

CHINA'S TALENT CULTIVATION SYSTEM FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF CADRE EVALUATION

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***Abstract:** In this paper, the author shares his view on some specific features of the talent cultivation system in China from the perspective of cadre evaluation. After a brief introduction to the Communist Party of China's view on Talent Utilization, the author focuses on the Mechanism for Evaluating Cadres in China, which has evolved in tandem with the reform and opening-up process since 1978. In the final part of the paper, the author briefly addresses some issues raised with the talent management system.*

***Keywords:** talent management system, cadre evaluation, Communist Party of China, Reform and Open-up process, Confucianism.*

1. Introduction

The article does not use the term “elite system”¹, nor does it employ “talent utilization mechanism”, as “utilization” is merely one aspect of a broader talent management system. This comprehensive talent management system encompasses various components, with utilization being only one part: (1) Selection; (2) Utilization; (3) Evaluation; (4) Inspection and Supervision; (5) Appointment and Dismissal, etc. Additionally, the focus of talent in this article is specifically on individuals in the fields of politics, social management, and national governance, rather than those in economics, business, science and technology, or literature and the arts.

China's success in the reform and opening-up process is closely linked to the establishment and practical implementation of a talent management system. The selection, identification, training, cultivation, support, appointment, and development of talent are all based on varying standards, which are continuously developed and adapted in response to China's practical needs and developmental demands. These standards are reflected in the methods and approaches used for cadre evaluation across various levels, fields, and stages. Yet, they represent a relatively consistent vision of the Communist Party of China on this issue,

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while also manifesting in diverse and dynamic ways within Chinese society.

In Vietnamese, terms like “cadre evaluation” or “cadre survey” often do not fully capture the meaning of the Chinese term “ganbu kaohe” (干部考核), as they lack the competitive, exam-like, and ranking characteristics inherent in “cadre evaluation” in the Chinese context. However, this article will aim to present “cadre evaluation” in a way that conveys the sense of “ganbu kaohe”.

2. The Communist Party of China’s Perspective on Talent Utilization

China has a long-standing tradition of a merit-based system rooted in Confucianism. When Zhong Gong asked about governance, Confucius replied, “Enable officials to fulfill their duties, overlook minor faults, and promote virtuous and talented individuals” (Tiên hữu tí, xá tiểu quá, cử hiền tài. 先有司，赦小過，舉賢才。Luận ngữ, “Tứ Lộ”). Confucian thinkers highly valued a sage (圣人 *shengren*) or a person of virtue (贤人 *xianren*). They asserted that everyone has the potential to attain the nature and integrity of a sage. They emphasized the virtue of uplifting the talented (*shangxian* 上贤), reflecting a tendency to value talent and select suitable leaders. To empower sages to practice benevolent governance (*renzheng* 仁政), they placed their faith in the political ideal of ruling through virtue (Chen et al 2023: 338). The *shanrang* (禪让) system

is a tradition of transferring the throne based on merit and virtue, contrasting with hereditary succession (*chuantizi* 传子 or *shieti* 世袭). Following the *shanrang* era, the Western Han Dynasty introduced the *chaju* (察举) system, where the court rigorously evaluated recommended candidates. This approach was notably formalized in the Confucian civil service examination system, which was widely implemented from the Tang Dynasty onward.

Over the years, China has implemented development strategies and policies to attract and cultivate talent. In December 2003, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held a National Talent Work Conference in Beijing. It adopted the resolution “Decision to Strengthen Further the Talent Work of the Central Party and the State Council”. This resolution clearly stated that “any individual with certain knowledge or skills, capable of engaging in creative labor to promote socialist material civilization, political civilization, and spiritual civilization, and who makes a positive contribution to the great cause of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, is considered a key talent for the Party and the country”. This laid the foundational basis for establishing evaluation standards and classifying talent, distinguishing between skilled talent, ordinary labor, and human resources.

In practice, there are three standards

for talent: the standard for utilizing talent, the social standard for talent, and the statistical standard for talent. The standard for utilizing talent refers to the criteria set by organizations for selecting and using talent, which vary depending on the specific needs of the organization. The social standard for talent is a relative formula that society applies to define talent, where individuals may have their own perspectives on what constitutes talent. This is a flexible standard, not a rigid one. The statistical standard for talent is the most crucial standard for building a comprehensive talent strategy, as it requires unified regulations across the entire country (but it is obvious that localities and organizations can also set their own statistical standards).

Along with clear standards for talent, the overall planning for building a talent pool in China's talent development strategy also focuses on defining the scope of talent evaluation. In February 2002, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council issued the "Outline of the National Talent Team Building Plan for the 2002-2005 Period", which aimed to address the overall needs and development of various industries and regions. It proposed the idea of building a "talent powerhouse" strategy. The scope of talent is categorized by fields such as political party talent, specialized technical talent, enterprise management talent, scientific and technological

talent, high-level technical talent, and rural talent, among others. It is also categorized by regions, including Northeast talent, Northwest talent, and so on. However, if the scope of talent is divided by type based on competence criteria, strategic planners commonly categorize it into three main types: management talent, professional talent, and creative talent.

For creative talent, the 15th Congress clearly stated: "In building a society with Chinese characteristics, it is necessary to enhance the moral and ideological qualities as well as the scientific cultural qualities of the entire nation, cultivate generations of citizens with ideals, ethics, culture, and discipline, and create strong and solid spiritual and intellectual momentum to support economic development and the comprehensive development of society". Creativity is the fundamental characteristic of this type of talent, in addition to the qualities already mentioned, and is expressed in three aspects: "First, inventive creativity; second, creative management; third, creative culture".

Specialized talent is defined as individuals who are knowledgeable and skilled in a specific field of expertise, including industry, commerce, science, education, healthcare, culture, agriculture, tourism, foreign trade, finance, currency, architecture, and construction, and so on. The "Outline of the National Talent Team Building Plan

for the 2002-2005 Period” explicitly emphasized the need to build a high-quality, professional, and socialized technical talent pool.

Management talent refers to individuals who organize and lead various industries and organizations, even at a national scale, to drive continued development. Whether the available resources are utilized efficiently, whether production and business operations achieve high yields, and whether the lives of the people and the economic, political, and social conditions develop harmoniously all of these require managers with sound policies and wise leadership.

In utilizing talent, China follows the following principles:

- Trust in intellectuals politically, allowing them to hold positions of authority, demonstrate their creativity, and improve work efficiency, creating opportunities for them to become recognized as talents.

- For talents, avoid seeking perfection and be bold in using them.

- Use talent based on the clear “three-stage mechanism”: Stage one, recruitment (selection, election, appointment); Stage two, utilization (awards, discipline, promotions, demotions, transfers, allocation of talent); and Stage three, departure. Based on relevant regulations and laws, retired individuals with long careers are invited to step down, and those unable to fulfill their responsibilities are required to resign. Officials who

have become corrupt or degenerate are removed from office.

In addition to encouragement, treatment, and recognition, China also applies the principle of not promoting talents who deviate from the Party’s policies, who are inconsistent in word and deed, who do not work for the benefit of the Party and the people, or who engage in corruption and self-interest.

On November 24, 2003, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China convened a meeting to discuss talent work. On December 19-20, 2003, the Central Committee convened a Talent Work Conference, with Deng Xiaoping’s “Three Represents” ideology as the guiding thought, recognizing talent management as a crucial and integral task for the Party and State in the new era. The conference outlined “three concepts”: building talent as the number one resource; ensuring talent development so that all Chinese people can become talented; and recognizing that people are the fundamental subjects of the nation. At the same time, the conference introduced the “four no exclusivities” (*si bu duiyu*): not exclusive to academic qualifications, not exclusive to positions, not exclusive to seniority or status, and not exclusive to identity, in order to broaden the scope of talent selection. These “four no exclusivities” were based on the “four respects” (*si zunzhong*): respect for labor, respect for knowledge, respect for talent, respect for creativity, with a

single standard being the insistence on the principle of both talent and virtue.

In the Political Report at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping dedicated nearly one page to outlining how to “build a high-quality and professional cadre team” (建设高素质专业化干部队伍). He emphasized the principles of selecting and using people, stating: “It is essential to adhere to the principle that the Party leads cadre work; uphold the principle that both virtue and talent are important, with virtue being the priority; adhere to the principle of recruiting talent from all places, selecting people based on capability; and uphold the principle of prioritizing the cause, fairness, and integrity; apply the standards for good cadres in practice”². Xi Jinping also outlined eight requirements for leadership cadres, including: Striving to enhance learning; Strengthening political leadership; Promoting creative reforms; Advancing scientific development; Governing by law; Strengthening work with the masses; Staying closely connected to practice; Strengthening risk control³.

3. The Mechanism for Evaluating Cadres in China

Before the reform and opening-up period, the appointment and promotion of cadres in China primarily relied on three criteria: morality, ability, and background. However, the most important and fundamental factor was ensuring loyalty to the Communist Party

of China (CPC), as well as ensuring that cadres came from a working-class background, particularly workers and peasants with lower educational levels and poor origins. This practice was referred to as “using our own people” (*用自己人*), meaning that preference was given to those who were ideologically loyal and came from the “correct” social class.

The cadre evaluation mechanism in China evolved in tandem with the reform and opening-up process. A significant starting point for this transformation can be traced to the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee in December 1978. Later, in July 1979, Hua Guofeng briefly addressed this issue in the “Government Work Report” submitted to the second session of the Fifth National People’s Congress. In November 1979, the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee issued a document calling for the establishment of a new evaluation system. This system emphasized measurable and quantifiable criteria, incorporating both rewards and punishments, material and spiritual incentives, linking work performance to career advancement, and classifying cadres based on their productivity and performance, distinguishing between those who worked hard and those who did less, and between those who performed well and those who performed average (Whiting 2004: 102-104). In 1980, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China officially

introduced the slogan “Revolutionize, youthify, intellectualize, and professionalize” (*革命化、青年化、知识化、专业化*). The criteria for evaluating cadres began to shift from social class composition to educational background, with a growing emphasis on young cadres over veteran ones. This marked a significant change in how the Party evaluated and promoted its cadres, moving towards a system based more on merit, education, and professional expertise.

In 1988, the Organization Department of the Communist Party of China issued the “Guidelines for Implementing the Annual Evaluation System of Cadre Work for Local Party Committees and Government Leaders”⁴ (see Table 1), which provided official guidelines for

the annual evaluation of party secretaries and local government leaders. The guidelines encouraged competition among peers and emphasized that the evaluation should serve as a basis for rewards and punishments, as well as promotions and demotions. The focus of the evaluation system was primarily on economic, social, and cultural goals. The cadre evaluation system (*干部考核制* - *gan bu kao he zhi*) shifted from subjective assessments of political loyalty to a more objective approach, based on quantitative indicators of actual work performance. This marked a significant change, with a focus on measurable achievements rather than solely on political allegiance, reflecting the broader reforms and emphasis on results in the governance structure.

Table 1. Guidelines for Implementing the Annual Evaluation System of Cadre Work for Local Party Committees and Government Leaders, Organization Department of the Communist Party of China, 1988⁵.

Categories	
1	Gross National Product
2	Total industrial output value (excluding production below the commune level)
3	Total agricultural output value (excluding production below the commune level)
4	Total output value of enterprises in towns and villages
5	Gross National Income per capita
6	Rural per capita income
7	Taxes and profits submitted
8	Financial income
9	Labor productivity of state-owned and collective enterprises

10	Purchase of agricultural products and by-products
11	Retail sales
12	Infrastructure investment
13	Natural population growth rate
14	Grain output
15	Local government revenue
16	Local government expenditure
17	Forest area
18	Rate of completion of 9-year compulsory education

The criteria have become increasingly clearer. In addition to the qualitative aspects, the evaluation of cadres based on performance has been systematized into major indicators, and within each

indicator, each criterion is assigned a specific score. We can refer to the criteria for implementation for the party secretary of the town's party committee and the town's government leaders (**Table 2**).

Table 2. Performance Evaluation Criteria for the Head of the Township Government and the Party Secretary of the Township Party Committee (Jia Ding District, Shanghai, 1989)⁶

Category		Points	County-level Unit Responsible for Evaluation of Target Fulfillment
Township- and village-run industry		33	
	Increase in gross value of industrial output	10	Rural Industry Bureau
	Increase in industrial profits	10	Rural Industry Bureau
	Increase in profit rate on gross value of output	5	Rural Industry Bureau
	Township ranking by profit rate on total capital	4	Rural Industry Bureau
	Increase in the total value of exports	4	Rural Industry Bureau
Agriculture		30	
	Sales to the state of grain and vegetables	15	Grain Bureau-Vegetable Office

	Sales to the urban market of pigs	10	Animal Husbandry Bureau
	Sales to the state of oil-bearing crops	3	Grain Bureau
	Sales to the state of leather and cotton	2	Supply and Marketing Cooperative
Party building		21	
	Building of party organizations	7	CCP Organization Section
	Building of party spirit and discipline	7	Discipline Inspection Committee
	Education of party members	7	CCP Propaganda Section
Education		9	
	Completion rate for compulsory education	3	Education Committee
	Participation rate for worker training	3	Education Committee
	Seale funds dedicated to education	3	Education Committee
Family planning		7	
	Family planning compliance rate	7	Family Planning Office
Public order		**7	Politics and Law Leadership Small Group
Total		200	

Along with the cadre evaluation mechanism is the reward and punishment system. In some localities, the salary of a cadre can be three times that of a counterpart based on their achievements.

Particularly, after Deng Xiaoping’s southern tour in 1992, the pressure-based system (“压力型体制”) became increasingly evident in cadre evaluation, with competitive selection

and placement. After the “Interim Regulations on the Evaluation of Civil Servants”⁸ In 1994, the civil servant evaluation system and job responsibility system were promulgated and implemented. Local cadre evaluations involve many criteria, but two of the most important criteria often used in practice are GDP growth rate and budget revenue.

In June 2000, the State Council of

China introduced the “Plan for Deepening the Reform of the Cadre and Personnel System”, with Section 5 addressing the improvement of the evaluation system for Party and government leadership. It required: “Establishing and improving the regular evaluation system for Party and government leaders. Conducting mid-term and end-of-term evaluations widely. Based on the construction of a responsibility system for the leadership terms of the Party and government, as well as regulations on the job responsibilities of Party and government leaders, research should be conducted to establish a system of evaluation indicators that focuses on work effectiveness. Establishing a system for evaluation reports, complaints about evaluations, and feedback on evaluation results. Improving methods for evaluating work effectiveness and strengthening the application of evaluation results”⁹.

In the 1990s, the Communist Party of China took the lead in public selection (gongkai xuanba) and competition for promotions (jingzheng shanggang) to improve the methods of cadre selection. In 2023, the Central Committee of the Party and the State Council officially established the principle that everyone must pass the civil service examination (fan jin bi kao¹⁰).

At the beginning of the 2000s, the Communist Party of China officially institutionalized cadre management, including the evaluation of cadres in all Party and government agencies at every level.

The evaluation criteria system also aims to promote performance based on work. In Table 3, professional qualities, organizational and leadership skills, professional dedication, and work performance are the key indicators for evaluating talent in the human resources management system.

Table 3. Key Political and Talent Indicators in the Evaluation of Party and Government Leadership¹¹.

Dimension of evaluation	Political indicators	Meritocratic indicators
Virtue	Firm political ideals and convictions, and loyalty to the party; compliance with the Party Constitution, political discipline, and political rules (zhengzhi guiju); ideological and political allegiance	Null
Ability	Political ability to deal with emergencies and mass disturbances	Professional qualities and organisational and leadership skills to deal with emergencies and mass disturbances

Diligence	Promoting the spirit of revolution and struggle, adhering to ‘Three Strictnesses, Three Honests’ (san yan san shi) ¹² ; daring to assume responsibility; showing willingness to dedicate	Working hard and
perseveringly		
Achievement	Adhering to the correct view of political achievement, emphasising the effectiveness of party building in the evaluation of actual performance.	Performing their duties; undertaking urgent and dangerous tasks; handling complex issues, and coping with major challenges
Integrity	Assuming the political responsibility of ‘one position, two responsibilities’ (yi gang shuang ze) ¹³ ; taking the initiative to both adhere to the spirit of and implement the ‘Eight Point Code’ and its detailed rules and regulations	

However, from this table, we can also see that the issue of political ideology has been emphasized again in recent times. Recent evaluations of officials in China have placed a strong emphasis on firm ideals, political belief, and loyalty to the Party; adherence to the Party’s Constitution, political discipline, and political principles; the ability to handle emergencies as well as incidents involving large crowds; and the need to promote revolutionary spirit. The focus has been on key messages, such as the “Three Rigor, Three Realities”, “One Position, Two Responsibilities”, and “Eight Regulations”, among others.

In 2019, the General Office of the Communist Party of China issued the “Regulations on the Work of Evaluating

Party and Government Leadership Officials”¹⁴. These regulations set out 6 principles for evaluating officials: (1) The Party manages officials; (2) Both virtue and ability are important, with virtue prioritized; (3) The career comes first, fairness and integrity; (4) Focus on actual achievements, supported by the masses; (5) Objective and comprehensive, simple and effective; (6) Link between evaluation and the use of officials, clear rewards and penalties (Article 4). The main content in the evaluation of the leadership team includes: (1) Building political thought; (2) Leadership ability; (3) Actual achievements; (4) Building a clean Party; (5) Building a work style (Article 7). There are four primary types of

evaluation: regular evaluation (Chapter 3), Annual evaluation (Chapter 4), Thematic evaluation (Chapter 5), and Term evaluation (Chapter 6).

The main content of evaluating leadership officials includes five aspects: moral and political ideological quality (德, *de*), work capability (能, *neng*), diligence and industriousness (勤, *qin*), work achievements (绩, *ji*), and integrity (廉, *lian*): (1) Moral: This involves a comprehensive evaluation of the political and ethical qualities of leadership officials. The political quality focuses on assessing their firm belief in ideals, loyalty to the Party, adherence to Party regulations, compliance with political discipline and rules, and alignment of thought, politics, and actions with the Party Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core. The evaluation of the ethical quality of leadership officials focuses on values such as loyalty and honesty, fairness and integrity, a genuine desire for self-improvement, integrity and incorruptibility, adherence to social ethics, professional ethics, family ethics, and personal virtue. (2) Ability. A comprehensive evaluation of the performance of leadership officials, particularly their political capability, professional qualifications, and leadership skills in handling emergency situations and public events. (3) Diligence. A comprehensive evaluation of the work ethic and style of leadership officials, focusing on promoting

revolutionary spirit, combativeness, persistence in “Three Rigidities and Three Realities” (i.e., strictness, practicality, and thoroughness), dedication, commitment to the job, responsibility, efficiency, determination to move forward, courage in tackling challenges, hard work, and willingness to contribute. (4) Achievements. A comprehensive evaluation of how leadership officials adhere to a correct understanding of achievements, complete routine tasks, take on difficult responsibilities, handle complex issues, overcome major challenges, and deliver tangible results. For Party secretaries, priority is given to evaluating the results of Party-building efforts. When assessing the performance of other Party members within the leadership team, more emphasis should be placed on their work in Party-building. (5) Integrity. A comprehensive evaluation of leadership officials who effectively fulfill their political responsibilities in Party-building and maintain integrity with the principle of “one position, two responsibilities”. This includes adhering to self-discipline and integrity, taking the lead in implementing the “Eight Provisions” of the Central Committee¹⁵ and related detailed regulations, exercising public authority with justice, fostering good family habits, setting strict requirements for family members and close associates, and opposing “four malpractice”¹⁶ (formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and

extravagance) and any elitist thinking or phenomena. Currently, some regions in China have begun to incorporate advanced technologies, especially big data and artificial intelligence, into the evaluation and monitoring of officials, including assessments during both working hours and after-hours (Xinhua News Agency 2018).

Many Western scholars, when studying China's cadre evaluation system, have observed that this system, in addition to helping China achieve strong growth and linking cadres to the institutional framework, may have also contributed to the sustainability of the Communist Party of China's rule. Moreover, it serves as a crucial tool for ensuring competency and controlling corruption.

4. Some Raised Issues in China

About three or four decades ago, many Western scholars, such as Samuel Huntington and Francis Fukuyama, believed that the Western democratic model was the optimal one and that the modern world would settle on the Western-style liberal democracy. They did not believe that any other model could foster development, let alone imagine that an alternative model referred to as "authoritarian" or "one-party" could compete or even possess superior potential compared to the Western democratic model. However, when China developed and achieved remarkable success, many Western scholars sought to explain this success.

They did not want to attribute China's development solely to its political regime or form of government but instead focused on a "technocratic" aspect, which they called "political meritocracy". This was positioned in contrast to what they described as "democracy". While there are reasonable aspects to the concept of "political meritocracy", using it as a substitute for the whole is an inappropriate approach. The "political meritocracy" cannot be separated from the political system, because both its strengths and weaknesses are tightly bound to or more precisely, determined by the political regime.

It is also not appropriate to set the system of talent cultivation in opposition to a democratic system, as these two concepts are not mutually exclusive. The system of merit-based talent selection first and foremost relies on education. Democracy also entails education and the intellectual development of the people, a concept recognized since the time of John Dewey. There are various interpretations of democracy. Democracy can be understood narrowly as a political system in which governments are chosen through universal elections. However, democracy also has a broader meaning; it is not only a model but also a driving force, and more importantly, a value. John Dewey argued that democracy is not merely a political system for holding elections and regulating government; it is also an ethical and social ideal.

Democracy represents a cohesive and complete community. Dewey believed the foundation of democracy lies in morality because it aligns with human dignity¹⁷. The Western democratic system (also known as “one person, one vote” electoral democracy) is facing serious issues: persistent inequality, political corruption, the breakdown of social cohesion, a lack of trust in the government and elite institutions, and inefficient governance. In short, liberalism has failed to deliver democratic outcomes” (The Economist 2021). This is not just an isolated phenomenon; rather, as some scholars pointed out several years ago, it is a global decline of the Western democratic model (Diamond 2019). Ironically, this decline has been implicitly criticized by some influential voices in the United States itself (Wegman 2020; Miller and Sokolsky 2021; Scherer et al. 2022). Daniel Bell highlighted four flaws of the Western democratic system: First, the tyranny of the majority, when democracy is used to oppress minorities and implement harmful policies; Second, the tyranny of the minority, when interest groups use economic power to interfere in politics, advancing the interests of a small group. Third, the tyranny of the voting community, when those with the current right to vote decide the future of others; Fourth, the tyranny of competitive individualism,

as elections sometimes exacerbate conflicts and hinder the resolution of social tensions through conciliatory measures (Bell 2015: 7).

Philosophy and mathematics professor Laurent Ross observed a harmony between Marxism and meritocracy. He wrote: “Marxists have no problem with a meritocratic system. Marxists want the best people to do the hardest jobs. Marxists want an efficient economy where everyone is compensated fairly for their efforts. Marxists want to encourage people to work harder... The goal of the socialist revolution is to end exploitation, so that everyone is rewarded fairly” (Ross 2019).

How do we select outstanding leaders? This has been a topic of debate for thousands of years across civilizations. Philosopher Plato offered a nearly irrefutable argument rooted in universal experience: if we want shoes, we choose a skilled shoemaker; if we need medical treatment, we seek a qualified doctor. So, why, when selecting a national leader, do we choose the person who receives the most votes, instead of the one with the highest morals and wisdom? (Durant 2008: 30).

Leadership and governance require a broad perspective and strategic vision, and should not be limited by “term-based thinking”. Moreover, a meritocratic system in itself can curb pure populism and prevent the rise of demagoguery.

Is a meritocratic system truly fair? Some may criticize meritocracy. For example, former U.S. Federal Reserve Chair Ben Bernanke, in a speech at Princeton University, argued that merit is often simply a matter of luck: luck in having good genes, good health, favorable family conditions, and access to quality education. Therefore, those who are talented should work hard and contribute to the community as a way of sharing their fortune (Weissmann 2013).

Chasing set criteria in evaluating officials can easily distort the original goals, leading to confusion between essence and appearance. Officials may focus solely on achieving specific indicators rather than considering the broader picture or long-term goals especially if these broader goals aren't clearly outlined as criteria. Additionally, this evaluation system can lead some leaders to pursue metrics, resulting in excess capacity in many industries, with large quantities of useless products, as well as vacant real estate and underused infrastructure in various parts of China.

There are many criteria for evaluating officials; some are relatively easy to measure, but others are often qualitative and hard to define. For example, beyond economic growth targets, goals related to environmental protection, social progress and equity, and human development are often more challenging

to quantify. Additionally, there's a risk of blurring the criteria meant for a leadership team with those for an individual, or mixing up organizational criteria with personal ones.

Intense competition among peers (e.g., commune party secretaries within a district) or near-peers (e.g., party secretaries and chairpersons), with the pressure of rewards and punishments, especially in promotion, transfer, or demotion, can erode solidarity, teamwork, and the spirit of fair play. This can create organizational disunity, where political infighting sometimes consumes the time and energy needed for actual work.

Using performance evaluation tools, rewards and penalties, and promotions or demotions to stimulate the work ethic, competitiveness, and creativity of officials can easily lead to lapses in strict adherence to party principles and state laws. Overstepping the system can result in punishment from supervisory and regulatory bodies. Conversely, the opposite extreme, known as "lying flat" (or disengagement), has become a common issue among officials, especially leaders, in China. Such external evaluation mechanisms can also stifle intrinsic motivation and erode officials' sense of responsibility, especially for those who are genuinely driven by belief, ideals, and a commitment to serving the community and society.

NOTES

¹ Western scholars, when writing about this issue in China, often use the terms “Meritocracy,” “Political Meritocracy,” or “Elitism”. The concept of “Meritocracy,” first used in the satirical work by renowned sociologist Michael Young titled *The Rise of the Meritocracy, 1870–2033: An Essay on Education and Equality*, was initially published in 1958 with the idea that power and wealth should be distributed based on achievement rather than origin.

² “要坚持党管干部原则，坚持德才兼备、以德为先，坚持五湖四海、任人唯贤，坚持事业为上、公道正派，把好干部标准落到实处。”

³ “八种本领”：“努力增强学习本领、增强政治领导本领、增强改革创新本领、增强科学发展本领、增强依法执政本领、增强群众工作本领、增强狠抓落实本领、增强驾驭风险本领” (Wu Xiaofeng 2019).

⁴ “关于实行地方党政领导干部年度考核制度的通知”

⁵ Source: *Table 3.1. National Guidelines for Performance Criteria of Local Party and Government Leaders* (Whiting 2004: 105).

⁶ Source: *Table 3.2. Performance Criteria for Township Government Executives and Party Secretaries, Jiading County, Shanghai, 1989* (Whiting 2004: 106).

⁷ According to the document, “the performance of township party and government cadres with respect to their public order responsibilities is to be evaluated separately by the county’s ‘politics and law leadership small group.’”

⁸ “国家公务员考核暂行规定”

⁹ “深化干部人事制度改革纲要” (State Council of China 2000).

¹⁰ “凡进必考”: Anyone who wishes to enter an organization or unit must undergo an examination.

¹¹ Source: *Table 13.1: Political and meritocratic indicators in the evaluation of party and government leading cadres* (Chen et al. 2023: 340).

¹² “三严三实”: On March 9, 2014, Xi Jinping emphasized that leaders at all levels should cultivate and promote a strict ethical style: be strict in self-cultivation, strict in the use of power, strict in self-discipline, practical in decision-making, grounded in reality when building careers, and honest in personal conduct. (严以修身、严以用权、严以律己，谋事要实、创业要实、做人要实).

¹³ 一岗双责: One position, two responsibilities. This means that leadership officials must not only perform their professional duties well and complete political tasks, but also excel in party building, ideological work, combating corruption, and upholding integrity.

¹⁴ “党政领导干部考核工作条例”

¹⁵ “八项规定”: Eight provisions regarding the improvement of work style

and close connection with the masses, as outlined by the Politburo of the 18th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

¹⁶“四风” : Four issues related to work style, including formalism, bureaucracy, hedonism, and extravagance and wastefulness.

¹⁷ Dewey considers democracy “a personal, an individual, way of life”. “The cause of democracy is the moral cause of the dignity and worth of the individual” (Tan 2010: 106-107).

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