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# Managed Campaign and Bureaucratic Institutions in China: Evidence from the Targeted Poverty Alleviation Program

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## ABSTRACT

In the reform era, the Chinese state often resorts to managed campaigns to implement important policies. This article examines how managed campaign influences the mode of bureaucratic operation in China. Avoiding a simplistic dichotomy between campaign mobilization and bureaucratic institutionalization, this study unpacks the Weberian bureaucratic concept and shows that some core dimensions of the model are compatible with managed campaign. While the pressure of mobilization tend to compromise functional differentiation and strict adherence to stable rules, they can reinforce other dimensions such as top-down control in a multilevel hierarchy and procedural integrity. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has configured the bureaucracy to serve its organizational and political needs, resulting in a mode of operation that partially conforms to the Western standard of public administration.

## Introduction

Built on the Leninist model of party organization, the bureaucracy has played a central role in the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)'s effort to consolidate power and pursue grand socio-economic transformation in China. The importance of the bureaucracy has induced many China scholars to study its underlying logic of operation with the aid of theoretical frameworks developed from multiple academic disciplines. One of the theoretical arguments that have surfaced in various forms to shape the field's understanding of the Chinese bureaucracy can be termed the 'mobilization thesis'. At its core, the thesis contends that Leninist bureaucratic organizations have a tendency to launch periodic campaigns aimed at accomplishing core tasks under tight time constraint, and this impulse to resort to campaign mobilization stems from both the lingering memories of revolutionary practices and principal-agent problems inherent in a large, centralized bureaucratic system.

The mobilization mode of policy implementation has its roots in the multiple rounds of political campaigns of the Mao period. Entering the reform era, many scholarly works have documented the widespread use of national mobilization to accomplish important objectives in various policy arenas. They have also identified major changes that occurred to the campaign mode of implementation. Features such as mass agitation, ideological indoctrination, and purges of Party personnel that defined the Mao-era campaigns have largely disappeared. Reform-period campaigns are mostly utilized to solve pressing governance issues rather than to launch a 'permanent revolution' and are generally carried out within the framework of the bureaucratic process.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Tyrene White, 'Postrevolutionary mobilization in China: the one-child policy reconsidered', *World Politics* 43(1), (1990), pp. 53–76; Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: 'Constructing a new socialist countryside'', in Elizabeth J. Perry and Sebastian Heilmann, ed., *Mao's Invisible Hand: The Political Foundations of Adaptive Governance in China*

Appropriately, Elizabeth Perry has used the term 'managed campaign' to describe reformist elites' effort to reconfigure revolutionary tactics for developmental purposes.<sup>2</sup>

How does the CCP leadership's disposition to tackle thorny governance problems with managed campaign shape the mode of bureaucratic operation in China? The prevailing view holds that campaign mobilization disrupts regular procedures and breeds particularistic ties and is therefore fundamentally at odds with building a modern, professional bureaucracy. On the other hand, a number of scholars have questioned the wisdom of seeing campaign and bureaucratic institutionalization as two opposite ends on a continuum of governance modes. Thus, Perry contended that managed campaign represents a 'complex amalgam' of revolutionary style of politics and a modern technocratic mode.<sup>3</sup> Similarly, White discovered that routine bureaucratic process has been joined to the Party's mobilizational tradition to yield a hybrid called 'institutionalized mobilization'.<sup>4</sup> Treating the bureaucratic system as an 'amalgam' or 'hybrid', however, provides little insight into how managed campaign affect various aspects of the bureaucratic process.

Building on studies that reject a simplistic dichotomy between campaign mobilization and bureaucratic institutionalization, this article seeks to present a fine-grained analysis of the impact of managed campaign on bureaucratic behavior. The Weberian model of bureaucracy is chosen as a reference point because it offers a widely accepted list of attributes that characterize legal-rational, professional bureaucracies, and because these attributes are often seen as key ingredients of state effectiveness in developing countries.<sup>5</sup> As a starting point, this article points out that Weberian bureaucracy contains multiple dimensions, and they could vary independently of each other. This insight allows us to probe how managed campaign exerts differential impacts on various dimensions of bureaucratic behavior. In brief, this article argues that such impacts are fourfold: 1) campaign-style implementation discourages functional differentiation and places a premium on general skills; 2) it breeds improvised, informal solutions to problems at the expense of stable, general rules; 3) it reinforces hierarchical control and monitoring; and 4) it fosters adherence to elaborate formal operating procedures.

This study treats managed campaign as the independent variable and examines how it affects the outcome of interest—the development of bureaucratic institutions. The claim is that the bureaucracy would have taken different forms had there not been repeated managed campaigns in the reform period. The burden of proof is to show that certain changes in bureaucratic features, such as the proliferation of monitoring mechanism and the obsession with procedural integrity, can be attributed to the occurrence of campaigns. These findings suggest that the Chinese state has configured the bureaucracy to serve its organizational and political needs, resulting in a mode of operation that only partially conforms to the Western standard of public administration.

To illustrate this argument, a case study is conducted on the Chinese bureaucracy's implementation of the Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) program. Starting from 2014, the Chinese government initiated an ambitious poverty alleviation program to move more than 70 million rural residents above the country's official poverty line before the end of 2020. The current Chinese leadership considers the program as the centerpiece of its agenda to 'complete the building of a well-off society (*xiaokang shehui*) in an all-around way'.<sup>6</sup> This article draws upon field research and secondary sources to examine the relationship between campaign tactics and the evolving features

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(Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2011), pp. 30–61; Zhengxu Wang, 'Campaigns in Politics: From Revolution to Problem Solving', in Weiping Wu and Mark W. Frazier, ed., *Sage Handbook of Contemporary China* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018); John J. Kennedy and Dan Chen, 'State capacity and cadre mobilization in China: the elasticity of policy implementation', *Journal of Contemporary China* 27(111), (2018), pp.393–405.

<sup>2</sup>Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From mass campaigns to managed campaigns: 'Constructing a new socialist countryside', pp. 30–61.

<sup>3</sup>Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From mass campaigns to managed campaigns: 'constructing a new socialist countryside', p.49.

<sup>4</sup>Tyrene White, 'Postrevolutionary mobilization in China: the one-child policy reconsidered', p. 68.

<sup>5</sup>Meredith Woo-Cumings, *The Developmental State* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999).

<sup>6</sup>BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, 'Beijing Pledges to Eradicate Poverty from China by 2020', November 29, 2015, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1737039200?accountid=10025>. (proquest account required).

of the bureaucracy. The original data come from the author's field investigations in three counties of Hubei province conducted in 2017 and 2018. To help overcome the spatial limitations of data collected from the field, the author also consulted a large body of case studies of the TPA's implementation conducted by other scholars.

Examining the impact of managed campaign on bureaucratic behavior also sheds light on the relationship between development and the quality of institutions. An influential argument posits that, as countries reach a certain level of socioeconomic modernization, good institutions—including Weberian bureaucracy—will follow.<sup>7</sup> In a recent study of China's developmental model, Ang depicts a more complex process of coevolution: changes in bureaucratic traits affect economic growth, which subsequently feeds back to the bureaucracy, and so forth.<sup>8</sup> Ang nevertheless shares the view that as China overcomes the constraints of poverty, it will move on to pursue bureaucratic modernization characterized by functional differentiation and impersonality.

The Chinese bureaucracy's operation amid a managed campaign shows that it indeed adapts to changing external environment, as attested by the contrast between Maoist and managed campaigns, but it is by no means certain that development will prompt the bureaucracy to evolve towards the Weberian model. The central state's impulse to employ the campaign method is deeply rooted in its profound mistrust of its local agents.<sup>9</sup> When the center perceives foot-dragging in local implementation of critical policies, it often decides to initiate all-out mobilizational efforts to fill the gap between central goals and local efforts.<sup>10</sup> So long as the dynamics of central-local relations stay the same, the bureaucracy's traits relative to various Weberian principles are also likely to remain, despite rapid socioeconomic changes.

The structure of this article is as follows. The next section reviews past studies that contributed to the mobilization thesis. The third section argues that, once the concept of bureaucratization is unpacked into different components, campaign mobilization may be seen as compatible with some aspects of bureaucratic institutionalization. The fourth section provides a context of the empirical analysis by describing the origins, goals, and content of the TPA program. Section 5 illustrates the key argument of the article with empirical evidence from the implementation of the TPA program. The final section concludes the article.

## From Maoist Campaign to Managed Campaign

According to the 'mobilization thesis', the Chinese state has a strong tendency to initiate periodic high-profile campaigns as a way to implement important policy objectives under tight time constraint. The predisposition to employ campaign mobilization can be attributed to its nature as a Marxist-Leninist political organization modeled on the Soviet Union. A defining feature of such Leninist regimes is their preoccupation with the rate of social development and the rapid fulfillment of potentiality, which can only be accomplished by mobilizing massive resources towards certain prioritized sectors.<sup>11</sup> To ensure that the potential of the society is fully realized, Leninist regimes tend to emphasize the achievement of substantive goals and targets over the adherence

<sup>7</sup>Edward Glaeser, Rafael La Porta, Florencio Lopez-De-Silanes, and Andrei Shleifer, 'Do institutions cause growth?', *Journal of Economic Growth* 9(3), (2004), 271–303; Marcus Kurtz and Andrew Schrank, 'Growth and governance: a defense', *The Journal of Politics* 69(2), (2007), pp. 563–569; Arthur Goldsmith, 'Is Governance Reform a Catalyst for Development?' In Jomo Kwame Sundaram and Anis Chowdhury, ed., *Is Good Governance Good for Development?* (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2012).

<sup>8</sup>何阳, [Yang He] '论精准扶贫政策的不精准执行与治理——基于扶贫案例的分析' [On the Implementation Deviation of Targeted Poverty Alleviation Policy and Its Governance—Based on The Case Analysis of Poverty Alleviation], *当代经济管理* [Contemporary Economic Management] 39, (2017), pp. 56–61.

<sup>9</sup>王礼鑫, 陈永亮, [Lixin Wang, Yongliang Chen] '叫魂'运动中的运动式治理' [Campaign-style Governance in Soulstealers], *复旦政治学评论* [Fudan Review of Political Science] 1, (2015), pp.272–285; Tyrene White, 'Postrevolutionary Mobilization in China: The One-child Policy Reconsidered', p. 75.

<sup>10</sup>John J. Kennedy and Dan Chen, 'State capacity and cadre mobilization in china: the elasticity of policy implementation', pp. 393–405.

<sup>11</sup>Kenneth Jowitt, 'An organizational approach to the study of political culture in Marxist-Leninist systems', *American Political Science Review* 68, (1974), pp.1171–1191.

to pre-existing procedures. Thus, '(b)oth the ethos and the structure of a mobilization regime are antagonistic to the routinization of tasks and the authority of impersonal-stable rule'.<sup>12</sup>

Other scholars have traced the Chinese state's mobilization ethos to the revolutionary origins of the CCP. During its prolonged struggle to seize national power, the Party launched numerous campaigns to mobilize cadres and the mass to participate in revolutionary activities.<sup>13</sup> After coming to power, the regime's founding elites made the conscious decision to reject the use of stable rules and procedures to regulate official behavior in favor of the maintenance of revolutionary spirits and discipline of Party cadres. In the PRC's early years, the CCP resorted time and again to intensive political campaigns to involve the mass in the construction of a socialist society and to attack the supposedly bad elements the Party. At the height of the Maoist campaigns, regular bureaucratic bodies such as supervisory organs and personnel management system experienced complete breakdowns, and state officials suffered arbitrary, unpredictable punishment that left them demoralized, cynical, and disillusioned.<sup>14</sup>

The transition from the Mao era to the reform and opening period was marked by the restoration and expansion of formal legal and bureaucratic institutions, but campaign-style enforcement remains an invaluable governing technique for the regime to cope with various challenges in a constantly changing environment. As Heilmann and Perry argued, post-Mao leaders of the CCP continued to embrace a 'guerrilla' style of governance which places emphasis on *ad hoc* adjustment and improvisation in contrast to stability-oriented mode of bureaucratic management.<sup>15</sup> Campaigns in the reform era, however, are qualitatively different from those of the pre-1978 period. The differences are mainly twofold. First, while Maoist campaigns emphasized indoctrinating the masses with ideas of class struggle and delivering instant utopia, reform-era campaigns focused on achieving practical results rather than cultural or attitudinal changes.<sup>16</sup> As Perry noted, the intellectual sources that inspired managed campaigns have become more eclectic and pragmatic, drawing on a wide range of historical and international experiences.<sup>17</sup> Second, Maoist campaigns mobilized the masses into politics, sometimes as an instrument to smash party/state apparatus that were seen as obstacles to realizing the people's revolutionary potential. Reform-era campaigns, by contrast, entail a much lower degree of mass involvement. Instead, it is the bureaucrats who became the main targets of intense mobilization.

Having abandoned ideological fervor and mass mobilization, campaign-style enforcement during the reform era tends to exhibit the following patterns. First, the initiator of the campaign will identify a 'core task' to which the bureaucratic apparatus should devote its maximum energy for a specified period of time. Tasks unrelated to the campaign can be set aside, postponed, or given less priority. Extensive propaganda is utilized to raise public consciousness and enhance the salience of the campaign. Second, once the overall goal is identified, it will be disaggregated into measurable targets and assigned to each level of government below the initiator. Implementing officials are under strong pressure to complete the targets on time, as serious inspection, reporting, and evaluation mechanisms are built to ensure the achievement of objectives. Third, *ad hoc* agencies will be established at each level to help mobilize and coordinate multiple functional departments. Senior officials will head these agencies to underline their importance.

Campaigns displaying these features have been utilized by the reformist elites to tackle problems in a variety of policy areas. In the regime's effort to contain official corruption, for example, the logic of mobilization is reflected in the periodic launch of intensive campaigns to

<sup>12</sup>Kenneth Jowitt, 'An organizational approach to the study of political culture in Marxist-Leninist systems', pp.1183.

<sup>13</sup>Zhengxu Wang, 'Campaigns in politics: from revolution to problem solving', in Weiping Wu and Mark W. Frazier, ed., *Sage Handbook of Contemporary China* (London: SAGE Publications Ltd, 2018), pp. 326–328.

<sup>14</sup>Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involvement of the Chinese Communist Party* (California: Stanford University Press, 2002).

<sup>15</sup>Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: 'Constructing a new socialist countryside'', pp.30–61.

<sup>16</sup>Tyrene White, 'Postrevolutionary mobilization in China: the one-child policy reconsidered', p. 63.

<sup>17</sup>Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From mass campaigns to managed campaigns: 'constructing a new socialist countryside'', p. 45.

temporarily strengthen anti-graft enforcement.<sup>18</sup> Kaufman showed how China fell back on its traditions of public health mobilization to bring the SARS epidemic under control.<sup>19</sup> White documented the state's use of campaign method to enforce one-child policy in the rural areas.<sup>20</sup> In the arena of economic development, Perry has studied the implementation of the 'constructing a New Socialist Countryside' initiative that bore notable resemblance to revolutionary mass campaigns.<sup>21</sup>

## Campaign and Bureaucracy: An Analytic Model

As discussed above, the Leninist Party-state in China considers campaign mobilization a time-tested tactic to realize ambitious development goals under time and resource constraint and to unify bureaucratic agencies with competing sectorial interests behind a coherent agenda. On the whole, scholars who studied campaign-style mobilization in China have conceptualized it as antithetical to the Weberian model of bureaucratic organizations. Features of political campaigns are usually considered incompatible with the development of a legal-rational mode of governance based on functional differentiation, impersonality, and strict adherence to rules and procedures.

Thus, Lü argued that the CCP has since coming to power deliberately chosen to resist routinization and bureaucratization in order to maintain revolutionary ideological commitment and organizational methods used during the guerrilla war.<sup>22</sup> Manion believed that anticorruption campaigns tend to distort the routine administrative and legal process of investigating corruption cases. The sudden and unpredictable occurrence of hyper enforcement punctuated by periods of relative leniency may strengthen the deterrence against corruption, but it can do little to promote the expectation that the law operates routinely and impartially to punish corrupt officials. In addition to the disruption of rules and regular procedures, the campaigns' tendency to mete out arbitrary and harsh punishment also induces officials to cultivate informal, patron-client ties with their superiors to safeguard their career prospects, further undermining the law-based, impersonal features of a professional bureaucracy.<sup>23</sup> Zhou argued that the campaign method must only be used occasionally between periods of routine bureaucratic operation.<sup>24</sup> This is because the effectiveness of mobilization to overcome bureaucratic conservatism and inertia rests on its sudden and unpredictable timing, and because the turbulence and tension generated by unbridled campaigns may spiral out of control to threaten political stability.

It is not surprising that the existing literature has generally seen campaign mobilization and bureaucratization as two conflicting modes of governance and equated the advance of one process with the retreat of the other. After all, many of the features of campaign-style enforcement fly in the face of taken-for-granted norms of Western public administration. The problem with this perspective, however, is that it treats bureaucratization as a single concept without specifying its constitutive dimensions and their interrelationships. In fact, bureaucratic behavior as elaborated in Max Weber's seminal works contains multiple organizational phenomena that do not always vary together. A detailed examination of these phenomena suggests that, while some components of

<sup>18</sup>Melanie Manion, *Corruption by Design: Building Clean Government in Mainland China and Hong Kong* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2004); Andrew Wedeman, 'Anticorruption campaigns and the intensification of corruption in China', *Journal of Contemporary China* 14(42), (2005), pp. 93–116; Qingjie Zeng, 'Cadre rotation and campaign mobilization in china's anticorruption enforcement', *Journal of East Asian Studies* 17, (2017), pp. 1–24.

<sup>19</sup>Joan Kaufman, 'SARS and China's health-care response: better to be both red and expert!', in Arthur Kleinman and James L. Watson, ed., *SARS in China: Prelude to Pandemic?* (Stanford University Press, 2006), pp. 53–69.

<sup>20</sup>Tyrene White, *China's Longest Campaign: Birth Planning in the People's Republic, 1949–2005* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2006).

<sup>21</sup>Elizabeth J. Perry, 'From Mass Campaigns to Managed Campaigns: 'Constructing a new socialist countryside', pp. 30–61.

<sup>22</sup>Xiaobo Lü, *Cadres and Corruption: The Organizational Involution of the Chinese Communist Party*, (California: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 73–4.

<sup>23</sup>Qingjie Zeng, 'Informal network as a safety net: the role of personal ties in China's anticorruption campaign', *China: An International Journal* 15(3), (2017), pp. 26–57.

<sup>24</sup>Xueguang Zhou, 'The road to collective debt in rural China: bureaucracies, social institutions, and public goods provision', *Modern China* 38(3), 2011, pp. 271–307.



the bureaucratization process are indeed incompatible with campaign mobilization, others can coexist with or even complement political campaigns. Unpacking the concept of bureaucratization provides a more accurate and nuanced understanding of its relationship with campaign-style implementation than offered in the existing literature.

In his foundational works on modern bureaucracy, Max Weber listed a series of attributes that constitute the bureaucratic form of organization. These characteristics include functional differentiation stipulated by rules, hierarchy of authority, recruitment of officials based on technical competence, a system of general rules and procedures that govern official behavior, and the separation of administration from ownership.<sup>25</sup> Most studies of the Chinese state have assumed that these attributes will move in the same direction as the process of bureaucratic institutionalization makes headways or suffers setbacks. This assumption, however, is unwarranted. As numerous studies have pointed out, the concept of institutionalization contains distinct dimensions that do not necessarily vary together.<sup>26</sup>

This study suggests that, for the purpose of analyzing the impacts of mobilization on bureaucratic traits, the concept of bureaucratization can be unpacked into four major components: a) a division of labor based on functional specialization; b) a system of elaborate rules governing the behavior of officials; c) a multilevel, closely followed hierarchical structure based on monitoring and coercion; d) a system of procedures strictly followed by officials performing their duties. Based on this framework, this article contends that contemporary campaign mobilization is indeed in conflict with features *a* and *b* but fully compatible with *c* and *d*.

The reasons for this complex relationship between campaign and bureaucratization can be stated as follows. In order to complete the ambitious targets of campaigns within the time frame set by the Party leaders, large numbers of local officials need to be mobilized to work on the 'core tasks'. As a result, the original division of labor between functional agencies often breaks down and officials are frequently assigned to perform jobs unrelated to their previous institutional affiliations. The campaign mode of governance therefore encourages the development of general skills at the expense of specialized technical competence. Moreover, given the magnitude and urgency of the core tasks, formal rules covering the rights and duties of officials are usually inadequate for, or even at odds with, the timely completion of targets. To avoid sanctions from higher-level authorities, local officials may adopt various coping strategies that manufacture the appearances of obedience while violating the substantive content of policy directives. The pervasiveness of informal coping methods induced by mobilization undermines the integrity of formal rules governing official behavior.

On the other hand, there is no inherent contradiction between the mobilization ethos and the hierarchical structure of a Weberian bureaucracy. The Chinese state is organized as a strict hierarchical entity wherein the higher-level governments enjoy legitimate authority over its subordinate agencies, and there is a clear line of authority that flows from the Center all the way down to the township and village administrations.<sup>27</sup> This hierarchical arrangement is supported by concrete rewarding and punitive powers, including the control over personnel decisions and the ability to appropriate funds to support local projects. Indeed, the CCP's elaborate organizational structure provides a critical tool to mobilize its cadre corps, as orders can be transmitted through the

<sup>25</sup>Max Weber, *Economy and Society: An Outline of Interpretive Sociology* (California: University of California Press, 1978), pp. 956–8.

<sup>26</sup>Richard H. Hall, 'The concept of bureaucracy: an empirical assessment', *American Journal of Sociology* 69(1), (1963), pp. 32–40; Dan Slater, 'Iron cage in an iron fist: authoritarian institutions and the personalization of power in Malaysia', *Comparative Politics*, (2003), pp. 81–101; Steven Levitsky, 'Institutionalization and peronism: the concept, the case and the case for unpacking the concept', *Party Politics* 4(1), (1998), pp. 77–92; Steven Levitsky and María Murrillo, 'Variation in institutional strength', *Annual Review of Political Science* 12, (2009), pp. 115–133.

<sup>27</sup>There are five formal levels of governments in China: the center, the province, the prefecture, the county, and the township. This article uses supervising and subordinate agencies to refer to governments at two adjacent levels: province-prefecture, prefecture-county, etc.

multilevel network to reach the lowest agents, and officials at each level are held accountable for completing the tasks assigned from above.

Finally, contrary to conventional wisdom, campaign-style implementation does not necessarily preclude the adherence to strict operating procedures. Requiring officials to follow due process and maintain records of each step of implementation is an important means of top-down control. Routine processes of information gathering, performance evaluation, and inspection can be employed to ensure that implementing officials are fully committed to the achievement of campaign objectives.

At first glance, it might appear self-contradictory to argue that managed campaigns impede compliance with general rules but preserve the integrity of procedures. This argument, however, will seem more reasonable if a distinction is made between substantive and procedural bureaucratic rules, which is analogous to the difference between substantive and procedural law in legal discourse. Simply put, substantive rules stipulate that certain official actions should be taken when specified conditions are met. For instance, when a peasant's annual income falls below the poverty line, officials should provide a fixed amount of material assistance. These substantive requirements, as already discussed, are often sabotaged by coping strategies. On the other hand, procedural rules set out the process of how an official action should proceed. Thus, to provide said assistance, officials need to go through an elaborate process of verifying the peasant's income, applying for aid from relevant agencies, delivering the assistance, getting the peasant's confirmation, and so forth. This article contends that procedural rules are less likely to be undermined because they are at once less costly for local officials to comply with and easier for superiors to verify. In sum, it is possible for officials to have followed all required procedures while at the same time deviating from substantive rules by granting favors, covering up misconduct, cutting corners, and/or fabricating data.

Figure 1 shows how various features of managed campaigns affect the development of a Weberian bureaucracy along different dimensions, with the dotted arrow representing impediment and the real arrow representing facilitation. The rest of the article will use evidence from the implementation of the Targeted Poverty Alleviation program to illustrate the argument that campaign mobilization may be compatible with some aspects of bureaucratic institutionalization but undermine others. The next section first describes the broad contours of the TPA program to set the stage for the empirical analysis.

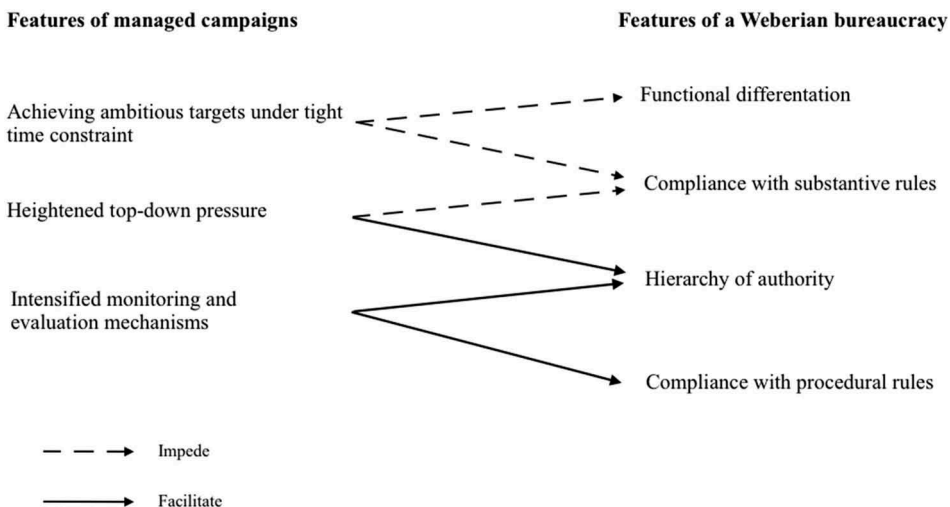


Figure 1. The impact of managed campaigns on bureaucratic features.



## The Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) Program: Origins and Goals

Rural areas in China were mired deeply in poverty before the start of the Reform and Opening Policy in 1978, with 250 million people or 30.7 percent of the rural population living below the official poverty line.<sup>28</sup> Poverty was reduced rapidly at the beginning of the reform era, as poverty number was cut in half by 1985, thanks to the coming together of several favorable factors. The agricultural collectives of which all peasants were compulsory members were gradually abolished, with pieces of land contracted to individual farm households. Taking over the management of a specific plot of land, farm households gained the freedom to dispose of agricultural products after turning over a certain amount of procurement and tax grain to the state following the harvest. The institution of contracting land to households greatly improved the incentives for agricultural production that, helped by higher government procurement prices and the increased availability of modern inputs, surged rapidly through 1984.<sup>29</sup>

By the mid-1980s, however, most of these one-time factors were exhausted and the speed of poverty reduction in the countryside slowed. In 1984, the government initiated a large-scale development-oriented poverty alleviation program and designated a total of 328 impoverished counties that were eligible for special assistance (the number of designated counties was increased to 592 in 1993). A special Leading Group for Poverty Reduction was established in 1986, and functional departments responsible for poverty alleviation were set up at all levels of the bureaucracy. As geographical targeting became the focus of China's anti-poverty strategy, resources were channeled to designated poor counties for economic development and revenue-generating activities.<sup>30</sup> During the period 1994–2000, around 125 million RMB of budgetary grants were transferred to the 592 national impoverished counties and another 27.8 million RMB were invested in the subsidized loans to rural enterprises and households. Assisted by the surge in nonfarm rural employment and migration, the annual per capita net income of the designated counties increased from 648 to 1337 RMB, while the number of population living below the official poverty line decreased from 80 to 30 million.<sup>31</sup>

Up until 2013, China's poverty alleviation efforts had mainly targeted geographical units such as counties and villages, a strategy with limited effectiveness due to the fact that many of the residents of poor counties were not poor and significant numbers of poor people outside the designated counties were left out. In 2014, the Chinese government released a policy program that would make the targeting more precise by identifying poor households and provide personalized poverty-alleviation plan for each poor household. This marked a major shift in the government's strategy to tackle rural poverty and became a signature reform agenda for the current Chinese leadership.

The Targeted Poverty Alleviation (TPA) program has three key components: precise identification, tailored assistance, and effective management. First, local officials were instructed to collect detailed economic information from the rural households and precisely identify those that should be granted the status of poor households according to the official poverty threshold. Local poverty-alleviation bureaus must create electronic archives and issue cards for each poor household to record its family status, cause of poverty, income, and the liaison cadre who is responsible for lifting that household out of poverty. Second, tailored assistance requires anti-poverty officials to conduct comprehensive analysis of the root causes of poverty and draw solutions according to each household's need. These plans can take a variety of forms, such as subsidizing poor young laborers to receive professional training, providing discount loans to those households that want to start

<sup>28</sup> 张爱琼, [Aiqiong Zhang] '农村精准扶贫问题研究' [A Study of Targeted Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas] (MA thesis, Yunnan Caijing Daxue, 2016).

<sup>29</sup> Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth* (Cambridge, MA: MIT press, 2007). p. 89.

<sup>30</sup> Barry Naughton, *The Chinese Economy: Transitions and Growth*, p.215.

<sup>31</sup> Yuheng Li, Baozhong Su, and Yansui Liu, 'Realizing targeted poverty alleviation in China: people's voices, implementation challenges and policy implications', *China Agricultural Economic Review* 8, (2016), p.446.

a business undertaking, and helping people to relocate to places more suitable for living and development.<sup>32</sup> Finally, effective management entails the proper maintenance and updating of information with respect to the poor households, the assistance projects, and the poverty reduction workers. The information will play a key part in the monitoring and evaluation of officials responsible for specific poverty alleviation tasks.

## Bureaucratic Implementation of the TPA Program

Once the CCP's top leaders had announced the launch of the new national poverty alleviation program, it was left to the Party and state bureaucracy to implement it. Even a casual glance at the implementation process reveals its heavy use of the campaign method. To begin with, The TPA program was introduced with the setting of ambitious targets and self-imposed deadlines to accomplish poverty reduction results. At the end of 2014, there were 70.17 million people in the countryside living below China's official poverty line of 2,300 yuan (\$376 US dollars) in annual income. A high-profile national conference held in late 2015 promulgated a document that pledged to lift the country's remaining impoverished people out of poverty by 2020, meaning that the country must reduce poverty population by about 10 million each year starting from 2016.<sup>33</sup> The Chinese government considered the 13<sup>th</sup> Five-year Plan period (2016–2020) as the time frame to 'complete the building of a well-off society in an all-around way', and to achieve this goal the elimination of poverty in rural areas was seen as 'the most difficult and arduous task'.<sup>34</sup> Xi Jinping, the Chinese President, had therefore instructed officials at all levels to 'grasp the time limit, strive to strength weak links ... and ensure that poverty-stricken people will shake off poverty by 2020 as scheduled'.<sup>35</sup> In a move characteristic of political campaigns, lower-level governments had sought to impress the center by announcing even more ambitious targets<sup>36</sup>—13 provinces had vowed to move ahead the deadline of poverty elimination by 2–3 years.<sup>37</sup>

Another manifestation of the campaign features of the TPA program is the ubiquitous use of military metaphors in the official narrative of the alleviation efforts. The above-mentioned 2015 document urged that '(e)xt extraordinary measures should be taken, solid solutions applied, and the Party and society should be mobilized to win the tough battle against poverty'.<sup>38</sup> The main offices established by local governments to coordinate poverty alleviation work were typically called 'War Rooms for Conquering Poverty'. An official film made to promote the campaign named 'The Decisive Battle' reported that more than 120 CCP members had 'sacrificed their lives on the anti-poverty battlefield' between 2013 and 2016, but 'there are a million more troops charging forward on the front line'.

Conventional wisdom posits that the pendulum of bureaucratic operation in China swings between campaign mobilization and routine management, and that the emphasis on substantive results, urgency, and improvisation during campaign periods hinders the development of a professional bureaucracy. In the following empirical analysis, the impact of the campaign policy style on each of the four dimensions bureaucratic behavior is investigated. It should be pointed out that, although the analysis frequently describes the behavior of individual officials, these pieces of

<sup>32</sup>Yuheng Li, Baozhong Su, and Yansui Liu, 'Realizing targeted poverty alleviation in China: people's voices, implementation challenges and policy implications', *China Agricultural Economic Review* 8, (2016), p.446.

<sup>33</sup>The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 'China Releases Blueprint on Fighting Poverty', December 7, 2015, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://www.scio.gov.cn/32618/Document/1458313/1458313.htm>.

<sup>34</sup>BBC Monitoring Asia Pacific, 'Chinese President Stresses Poverty Reduction in Rural Areas', June 21, 2015, accessed April 1, 2019, <https://search.proquest.com/docview/1690048556?accountid=10025> (proquest account required).

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>周飞舟,[Feizhou Zhou] '锦标赛体制' ['The Tournament System'], *社会学研究* [*Studies in Sociology*] 3, (2009), pp.4–77.

<sup>37</sup>刑成举,[Chengju Xing] '压力型体制下的“扶贫军令状”与贫困治理中的政府失灵' ['Poverty Alleviation Guarantee under Pressurized System and Government Failure in Governance of Poverty'], *南京农业大学学报: 社会科学版* [*Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University: Social Science Edition*] 16, (2016), p.65.

<sup>38</sup>The State Council Information Office of the PRC, 'China Releases Blueprint on Fighting Poverty', December 7, 2015, accessed June 17, 2019, <https://www.scio.gov.cn/32618/Document/1458313/1458313.htm>.

evidence are meant to support arguments about organizational features. Thus, this exercise seeks to capture systematic behavioral patterns, or how a ‘typical’ bureaucrat would respond given certain structural incentives. Overall, the evidence shows that campaigns present obstacles to some aspects of an institutionalized bureaucratic process, but are compatible with others.

First of all, the campaign style is usually not conducive to the development of functional differentiation and specialization. The Weberian principles of bureaucratic organization require clear division of labor that will leave a policy task to be performed by personnel with prescribed jurisdictions and relevant professional training, but the logic of mobilization defies such differentiation. Due to the magnitude of the poverty alleviation targets and the need to complete them on time, local governments were forced to break down the boundaries between functional departments and mobilize all bureaucrats to participate in activities related to poverty reduction. At every level of government, *ad hoc* ‘anti-poverty headquarters (*tuopin gongjian zhihuibu*)’ were established and staffed by personnel temporarily transferred from other bureaus. One employee of a county-level headquarters informed us that, among the 52 people working for the headquarters, more than 30 were transferred from functional departments not directly related to poverty reduction.<sup>39</sup>

One practice that the TPA program had inherited from earlier rural campaigns is the formation of ‘village work teams (*zhucun gongzuodui*)’. Members of these work teams were transferred outside of their urban work units (government bureaus, schools, hospitals, research institutions, etc.) and dispatched to villages to implement poverty reduction policies.<sup>40</sup> Work teams must spend at least 20 days per month in the village until the entire village has been lifted out of poverty.<sup>41</sup> The director of a county poverty-alleviation bureau informed the authors that:

Implementing the TPA policies is extremely stressful for local cadres, and that’s why they are not willing to engage in poverty alleviation work. There are more than 1000 cadres in our county who were appointed stationing in the villages, with each village getting 2–3 sent-down cadres. For at least one year, these cadres must spend five days and four nights in their village each week. The cadres stationed in the villages account for about 12 percent of the entire cadre corps. Even cadres who have not been assigned are having a heavy workload and can rarely get a rest during weekends. Under these conditions we can only rely on the self-sacrifice of party members and cadres.<sup>42</sup>

Case studies done by other researchers confirm that the mobilization of the entire bureaucracy to meet poverty alleviation targets is a uniform pattern across rural China. In N county of Henan Province, for example, each of the 100 county government bureaus was tied up with a poor village and each of the 1000 section-level cadres was tied up with a poor household. The ties of assistance would not be terminated until the villages or households had been lifted out of poverty.<sup>43</sup> Moreover, the government’s financial resources were directed in large amounts to anti-poverty projects. Local officials informed the authors that, while in the past funds earmarked for poverty alleviation projects were often diverted to other uses, nowadays government grants allocated for other purposes were routinely integrated into financial resources for anti-poverty work.<sup>44</sup>

Second, campaign-style implementation also discourages officials to behave within the confines of substantive bureaucratic rules. Given the enormous power placed in the hands of superior authorities, the subordinates have strong incentives to respond to the demands transmitted from above. The Party’s pervasive use of concrete task measurements to evaluate local agents has been

<sup>39</sup>Interview with an official from County C’s Poverty Alleviation Headquarters (Interview #20180123).

<sup>40</sup>Yuheng. Li, Baozhong Su, and Yansui Liu, ‘Realizing targeted poverty alleviation in China: people’s voices, implementation challenges and policy implications’, *China Agricultural Economic Review* 8, (2016), p.446.

<sup>41</sup>Interviews with members of a village work team in county C. (Interview #20180117).

<sup>42</sup>Interview with the director of county A’s poverty alleviation bureau. (Interview #20170802).

<sup>43</sup>张爱琼,[Aiqiong Zhang] ‘农村精准扶贫问题研究’ [‘A Study of Targeted Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas’] (MA thesis, Yunnan Caijing Daxue, 2016), p.13.

<sup>44</sup>Interview with the director of county A’s poverty alleviation bureau (Interview #20170802); interview with a township head in county B (Interview #20170805).

well documented.<sup>45</sup> Since the mid-1990s, the Chinese bureaucratic system has witnessed a trend of increasing centralization in decision-making and strengthening performance evaluations based on task measurements.<sup>46</sup> Ironically, the intensification of incentive mechanisms coupled with the arduous nature of assigned tasks forces local officials to ignore general rules, which are inadequate for, or at odds with, finishing targets on time. Instead, they have developed various kinds of coping strategies that create the outward appearances of compliance while deviating from the essence of the policy directives.

During field investigations, the authors were left with the impression that policy instructions from higher level authorities were often very demanding, inconsistent, and/or ill-matched with local conditions. Overstretched and under enormous pressure, implementing officials resorted to numerous instances of dissimulation, or 'the simulation of a successful performance by some deceptive manipulation'.<sup>47</sup> Because performance evaluations were mostly based on the completeness of physical records, poverty reduction workers were inclined to prioritize the production of forms and archives over the realization of substantive policy goals. Village cadres often complained to the authors that the task of completing a large number of complex forms<sup>48</sup> was so onerous that it distracted them from providing actual assistance for poor households. Other studies have reported the widespread practice of filling out forms with fabricated data in order to reduce workload or meet poverty reduction targets.<sup>49</sup>

The process of identifying poor households also tends to deviate from the degree of precision required by official policies. It was not uncommon for peasants to have multiple sources of income that were beyond the government's monitoring capacity. Moreover, income inequality in rural areas was relatively low, making it nearly impossible for village cadres to differentiate households based on accurate measurement of wealth.<sup>50</sup> As a result, it was not unusual for implementing cadres to take the shortcut of using their subjective judgments to arbitrarily assign poverty status. Indeed, there is evidence that such decisions could be shaped by kinship or social ties between cadres and villagers.<sup>51</sup>

To cope with regular evaluations and *ad hoc* inspections from higher authorities and to demonstrate progress in poverty reduction, implementing officials had adopted a wide array of informal, adaptive measures. In addition to filing reports with made-up data, some cadres had encouraged peasants to take out loans from state-owned banks or rural credit cooperatives and counted the loans as the income growth of poor households. In Yunnan Province, some county leaders even demanded that all the bureaucrats in the county donate part of their income to help lift households out of poverty, with the amount of donation ranging from RMB 5000 for section-level cadres to 1000 for the lowest-ranking civil servants.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>45</sup>Yasheng Huang, 'Administrative Monitoring in China', *The China Quarterly* 143, (1995), pp. 828–843; Maria Edin, 'State capacity and local agent control in China: CCP cadre management from a township perspective', *The China Quarterly* 173, (2003), pp. 35–52; Carl Minzner, 'Social instability in China, causes, consequences, and implications', (New York: Center for Strategic and International Studies of Fordham University, November 2006).

<sup>46</sup>Xueguang Zhou, 'The road to collective debt in rural China: bureaucracies, social institutions, and public goods provision', *Modern China* 38(3), (2011), pp. 271–307.

<sup>47</sup>Jowitt Kenneth, *New World Disorder: The Leninist Extinction* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992), p. 1183.

<sup>48</sup>The creation of archives for each household alone requires the filling out of 17-page form with hundreds of questions, see 张爱琼, [Aiqiong Zhang] '农村精准扶贫问题研究' ['A Study of Targeted Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas'] (MA thesis, Yunnan Caijing Daxue, 2016), p.24.

<sup>49</sup>张丽杰, [Lijie Zhang] '县级政府精准扶贫政策执行问题研究' ['Study on the Performance of the County Government of Targeted Poverty Alleviation'] (MA thesis, Zhengzhou Daxue, 2016), p. 16.

<sup>50</sup>Interview with a village cadre in County C. (Interview #20180123).

<sup>51</sup>郑维东, [Weidong Zheng] '精准扶贫政策执行偏差问题研究——以四川省x县精准扶贫政策执行为例' ['A Study of Policy Implementation Bias Problem in Taking Targeted Measures in Poverty Alleviation—Use X County in Sichuan Province as an Example'] (MA thesis, Shenzhen Daxue, 2017), p. 30.

<sup>52</sup>何阳, [Yang He] '论精准扶贫政策的不精准执行与治理——基于扶贫案例的分析' ['On the Implementation Deviation of Targeted Poverty Alleviation Policy and Its Governance—Based on The Case Analysis of Poverty Alleviation'], *当代经济管理* [*Contemporary Economic Management*] 39, (2017), p. 57.

Perhaps the most common tactic used by local leaders is to focus limited resources on the development of selected villages and 'lure' the inspecting officials to visit these prosperous villages as a demonstration of successful poverty alleviation. Local officials in China are widely known to be extremely resourceful in obtaining information about the destination of inspection in advance and cultivating informal ties with inspecting officials to soften the exercise of impersonal bureaucratic rules.<sup>53</sup> This particular attempt to manipulate information could lead to serious uneven distribution of resources across localities: one study reports that a 'demonstration village' slated for inspection had received over RMB 20 million in grants over a period of ten years, which was ten times the amount received by a neighboring village.<sup>54</sup>

While functional specialization and general rules that cover official rights and duties are undermined during the process, other dimensions of bureaucratization have proven compatible with or even essential for campaign mobilization. Thus, the normal functioning of the bureaucratic system is reflected in the preservation of the multileveled hierarchy for transmitting authoritative directives and breaking down policy alleviation targets. Once the center had made up the overall plan of poverty alleviation, it did not seek to bypass the normal hierarchy but passed the order downward through the formal levels of administration. Indeed, the center was heavily dependent on the bureaucratic hierarchy for converting its national blueprints into more concrete plans that can be executed at lower levels of government. For example, once the center came up with an estimate of 70.17 million impoverished people based on official poverty threshold and nationally representative sampling<sup>55</sup>, it disaggregated that figure and assigned each province a quota of poor population. Having received the quota, the provincial governments would further break it up and assign quotas to the prefectures, and so forth. Overall, the process of quantifying impoverished population and drawing up specific alleviation plans was carried out predominantly within the bureaucratic system, with little participation from the general public.

The fact that local officials often adopt coping strategies that contradict the intended goals of higher authorities must have alarmed the Party leaders. However, the disastrous consequences of the Maoist mass campaigns have probably taught these leaders that bureaucratic means of monitoring remains the best way to preserve the hierarchy of authority. To ensure the elimination of rural poverty by 2020, for instance, the Party had applied regular mechanisms of performance evaluation that linked the fulfillment of measurable targets to the material interest of implementing officials. In February 2016, the center issued a document detailing the methods of evaluating the poverty alleviation work of provincial officials. Headed by the Office of Poverty Alleviation under the State Council and the CCP's Organization Department, the evaluation process would conclude with reports that recommend rewards for well-performing provinces and punitive measures for provincial leaders who failed to complete assigned tasks or used funds inappropriately.<sup>56</sup> Lower-level governments soon came up with their own regulations that held official responsible for their poverty relief performances. Shangyao county of Jiangxi Province, for example, announced that cadres' behavior in poverty alleviation work would be a major factor in promotion decisions, and that leaders of townships which failed to deliver poverty reduction results on time would not be promoted or transferred to other posts<sup>57</sup>.

<sup>53</sup>Xueguang Zhou, Ai Yun, and Lian Hong, 'The limit of bureaucratic power in organizations: the case of the Chinese bureaucracy', *Research in the Sociology of Organizations* 34, (2012), pp. 81–111.

<sup>54</sup>刑成举, [Chengju Xing] '压力型体制下的“扶贫军令状”与贫困治理中的政府失灵' ['Poverty Alleviation Guarantee under Pressurized System and Government Failure in Governance of Poverty'], 南京农业大学学报: 社会科学版 [Journal of Nanjing Agricultural University: Social Science Edition] 16, (2016), p.68.

<sup>55</sup>张爱琼, [Aiqiong Zhang] '农村精准扶贫问题研究' ['A Study of Targeted Poverty Alleviation in Rural Areas'] (MA thesis, Yunnan Caijing Daxue, 2016), p.23.

<sup>56</sup>中共中央办公厅、国务院办公厅['The Office of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party, The Office of the State Council'], '省级党委和政府扶贫开发工作成效考核办法' ['Methods of Evaluating the Poverty Alleviation and Development Work of the Provincial Party Committees and governments'], February 2016, accessed June 16, 2019, [http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-02/16/content\\_5041672.htm](http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-02/16/content_5041672.htm).

<sup>57</sup>Yuheng Li, Baozhong Su, and Yansui Liu, 'Realizing targeted poverty alleviation in China: people's voices, implementation challenges and policy implications', *China Agricultural Economic Review* 8, (2016), pp. 443–454.



Another mechanism of top-down control is mainly procedural: local bureaucrats are required to follow the due process stipulated in policy documents and maintain written records of each step of the implementation. Compared with substantive rules, compliance with procedural requirements is relatively easy to verify. The author's field investigation reveals that officials were rather meticulous in following the standard operating procedures. For example, the identification of poor households would involve the following steps. Rural families that wished to receive poverty reduction assistance would first apply for the official status of poor households. Village cadres would then visit the applicants in their houses to authenticate the information provided in the application forms. Next, meetings of village representatives would be convened to deliberate and decide which applicants should qualify for poor households. The finalized lists would then be displayed in village bulletin boards to invite comments and suggestions. After the period of public notice was over, the lists would be submitted to township and county governments for final approval.<sup>58</sup> Local officials were careful to keep physical proof of the activities of the implementation process including forms, signatures, and photos so that they would be able to cope with inspection from above and avoid accusations of bypassing necessary procedures.

In the Party's recent effort to minimize local non-compliance with central policies, increasingly sophisticated countermeasures had been developed to detect and penalize deviating behavior. It is noteworthy that none of these mechanisms challenges the well-defined hierarchy of authority or disrupt routine bureaucratic operation. One of the sources of innovation in monitoring mechanisms is technological advances: for example, the central authority had initiated the creation of a big data platform for the TPA program to acquire detailed information about the implementation process that would greatly facilitate top-down supervision.<sup>59</sup>

The primary function of the big data platform is to allow information sharing across government departments to detect possible policy deviation in the form of nepotism, embezzlement, and false claims of financial assistance. Typically, the supervising agencies such as the Party's disciplinary inspection commission and auditing bureau would examine a rural resident's electronic data stored in multiple pertinent departments to identify possible cases of irregularity. The relevant information included the resident's official poverty status, receipt of poverty-alleviation funds, ownership of houses and vehicles, employment, payment of income taxes and social insurance, business registration, and so forth.<sup>60</sup> A red flag would be raised if this cross-check of information detected conditions in violation of official policies. Such irregularities would include, for example, the assignment of poverty status to peasants who owned a car or a house in urban areas, was employed by local governments, or was a relative of party officials. Importantly for the purpose of bureaucratic monitoring, the big data platform and newly developed software allowed the supervising agencies to check the information of all rural residents instead of using random samples, reducing the likelihood that misconduct in the implementing process would escape the attention of higher authorities.

After the automated check of big data had discovered suspected cases of irregularity, the disciplinary inspection committee would organize work teams to visit rural households to substantiate problems of deviation. In the field, village cadres showed us a form that tabulated the potential problems spotted by big data cross-check, the information gathered by the follow-up house visits, and whether each allegation of deviation was substantiated. One peasant with official poverty status, for example, was discovered by the cross-check to have a business registration, which cast doubt on his eligibility for financial aid. The work teams, however, found that the small business could only generate the minimum income

<sup>58</sup>Interview with a township head in county B (Interview #20170805).

<sup>59</sup>The State Council of the PRC, 'China Stresses Officials' Poverty Relief Responsibilities', October 18, 2016, accessed June 17, 2019, [http://english.gov.cn/news/top\\_news/2016/10/18/content\\_281475469144338.htm](http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/10/18/content_281475469144338.htm).

<sup>60</sup>罗心澍, [Xinshu Luo] '大数据在精准扶贫审计中的作用探究' [A Study of the Role of Big Data in the Auditing of Targeted Poverty Alleviation], 财政监督 [Financial Supervision] 13, (2017), pp.74–76.

needed for subsistence and concluded that no official policy was violated. If a problem of deviation was substantiated, not only would the situation be rectified but the officials involved in the misconduct could also be subject to the Party's disciplinary measures. According to a report issued by the Disciplinary Inspection Commission of Hubei Province, four months of investigation had substantiated 432,000 cases of misconduct that involved funds worth RMB 602 million and 317,406 individuals who illegally claimed financial subsidies. The Commission investigated a total of 5204 Party officials for misconduct, and among them 3240 had been punished according to the Party's disciplinary regulations.<sup>61</sup>

The creative use of big data collected by multiple government agencies is only one manifestation of the Party center's aggressive attempt to strength the monitoring of local officials. In Shaanxi province, some city governments took advantage of the Global Positioning System (GPS) on mobile phones to ensure that poverty reduction officials spend enough time in the villages.<sup>62</sup> Another innovative measure is referred to as 'third-party evaluation (*disanfang pinggu*)', which entails the 'outsourcing' the monitoring tasks to non-governmental actors, especially university professors and students, whose research expertise and relative detachment from the bureaucratic system make them ideal candidates to independently evaluate implementing outcomes.<sup>63</sup>

On balance, evolution in bureaucratic monitoring had made it increasingly difficult for local cadres to deceive their supervisors. A township Party vice-secretary told us:

The higher-ups have changed their way of inspecting our work, making unannounced visits and using third party evaluations. We had no idea where they would go. It's completely random. The Xinhua News Agency seemed to have made a secret visit here a few days ago. They left before we even knew it. If they discovered any problem, they will inform us to rectify. There have been major changes in how we cope with inspections.<sup>64</sup>

Importantly, while new technologies such as the big data platform and GPS tracking may be employed during normal times for bureaucratic control, the commitment of manpower and administrative resources (for example, the dispatch of work teams) to detect and penalize even minor wrongdoings demonstrates the extraordinary nature of the poverty alleviation efforts. Rather than making campaigns less necessary, technological innovation has been used to facilitate the heightened top-down pressure during a managed campaign.

Therefore, despite the widespread instances of non-compliance and dissimulation, it is the higher authorities that have the initiative to tighten the grid of bureaucratic rules and exert increasingly strong pressure on the subordinates to deliver assigned targets. Once the CCP's central authority has identified a policy program as its top priority and resorted to campaign mobilization to push it forward, the room for local officials to maneuver can be highly restricted. As indicated by the adoption of novel monitoring mechanisms, the Party-state recognized that the best way to ensure that grassroots cadres are fully committed to the realization of campaign goals is to utilize, rather than abolish, bureaucratic means of information gathering and supervision. Hierarchical control and procedural integrity play a critical role in sustaining the momentum of the TPA program.

<sup>61</sup>湖北: 大数据监督检查惠民政策落实, 党纪处分3240人 [Hubei: Big Data Inspection of Policies that Enrich the People: 3240 men received Party Disciplinary Punishment], 新华网[Xinhuanet], October 23, 2016, accessed June 17, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-10/23/c\\_129333787.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2016-10/23/c_129333787.htm).

<sup>62</sup>陕西榆林GPS定位管理扶贫干部 [Yulin City of Shaanxi Province Use GPS to Manage Poverty Reduction Cadres], 新京报 [The Beijing News], June 23, 2017, accessed June 17, 2019, [http://epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2017-06/30/content\\_686843.htm?div=-1](http://epaper.bjnews.com.cn/html/2017-06/30/content_686843.htm?div=-1).

<sup>63</sup>汪三贵, 曾小溪, 殷浩栋, [Sangui Wang, Xiaoxi Zeng, Haodong Yin] '中国扶贫开发绩效第三方评估简论——基于中国人民大学反贫困问题研究中心的实践' [Role of Third-Party Assessment of Performance on Poverty Alleviation and Development: Using the Practice of Anti-Poverty Research Center of Renmin University of China as an Example], 湖南农业大学学报: 社会科学版 [Journal of Hunan Agricultural University: Social Sciences] 17, (2016), pp.1-5; 罗心澍, [Xinshu, Luo] '大数据在精准扶贫审计中的作用探究' [A Study of the Role of Big Data in the Auditing of Targeted Poverty Alleviation], 财政监督 [Financial Supervision] 13, (2017), pp. 74-76.

<sup>64</sup>Interview with a township Party vice-secretary in County C. (Interview #20180116).



## Conclusion

The bureaucracy remains the most important institution for policy making and implementation in contemporary China, making it a critical undertaking to grasp its fundamental logic of operation. This research has sought to understand the relationship between managed campaign and bureaucratic behavioral patterns by closely following the implementation of the TPA program, an effort central to the incumbent leadership's ambitious reform agenda. It finds that periodic managed campaign is not diametrically opposed to bureaucratic institutionalization. Specifically, while the tension and pressure of the mobilization ethos tend to compromise functional differentiation and strict adherence with stable rules, they can reinforce other dimensions of bureaucratization such as top-down control in a multilevel hierarchy and procedural integrity. Indeed, although local officials frequently resort to coping strategies that simulate the accomplishment of tasks and contradict original policy intent, their latitude to do so is highly constrained when higher authorities are determined and focused to realize certain policy objectives. The fact that the supervising organs will go to great lengths to upgrade their monitoring capacities, and that the subordinates have increasingly less discretion in their everyday operation, underscore the centralized and hierarchical nature of the Chinese bureaucracy.

Taking a broader perspective, this article suggests that the development of modern bureaucracy along Weberian principles is highly contingent on a country's historical legacy and institutional context. In contemporary China, socioeconomic development has indisputably made the bureaucracy evolve towards a model that is more functionally differentiated, technically competent, rule-based, and impersonal. But the Party leadership's periodic use of campaign mobilization, an impulse stemming from the regime's revolutionary legacy and principal-agent conundrums inherent in a super-sized organization, can still stifle or reverse the development of ideal-typical professional bureaucracy on key dimensions.

This article has focused on the effects of campaign-style implementation on bureaucratic traits, but it should be noted that, once the bureaucracy acquires certain patterns of behavior, they could also reinforce the Party's choice of policy implementation style. Thus, armed with a bureaucratic apparatus that systematically favors generalists over specialists and prioritizes top-down control over impersonal rules, Party leaders are inclined to demand an implementation process that resembles the campaign mode. Political goals can define organizational weapons, and vice versa. Moreover, those who initiated campaigns rose through the bureaucratic hierarchy and were once grassroots executors of campaign instructions. These actors have therefore internalized the norms and discourse of campaign governance and adapted their survival strategies to fit the 'logic' of the system.<sup>65</sup> Consequently, there exist strong feedback effects that sustain the bureaucratic traits described in this study.

How does managed campaign as a mode of policy implementation affect the outcome of poverty alleviation? That is, what differences does it make to poor peasants' well-being if poverty reduction policies were implemented through normal bureaucratic processes instead of a campaign? Although only an in-depth study can do justice to this important question, two preliminary observations can be made here. First, the swift injection of large amounts of financial resources into the countryside has instantly raised the living standards of many poor households. However, the political imperative to declare the success of the TPA program in 2020 has incentivized most localities to adopt 'quick fixes' rather than careful planning that will generate economic benefits in the long run. Peasants may have been officially lifted out of poverty due to a one-time cash or in-kind subsidy, but they are likely to revert to poverty once the campaign ends. Second, the mistrust of on-the-ground enforcers being a major motive behind campaign mobilization, the CCP has deployed work teams to implement centrally-formulated policies. This, coupled with frequent top-down inspections, has greatly eroded the autonomy of village committees, which

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<sup>65</sup>Kathleen Thelen, 'Historical institutionalism in comparative politics', *Annual Review of Political Science* 2(1), (1999), p. 392.

are by law self-governing bodies in charge of village affairs. This article's field research has encountered quite a few village leaders who disagreed with policies imposed from above, for example concerning which cash crops to grow on a large scale, but were powerless to resist. The declining influence of village leadership may very well lead to rural development strategies that fit poorly with local conditions.

Admittedly, the external validity of the findings derived from a case study is limited, and future inquiries are well advised to examine whether the theoretical arguments developed in this article also apply to the implementation of other important policy programs. Moreover, since the adoption of novel mechanisms to monitor local officials is an ongoing development, more researches are called for to study the effects of these innovative measures on both the attitudes of officials and the outcome of implementation. This article will hopefully be followed by a series of studies that generate more sophisticated and balanced theoretical insights on the Chinese bureaucracy than what existing conceptual models have to offer.

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## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

## Notes on contributor

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