

Preface

This book originates from the 10th workshop of the Greater China Australia Dialogue on Public Administration, a collaboration established in 2009 between a group of public administration scholars and former practitioners from the People's Republic of China (including both Mainland China and the Hong Kong Special Administration Zone), Taiwan and Australia. The workshop, held online in March 2021, provided the opportunity to reflect upon the developments in public administration the Dialogue has explored over the previous decade and to consider likely future developments over the next decade.

Previous workshops explored the following areas of public administration in the three jurisdictions:

- Citizen-centred service delivery (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 2011), a symposium of articles later published in a special issue of the *Australian Journal of Public Administration (AJPA)* in 2012;
- Intergovernmental relations (The Australian National University, Canberra, 2012), a symposium of articles later published in a special issue of *AJPA* in 2013;
- Public sector human services management (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 2013), a third symposium of articles published in *AJPA* in 2015;
- Decentralisation (Zhejiang University, Hangzhou, 2014), a selection of articles later published in the *Journal of Chinese Governance* in 2016;
- Budgeting and financial management (National Taiwan University, Taipei, 2015), an edited book of articles (*Value for Money*) later published by ANU Press (2018);
- Policymaking processes (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 2016), selected papers published on the Australia and New Zealand School of Governance (ANZSOG) website;

- Institutional structures (City University, Hong Kong, 2017), a second edited book, *Designing Governance Structures for Performance and Accountability*, published by ANU Press (2020);
- Urban governance (Jiao Tong University, Shanghai, 2018), a symposium of articles later published by the *Australian Journal of Social Issues* in 2019;
- Taking advantage of new technology (Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, 2019), a symposium of articles later published by the *Asia Pacific Journal of Public Administration* in 2020.

All the published articles from these workshops, including papers not published in books or journals, are publicly available via www.anzsog.edu.au/resource-library/research/the-greater-china-australia-dialogue-on-public-administration (accessed 20 June 2023).

While past Dialogue workshops all highlighted the major differences in institutional frameworks as well as in economic and social contexts, much of the emphasis was on how each jurisdiction was addressing common challenges and the extent to which there was a diffusion of ideas and approaches, albeit always adapted to each jurisdiction's circumstances.

As highlighted in the opening chapter of this book, however, it is the differences now that are being emphasised as rising international tensions inevitably draw attention to where interests and philosophies diverge. Is it even possible to compare public administration practices between such different jurisdictions? Yet an understanding of each other's approach to government and governance requires some common concepts that allow some comparisons to be made. And such understanding is of even greater importance when there are tensions and where the risk of misunderstanding limits the opportunity for finding shared interests and heightens the likelihood of deeper divisions. Notwithstanding the differences, and the serious (and worsening in some cases) weaknesses in public administration in all three jurisdictions, all three have also delivered significant improvements in public sector performance over the last decade (notwithstanding the challenge of COVID-19) and there is continuing evidence of cross-border learning about good practice.

The subsequent chapters in the book explore four areas of public administration in more detail:

- a. Intergovernmental relations, and the shifting balances between centralisation and decentralisation in each jurisdiction;
- b. Budgeting and financial management, including the challenges associated with the responses to COVID-19 and the continuing importance of performance management and accountability;

- c. The civil service, and its relationship with both government and the public, and its capability;
- d. Service delivery, including the challenge of greater responsiveness to citizens' needs and preferences and the role of new technology; particular fields examined are health care and aged care as well as administrative services.

These four areas were chosen not only because each had been explored at earlier workshops and hence more recent developments could be examined more easily, but also because, overall, they represent a very large proportion of public administration practices in any jurisdiction, whatever their political institutional arrangements. They also all involve multiple levels of government (central and local), they involve substantial resources and they open discussions regarding the national government's relationships with ordinary citizens. The very different political institutional arrangements across the three jurisdictions are not expressly explored but form a backdrop to the examination of each of these areas. This reflects the main purpose of the Dialogue from the beginning, which has been to explore areas where cross-border learnings seem most likely; in this book, however, those differences are more firmly underlined.

Brief introductions to each of the sections draw attention to similarities and differences in the approaches adopted and the developments currently taking place. In some cases, differences seem to be diverging further while in many others there continue to be signs of diffusion of ideas and practices, if applied very differently.

We hope this book attracts a wide readership among public administration scholars and practitioners, not only within the three jurisdictions explored but also among others keen to know more about the People's Republic of China, Taiwan or Australia. Our aim also is to encourage continued engagement, notwithstanding current tensions, to better understand different approaches: where necessary, confirming fundamental philosophical differences but also looking for common ground and opportunities for shared learning.

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