Bureaucratisation of worth: How business schools demonstrate scholarly impact?

Journal:	*Academy of Management Learning & Education*
Manuscript ID	AMLE-2022-0320-RES.R3
Manuscript Type:	Research & Reviews
Submission Keywords:	Business Schools Rankings, Critical Theory, Managing a Business School, Qualitative Methods
Abstract:	This study provides qualitative insights into academic research management in Chinese business schools. We conceptualise research performance measurement and value-based judgements as tests, to explore the potential for compromise. We draw on quantification and valuation studies and Boltanski and Thévenot's Economies of Worth (EW) concept. In this article, the compromises are called into question when the research performance measurement (RPM) system is constructed as an end goal rather than for the common good. Close observations of how RPM systems foster dynamics of controversy, compromise, or both between different orders of worth over time, help us to make sense of the trajectories of tensions inherent to performance measurement in the Chinese business school arena and the justification, critique, compromise, and domination at play.

Bureaucratisation of Worth: How Business Schools Demonstrate Scholarly Impact

Chao Ren
Joe.ren@unsw.edu.au
The University of New South Wales,

Gillian Vesty
Gillian.vesty@rmit.edu.au
RMIT University

Mingqiong Mike Zhang
Mike.zhang@monash.edu
Monash University

Hui Situ
Situh1@cardiff.ac.uk
Cardiff University

Disclosure statements
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors

This research did not receive any specific grant from funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

ABSTRACT

This study provides qualitative insights into academic research management in Chinese business schools. We conceptualise research performance measurement and value-based judgements as tests, to explore the potential for compromise. We draw on quantification and valuation studies and Boltanski and Thévenot's Economies of Worth (EW) concept. In this article, the compromises are called into question when the research performance measurement (RPM) system is constructed as an end goal rather than for the common good. Close observations of how RPM systems foster dynamics of controversy, compromise, or both between different orders of worth over time, help us to make sense of the trajectories of tensions inherent to performance measurement in the Chinese business school arena and the justification, critique, compromise, and domination at play.

Keywords: research performance measurement (RPM), tests of worth, compromises, Chinese business schools, mutable compliance

INTRODUCTION

The recognised value and impact of academic contributions to society (Hughes et al., 2019; Johnson & Orr, 2020) draws attention to the importance of research performance management and how the effectiveness, legitimacy and relevance of academic research plays out managerially in conceptual and functional terms. Given recent efforts by the Chinese public government reforms targeted toward Chinese academics becoming important contributors to global academic research, we address calls with insights on explicit performance management activities of Chinese public university business school administrators (Fey, 2022). We explore how academics embrace the research performance measurement (RPM) system changes recently put in place by the Chinese government specifically designed to rebalance efficiency, impact, and innovation. We contend that the new research evaluation mechanisms reveal competing performance expectations and undermine the ability of senior management to compromise when conflict exists. The present study aims to investigate (e)valuation practices, and Chinese business school actors' justifications or compromises, to demonstrate this proposal.

Compromises over divergent values and evaluative principles are vital to organisational sustainability or viability (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020; Vakkuri et al., 2021). Unlike the general understanding of a compromise as a winning/losing or a trade-off situation, 'compromise' in this present study is defined as an agreement on a common good that: firstly includes all relevant value principles; and secondly, does not privilege any of the value propositions in conflict (Boltanski & Thévenot, 2006). Further, business schools can be understood as a compromising device (Thévenot, 2001) generating multiple modes of coordination and activating assemblages of conventions between competing and even conflicting value propositions, accountabilities (political, managerial, and public), stakeholders (e.g., industries, students, the academic community, funders, governments, and the wider society), with diverse evaluation criteria, located within and beyond the formal boundaries of organisations (Haley et al., 2022).

Given the realities associated with ambiguous and ambivalent missions, activities and complex-to-measure outcomes to which universities and schools are expected to contribute, we place the RPM system at the centre of our examination. This focus is in line with Chenhall et al. (2013) who contend that organisational performance measurement systems (PMS) are the pivotal point around

which compromises between different modes of (e)valuation evolve. PMS are similarly noted for their equivocal role concerning entwined moral values and generated organisational conflict (Grossi & Thomasson, 2015). It is thus important and timely to operationalise and account for scholarly impact in business research that genuinely effects common interests and/or compromise (Haley, 2021). Especially given a current conceptual and empirical understanding of how, why and in what conditions PMS can (or not) facilitate the balance of disparate goals is limited.

With quantification elevated to a legitimate form of management expression (Mennicken & Espeland, 2019), PMS quantification is neither an innocent, neutral nor independent elaborative activity. It is a practice of talking and doing that is inextricably located within a matrix of other practices. Despite the ongoing evolution of contemporary PMSs around the globe, to date, the effects of audit cultures (Power, 2013; Shore & Wright, 2015; Shore et al., 2015), quantification (Espeland & Stevens, 2008), and calculative technologies (Martin-Sardesai et al., 2020) on the research on business academics, managers and other university stakeholders in non-Western contexts remain significantly under-investigated. PMSs and their promises are highly context-dependent, varying with respect to university systems, governments, and nations. This gives rise to the need to demystify the ways in which stakeholders deal with institutional hybridity to work out compromises. In this paper, we consider the possibility of compromise in preserving intellectual curiosity and academic autonomy so that research maintains its social usefulness and validity, while pursuing the productivity that is intrinsically entwined with the ambit of quantification today.

The present study involves fieldwork conducted in 2019 and 2021 in five Chinese public university business schools. China has one of the largest business education sectors in the world and since 2020, the Chinese government has actively engaged in establishing a new academic evaluation system to drive global competition. Without a better understanding of Chinese business schools, it is impossible to understand the global dynamics of global business education and research. Due to China's distinct political systems, economies, historical traditions, trajectory, and cultural contexts, Chinese business schools offer a privileged position from which to study the valuations made for accounting for research and the ways in which business school actors manage controversies and effect compromise. The present study is appropriate because the situations within China relate to both the quantification and reformation of RPM systems, accompanied by shifts in values. We

propose that our analysis helps us to highlight agreements and discords, both in technical debates and moral disputes, between diverse and competing rationales. The investigation is situated as two 'situations' - before and during the reform currently underway. Overall, the study thus seeks to answer the following research question:

Whether and how does the design of RPM systems facilitate or undermine the dynamics of compromise?

To address this question, the theoretical approach adopted here engages the sociology of valuation (e.g., Kornberger et al., 2015; Lamont, 2012) and Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991, 2006) critique of justification. The first stream of literature on the modes of valuation through which mechanisms and quantification practices demonstrate the worth of academic research is juxtaposed with the second stream of literature which highlights the importance of socially founded conventionalised practices and justifications. Boltanski and Thévenot's (1991, 2006) Economies of Worth framing, hereafter EW, provides the opportunity to 'test' the critical moments when (e)valuative practices are debated (Dansou & Langley, 2012). Renn's (1992) 'arena' metaphor is used to portray the environment, and the RPM systems contained therein, as they contribute to justification, critique, valuation and domination in practice.

Our study seeks to contribute to the literature in three ways. Firstly, we contribute to the literature on valuation and evaluation by offering an in-depth analysis of the complexity inherent in the conventionalisation dynamics of PMSs. This considers the notion of worth and the dynamics of tensions enabled by the transformation of the RPM system reforms in China. We propose the concept of the 'bureaucratisation of worth' which conceptualises the continuation of the domination of the Chinese bureaucracy underlying the development of RPM systems and their implementation (Lamont, 2012). Secondly, in encompassing both an analysis of bounded rationality around PMSs and a comprehension of struggles between criticism and coordination (Grattarola et al., 2023), our integrated approach advances recent organisational studies with EW's turn to domination (e.g., Daudigeos et al., 2021; Nyberg et al., 2017). We contribute to a better understanding of the logics of both appropriateness and consequences of the conventionalisation of PMS by introducing the concept of 'mutable compliance' to theorise a particular type of justification work emerging from the findings: the amalgamation of moral resistance and instrumental compliance of subordinated actors. Mutable compliance is a product of the

domination systems and the level of pressure instilled by the Chinese bureaucracy and is implicated in the creation of new realities. This is through the continual interaction of the bureaucratisation of worth and agents. As a result, this study provides further insights into how a system of domination exerted by the bureaucratic state constrains and enables dominated groups' critiques and actions. The tests of worth seek to mirror and reproduce compliance within the Chinese business school arena. Thirdly, we offer additional insights to management education studies on the issues inherent to the evaluation of research, impact, and engagement in business schools (Johnson & Orr, 2020; Mingers & Willmott, 2013). Given that research management reform in Chinese business schools is still in progress, this study provides valuable insights for Chinese policymakers in repurposing RPM systems to create a new social order in business schools.

In the section that follows, we provide a theoretical background on the EW literature and valuation and quantification studies. The third section describes the background of Chinese public university business schools. This is followed by an explanation of our methods and data; with the fifth section presenting findings from the field study. In the final section, we highlight the findings and outline the contributions, implications, and limitations of this study, and present possible future research directions.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

Critical perspectives on RPM systems

With government reforms that incorporate a mix of government, business and professional values, the hybridisation effects that impact Higher Education (HE)'s structures, activities, and practices have been well noted in the literature (Kallio et al., 2020; Ye et al., 2019). Contested values are observed within and across levels, including goal ambiguity with PMSs playing a mediating role, bringing together conflicting values and varying accountabilities held by stakeholders. The merits of PMS mediating practices have been questioned when they are incomplete and fail to capture cause-and-effect relationships (Vakkuri & Johanson, 2020), or overlook important values that characterise hybridity (Grossi & Thomasson, 2015). Kurunmäki et al. (2016) note that quantifiable and commensurable PMS devices are bestowed with supremacy and justified in terms of their utility and accuracy. Nevertheless, economization that links accounting and/or economics to various objects, attributes, or people makes immaterial things visible, depersonalises relationships, standardises and simplifies contextual relevance by a common metric (Espeland et al., 2016).

Notwithstanding, the pace of the rise of systems of quantification is particularly relevant in universities, thus creating PMS ambiguity wherein systematic attention to efficiency leads to the domination of a singular evaluative principle (Grossi et al., 2019)

Although considered controversial, RPM systems are increasingly harnessed by universities interested in quantification methods for audit control (Power, 2013) and fostering a performance measurement culture (Shore et al., 2015). The 'moral orientations' of RPM compete with professionalism and intellectual curiosity, which affects individual moral priorities (Sutton & Brown, 2016). Prior studies have focused on the adverse outcomes of RPM proliferation, including degradation of knowledge production, not least in terms of narrowing the research foci and empirical territories, luring academics away from critical thinking and research that lacks relevance to practice (Broadbent et al., 2010; Willmott, 2011). Others opine that there has been a deterioration in community ethos, one that reduces academic collegiality and freedom (Knights & Clarke, 2014; Sousa et al., 2010), teaching rigour (Gebreiter & Hidayah, 2019), impacting the overall wellbeing of academics (Knights & Clarke, 2014).

An alternative argument is that PMSs can also be used to construct and crystallise compromise in situations where the co-existence of disparate evaluation principles is required. Compromise is essential for hybrid organisations with PMS having the potential to provide a fertile arena for debate between actors with divergent evaluative principles. Chenhall et al. (2013) highlight how PMS help to bridge different perspectives by providing an acceptable compromise between a plurality of values and contexts. The compromise forms an agreement toward a common good and suspends disputes that seek to privilege one evaluative principle over another. Carlsson-Wall et al. (2016) maintain that PMSs foster recognition and visibility of disparate values to enable compromise. According to Jay (2013), accounts are important to the compromise process because a variety of values held by actors can resurface as conflict at particular moments and situations in time, including during the design and use of PMS. Thus, analysis of PMS systems helps to understand what counts and whether or not compromise between diverse evaluative principles can be established. This understanding can then support the 'how' in design activities.

The literature has so far endowed the PMS with capacities to either foster or undermine compromise. It points out that RPM systems can contribute positively or negatively to the common

good. Business schools are rife with competing pressures, demands, and the need to represent diverse evaluative principles of stakeholders (Mailhot & Langley, 2017). Nevertheless, how business schools reconcile competing values through their RPM systems and compromise arrangements, is not well explored in the management education literature. As core to the expression of value, a PMS signals how business academics should act, which alludes to the question of how actors mobilise actions to comply with or resist compromise.

Economies of Worth (EW)

Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) theorise a multiplicity of co-existing moral orders that legitimise social actions. They propose different systems of normative qualification that assess what is appropriate in moral terms. These include *market*, *industrial*, *domestic*, *civic*, *inspiration*, and *fame* orders of worth and comprise different subjects, objects, evaluation practices, tests, and proofs which form stable moral agreements around a higher common principle to achieve common goods. Justifications emerge through the contention of values upon other actors, and the ensuing action where things and acts are judged. In a pluralistic society, one will expect that multiple justifications for the common good to exist. For example, in the civic world, where civic equality and collective interests are deemed paramount, these interests are evaluated based on the notion of collective welfare. A political organisation or community are a qualified subject, with regulations and other legal forms that are qualified objects. In the market world, short-term profits are central, and judgements and disputes are evaluated using market goods, prices, and costs, whereas the industrial world of worth is measured through productivity and emphasises long-term investment infrastructure. The world of domestic worth justifies the notion of traditions; thus, the significance of hierarchy, locality and chains of personal dependencies hold sway in this moral order. In the world of inspiration, creativity is the key quality. In the world of fame, public opinion and recognition are valued.

These macro-level conceptions of the 'good' are competing (with none ranked higher than another), since each constitutes a distinct value system with its own logics and schemas that define institutions and institutional work and through which justification and critiques emerge. Boltanski and Thévenot (2006) define situations as the origins of controversies and critiques, referring to the micro process through which evaluative principles and practices become contentious. Resolution often requires a test of worth within a common world or a compromise between various types of

worth (Dansou & Langley, 2012). Tests are moments in which material proofs, such as promotion criteria or sustainability reporting, are used by actors to confirm or question disputed situations or practices to reach agreements and where various parties attempt to dominate (See Lamont, 2012; Annisette & Richardson, 2011 for a comprehensive review).

A disputed PMS can be tested to determine whether it conforms to these social goods. Annisette and Richardson (2011) classify situations of PMSs in contention under two categories, as disputes: firstly, involving a *state of worth*; and secondly, involving a *clash of worth*. Disputes over the former arise when the tests on which the principle is based are deemed to be valid in principle, but are imperfect or flawed in the application (such as accuracy or unrealistic targets) or in what they represent (Vesty et al., 2018). For instance, measuring incommensurable goods (e.g., happiness) across a single scale has been subject to debate because, while some laud the value attributed to measuring non-financial objectives, others see an inherent incompatibility in the logic of measurement (Mulgan, 2010). This incompatibility can be resolved by 'tightening the test', using more sophisticated and procedural changes. The alternative situation is a clash of worth where multiple worths stand in contention. This type of dispute can arise when actors feel that some fundamental principles evident in extant practices are not appropriate and changes are thus required to reach an agreement between old and new practices (Lamont, 2012).

Boltanski (2011) engages two tests: reality tests and existential tests. Reality tests involve the conformation or contest of a given constructed reality and the claims expressed therein. This is accomplished by examining which claims are justified against articulated qualifications and principles. The reality test can then reduce the uncertainty of the situation through confirming the potential order, or via critique challenging the underlying order and opening up the potential for reform (Boltanski, 2013). This test allows researchers to understand how actors deal with disputes, by generating criteria from societal and local discourses on what is and what is not important. Existential tests refer to an examination of the incompleteness or invalidity of socially constructed reality based on individual experience. From this perspective, existential tests function as a check in terms of whether the social reality matches a subjective position.

The EW lens has been used to examine disputed situations. Huault and Rainelli-Weiss (2011) analyse the climate risk market and highlight how contests over commensuration and the varying

forms of worth that are at stake, make it difficult to reach an agreement. Mailhot and Langley (2017) analyse the assignment of worth to knowledge commercialisation projects in business schools. They show that academic values and business values are not necessarily commensurable, but explain how the composite objects contribute to a durable compromise that makes the tests from disparate orders of worth compatible. Annisette et al. (2017) theorise that PMSs can necessitate compromise by occupying different identities in disparate worlds (as ambiguous objects). A PMS may also be viewed as a composite object if it pulls together objects and subjects from all the orders of worth in a mutually reinforcing assemblage. Nevertheless, compromise involving distinct and contradictory types of worth are difficult to effect, solidify and sustain. A compromise arrangement means that each party give up something as a way to reach an agreement. The challenges and fragility that are inherent in potentially temporary arrangements are always sources of threat to the stability of compromise. The outcome is that the moral legitimacy of such an agreement is highly uncertain and ambiguous. Reconciling a multiplicity of worths requires constant, ongoing dialogue between different stakeholders (Stark, 2009).

While these studies have made a fruitful contribution to organisational coordination with reference to a plurality of orders of worth, the notion of power relations is downplayed in Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) symmetrical frame of analysis. Negotiation and compromise often involve conflicts and power struggles. Boltanski et al. (2014, p. 604) propose that "constructed reality is at the same time partial and biased, in the sense that it tends to reinforce asymmetrical distributions". Accordingly, the theorisation of coordination may not be taken as being adequately explained by reference to the appropriate social goods that are drawn upon (critical competence) or superior rhetoric (Grattarola et al., 2023; Nyberg et al., 2017).

The co-existence of power and critique is not entirely new. Scott (1985, 1990) noted the existence of the 'public transcript' and the 'hidden transcript' within systems of domination. The former corresponds to words and deeds of subordinated groups in the presence of authority, often disguised or tailored to appease those in power. The latter, however, embodies the discourse and practices of these groups when they regain power and is likely to be the realm of resistance. Fleming (2013) further argues that in situations where public resistance is deemed exceedingly risky, seeking less conspicuous alternatives becomes preferable to direct confrontation with the dominant system.

Boltanski later emphasises the potential of mechanisms of power to account for political regimes of domination where domination does not originate from the simple removal of people's right to freedom as human beings (i.e., a violent regime). Rather, domination is a complex struggle between coordination and criticism (Boltanski, 2011, 2013). In this regard, understanding how coordination and critiques unfold can help to locate actors' positions, explore their points of application, and cast light on power relations.

Although such a perspective informs the interaction between domination and critique (e.g., Boltanski, 2011; Nyberg et al., 2017), it tends to neglect key structural features of social relations and does not claim to be predictive, which limits its critical potential (Barthe et al., 2013). With performance management and quantification scholarship being entwined with power relations (Burchell et al., 1985; Miller & Power, 2013; Rose, 1991), it can be argued that PMS channel power, enforce norms, and reproduce organisational actions, underscoring the constitutive potential or performativity of quantification (Yu & Huber, 2023). By exploring conventionalised dynamics in complex contexts, with a better understanding of the bounded rationality around the conventionalisation of PMSs that involves "a complex of procedural rationality and critical competence" (Grattarola et al., 2023, p. 18; Simon, 1976), this can arguably contribute to organisation and management scholarship, methodologically and theoretically. That is, integrating what is both rational and appropriate in actors' cognition, evaluation and actionable options to examine the complex and nuanced social process and consequences that emerge from the normatively oriented interventions of PMS.

EW has been criticised for restricting control of the context, mainly taking conditions of situations into account (Celikates, 2015). However, while each order of worth is available in every situation, one can assume that a field-level influence will guide the mechanisms for constituting hierarchies of social good and how various groups go about making their justifications. In this paper, we proceed with an analysis of what we refer to as the 'arena' of institutional, legal and material arrangements that influence the compromise in any given situation. The 'arena' metaphor was introduced by Thévenot et al. (2000) in the analysis of environmental conflicts in the US and France. It is a metaphor that describes the space being governed, the level of tensions, and the negotiation of actors and their mobilisation (Renn, 1992). As Thévenot et al. (2000) explain, the concept of arenas offers a focal point for the analysis of situations alongside their contexts and for exploring

the interactions between the critical competence of actors, dynamics of conventions, circumstances of actions and organisations and social systems.

We selected the arena of Chinese public university business schools as an empirical setting to put the RPM system to the test as a valid compromise account. This is because, systems of domination vary from country to country, particularly amongst those with bureaucratic states that prioritise hegemonic power and hierarchical chains of command. In more politically charged environments, Oldenhof et al. (2014, p. 61) argue that justification work could be considered "a cover-up". Thus, a compelling analysis of the domination exerted by powerful actors requires interlocking narratives, to account for the outcomes of a justification process involving tests and compromises. The complex nature of domination moves beyond institutional sensitivities to the contextuality of dominated structural conditions.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Empirical background: Chinese business school arena

Our empirical setting is Chinese public university business schools. Business school education and research in modern China have expanded greatly since the early 1990s when the government commenced market-oriented reforms. Currently, Chinese business schools offer more than 200 MBA programs and attract around 200,000 applicants annually (Economist, 2020). Over 700,000 students obtain their Bachelor-level degrees from more than 500 management programs every year. Chinese business schools are eager to seek external recognition and prestige and improve global rankings. Two decades ago, no Chinese business school was accredited by international bodies. By 2020, around 40 Chinese business schools had earned AMBA accreditation, 30 were accredited by AACSB, and 20 had achieved EQUIS accreditation (Wang & Van Fleet, 2021).

As a latecomer in business education and research, Chinese business schools have devoted themselves to catching up with their counterparts in developed economies by importing Western textbooks, theories, methods, research paradigms, scholars with PhD degrees from top international universities, and notions of academic excellence and quality (Tan, 2021). China's business scholars now produce more publications than any other nation aside from the US. Chinese business schools imitate Western personnel management practices; for instance, since the early 2000s, China's

business schools have increasingly taken on the American tenure-track structure and many of them have adopted this scheme to recruit new academic personnel. Under such a program, successful applicants are first offered a contract as an assistant professor for a fixed term, with generous, market-based remuneration. They must acquire the qualifications of associate professor at the end of this term. If they fail to be promoted, then they have to leave to find a new job. For staff employed in tenure-track positions, publications in top international journals and external research grants are the main performance indicators, especially in top Chinese business schools (Ren et al., 2023).

While there is thus convergence between Western countries' business schools and Chinese business schools, we suggest that how academic research is managed in China is more complex. Chinese universities are still part of the state bureaucracy, with an administrative rank, and are highly regulated by the government through regulations, policies, and funding schemes (Zhang et al., 2020). Furthermore, Chinese culture, which is characterised by the features of paternalism, formalisation, particularistic ties, collectivism, egalitarianism, and harmony (Westwood, 1997), plays a significant role in daily operations and performance management. As a formerly socialist country, some socialist practices such as the iron rice bowl system still exist in Chinese universities and business schools (Xia et al., 2020). Conversely, assistant professors employed in tenure-track positions are 'staff outside the system' since they are paid and assessed differently from those within the system. Accordingly, academics' reflexivity and sentiments, toward, and engagement with, the RPM may be expressed differently.

Due to their significantly distinct political, cultural, and institutional contexts, Chinese business schools thus offer a useful site to study the valuations made in accounting for research and the ways in which business school actors manage controversies and effects. Additionally, Chinese business schools are subject to huge demands for change made by the central government, and by the public to adopt reforms, to enhance their social impact.

Method

We deployed a field-based approach using an exploratory, multiple-case study analysis (Eisenhardt, 1989). This choice enables us to develop a deeper appreciation of specific instances of tests of worth and compromises in practice, which we interrogate through cross-case analysis, thus making

the results more robust. Five business schools at Chinese public universities were selected, based on the criteria of accessibility and sample variation in crucial categories including whether they are research-oriented or selected in the Double World-Class University Program. World-class universities are supposed to be more research-intensive, have higher global and local reputations, and take more responsibility in demonstrating the relevance of research to spatially wider contexts. This empirical setting enables a rich account of how the Chinese elite business schools define what is valued as legitimate in the RPM system. To ensure anonymity for this research project, these schools were coded as A, B, C, D, and E (see Appendix).

Kornberger et al. (2015) note that valuation moments are times for contention and negotiation, which is helpful to highlight what counts as compromises, success or failure, and why and how tensions are brought into, or may (not) be resolved through, the dynamics of compromise. In the Chinese public university business school arena, the role of regulatory activities cannot be overlooked, as the state directly affects business school activities. Thus, regulation texts embody justifications for interventions, with readily identifiable subjects and accounts in this field setting. As such, the content of the regulation may itself be the source of disputes concerning worthiness. Prior to the commencement of this research project, there were calls from the state and the public for Chinese universities and business schools to balance priorities between international and indigenous research. President Xi Jinping, in 2018 at the national education conference, stated that Chinese university academic standards should move away from, and not be led by, Western academic norms and rules. He stressed that China needed to establish a new evaluation system and that research should be responsive to Chinese problems. Consequently, in 2020, the Ministry of Education (MOE) enacted *Several Opinions on Eliminating the "paper-only" Bad Orientation in the Evaluation of Faculty in Philosophy and Social Science Research,* which is of particular relevance to Chinese business schools. In 2021, *Guiding Opinions of the Ministry of Education and Other Six Departments on Strengthening the Reform of the Construction of Faculty in the New Era* was published. Two distinct phases were identified in the present research, before and during the RPM reform, where tensions and domination were observed to impact different cognitive forms of academic production.

Interviews were the main method of data collection. In total, we conducted 105 one-to-one interviews. For the first phase, we conducted 75 semi-structured interviews. During the second

phase, we conducted a further 30 interviews with the same participants, via WeChat due to the Covid-19 pandemic restrictions in China. The second-round results were compared with participant findings from the first round of interviews. We interviewed faculty members working in different positions at the business schools, including deans, heads of departments, discipline leaders, and academics of different ranks, genders, scientific disciplines, experiences, backgrounds (domestic or overseas training), systems, and scientific achievements. The sampled interviewees hold various academic and/or managerial positions as well as being members of professional associations. For example, university administrators, deans and heads are likely more involved in the conceptualisation and operationalisation of RPM systems than faculty staff. Although our study aims to capture internal designers' and users' views on issues related to research management, the analysis was not blind to the wider stakeholder involvement in navigating compromise. We conducted three semi-structured interviews face-to-face with university administrators in charge of research beyond the faculty level, and with six PhD students. We also requested those who sit on editorial boards and/or engage with external funding bodies and practitioners to share their stories with us. Moreover, we conducted many informal discussions with interviewees, both at their offices and during lunch and dinner.

The documentary analysis focused on government policies concerning the Chinese business school arena from 1992 to 2021. In addition to regulations, we analysed university and school policies and academic papers in Chinese, through the CNKI (China National Knowledge Infrastructure) database, newspaper articles and media comments related to research. RPM system issues were examined and used as a research interview tool to guide discussion on the associated unfolding compromise. Table 1 summarises all our data sources and their usage within our analytical protocol.

Table 1: Data Inventory

Data type	Data	Quantity	Data utilisation
Interviews	Informants	105	1. To understand the evolution of RPM systems 2. To analyse the disputes and controversies 3. To explore diverse kinds of justification of worth stemming from actors, and different attempts to find agreement, pursue contention or

			challenge the RPM system, invoked by the situations.
External archival data	National policies Regulations for Chinese universities and business schools Five university and school policies, located on their websites	27 national policies 47 regulations 29 policies	1. To analyse the main events and changes 2. To guide the interpretation of the interview data 3. To enhance understanding of the managerial policies at the macro and meso levels 4. To document the formal performance measurements 5. To contrast the initial findings with interviews with informants 6. To triangulate empirical evidence from interviewees
Internal archival data*	Internal assessment, employee workload policies, faculty evaluation standards, journal lists, reward systems and the recruitment and selection of faculty	19 documents	1. To supplement the interview data 2. To develop a deep knowledge of the RPM system in the Chinese business school arena 3. To triangulate empirical evidence from interviewees
Media and literature resources	News and commentaries from media Chinese academic literature	25 pieces of news 89 academic articles from the English and Chinese academic literature (76 articles related to Situation 1 - before the reform and 13 articles about Situation 2 – after the reform).	1. To further understand the debates and discussions regarding PRM systems in a broader sense. 2. To enhance understanding of the managerial policies at the macro and meso levels 3. To triangulate empirical evidence from interviewees

*Note: Access to these documents was provided based on trust between researchers and interviewees. Some allowed the researcher to take official memos, while others only allowed the researcher to read them.

As identified by Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2006), the elements that help to evaluate and critique worth attributed to objects, as a test, include three forms of evidence: arguments supporting and denouncing the measures; measurable criteria that support the justification of performance indicators and controls as a qualified object; and actors who are granted a legitimate voice from a different order of worth to justify how RPM systems should be organised. Furthermore, we gave attention to how a shift in RPM systems triggers distinct types of justification work in order to explore patterns of compromise and domination. The interview questions revolved, accordingly, around the following: the role of business schools; the uses and users of the RPM systems; and the perceptions of the RPM system and actions. These questions served as a common guide, whilst recognising the need to be reflective when dealing with different groups of interviewees espousing different beliefs. We were attentive to specific moral orders of references or experience used in actors' justificatory accounts and tests at play, and to their ultimate actions that constitute justification work.

The data were collected in the Mandarin Chinese dialect and then fully transcribed. We analysed the data following the method of Saldaña (2016). The lead author initially read the transcribed interview statements carefully without any attempt to codify them. After becoming familiar with the transcript, an interpretive, analytical approach was undertaken. Coding was carried out manually and iteratively by the authors. Provisional and descriptive coding was performed on the empirical materials, followed by pattern coding. Firstly, descriptive codes inductively generated the pertinent themes that stood out from the meanings behind the words, phrases, and statements of participants' accounts. Instead of pre-judgement of what orders of worth or domination are involved, it is important to allow them to emerge from the data. We classified, grouped, consolidated, and differentiated these descriptive codes into clusters by their meanings, such as RPM system content and implementation, disputes, trade-offs, sayings and doings, and power. Each cluster was assigned to descriptive codes which correspond to similar contexts.

Next, provisional codes derived from EW were implemented deductively to individual segments of text (e.g., six orders of worth, tests, states of worth, clashes of worth, reality tests, existential tests, and compromises). When multiple worlds were evoked, we investigated the diverse values from which they were derived and, combined, and which sometimes supported each other. We were also aware that the same order of worth can take specific and different perspectives (and

objects in different situations, invoked by actors to evaluate people, things and arrangements and justify their activities (Patriotta et al., 2011)). In the Chinese context, for instance, the prevalence of extended social networks is consistent with the connotations of the domestic common world. The authority relationships also align with the principle of the domestic world of worth. Subsequently, we compared the similarities and differences between RPM systems and justification work to discern the overall picture of what transpired.

Pattern coding was then established to lift the themes to a conceptual level, where the synthesis of meaning and constructs was consolidated. The conclusions were then translated into English. Table 2[1] illustrates the contextualisation of Boltanski and Thévenot's (2006) six worlds to the Chinese business school arena in general, based on the above data analysis. As we present the findings below, further concrete examples of compromises and tensions within the given test settings are provided.

Table 2: The six orders of worth contextualised for the Chinese business school arena

World	Principle of valuation	Devalued characteristics	Valued objects	Valued subjects	Test (and the RPM system)
Market	Market competition, rivalry, short-term productivity, self-interest, cost	Defeat and unproductivity	Monetary value, prices, transactions, benefit, payment by results	Money-makers, competitors, businessman, managers, paper producers	Completion of deals, transaction, and contracts,
Industrial	Long-term productivity, professionalism, efficiency, validity, competence, robustness, performance	Inefficiency	Measurable criteria, control, and rigor	Academics, experts	Judgemental performance measures, professional knowledge

[1] Subsequent studies have investigated the green world (Beamish & Woolsey Biggart, 2017) or the project world (Boltanski and Chiapello, 2006). However, as with our data, we couldn't see clear evidence of project and green worths, therefore it is out of the scope of our paper.

Inspired	Novelty, creativity, passion, spontaneity	Routines, realism	Originality of ideas, research	Knowledge creators, researchers	Quest, motivation
Domestic	Esteem, Chinese tradition, respect, hierarchy, loyalty, familiarity, trust, task social and interpersonal ties, cooperation, dialogue value-sharing	Treachery, outlier	Exchanges, self-giving, legacy, informal rules, titles, gifts, customs	Supervisors, the governments, mentor (researchers), bureaucrats	Ceremonies, RPM system as a symbol
Civic	Collective interest, political interest, public interest, common good, operating in good faith, equality, value to society, participation, democracy	Individualism	Rules, regulations, rights, standards, legal force, resolution, proposal, conventions, rights, consultations, control, social impact	Society, citizens, officials, collaborator	RPM system as demonstration
Fame	Renown, recognition, prestige, success	Indifference, disinterest, invisibility	Top publications, Chairs, Grants, rankings, league tables	Ranking bodies, funding agencies, Opinion leader	Presentation through performance measures

Sources: Interview data, Patriotta et al. (2011), Mailhot and Langley (2017), and Richards et al. (2017)

FINDINGS

We first juxtapose and unpack the findings according to the differences in RPM systems, before and during the reform, providing empirical evidence of the perceptions of business school actors. We illustrate how the bureaucratisation of worth upholds differing orders of worth according to the

old and new systems and associated tests of worth. We highlight how this hinders compromise efforts. In the second section, we examine the reasons behind the decoupled academic critiques and explore the behaviours that prevail in the Chinese business school arena.

Bureaucratisation of worth as evidenced in RPM systems

A clash of worth: 2019

Calls for Chinese academics to promote more responsible and relevant Chinese research and education reveal that many informants pre-reforms criticised their business school research as not having adequate impact. One professor who worked on the editorial board of several domestic and international management journals remarked:

> *When I read my colleague's research published in English journals, I could not feel a nuanced and distinctive system of Chinese thought. This is probably because Chinese scholars simply follow the Americanisation path. Conducting quantitative research in terms of developing a statistical model and testing hypotheses is common. Meanwhile, there remains a widening gap between research and practice.* (A3 Professor)

In defending their vision, interviewees also rely on the existential test by bringing in other stakeholders or foregrounding their own experiences, as one interviewee illustrates:

> *External parties ask why we are so keen on publishing academic papers because they will not read them at all. What is the value for them?* (E5 Professor)

A few interviewees commented that they joined the call for Chinese business school research that promotes more responsible research relating to Chinese business practices through their academic publications, conference presentations or media comments:

> *I heard many vague propositions that academics should conduct meaningful research that contributes to society to reach this vision. Yet, many fail to recognise the deep-rooted problem, that is, performance evaluation itself.* (C6 Professor)

Similar to international institutions, the Chinese public business schools had PMS that emphasised obtaining external research grants and publishing papers (the industrial worth). While these differed with respect to size, disciplinary focus, specialisation, and funding, the RPM systems across the field were largely similar. These characteristics included: the number of quality publications; the number of national or provincial grants received, or what is known as 'vertical

research', such as those from the National Natural Science Fund of China (NNSFC) and the National Social Science Fund of China (NSSFC); the amounts of funded projects from industry (or the so-called horizontal research); and the level of awards. The results of assessments were converted into credits at the end of the academic year, and these were then associated with monetary rewards and career-related progress.

Academic informants generally believed that the notion of research quality and the reach of research were oversimplified as being based on the identity of the journal in which the research was published and in a narrow focus on applying for research grants. A theme that emerged from the data concerns disputes over the content of research performance measurement criteria and mechanics, such as the issue of whether Social Sciences Citation Index (SSCI) journal publications were accorded a higher-ranking category than other forms of intellectual work. This is what Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2006) refer to as the state of worth. The following statement is indicative of how the interviewee academics perceive domestic and international publishing:

> *Chinese business research and education started from a limited theoretical and knowledge base which is still far behind the international counterparts. It is naive to indicate that there is no differentiation in the quality of Chinese Social Sciences Citation Index (CSSCI) journals and English SSCI journals. Compared to Chinese journal publishing, those internationally recognised journals focus more on research rigour. We need to learn their academic standards to develop our research. The issue is to what degree SSCI journals should be prioritised.* (B8 Professor)

Unlike Haley et al. (2017) who found that the majority of academics believed that journal rankings did not reflect faculty contributions or scholarly impact, the data here indicates that academics accepted that journal rating may be an important, albeit not exclusive proxy for evidencing the social utility of academic research for broader audiences. Hence, it is not the use of measurement criteria that is being questioned in our data, but its design, which is deemed to be imperfect in practice. In the EW language, the dispute here involves a test of the industrial and market world state of worths. This can be settled by tightening the test with more sophisticated quantification techniques that account for a coverage of scholarly and social impacts across a portfolio of publications, grants, education, and engagement efforts, that demonstrate contributions to society.

When asked about the appropriateness of the values driving research accountability, we noted that controversies involving states of worth were often set aside. Academics commonly viewed values

behind the RPM system as not being placed on the same footing, leading to them questioning the capacity of RPM systems to reconcile the principles of the different worlds. Surprisingly, the intensification of quantification was not considered problematic with the industrial and market worths potentially fostering meaningful judgement and rewards for research. According to the interviewees, building visible and quantitative performance metric systems would provide feasible solutions to situations in which traditions of working and specific customs existed. Academic interviews argued for the potential for RPM systems to foster multiple modes of evaluation, representing the values of 'efficiency' and 'transparency', with the potential to compromise with civic and inspirational values. It was proposed that a PMS could help to translate the inspired and civic ideals into an ally of the market and industrial orders of worth.

This justification was inherent to the multiple roles of business scholarship that serve several functions and audiences, including academics, practitioners, students, and governments. When reconciling the principles from the different worlds, disputes were conditional on the way industrial and/or market worths hybridised with other values. Concerns about the bureaucratisation of orders of worths are particularly dense in the interview data:

> *Many initiatives are taken in the school to foster academic-industry cooperation and build collaborative and interdisciplinary research centres. Ironically, when it comes to performance evaluations, managers don't care what kind of research you are doing. They take a narrow and short-term vision and count research using a "one-size-fits-all approach" according to whether papers are in the SSCI or CSSCI. In this sense, we do have 'active' leeway to do what we are passionate about. But if you do not publish enough articles in CSSCI, SSCI or get grants from NNSFC and NSSFC, then you will experience trouble in the performance evaluations.* (D7 Professor)

Interviewed academics often deconstructed the compromise (Demers & Gond, 2020) using the civic and/or inspired worth to denounce the compromise as a one-sided arrangement subject to economic administrative intervention, the latter of which was viewed as dominating. In the instances where interviewees critiqued the bureaucratisation of civic and/or domestic worlds and industrial and/or market worths, the orders of worth implicated the RPM system, because the school managers and administrators "*took a narrow and short-term vision*" (A11 Associate professor) and failed to consider the unrepresentative interests of broader stakeholders. In this situation, the arena was also being tested and being viewed as overwhelmingly bureaucratic, subsequently hindering good norms. The statement below hints at its dominating nature:

> *Managers may either focus on the achievement of schools, mainly financially or care about their career progress individually. Notwithstanding the fact, you cannot blame them fully. This is a bureaucratisation of Chinese business schools. The big purpose of doing research is for bureaucracy.* (A11 Associate professor)

The clash of worths is further evident in the conversations with university and school administrators. Although school managers ascribed civic, domestic, and inspired values to academic research as a common good that needs to be shared to create and disseminate business knowledge for the benefit of students, organisations, and society, they were also aware that a narrow functionalist perspective had crept into the test and that this was at the expense of other social values at the operational level (c.f. Figure 1 below). The following statement reflects the feeling of having to speak about the 'compromises' needed to shape and inform the RPM so that it becomes inclusive of 'pluralistic' impact measures, owing to the overwhelming presence of Chinese bureaucracy:

> *For the business school's development, we need to think about the broad issues. We encourage our staff to pursue the impact of research and teaching practices […] However, government agencies and bureaucrats want us to be measured on a competitive scale. At least from what we reported, many have clear objectives but no measures. Most policies are imposed from the very top. We must focus on what gets measured first. This leaves them (faculty members) to decide how to serve the interests of beneficiaries in their knowledge production and dissemination.* (C2 Associate Dean-Research)

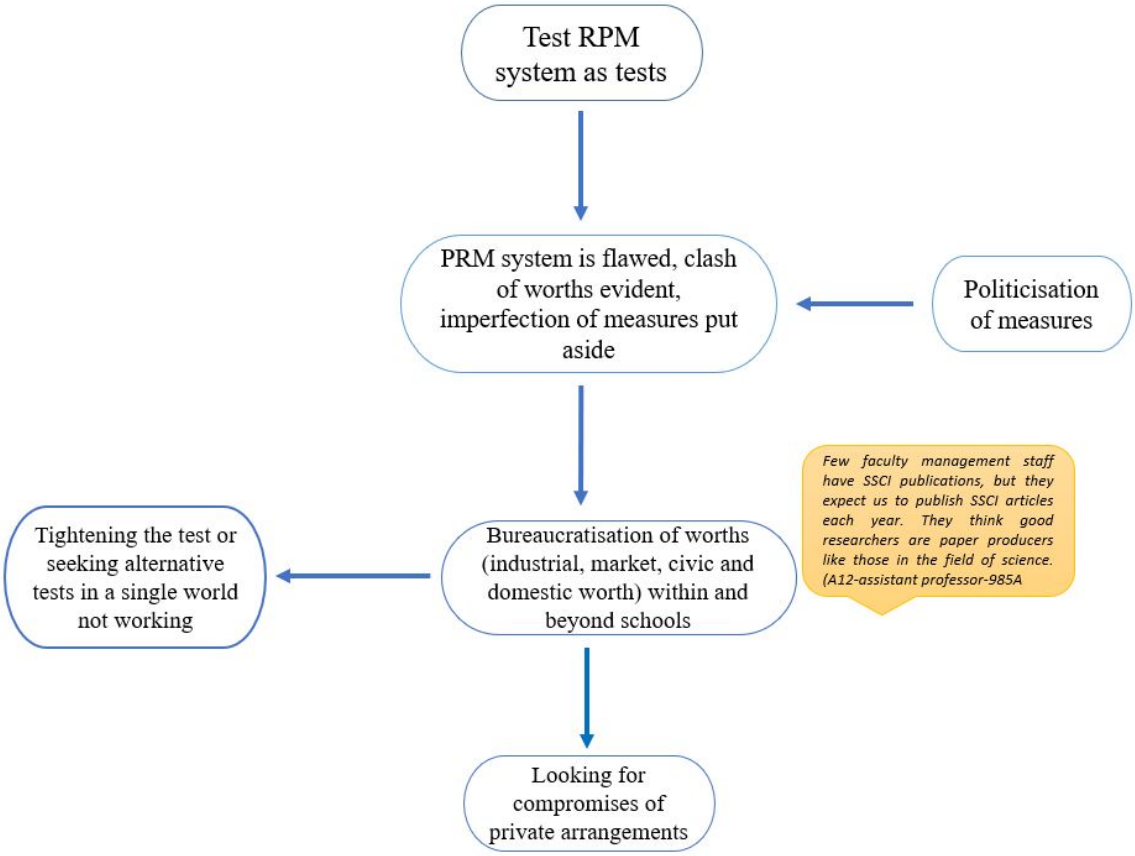
The authority-based Chinese bureaucracy ensures that top-down state policies are implemented, through the designation of policy targets at different levels of the administrative apparatus (i.e., central, provincial, and prefectural levels) with bureaucratic milestones and deadlines such as semi-annual and annual reviews. The outcome-driven examinations mean there is a tension for schools and universities in forging their own identity while concurrently striving to meet both university requirements and government-based performance measures. The narrative below exemplifies this state of worthiness:

> *The government, representative disciplinary bodies at various levels, and the university undertook regular assessment visits to the university. Provinces and universities have set targets on, in five years, how many universities and schools should be ranked as top. Each evaluation visit exerted a considerable amount of pressure on me and the leadership team. Publications, research funding, reputable titles and rankings constitute the major part of the assessment carried out by governmental departments of education at different levels. We must tell a good story by focusing on what is visible. You can understand this as a political task.* (E1 Associate Dean-Research)

Presenting achievements and paying more attention to those visible and quantifiable aspects are of most concern for school administrators. The latter at least in part viewed the designated tasks as their own aspiration and even as dominant values. They must always be ready for inspection by internal and external auditors and cadres. Like other public sector managers in China, business school deans are middle-level managers and have a ranking in the party-led administration system, making them accountable to a multitude of constituencies (our interviewees identified academics, students, practitioners, businesses, professional bodies and funding councils, society at large, and the like) but, ultimately, to the government. Herein, we see the decisive role of bureaucracy in the Chinese business arena in reinforcing the reductive tendency and the central test of orders of worth. This occurs through the bureaucratisation of the auditing regime, a regime that represents the confluence of competitive pressures of industrial and market worths and domestic and civic worths, with politicians and regulatory bodies being the most qualified subjects within the world of research. Caught between the bureaucracy and the market, Chinese business schools are in a position to work on bureaucratic priorities, catering to bureaucratic interests while gaining more institutional autonomy and flexibility to carve out how to prove their superiority in the international, domestic and university contexts, as shown in Figure 1.

In summary, notwithstanding a dispute over what measures should be used, the greater density of debate was connected to what Boltanski and Thévenot (1991, 2006) describe as 'a clash of worths' wherein, rather than being aggregated pluralistically or in the same manner, values are aggregated bureaucratically. This results in the question of whether the RPM system formed a valid compromise.

Figure 1: Establishing the RPM system as a test



Juxtaposition of clash and state of worthiness: 2021

Echoing the changing discourse promoted by the Chinese state since the 2020 reforms, all cases stated they would revise the evaluation of research to abandon the excessive reliance on numerically-based performance metrics, or what is called the 'four only' evaluation approach (破四唯) based on only paper, only titles, only qualifications, and only awards. For example, in School C, the university decided to adopt representative work evaluation to highlight innovative quality and replace the paper-only assessment. School B, from its documents, mandated that academics must publish at least one-third of their work in domestic journals as part of the academic evaluation process; also, they should pay more attention to indigenous issues and balance the indigenisation-internationalisation publication agenda. In this way, the number of papers, journal rankings and impact factor are not used as the main criteria for decisions on academic evaluation promotion and awards. Other case schools reported a similar trend, proposing that they would build a pluralistic performance evaluation system with fewer but better agenda items, increasing the weight of impact over quantity, employing the peer review method, and reducing quantification. These new

regulatory changes signalled that the Chinese business school arena is embarking on a transformation pathway for research and teaching via interventions in the existing landscape of quantification techniques.

While many welcome the removal of the 'publish-or-perish' culture with this alternative system to value research of practical significance, in general, operationalising the utility of innovation in business research through the RPM system, and the new reform specifically, were perceived by the managers and academics as a herculean technical and social challenge:

> *Now performance measures are extended to the degree of research's practical relevance. Nevertheless, there are remarkable differences between disciplines. Unlike science or engineering, with many causal inferences between original research, inventions, and applications in the industry, measuring the impact of business research is a matter of subjectivity and can take a long period to put into practice. Considering the nature of business research, publications are still a valid and key indicator.* (A1 Associate Dean-research)

Instead of delegitimising the moral foundations upon which the new compromise is based, some informants queried the state of worth with regard to the compromise measurement criteria and challenged its capacity and strength to reconcile the principles derived from different worlds, and account for the contributions and applications of business research. Our informants believed the consideration of different disciplines, types of research activities, the materialisation of non-commensurable things and implications for broader stakeholders were incomplete and remain tenuously explained, thus creating unintended outcomes in the landscape of Chinese business school research:

> *I am wondering publishing papers in CCSCI journals equals solving Chinese society's problems? Many practitioners don't read Chinese academic journals. I was sceptical of the new proposal that it can better serve the interests of society locally and internationally* if *there is no further consideration.* (D5 Professor-Discipline leader)

Furthermore, academics raised concerns regarding the supremacy of qualitative measures (in this case, representative work) and their applicability in academic performance evaluations through peer reviews, as this may lead to a revitalisation of 'old' tendencies. The following comment best captures academics' justification in this regard:

> *How to account for representative work? It is left for academics to justify. Chinese business schools have a long tradition of relying on favouritism and nepotism. Without quantitative performance measures, in the future, relationships with powerful figures, Chinese journal editors, or Deans can be more important than the value of the research itself.* (C7 Professor)

Critiques of subjective peer opinions in the new evaluative practices speak to tensions arising. The reduction in reliance on quantification metrics was viewed negatively in that fairness had been stripped away. The feature of the first phase gave explicit recognition to quantification (anchored in the industrial/market world) which devalues the role of interpersonal ties which are central to the 'guanxi' or favouritism, associated with the domestic principle in Chinese business academia, and may create a bridge to civic and inspired worlds. In this way, the critiques by our informants of research were not a call to eschew the need for managing and evaluating research, but directed to how performance measurement and control mechanisms fulfil industrial and market worlds with the common good (other values) in mind.

By contrast, balancing evaluations removes quantification as an important evaluative principle. Tellingly, when informants compare the old and new tests, the latter is regarded as more contentious; that is, the PMS is not only becoming more difficult to justify within and beyond the industrial and market worlds but also becoming more difficult to operationalise. The issues include, for example, a lack of ready cause-and-effect relationships between qualitative and quantitative measures that reflect research relevance, uncertain relative weighting assigned to each metric, and the time lag between research and the demonstrable impact of the research. Rather than a deliberate course of plan portrayed in the rational image, implementation, in one participant's words, "*can be full of uncertainty*" (B6 Professor).

Substantively, the earlier appeals by interviewees to improve the very principles upon which the RPM system was based were no match for the new test being viewed as one-sided, reductionist and opposed to the ideals of industrial (e.g., places little emphasis on professionalism and non-professional gatekeepers), civic (no implications for various audiences) and inspired worlds (without freedom and autonomy). Revealed here is a situation where informants reflect at a distance on their disillusionment of the ideals embodied in the new test:

> *The problems can be attributed to multiple and conflicting goals and ambiguous measures. Yet, even when it is well-specified, it is a one-sided process of building*

> *consensus rather than polyphonic negotiations between different stakeholders. It leads to many new problems.* (C12 Assistant professor (tenure-track))

For many informants, although the new test tends to add more civic and inspired orders into business academic work, there are multiple, disparate goals. For example, scholarly impact is poorly understood and constructed, performance measures are ambiguous and subject to many interpretations and manipulation, and the causal link between measures and impact is unclear. This suggests that the relationship between the state, schools, and academics does not change. Revealed in the data is the incompatibility and lack of plurality of orders of worth of the new test preventing an acceptable compromise. In this situation, the civic and inspired orders of worth are opposed to the domestic order of worth, and the moral principles of the latter are viewed as dominating due to the power of the Chinese bureaucracy.

It is interesting to note that academic managers also believe there is a loose coupling with the surface-level RPM reform project. For example, one manager tested the RPM system:

> *Simply relying on universities cannot achieve the arrival of a multi-dimensional PMS and impactful research. The problem lies in the fact that, on one level, the government's overarching goal of building world-class universities and disciplines is unchanged, based on quantitative data for resource allocation. On another level, the government encourages institutions to actively pursue impact that is not counted in the evaluations.* (E2 Deputy Dean)

The new inscription of 'accounting for research impact' was more tellingly perceived by many as reflecting stricter guidance by the state:

> *Focusing on rankings and outputs continues to be a technology in the exercise of government oversight and control to assess institutional performance. In the school, an emphasis on meeting rankings is still given higher weight rather than the needs of different audiences for research. Otherwise, schools and universities may lose in the competition.* (C7 Associate professor)

This clash of worth expresses moral outrage with the test perceived to be challenging not only the mechanics but also the basis of the new compromise initiated by the government. The critique was not about how to fix the RPM system per se but on whether the new test itself is an appropriate practice. Given the authoritarian nature of the formal institution, Chinese public business schools feel compelled to demonstrate compliance with top-down policy directives in terms of how the RPM system is used. At the same time, the unchanged competitive attitude and content of research

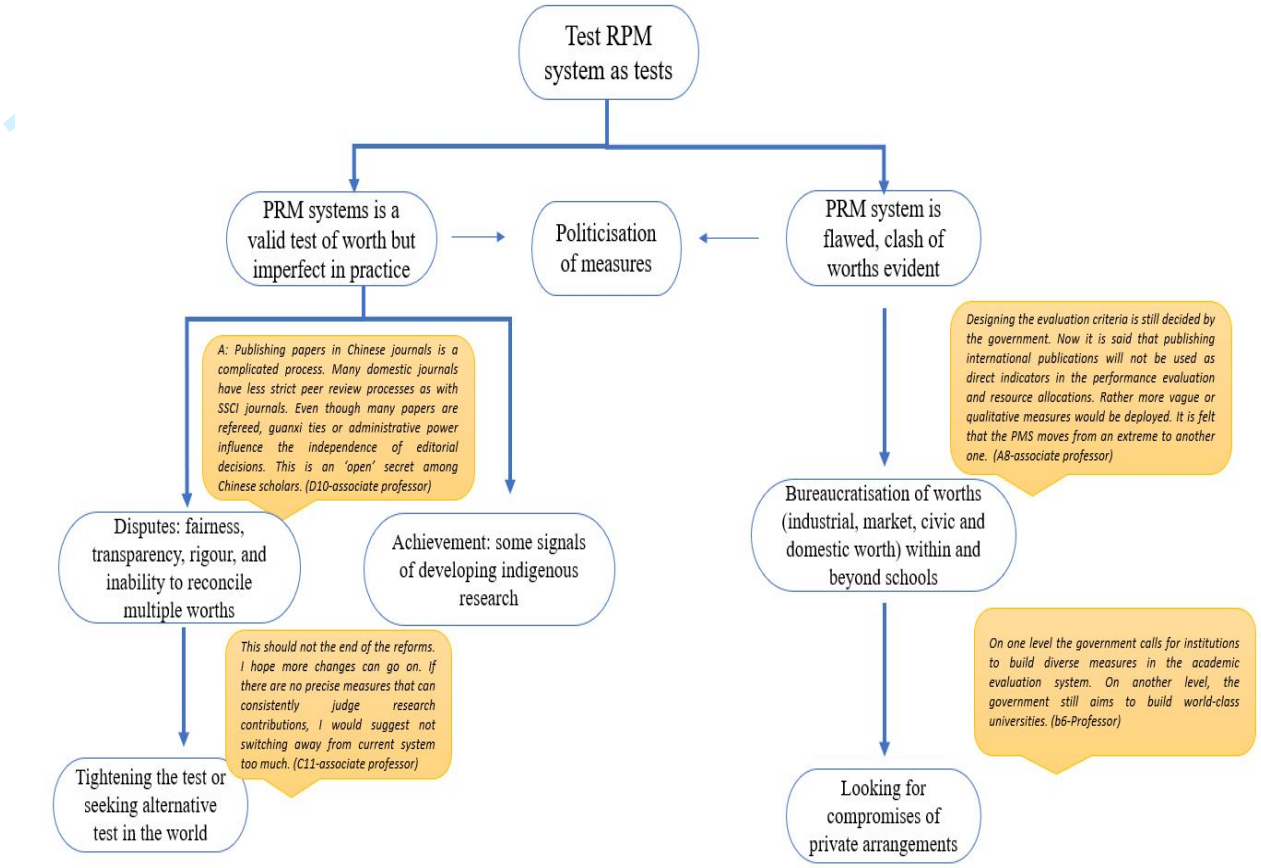
assessment inevitably places more pressure on business schools and academics to invest more of themselves (effort, emotion, and commitment) to produce and improve "impactful" research outputs.

Evidence suggests that most informants were well aware of the symbolic display of the new compromise arrangement when, in fact, the fundamental normative parameters and implicit rules of the order remained relatively unchanged. Given the ineffective compromise, the de-coupling strategies and the distorted interpretation of an incomplete and singular view of academic work, the academic interviewees remained suspicious of the nature of the new test. Believing it primarily as serving power domination, this sentiment is perhaps most candidly expressed in the following quote:

> *The government-led academic evaluation is a systematic problem across different disciplines, and public demand for research accountability rises. Resolving disputes of measures and enhancing impact is one thing. Appeasing public concerns to maintain government order and legitimacy is another thing. However, the former seems secondary in the reform. You can attribute the ill-defined and vague policies to the government's inadequate implementation. However, I take a pessimistic view: the reform ends up as a form of windowing dressing.* (B5 Professor)

In short, these reiterated criticisms and disputes in our interview data reveal that an equivalence between worlds in the evaluation system is yet to be settled. Figure 2 supplements our analysis to test the value of the RPM system and compromise.

Figure 2: Establishing the new RPM system as a test



Bureaucratisation of worth and compliance

In the previous section, we can see a clear "clash of worths" when academics discussed the RPM system. However, interestingly, we also found a decoupling between critiques and behaviours that prevails.

Critiques in the gaze of the state

Interviewees were largely resistant, however, their overarching desire and effort to engage in more public and direct radical critiques and overt resistance was lacking. They tended to hide their underlying conflict with the RPM, instead electing to be compliant with the existing domestic order of worth. Their major concern was with the structural tyranny of the rules (The´venot, 2011) and narrow options available under the Chinese bureaucracy. Questioning political authority was generally considered taboo. A senior faculty member who joined in the public critiques elaborated that his criticism focused more on improving the technical aspects of performance measures as a

tool and curtailing RPM systems as an end. This type of critique is perceived as a mild way to resist bureaucracy in the construction of "*giving modest advice to improve small things, not to overthrow the system*" (A6 Professor) operating as a shield from potential punishment or reprisal while enabling their voice to be heard:

> *In my two publications, I pointed out some unhealthy trends in the Chinese HE administration. But I am mindful that I could not go further. Some matters are prohibited. I cannot say that the persistence of many issues arises from government policies.* (A6 Professor)

More than half of the interviewees engaged in mild debate in their annual employee meetings, and six senior academics, including heads and deans, presented on potential reforms to the RPM system. These were made in the public media and conferences including two published academic articles. Overt criticisms were avoided with interviewees expressing radically resistant attitudes only towards themselves and close friends. Similar behaviour was also noted during the conversation where interviewees we spoke with were careful to ask us not to record and to ensure no colleagues were around when discussing this topic. A 'safe place' was frequently raised by interviewees, describing the driving forces that led them to voice opinions, propose changes, and connect with communities of practice. Their conscious compliance and interpretation of their actions in terms of what they can or cannot do suggests the constraining power of Chinese bureaucracy is undermining the capacity of critique.

Looking closely at the separation between compliance and moral resistance, there is an underlying tone of passivity and vulnerability among faculty members. Many of our respondents explained that these constraints are symptomatic of the wider Chinese bureaucratic culture. An academic explicitly highlighted the importance of respect for authority and passivity, explicable by institutionalised beliefs associated with the traditional bureaucratic and domestic principles of following rules and knowledge of their subservient status in the power relations:

> *It is not a system that the authorities will listen to, then they will transform the system. Often these senior academics with connections with the government will voice their concerns, not us. For rank-and-file academics, we are destined to follow the rules. This is the key if you wish to stay in the system.* (D8 Associate Professor)

This quote illustrates how hierarchical rules and a normative dimension of deference come together, constraining the possibility of reformist critiques and actions beyond the defined norms. Their

mental acquiescence embeds docility - behaving within their prescribed destiny – further holding different worths together.

Steering mechanisms and pursuit of pragmatism

There is also a tendency for faculty members to take a pragmatic view of their work. We find many instances where they espouse the values of inspired and civic worlds of worth while being caught up in the norms prescribed by the RPM system. Agreeing to compromise is centred on blending values or agreeing to fully adopt the instrumental values prescribed by the market and industrial orders of worth. A blending of values is largely evident in the old-track system in that, while Chinese university personnel management practices have been transformed significantly, some conventional practices in the form of the iron-rice bowl system have survived. In comparison to untenured academics, the 'inside-of-the-system' academics are permitted to have more options and room to reconcile different values to become involved in bridge-building, disseminate research beyond academia, and commit to university and community services that are not valued by the RPM system. This is reflected in their combination of strategies that seek to partly satisfy different constituents. The following comment justifies their adaptability activities within the system:

> *If you cannot reverse the system, taking a pragmatic orientation to proactively adapt yourself to the environment is important. But it does not mean that I ignore pursuing the common good as academics. I undertake some long-term research that is not appreciated by the system, but this needs to be balanced with some quickly written papers.* (C7 professor)

Statements such as these affirm that PMSs are now considered one of the most vital motivating tools. These pragmatic views are activated as a response to the confluence of the penetrated incentives and the rapid economic development occurring in China. On the one hand, Chinese bureaucracy structures business academic activities to establish a direct link between academic activities, performance and remuneration via promotions, salary bonuses, funding benefits, welfare packages and privileges. These PMSs are dispersed throughout the Chinese business school arena, making institutions and individuals dependent on benefits conferred by the state more than ever, and directing academic effort towards the criteria for success defined by the Chinese bureaucracy. On the other hand, the emergence of certain kinds of materialism in the Chinese economic transition process has encouraged individuals to pursue their aims. Most of our

respondents reported that they valued the material incentives associated with the performance-contingent incentive systems, which diverts academic interest away from critiques and towards reproducing compliant behaviours. From this vantage point, it is a dual process of being made and self-making that internalises these normative commitments (Ong et al., 1996), leading to a significant divorce between 'moral resistance' and behavioural depositions.

Instrumental compliance was seen to be more pronounced in tenure-track academics, in that the compromise, through an explicit promise of what is expected to be given and taken, was contingent on achieving performance indicators within a prescribed period, one where academic publication dominates. They were thus more concerned with what Bauman (1989) called 'technical responsibility' rather than 'moral responsibility'. Most claimed they would avoid time-consuming projects, for example, qualitative research in terms of fieldwork, interviews, and observation deemed to be less efficient due to higher expectations from strict regimes of bureaucratic accountability and the pressure of job insecurity. There are a few extreme examples of untenured faculty members deliberately turning away from the inspired and civic orders of worth and embracing the transactional mindset:

> *Doing research to benefit society is a vague statement. In a system that creates ever greater publication pressure, I am very pragmatic about my work. For me, it is a matter of developing a track record for career progression.* (E11 Assistant professor)

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

With aims to reveal whether RPM systems can be perceived as a proper test and compromise across multiple world principles in practice, we centred our analysis on five Chinese public university business schools. In this paper, we illuminated two distinct compromise activities inherent in the evolution, design and implementation of RPM systems and their impacts on academic behaviours. The dynamics of compromises, and lack thereof collectively shed light on the reason why research management struggles to function well as a compromise within Chinese business schools.

Bureaucratisation of worth

The significance of the two situations helped to better comprehend the dynamics of compromises and the dominance of Chinese bureaucracy within the RPM systems setup. In Situation 1, despite

criticisms addressing technical deficiencies in measurements and structuring categories, an analysis of the RPM system highlights how multiple evaluation principles came into play, effecting a clash of worth. We find that the quantification tests, designed to emulate industrial and market worth do not necessarily bring to the fore moral conflicts among diverse orders of worth when the objective is genuine accountability or fostering innovation. Depending on the way the industrial and market principles, and objects therein, are ordered and articulated (within other values at stake), the tests may be judged as a valid evaluative principle, addressing contradictions such as favouritism within the Chinese business school arena. However, when the RPM system reflects the bureaucratisation of industrial and market and civic and domestic worths, the quantification is portrayed as a destructive force yielding undesirable outcomes. We thus observe the RPM system becoming easier to operationalise, but harder to justify to wider audiences.

Compared to Situation 1, the introduction of a more balanced form proposed by the Chinese government appears increasingly challenging, both in operationalisation and justification. Highlighted here is that the format of the reform, similarly failing. On one hand, the formalisation of scholarly impact and quality attributions is not well grasped by the civic grammar. Underpinning the reductionist view is the perpetuation of Chinese bureaucracy's domination in a constellation that crucially determines what is valid, reinforcing the asymmetrical valuation and re-introducing new obscurities (Espeland et al., 2016). On the other hand, the justification work appears symbolic, resulting in a disconnection between rhetoric, objects, and behaviour. These findings align with Oldenhof et al.'s (2014) view of justification work being covered up within more politically charged environments. The evident value dissonance between dominant and dominated groups, alongside conflicting messages, not only prompts questions about the prospect of a new test but suggests a development contrary to policy discourse. Compared to prior literature (Espeland & Stevens, 2008), we argue that it is not the presence of quantification, associated with economic rationalisation, that is the problem, but how it is used. Table 3 illustrates the contrast of the tests between the two situations.

Table 3: Comparison of the two tests

Test of tests of worth	Situation 1 Before the reform	Situation 2 After the reform

Attempts to achieve compromise	• For school and managers: The compromise between market and industrial worlds-enabling efficiency and productivity, obtaining good performance, resources, and reputation (fame worlds), signalling political and public accountabilities (civic and domestic worlds), harmonising workplace relations (domestic world), stimulating good research • For academics: The compromise between market and industrial worlds stimulates research interests (papers and research income), fulfils individual goals, and facilitates fairness (the industrial object rid of interpersonal relations and informal institutions - domestic worlds)	• Proposed visionary goals: to reduce an excessive reliance on quantitative measures and change the unhealthy academic climate through reducing the emphasis on quantification • Re-establish research quality and impact, and the spirit of universities • Focus more on the locally relevant and indigenous knowledge production • Build cultural identity • Improve the wellbeing of researchers
Sources of dissonance	• The rigour and scientific value of industrial worth is disputed: a lack of diversity, with a narrow range of measures • Tensions in the object of industrial worth: unable to measure the social utility in the civic world • The social utility of research is not explicitly emphasised in the measures • Tensions between the bureaucratisation of orders of worth through policing regime of auditing or coercive commensuration, organised in the hand of top leaders, and the valorisation of civic and inspired orders of worth • Producing a culture of utilitarianism and marginalizing local relevance, education, and engagement.	• Ambiguous and problematic measures to capture the indigenous knowledge and research • Over-devaluing Western knowledge • An excessive reduction of quantification: reverting back to subjective measures, concerns about the dominance of informal social ties • Conflicting and unclear policy goals: unchanged institutional evaluations • Ignore academic professionalism in decision making (industrial world) • The bureaucratisation of orders of worth, with the expressional role of RPM being equally ignored • Loose-coupling might occur - more pressure on and work for academics

Whilst the surface trajectories of changes within Chinese business schools may be akin to those of their Western counterparts, initially embracing neoliberal practice, leading to the narrowness of measurements, followed by a shift towards accommodating diverse values to reconstruct a new social order (e.g., Alvesson & Sandberg, 2013; Pettigrew & Starkey, 2016), our analysis unveils both RPM systems perpetuate tests of the bureaucratisation of worth. This perpetuation occurs amidst the endurance of Chinese bureaucracy, influencing the agreements among disparate worlds of worth. In contrast to the competitive bureaucracy prevalent in many Western countries (Kallio et al., 2020; Tucker & Parker, 2019) where academic concerns are turned into administrative matters, our data suggests that the Chinese bureaucracy reigns supreme within the Chinese business school arena. This dominance significantly converts administrative matters into political ones, superseding them through the politicisation of the authority relationship and the organisational process. When the RPM system is compelled to prioritise satisfying political control over attending to a multitude of stakeholder demands, this inevitably triggers a clash of worths.

Justification work: Mutable compliance

This study also underscores the pervasive bureaucratisation of worth in accounts of how business school subordinates navigate and act upon tests of worth. Our data examination reveals a nuanced landscape: while moral disagreements permeate the guiding principles of RPM systems, dominated groups tend to respond with veiled radical critiques and instrumentally compliant behaviours. This underlines the fact that agreements are weak when RPM systems are tolerated but criticised. We conceptualise a subtle mixture of instrumental compliance and moral resistance as 'mutable compliance'. This justification work refers to a dynamic form of obedience that is adaptable and shaped by the confluence of Chinese bureaucratic pressures, individual agency, and social influences. This concept highlights two critical yet overlooked facets.

Firstly, our observations indicate that, to a large extent, both middle managers and faculty members have the competence to question the justifications that underpin the domination exerted by the Chinese bureaucracy which holds a political and managerial monopoly over defining outputs (c.f. Fleming, 2022). Being subjected to the constraining power of the Chinese bureaucracy, the form of criticism taken by interviewees is more often than not subtle. They resort to mild critiques that focus on improving the content of RPM systems while refraining from direct challenges to state

authority. Here, our findings partly corroborate Gutmann's (1993) assertion that subordinates, including their consciousness, capabilities, and behaviours, are constrained by deliberate settings of specific norms and power structures. However, there exists a crucial difference between abject compliance and mutable compliance.

Secondly, our data reveal that what subordinates think about tests of worth, and how they subsequently mobilise and coordinate actions to comply, resist or compromise, are considered separate projects. In this case, instrumental compliance is more genuine. This cognitive disjunction departs from the notions of superficial deference (Xiao & Klarin, 2021) or hidden resistance (Fleming, 2013; Parker, 2014). Superficial deference typically encompasses a subtle mixture of feigned compliance and guarded resistance, wherein subordinate actors veil resistance tactics beneath an outward guise of compliance. Mutable compliance also transcends the realm of mere cynical consciousness where subordinates work at a cynical distance to hide themselves from dominant norms while preserving sensed autonomy (Fleming & Spicer, 2003; Rintamäki & Alvesson, 2023). Our analysis thus signifies a discernible shift among internal Chinese business school actors towards an increasingly instrumental approach to their work.

Although the documented mutable compliance, referring to the co-existence of compliance and hidden radical critique, has some similarities with Scott's (1985, 1990) work, it bears specificities that highlight the adaptive and unsustainable characteristics of critiques as practice (Gond et al., 2015). To date, this has received limited attention in the literature. The adaptivity of mutable compliance means that the dichotomy and interplay between the 'public transcript' and the 'hidden transcript' are contingent on the level of constraining and enabling power from external pressures. This often involves attitudes of passivity and subordination at the core of their subjectivities that steer them to separate their actions from critiques. Potentially unsustainable, engaging in compliance or cautious concession is still possible even when the monitoring decreases or when opportunities arise to circumvent restrictions discreetly. This is evident where mutable compliance often underpins the bureaucratisation of worth: Chinese faculty members not only conform with but actively render the RPM system as a self-fulfilling prophecy and reorientation (Espeland & Sauder, 2007), due to existential or pragmatic reasons. In other words, what mutable compliance highlights is that there can be complicity on the part of those who are governed, who actively and consciously collaborate with the reproduction of domination in exchange for state-awarded benefits.

The mutable nature of compliance therefore entails that it is subject to change (mutable) without necessarily losing its fundamental nature (compliance), which may subtly erode their desire and capabilities and effect change over time.

Mutable compliance is thus a valuable concept, encouraging reflection on institutions' function in the authoritarian environment. As our findings indicate, actors have a capacity to assess validity claims through tests of worth (Lawrence & Suddaby, 2006). Highlighting the fact that mutable compliance appears to have been a somewhat forced and voluntary response leads us to concur with Perry's (2020) conclusion that Chinese academics may serve as an anchor of authoritarian duality, not an engine for challenging the prevailing power and evaluation structures. The complexity, dynamism and contextuality of mutable compliance suggest a need to be alert to the role of human agency, inevitably interwoven with the domination of systems.

Domination of system within the Chinese business school arena

We propose three distinct but interdependent mechanisms that theorise a complex domination system exerted by the Chinese bureaucracy. These hold different types of Chinese academics and other stakeholders together, drawing on the interplay between criticisms, structures, and coordinated actions at both organisational and individual levels, and relate to multiple orders of worth. First, and more obvious, are coercive control mechanisms deployed by the party-state to curtail radical critiques while reinforcing obedience. Second is an emerging paradox as the bureaucratic system's extensive use of quantification purposively diverts academic focus away from radical critiques. Third, and perhaps even more ironic, is the symbolic incorporation of critiques by the bureaucratic system into its strategy formulation, strategically diluting the transformative potential of radical critique from external stakeholders.

In line with a substantive body of literature affirming the pervasive influence of the Chinese bureaucracy across public and private domains (e.g., Choi et al., 2015; Howell & Pringle, 2019), our study underscores the hegemonic power through establishing and imposing coercive standards, presenting formal rewards and sanctions, and prioritising hierarchical chains of command via a dual administrative structure. In an arena where power is highly concentrated, overt critiques challenging domination are rarely permissible. This limitation echoes the observation of tyranny

by The´venot (2011) where a one-sided moral view merely replaces one regime's good with another and, in the process, serves dominance and stifles engagement. Arguably, among the most powerful instruments in the government's toolkit for managing Chinese business schools is a policing regime of quantification. The widespread adoption of quantitative performance assessments within the Chinese business school arena is a political arrangement to overcome enduring institutional conflicts, between political centralisation and effective governance, for the benefit of the central authority. The rationality of following rules to make decisions is procedural rationality (Simon, 1976), which is viewed as rational and appropriate by internal Chinese business school actors, even though the agreement is perceived to be morally disputed.

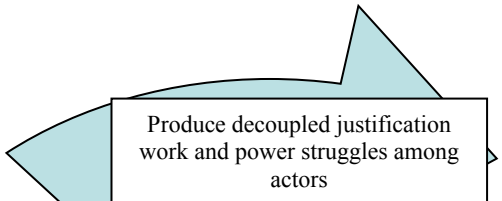
Moreover, through our analysis of the evolving design of the RPM system, the quantification regime in the Chinese business arena is shown to be a simultaneous intervention, amalgamating both coercive and normative functions. Bureaucratic states, by definition, possess greater leverage to design and implement sophisticated instruments than liberal democracies. This imposes a social-economic frame on academic agency, via disciplining and inundating with a surfeit of metrics, weaving these into a tightly woven network of governmentality (to use Foucault's terminology) or normative pressures (March & Olsen, 2013). The bureaucratic state power is observable in the establishment of priorities, deadlines, and performance audits from agencies at the national, provincial, and institutional levels.

Our analysis also sought to shed light on how the quantification regime is deployed by the bureaucratic state to lure people into action, therefore buttressing its dominance. Our findings point to both conforming and amplifying effects of the performativity of quantification (Yu & Huber, 2023), suggesting a correspondence and co-constitution between actor behaviours and the normativity of quantification. We witness the performative capacity of Chinese business school actors in the co-production of domination, which arguably involves an ambivalent self-negotiation and strategic utilisation of rules within the limits of the situation to find 'satisficing' solutions (Simon, 1976). Procedural rationality emerges when quantification becomes a pervasive process that is performative, particularly when pegged into appointments, promotions, revenues, status, and rewards. This significantly influences a procedurally rational search. The findings further show that procedural rationality in terms of the search for actions and goals is entwined with power

structures (e.g., assessing the possible outcomes in the authoritative environment) and social conditions (e.g., estimating the extent of aspiration through working with performance indicators).

We further saw in this study how the quantification regime has empowered the Chinese bureaucracy. This has resulted in wielding more instantiated power in coordinating the coupling among multiple processes and levels, further exerting influence over institutional and labour processes. This is most evident where quantification mechanisms are represented at various levels, and tight coupling, both symbolically and behaviourally, is reinforced, whereas rhythms of variable coupling between symbolic and behavioural compliance are noted in the absence of quantification mechanisms. This variability characterises the bureaucratisation of worth, inducing mutable compliance. By layering quantification, bureaucratisation of worth and mutable compliance one upon another, we are able to interpret their interconnectedness in a meaningful manner: these are all manifestations of the same institutional foundations in response to tensions built within the Chinese bureaucracy, continuously relating to, and influencing, each other, which potentially perpetuates a vicious cycle (see Figure 3).

Figure 3: Interplay between quantification, bureaucratisation of worth and mutable compliance



In addition, our study highlights that an intricate interplay with critique may be encouraged by the bureaucratic government if symbolic actions could support the *status quo*. This is exemplified by the justification work made by the Chinese bureaucracy in efforts to repair and restore breaches in Situation 2, where the necessary structural preconditions for integration are lacking. Our findings indicate that the new reform considers individual institutions to be the primary carriers of the contending concept of scholarly impact and emphasises institutional responsibility in promoting research impact. This delegation, however, could open doors for selective coupling or manipulation, especially when institutional control remains unaffected.

Our findings have also led us to suspect that the mechanisms exerted by bureaucratic governments may take renewed forms. Rather than resorting to coercive measures for suppressing dissent or such dissent simply going unnoticed, our findings denote a complex domination taken by the Chinese bureaucracy. Quantification serves as a malleable technique appropriated by the

bureaucratic system to underpin the multiplicity of rationales. These include concealing contradictions in a particular reality through discourse, preserving the *status quo,* and exerting control. Critically, the utilisation of quantification techniques makes it challenging for external observers to denounce the disparities between tests, modes of qualification and actual implementation. The discourse of ongoing policy change appears rhetorically appealing, but the internal operations remain opaque to the public eye, thus closing down radical challenges. Internal users find it difficult to escape the ubiquity of Chinese bureaucracy embedded within the business school arena, despite comprehending the unchanged reality of test formats and the normative core. It is thus the bureaucratisation of worth that regulates mutable compliance, often discouraging the academics from challenging overtly the underlying order. Future evaluations utilising longitudinal approaches may provide insights into whether changes are materialised or serve as ceremonial window-dressing. In particular, the new system had only been implemented for a short period when data was collected. This might have limited our ability to capture the full picture of the reform.

Contributions and conclusions

Our study, firstly, contributes to the growing stream of EW studies dedicated to domination (Daudigeos et al., 2021; Nyberg et al., 2017). Extant studies predominately delve into power dynamics stemming from the struggle between actors' normative claims, criticism and coordination to unpack how dominant actors collectively establish domination (Barthe et al., 2013; Gond et al., 2016). Our analysis advances this line of research by attending to both the bounded rationality around the conventionalisation of PMS, diffused within everyday structures and sense-making process, and the accompanying justification involving critical competence, tests and compromises (Grattarola et al., 2023). In so doing, we develop a more nuanced understanding of reasoning about the consequences and appropriateness of organisational coordination, while analysing how causal mechanisms of domination prevail.

On the one hand, by testing the formats and compromises of RPM system dynamics, our results uncover the pivotal role played by the Chinese bureaucracy in undermining the compromises via the bureaucratisation of worth. On the other hand, by looking into a process of criticisms and the complexity of decision-making, our study has sought to unmask the underlying mechanisms, instilled by the Chinese bureaucracy, which both constrain or enable critiques and act upon tests of

worth from dominated groups. We have developed the notion of mutable compliance to enrich our understanding of agency, as well as the system of domination, which interweave to shape justification work at both individual and institutional levels and which are both increasingly relevant in EW research (Grattarola et al., 2023).

Building on work by Thévenot et al. (2000), our analysis of conventionalisation dynamics of RPM systems and coordination extends prior work on valuations (Chenhall et al., 2013; Lamont, 2012) by broadening the organisational boundaries across multiple levels of analysis over different timeframes (c.f. Ashforth, 1994). While the EW theory is useful to study the individual-level process that underlies the functioning of organisations and institutions, it has largely overlooked the arena level of analysis. Our focus on the interactions of individual-level components, quantification instruments between and within organisational and institutional levels, and societally relevant moral values, contributes to addressing this gap by unveiling a rich contextual account of the existence of hierarchies of worth in the Chinese business school arena.

Additionally, our study adds to the literature on RPM systems and hybridisation in educational management (e.g., Johnson & Orr, 2020; Mingers & Willmott, 2013). On the one hand, previous work has left unexplored how hybridity emerges through compromise between diverse worths and the moral struggles inherent in hybrid PMSs. Our use of 'the test of tests' helps to address questions raised by the existing literature regarding the ambivalent role of research evaluations within business schools. Our findings address the nature of RPM systems (what), how the multiplicity of values is ordered, and the causes of the dissonance (why). We further unpack the intricate complexities of employing quantification, exploring both fulfilled and unfulfilled promises. On the other hand, we develop a more granular understanding of compliance and resistance amidst the process of coping with hybridisation, by bringing critiques to the fore. Although a considerable body of research has focused on power and resistance with business schools (Bowes-Catton et al., 2020; Gebreiter & Hidayah, 2019; Kalfa et al., 2017; Rintamäki & Alvesson, 2023), less attention has been directed towards critique itself, which often intersects with resistance. Our argumentation is that the cyclical nature of critique and resistance, and their potential to initiate changes, need to be cautiously tested in light of the political economy of business school arenas. The concept of mutable compliance serves as an illustrative example in this regard.

Lastly, our analysis enriches the limited empirical literature concerning the measurement and evaluation of research, impact, and engagement in Chinese business schools (Tan, 2021; Zhang et al., 2020). This discussion and analysis is particularly timely and imperative now that Chinese business schools are facing the pressure of transition. Our study implies that the current RPM system is constructed as an end goal rather than a compromise and realising a workable compromise solely through academic and business school spontaneous voluntary initiatives. Aspirations from the bottom seem impossible given the overwhelming influence of the government as the most powerful stakeholder in instigating institutional changes. Without government endorsement, individual leadership agencies are unlikely to initiate transformation. If the government's primary objective is to enhance the sociality utility of education and research, it becomes imperative for the government to take pluralism seriously as a foundation upon which to develop a relational approach to research relevance, because reaching and stabilising a compromise cannot be negotiated by a single party but requires wider, societal-level dialogue. This involves placing multiple evaluative principles on the same footing (Broadbent, 2007), building collective and collaborative relations alongside a flexible and non-hierarchical mode of operation (Stark, 2009), and allowing diverse stakeholders to decide what constitutes a valid set of measures. Such a process of development may hold as much significance as the resultant measures in the formulation of RPM systems. Achieving viable compromise is a socio-technically challenging task.

The insights gained from our data analysis should be considered a reflection as well as an impetus for advancing future research exploring the possibilities of compromise. Future research can further capture the dynamism of the ongoing Chinese HE reforms and the ramifications of the RPM systems on business academics, schools, and the involved community. We need more knowledge about how a more responsible research management strategy and impact agenda can be accomplished. Furthermore, we suggest the concept of mutable compliance is significant owing to the substantial influence exerted by the bureaucratic state, alongside a greater moral fragmentation and inner workings of power struggles than have been previously acknowledged. Future studies could leverage and develop this justification work to recast our understanding of compromise and coordination in other settings. We also encourage scholars to consider the use of green and project orders of worth in future research.

References

Alvesson, M., & Sandberg, J. (2013). Has Management Studies Lost Its Way? Ideas For More Imaginative and Innovative Research. *Journal of Management Studies, 50*(1), 128–152.

Annisette, M., & Richardson, A. J. (2011). Justification and accounting: applying sociology of worth to accounting research. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 24*(2), 229-249.

Annisette, M., Vesty, G., & Amslem, T. (2017). Accounting values, controversies, and compromises in tests of worth. In C. C. M. Lounsbury, J-P Gond and B. Leca (Ed.), *Justification, evaluation and critique in the study of organizations: contributions from French pragmatiest sociology.* (pp. 209-239). Bingley, UK: Emerald Publishing Limited.

Ashforth, B. (1994). Petty tyranny in organizations. *Human Relations*(47), 755–778.

Barthe, Y., De Blic, D., Heurtin, J.-P., Lagneau, É., Lemieux, C., Linhardt, D., . . . Trom, D. J. P. (2013). Sociologie pragmatique: mode d'emploi. *26*(3), 175-204.

Bauman, Z. (1989). *Modernity and the Holocaust*. Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press.

Boltanski, L. (2011). *On critique: A sociology of emancipation*: Polity.

Boltanski, L. (2013). A journey through French-style critique. In P. D. Gay & G. Morgan (Eds.), *New spirits of capitalism?:Crises, justifications, and dynamics* (pp. 43-59). Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Boltanski, L., Honneth, A., & Celikates, R. (2014). Sociology of Critique or Critical Theory? Luc Boltanski and Axel Honneth in Conversation with Robin Celikates. Translated by Simon Susen.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (1991). *De la justification : les économies de la grandeur*. Paris: Gallimard.

Boltanski, L., & Thévenot, L. (2006). *On justification : economies of worth*. Princeton: Princeton : Princeton University Press.

Bowes-Catton, H., Brewis, J., Clarke, C., Drake, D. H., Gilmour, A., & Penn, A. (2020). Talkin''bout a revolution? From quiescence to resistance in the contemporary university. *Management Learning, 51*(4), 378-397.

Broadbent, J. (2007). If you can't measure it, how can you manage it? Management and governance in higher educational institutions. *Public Money and Management, 27*(3), 193–198.

Broadbent, J., Gallop, C., & Laughlin, R. (2010). Analysing societal regulatory control systems with specific reference to higher education in England. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 23*(4), 506-531.

Burchell, S., Clubb, C., Hopwood, A. G. J. A., organizations, & Society. (1985). Accounting in its social context: towards a history of value added in the United Kingdom. *10*(4), 381-413.

Carlsson-Wall, M., Kraus, K., & Messner, M. (2016). Performance measurement systems and the enactment of different institutional logics: insights from a football organization. *Management Accounting Research, 32*, 45-61.

Celikates, R. (2015). Against Manichaeism: The politics of forms of life and the possibilities of critique. *Raisons Politiques, 1*, 81-96.

Chenhall, R., Hall, M., & David, S. (2013). Performance measurement, modes of evaluation and the development of compromising accounts. *Accounting, Organizations and Society, 38*(4), 268-287.

Choi, J. J., Jiang, C., & Shenkar, O. (2015). The quality of local government and firm performance: The case of China's provinces. *Management and Organization Review*(11), 679-710.

Dansou, K., & Langley, A. (2012). Institutional work and the notion of test. *M@n@gement*(5), 503-527.

Daudigeos, T., Edwards, T., Jaumier, S., Pasquier, V., & Picard, H. (2021). Elusive domination and the fate of critique in neo-participative management: A French pragmatist approach. *Organization Studies, 42*(3), 453-471.

Demers, C., & Gond, J.-P. (2020). The moral microfoundations of institutional complexity: Sustainability implementation as compromise-making at an oil sands company. *Organization Studies, 41*(4), 563-586.

Economist, T. (2020). MBAs with Chinese characteristics: Chinese management schools are thriving.

Eisenhardt, K. M. (1989). Building theories from case study research. *Academy of management review, 14*(4), 532-550.

Espeland, W. N., & Sauder, M. (2007). Rankings and reactivity: how public measures recreate social worlds. *American Journal of Sociology, 113*(1), 1-40.

Espeland, W. N., Sauder, M., & Espeland, W. (2016). *Engines of anxiety: Academic rankings, reputation, and accountability*: Russell Sage Foundation.

Espeland, W. N., & Stevens, M. L. (2008). A Sociology of Quantification. *European Journal of Sociology, 49*(3), 401–436.

Fey, C. F. (2022). A perspective on the potential of Chinese business schools: A call for greater attention to context, differentiation, and developing an indigenous model. *Management Organization Review, 18*(5), 982-999.

Fleming, P. (2013). "Down with Big Brother!" The end of "corporate culturalism". *Journal of Management Studies*(50), 474–495.

Fleming, P. (2022). How biopower puts freedom to work: Conceptualizing 'pivoting mechanisms' in the neoliberal university. *Human Relations, 75*(10), 1986-2007.

Fleming, P., & Spicer, A. (2003). Working at a cynical distance: Implications for power, subjectivity and resistance. *Organization, 10*, 157–179.

Gebreiter, F., & Hidayah, N. N. (2019). Individual responses to competing accountability pressures in hybrid organisations: the case of an English business school. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 32*(3), 727-749.

Gond, J.-P., Leca, B., & Cloutier, C. (2015). An economies-of-worth perspective on strategy as practice: Justification, valuation and critique in the practice of strategy. In G. Damon, R. Linda, S. David, & V. Eero (Eds.), *The Cambridge handbook of strategy as practice* (pp. 200-219). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Gond, J. P., Barin Cruz, L., Raufflet, E., & Charron, M. (2016). To frack or not to frack? The interaction of justification and power in a sustainability controversy. *Journal of Management Studies, 53*(3), 330-363.

Grattarola, A., Gond, J. P., & Haefliger, S. (2023). Traduttore traditore? Gains and losses from the translation of the economies of worth. *International Journal of Management Reviews*, 1-23.

Grossi, G., Kallio, K.-M., Sargiacomo, M., & Skoog, M. (2019). Accounting, performance management systems and accountability changes in knowledge-intensive public organizations: a literature review and research agenda. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 33*(1), 256-280.

Grossi, G., & Thomasson, A. (2015). Bridging the accountability gap in hybrid organizations: the case of Copenhagen Malmö Port. *International Review of Administrative Sciences, 81*(3), 604-620.

Gutmann, M. C. (1993). Rituals of resistance: A critique of the theory of everyday forms of resistance. Latin American Perspectives, 20, 74-92.
Haley, U. C. (2021). *Impact and the management researcher*: Routledge.
Haley, U. C., Cooper, C. L., Hoffman, A. J., Pitsis, T. S., & Greenberg, D. (2022). In Search of Scholarly Impact. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 21*(3), 343-349.
Haley, U. C. V., Page, M. C., Pitsis, T. S., Rivas, J. Y., & Yu, K. F. (2017). *Measuring and achieving scholarly impact: A report from the Academy of Management's Practice Theme Committee*. Retrieved from
Howell, J., & Pringle, T. (2019). Shades of authoritarianism and state–labour relations in China. *British Journal of Industrial Relations, 57*(2), 223-246.
Huault, I., & Rainelli-Weiss, H. (2011). A market for weather risk? Conflicting metrics, attempts at compromise, and limits to commensuration. *Organization Studies, 32*(10), 1395-1419.
Hughes, T., Webber, D., & O'Regan, N. (2019). Achieving wider impact in business and management: analysing the case studies from REF 2014. *Studies in Higher Education, 44*(4), 628-642.
Jay, J. (2013). Navigating paradox as a mechanism of change and innovation in hybrid organizations. *Academy of management Journal, 56*(1), 137-159.
Johnson, S., & Orr, K. (2020). What is business school research for? Academic and stakeholder perspectives, politics and relationality. *Studies in Higher Education, 45*(3), 557-578.
Kalfa, S., Wilkinson, A., & Gollan, P. (2017). The academic game: compliance and resistance in universities. *Work, Employment and Society, 32*, 274–291.
Kallio, T. J., Kallio, K. M., & Blomberg, A. (2020). From professional bureaucracy to competitive bureaucracy – redefining universities' organizational principles, performance measurement criteria, and reason for being. *Qualitative Research in Accounting and Management, 17*(1), 82-108.
Knights, D., & Clarke, C. A. (2014). It'sa bittersweet symphony, this life: Fragile academic selves and insecure identities at work. *Organization Studies, 35*(3), 335-357.
Kornberger, M., Justesen, L., Madsen, A. K., & Mouritsen, J. (Eds.). (2015). *Making things valuable*. USA: Oxford University Press.
Kurunmäki, L., Mennicken, A., & Miller, P. (2016). Quantifying, economising, and marketising: democratising the social sphere. *Sociologie du travail, 58*, 390–402.
Lamont, M. (2012). Toward a Comparative Sociology of Valuation and Evaluation. *Annual Review of Sociology, 38*, 201-221.
Lawrence, T. B., & Suddaby, R. (2006). *Institutions and institutional work*. London: Sage.
Mailhot, C., & Langley, A. (2017). Commercializing Academic Knowledge in a Business School: Orders of Worth and Value Assemblages. *Research in the Sociology of Organizations, 52*, 241-269.
March, J. G., & Olsen, J. P. (2013). The Logic of Appropriateness. In R. E. Goodin (Ed.), *The Oxford Handbook of Political Science*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
Martin-Sardesai, A., Guthrie, J., & Tucker, B. P. (2020). What you see depends on where you look: performance measurement of Australian accounting academics. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 33*(6), 1193-1218.
Mennicken, A., & Espeland, W. N. (2019). What's new with numbers? Sociological approaches to the study of quantification. *Annual Review of Sociology, 45*, 223-245.
Miller, P., & Power, M. (2013). Accounting, organizing, and economizing: connecting accounting research and organization theory. *Academy of Management Annals, 7*(1), 557–605.

Mingers, J., & Willmott, H. (2013). Taylorizing business school research: On the 'one best way'performative effects of journal ranking lists. *Human Relations, 66*(8), 1051-1073.
Mulgan, G. (2010). Measuring social value. *Stanford Social Innovation Review, 8*(3), 38-43.
Nyberg, D., Wright, C., & Kirk, J. (2017). Re-producing a neoliberal political regime: Competing justifications and dominance in disputing fracking. In *Justification, evaluation and critique in the study of organizations: Contributions from French pragmatist sociology* (pp. 143-171): Emerald Publishing Limited.
Oldenhof, L., Postma, J., & Putters, K. (2014). On justification work: How compromising enables public managers to deal with conflicting values. *Public Administration Review, 74*(1), 52-63.
Ong, A., Dominguez, V. R., Friedman, J., Schiller, N. G., Stolcke, V., Wu, D. Y., & Ying, H. (1996). Cultural citizenship as subject-making: Immigrants negotiate racial and cultural boundaries in the United States [and comments and reply]. *Current Anthropology, 37*(5), 737-762.
Parker, M. (2014). University, Ltd: Changing a business school. *Organization, 21*(2), 281-292.
Patriotta, G., Gond, J. P., & Schultz, F. (2011). Maintaining legitimacy: Controversies, orders of worth, and public justifications. *Journal of Management Studies, 48*(8), 1804-1836.
Perry, E. (2020). Educated acquiescence: How academia sustains authoritarianism in China. *Theory and Society, 49*(1), 1-22.
Pettigrew, A., & Starkey, K. (2016). The Legitimacy and Impact of Business Schools: key Issues and a Research Agenda. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 15*(4), 649-664.
Power, M. (2013). Evaluating the audit explosion. *Law & Policy, 25*(3), 185–202.
Ren, C., Situ, H., & Vesty, G. M. (2023). Umbrella protectors? Analysing valuing, hybridity and compromises for Chinese middle managers. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, ahead-of-print*(ahead-of-print).
Renn, O. (1992). The social arena concept of risk debates. In S. Krimsky & G. D. (Eds.), *Social theories of risk* (pp. 179-196). London: Praeger Pubishers.
Richards, M., Zellweger, T., & Gond, J. P. (2017). Maintaining moral legitimacy through worlds and words: an explanation of firms' investment in sustainability certification. *Journal of Management Studies, 54*(5), 676-710.
Rintamäki, J., & Alvesson, M. (2023). Resisting whilst complying? A case study of a power struggle in a business school. *Academy of Management Learning and Education, 22*(2), 257-273.
Rose, N. (1991). Governing by numbers: figuring out democracy. *Accounting, organisations and society, 16*, 673–692.
Saldaña, J. (2016). *The coding manual for qualitative researchers* (3E [Third edition]. ed.): Los Angeles, Calif. London SAGE.
Scott, J. C. (1985). *Weapons of the weak: Everyday forms of peasant resistance*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Scott, J. C. (1990). *Arts of resistance: The hidden transcript of subordinate groups*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press.
Shore, C., & Wright, S. (2015). Governing by numbers: audit culture, rankings and the new world order. *Social Anthropology, 23*(1), 22-28.
Shore, C., Wright, S., Amit, V., Brown, J., Bruun Jensen, C., Maguire, M., . . . Smith, G. (2015). Audit culture revisited: Rankings, ratings, and the reassembling of society. *Current Anthropology, 56*(3), 431-432.
Simon, H. A. (1976). From substantive to procedural rationality. In *25 years of economic theory: Retrospect and prospect* (pp. 65-86): Springer.

Sousa, C. A., de Nijs, W. F., & Hendriks, P. H. (2010). Secrets of the beehive: Performance management in university research organizations. *Human Relations, 63*(9), 1439-1460.

Stark, D. (2009). *The sense of dissonance: Accounts of worth in economic life*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Sutton, N. C., & Brown, D. A. (2016). The illusion of no control: management control systems facilitating autonomous motivation in university research. *Accounting & Finance, 56*(2), 577-604.

Tan, H. (2021). A Transition Perspective for Business School Research and Education in China. *Management and Organization Review*, 1-20.

The´venot, L. (2011). Powers and oppressions viewed from the sociology of engagements: In comparison with Bourdieu's and Dewey's critical approaches of practical activities. *Irish Journal of Sociology, 19*(1), 35-67.

Thévenot, L. (2001). Organized complexity: conventions of coordination and the composition of economic arrangements. *European Journal of Social Theory, 4*(4), 405-425.

Thévenot, L., Moody, M., & Lafaye, C. (2000). Forms of valuing nature: arguments and modes of justification in French and American environmental disputes. In *Rethinking comparative cultural sociology: Repertoires of evaluation in France the United States* (pp. 229-272). Cambridge, UK Cambridge University Press.

Tucker, B. P., & Parker, L. D. (2019). The question of research relevance: a university management perspective. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 33*(6), 1247-1275.

Vakkuri, J., & Johanson, J.-E. (2020). Failed promises–performance measurement ambiguities in hybrid universities. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management, 17*(1), 33-50.

Vakkuri, J., Johanson, J.-E., Feng, N. C., & Giordano, F. (2021). Governance and accountability in hybrid organizations–past, present and future. *Journal of Public Budgeting, Accounting & Financial Management, 33*(3), 245-260.

Vesty, G. M., Ren, C., & Ji, S. (2018). Integrated reporting as a test of worth: A conversation with the chairman of an integrated reporting pilot organisation. *Accounting, Auditing & Accountability Journal, 31*(5), 1406-1434.

Wang, H., & Van Fleet, J. D. (2021). Chinese Business Schools on the World Stage.

Westwood, R. (1997). Harmony and patriarchy: The cultural basis for 'paternalistic headship' among the overseas Chinese. Organizatios. *Organization Studies, 18*, 445–480.

Willmott, H. (2011). Journal list fetishism and the perversion of scholarship: reactivity and the ABS list. *Organization, 18*(4), 429-442.

Xia, J., Zhang, M. M., Zhu, J. C., Fan, D., & Samaratunge, R. (2020). HRM reforms and job-related well-being of academics. Personnel Review, 49(2), 597-619.

Xiao, Q., & Klarin, A. (2021). Subordinate actors' institutional maintenance in response to coercive reforms. *Journal of Management Inquiry, 30*(1), 24-39.

Ye, J., Wu, Y., Hao, B., & Chen, Z. (2019). The interplay of external ties and internal knowledge base: implications for radical innovation in China's university spin-offs. *Chinese Management Studies, 13*(4), 778-801.

Yu, L., & Huber, C. (2023). How accounting research understands performativity: effects and processes of a multi-faceted notion. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management, 20*(5), 704-738.

Zhang, X., Zheng, X., & Xi, Y. (2020). How governmental agencies legitimize organizations: A case study on Chinese business schools from 1977 to 2014. *Academy of Management Learning & Education, 19*(4), 521-540.

Additional references

Beamish, T. D., & Woolsey Biggart, N. (2017). Capital and carbon: The shifting common good justification of energy regimes. In Lounsbury, M. & Cloutier, C. (eds). Justification, Evaluation and Critique in the Study of Organizations: Contributions from French Pragmatist Sociology Research in the Sociology of Organisations, vol. 52 (pp. 173-205). Emerald Publishing Limited, London.

Boltanski, Luc, and Eve Chiapello. 2006. Der neue Geist des Kapitalismus. Konstanz: UVK.

Appendix: Profile of the universities

Code	Ranking	Affiliation	Size of the business school	Number of interviewees Phrase 1	Number of interviewees Phrase 2
A	Double World-Class A	MOE	80-90	15	6
B	Double World- Class A	MOE	60-70	13	7
C	Double World- Class B	MOE	Around 100	15	5
D	World-Class Discipline Construction	Ministry of Industry and Information Technology	70-80	15	6
E	World-Class Discipline Construction	MOE	70-80	17	6

Dr. Chao (Joe) Ren (Joe.ren@unsw.edu.au) (Ph.D. Monash University) is a lecturer of accounting and Chinese studies at the School of Business, University of New South Wales, Sydney. His research interests are centred on the interface of accounting, management and organisation studies and labour research across sustainability, public administration, and education. He is an Associate Editor at Chinese Management Studies.

Professor Gillian Vesty (gillian.vesty@rmit.edu.au) (Ph.D. The University of Melbourne) is a Professor and Deputy Dean of L&T in the School of Accounting, Information Systems and Supply Chain at RMIT University, Melbourne, Australia. She researches and teaches the topics of management accounting. Her recent studies are published in Accounting, Auditing & Accountability, Accounting & Finance and Issues in Accounting Education.

Dr. Mingqiong Mike Zhang (mike.zhang@monash.edu) is an Associate Professor of International Business/International Management in Department of Management, Monash University, Australia. Mike comes from a multi-disciplinary background. His research is mainly in areas of Human Resource Management, International Management, and Critical Management Studies. His publications appear in a number of highly reputable journals.

Dr. Hui Situ (situh1@cardiff.ac.uk) is a lecturer in Accounting in the Cardiff Business School. She is an interdisciplinary researcher, who draw from sociological and philosophical literatures to understand institutions' accounting behaviour from a more critical perspective. Hui has published a number of papers in top academic journals and refereed books. She is currently on the editorial board of Accounting Forum, a high-ranking accounting journal.

Bureaucratisation of worth: How business schools demonstrate scholarly impact

Figure 1

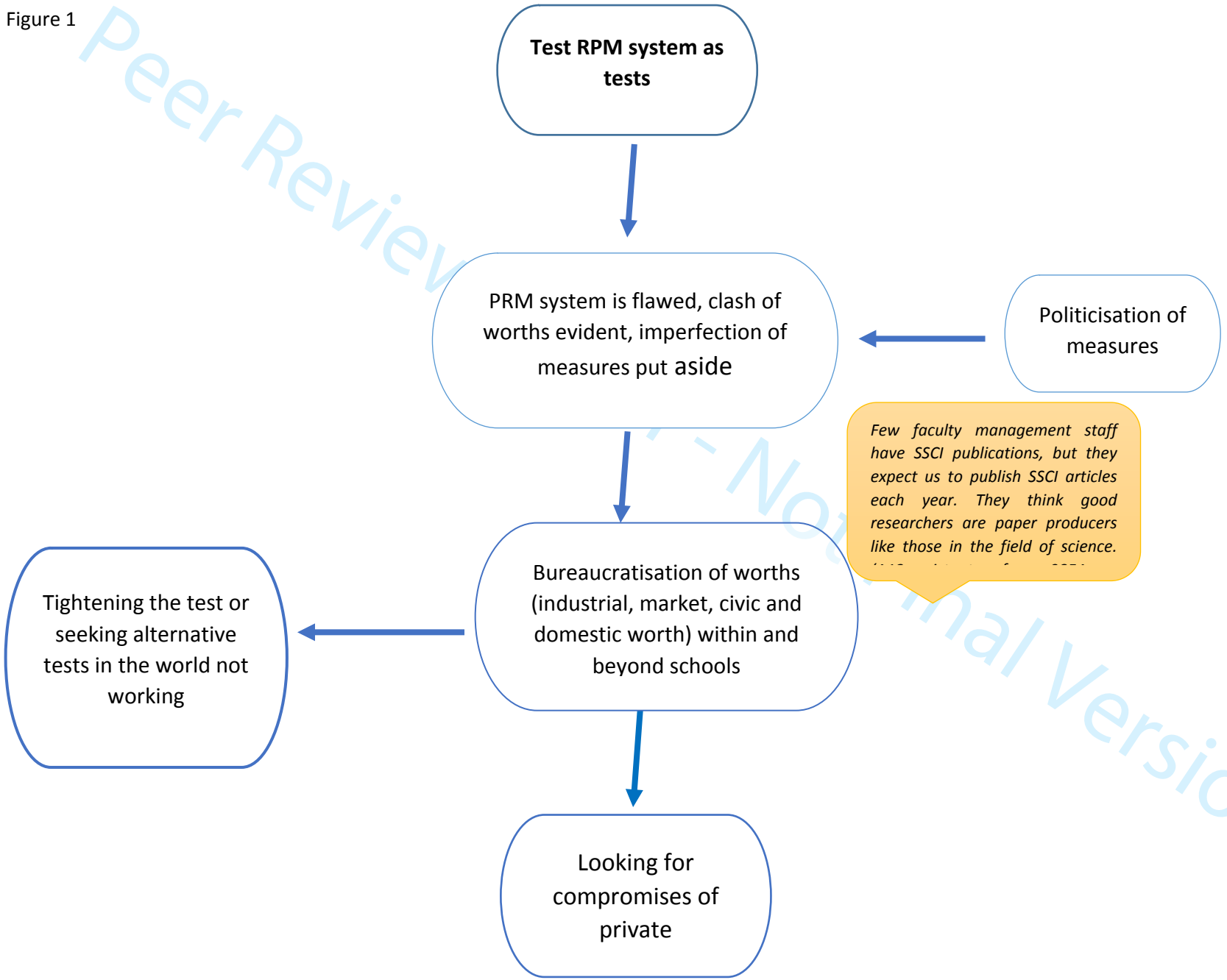


Figure 2

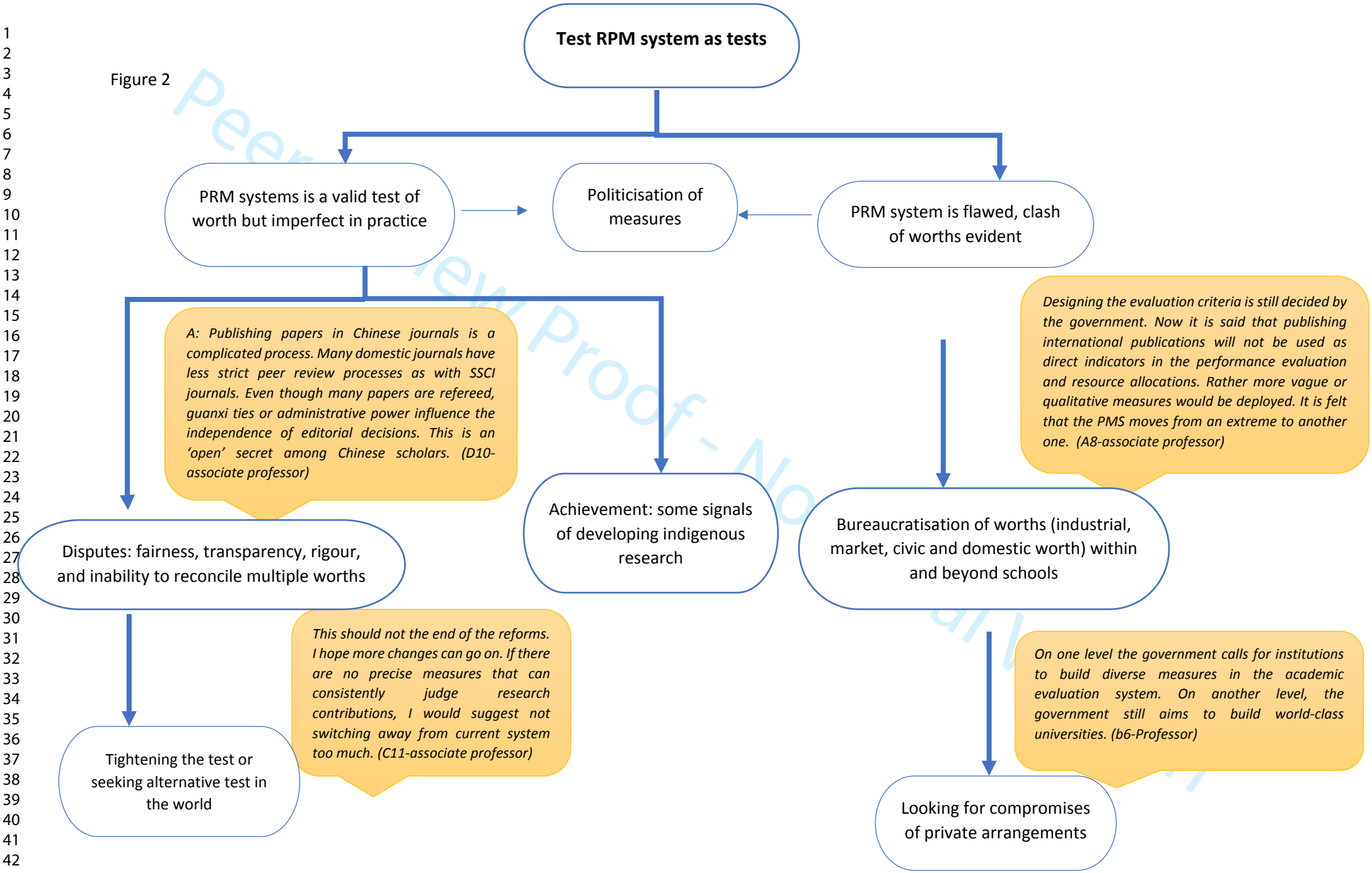


Figure 3