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Public values on the public/private boundary: the case of civil servant recruitment examinations in China

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Abstract

This article looks at public values as an alternative public management instrument to the traditional public instruments or those of New Public Management (NPM). China offers very explicit examples of public values deliberately built on the boundary between the public and the private. We examine this issue through the civil servant recruitment examinations in China and the point of view of the candidates. We propose a cultural approach to the "publicness" of these examinations to understand the public/private articulation of the values they convey and their roles in the field of public management in China. We highlight a set of spiritual and moral values from the private sphere that are transmitted in the public values through the civil servant recruitment examinations, often to legitimise the government and its social control.

Points for practitioners

In this paper we consider public management instruments in China that are often relatively unknown or considered archaic. Their uses offer original examples of instruments that are embedded in Chinese society that open out the spectrum of public values towards private values, mainly spiritual and moral.

We wish to make an empirical contribution to the debate on the role of public values in public management. We investigate the civil servant recruitment examinations in China through their contents and the values they transmit. Candidates to the examinations explain to us the values that guide their preparation for public jobs and we analyse their role in Chinese public management.

Keywords: public values, spirituality, morality, China, traditional culture

Introduction

The eagerness to move beyond New Public Management (NPM) and the confusion of public roles that this has often generated (Pollitt, 2012) is accompanied by a renewed interest in the study of public values in the modernisation of public management. This translates into a shift in the study of its values towards their deliberative dimensions between individual and collective preferences (Lévesque, 2012), driven primarily by the reevaluation of the theory of the "new public value" (Moore, 1995; Lévesque, 2012) or that of the "publicness" (Bozeman, 1984, 2007).

Bozeman (2007) defines a value as "a complex and extended appreciation of an object or set of objects characterised by both cognitive and emotional elements". He extends the scope of analysis of "publicness" to individual and private values that are often ignored or at least not solicited by the European public tradition.

For Moore (1995), the public value is created by public bodies for the benefit of citizens and stakeholders and its conceptualisation as a theory ("new public value") should make it possible to surpass the NPM management methods inspired by the search for the "private values" of the market and where public values become performance targets that say relatively little about the processes used to achieve them.

For Stoker (2006), the "new public value" should be a response to the utilitarian vision of NPM but, by focusing on the results, it defines the preferences of citizens around respect for certain values (collaboration, transparency, participation, equity) without determining which values guide the actions of the public managers or officials. This is an obvious weakness of the postulates of the "new public value", which also bases its

ambition on the rebuilding of public confidence in public institutions and politicians (Stocker, *ibid*). However, an approach to the new public value that focuses on the "what" rather than the "how" (Emery and Giauque, 2005, p. 95 and 100), reproduces the confusion of roles between public policies and manager produced by NPM.

To be considered as an alternative to NPM (Benington and Moore, 2011), in our view, the new public value requires a process-value analysis undertaken to determine, first, how the public service is running or could run on the basis of these values. A cultural analysis of the "publicness" of these values as proposed by Bozeman (*op.cit.*) makes it possible to extend their study to broader private and public fields that are more embedded in society.

The cultural approach to "publicness" is as such an exploration of public values that has the advantage of transcribing with a certain reliability strong connections between the values expressed or implemented in public policy and the cultural values attached to a community or a nation. To date, we do not find in the literature known to us, a cultural approach to "publicness" which, in our opinion, significantly broadens its scope of understanding.

We are talking here about a "culturalist" approach to define the elements of a national cultural context (cognitive schemata, values and attitudes of individuals and groups) that explain and give meaning to professional values (d'Iribarne, 2011). The proposals we put forward in this paper are intended primarily as interpretations of national public values (those of China) without advocating their universalism, or their unsurpassable character.

Research context

China offers us an example of a public context where, for more than three millennia, public values build their legitimacy by drawing on traditional culture (cult of the family, of the ancestors, of social harmony, nature worship, worship rites). Zhou and Qi (2009) refers to deviations from "publicness" to talk about the specific characteristics of the Chinese civil service. They describe the objective content of deviations (development of evaluation and of public law) and more subjective content attached to the culture or the public social control.

To justify its power, the public authority in China focuses its efforts on the protection, social harmonisation and moral edification of individuals (Sanjuan, 2010). The public domain in China most often nests in larger spaces, which are neither private nor public, but represent the community in which traditional cultural values (spiritual and moral) agglomerate individual rationalities.

Beyond the influence they have had in the history of public management in Europe (Gernet, 1997), civil servant recruitment examinations in China still represent one of those strong moments of convergence between public and private values that is worth studying in order to grasp the ambitions the public authorities attribute to them in terms of public value management.

A research problem

The interdependence between culture and public management is often proven in practice but much less conceptualised in theory (Schedler and Proeller, 2007). The theoretical challenge of this paper is to test the cultural analysis of public values in the

description of the processes via which public services are performed through the underlying values. To do so, on a theoretical level, we use the analytical framework of "publicness" (Bozeman, 1984, 2007, 2013) to approach culturally the public values conveyed by the civil service competitions in China and to propose "benchmarks of meaning" (Lévesque, 2012), which stabilise the public service processes and meet public management objectives.

In practical terms, we study the transmission of this private reasoning in the public values via civil servant recruitment examinations in China by setting out to describe the values that, through their cultural dimension, define the meaning given by civil servants to the achievement of their public service missions. China offers an original field of analysis in which some public values are, including through the civil servant examinations, defined before the performance of the public services, in conflict with the performance target models inspired by NPM.

At a methodological level, this study is divided up into two recursive sections through a historical and cultural analysis of the examination tests associated with a series of interviews conducted with candidates preparing for the examinations, whose responses are analysed by axial coding to highlight the most significant values.

Literature review and background

Public values in the literature

Das and Teng (1998) perceive the values transmitted in an organisation as a process of regulation to make the system predictable by establishing standard and repeatable elements. This process can take both formal and social forms. Building on the work of

Ouchi (1979), they make a distinction between two types of controls of inter-organisational relations. A first type of formal control regulates behaviour and the objectives pursued and is based primarily on power and deterrence. In public organisations, this control system is based on objective procedures and rules using the transfer of information (laws, financial and budgetary reporting) as a source of legitimacy (Inkpen and Currall, 2004).

The second type of control is based on the values and standards shared by the stakeholders of the organisation. It takes the form of an informal or social control or "clans" (Ouchi, 1979) with few rules or written procedures. Reciprocity and the sharing of values define in this case the limits of morality and the level of formal standards of an organisation (Horwitz, 1990). Public management cannot simply build its effectiveness around respect for formal and hierarchical rules as has long since been suggested by traditional public administration (Lévesque, 2012). NPM had plans to restore the efficiency of public management through the introduction of market values, the theory of "new public value", describing the values shared by public officials and citizens in order to contribute to the renewal of public management by understanding the process via which public services are performed. Differences of values and methods of management in public organisations have become objects of research (Boyne and Walker, 2010) for the identification of a common frame of reference (Préfontaine et al., 2009) between public actors. This framework should serve as a "common denominator" in the inter-organisational and intra-organisational interactions (Thévenot and Boltanski, 1991) "to strive for effectiveness of public action" (Cossette, 2004, p. 121-122).

Bozeman (1989, 2007) offers a starting point to investigate the legitimacy of public

values in the term *Publicness*." It describes the dual political and economic influence exerted on the values deployed in public organisations and calls for greater consideration of this double influence in work on public policy and its (new) management. However, the conceptualisation of "publicness" suffers from a scope of investigation that is limited to the internal values of the public organisations that Gibert (2008) denounces as the gradual internalisation of public management in Europe, in particular through the adoption of NPM instruments that deflects it away from its true purpose in terms of impacts on society.

Rainey (2003, p. 68) considers the extreme complexity and variation of the factors taken into account when defining public values and treat them as a continuum rather than exclusively. A study of public values offers an opportunity to describe the interactions that may exist between how the public service is performed and the cultural determinants of a community. This makes it possible to intensify or even manage the relations that may exist between public choices, the public officials and the citizens in a collaborative perspective. Rhodes and Wanna (2011) try to steer the theory of "value public management" in this direction by defining public values as an expression of "common and constructed meaning that emerges through dialogue and its confirmation in society" extending their range far beyond the boundaries of the public sphere.

More recently, Gibert (2008) and Emery (2009) have repositioned "publicness" in debates on what comes after New Public Management (NPM). "Publicness" characterises "organisations that are subject to political authority rather than the authority of the market" regardless of whether these organisations are public or private (Bozeman, 2007). This analysis of organisations straddling the boundary between the

public and private offers very promising prospects, as it provides a unique perspective of the problem of isomorphism between public and private management (Mazouz et al., 2012). Salminen (2006) evokes a kind of mixture of traditional values of the public service and more subjective individual values (compassion, empathy, social awareness) to characterise the incommensurability of these public values. This attributes a diversity to public values that is difficult to quantify and almost incommensurable (public) performance levels (Mazouz, 2008; Moynihan et al, 2011.) that cultural analysis can help contain by identifying cultural elements that assign a common sense to the public action or service.

Bartoli et al. (2011) describe the changes in the macro and micro environment of public organisations to see in the management of these new tensions of public governance, a key issue of public management for future periods. The "new public value" (Moore, 1995 Stoker, 2006 Benington and Moore, 2011) by focusing on the joint and deliberative construction of public values (O'Flynn, 2007, p. 362), differs significantly from the traditional public administration and NPM by facilitating the approximation of the private and public spheres. On the other hand, its implementation remains very complicated from the point of view of its processes and its goals (Lévesque, 2012).

Schultz (2004) compares the values relating to privacy (love, friendship, trust, generosity, temperance, wisdom, courage) with those developed in the private sector (interest, contracts, profitability, entrepreneurship) and the public sector (duty, law, legitimacy, accountability). For this author, the boundaries between private and public life are crumbling as a result of new management practices (evaluation, empowerment) and professional practices (teleworking, e-learning). For public organisations, this new

state of affairs raises questions about the balance between personal and professional values that shape public values. It threatens traditional public values, but also brings opportunities for the construction of renewed public values oriented towards personal values (morality, friendliness, honesty, respect) able to meet public management objectives (relevance, effectiveness, efficiency) (Santo and Verrier, 2007).

Van Der Wal et al. (2008), in their review of the literature on public values, identify both moral values such as honesty and responsibility and instrumental values such as efficiency or legality. Préfontaine et al. (2009) distinguish between the self-proclaimed public values that they call "legitimate" (fairness, loyalty, responsibility, transparency, accountability) and public values derived from private principles of action (compliance, prudence, predictability, integrity) that are often less easy to claim (Heinich and Verdrager, 2006). These scientific findings on the existence of private and public values in the manner of serving public action are rarely included in studies into the renewal of public management mainly because of the difficulties, on the one hand, of identifying the diversity of its values, but above all, on the other hand, of coming up with a response model to these values. As such, the civil servant recruitment examinations in China are characteristic of a desire to control public values so that they can draw their legitimacy from their proximity to civil society.

Feeney and Welch (2012) in their study into the values of university research in the United States, provide an analytical framework highlighting the associative, regulatory and cultural resources that allow a distinction to be made between the determinants of performance of public services and that can steer the work on public values closer to the description of public policy processes rather than results. For these authors, another

model emerges that departs from that of the servant of the State with its own values to move closer to that of man living in a society that is both public and private. Thoenig (2008) speaks of a shift rather than a crisis of public values, as the modernisation of public action takes place first at the periphery in a sociological and cultural manner. The civil servant recruitment examinations in China, through their historical and cultural origins, provide an explicit opportunity to describe this shift in public values.

From the Imperial examinations to today's civil servant recruitment examinations

Since the Han Empire (206 BC - 220 AD), questions about the authority and role of the State have played a central role in China (Zi, 1894). In 136 BC, the principal dignitaries of the dynasty created a body of scholars (better known as the mandarins) specialists in the "Five classics" of traditional Chinese culture (the *yijing* or book of changes, the *shijing* or book of poetry, the *lijing* book of Rites, the *shujing* book of documents, the *chunqiu* or spring and autumn annals) to ascertain their morality and their ability to transmit them in the public sphere.

The system of recruitment and promotion of civil servants by examination became systematic under the Tang dynasty (618-907) and reached its peak during the Song dynasty (960-1279). At that time, the civil servant recruitment examination incorporated three tests: two compositions on the "Five classics" and the "Four canonical books" of Confucianism (the *Lun Yu* interviews with Confucius, the *Meng Zi* teachings of Mencius, the *Da Xue* great learning, and the *Zhong Yong* the application of centrality) and finally a play in verse (Tsien, 1964). Today, the high school leaving certificate, known as *Gaokao* is still the expression of this ancient tradition and each year determines the University admission of millions of students.

The emperors of the Tang dynasty and especially the emperor *Li Shimin* (626-649), made the civil servant recruitment examination a standard of social hierarchy. During his reign, a scoring system was developed for civil servants to verify the persistence of the morality of public officials in the exercise of their function. Empress *Wu* (690-705) gave prestige to the imperial examinations by assigning them in the Chinese mentality a key role in social stratification. She replaced the civil servants recruited in the traditional way (i.e. through their aristocratic or courtier status) by a social hierarchy built on the basis of the merit and the moral integrity of the civil servants.

Implementing large-scale public examinations favoured the lower classes that could climb the social ladder through the civil servant recruitment examination. All strata of society could study and disseminate the knowledge and postures specific to the civil service recruitment examinations.

The examinations have always made moral integrity and ethics prerequisites for the exercise of the profession of public official, even if subsequently the practice has often been punctuated by much less honest intrigues. A person with a "dishonourable" past was banned from sitting the examinations, which set out to strengthen the image of power and public policy among the people.

Successive emperors (in particular the Songs) put a great deal of effort into this search for the legitimacy of public action through examinations by preventing the creation of family networks within the civil service, by prohibiting the employment of relatives in the same region or by developing geographical mobility of civil servants on a very regular basis.

Under the Ming dynasty (1368-1644), the imperial regime took on bureaucratic and despotic forms challenged by the people but the imperial examination system lasted until 1905 with the last imperial dynasty (the Qing).

For Gernet (1997), it is clear that knowledge "of the forms of recruitment of civil servants in China was not without effect on the movement of ideas in the Europe of the Old Regime." Brought to Europe by the Jesuits, the Chinese example of the selection of men according to their merits alone helped support revolutionary ideas in the Europe of the Old Regime and served in the development of the status of the civil servant in France, first under Napoleon then at the beginning of the Third Republic.

From 1911, Sun Yat Sen was inspired by the imperial examination system to create public examinations (called *yuan*) to develop the administrative management of the young Chinese republic. In 1949, the communist regime shelved the use of examinations to access public office and instead introduced a recruitment of senior civil servants among the Party officials. But in 1978, the "Four Modernizations" programme driven by Deng Xiao Ping broke with the habits of his predecessor. The statute of 14 August 1993 was to temporarily conclude this reform process by defining a general status of civil servant with the use of access examination, a career system and the development of a training institution for careers in public service.

In 2013, no fewer than two million people sat the national civil servant recruitment examinations for the coveted 20,000 positions available (People's Daily of 16/10/2013). This competition is still defined according to the principle of the three tests of the imperial examinations: a technical test and two professional tests that explicitly call on the spiritual and moral values of the civil servant.

Competitions integrating both public and private values

The spiritual and moral values are original in the sense that, in Chinese society, they span both the public and private spheres even though they are sometimes contradictory, often separated in Western societies. This is due to the flexibility of Chinese thought that, rather than dividing or opposing ideas, has always favoured a meeting of minds and historical continuity. Confucianism and Taoism were a rehash of ideas from ancient cults (ancestor worship, nature worship, worship rites) and Chinese communism never denied these principles, but instead used their potential to support the community system it proposed.

For Needham (1995), Chinese thought seeks harmony between, natural, physical and human elements without trying to build a distinction between them to better comprehend them, as was the case for Cartesian thought.

Confucianism was, after the classics of traditional Chinese thought, a very structuring current of the Chinese public ideology, first under the Western Han dynasty (206 BC -23 AD), because it formalised the relationship between family and State in a space that is both hierarchical but also very permeable. In his writings, Confucius favoured hierarchical relations between the sovereign and the people, but he positioned them at the same level as family relationships between parents and children or ancestors and the living. The paternalism of the State with regard to the citizens, much the same as that of the head of the family or ancestors in private life, has thus always been favoured.

Faced with the community or even clan values of Chinese society (Lin, 1997), the public authorities, with the exception of the Maoist period, used the currents of thought

and especially Confucianism as social structures that give precedence to merit, fairness and private morality in the forms of public action. Recourse to justice or arbitration of senior levels of government is an exceptional measure and should be avoided.

In twenty-first century China, these connections remain paramount. Their importance cannot be attributed solely to the execution of the authoritarianism of the communist regime but rather to the expression of a culture of social consensus that does not exclude the order and hierarchy paradoxically expected by most Chinese.

Even if a "Western" individualism is emerging in the daily life of the Chinese, their role in society continues to be shaped by their spirituality and morality. This recursive influence of the individual on the social proposes an original pattern of relations in which the private sphere and public sphere merge and enrich each other where Western countries offer more antagonistic public and private models.

The content of public examinations in China

The image of a bureaucratic China full of civil servants is quite far removed from the reality in the field and the flexibility of the contracts of public officials is often central to the human resource management of public institutions. The status of civil servant, as we understand it in the West, is mainly given to national civil servants (20% of public officials) only recruited by examination and generally employed in managerial positions. The other officials, including those working for the provincial governments, only have public contracts that call for a professional certificate. On the other hand, succeeding a public competition or a professional certificate seems to be an almost obligatory rite of passage for future public officials. To take stock of the content of these

examinations, we will start by describing the skills assessed by these examinations, as gleaned from official programmes and preparation books.

A distinction must first be made between the national examinations and the regional examinations before they are then compared to measure their similarities.

The national public examination

The current popularity of the Chinese civil service is due to the stability of jobs and benefits offered by the positions held (bonuses and benefits in kind). But most of all, in a country where the administration is all-powerful, a position in the civil service is also synonymous with power, accessible on the basis of merit, by examination. This examination, broken down into several anonymous tests with double marking, has a reputation of reliability and has a very strong legitimacy among the population.

The tests of the national examination consists of three parts:

- a MCQ of two hours and 140 questions covering four main themes (logic, mathematics, politics and philosophical ideas),
- an analysis of economic or policy documents of two and a half hours,
- an essay on the resolution of a question relating to one of the themes in the articles of the second test.

One third of the questions asked in the first test relate to the resolution of social, economic or societal problems for which the candidate must demonstrate their morality, integrity and ability to think of solutions in accordance with the Chinese philosophical principles, in particular those promulgated by Confucius or Lao Tzu (*LaoZi*). For the vast majority of questions, the answers proposed include a large number of responses that make it possible to assess the morality but also the goodwill of the candidates. This

goes beyond the theoretical knowledge of the candidates, the aim being to take into account their skills that can be used in a professional situation, the foundations of Chinese thought recognised as almost universal by the population.

The second test consists of three or four questions on one or more news articles designed to evaluate the candidate's ability to apply the role and duties of the civil servant to these themes. This is a means of assessing the candidate's ability to express their commitment towards public action.

The essay is assessed according to three main criteria, which are the quality of the writing, knowledge of ancient Chinese literature and the quality of argumentation. This systematic search for spiritual and moral values in the candidates' answers makes this national examination an instrument of communication and promotion of the civil service and the civil servants among the Chinese population. As highlighted by a candidate for the national examination we interviewed, "*the national examination defines the skills that every good Chinese should have*". It is the guarantor of respect for the philosophical tradition of public examinations in China and the legitimacy of the examinations and public officials among the population.

The regional professional certificate

The organisation of this examination is inspired by the tests of the national examination and is conducted by the provincial governments and local authorities. It adopts the principle of the three tests, one of which focuses completely on knowledge of Chinese thought and the other on the use of this knowledge in a professional setting. The third test evaluates the administrative skills of the candidates including writing skills or knowledge of the workplace. It takes the form of an oral examination that to all

appearances makes it possible to judge administrative skills but is mostly an opportunity to check the abilities of the candidates to define their role as a civil servant and to get across their individual morality and respect for the core values of Chinese thought.

A cultural approach to "publicness"

Our conceptual framework incorporates the principles of "publicness" redefined by Bozeman (2007) by perceiving public values as the result of a mixture of public and private authority.

For Bozeman (2013), public values are everywhere and it is difficult to conceptualise them for the purpose of performing a comprehensive analysis. We find public values everywhere and in a range of sources: surveys, literature, artefacts and cultural traditions, administrative documentation (Jorgensen and Bozeman, 2007). Society is necessarily impregnated and structured by public values. The problem is not to find public values but to understand them.

We believe that the private values have very diverse origins, integrating economic values (Bozeman, 2007) but also moral and spiritual values with a strong cultural connotation. Bozeman (2013) speaks of cross-fertilization to broaden the field of analysis of "publicness" towards the private sphere.

To take into consideration the influence of Chinese culture on this approximation of the public and private spheres, we propose a cultural approach to the "publicness" of the values conveyed by the civil servant recruitment examination in China. To do so, we mobilise the main currents of Chinese spirituality (ancient traditional religions, Confucianism and Taoism) to come up with an "endogenous" reading of these values

and thus highlight the objectives assigned in terms of legitimacy and social control, in the search for a greater proximity between public and private values.

Methods and data

We have focused our attention on the two main public recruitment examinations used in China namely:

- The national civil service recruitment examination organised by central government and destined to recruit the future senior officials or officers of the ministries and their devolution in 25 Chinese provinces.
- The regional recruitment examinations of the officials of the local authorities organised in each province by provincial governments and corresponding to a professional certificate.

To conduct this analysis work, we initially studied the content and program of these examinations. We read the official programmes and major works recommended for the preparation of these examinations (Lianchang, 2011; Zhenti, 2011; Yuqun and Junsheng, 2012).

In a second step, we tried to validate our initial assumptions by conducting face-to-face interviews with several candidates for the regional and national examinations as part of their annual preparation for the examination. This exploratory work was undertaken as part of a 7-year Franco-Chinese university exchange between partner institutions (University of Auvergne in France and University of Finance and Economics of Guangxi, China). This university, like all Chinese universities, offers preparatory courses for national and regional examinations earmarked either at the institution's non civil servant staff or at students at the end of the Master's cycle (*shuo shi*). This training

was offered in 2011-2012 to 180 registered students, with 110 students regularly attending the evening courses offered by the training.

The face-to-face survey was conducted on the basis of an interview guide (appendix), the questions being put together on the basis of our literature review. The purpose of this interview guide is to pinpoint the values that guide the actions of civil servants in China and measure their actual presence in the content of public examinations. The questions focus on the content of the examinations and the values they evaluate. We set out to compare them with the ideas expressed by the candidates about the examinations so as to check the continuity of its values in the process that goes from the preparation of the examination to the performance of the public duties of the civil servants or future civil servants.

These questions were formulated in such a way as to enable a cultural analysis of the values expressed by the respondents to determine whether it is possible to identify a meaning common to these values with relevance to the management objectives we are seeking to identify (Table 1).

Sample

The respondents were identified by a mixed positional approach (selection according to the type of examination prepared) and generational approach (age and seniority of the respondents in the public service).

With the aim of interviewing a variety of actors coming either from the civil service or from a graduate cycle and of triangulating their perceptions, 66 controlled interviews were conducted, each lasting 15 to 30 minutes. The respondents were identified according to three criteria:

- the type of examination prepared: 22 respondents preparing the national examination identified by [CN]; 44 respondents preparing the regional examination identified by [FR];
- their organisational position: 11 teachers identified [ENS], 16 intermediate administrative senior officials identified by [CAD], 19 administrative staff identified by [ADM] and 20 students working towards or having obtained their Master's identified by [ETU]
- their experiences working in the civil service in China expressed in number of years.

We apply the thematic content analysis (Paille and Mucchielli, 2012) to reduce the data to a limited set of themes that can then be analysed and interpreted. This analysis is inspired by the one proposed by the *Grounded Theory* as it facilitates an axial coding of data and its use by comparing the responses supplied in order to more accurately categorise the values in question.

The data obtained were coded using the research software N'Vivo (Version 10) to conduct an analysis and a relevant processing of qualitative data (Bazeley and Richards, 2000). The initial codification was done according to the original themes of the interview guide (e.g. harmony, family, face, morality, balance, etc.) defined in advance and then padded out in the course of the codification. The content of the answers was first analysed thematically for each interview and then transversally in order to reconcile the accounts. The codification was performed independently by the two French and Chinese researchers. The purpose of this double codification is to reduce bias arising from differences of interpretation (Miles and Huberman, 2003). The inter-codification agreement rate obtained was 88% and it represents a reliability criterion that may be

mere coincidence (Zwick, 1988), but that demonstrates the closeness of the interpretations of the two researchers.

The interpretation that we conduct thereafter serves to identify the relationship between our literature review of Chinese culture and the answers obtained or to confirm hunches that emerged when coding data by comparing the views of the two researchers. This led us to return to the literature to clarify the data obtained but also to offer alternative perspectives to validate our own process of interpretation.

We summarize in Table 1 the objectives of public management and the expressions of the relationship between public and private values that are found in the main comments collected to which we attach the cultural content identifiable in the public examination programmes in China. We equate this relationship to a cultural shift described by the results of our NVivo codification that compare the perceptions of the candidates to eight major Chinese cultural values. This initial analysis is then commented and justified in the light of the literature relating to Chinese culture and its origins.

The codifications performed on the basis of the answers obtained reveal a significant asymmetry of the sociological profiles within each dominant cultural value. This suggests that the status, experience or the type of examination prepared have very little influence on the values put forward by respondents. The civil servant recruitment examinations and their candidates correlatively demonstrate a strong attachment to individual spiritual and moral values that are explicitly found in traditional Chinese writings.

The civil servant recruitment examinations in China focused on the morality and spirituality of the officials

By studying in detail the preparatory books for this examination (Zhenti, 2011; Lianchang, 2011) or the answers given by the candidates interviewed, we find that the evaluation of the morality of the candidates is the subject of the first two-hour long test consisting of ten multiple choice questions, academic questions and a practical case study. To prepare for this test, several books are available to candidates that describe the attitudes to be adopted by officials in the workplace: "*be an example*", "*develop experience*", "*watch what you say*", "*be brave and honest*". Such principles of action are also essential pillars of Chinese thought that govern extra-professional relations, in particular those of the family. They are derived from the Confucian literature (the "Canonical books") but also ancient books (the "Classics"). There are also significant borrowings from Taoist philosophy in particular to ensure the connection between the individual Way (the *dao*) and the values defined by the public authorities.

Candidates must demonstrate their ability to reproduce in their profession as civil servant the modes of thought common to the majority of Chinese that incorporate both Confucian morality but also Taoist harmony. "*Following your path in public action*", "*being yin and yang in your work but also in your life*", "*educating your feelings*", are the main precepts recommended in the literature preparing for the examination and that should make it possible, as noted by a candidate interviewed, "*to unify personal values and public values like the yin and yang that intermingle in Chinese thought.*" The exercise of a public office requires "*being both interior and exterior*" to be in a continuation of your "*private conscience*".

This complementarity between individual values and public values is reflected in the content of the second test which includes in its second part a knowledge test of two

hours on Western psychology and philosophy (Plato, Hippocrates, Rogers, Fischer are cited). The confrontation of ideas from various sources is very representative of Chinese thought, which adopts or superimposes external knowledge either, sometimes, to better prove its own superiority or, more often, to strengthen the principle of complementarity of ideas rather than their opposition.

The sharing of values between the private and public sector is one of the dominants of our analyses. Down the centuries, the public authorities have included this cultural complementarity in their forms of intervention.

Moral rectitude and the ritualisation of the main Chinese spiritual values (respect for family, harmony, respect for ancestors, inaction) have allowed the authorities to reconcile the people with public officials so that, as highlighted by a candidate that we interviewed "*the civil servant is considered as a relative*". Thus, the bureaucratic image of the public administration is quite well accepted by the population, as the State, through the examinations and family networks, offers all Chinese an opportunity to all Chinese to have one or several public officials among its "relatives".

The Chinese bureaucratic tradition, reinforced by the communist era, encourages the population to find spaces of freedom in the face of official rules that appear to be very rigid. Thus, the honesty of public officials is rarely questioned when, to defend the interests of their family, they bend the rules for members of their network. Through their groups and networks, the Chinese prefer informality and the flexibility of close relationships to facilitate effective action against a non-modelled and changing reality. The plasticity of public officials is a quality that the civil servant recruitment examinations promote. The civil servant is the one who, "*through the respectability of*

his thought, must seek the fairness and the balance of public decisions" [CR/ADM/7].

In China, the Chinese people consider the public-private antagonism as *yin* and *yang*, that is to say, not in opposition but complementary, a part of one always being in the other, in a continual movement of ebb and flow, like the Tao *taijitu* drawing with the two nested commas and a dot of one in the other. The civil servant recruitment examination must accompany a movement across the public/private boundary that is not brutal but instead, locally breaks down this boundary to allow the individual to gain a foothold in the public service.

Thus, like the *yin* and the *yang* whose grammatical category in Chinese would be the verb rather than the adjective, we need to consider public and private as dynamic notions indicating a movement and a direction: a self-appraisal and opening for the private, closure and reflexive actions for the public.

The system of public examinations that represents a cultural border and a highly visible instrument of passage between public and private spaces is exemplary in this way of thinking and of building the values of a society (Figure 1).

This cultural shift requires the public official to be primarily trained in the values particular to the private and public cultures and this training to be validated by an examination or entry certificate. Our analyses retain (Figure 1) that these values are partly disseminated by validation in public examinations of eight spiritual and moral values which are to be compared with the eight cultural values selected by the encoding of responses to our face-to-face interviews (Table 1). They contribute to the construction of a cultural continuum between private and public values legitimising the public official and the social control of the State, while influencing how public services are

carried out. The enforcement of its values through the content of the civil servant recruitment examinations is a management objective of public values that is part of a dynamic of the process-management of the professional behaviour of public officials.

This public-private complementarity is supported by an analysis of the Chinese script which reproduces in part the traditional culture in the shape and definition of the main ideograms or phonetic keys. Thus, the "public" character is pronounced *gong* (first tone) and is written as 公 in Chinese. It is composed of two parts: above the figure eight 八 and below the symbol of the private 厶. To the Chinese mind, the public is thus at the heart of the private. This character dates from a time when the land belonged to nobles, representing the king and the State and where the peasants "belonged" to the owner of the land (the king gave land and families to local lords). Eight families of peasants worked the eight outer squares for themselves and the eight families worked together the inner square whose produce was earmarked for the owning lord in the form of a tax. The public is explicitly designated as the fact of working together for the State and is designated by eight private units characteristic of Chinese thought, which considers concepts in their entirety and where that which is not said is as important as that which is said. Considering eight private units is automatically tantamount to designating the missing unit, the public and thus to characterising it.

The private character also conveys this public-private complementarity. It is written in modern Chinese as 私 and is also composed of two parts. The left part 禾 represents a cereal and the right part 厶 is the key seen above which means the act of carrying. The private is designated by the fruit, the harvest, the *usus* and the *fructus*, but without full ownership.

Conclusion

We have presented the close relationship in China between public values and private values incorporating the spirituality and morality of public officials. This determination of public values integrating spiritual and moral values belonging more to the private sphere offers a vision that is both opposed and complementary to that of Western secularism. It has the theoretical interest of describing values of public or private origin that constitute an axiological foundation from which public management can draw its inspiration to build its management tools. The civil service competitions present the characteristics of an "a priori" management of the performance of public services on the basis of values that are common to the general public and the civil servants. Whether that management is completely deliberate or not, it describes a mode of operation that grants a more significant role to the process (the how) than to the result (the what). This is basically representative of Chinese thought and culture and can inspire the managerial reshuffles that the theory of "new public value" sets out to trigger. We suggest that a potential avenue of development of the theoretical and practical foundation of this theory lies in overcoming the "logic of results" of NPM by putting a greater focus on the "logic of value."

This method of approximating the public and private spheres is not flawless, as the political system in China can corrupt the execution of this character inspired by traditional Chinese thought. In practice, the low wages of Chinese officials (they are also referred to China by the image of the "iron rice bowl") and the need for proximity to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) requires from them strategies ranging from the acceptance of the gift received as a gratuity to large-scale financial corruption. This

corruption is a strong limit of the public value system in China (Chan and Ma, 2011).

It also seems obvious that the public authority in China owes a significant part of the respect shown towards it to the political system in place since 1949. That being said, historically, even the most liberal regimes (those of the Song emperors or the communist governments since 1978) were able to legitimise their power by incorporating the values of traditional Chinese culture in various forms of public intervention. Without this, it is not presumptuous to claim that the public authority and in particular the examinations could have been more conspicuously challenged by Chinese society.

The cultural approach to public values in China is not, to our knowledge, proposed in the literature even though it is based, as are the civil servant recruitment examinations, on historical knowledge going back several centuries. For Bozeman (2007), regardless of the approach developed to describe or analyse public values (surveys, interviews, document analysis, literature review), it seems unlikely that it could be unanimous. That proposed here paves the way for a culturalist analysis of public management (Hood, 1998; Pollitt, 2011) in China that will need to be extended in the study of other public management instruments and the effective exercise of these values.

Although it is premature to speak of a real management of public values in China, the civil servant recruitment examinations and, more generally, the forms of public action in this country represent broad avenues of investigation and discovery that are very culturally defined. Without wishing to be naively optimistic or idealistic about the public structures and power in China, it seems essential to pay particular attention to the relatively unknown public organisation of a nation representing more than one fifth of

the world population and whose public organisation has its roots in a cultural tradition still very present in all spheres of private and public life.

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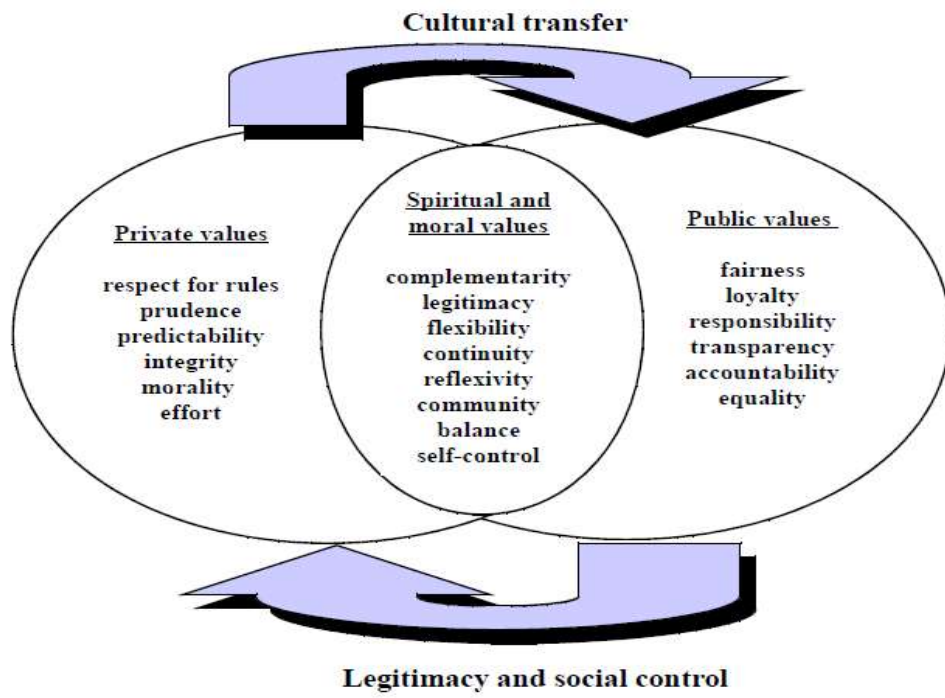
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Table 1. Analysis of the “cultural shift” between private and public values

| Verbatim comment | Corresponding cultural values | Target goals |
|---|--|---|
| <p>“the civil servant is considered as a relative” CN/ETU/03 “the public organisation is modelled on that of the family” CR/ADM/10</p> | <p>Respect for the family’s ancestors (cult of ancestors and family piety)</p> | <p>Bring the public closer to the civil servants</p> |
| <p>“The public official is the one who, through the respectability of his thought, must find the balance of public decisions” CR/ADM/7 “Be fair and balanced” CN/CAD/1</p> | <p>Social harmony (Confucianism)</p> | <p>Privilege the information and flexibility of local relations</p> |
| <p>“Be both interior and exterior” CR/ENS/3 “be yin and yang in your work but also in your life” CN/CAD/7</p> | <p>Yin and Yang (Taoism) the balance of opposites</p> | <p>Search for public-private complementarity</p> |
| <p>“Chinese culture imposes spaces of negotiation” CR/CAD/2 “we have to listen to the people” CR/ADM/5</p> | <p>Cult of nature and non action (Book of changes)</p> | <p>Leave spaces of freedom faced with official rules</p> |
| <p>“Be a good example” CN/CAD/7 “watch what you say” CR/ENS/1 “match your word to your reasoning” CN/ENS/10</p> | <p>Collective orientation (Confucianism) Book of documents (<i>Shujing</i>)</p> | <p>Match private behaviour/public behaviour</p> |
| <p>“Follow your path in public action” CR/ENS/4 “Apply your own values in your profession” CN/EDU/0</p> | <p>The path (Taoism)</p> | <p>Obtain the reflectivity of public action from private values</p> |
| <p>“The national examination delimits the skills that each good Chinese must have” CN/EYU/0 “be honest and transmit it” CR/ENS/2</p> | <p>The ritualisation of values Book of rites (<i>Liji</i>)</p> | <p>Ritualise and legitimise the public values</p> |

Figure 1. the cultural transfer of civil servant recruitment examinations in China



APPENDIX: INTERVIEW GUIDE

Age:

Level of education:

Status or job of the respondent:

Seniority in the civil service:

Type of examination prepared:

The content of the civil servant recruitment examinations

Which tests make up the civil servant recruitment examinations that you are sitting? What is the main content? Which documents are you using for the preparation?

What is the basic knowledge that must be acquired to pass the civil servant recruitment examinations?

Why are you sitting the civil servant recruitment examination? What are your motivations?

Is knowledge of Chinese culture and philosophy important in the examination tests? If yes, give examples?

Private values and public values

What do you consider to be civil service values?

What are the values and qualities that are indispensable for the performance of a civil service position?

How should a civil servant behave when performing their duty? Which personal or collective values should they apply?

What place does a civil servant hold in society in your opinion? What is their role?

In your opinion, what does the general public expect from the work of a civil servant and more globally from a public service?

How do you see your role as a holder of public office or when performing a public service?

Which principles of action do you believe that you have to implement?

Conclusion

Can you add any other elements that describe the civil service values?

Are there any other elements that can describe the content of the civil servant recruitment

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