
The Case Study Method in Chinese Administrative Training: the crucible of a new professional ethos.

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Abstract (in French and/or English)

The communication discusses the reform process in Chinese higher education, as illustrated by the introduction of the American-style MPA (Master in Public Administration). Based on firsthand empirical work conducted in 3 leading Chinese universities, Peking University, Tsinghua, and Fudan, it highlights the role of the case study method, borrowed from the Harvard Kennedy School and adapted to the local needs. The MPA was created in China in 1999 to train public administrators, with teaching methods and substantive content inspired by the U.S. Analyzing the cases helps understand the puzzling choice of the American model. The case study method brings students face-to-face with concrete dilemmas and issues in local government, indeed even in heightened form, as they are fictionalized in order to sharpen the conflicts encountered in daily administrative life. The case studies starkly reveal the flaws of authoritarian government, the lack of rule of law, the ability of officials to oppress citizens, the way in which the engrossed power of government creates social resistance. Aside from the content, as a pedagogical technique the case requires more independent thought on the part of students and more interaction with teachers than traditional methods of instruction. Through the case, the students can confront and discuss these issues without developing anti-regime analyses. By experiencing choices, alternatives and options, they experience pluralism, debate and discussion. The MPA becomes therefore the crucible of a new professional ethos for the Chinese administration, capable of continually modernizing and benefiting from international exposure in tackling local problems. The Chinese MPA neutralizes nonetheless the issue of regime type, burying it in the discourse of technocracy, helping to legitimize rather than undermine the status-quo.

Keywords: Higher Education, Case Study Method, Training, Public Administration, University, Transnational Education

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