western theories/experiences
31. Other	
A34: Theme of the article for comparing with He Yanling's*	
1. Administrative organization and functions	
2. Administrative decision-making	
3. Public policy	
4. Public budgeting	B. Basic Research
5. Civil service system and human resources	B1: Research methodology
6. Performance assessment (administrative efficiency)	1. Recollected experience: anthropological
7. (Specific) Administrative reform	2. Recollected experience: historical
8. Intergovernmental relations	3. Recollected experience: descriptive
	4. Deductive reasoning: mathematical

*He Yanling, "Problems and Methods: Assessment of Chinese Public Administration Research (1995-2005)," *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* (CASS Journal of Political Science) (Beijing), 2007, no. 1:93-104.

Appendix 1 (Continued)

-
- | | |
|--|--|
| 5. Deductive reasoning: logical argument | 6. Simulation |
| 6. Deductive reasoning: legal brief | 7. Forecasting |
| 7. Empirical analysis (inductive) | 8. Meta-analysis |
| 8. Heuristic analogy such as simulation | 9. Secondary data |
| 9. Literature review | 10. Content analysis |
| 10. Other | 11. Q Sort |
| B2: Method of analysis | 12. Other |
| 1. Non-empirical analysis | B7: Is it a critical approach? |
| 2. Case study | 1. Yes |
| 3. Cross-sectional, correlation analysis | 2. No |
| 4. Structural equations | |
| 5. Longitudinal analysis | C. Applied Research |
| 6. Controlled field or laboratory analysis | C1: Research approach used: |
| 7. Other | 1. Strategic research |
| B3: Sources of data | 2. Reflection study |
| 1. First-hand | 3. Constructivist study |
| 2. Second-hand | 4. Logical analysis |
| 3. None of the above | 5. Action research |
| B4: Research approach used | 6. Practice-based research/
performance as research |
| 1. Qualitative approach | 7. Theory application |
| 2. Quantitative approach | 8. Method importation |
| 3. In combination | 9. Other |
| B5: Qualitative methods used: | C2: Does the study contribute to theoretical knowledge? |
| 1. Qualitative logic of inquiry | 1. Yes |
| 2. Interviews | 2. No |
| 3. Participation observation | C3: Is the study promising in solving the targeted problem? |
| 4. Action research | 1. Yes |
| 5. Literature review | 2. No |
| 6. Other | C4: Is the study timely? |
| B6: Quantitative methods used: | 1. Yes |
| 1. Survey research | 2. No |
| 2. Experimental design | C5: Is the proposed solution(s) operational? |
| 3. Statistics | 1. Yes |
| 4. Mathematical modeling | 2. No |
| 5. Economic/financial analysis | C6: Is the study relevant to issues in other areas? |
-

Appendix 1 (Continued)

1. Yes	1. Yes
2. No	2. No
C7: Is the study accessible to users?	C9: Does the study help the practitioner(s) critically examine their current measures used to solve the respective problem?
1. Yes	1. Yes
2. No	2. No
C8: Does the study help the practitioner(s) reflect on their current thinking in coping with the respective problem?	
	1. Yes
	2. No

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Adam, Matthias, Martin Carrier, and Torsten Wilholt. 2006. "How to Serve the Customer and Still Be Truthful: Methodological Characteristics of Applied Research." *Science and Public Policy* 33, no. 6 (July): 435-44.
- Adams, Guy B., and Jay D. White. 1994. "Dissertation Research in Public Administration and Cognate Fields: An Assessment of Methods and Quality." *Public Administration Review* 54, no. 6 (November/December): 565-76.
- Bo, Guili (薄貴利). 1998. "Chinese Public Administration: Problems, Challenges, and Solutions." *Zhongguo xingzheng guanli* (中國行政管理, Chinese Public Administration) (Beijing), no. 12:6-9.
- Butterfield, Fox. 1982. *China Alive in a Bitter Sea*. New York: Times Book.
- Caulfield, Janice L. 2006. "Local Government Reform in China: A Rational Actor Perspective." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 72, no. 2 (June): 253-67.
- Chan, Hon S., and King W. Chow. 2007. "Public Management and Policy in Western China: Metapolicy, Tacit Knowledge, and Implications." *American Review of Public Administration* 37, no. 4 (December): 479-98.
- Cheney, George, Morgan Wilhelmsson, and Theodore E. Zorn, Jr. 2002. "10 Strategies for Engaged Scholarship." *Management Communication Quarterly* 16, no. 1 (August): 92-100.
- Cheng, Zhen (程臻). 2004. "Improving the Incentive Mechanism for Civil Servants." *Gansu xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (甘肅行政學院學報, Journal of the Gansu Administrative Institute) (Lanzhou), no. 3:24-26.
- Chow, King W. 1991a. "Public Administration as an Academic Discipline in

- China." In *Handbook of Comparative and Development Administration*, edited by Ali Farazmand, 409-20. New York: Marcel Dekker.
- _____. 1991b. "Reform of the Chinese Cadre System: Pitfalls, Issues, and Implications of the Proposed Civil Service System." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 57, no. 1 (March): 25-44.
- _____. 2005. "On the Distinctive Competence in Public Administration as a Field of Study." *Qiusuo* (求索, Explore), no. 6:87-88.
- _____, and Laura Q. Luo. 2007. "Contending Approaches and Models for Rationalizing Chinese Public Organizations: The Case of Western China." *Public Organization Review* 7, no. 1 (March): 69-91.
- Cleary, Robert E. 1992. "Revisiting the Doctoral Dissertation in Public Administration: An Examination of the Dissertations of 1990." *Public Administration Review* 52, no. 1 (January/February): 55-61.
- Dong, Jianxin (董建新), Bai Rui (白銳), and Liang Maochun (梁茂春). 2005. "Analysis of the Methodology in Chinese Public Administration: 2000-2004." *Shanghai xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (上海行政學院學報, Journal of the Shanghai Administrative Institute) (Shanghai), no. 2:50-55.
- Douglas, James W. 1996. "Faculty, Graduate Student, and Graduate Productivity in Public Administration and Public Affairs Programs." *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 5 (September/October): 433-41.
- Furlong, John, and Alis Oancea. 2005. "Assessing Quality in Applied and Practice-Based Educational Research: A Framework for Discussion." Working Paper. London: Department of Educational Studies, Oxford University.
- Grindle, Merilee S. 2004. "Good Enough Governance: Poverty Reduction and Reform in Developing Countries." *Governance* 17, no. 4 (October): 525-48.
- Hao, Yalin (郝亞琳), and Dong Jun (董峻). "Zhongguo nongcun juegui pinkun renkou yi jianzhi 1500 wan yixia" (中國農村絕對貧困人口已減至1,500萬以下, China's rural absolute poor population has been reduced to less than 15 million). Xinhuanet.com, July 8, 2008. http://news.xinhuanet.com/newscenter/2008-07/08/content_8510642.htm.
- He, Yanling (何艷玲). 2007. "Problems and Methods: Assessment of Chinese Public Administration Research (1995-2005)." *Zhengzhixue yanjiu* (政治學研究, CASS Journal of Political Science) (Beijing), no. 1:93-104.
- König, Klaus. 2003. "On the Typology of Public Administration." *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 69, no. 4 (December): 449-62.

- Lam, Tao C., and Hon S. Chan. 1996. "China's New Civil Service: What the Emperor Is Wearing and Why." *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 3 (May/June): 479-85.
- Lan, Zhiyong, and Kathleen K. Anders. 2000. "A Paradigmatic View of Contemporary Public Administration Research: An Empirical Test." *Administration and Society* 32, no. 2 (May): 138-65.
- Lijphart, Arend. 1977. *Democracy in Plural Societies: A Comparative Exploration*. New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press.
- Ma, Jun (馬駿). 2006. "Reflections on Chinese Public Administration Research: The Courage of Facing Problems." *Zhongshan daxue xuebao* (中山大學學報, Zhongshan University Journal) (Guangzhou), no. 5:73-76.
- Ma, Stephen K. 1996. *Administrative Reform in Post-Mao China*. Lanham, Md.: University Press of America.
- McCurdy, Howard E., and Robert E. Cleary. 1984. "Why Can't We Resolve the Research Issue in Public Administration?" *Public Administration Review* 44, no. 1 (January/February): 49-55.
- Perry, James L., and Kenneth L. Kraemer. 1986. "Research Methodology in the *Public Administration Review*, 1975-1984." *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 3 (May/June): 215-26.
- Phelan, Steven E., Manuel Ferreira, and Rommel Salvador. 2002. "The First Twenty Years of the *Strategic Management Journal*." *Strategic Management Journal* 23, no. 12 (December): 1161-68.
- Shangraw, Ralph F., Jr., and Michael M. Crow. 1989. "Public Administration as a Design Science." *Public Administration Review* 49, no. 2 (March/April): 153-58.
- Simon, Herbert A. 1969. *Sciences of the Artificial*. Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press.
- Stewart, Debra W., Norman A. Sprinthal, and Jackie D. Kem. 2002. "Moral Reasoning in the Context of Reform: A Study of Russian Officials." *Public Administration Review* 62, no. 3 (May/June): 282-97.
- Terry, Larry D. 2005. "Reflections and Assessment: *Public Administration Review*, 2000-05." *Public Administration Review* 65, no. 6 (November/December): 643-45.
- White, Jay D. 1986a. "On the Growth of Knowledge in Public Administration Review." *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 1 (January/February): 15-24.

- _____. 1986b. "Dissertations in Public Administration." *Public Administration Review* 46, no. 3 (May/June): 227-34.
- _____, Guy B. Adams, and John P. Forrester. 1996. "Knowledge and Theory Development in Public Administration: The Role of Doctoral Education and Research." *Public Administration Review* 56, no. 5 (September/October): 441-52.
- Wooten, Lynn Perry, Anne Parmigiani, and Nandini Lahiri. 2005. "C. K. Prahalad's Passions: Reflections on His Scholarly Journey as a Researcher, Teacher, and Management Guru." *Journal of Management Inquiry* 14, no. 2 (June): 168-75.
- Worthley, John Abbott, and King K. Tsao. 1999. "Reinventing Government in China: A Comparative Analysis." *Administration and Society* 31, no. 5 (November): 571-87.
- Wright, Bradley E., Lepora J. Manigault, and Tamika R. Black. 2004. "Quantitative Research Measurement in Public Administration: An Assessment of Journal Publications." *Administration and Society* 35, no. 6 (January): 747-64.
- Yuan, Dayi (袁達毅). 2002. "The Crisis and the Way out of Chinese Public Administration." *Jiangxi xingzheng xueyuan xuebao* (江西行政學院學報, Journal of the Jiangxi Institute of Administrative Science) (Nanchang), no. 2:17-19.
- Zhang, Cheng F. 1993. "Public Administration in China." In *Public Administration in China*, edited by Miriam K. Mills and Stuart S. Nagel, 3-20. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood.
- Zhang, Mengzhong (張夢中), and Marc Holzer. 2001. "Chinese Public Administration Research Methodology: Preface on Special Column." *Zhongguo xingzheng guanli*, no. 8:40-41.

