

Beyond NPM to post-NPM? A study of China's government reforms over the past forty years

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Abstract

This article examines China's government reforms over the past forty years from an instrumental-structural and a cultural-value perspective with the aim of exploring the supposed shift from New Public Management (NPM) to post-NPM. It finds that some aspects of the Old Public Administration (OPA) have been combined with NPM and post-NPM features in a layering process, resulting in new hybrid organizational forms and value orientations. In particular, the analysis shows that China's post-NPM-oriented reforms have focused on positive coordination in the sense of super-ministries and networks on the one hand and value-based governance with a service orientation on the other hand.

Keywords

China, New Public Management, Post-NPM, Service-oriented government, positive coordination, value orientation

Introduction

This anniversary of the Reform and Opening Up is devoted to China's large-scale socio-economic transformation from a centrally planned economy to a market economy over the past forty years, and as such China's economic 'miracle' can be attributed to many factors, ranging from market-oriented economic reforms to the government reforms examined here. Recent works have inquired generally into the manner and extent of external influences on China's government reforms (Christensen et al., 2008; Dong et al., 2010) and how they are linked to post-New Public Management (NPM) (Christensen & Fan, 2016). Arguably, these multiple rounds of government reforms have been driven by both internal and external factors, and the causal links between reform origins and outcomes is multifaceted in such complex processes. Moreover, some ongoing reforms, including the super-ministry reform, reflect various aspects of post-NPM.

Worldwide government reforms in recent decades have been characterized by NPM being supplemented by post-NPM, generating a complex combination of elements from the two reform movements in a process where new reform elements are continuously added to older ones (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017: 7–8). A review of the rich English-language literature on China's government reforms shows that they have both NPM (Ngok & Zhou, 2007) and post-NPM features (Christensen & Fan, 2016).

The next question is then whether post-NPM has transcended NPM in China, i.e. what kind of dynamics does it involve or what characterizes the new pattern? Western studies on post-NPM, 'joined-up government' or 'whole-of-government' often focus

on instrumental design and problem-solving, boundary-spanning activities and coordinating mechanisms, or networks of various kinds, as in the New Public Governance approach (Osborne, 2010). In China's case, however, researchers are mainly interested in the regular hierarchical ministerial/agencies arrangements.

Second, it is often argued that post-NPM reforms focus on public service values (Bhatta, 2003) and that comparing government reforms in different countries should take their national cultures and values into account (Wang & Christensen, 2017). Yet the historical development of value orientation or the value-based governance in China's reforms is far from clarified and one still lacks knowledge about these issues in China. Given all of the above, the fortieth anniversary of China's Reform and Opening up is therefore a very fitting time to contribute to this body of literature.

China's government reforms present a promising case for studying a reform pattern shift under a political system different from the Western tradition. Since 1982, which is a natural starting point because of the Reform and Opening Up policy, eight rounds of central government reform or institutional reform of the State Council have been launched: in 1982, 1988, 1993, 1998, 2003, 2008, 2013 and 2018. The eighth and most recent round was launched in March 2018 and its effects have yet to be realized. In the present article, we will take as a case study the first seven rounds of government reforms during the past nearly four decades. these seven rounds of reforms can roughly be grouped into three periods: the reforms of the 1980s, those of the 1990s, and the reforms that have taken place in the new century (Ngok & Zhu, 2007; Christensen et al., 2008; Ma & Christensen, 2018).

Accordingly, we will try to answer the following research questions:

- What characterized the seven rounds of central government reforms in China from 1982–2013? To what degree and in what ways do the recent reforms represent a clear shift from NPM to post-NPM, or do the two reform waves combined represent a layering process resulting in hybrid features?
- How can we explain the reform features and the dynamic between NPM and post-NPM based on an instrumental-structural perspective and a cultural-value perspective?

We will trace China's reforms chronologically based on academic contributions, mainly published articles and political publications, but also data like Party and government reports and policy documents. Our main assumption is that both structural and value traits are crucial for understanding what happens when NPM and post-NPM reform measures meet and what basic elements characterize the modern post-NPM pattern in China.

Some limitations may be acknowledged up front. First, even though the period studied is long, it could have been supplemented with an historical account pre-1982. Second, the focus on studying administrative reorganizations in China through the lenses of NPM and post-NPM, presupposes that using these reform wave concepts gives meaning in a Chinese context, as we try to argue for. It must also be accepted that the administrative reorganizations studied could be caused by many factors, of which those related to the reform waves are among the most important, as we see it, but definitely

not the only ones. Third, the administrative reorganizations studied are also related to specific sectoral changes, but our study doesn't include those.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows: We will first outline the two reform waves and analytical perspectives briefly. In the following section we will describe the substance of the reform story and the changes in values that have taken place. Our elucidation of the broad changes in values will be followed by a comparative discussion within our theoretical framework. The article will close with some theoretical implications.

Theoretical frameworks and analytical perspectives

OPA, NPM and post-NPM

Our analysis of the process of change in China's reform pattern is based first on an understanding of the framework of NPM and post-NPM that transformed the traditional bureaucracies in many countries from the 1980s and 1990s onwards (Pollitt & Bouckaert, 2017). For the greater part of the twentieth century, the Old Public Administration (OPA) (Christensen, 2012), also referred to as 'Traditional Public Administration' or 'Orthodox Model of Public Administration' (Fox, 2001: 109), characterized by the dominance of rule of law (Osborne, 2013: 418), hierarchical management and Weberian bureaucracy, occupied practical and academic attention.

As a response to the challenges of the OPA as well as to economic crises and a more ideologically oriented neoliberal economic policy, the NPM reform movement emerged first in the UK government reform in the late 1970s (Richards & Smith, 2006), and in Australia and New Zealand in the early 1980s (Boston et al. 1996). However, as

an academic concept, 'NPM' did not appear in the literature until 1991 when Hood (1991) coined it as a shorthand name for the set of broadly similar government doctrines which dominated these reforms in many OECD countries from the late 1970s onwards. Subsequently, academics identified the common features of these reforms – marketization, horizontal specialization, single-purpose organization, competition, efficiency, deregulation, decentralization, etc. – and organized them under the label of NPM (Barzelay, 2001).

NPM reform efforts undermined the hierarchical control of political leaders under the OPA and introduced market solutions and market ideology into the public sector. But it also resulted in the disintegration, or fragmentation, of the public apparatus and put more pressure on top leaders to coordinate and build capacity (Gregory, 2003). Therefore, as a remedy for NPM, post-NPM reform efforts emerged in the late 1990s, first in New Zealand, in an attempt to strengthen central political capacity and to move back toward the hierarchical order of the OPA as well as to deliver integrated and coordinated services in the sense of networks and taskforces (Halligan, 2007). Unlike NPM, post-NPM focuses on recentralization, coordination and integration to replace decentralization, specialization and agencification. Post-NPM also implies a mixed pattern of in-house and marketized services, delivery networks, boundary-spanning skills, procedural/centralized controls, collective values and impartiality/ethics rules (Lodge & Gill, 2011).

We will argue that new reforms are often added to the old ones, producing hybrid reform patterns in the sense that reforms do not replace but rather supplement one

another. The OPA, exemplified by Weberian bureaucracy, specialization and division, command-and-control and hierarchy, was supplemented during the peak period of the NPM movement by marketization, competition, efficiency and effectiveness. It was followed by increased horizontal coordination and value-based governance under post-NPM. One can also describe this development as layering as Mahoney and Thelen (2010: 15-17) do, where new reform elements are blended with traditional elements in an ever more complex combination.

An instrumental-structural and a cultural-value perspective

There are two basic perspectives from organization theory that can be used in this study of the dynamic process of development from traditional bureaucracy through NPM to post-NPM in China's government reforms: an instrumental-structural perspective and a cultural-value perspective.

Public organizations can be understood as tools or instruments for achieving certain goals and addressing problems (March & Simon, 1958). Within the *instrumental-structural perspective*, instrumental problems cannot be easily addressed by a single organizational form (Gulick, 1937). Traditionally, the dominant principle of authority-based, bureaucratic organization is central to twentieth-century public administration theory and practice. However, to cope with the growing problems and global challenges that have emerged over the past several decades, governments have responded in many ways, ranging from NPM to post-NPM reforms.

Three major coordination forms – hierarchical bureaucracy, networks and

markets- can be identified along a familiar bureaucracy-market continuum (Powell, 1990; Tang & Mazmanian, 2008). The first and still dominant organizational form is the Weberian bureaucracy, based on legal authority and characterized by command-and-control according to the OPA pattern. The second form is the networks, based on heterogeneity inside governments and between governments and external stakeholders, and a relaxation of hierarchical control and more focus on negotiations (Osborne, 2010). At the other end of the continuum is the marketized form applied in NPM reforms. To be more exact, market solutions and market ideology became more or less institutionalized within the public sector, albeit without erasing major Weberian features (Self, 2000).

The increased complexity and fragmentation ushered in by NPM, combining structural vertical and horizontal specialization (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007a), led to the recognition that some problems and issues cannot be solved within one ministerial/agencies area alone. When dealing with these ‘wicked’ problems and transboundary issues, governments often seek to strengthen central political control while at the same time looking for other coordination and network approaches (Head & Alford, 2015). Subsequently, networked cooperative governance under post-NPM emerged along the continuum that extends from bureaucracy at one end to market at the other, with much room for hybrids in between.

Post-NPM is mainly inter-organizationally oriented and seeks to improve the vertical and horizontal coordination among government organizations, but also to enhance coordination between the government and external actors (Christensen, 2012).

The notion of an inter-organizational orientation and the concept of working across organizational boundaries or 'public management networks' (PMNs) (Agranoff, 2007) are reflecting a need for more coordination. Coordination is definitely not a new phenomenon in post-NPM, because Gulick (1937: 5) early distinguished between coordination by formal organization and by dominance of an idea, which alludes to cultural norms and values.

The instrumental-structural perspective directs our attention toward existing forms of government coordination within formal arrangements. Here, a distinction can be made in between a hierarchical variant mainly embodied in the Weberian bureaucracy, a negotiational variant based in heterogeneity (March & Olsen, 1983), a negative variant in the marketized arrangement and a positive variant in networked cooperative governance (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003: 23; Scharpf, 1997). In NPM reforms, which combine specialization and marketization, coordination is often limited to negative coordination where the actors agree to avoid encroaching on each other's territory (Askim et al., 2009), while at the same time competing motivated by self-interest. Post-NPM reforms seek to move from negative coordination to positive coordination via networked and value-based governance, viewing coordination as an integrative process and emphasizing a commitment to something larger than self-interest (Osborne, 2010).

However, instrumental and structural changes are often influenced and mediated by existing cultural values, both intra-sectoral (Selznick 1957), but also cross-sectoral as seen with public management networks (PMNs) (Agranoff, 2007: 155). Thus,

instrumental action alone is not enough to fulfill the goals of reform initiatives; and changes in cultural values are also necessary, as seen in China (Wang & Christensen 2017). It is the collective action or coordination embedded in structural arrangements that connects the organizations with their respective value orientations. The *cultural-value perspective* emphasizes informal norms and values that have developed during a changing process of cultural identity and value orientation that informs collective action (Selznick, 1957). Path-dependencies and historical traditions are often crucial to understand public reforms (March & Olsen, 1983), which is very typical for the development in China (Lan, 2000). The success of an implemented reform depends largely on the extent to which it is compatible with cultural identity and value orientation (Christensen & Fan, 2016). Thus, one would expect political and administrative culture and value changes to make a difference in government reform.

The OPA pattern assumes distinctiveness in the values of public, as opposed to private-sector management (Osborne, 2013: 428) and focuses more on hierarchically oriented values such as obedience and rule of law (Bardach, 1998: 232), a feature that will look different in a one-party state like China where the law is subordinated to the Party. By comparison, NPM is more often associated with a one-sided orientation toward economic values, or entrepreneurial spirit. Although efficiency and effectiveness are hardly new values in government reforms, this one-dimensional economic orientation under NPM has the potential to weaken political hierarchy and central control, ultimately eroding the ethical capital as well as the publicness of public service. Under post-NPM, the debate about values has become a contested one

(Osborne, 2013: 428), and there is a need to re-establish a common ethic and cohesive culture in the public sector because of the reported corrosion of loyalty and increasing mistrust brought about by NPM (Halligan, 2007). In fact, one major reason for the emergence of post-NPM is that NPM failed to fulfill its central promise of efficiency and also increased social inequality.

Having recognized the need to blend different perspectives to understand the pattern of the transition process of China's government reforms over time, we regard the two analytical perspectives as complementary rather than mutually exclusive and argue that the dynamic process of NPM becoming blended with post-NPM can best be interpreted as a complex and dynamic mixture of structural features and the historical cultural-value contexts (Christensen & Lægreid, 2001).

Insert table 1 here

Table 1 brings together the ideas of organizational form, collective action and value orientation that have been associated with the three major reform patterns in public administration discussed above. This gives insight into the potential integration and interdependencies between structural and cultural factors. Under OPA structural hierarchical control is reinforced by supporting cultural values. NPM represents both challenges of structural control and disintegration of cultural norms and values, while post-NPM tries to integrate structurally the system again with combining hierarchical

and especially horizontal measures with collective cultural norms and values.

The three phases of reform in China

Reforms in the 1980s

The 1982 reform. When Deng Xiaoping regained supreme political power and launched the Reform and Opening up in 1978, China entered into an era of reform. The Party and state decided to shift their attention from class struggle to economic growth. They moved to centralize power in the traditional administrative bodies in order to deal with the growth of business and to consolidate their authority. This led to a swelling of State Council ministries and agencies (Lan, 2000; Ngok & Zhu, 2007). Realizing that economic reform could not succeed without political and administrative reform, Deng and other main leaders tried to restructure the over-staffed and overlapping Party-state organizations.

In 1982, the 22nd Meeting of the Standing Committee of the Fifth National People's Congress (NPC) approved the Plan for the Institutional Reform of the State Council, thus launching the first round of government reforms. Its major objectives were to downsize the government, reduce staff and improve administrative efficiency (Ngok & Zhu, 2007). More specifically, this reform reduced the total number of agencies in the State Council from 100 in 1981 to 61 in 1982, with a 40 percent reduction in staff from 51000 to 30000 (Wang, 2010). Other reform measures included making bureaucrats more professional as well as putting an age limit on government positions, which

implied the establishment of a retirement system and the abolition of lifelong tenure for leading cadres (Zhao, 1982).

The 1982 reform focused only on downsizing and reorganizing government agencies while retaining the basic organizational structure, namely the old, highly centralized administrative system based on the planned economy (Ngok & Zhu, 2007). As a result, everything that was downsized in this first round of reforms grew back quickly during the following years. In this sense, the 1982 reform was rather superficial and didn't go far enough (Lan, 2000), reflecting a desire to try to retain the old system while blending it with the new (Ngok & Zhu, 2007). By 1988, the number of government agencies in the State Council had increased to 72, and the number of staff had risen again to more than 50000. What is more, 82 provisional organs were added at the central level (Song, 1988).

The 1988 reform. The main objective of the 1988 reform was to adapt government structures better to the economic and political reforms (Lan, 2000). Besides measures similar to the downsizing and reorganization applied during the 1982 reform, the reformers tried to achieve a clearer separation of government from both the Party apparatus and the state-owned enterprises (SOEs), the first of many such efforts (Christensen et al., 2008), aimed at strengthening the central government's regulatory function in economic affairs rather than giving it direct control. As a result, this reform reduced the number of organs in the State Council from 72 to 65 by the end of 1988 (Ngok & Zhu, 2007).

Notably, the so-called Three Fixings program – which statutorily changed the functions, structure and staff of the administration – was adopted for the first time. However, this reform was not actually implemented, owing to the unfavorable economic and political environment, especially at the local level (He, 2008). On the one hand, an overheating of the economy combined with the failure of the price reform in 1988 had caused inflation to rise, creating a chaotic situation in economic reform. This led to serious disagreement between the reformers and the conservatives over reform issues. On the other hand, the 1989 Tiananmen incident, which was largely rooted in dissatisfaction with the slow pace of reform and anger at the rampant corruption in government (Lan, 2000), terminated this ambitious reform.

Reforms in the 1990s

The 1993 reform. In early 1992, Deng's inspection tour of the economic zones in Southern China and his series of talks on furthering being open-minded and deepening reform ended the economic and political stagnation and marked a new phase of reform. In the autumn of 1992, the 14th Party Congress confirmed the establishment of a 'socialist market economy system'. Subsequently, in order to satisfy the requirements of market-oriented economic reform, another round of government reforms basically focusing on functional transformation was launched in 1993. This reform proposed the concept of 'administrative system reform' (xingzheng guanli tizhi gaige) instead of the previously limited concept of 'institutional reform' (jigou gaige). The idea was to underscore the broader scope of this reform (Christensen et al., 2008), while following up on some of the goals and measures from the 1980s reforms. Specifically, this reform

was aimed at “downsizing the administrative organs, transforming the functions of the government and preventing governmental departments or functionaries from running profit-making enterprises” (Ngok & Zhu, 2007). More downsizing was carried out under the Three Fixings program, and corporatization played an important role in separating the government from SOEs. After this reform, the number of government agencies in the State Council was reduced from 86 to 59, and the staff were reduced by 20 percent (Luo, 1993).

The core objective of this reform was to separate the government from SOEs, but the specialized economic management departments were not reduced significantly, as some people had expected. Of the original 18 departments, 7 were abolished but 5 were newly established. However, government personnel grew faster than government revenue during these reforms (Lan, 1999), so yet another round of reforms was necessary.

The 1998 reform. The 1998 reform could be seen as a continuation of the 1993 reform to the extent that both reforms aimed to separate governmental functions from economic functions. Through the 1998 reform, besides the General Office of the State Council, the number of constituent departments was reduced from 40 to 29 and the number of employees was cut from 33000 to 16000 (Yang, 2007). Functional transformation made progress in strengthening macro-regulation rather than micro-management. Particularly through downgrading, corporatization and mergers, most of the specialized economic management departments were turned into State Bureaus

under the leadership of the State Economic and Trade Commission (SETC), while their commercial functions were transferred to the respective economic enterprises (Luo, 1998; Ngok & Chan, 2003).

Reforms in the new millennium

The 2003 reform. China's entry into the World Trade Organization (WTO) exposed it to stronger international pressure. This new century reform actually started as early as September 2001 when the Leading Group for the Reform of the Administrative Examination and Approval System was established. In October 2002, 789 administrative approval requirements were repealed (State Council Gazette, 2002). In order to comply with WTO requirements, the state launched a swift cleanup of administrative approval items that needed central government approval, something that was followed up in later changes.

Against the background of the internal market-oriented economic reform and the external impact of globalization, the 16th Party Congress, held in 2002, called for the building of an administrative system characterized by standardized behavior, coordinated operation, fairness and transparency, honesty and a high level of efficiency. A new phase began, which focused more on strengthening social management and public service functions, while the priority of the previous ones had been to transform government functions in relation to economic management (Zhou & Xu, 2016).

The key points of the 2003 reform were to deepen the reform of the system for managing state-owned assets, to improve the macro-regulation system, to strengthen

the financial regulatory system, to continue to push forward the national trading system reform, and to enforce the establishment of a system regulating food and production safety (Wang, 2003). Subsequently, some components of the State Council were restructured: a new Ministry of Commerce was created and bodies established to regulate business (Wang, 2003). All these reorganizations were expected to strengthen the government's role in coordinating the various departments more efficiently.

With hindsight, the 2003 reform can be said to have been politically motivated rather than being a systemically designed reform, considering that the preparatory work for the 2008 super-ministry reform began in 2003 (Dong et al., 2010). Against this background, in addressing principal leading officials in 2004, then Premier Wen Jiabao for the first time officially advocated building a service-oriented government (SOG), a term coined by Zhang (2000). The 17th Party Congress, held in 2007, officially confirmed the importance of building an SOG. One year later, the Second Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee approved a plan for a sixth round of government reforms in 2008.

The 2008 reform. The main feature of the 2008 reform was the introduction of the super-ministry model. Five new super-ministries were established by merging existing departments: the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security, the Ministry of Environmental Protection and the Ministry of Housing and Urban-rural Development (Hua, 2008). In addition, other measures were adopted to strengthen central

coordination. For example, a more detailed State Council notice on coordination agencies was issued to regulate and standardize the establishment of these coordination agencies. As a result, 29 agencies were either retained or newly set up, while 25 old ones were abolished (State Council Notice, 2008).

This reform was informed by a timeline for administrative system reform approved at the Second Plenary Session of the 17th CPC Central Committee. Specifically, by 2020 a relatively stable ‘socialist administrative system’ with Chinese characteristics was to be established. In this regard, the 2008 reform could be seen as a step in an ongoing reform process; “the priority now was to fine tune the policy making and supervisory roles of the national government through functional rationalization of the remaining agencies” (Dong et al., 2010).

The 2013 reform. Once the super-ministry model had been established there was clear continuity between the 2013 and the 2008 reform. Under this reform, several sectors – railways, oceanic, health and family planning, food and drugs, and media administration – were reorganized to deal with related coordination matters and to provide better services. Besides, a cross-ministerial Coordinating Group for the Functional Transformation of the State Council was established to guide and coordinate ministries and agencies to carry out relevant work according to the reform schedule. The reform clearly recognized building an SOG as a main objective (Ma, 2013), and it also gave priority to eliminating and delegating administrative review and approval powers. The plan for this reform specified that many administrative approval

requirements concerning investment, production, operations, licensing and accreditation would be cancelled or delegated to lower levels of government (Ma, 2013).

This new round of reforms was launched after President Xi came to power, but in light of the political situation he encountered, similar to the situation his predecessor Hu had faced ten years previously, political stability was Xi's primary consideration. Notably, just months later, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee resolved to set up a Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform, providing a political and organizational guarantee for building a 'law-based and service-oriented government' on a broad basis.

Explaining broad value changes

One important function of government is to create and protect public values, whether political, social or economic, either directly or indirectly (Bozeman, 2007). According to a cultural-value perspective, any institution is inevitably embedded in a particular cultural and value context that will influence actors' modes of thought and action (Wang & Christensen, 2017). All value changes, whether they lead to structural changes or are caused by structural changes, will make a difference to government reform and hence help us to understand change processes.

After 1976, out of fear of the arbitrariness of the ten-year Cultural Revolution, under which science, law and moral values suffered, a more science- and law-based modern management system with Weberian features was urgently needed to replace the traditional over-centralized system of rule. Therefore, many of the reform measures in

China in the 1980s, such as the abolition of lifelong tenure and the imposition of an age limit in the 1982 reform, the introduction of the Three Fixings program in the 1988 reform, and the adoption of diverse new legislation to guide reforms, were mainly characterized by scientific management, Weberian bureaucracy and the rule of law under OPA (Agranoff & McGuire, 2003: 58). Values changed more in the direction of hierarchical obedience than efficiency.

But downsizing and separating government from SOEs also had some similarities with New Managerialism, namely NPM. These measures were more about negative coordination resulting from self-interest-based competition and economic values than about hierarchical coordination on the basis of command-and-control and hierarchical values. Economic values generally form an important foundation for other values, but the excessive pursuit of economic values in China from the 1990s onwards potentially threatened and undermined other values, like ethical, egalitarian and environmental values – a development that post-NPM has tried to counteract through cultural integration, ethical norms, improving health and social insurance measures and later environmental regulation (Christensen & Fan 2016).

In the late 1980s and early 1990s, more profound problems connected with the acceleration of economic reform and the overemphasis on economic values gradually emerged. As a result, the widening gap between rich and poor, along with the increasingly serious corruption and abuse of official powers contributed to value changes in the 1990s, not least in the wake of the Tiananmen Square incident.

The political and economic situation in the early 1990s necessitated reinforcing

the government's role as a regulator of both the public administration and the market, and several new administrative laws and regulations designed to maintain public order and improve social equality were drafted and implemented (Burns, 2000). As a result, the pace of reform legislation picked up in the 1990s. For example, the Administrative Procedure Law went into effect on October 1, 1990, providing a general basis for citizens to sue government officials. In 1990, the Regulation on Administrative Supervision was enacted in order to strengthen administrative supervision and improve administrative management. In 1994, the Law on State Compensation was passed, followed by the Law on Administrative Penalty in 1996.

Accordingly, between the 1980s and the end of the 1990s, the legal system was supposed to change from an instrumental rule-by-law system in which law was a tool to be used as the Party-state saw fit, to a rule of law system where law imposed constraints on the Party-state and focused more on individual rights (Peerenboom, 2001), even though there are clear limitations to such a process in a one-party state. One guiding principle of the 1998 government reform was to strengthen the structure of legislation pertaining to the administrative system in accordance with the requirements of law-based governance and law-based government administration (Luo, 1998), and great efforts were spent on strengthening the law enforcement and supervision departments. At its most basic, rule of law could create a culture of equity, because it was inherently not oriented toward economic values but to a system in which all are equal before the law, albeit combined with a degree of hierarchical obedience, which makes it challenging to achieve. The value orientation of the 1990s reforms

gradually pointed to social equity, or at least to a balance between social equity and economic values (Tian, 2017).

In recent years, ethics have increasingly become an issue in government reforms worldwide (Frederickson & Ghere, 2013). The key point for public administration is that institutions, administrative leaders and individual civil servants should attend to more general principles of service commitment and public ethos and think more about ethical norms and collective values (Cooper, 2004).

As for China, in 1996, the Sixth Plenary Session of the 14th CPC Central Committee approved the Decision on Some Important Issues of Strengthening the Development of Socialist Spiritual Civilization, stressing that the focus of improving socialist morality should be connected to serving the people. In a 2001 speech, Jiang Zemin stressed that alongside strengthening the socialist legal system and rule of law, socialist morality and rule of morality should be given greater priority. Jiang's speech reflected the increasing demand for the rule of morality and ethical management in government reform, comparable to 'public value management' in the West (Stoker, 2006).

In September 2001, the Program for Improving Civic Morality was issued, indicating that China was embarking on a new cultural path to modify one-sided economic values. Notably, to address what was perceived as a moral crisis resulting from rapid economic development, a twenty-four-character set of 'core socialist values' was proposed at the 18th Party Congress in 2012, after the 'core socialist value system' was first put forward in 2006. The twelve values include the national values of

prosperity, democracy, civility and harmony, the social values of freedom, equality, justice and the rule of law, and the individual values of patriotism, dedication, integrity and friendship. Basically, these ethical norms and collective values have mostly to do with value-based governance and ethical management and form the ethical context for government reforms in the new century. Thus, when building an SOG was finalized at the 18th Party Congress – “We should build a well-structured, clean and efficient SOG that has scientifically defined functions and satisfies the people” (Hu, 2012) – it illustrated that ‘service’ in the term ‘service-oriented government’ was more a value statement comprising “cleanness, efficiency, satisfaction and service” rather than simple service delivery or a one-sided economic value (Tian, 2016; Tian, 2017).

Discussion

If we are to understand the nature of a country’s reforms we need to take its reform history into consideration (Christensen & Fan, 2016). In the case of China, over-centralization of power has long been held to be a major problem in its administrative system. Therefore, since the first round of reforms, Chinese government reform has focused on the down-sizing/streamlining, decentralization, simplification, and rationalization of administrative power to build a science- and law-based management system with the features of a bureaucracy, with Chinese characteristics. Moreover, the principle of rule of law, a key element of OPA, has been emphasized since the 1980s. Nevertheless, there is still a difference between the administrative system in China,

where reform measures, including a civil service system, have been introduced without giving up the strong control of the CPC, and the Weberian bureaucracy under OPA in Western countries where political neutrality is customary.

Seen in terms of the value changes outlined above, Chinese government reforms in the 1980s tried to combine OPA and NPM. The tacit ethical implication of the classical OPA, embodying the principles of hierarchy, bureaucracy and rule of law, is that the ethical choice made by an individual civil servant is limited to “choosing to follow the rules (the ethical thing to do) or to violate them by commission or omission (unethical acts)” (Fox, 2001: 110). Under this OPA ethic or ‘ethic of compliance’ (Gawthrop, 1998: 153), civil servants have to obey the rules, and their supervisors have the authority to interpret those rules (Maesschalck, 2004). Thus, efficiency or effectiveness are actually subsidiary values which rely on the validity of the rest of the hierarchical construct for their own validation as means (Fox, 2001: 110). When it comes to public service delivery, this kind of ethical thinking and collective action becomes problematic in that it is controlled from the top down and largely detached from citizens.

It is fair to say that NPM is not much concerned with common ethics or collective values, because of its one-sided economic orientation (Self, 2000). Under NPM reform, the differences between the civil service and the private sector are deemphasized. NPM government reforms have introduced more market-related measures, such as encouraging executives from the private sector to take up senior government posts, to improve the quality of public service. Corporatization is another key element of NPM

reform in the West where reformers believed that large SOEs would perform more efficiently under private management in a deregulated economy and thus offered the shares of some SOEs to the public (Burns, 2000).

Like NPM reforms in the West, but with Chinese characteristics, both the downsizing, mainly in the 1982, 1988, 1993 and 1998 reforms, and the corporatization, mainly in the 1988, 1993, 1998 and 2013 reforms, reflect the NPM concern with efficiency and effectiveness. Particularly, corporatization in China has occurred under the policy of “grasping the large whilst releasing the small (enterprises)”. For example, the creation of the State Assets Supervision and Administration Commission (SASAC) in 2003 reflects a renewed effort to more efficiently implement the “grasping the large” part of the formula (Pearson, 2007). The SASAC has been made the “owner” of the large non-financial SOEs’ assets. Thus, in many cases, the process of corporatization does not implicate privatization of China’s traditional SOEs. In other words, China’s “corporatization without privatization” has a “Chinese characteristics”- influenced by path dependency (Howson, 2017). At the same time, the differences between the civil service and the rest of the workforce have been increasingly emphasized (Burns, 2000). The Provisional Regulation on State Civil Servants enacted in 1993 and the Civil Servant Law issued in 2005 gave civil servants a different status to that of other administrators. Meanwhile, legislation and regulations began to carry more weight in the 1990s to alleviate the tension between one-sided economic values and social equity and to try to strike a balance between efficiency and equity, albeit combined with the OPA-related principle of rule of law.

In the new century, China's government reforms have represented a move toward both NPM, in the sense of relaxing procedural rules, and post-NPM in the sense of working across boundaries. Concerning the former, since the Administrative Examination and Approval System Reform was initiated in 2001, the state has repealed thousands of administrative approval items that needed central government approval to simplify civil service regulations and give civil servants more flexibility. This contrasts with the earlier phases of the 1980s and 1990s which were characterized by an OPA-related focus on strengthening procedural controls and redesigning regulatory frameworks (Burns, 2000). For the latter, the merging of ministries, particularly the creation of the so-called 'super-ministries' in the 2008 and 2013 reforms, can be seen as an instrumental post-NPM effort to use an old organizational solution in a new NPM-generated, fragmented and complex context (Christensen & Fan, 2016). The use of post-NPM measures is reflecting limitations of too much use of NPM, particularly the parts related to devolution, in a one-party system, i.e. there are obvious needs for control and regime stability. But dealing with unwanted effects of NPM, like increased social inequality and environment problems are also crucial.

Despite the recent spate of attention to super-ministries under post-NPM, seemingly running counter to the fragmented arrangements under NPM, the attempt to coordinate across organizational boundaries is not really a new phenomenon in China. In fact, new networked organization forms, such as leading groups (*lingdao xiaozu*), coordinating groups and special committees, have been widely used in most reforms since the mid-1980s (Miller, 2008), in order to address 'wicked' problems that

transcend traditional ministerial areas and departmental boundaries. Most of the leading groups and special committees headed by the State or State Council belong to the Deliberation and Coordination Agencies under the State Council.

Seen from the instrumental-structural perspective, the network is a task-oriented coordinating mechanism in China's administrative system, one that entails officials from different ministries/agencies working together with the aim of fulfilling a shared task or value while retaining their own organizational identity (Ling, 2002). A case in point is the special negotiation committee for China's accession to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT, known later as the WTO) set up in 1993, with then Vice Premier Li Lanqing as its director and five other officials from different ministries/agencies as deputy directors (State Council Notice, 1993). Another good example is the Leading Group for the Reform of Administrative Examination and Approval System set up in September 2001 to coordinate different ministries and agencies to promote the administrative examination and approval system reform (State Council Notice, 2001).

Besides the positive coordination element, another typical feature of post-NPM viewed from the cultural-value perspective is the focus on collective values and ethical norms. NPM frames organizational forms in economic terms such as efficiency and effectiveness, thus ethics in NPM are mainly about one-dimensional ethical norms and the value orientation of private market actors involved in the provision of public services (Christensen & Lægheid, 2001). Post-NPM comes primarily out of the recognition that civil servants cannot just follow the top-down rules or one-dimensional

values and brings broader ethical issues back onto the government reform agenda with its focus on value-based governance (Halligan, 2007). In China's case, after the mid-1990s, administrative morality and rule of morality started to gain increasing attention and the introduction of ethical norms and collective values led to value-based governance. Wen's speech on building an SOG marks a political recognition of the change in value-orientation from more one-sided economic values to broader value-based governance oriented toward service. Service itself is an important value, and as Gawthrop (1998: 80) has argued, civil servants should take personal responsibility for service as a central value (Maesschalck, 2004).

It is noteworthy that although the classical OPA has been modified, it has not been replaced by NPM or post-NPM – bureaucratic organization and hierarchical values are still the basic official institutional elements (Christensen & Lægreid, 2008). Through the consolidation of the top-down organizational structure, the passing of laws and the promulgation of regulations, reformers have attempted to reinforce the bureaucracy and hierarchy by “making rules that are basically designed to ensure that other rules are followed” (Fox, 2001:110). Furthermore, it is argued that China is “primarily an agricultural society dominated by traditional modes of social hierarchy and personal dependence” (Lan, 2000), and that some big obstacles to China's law-based governance system such as “the persistent influence of paternalistic traditions and a culture of deference to government authority” are institutional and systemic in nature (Peerenboom, 2001). In view of these arguments, China's existing political-administrative system is still very much influenced by its own cultural tradition.

Insert table 2 here

Summing up, using a combination of the instrumental-structural and cultural-value perspective, we find that the seven reforms analyzed do not fit easily into any single Western pattern. Rather, under the Party's substantial control, China's reform story can be seen as a layering process combining some major elements of OPA, NPM and post-NPM with its own traditional administrative system, resulting in more hybrid and complex organizational forms and value orientations in which governance elements coexist with other reform features (cf. Mahoney & Thelen, 2010). Particularly post-NPM reforms have an increasing focus on horizontal coordination and value-based governance, which is crucial in such a complex and heterogeneous system as China's. In the West, the main goal of post-NPM reforms is to achieve an integrated government called 'joined-up government' or 'whole-of-government' in the sense of reintegration and coordination, while taking account of public value management as well (Christensen & Lægreid, 2007b). In China, government reforms related to post-NPM are usually labelled 'SOG', which is more about service orientation as a value, providing a new label for the old service commitment under NPM, in addition to coordination in the form of networks and super-ministries (Zhang, 2013).

Conclusion

This article has contributed not only to the literature on the process of change in China's government reforms, compared to the Western reform pattern, but also to a wider understanding of the constituent elements of post-NPM in China. It has shown how changes in the values and organizational measures of OPA, NPM and post-NPM together help us to understand the change processes.

First, China's government reforms seem to show that the argument that there has been a fundamental shift from NPM to post-NPM is difficult to sustain. Rather they demonstrate that China is at least learning the major reform elements of OPA, NPM and post-NPM from the West and adapting them to its own traditional administrative system and values (Christensen & Fan 2016). This ongoing and dynamic 'learning and adaptation' process constitutes a kind of layering process in which new reforms supplement rather than replace old reforms, implying that post-NPM reforms in China do not represent a fundamental break with the past. As a result, in both instrumental-structural and cultural-value terms, this layering process has led to a hybrid pattern with more complexity and uncertainty.

Second, post-NPM has never been as purely implemented as the normative literature has suggested. Drawing on the distinction between instrumental organization and cultural values, both the super-ministry and the network can be seen as instrumental post-NPM efforts designed to secure broader values through positive coordination rather than competition motivated by self-interest, while SOG can be viewed as a cultural post-NPM effort from the point of view of value-based governance with service

as its value orientation.

A common feature of China's government reforms is that the Party-state leadership in the State Council takes the reform initiative, and thus these seven rounds of government reforms are directly influenced by its political cycle (Ma & Christensen 2018). The question is whether post-NPM reform efforts are just a reflection of the natural tendency of a one-party state wanting to increase social stability (Christensen & Fan, 2016) or whether they will continue to be a strong reform movement. To judge from the 2018 reform just launched, post-NPM-oriented reform will be around for some time.

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Table 1. Comparison of Government Structures and Reform Patterns*

	OPA	NPM	Post-NPM
Organizational form	Weberian bureaucracy	Less bureaucracy, more market	Hierarchy-based network-oriented cooperative governance
Collective action	Hierarchical coordination on the basis of command-and-control	Negative coordination based on competing for self-interest	Positive coordination
Value orientation	Top-down hierarchical values	One-sided economic values	Value-based governance

*Based on Scharpf (1997), Christensen and Lægreid (2007), Lodge and Gill (2011)

Table 2. Contrasting Main Structural/Cultural Elements of NPM and Post-NPM with Typical Reform Measures across Three Periods in China

		NPM		Post-NPM	
		Structural: marketization, deregulation	Cultural: economic values	Structural: rehierarchization, networked form, joined-up government	Cultural: value-based governance
Period	1980s	Downsizing (1982, 1988), corporatization (1988)	One-sided economic values (efficiency, etc.)	Network (1986-)	
	1990s	Downsizing, corporatization	Economic values and social equality (1989-)	Network	
	New century (2000- 2013) Building an SOG (2004-)	Reform of administrative examination and approval system (2001-) Corporatization (2013),		Network (2003, 2008, 2013) super-ministry (2008, 2013)	Service for the people, Program for Improving Civic Morality (2001), rule of morality (2001-), core socialist value system (2006-), 24- character core socialist values (2012-)

Note: Table 2 provides a matrix connecting the typical reform measures in each period of the three to main structural/cultural elements of NPM and post-NPM. Although some reform measures cut across all the three periods, such as the Three Fixings program and scientific management system, the matrix concentrates on the main NPM/post-NPM elements and doesn't intend to go deeply into some few reorganizations.