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SOCIOLOGY OF MANAGEMENT IN THE CHINESE DIMENSION: INSTITUTIONALIZATION PROBLEMS



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Currently, there is a growing need to study the experience of sociological schools in countries that for some time were in a state of “catching-up development” and gradually increased their opportunities to participate in the processes of world science. The article is devoted to the state and prospects of development of Chinese mainland sociology, especially as it relates to the sociology of management. The scientific problem is tied to understanding the degree of influence of three factors (traditionalism, ideology and pragmatism) on the formation and development of this branch of sociology. The paper applies a system-modeling methodology, including factor analysis to identify the state and prospects of development of sociology of management as a scientific branch. Based on the principle of historicism and continuity/discreteness of cultural and social development, the paper considers the concepts of traditionalism, ideology and pragmatism in the context of the development stages of Chinese mainland sociology and sociological and managerial concepts. We describe the main strategies chosen by Chinese sociologists at different stages of sociology’s modern development. In the 1980s, it was studying foreign management experience and searching for ways to adapt it, adhering to Marxist ideology and searching for their own, region-specific path of sociology’s development. In the 1990s–2000s, it was the refusal to fully institutionalize sociology of management in the country, despite the developing attention to this field. The article also notes the trend of the 2010s, associated with the growing importance of the concept of social management in Chinese sociology. The conclusions point out that it is the determining influence of the factors of traditionalism, ideology and pragmatics that leads to the redistribution of directions studying management not in favor of sociology. Each of these factors is in contact with sociology within interdisciplinary fields, but only

one aspect – social governance – is fully owned by sociology. On the basis of this analysis, we assume that sociology of management in China will continue developing in the following patterns: explicit borrowing of foreign methods and implicit distribution of Chinese governance research among different social sciences.

China, sociology of management, pragmatism, ideology, traditionalism.

Introduction

The thorny path of Chinese sociology to its current state can be viewed through the prism of several characteristics specific to it. First, contemporary Chinese sociology is divided into two unequal parts: mainland and non-mainland, due to the presence of two different political regimes in China. Second, the formation of mainland sociology was influenced by a long gap in the scientific tradition: before the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, it developed in the mainstream of world science, and after a long hiatus since the late 1970s, it took on a new face, largely due to the political-ideological demands of the state. Third, sociology in the PRC, due to the rather significant influence of Chinese ethnocentrism (Kobzhitskaya, 2018), is experiencing a constant pressure of traditionalism, in which the state and a significant part of the scientific intelligentsia are looking for confirmation of the idea of the specificity, uniqueness of the Chinese civilization.

All these characteristics significantly influence the development of sociology of management as a branch of Chinese mainland sociology. Governance as a process and as an object of the study is at the center of attention of the political and social elite, and this kind of research is enclosed in a rather strict methodological framework. They have been shaped by three determining factors: pragmatism, aimed at realizing scientific objectives, ideology, which uses the scientific field to strengthen the existing party-state system, and traditionalism, which serves to shape and reinforce the idea of the “special spirit” of the Chinese nation. These three factors have shaped China's contemporary sociology of governance. This article seeks to establish the extent to which these three

factors have influenced this field, and to identify the difficulties of institutionalization and prospects for the development of Chinese mainland sociology.

Methodology and methods

To identify the state of sociology of management as a scientific branch, we applied a systemic modeling approach, including factor analysis, which allowed identifying the factors conducting the influence on the development of this sociological subdiscipline. The evolution of the branch's development was conceptualized on the basis of the principle of historicism and continuity/discreteness of cultural and social development, which contributed to the identification of the most significant periods.

As for the basic concepts, we define them as described above, following the researchers who have studied them both separately and in interrelation¹ (Kobzev, 2004, Malyavin, 2007; Malyavin, 2013; Kobzev, 2016; Khandarkhaeva, 2022, etc.). Understanding traditionalism as a significant characteristic of Chinese culture can be divided into two interrelated and complementary aspects. Summarizing the approaches of scholars studying Chinese traditionalism, including in the managerial aspect, it can be viewed as a continuous process of reproducing various directions of spiritual culture and as adherence to a set of stable and socially transmitted values based on the aforementioned directions. In the managerial sphere, traditionalism is a strong argument for the preservation and reproduction of management strategies implemented today, referring to the five-thousand-year history of the Chinese civilization, which in the eyes of the Chinese appears successful and effective.

Ideology in the modern context of the People's Republic of China acts as a set of values,

¹ Bukataya M.V. (2010). Axiological Bases of Interaction between Tradition and Innovation in Chinese Culture: Candidate of Sciences (Cultural Studies) thesis: 24.00.01. Barnaul: Kemerovskii gos. un-t kul'tury i iskusstv.

norms and guidelines officially enshrined by the party and the state in order to maintain the stability of the existing system of state-party governance. Ideology, acting as an instrument of governance, also becomes a factor in the scientific process, as it realizes its basic function at all levels of political and social life.

Finally, pragmatism as a factor of ensuring the scientific content proper under the significant pressure of traditionalism and ideology on the research process can be defined as a focus on the realization of socially useful tasks.

Research results

It is impossible to understand the evolution of Chinese sociology of management without taking into account the stages of its development. Obviously, the mentioned branch in its relatively formed form appeared in China already at the modern stage, but the foundations of its “Chineseization” were laid together with the penetration of sociological knowledge in China in general (Kremnyov, 2019). For instance, traditionalism as a factor of influence on the scientific comprehension of managerial processes was formed in the works of Chinese educators of the late 19th – early 20th century: Zhang Taiyan (Zhang Taiyan, 1906; 1977; 1985), Liu Shipei (Liu Shipei, 1992), Xu Zhiheng (Xu Zhiheng, 1905), etc. Traditionalism was a reaction to the increasing importance of Western positivist science, which by that time had significantly surpassed the achievements of Chinese civilization.

The ideology of Marxism became a significant factor in Chinese sociological studies of governance also long before the modern stage, particularly within Marxist sociology in 1910–1930 (Kremnyov, 2020). Ideologized approaches are outlined in the works of early Chinese communists Li Dazhao (Li Dazhao, 1999), Qu Qiubai (Qu Qiubai, 1998), Li Da (Li Da, 2007), etc.

The pragmatics of sociological management research was shaped simultaneously with the above two factors, both by the efforts of the enlighteners who advanced the development of

positivist knowledge at the initial stage: Yang Du (Yang Du, 1960), Ou Jujia (Taipingyang ke, 1902), etc., and by the established sociologists of the first half of the 20th century, Li Hanlin, Sun Bingyao, Fang Ming, et al. (Li, et al., 1987). Western sociologists working in China at that time played an important role in the spread of sociology: in 1908, American A. Monn began teaching sociology at St. John’s University, and in 1913, American professor D. Culp founded the first sociology department in China (Veselova et al., 2018). A significant work that included the study of governance was the work of Americans S. Gamble and J.S. Burgess “Peking: A Social Study” (Gamble, Burgess, 1921).

The long hiatus in the development of the Chinese sociology, caused by the Communist government’s negative attitude toward it between 1949 and 1979, conditioned the way in which sociology of management had to force its way back to China in the modern phase, after 1979.

In the 1980s, Chinese sociologists had to adopt a catch-up strategy and begin studying foreign management experience. They did so cautiously, balancing pragmatics and ideology, the demands of which had softened but not disappeared. Chinese scholars had to balance the two vectors by finding their own path of development that would satisfy both.

The task could be partially solved by studying sociological and managerial knowledge of socialist countries, first of all, the USSR, which has already had the experience of borrowing the achievements of Western science and simultaneously dissociating itself from it. Thus, in 1986–1987, the editions “Foreign Social Sciences” and “Digest of Modern Foreign Social Sciences and Philosophy” published review materials on sociology of management and sociology of organization (Shulga, 1986; Xu Zheng, 1986; Pisarenko, 1987), which represented a transposition of the corresponding sections of the “Dictionary of Applied Sociology”² published in 1984 in Minsk. However, despite the USSR’s experience in management studies, sociological practices of studying management in general were insufficient.

² Davidyuk G.P. et al. (Ed.). (1984). Dictionary of Applied Sociology. Minsk: Universitetskoe.

Another strategy was to continue the lineage of the temporarily forgotten sociology of Marxism. It allowed transposing actual borrowings from the West onto a Marxist ideological basis. These attempts can be seen in Yuan Shaoqing and Tao Wenjun's "Remarks on Management Sociology" (Yuan Shaoqing, 1987). The authors put forward the thesis that sociology of management is a part of Marxist sociology and then give it standard definitions for Western approaches. Revealing the essence of sociology of management, the authors first of all point to its class character, then write about such characteristics as comprehensiveness, multileveledness, unity of concreteness and abstractness. They see the Marxist content of management sociology in the fact that it should, based on human needs and motives, through the coordination and control of social groups and interpersonal relations in the management system, stimulate and induce people to a certain behavior, prevent and correct irrational ways of action, and eliminate factors that hinder the implementation of management goals.

We also try to consider the theoretical basis of management sociology in a Marxist manner, believing that only in this way can Western theories be used. Mentioning many of them, they include in the list of literature only the works of K. Marx and F. Engels; the text of the article without references also quotes V.I. Lenin, I.V. Stalin, etc., and sociological approaches to management are considered through the opposition of Marxist and capitalist interpretations.

In parallel, a third strategy is developing – the search for the regional specificity of governance as an object without a strict doctrinal attachment to Marxism, but with a clear bias toward "Chinese specificity", but not in a Marxist, but in a neo-traditionalist way. In such works one can also feel Western borrowings, as the aim is to rethink the sociology of management through the Chinese experience and Chinese culture. For instance, Yang Huaxian (Yang Huaxian, 1985) first formulates a rather general definition: sociology of management is a discipline that studies the application of sociological theories and methods to the

management of enterprises, the management of human activity (mainly production) as social behavior, and management as a social phenomenon. However, after that, the author immediately proceeds to outline his concept of the branches of sociology of management, reflecting the search for "Chinese specificity". He proposes that the discipline be viewed as a set of three types of studies: 1) a democratic type of governance, although seeking to resolve social contradictions by incorporating the human factor, following J.E. Mayo, but still purely bourgeois, i.e., bearing all the problems of the capitalist system; 2) an effective type of governance, built only on the technology of using human resources to achieve goals; and 3) an adequate type of governance, which takes into account regional specifics and makes it possible to construct the most appropriate models for each region, including China.

We should also note the purely pragmatic approaches to the sociology of management at that time, which took less account of ideological and traditionalist factors. Within the framework of these approaches, Chinese sociologists actively studied the achievements of Western science in the field of management, and the works of classics (Taylor, 1911; Taylor, 1984) and contemporaries (Hanken, 1981; Hanken, 1984) were translated into Chinese. The catch-up strategy allowed scholars to act in this way because acquiring the tools necessary for socio-economic development came first. Similarly, the compilers of the 1986 Dictionary of Modern Management Sciences, Zhu Xinmin, Li Yongchun, and Zhou Ji (Zhu Xinmin, 1986), write about the sociology of management in an ideologically free manner. They define sociology of management as follows: sociology of management is an applied science that uses sociological theories and approaches to study management practice. It focuses on the study of contradictions and problems arising in the process of managerial practice in the interaction of individuals, groups, organizations and communities, as well as the characteristic properties of social roles in various spheres of activity, considering all this from the holistic, systemic and

dialectical position of sociology. According to the dictionary, sociology of management studies managerial activity as a social act, a process of social interaction and at the same time as a social phenomenon. The authors see as the subject of sociology:

- 1) processes of social interaction in all spheres of life;
- 2) organizational structure of management, its efficiency, mechanisms and trends of its transformation;
- 3) functions of systems and norms, as well as their effectiveness in management practice;
- 4) individual and social factors of effective management.

Separately, the authors of the dictionary point out that sociology of management studies the motivation and social responsibility of workers, and contributes to the improvement of management structures and scientific approaches to management.

At the same stage, the term “social management” appeared in the scientific discourse, and at that time the phrase “shehui guanli” was used in this sense. At the beginning, it had no single usage, and it was used in several meanings. First, as a way of translating foreign-language terms with similar meanings, for example, in A.K. Lepekhin’s article (Lepekhin, 1983) translated by Tong Qingcai and published in the journal *Foreign Social Sciences* (Lepekhin, 1984). Second, as a synonym for related terms from the field of governance, for example, as a synonym for “social control” over sanitary and epidemiological work in an article by Li Chunsheng (Li Chunsheng, 1985), product quality in a paper by Li Mingcheng and Zheng Jiaqi (Li Mingcheng, 1986), and the field of grassroots taxation in an article by Li Weixin (Li Weixin, 1987); as a synonym for “social policy” in an article by Xu Zheng (Xu Zheng, 1986); as a synonym for “public administration” in an article by Liu Zhifang and Yang Haijiao (Liu Zhifang, 1986), etc. At the same time, approaches to the understanding of social management close to the modern approaches are already being formed, at first in a very general sense, without a specific definition, for example, in Zhong Yangsheng’s article “Science and the Analytical

Method of Society and Social Management” (Zhong Yangsheng, 1985). Then it is more and more specifically: as an instrument of self-regulation of society in Zhao Wenxian’s “The Position of Social Management in Historical Materialism” (Zhao Wenxian, 1987), as a new approach involving social organizations in the management of society in Yan Jiaming’s article “Social Management and the Object of Sociological Research” (Yan Jiaming, 1987), or involving citizens in governance, turning them into a subject of governance in Wang Jinling’s “The Great Unification and Modernization of Social Management – a Brief discussion on the Disadvantages of Excessive Concentration of Power” (Wang Jinling, 1987) and Wu Yue’s “Social Management Functions and Government Agency Reform” (Wu Yue, 1988).

The three main outcomes of the 1980s were the introduction of Chinese to the field of sociology of management, the conceptualization of the notion of “social management”, and the question of finding a region-specific path for Chinese sociology. At this stage, Chinese science had already begun to search for the “right” correlation between pragmatics and ideology: the former, due to the lack of comprehensive sociological knowledge in China, had to be sought in Western works, while the latter had already become an indispensable attribute of a scientific text, as required by a systematic approach to the ideologization of sociocultural activities in socialist countries. The third component – the traditionalist component – almost immediately begins to be used as a tool for creating region-specific knowledge.

The period of the country’s governance by two generations of technocrats under Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao in the 1990s–2000s is often characterized as relatively low-ideological and highly pragmatic. Socio-economic objectives came first, and governance was supposed to serve their fulfillment. Borrowing Western theory and methodology was “given the green light”.

At the same time, sociology of management during this period experienced serious difficulties in establishing itself in China. Despite the serious potential of this subfield, there is

only sustained interest in its achievements, but no full-fledged institutionalization. The CNKI's general database of the PRC's research papers does not record a single master's or doctoral thesis on sociology of management (the list of areas for defense is usually determined by the organization where the defense takes place). Sociology of management appears only in selected articles, such as Chen Dilin's "The Monotonic Mechanism in the Perspective of Management Sociology" (Chen Dilin, 2008), Zhu Huafei's "The Impact of Chinese Traditional Culture on Interpersonal interaction from the Perspective of Management Sociology" (Zhu Huafei, 2012), etc., and as a course in universities, such as Qu Xihua's "Management Sociology" (Qu Xihua, 2008), etc.

Since this period, sociological and management studies have been defended either without specifying the direction/specialty (this method of defense is quite common in China), or within other areas of sociology. As a rule, the degree-granting organization determines the list of such fields, including social management, social guarantees and social policy (Yu Jinghui, 2011; Xu Yun, 2015), applied sociology (Jia Yujiao, 2010), management in non-profit organizations (Ma Yujie, 2014), social anthropology (Wu Qiaoyu, 2011), etc.

Since the early 2010s and the rise to power of the new elite under Xi Jinping, social governance as a concept has come to the forefront. In 2013, the Third Plenum of the 18th Chinese Communist Party Central Committee adopted the Decision of the Chinese Communist Party Central Committee on Some Important Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform, which pointed out that social governance needed reform in the ideological, legal, political economy, and social-oriented spheres. At the same time, the state strengthened its appeal to traditionalism as an argument to justify China's development and social and political progress. For instance, Xi Jinping regularly refers to traditional values and Confucian concepts in his speeches, postulating the assertion that "China's outstanding traditional culture is the foundation of the Chinese nation and its soul" (Xi Jinping, 2022). He explicitly points out that

it is necessary to look to it as a source of ideas for governing the country (Zhang Jun, 2022).

It has spawned and continues to spawn a new body of sociological and managerial works whose authors balance ideology, tradition, and pragmatics: Feng Shizheng's "Social Governance and Political Order in Contemporary China" (Feng Shizheng, 2013), Wang Ming's "Social Organizations and Social Governance" (Wang Ming, 2014), Zhang Yi's "Social Governance: New Thinking and Practicing" (Zhang Yi, 2014), Yu Keping's "Promoting Modernization of National Governance and Social Governance" (Yu Keping, 2014), and Li Youmei's "Urban Social Governance" (Li Youmei, 2014). Thus, modern sociology, studying governance, is in a constant search for methodology and models of scientific text, allowing to achieve harmony between the three identified factors.

Conclusion and discussion

Our research results make it possible to draw some conclusions about the current state of sociology of management in the PRC.

First, it exists in two states, implicit and explicit. The first state characterizes its insufficient institutionalization in the sphere of defending scientific papers, master's and doctoral theses. No papers are defended on sociology of management as a scientific specialty, despite the fact that management continues to be a subject of Chinese sociology. The second state refers to a free field, not regulated by strict limits of defenses. For example, along with the achievements of other scientific disciplines, the Chinese sociologists used the achievements of the world sociology of management, its methods and approaches. In addition, a number of universities have a specialty "Sociology of Management", and textbooks and programs are created for it.

Second, the insufficient institutionalization of sociology of management as a scientific specialty is a direct consequence of the influence of three determining factors on the field of management: traditionalism, ideology, and pragmatics. This leads to a redistribution of scientific specialties devoted to the study of management, not in favor of sociology.

The ideological aspects of management fall to political science and scientific Marxism, the traditional to history and philosophy, and the pragmatic to management. They interact with sociology within the framework of interdisciplinary fields (political sociology, economic sociology, etc.), while sociology itself has only one aspect – social governance, which is consonant with this science both conceptually and terminologically.

We should assume that the current state of Chinese sociology – relatively stable and balanced – is unlikely to give management sociology a stronger niche than it has today. It seems that it will continue developing in the already established dichotomy: explicit borrowing of achievements of foreign sociologies of governance and implicit distribution of Chinese governance studies in various social sciences, including works on social governance within sociology proper.

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