

Beyond “Bureaucracy”: the Action Logic of Chinese “Cadres” under Role Theory

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Abstract: Traditional bureaucracy theory is the basic theory of public administration and is widely practiced and developed in Western countries. Bureaucracy emphasizes rules and efficiency, and aims to improve organizational efficiency through the professional division of labor among officials. However, the criticism and revision of bureaucracy in theory continues to this day, and problems such as institutional rigidity and bureaucracy have emerged in practice. The construction of Chinese bureaucratic organizations also refers to bureaucratic theory, but it can maintain a high level of governance effectiveness. The emergence of this phenomenon of "Chinese governance and Western chaos" is due to the fact that the political role of Chinese "cadres" has achieved a transcendence of Western "bureaucrats" from individual action logic to national governance logic. Based on the achievements and shortcomings of existing research, this paper innovatively applies role theory to the comparison of the political roles of cadres and bureaucrats, and gradually constructs a research paradigm with Chinese cadres as the core from the role of cadres, deducing how their role action logic fits the national governance logic, and achieving the improvement of governance effectiveness and transcendence of bureaucrats.

Keywords: Cadres; Bureaucracy; Role Theory; Political Role; Governance Logic

1. Introduction

Bureaucracy theory was proposed by Max Weber. It laid the foundation for modern organizational structure and profoundly influenced the development of public administration. Bureaucracy theory emphasizes rationalism and strives to build a hierarchical and rule-based organizational structure with efficiency as the top priority based on legal authority. In terms of theoretical system,

bureaucracy theory includes specialization of division of labor, strict hierarchy, impersonal management, and performance appraisal. For the "bureaucrats" in it, they should regard official positions as professions and be loyal to the goals and behavioral norms stipulated in the position, and serve functional administrative goals exclusively. This requires bureaucrats to eliminate the influence of all irrational emotions and make bureaucrats impersonal "tools".

Weber's "rational bureaucracy" emphasizes rationality and efficiency, which is regarded as a sign of the rationalization of the administrative system and the standardization of the governance structure. Under this theory, Western countries have established a modern bureaucratic system, following the principles of reasonable division of labor, hierarchical control, and standardized operation, in order to achieve the improvement of administrative efficiency and governance effectiveness. However, with the advent of the information economy era and post-industrial society, the limitations of bureaucracy have become increasingly apparent, and theory and practice have been constantly impacted. The instrumentalized "bureaucrats" find it difficult to cope with many problems in modern political society, and countries guided by this theory have also encountered bureaucratic action dilemmas. What is noteworthy is that when China built a bureaucratic system, it also learned and borrowed from bureaucratic theory, but maintained a high level of administrative efficiency and governance effectiveness, and was able to effectively suppress the above bureaucratic action problems. What is the reason behind the phenomenon of "Chinese governance and Western chaos" in the bureaucratic system? This article focuses on the lack of explanatory power of traditional bureaucratic theory on the Chinese official system, and also ignores the study of individual official action patterns - it is necessary to compare the political role of Chinese officials to that of Western bureaucrats

under the Chinese political system, and analyze the political role of this behavior pattern on governance effectiveness[1].

2. The Transcendence of “Cadres” Over “Bureaucrats” Under Role Theory

2.1 Political Roles: An Innovative Introduction to Role Theory

"Role" was originally a special term in drama, referring to the characters played by actors on stage. American sociologists first applied "role" to sociological research, and gradually formed role theory under the systematic use of the Chicago School. Its theoretical schools mainly include structural role theory and process role theory, and the research content includes role attributes, role expectations, role playing, etc. Role theory focuses on explaining the logic of individual actions, highlighting the constructive, creative and changeable nature of individual behavior[2].

The reason why role theory is introduced to compare the political roles of cadres and bureaucrats is mainly because of the effectiveness of role theory in explaining the relationship between individual action logic and organizational operation logic. First, role theory provides a theoretical basis for explaining and analyzing the behavior patterns of political roles, provides explanatory concepts and follows a complete behavioral logic, including role attributes, role expectations, etc. Second, role theory has the ability to "describe institutions from a behavioral perspective." Different from existing studies that mostly regard political roles as tools that follow institutional arrangements and analyze role functions from top to bottom, thus falling into the pre-set trap of bureaucratic theory instrumentalism. Role theory focuses on political roles, pays attention to the psychology and behavior of individuals, and their interactions with other individuals and organizations in the "structure-process", emphasizes the initiative and constructivism of individuals, and can interpret organizations and institutions through the study of political roles and behaviors. Finally, role theory provides a new perspective for understanding the nature of political operation and the mechanism of governance logic. The "script" followed by political roles is the operating logic of the political system, and the functions and effects of roles can also be judged, that is, the effect of role

"deduction". Connecting "roles" and "scripts", and connecting individuals with systems, makes it easier to demonstrate that cadres transcend the logic of bureaucratic governance[3].

2.2 Comparison of Political Roles: Cadres and Bureaucrats

From the above, we can see that role theory is suitable for explaining different political roles. This section will compare cadres and bureaucrats from four aspects: role attributes, role expectations, role construction, and role playing. On the basis of comparing similarities and differences, it will explore the improvement of cadres' effectiveness compared with traditional bureaucrats.

2.2.1. Role Attributes

Attributes are the indispensable properties and relationships of individuals, and role attributes are the indispensable characteristics and abilities of roles. Attributes determine functions, and roles determine actions. Therefore, role attributes determine the differences in the behavior and role of political roles, and are the basis for comparing political roles. The behavior of traditional bureaucrats completely complies with the rules of the organization, and the nature of their role is reflected in the efficiency purpose under instrumental rationality. Bureaucrats are "tool people" who faithfully perform their duties and achieve organizational goals, which reflects the absolute status of instrumental rationality in bureaucratic organizations. However, the excessive emphasis on instrumental rationality also requires bureaucrats to be value-neutral and depersonalized, and everything serves to improve administrative efficiency. Bureaucrats are like gears on a machine, turning mechanically without a "soul", and individual value orientations and wills are ignored. While performing their duties, cadres also pay attention to individual value goals and behavioral freedom, highlighting the guiding role of value rationality[4].

2.2.2 Role expectations

Role expectations are the expectations and requirements that society and organizations put forward for the behavior patterns of actors in specific positions. They are the key to constructing role images and regulating role behaviors. Role expectations can be divided into social expectations and self-expectations, among which social expectations include institutional expectations and moral expectations. The

requirements for bureaucratic behavior come from institutional expectations, which are mainly the norms of organizational rules. The assessment and incentives for bureaucratic behavior are also based on performance indicators, which are regular and mandatory. At the same time, due to the depersonalization of bureaucrats, their self-expectations are mostly limited to meeting the administrative tasks, and because they are in administrative organizations, they have less interaction with the political system and the masses of society, so they lack the driving force of political beliefs and social requirements, which affects the comprehensiveness and satisfaction of the role. The difference is that the "political" expectations of cadres' roles include both ideological political guidance and the handling of political-administrative and political-social relations. Therefore, the sources of role expectations are more diverse. In addition to the norms of organizational systems, they also include the driving force of ideological beliefs and political value goals, as well as the moral expectations of the masses of society - both mandatory institutional norms and social moral requirements[5].

2.2.3 Role Construction

Role construction refers to the recognition and understanding of role expectations by the role bearer, as well as the content of behavior formed accordingly. It is an "internalization" process involving behavioral patterns, behavioral fields, behavioral mechanisms, etc. It is a process of unifying political status and identity. In terms of role construction, the biggest difference between cadres and bureaucrats is the different fields of individual behavior, which leads to differences in the understanding of the role's own role requirements. Traditional bureaucrats are influenced by managerialism and technocracy. When constructing their personal role images, they take administrative goals as the only guide. They are only administrative tools, which leads to the simplification of roles, limits the scope of role functions, and cannot flexibly switch identities in different situations. Cadres have different political identities. They are the bearers of political ideology, the implementers of public policies, and the servants of the masses. Their behavior has administrative, political, and social attributes. The objective overlap of cadres' political roles - individuals are not only institutional tools, but also social individuals,

and can effectively handle complex relationships in the performance of their duties through role networks[6].

2.2.4 Role Playing

The actual behavior of a role is called role-playing, which refers to the process and activities of a politician who assumes a certain political role to assume and perform a political role. Role-playing is a comprehensive and profound behavioral process. Its key is not only to portray the behavioral settings of the "script" for political roles, but more importantly to convey the "spirit" of the script, that is, to show the efficiency of governance logic and institutional design. The role-playing of Chinese cadres is injected with the practice of public values. It is the unity of purpose rationality and value rationality, combining technical rationality and political value - taking into account the internal balance of personal and social interests, public values and private values, freedom and democracy. This value rationality is "substantive rationality", which fits the public nature of power behavior, realizes the complementary advantages of instrumental rationality and value rationality, and breaks through the contradiction between bureaucracy as a means and the realization of purpose[7].

2.3 Transcendence of Action Logic

After comparing the differences in the political roles of cadres and bureaucrats, this section will combine their respective role characteristics and behavioral patterns to explain how Chinese cadres transcend the action dilemma of traditional bureaucrats and explore China's experience of distinctive bureaucratic organizations.

2.3.1 Role expectations determine role construction

Role expectations determine role construction, and different expectations lead to differences in role functions. In terms of role construction, the role field of traditional bureaucrats is based on the assumption of the state-society dichotomy and lacks contact and interaction with society. The closed characteristics of the bureaucratic system rely on experts to operate internally, and there is little room for external public participation. Even the political participation of individual bureaucrats is very limited. It is a purely institutionalized product. However, China's politics-society is not a split binary relationship. Cadres are in a political system that

is open to society, and politics and society are constantly "exchanging energy". The role construction of cadres has the characteristics of semi-institutional and semi-social. The overlap of multiple role expectations enables cadres to construct different role images in the interaction between the administrative system, the political system and the social environment, and can solve administrative problems through social relations and actions, expand the scope of democratic decision-making and democratic management, and transcend bureaucrats in terms of guaranteeing and developing democracy[8].

2.3.2 Role attributes affect role playing

In the pursuit of rationality and efficiency, Western bureaucrats act according to organizational rules as a tool to achieve administrative goals, and individual personality attributes and value choices are often ignored. Therefore, in practice, they encounter contradictions between impersonality and humanity, as well as conflicts between purpose and means. Compared with bureaucrats, the role attributes of Chinese cadres are infused with value rationality, and they rely on the initiative of the subject to overcome action dilemmas in different fields[9].

On the one hand, faced with the contradiction between impersonality and humanity, bureaucrats are under impersonal management, and in the administrative process, they eliminate the interference of emotional and value factors, which leads to the loss of initiative and enthusiasm of bureaucratic activities, suppresses individual creativity and follows the old ways, and makes it difficult to deal with the relationship with the public. The motivation of cadres' behavior is not only to follow organizational rules, but also driven by ideological beliefs, the mission of being responsible to the people and the responsibility of themselves, which can achieve the combination of instrumental rationality, value rationality and subject rationality. In the tension between political loyalty and technical rationality, Chinese cadres choose to use the former to guide the latter, and transform from "tool people" to "party people" or "political people". The characteristics of Chinese cadres' both moral integrity and ability enable them to not only handle administrative tasks professionally, but also as the bearers of ideology, driven by political identity, the initiative of political roles is fully exerted,

especially when dealing with the relationship with the people. Their behavior patterns are more creative and constructive, giving play to the advantages of "humanity" and taking into account multiple interests and value demands[10].

On the other hand, in terms of the goal attribution of political roles, bureaucrats seek technical paths to improve efficiency and meet task targets. This efficiency orientation is a mechanical efficiency that only considers results, which goes against the original intention of public policy. However, the political positioning and administrative goals of Chinese cadres are highly internally consistent, unified in the value orientation of "everything for the people" - administrative tasks are subject to political positioning. Cadres perform their duties based on political ethics, enriching the connotation of political values and social morality. This political rationality is the unity of purpose and value. In role-playing, cadres are different from the "weak incentives" of bureaucrats and have greater behavioral motivation. Roles are no longer just a means and tool to complete tasks, but are closely linked to value goals, so Chinese cadres can overcome the contradiction between purpose and means[11].

3. Governance Logic: The Transcendence of the Cadre Paradigm over the Bureaucratic Paradigm

By comparing the political roles of cadres and bureaucrats, this paper concludes that Chinese cadres suppress the shortcomings of bureaucratic instrumentalism through the value rationality of political loyalty, and achieve transcendence of bureaucratic behavior patterns through the semi-institutional and semi-social identity constructed under social expectations. Under the Chinese political system, the policy implementation is stronger and the governance effectiveness of connecting with society is exerted. Following the explanatory logic of the role theory "structure-function", this section will rise from the individual actions of political roles to the operating logic of organizational systems, explore the shaping and contribution of cadre behavior to China's political system and administrative operations, and further explain the transcendence of cadre paradigm governance logic over bureaucratic paradigm administrative logic[12].

3.1 Power Delegation: Ideological Guidance and Motivation

The most common problem in Western bureaucratic practice is the issue of power delegation. How to deal with the principal-agent relationship of power is an issue that both Western bureaucrats and Chinese cadres are working hard to solve. In a bureaucratic organization, the principal will assign clear administrative goals, and the identity of the agent executor as an "economic man" makes his behavior rational, realistic and self-interested, which easily leads to a deviation between the execution effect and the public nature of the set goals. In this case, it is particularly important to establish an effective incentive and supervision mechanism for the agent executor. Western bureaucrats often use information asymmetry and non-institutional relationships to cope with the norms and tasks of their superiors out of self-interest, leading to problems such as formalism and bureaucratic corruption, resulting in the incentive mechanism of Western management being a "weak incentive".

Chinese cadres, by virtue of their political loyalty in their role expectations, guarantee and encourage conscientious political behavior, adhere to the party's original aspiration and mission, serve the people's needs, and do not deviate from the publicity and normative nature of policy implementation. The cadre paradigm's solution to the problem of power delegation is to build an "authority-obedience" relationship to guide the "principal-agent" relationship. Under the personnel principle of "the party manages cadres", cadres are the bearers of ideology and loyal party believers under ideological party building. The authoritative coordination led by party building can not only enhance the political identity of individual cadres, but also encourage the expansion of the ability of such beliefs to be externalized into individual behavior and the organizational adaptation of the bureaucratic system. Therefore, in the incentive and supervision mechanism of Chinese cadres, rule guidance, legal regulations or economic incentives do not occupy a primary position. What is more important is the cadre responsibility system based on ideology. Cadres understand the entrusted tasks, implement them in a targeted manner in different situations, and are flexible in achieving goals. The inherent unity of the political positioning of Chinese cadres being responsible to the Party and the

value positioning of "people-centered" has changed the situation of cadres being merely executors of the will of their superiors. It can give full play to their individual qualities, abilities, social relations, etc., and it has also resolved the conflict between self-interest and public power in the bureaucracy to the greatest extent. It is a breakthrough in the "principal-agent" dilemma of traditional bureaucracy.

3.2 Mass Relations: Role Identity Inhibits the Alienation of Bureaucratic Organizations

The actions of traditional bureaucrats emphasize strict compliance with impersonal rules, and they also regard administrative objects as impersonal objects. The role construction is separated from the social environment and only follows administrative regulations. The institutional identity of bureaucrats is stripped of emotions and values, which rigidifies the "bureaucrat-people" relationship and restricts the political participation of the public. On the one hand, the loss of bureaucratic autonomy may go to extremes, and the rigidity of rules makes the bureaucracy less sensitive to governance needs; on the other hand, the characteristics of bureaucracy such as professional thresholds and information monopoly will exclude most people from public affairs. Bureaucracy is the rule of bureaucrats, which is not contradictory to the rule of the people. It is just that the singleness of the bureaucratic role construction leads to the lack of its function of representing public opinion and connecting with society. Some scholars believe that the bureaucratic arrogance of "who else but me" is a deviation from democracy.

The social identity of the cadre role is also reflected in the implementation of the Party's mass line, which makes the "cadre-mass" integrated relationship transcend the representative relationship of "bureaucrats-people", actively responds to the governance needs of public participation, and promotes the whole process of people's democracy. For the political role of cadres, the mass line is not only based on the political participation of citizens' rights, but also emphasizes the self-responsibility of political missions. With the transformation of China's political goals from power to management and then to governance logic, the mass line adhered to by cadres is also a two-way interactive

governance means. The cadres' practice of the mass line has made the bureaucratic organization from closed to open, effectively curbing bureaucracy and formalism. The mass line can also realize the effective conclusion of power networks and social networks, avoid the governance crisis of being out of touch with the masses, and enhance the flexibility and efficiency of governance actions.

3.3 Governance Effectiveness: Fit Between Political Leadership and Executive Function

Most mainstream political theories in the West agree on the political-administrative dichotomy: politics, as the expression of the state's will, is mainly embodied by political parties; administration, as the execution of the state's will, is undertaken by government organizations. The "bureaucrats" in the bureaucracy are officials who maintain political neutrality under the administrative system and are only responsible for completing the administrative tasks of their superiors. In this case, the relevant relationship has also become a difficult problem in Western governance practice. The isolation and separation of the political system and the administrative system make it difficult for actual governance to deal with the relationship between political values and administrative efficiency. In fact, it is difficult for officials to be completely politically neutral, and the lack of political guidance will cause administrative results to deviate from political goals.

From individual behavior to governance logic, the Chinese cadre paradigm combines political themes and administrative goals, breaking through the chronic disease of the political-administrative dichotomy. In terms of political roles, cadres have dual identities, and their behaviors have both value rationality and purpose rationality; in terms of organization, party members and party organizations are embedded in the bureaucracy and can handle the relationship between the party's overall leadership function and the government's administrative function. Therefore, in terms of governance logic, the flexibility of the party-government structure and the complexity of its functions make the governance effectiveness of the cadre paradigm surpass that of traditional bureaucrats.

4. Conclusion and Discussion

In general, the political role of "cadres" is an

important component of the new national governance structure under the overall leadership of the Communist Party of China, and has achieved a transcendence of the bureaucracy from individual behavior patterns to national governance logic. Under the "attribute-function" logic, cadres drive political behavior through ideological guidance and overcome the negative functions of technocracy with political loyalty; under the multiple role expectations of "state-society", they construct a semi-institutional and semi-social identity, expand democratic participation through the mass line, and break through the dilemmas of bureaucracy and formalism; under the political and administrative governance structure, cadres break through the traditional bureaucratic political-administrative dichotomy by playing the roles of "party cadres" and "state cadres", and integrate political goals and administrative tasks.

Of course, the future development direction of "cadres" in China still needs to overcome practical difficulties. The reality of the superposition of political roles requires cadres to construct a suitable identity image in different contexts and fields. Faced with the semi-institutional and semi-social role identity, how to grasp the balance between the closed and open administrative system to avoid role overload, role dislocation and other problems. The fragmentation of interests in modern society is becoming more and more obvious, and the political role of cadres cannot satisfy everyone. In addition to adhering to ideological beliefs and the mass line, we must further think about the tension between cadres and the masses, and between politics and administration. How to make the political "role" perform a good governance "script" requires continuous exploration in theory and practice.

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