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Public Administration Research in Mainland China and Taiwan: An Assessment of Journal Publications, 1998-2008

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Abstract

The development of Public Administration (PA) as a field of study in China has been tremendous over the last three decades. This paper provides an overview of PA research in China from a sample of 2,877 articles published in six top PA journals in mainland China and Taiwan between 1998 and 2008. Our analysis based on these journal publications reveals several critical shortcomings of PA research in China in research reporting, approaches, and methodologies, pointing to a long journey ahead before full potential of such research can be unleashed. Our comparison of journal publications between mainland China and Taiwan suggests that scholars in Taiwan have made great strides in improving quality of research in a short period of time, and that such experience could provide their colleagues across the Taiwan Strait with valuable insights into the future direction of the field.

Introduction

The development of Public Administration (PA) as a field of study in China has been tremendous: PA was not recognized as an academic field there until the mid-1980s, but today there are at least 1500 PA scholars based on the number of MPA programs across the country (Ma and Liu, 2007). Despite being newcomers to the field, Chinese PA scholars collectively have produced an enormous amount of research: there are now more than two dozen journals that feature PA research and practices. One leading journal among these, *Chinese Public Administration (CPA)*, published about 360 articles in 2008, more than the combined total of articles published in the same year by eight top English-language PA journals: *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Journal of Public Administration Research and Theory*, *Public Administration Review*, *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Public Administration*, *Journal of European Social Policy*, and *Governance* (impact factor in *Social Science Citation Index* was the ranking criterion for their selection).

While impressive in the amount of research generated, the rapid development of the field has prompted critical assessments of the quality and contribution of PA research in China in recent years. Borrowing a term used by American scholars several decades earlier, Ma and Liu (2007) warn that PA research in China has run into a so-called ‘identity crisis’, arguing that PA scholars in China collectively have failed to address real problems facing the country while focusing much of their attention on importing theories and practices from the West. Several recent empirical studies based on journal publications and doctoral dissertations (Dong, Bai, and Liang 2005; He 2007; Jing 2009) have pointed to another major shortcoming in Chinese PA publications: lack of analytical rigor due to inadequate attention to research methodology. Some have even argued that PA research in China may inadvertently have helped to rationalize or even perpetuate archaic and highly inefficient bureaucratic practices in Chinese institutions, as many so-called PA theories are merely ‘prescriptions of institutional and administrative arrangements from CCP (Chinese Communist Party) perspective’ or ‘descriptions of officially prescribed practices of management in state organs’ (Cheng and Lu 2009).

Although there seems to be a consensus among PA scholars on the fundamental problems confronting the discipline, scholarly opinion with regard to its future direction are sharply divided (He 2009). For example, some believe that PA scholars in China should focus on improving the rigor of their research through strengthening the standards of how research is conducted, in particular through the use of empirical analysis (Dong, Bai, and Liang 2005; He 2007), but emphasis on empirical analysis has been dismissed by some as arising from an unduly Western perspective (Chow 2007). Fearing that the Chinese PA research agenda has been hijacked by Western influences in recent decades, some PA scholars advocate an overhaul of the field to establish a truly ‘Chinese Public Administration’ that would break away from the Western origin of the field (Guo and Xiao 2006; Ma 2006).

Just across the strait from mainland China, PA scholars in Taiwan have grappled with a range of similar challenges, although the history of the development of the field in Taiwan has been much longer (Sun 1998). Jan (2005) notes that debates over ‘right’ research methods in Taiwanese PA scholarship arose during the early 1990s, when a new generation of scholars returned home with newly minted Ph.D.s from the United States. Like some of his mainland counterparts, Jiang (1997) has pointed out that despite decades of effort the development of PA theories in Taiwan has continued to rely upon imported ideas from the West, failing to provide useful guidance to practitioners at home. But whereas the development of the field in mainland China was disrupted by an ideological shift after 1949, the development of the field in Taiwan has benefited from sustained growth over a long period of time. From this perspective Taiwan’s experience in dealing with critical questions in a context of continuity might offer an important vantage point for assessing current debate on PA theory and practice in mainland China.

Discussion on the development and future direction of PA research in mainland China and Taiwan could prove to be of global significance to development of the field. Debates on crucial issues — the identity of PA as a field of study, the usefulness of empirical analysis relative to other research methods, and divergence between theoretical development and practical needs — are far from being settled even in the West, where the field originated (Box 1994). Given the massive intellectual capital invested in the field in mainland China and Taiwan, PA research in both places may provide fertile ground for developing and testing innovative solutions to these challenging but fundamental questions. So far, however, much of the exchange between PA scholars in mainland China and Taiwan and those outside the Chinese-language environment has been largely unidirectional in nature. Chinese and Taiwanese academics are generally well acquainted with PA publications in major Western languages, even if their usefulness at home is controversial. But scholars internationally, handicapped by language barriers, still know very little about the enormous amount of research generated by PA scholars in mainland China and Taiwan.

The aims of the analysis presented here, of Chinese and Taiwanese journal articles on PA theory and practice, are threefold. First, we have sought to provide some information on the basic characteristics of PA research conducted by Chinese and Taiwanese scholars, to facilitate more meaningful dialogue between scholars both within and outside China. Second, by systematically comparing PA research in mainland China and Taiwan, we have attempted to draw insights about future directions for the field in both places. Third, by broadening the geographic focus beyond Western publications, we have aimed at shedding some light on current critical debates that are of global significance.

Data and Research Methodology

Studies of PA research have generated considerable interest in the literature (Perry and Kraemer 1986, 1990; Stallings and Ferris 1988; Houston and Delevan 1990; Box 1994; Lan and Anders 2000). Based on empirical analysis of articles published in top Western PA journals, these studies not only delineate past trends in PA research but also point to areas for improvement in future research efforts.

Largely inspired by this literature, empirical analyses of PA research in mainland China and Taiwan have begun to appear over the past 20 years, some of them including contributions from authors of the present article. Sun (1993, 1998) conducted research on PA publications in Taiwan from 1960 through 1990 by analyzing 700 articles published in 14 leading PA journals in Taiwan. More recent efforts (e.g., Dong, Bai, and Liang 2005; He 2007; Chen 2008; Cheng and Lu 2009; Jing 2009) have focused on articles published in major PA journals and doctoral dissertations from PA programs in mainland China.

The analysis reported here builds on these earlier studies but introduces several innovations in data and research design. The first innovation is our emphasis on comparative analysis of PA research between mainland China and Taiwan. Our data sources are articles published in six leading PA journals,

three from mainland China and three from Taiwan (Table 1). These journals were chosen on the basis of academic reputation and impacts on the field.

[Table 1 about here]

We focused on recent developments in the field by limiting our selection to articles published from 1998 through 2008. To reduce sampling error, we simply included *all* articles that appeared during that period in our roster of journals (except for *Journal of Political Science*, for which we excluded articles unrelated to PA research). Some earlier studies (e.g., Dong, Bai, and Liang 2005; Chen 2008) had included only the ‘academic’ articles in each issue studied, but we elected to include all articles except book reviews, thus obviating the need to establish criteria for determining which articles were ‘academic’ and which were not. The sample ultimately used in our analysis consisted of a total of 2877 articles, coded into variables according to six categories: authorship, themes, basic structure, types of research, research methods, and references. A codebook was developed for this process (see Appendix 1).

Another innovation was our development of several measurements that had not been used in previous studies. First, to explore the much-debated balance between theory and practice, for jointly authored articles we created a variable to reflect the degree of collaboration between academic and practitioner. Second, we introduced ‘basic structure’ as a category, with the aim of describing the presence of key components expected in a typical journal publication, such as research questions, literature review, research methods, analysis, and conclusion, as well as length of the article. Third, we constructed a variable to categorize articles on the basis of five intentions inherent in most contributions to research: (1) building (proposing/developing/testing) new theories, (2) introducing/reporting/testing existing theories, (3) introducing/reporting practices from own country, (4) introducing/reporting practices from foreign countries, and (5) focusing on finding solutions to a practical problem. To these

were added two other fairly common types of academic articles: (6) general reviews of existing literature and (7) ‘reflection’ or ‘think’ pieces (no theory, no practice, and no literature review). Fourth, a ‘references’ category was included to assess the impacts of PA research produced locally: variables were created to enumerate each article’s citations from PA publications produced by local (Chinese or Taiwanese) researchers.

A third innovation lies in how our analysis of relationships between some key variables was conducted. One shortcoming of most previous studies was that they were primarily based on univariate analysis, such that potentially fruitful relationships between variables were not explored. In particular, we focused on three factors to account for some observed patterns in several key variables: (1) journal in which the article appeared, (2) academic rank of the first author listed beneath the title, and (3) type of research, as stated, regarding the intended contribution (theory building, theory review, practice, literature review, conceptual essay).

Focusing on differences across journals enabled us to draw insights on how editorial process (and standards) for the journals might help to shape the dimensions of quality for the articles we analyzed. A bivariate analysis of some key variables in tandem with the academic rank of first-listed authors permitted a view of the impact of the gaps in training and conceptual norms between different generations of scholars. Similarly, focusing on type of contribution allowed an overview of prevailing concepts of appropriate standards to apply in different types of research.

Altogether, the data and methodologies described above were sufficient to inform investigation of five research questions: (1) Who are the main contributors to the PA literature in mainland China and Taiwan? (2) What are the main themes examined by PA scholars in mainland China and Taiwan? (3) What types of research have been conducted by PA scholars in mainland China and Taiwan, in terms of

purpose of research (conceptual, relational, or evaluative) as well as intended contribution (ranging from theoretical to practical)? (4) What are the leading research methods used in PA research in mainland China and Taiwan? (5) What impacts does a particular instance of PA research have on the literature, as measured by references?

Findings and Discussion

1. Authorship of Journal Articles

Table 2 presents descriptive statistics of various measures based on authorship of articles. A first point of interest is that articles in our selected PA journals were predominantly (more than 90%) written by only one author or by two authors, with a higher percentage of single authorship in Taiwan (73.0%) compared to mainland China (67.4%). While the majority of all authors in our study were affiliated with academic institutions (85.1% in mainland China, 96.1% in Taiwan), governmental officials in mainland China were also quite active in contributing to leading journals in the field accounting for more than 10% of authors for such journals.

[Table 2 about here]

Table 2 also reports the level of collaboration between academicians and practitioners. Given the widely perceived gaps between theoretical development and practical needs in the field, as described above (e.g., Jiang 1994), evidence of where close collaboration occurs between academicians and practitioners might suggest points for bridging the differences. Joint authorship by academicians and practitioners, as a proportion of total number of jointly authored papers (6.9% for mainland China and 8.3% for Taiwan), is the category of interest here.

Among authors affiliated with academic institutions, full professors are the leading contributors to the PA literature in mainland China, where about a half of all authors (45.6%) and of first authors of joint publications (51.6%) hold a full professorship, while in Taiwan associate professors (27.8% of all authors and 31.5 of the first authors) and assistant professors/lecturers (26.4% of all authors and 28.8% of the authors) are more active in publishing in leading PA journals than full professors (about 17%). One notable finding is that graduate students in doctoral or master's programs have made substantial contributions to the PA literature (25.9% of all authors; 11.8% of first authors in mainland China; 20.5% of first authors in Taiwan) in articles published in leading PA journals, notably higher than the proportion (only 2.3%) of graduate students among first authors for top English-language PA journals (Lan and Anders 2000). The strong presence of graduate students as contributors to top PA journals in mainland China and Taiwan may in part reflect a higher quality of training and experience among these students in comparison to those in doctoral programs in the West; but their astonishing successes in publishing in these journals may otherwise raise concerns regarding knowledge accumulation in PA scholarship in general, and the value of doctoral training in particular.

2. Subareas of PA Research

Table 3 presents the distribution of journal articles across different subareas of PA research. The list of themes not only includes some traditional subareas, such as organizational theory/study, public policy, human resource management, public finance and budgeting, and administrative law, but also covers emerging topics such as New Public Management, crisis management, and network governance. The diversity of research themes may reflect the expanding function of governments and changing demand for government services in both mainland China and Taiwan. In addition, systematic and sustained efforts have been made in the translation of influential Western PA textbooks into Chinese, which may help to increase awareness of new and emerging topics among Chinese PA scholars.

[Table 3 about here]

The top five subareas of research in mainland China, in terms of frequency of representation among the articles, are administrative philosophy and ethics (10.6%), local government (8.7%), public policy (7.7%), public sector reform (7.5%), and administrative law (7.4%); the top five for Taiwan are public policy (12.5%), New Public Management (11.6%), information technology and e-government (7.4%), public sector reforms (7.4%), and local government (7.4%). Some specific circumstances in mainland China and Taiwan may have given rise to the emphases observed. In particular, the attention given by journals from mainland China to administrative philosophy and ethics and to administrative law may be strong because many Chinese PA scholars were trained in such disciplines as philosophy and law. The emphasis on New Public Management in Taiwan is not surprising given the government's efforts to implement various public sector reforms influenced by the prominence given to that theoretical movement in Western countries.

Closer scrutiny of the patterns of coverage in several individual subareas, however, raises concerns about how well the PA literature is able to respond to major challenges in practice. For example, while corruption is both prevalent and persistent in mainland China, fewer than 2% of articles in top PA journals emphasized on anticorruption topics; even more puzzling, attention to such issues declined noticeably from 1998-2001 to 2006-2008. Other subareas that one would expect to have received more coverage are public administration education, because of the unprecedented challenges that arose with the newly launched MPA programs across both countries after 2001; and information technology and e-government, because of its dramatic emergence in all levels of government. To sustain the development of these fields, PA research in both countries needs to address the practical challenges posed by their innovations.

3. *Basic Structure of Journal Articles*

Although a major criticism of PA literature in mainland China has been its lack of attention to the ‘norm’ of modern PA research (He 2007; Ma and Liu 2007), little discussion has been published on what that norm consists of. Our data set and analytic strategy permit a focus on the presence of several key components expected to appear in research articles prepared for journals in social science disciplines, such as statement of research questions, literature review, description of research methods, analysis, and conclusion. Table 4 shows descriptive statistics summarizing the presence of these components in the articles in our data set.

[Table 4 about here]

Several salient features emerge regarding to basic structure of the journal articles surveyed. First, in terms of our list of key components, the majority of articles published in the three PA journals from mainland China suffer from structural deficiencies of one kind or another. Overall, only 1.6% of these articles included all five key structural components, and roughly two-thirds (65.7%) did not contain any of the five components. The weakest area is research methods: fewer than 10% of the articles mentioned the research methods used in the research presented. Second, scholars in Taiwan paid more attention these key components than did their counterparts in mainland China. For the most recent part of the decade studied, 2006-2008, only 6.9% of PA journal publications in Taiwan contained none of the five key components, a considerably lower proportion than the comparable figure (65.7%) for mainland China. Third, for both mainland China and Taiwan substantial improvements can be seen in the presence of almost all components over the decade studied, suggesting that the PA research community as a whole has begun to pay serious attention to this issue.

We singled out and analyzed two potential factors that might account for the observed variability in the basic structure of articles. Results for the first factor, academic rank of author first listed for the article, are also presented in Table 4. It is clear that articles with full professors named first are more likely to have structural deficiencies; in fact, for articles from mainland China the results show a *perfect reverse* correlation between academic rank of the first author named and the likelihood of inclusion of various key structural components. A plausible explanation is the differential among succeeding generations of PA scholars in areas such as training and overall approaches to research. In mainland China, for example, the first generation of the PA scholars (most of whom are now full professors) typically received no formal training in the field (the first doctoral program in Public Administration was not introduced until 1998), whereas most young scholars have benefited from the rapid expansion in PA graduate programs and the chance to study abroad in recent years. On other hand, a more worrisome trend is that attention to research methods seems to remain a significant shortcoming even among new-generation PA scholars, in both mainland China and Taiwan.

The potential impacts of editorial control on the formation of norms for journal publications cannot be overstated. Journal publications are well regarded by most academic institutions, and a journal's editorial decisions may have significant impacts on the tenure and promotion of individual academicians, and on setting trends and standards in research internationally. As a result, journals can play a significant role in shaping the quality of PA research through editorial policies and practices. Table 4 analyzes structural characteristics of articles according to the journals in which they appeared. There are considerable variations across the seven journals surveyed. Among the three journals from mainland China, articles that appeared in *JPM* are 3 to 6 times more likely to have included the key structural components than those in *CPA*, an indication of the potential of leveraging in the peer review and editorial process of journals.

[Table 5 about here]

Length of articles was also analyzed, as our proxy for depth of research. Table 5 shows that on average the articles in Chinese PA journals are much shorter than would be expected by readers of articles of similar prestige in top Western-language PA journals. The length of most articles in PA journals in mainland China (more than 75%) is between 3000 and 10,000 Chinese characters, the equivalent of only 2000 to 6500 words in English (given a conversion rate of 1.5:1 between Chinese characters and English words). On average, articles from PA journals from mainland China (7160 Chinese characters) are substantially shorter than those from Taiwan (17,990 Chinese characters), where the majority of articles are over 15,000 Chinese characters.

There is great variability in the length of articles across different journals. For example, the average length of articles published in *JPM* (12,890 Chinese characters) is twice the length of those in *CPA* (6148 Chinese characters). As with Western-language journals, the length of articles in a PA journal in mainland China is often the function of page-limit restrictions issued by its editorial board. It is estimated that the length of the majority of articles published in social sciences journals in mainland China falls between 3000 and 6000 Chinese characters, or the equivalent of 2000 to 4000 words in English. Many journals impose tight controls on page limit in order to publish more articles in a single issue, but the resulting increase in the quantity of articles may be achieved at the expense of depth and quality. This is an area where collectively the research community could make significant improvements in quality of publications by revising editorial rules of major journals in the field.

4. *Types of Research*

What types of PA research have been conducted in mainland China and Taiwan? We began our analysis by applying the typology developed by Stallings and Ferris (1990), whereby articles are coded in

terms of purpose(s) of research, according to three categories: conceptual, relational, and evaluative. The results are reported in Table 6.

[Table 6 about here]

One finding visible in Table 6 is that PA literature in Chinese is dominated by articles focused on identifying or conceptualizing a researchable issue (about 85%); a much smaller percentage focuses on evaluating policy or programs (12.4%), and fewer still on examining relationships among variables (3%). This pattern suggests a bias in the literature against theory-building/testing, and an overemphasis on conceptual research, an imbalance that could undermine the prospect of desirable impacts on PA practices.

Because PA differs from other social science disciplines in its strong emphasis on practice, we developed a typology to differentiate research according to its intended contribution to the field, along a wide spectrum ranging between theoretical orientation and practical orientation. For example, the typology distinguished articles focused on building new theories from articles directed at testing existing theories. Results of our comparisons regarding intended contribution are shown in Table 6.

Considerable differences can be seen between mainland China and Taiwan in the distribution of articles across type of intended contribution. First, PA scholars from mainland China appear to be more ambitious in theory building than their counterparts from Taiwan, who tend to limit their interest in theoretical work to ‘introducing/reporting/testing existing theories’ Second, results show a strong orientation among PA scholars from mainland China toward problem solving (about one-third of articles focus on ‘finding solutions to practical problem’), whereas that orientation is underrepresented among journal publications from Taiwan (although there is an upward trend there as the decade progresses). Third, a considerable share of articles from mainland China are categorized as being ‘reflection’ or ‘think’

pieces containing no discussion of theory, practice, and literature in the field. In fact these articles accounted for over 40% of all journal publications in the period 1998-2001, in striking contrast to the small percentage (2.2%) devoted to this category in journals from Taiwan. Fourth, a large number of articles (more than 50%) in PA journals from Taiwan aim at introducing/reporting on local practices or practices from foreign countries.

5. *Research Methods*

Some recent critiques of PA research in mainland China (e.g., He 2007) have focused on its lack of attention to empirical analysis, and to a perceived imbalance between empirical analysis and other types of research methods. Our results regarding publications on methodology (Table 7) are consistent with these assessments: empirical analysis was used only in 4.8% of the articles published in the PA journals from mainland China in the recent decade that we studied. A more disconcerting finding is the scarcity among mainland publications of articles covering *any* research methods, empirical or non-empirical — about 90% of these articles did not engage with any formal research methods at all. Articles from Taiwan paid more attention to the use of formal research methods: 90% of articles consider some type of research method. The sharp contrast here between mainland and Taiwanese publications highlights the differences in prevailing academic emphases and values in mainland China and Taiwan in recent decades. One plausible explanation for the glaring neglect of research methods among PA scholars in mainland China is a misperception of qualitative research as including any research that does not involve quantitative analysis (He 2007). As a result, most research published in top PA journals is neither quantitative nor qualitative, on the criteria for research methodologies employed in our study.

[Table 7 about here]

Nevertheless, empirical analytic methods do show a material increase in publications from mainland China over the decade we analyzed: the share of such articles increased from 1.2% in 1998-2001 to 7.3% in 2006-2008. Progress in other types of research methods remained quite limited. The increased interest shown in empirical analysis may or may not be attributable to the common misperception of empirical analysis as the ‘gold standard’ in PA research. As in the West, mainland scholars may regard normative research as equally important to development of the field. Our evidence suggests that ambivalence may still exist regarding the nature of suitable research methods.

Table 7 shows that better-established academicians (full professors and associate professors) have not played a leading role in enhancing research rigor in the field. A prevailing majority (86.2%) of articles from mainland China that listed full professors as the authors first named did not involve any formal research methods. Perhaps more surprising is the strong evidence of lack of attention to research methods among younger-generation PA scholars as well, perhaps a product of design flaws in the training of research methods during the rapid expansion of doctoral programs throughout mainland China during the decade we studied.

Table 8 shows the extent to which data analysis was used in the journal publications we studied. As with empirical methods, the majority of articles (78.2%) published in PA journals in mainland China did not involve the analysis of any data, either firsthand or secondary, although a very small minority of articles (3.6%) did report on primary data collection. In Taiwan considerable progress was made over the decade in the use of data in PA research, especially in the use of primary data.

[Table 8 about here]

There are consistent differences across journals in the relative prominence given to data analysis. For example, articles published in *JPM* are twice likely as those from *CPA* to use either primary or

secondary data. About 30% of articles in the *Journal of Administration and Policy (JAP)* from Taiwan are concerned with primary data. Here again, we see a dramatic difference in styles of approach that invites further investigation as scholars consider future developments in the field.

[Table 9 about here]

Table 9 reports on patterns in the use of data across types of research defined in terms of intended contribution. Interestingly, a large majority (80.7%) of articles with a focus on building new theories, as well as on introducing/reporting/testing existing theories (88.4%), did not involve any data. One would expect that research concerning theory building would be data-intensive, given the high standards attached to such inquiries in mainstream literature in the field. PA scholars in mainland China are clearly ambitious in building new theories (Table 6), but the results here suggest that the analytical challenges of theory building may not be receiving adequate attention.

6. *Use of References*

Referencing is a critical aspect of scholarship. References help readers to assess the originality of the scholarship employed in research as well as the linkage between the research and previous efforts. References also help in assessing the impact of previous research. Thus they reflect both the depth and the breadth of research relevant to the topic covered by an article. Analysis of references can provide critical insights about the development of a field. Yet very few articles in our study paid attention to this critical aspect of academic reportage (Table 10).

[Table 10 about here]

The average number of references in articles published in mainland China seems quite low compared to what one customarily sees in articles published in Western-language PA journals; the average for articles from early in the decade we studied (1998-2001) was only three items. This finding suggests either that minimal importance is attached to referencing (perhaps owing to research conventions local to the discipline) or that international standards of referencing are not yet well understood, or perhaps both. Articles from Taiwanese journals average three times as many references as articles from mainland China.

Table 10 also shows that referencing practices changed over the decade we studied, both in mainland China and Taiwan, in both cases resulting in substantial increases in the average number of references in journal articles. This increase indicates that scholars have recognized the problem of insufficient attention to referencing, so apparent in the statistics for early years of the decade. However, our results for referencing to *local* PA research suggest that the rate of knowledge accumulation in PA literature, local and international, has been slow. The low percentage of total referencing that is devoted to local PA research (local PA journals or books), especially in Taiwan, indicates that Chinese-language PA scholars tend to draw heavily from foreign sources while neglecting contributions from local scholarship. While average number of references varies greatly from journal to journal, ranging from 5 per article in *CPA* to 51 per article in *JAP*, local PA research has been underappreciated across journals, as measured by numbers of local PA journal articles and books cited.

Referencing is another area in which editorial policies of journals may have significant influence. Faced with the strict page limits imposed by most leading journals, the potential contributor may have to make a difficult trade-off between length of the main text and comprehensiveness in the reference list, with the result that the latter is often compromised.

Conclusions

Since it reemerged in 1980s, PA as a field of study in mainland China has made enormous progress. Launched in 2001, Chinese MPA programs are now offered in 100 universities and academic institutions across 20 provinces, and enrollment has since increased nearly threefold, from 3,506 in 2001 to 10,253 in 2007. More than 1,500 scholars claim expertise in the field of public administration, and collectively they have produced a huge quantity of research in a short period of time. The deployment of intellectual capital on such an enormous scale indicates a potential for significant progress in advancing Chinese-language studies of PA theory and practice globally.

This tremendous growth, however, not only has given rise to high aspirations but also calls for high expectations regarding standards of research and academic reporting. Our analysis of 2,877 articles published in leading PA journals in mainland China and Taiwan from 1998 through 2008 reveals several critical shortcomings in research approaches and methods, pointing to a long journey ahead before the full potential of growth in the field can be unleashed.

First, the majority of articles published in leading PA journals did not contain one or more of the key structural components — statement of research questions, literature review, description of research methods, analysis, and conclusion — that we identified as customary in international journal publications. Two-thirds of articles published in PA journals in mainland China contained none of these components.

Second, our findings indicate that PA literature in mainland China is dominated by research focusing on identifying or conceptualizing a researchable issue (about 85%); a small percentage of articles focus on evaluating policy or programs (12.4%), and relatively few are concerned with examining relationships among variables (3.0%). Such structural imbalance could undermine prospects for diversifying and expanding research efforts in the field.

Third, although our results are consistent with those from some recent studies of PA research in mainland China in pointing to a dearth of empirical analysis in the PA literature, a more discouraging finding from our analysis is the lack of any research methods — empirical or non-empirical — reported in articles published in leading PA journals: nine of ten articles published in top PA journals in mainland China did not report any formal research methods at all. Another very troubling trend is the apparent lack of concern for research methods even in articles published by the younger generation of PA scholars.

Our analysis also reveals several potential opportunities for improvement. First, PA journals can and should play a leadership role in imposing high standards of research and research reportage on articles that they publish. The competition for acceptance of articles by the leading PA journals is fierce given the sheer number of PA scholars, and journals should see this as an opportunity to institute more rigorous review and editorial processes, to help foster a research culture promoting analytical rigor. Second, the courage and spirit found in the critical assessments of PA literature should be sustained. Conferences such as ‘First Young PA Scholars’ Forum: Reflection on PA in China,’ held in Sun Yat-sen University in May 2007, can have a significant impact in shaping the quality of future PA research. Third, our comparative analysis of data for PA journals in mainland China and Taiwan suggests that scholars in Taiwan have made great strides in improving quality of research in a short period of time. Their experience in grappling with some big questions in the field in a timely manner could provide their colleagues across the Taiwan Strait with valuable insights into the future direction of the field.

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APPENDIX 1. *Basic structure of coding book and measurements*

Category	Variables	coding
Authorship	Number of author(s)	
	Affiliation of Author(s)	1. Academic Institution; 2. Government agency; 3. Others
	Academic Rank of Author(s)	1. Full Professor; 2. Associate Professor; 3. Assistant Professor/Lecturer; 4. Others
Subareas of Research	Theme	1) PA as a field of study (Evolution, definition and scope)
		2) Organization theory (including Administrative organization and functions)
		3) Administrative decision-making
		4) Public policy (policy-making, policy process, policy analysis, and sectoral policy)
		5) Information technology management and e-government
		6) New Public Management (privatization, contract out, PPP, and reinventing government)
		7) Public sector reforms
		8) Leadership
		9) Public Finance and Budgeting
		10) Human Resource Management
		11) performance management
		12) NGOs and nonprofit management
		13) Crisis management
		14) Intergovernmental relations
		15) Local government
		16) Public Administration Education (degree programs, courses, and pedagogies)
		17) strategic management
		18) Administrative law
		19) Anti-corruption
		20) Administrative philosophy and ethics
		21) Research methods for public administration
		22) Citizen/public participation
		23) Network governance
		24) Others
Basic Structure	Research Question	1. Yes; 2. No
	Literature Review	1. Yes; 2. No
	Research Methods	1. Yes; 2. No
	Analysis	1. Yes; 2. No
	Conclusion	1. Yes; 2. No
	Length of Article	
Type of Research	Type of Research based on Purpose of research	1. Conceptual; 2. Relation; 3. Evaluation
	Type of Research based on Intended Contribution	1. Building (proposing/developing/testing) new theories 2. Introducing/reporting/testing existing theories 3. Introducing/reporting practices from own country 4. Introducing/reporting practices from foreign countries 5. Focusing on finding solutions to a practical problem---5 6. General review of existing literature 7. A "reflection" or "think" piece (no theory, no practice and no literature review)
Research Method	Research Methods	1. Empirical Analysis
		Non-empirical analysis:
		2. Historical research
		3. Descriptive research
		4. Logical analysis
		5. Action research
		6. Other method
	7. No formal research method	
	Type of Data	1. First-hand data; 2. Secondary data; 3. No data
	Data collection for first-hand Data	1. Interview; 2. Observation; 3. Survey
References	Number of references	
	Number of references from local PA journals	
	Number of references from local PA books	

TABLE 1. *Journals and articles included in the sample*

Journal		Publication interval	Number of articles
Mainland China			
<i>China Public Administration</i> (<i>Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li</i>)	CPA	Monthly	2,111
<i>Journal of Public Management</i> (<i>Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao</i>)	JPM	Quarterly	269
<i>Journal of Political Science</i> (<i>Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu</i>)*	JPS	Bimonthly	186
Taiwan			
<i>Journal of Public Administration</i> (<i>Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao</i>)	JPA	Quarterly	138
<i>Journal of Administration and Policy</i> (<i>Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao</i>)	JAP	Semi-Annually	98
<i>Chinese Administration</i> (<i>Zhong Guo Xing Zheng</i>)	CA	Semi-Annually	75
Total			2,877

*Although not dedicated solely to PA research, the *Journal of Political Science* is widely considered as one of the major outlets for PA research in mainland China.

TABLE 2. *Descriptive statistics on authorship*

	Mainland China		Taiwan	
Number of author(s)				
Single author	67.4%		73.0%	
Two authors	27.7%		17.4%	
3 and above	4.9%		9.7%	
Affiliation of authors				
Academic institution	85.1%		96.1%	
Government agency	11.4%		3.5%	
Other	3.5%		0.5%	
Collaboration of authors from academic institution and government agency				
Articles with more than one author	57 (6.9%)		7 (8.3%)	
Position of authors affiliated with academic institutions				
	All authors	First authors	All authors	First authors
Full professor	45.6%	51.6%	17.4%	17.6%
Associate professor	20.2%	22.4%	27.8%	31.5%
Assistant professor/lecturer	16.7%	13.4%	26.4%	28.8%
Graduate student	16.8%	11.8%	25.9%	20.5%
Other	0.7%	0.8%	2.4%	1.7%

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TABLE 3. *Distribution of themes of PA research*

	Mainland China				Taiwan			
	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2008	Total	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2008	Total
PA as a field of study	3.2%	3.1%	1.6%	2.4%	6.7%	6.7%	3.5%	5.8%
Organizational study	4.6%	6.7%	6.4%	6.1%	9.6%	6.7%	5.8%	7.4%
Administrative decision	1.6%	1.3%	0.9%	1.1%	1.9%	0.0%	0.0%	0.6%
Public policy	9.1%	6.1%	8.3%	7.7%	11.5%	11.7%	14.9%	12.5%
Info tech and e-government	2.4%	4.9%	3.6%	3.8%	5.8%	7.5%	9.2%	7.4%
New Public Management	1.0%	1.9%	1.2%	1.4%	10.6%	15.0%	8.1%	11.6%
Public sector reforms	13.5%	6.0%	6.0%	7.5%	15.4%	4.2%	2.3%	7.4%
Leadership	6.2%	1.3%	0.9%	2.1%	0.0%	1.7%	1.2%	1.0%
Public finance and budget	4.8%	3.5%	3.6%	3.8%	3.9%	6.7%	3.5%	4.8%
Human resource management	6.0%	6.7%	6.1%	6.3%	4.8%	2.5%	5.8%	4.2%
Performance management	1.0%	6.0%	6.7%	5.3%	1.9%	3.3%	10.3%	4.8%
NGOs and nonprofit management	0.6%	4.2%	4.2%	3.5%	5.8%	4.2%	5.8%	5.1%
Crisis management	0.2%	3.8%	2.9%	2.7%	1.9%	0.8%	1.2%	1.3%
Intergovernmental relations	2.2%	1.6%	1.3%	1.6%	2.9%	1.7%	2.3%	2.3%
Local government	5.2%	6.6%	11.8%	8.7%	3.9%	10.8%	6.9%	7.4%
Public administration education	1.4%	1.4%	0.4%	0.9%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.3%
Strategic management	0.0%	0.2%	0.3%	0.2%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Administrative law	9.1%	6.9%	6.9%	7.4%	0.0%	1.7%	1.2%	1.0%
Anti-corruption	3.4%	1.8%	0.9%	1.7%	0.0%	0.0%	2.3%	0.6%
Administrative philosophy and ethics	6.0%	10.5%	12.8%	10.6%	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%	1.0%

Research methods for public administration	0.6%	0.5%	0.4%	0.5%	1.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.6%
Citizen/public participation	1.0%	1.7%	1.8%	1.6%	2.9%	3.3%	3.5%	3.2%
Network governance	0.4%	0.3%	0.7%	0.5%	0.0%	2.5%	4.6%	2.3%
Other	23.4%	14.6%	10.0%	14.1%	8.7%	6.7%	6.9%	7.4%

TABLE 4. *Basic structure of articles*

		Research questions	Literature review	Research methods	Analysis (quantitative or qualitative)	Conclusion	All of these	None of these
By year of publication								
Mainland China	1998-2001	13.3%	5.4%	3.0%	10.1%	4.8%	0.0%	80.6%
	2002-2005	19.7%	10.5%	5.1%	20.2%	13.2%	1.3%	69.0%
	2006-2008	23.2%	18.0%	10.4%	25.7%	21.7%	2.5%	56.9%
	Total	20.0%	12.9%	7.1%	20.8%	15.4%	1.6%	65.7%
Taiwan	1998-2001	25.0%	57.7%	14.4%	12.5%	43.3%	5.8%	29.8%
	2002-2005	30.0%	72.5%	24.2%	28.3%	61.7%	7.5%	10.0%
	2006-2008	41.4%	83.9%	48.3%	46.0%	70.1%	18.4%	6.9%
	Total	31.5%	70.7%	27.7%	28.0%	57.9%	10.0%	15.8%
By academic rank of first author								
Mainland China	Professor	23.1%	14.7%	9.9%	23.6%	16.8%	1.8%	58.9%
	Associate Professor	28.2%	18.6%	10.3%	30.6%	24.4%	3.1%	52.9%
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	42.8%	37.0%	16.2%	43.4%	38.2%	6.4%	34.7%
Taiwan	Professor	20.8%	66.0%	18.9%	20.8%	50.9%	7.5%	20.8%
	Associate Professor	33.7%	65.3%	27.4%	28.4%	61.1%	12.6%	20.0%
	Assistant Professor/Lecturer	34.5%	72.4%	28.7%	32.2%	62.1%	9.2%	13.8%
By journal								
Mainland China	<i>China Public Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li)</i>	14.7%	10.4%	4.3%	15.7%	10.9%	0.5%	71.2%
	<i>Journal of Public Management (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	58.7%	32.3%	24.9%	58.7%	48.7%	10.0%	29.0%

	<i>Journal of Political Science (Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu)</i>	24.2%	13.4%	13.4%	23.1%	18.8%	2.2%	55.4%
Taiwan	<i>Journal of Public Administration (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	39.1%	90.6%	31.2%	30.4%	66.7%	13.8%	4.3%
	<i>Journal of Administration and Policy (Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao)</i>	15.3%	38.8%	26.5%	30.6%	48.0%	3.1%	37.8%
	<i>Chinese Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng)</i>	38.7%	76.0%	22.7%	20.0%	54.7%	12.0%	8.0%

TABLE 5. *Length of articles*

		< 3000 words	3000-6000	6000-10000	10000-15000	15000-25000	>25000	Average length
By year of publication								
Mainland China	1998-2001	11.1%	53.4%	28.0%	6.0%	1.4%	0.2%	5,620
	2002-2005	3.8%	39.4%	34.5%	17.6%	4.7%	0.1%	7,265
	2006-2008	2.1%	31.8%	43.9%	17.3%	4.5%	0.3%	7,740
	Total	4.4%	38.6%	37.5%	15.2%	3.9%	0.2%	7,160
Taiwan	1998-2001	0.0%	1.0%	13.5%	36.5%	43.3%	5.8%	15,815
	2002-2005	0.0%	1.7%	4.2%	21.7%	67.5%	5.0%	18,000
	2006-2008	0.0%	1.2%	3.5%	10.3%	67.8%	17.2%	20,579
	Total	0.0%	1.3%	7.1%	23.5%	59.5%	8.7%	17,990
By journal								
Mainland China	<i>China Public Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li)</i>	5.3%	46.5%	40.2%	7.2%	0.9%	0.1%	6,150
	<i>Journal of Public Management (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	0.7%	0.7%	14.5%	59.5%	22.7%	1.9%	12,890
	<i>Political Science Study (Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu)</i>	0.5%	4.3%	40.9%	42.5%	11.8%	0.0%	10,340
Taiwan	<i>Journal of Public Administration (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	0.0%	2.2%	3.6%	24.6%	60.1%	9.4%	18,140
	<i>Journal of Administration and Policy (Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao)</i>	0.0%	1.0%	6.1%	13.3%	67.4%	12.2%	19,745
	<i>Chinese Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng)</i>	0.0%	0.0%	14.7%	34.7%	48.0%	2.7%	15,425

TABLE 6. *Types of research*

	Mainland China				Taiwan			
	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2008	Total	1998-2001	2002-2005	2006-2008	Total
Type of research based on Stallings and Ferris (1990)								
Conceptual	87.5%	85.8%	82.4%	84.6%	64.4%	57.5%	49.4%	57.6%
Relation	1.2%	3.0%	3.8%	3.0%	13.5%	13.3%	29.9%	18.0%
Evaluation	11.3%	11.3%	13.8%	12.4%	22.1%	29.2%	20.7%	24.4%
Type of research based on the purpose of research								
Building (proposing/developing/testing) new theories	4.6%	5.9%	14.7%	9.7%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%	0.0%
Introducing/reporting/testing existing theories	5.2%	8.8%	9.0%	8.2%	67.3%	64.2%	67.8%	66.2%
Introducing/reporting practices from own country	13.6%	12.3%	13.2%	13.0%	16.4%	23.3%	14.9%	18.7%
Introducing/reporting practices from foreign countries	5.2%	5.7%	6.8%	6.1%	12.5%	5.8%	8.1%	8.7%
Focusing on finding solutions to a practical problem	26.3%	36.0%	34.0%	33.1%	2.9%	5.0%	8.1%	5.1%
General review of existing literature	2.4%	3.1%	3.2%	3.0%	0.0%	0.8%	0.0%	0.3%
A 'reflection' or 'think' piece (no theory, no practice and no literature review)	42.8%	28.2%	19.1%	26.9%	1.0%	0.8%	1.2%	1.0%

TABLE 7. Research methods used, by academic rank of first authors and by journals

		Empirical analysis	Historical research	Descriptive research	Logical analysis	Action research	Other method	No formal research method
By year of publication								
Mainland China	1998-2001	1.2%	1.6%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	2.4%	93.9%
	2002-2005	3.5%	1.3%	0.2%	0.7%	0.0%	2.2%	92.2%
	2006-2008	7.3%	1.4%	0.7%	0.3%	0.2%	3.5%	86.7%
	Total	4.8%	1.4%	0.6%	0.4%	0.1%	2.8%	90.0%
Taiwan	1998-2001	13.5%	35.6%	19.2%	2.9%	2.9%	10.6%	15.4%
	2002-2005	25.8%	28.3%	20.0%	0.0%	5.0%	15.0%	5.8%
	2006-2008	40.2%	19.5%	19.5%	2.3%	2.3%	6.9%	9.2%
	Total	25.7%	28.3%	19.6%	1.6%	3.5%	11.3%	10.0%
By academic rank of the first author								
Mainland China	Professor	6.0%	2.5%	1.0%	0.2%	0.0%	4.1%	86.2%
	Associate professor	8.9%	1.4%	1.0%	0.0%	0.0%	3.1%	85.6%
	Assistant professor/lecturer	11.0%	1.7%	1.2%	1.2%	0.6%	3.5%	80.9%
Taiwan	Professor	20.8%	34.0%	24.5%	3.8%	0.0%	9.4%	7.6%
	Associate professor	24.2%	25.3%	19.0%	3.2%	5.3%	10.5%	12.6%
	Assistant professor/lecturer	31.0%	27.6%	19.5%	0.0%	4.6%	8.1%	9.2%
By journal								
Mainland China	<i>China Public Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li)</i>	14.7%	10.4%	4.3%	15.7%	10.9%	0.5%	71.2%

	<i>Journal of Public Management (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	58.7%	32.3%	24.9%	58.7%	48.7%	10.0%	29.0%
	<i>Journal of Political Science (Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu)</i>	24.2%	13.4%	13.4%	23.1%	18.8%	2.2%	55.4%
Taiwan	<i>Journal of Public Administration (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	39.1%	90.6%	31.2%	30.4%	66.7%	13.8%	4.3%
	<i>Journal of Administration and Policy (Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao)</i>	15.3%	38.8%	26.5%	30.6%	48.0%	3.1%	37.8%
	<i>Chinese Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng)</i>	38.7%	76.0%	22.7%	20.0%	54.7%	12.0%	8.0%

TABLE 8. Sources of data

		Primary data	Secondary data	No data
By year of publication				
Mainland China	1998-2001	1.2%	17.1%	81.8%
	2002-2005	2.4%	16.3%	81.3%
	2006-2008	5.6%	20.0%	74.4%
	Total	3.6%	18.1%	78.2%
Taiwan	1998-2001	13.5%	26.0%	60.6%
	2002-2005	22.5%	39.2%	38.3%
	2006-2008	37.9%	37.9%	24.1%
	Total	23.8%	34.4%	41.8%
By journal				
Mainland China	<i>China Public Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li)</i>	2.3%	16.7%	81.0%
	<i>Journal of Public Management (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	13.0%	33.5%	53.5%
	<i>Political Science Study (Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu)</i>	5.4%	12.4%	82.3%
Taiwan	<i>Journal of Public Administration (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	21.7%	52.2%	26.1%
	<i>Journal of Administration and Policy (Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao)</i>	30.6%	18.4%	51.0%
	<i>Chinese Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng)</i>	18.7%	22.7%	58.7%

TABLE 9. *Type of research and data sources*

	Mainland China			Taiwan		
	Primary data	Secondary data	No data	Primary data	Secondary data	No data
Building (proposing/developing/testing) new theories	6.9%	12.5%	80.7%	--	--	--
Introducing/reporting/testing existing theories	1.5%	10.1%	88.4%	17.0%	35.0%	48.1%
Introducing/reporting practices from own country	13.0%	31.8%	55.2%	44.8%	36.2%	19.0%
Introducing/reporting practices from foreign countries	2.6%	39.4%	58.1%	7.4%	44.4%	48.2%
Focusing on finding solutions to a practical problem	2.6%	22.2%	75.2%	68.8%	6.3%	25.0%
General review of existing literature	2.6%	9.1%	88.3%	0.0%	0.0%	100.0%
A 'reflection' or 'think' piece (no theory, no practice and no literature review)	0.3%	7.5%	92.3%	0.0%	33.3%	66.7%

TABLE 10..Number of references

		Number of references cited	Number of local PA journal articles cited	Number of local PA books cited
by year of publication				
Mainland China	1998-2001	3.4	0.4	0.8
	2002-2005	6.8	1.6	1.6
	2006-2008	9.0	2.7	1.5
	Total	7.1	1.8	1.4
Taiwan	1998-2001	42.4	3.6	5.9
	2002-2005	45.3	6.2	5.8
	2006-2008	57.6	5.5	7.6
	Total	47.8	5.1	6.3
By journal				
Mainland China	<i>China Public Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng Guan Li)</i>	5.3	1.4	1.0
	<i>Journal of Public Management (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	16.6	4.7	2.3
	<i>Political Science Study (Zheng Zhi Xue Yan Jiu)</i>	14.2	3.2	3.8
Taiwan	<i>Journal of Public Administration (Gong Gong Xing Zheng Xue Bao)</i>	48.5	5.1	8.1
	<i>Journal of Administration and Policy (Xing Zheng Yu Zheng Che Xue Bao)</i>	50.9	5.8	5.6
	<i>Chinese Administration (Zhong Guo Xing Zheng)</i>	42.4	4.4	4.0