

Cultural Root of Political Accountability in China **and Its Implication to US-China Relationship**

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Abstract

The political reform that has been going on in China will have far-reaching impact on China's future and the US-China relationship. As an important part of the reform, the concept and practice of political accountability have been gaining momentum in China, despite the lack of clear definition of the concept in the cultural root of China. Contrary to the Western culture of political accountability, whose emphasis has long been placed on external checks and balances of power and the rule of law, in traditional Chinese society and the People's Republic of China alike, there has been overemphasis on individual moral standard on the one hand and a serious lack of external checks of power on the other. Since the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), during which China was plunged into chaos and a state of anarchy, the call for the rule of law has been on the rise. Faced with the serious problem of corruption, many people have acknowledged the dangerously insufficient restriction mechanism to governmental power and the various

consequences. The root causes, however, behind the symptoms remain unanswered—why is there such a lack of restriction mechanism to power? Given the fact that the abuse of power is not a new phenomenon but instead can be found throughout China's long history, it is unfair to blame only current circumstances such as the transitional economy or low salary of the public servant. The answer is more likely to hide in the culture itself.

The paper attempts to find an answer to this research question—what are the cultural factors that contribute to the reality of political accountability in China? This paper aims at illustrating the seemingly opposite directions in the development of political accountability of China and the western countries, bridging the gap of meaningful comparison of political accountability between China and the western countries. This paper argues that without better understanding of its cultural restriction to the development of external checks on power, the future of China, as well as the US-China bilateral relationship, may not develop smoothly.