

A Review of the Chinese National Center for Science and Technology Evaluation

Laura Pan Luo

China is now in a transitioning stage from planned economy to market economy. There is a growing interest in China to have a strong evaluation process in place so that planning and decisions can be based on valid and credible information. Evaluation also provides a guide for resource allocation.

The Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST) is the highest administrative body responsible for formulating and implementing science and technology (S&T) policies and programs in China. To provide accountability for government funding and improve management practices, in 1997, MOST commissioned an independent entity, the National Center for Science and Technology Evaluation (NCSTE), to conduct evaluations of science and technology policies and programs in China. The goal of NCSTE is to provide an objective peer review of government-funded S&T research programs.

Ms. Deng Nan, former Chinese Vice Minister of the Ministry of Science and Technology, noted that the evaluation system is important in the following four aspects: (1) improving the decision-making process; (2) enhancing the macro-level management of technology; (3) promoting innovation in the science and technology management system; and (4) reinforcing the implementation of the national science plan (People's Daily, 1999).

Over the last several years, NCSTE has evaluated over 1,000 projects focused on technical, institutional, economic, and financial aspects, ranging from information technology, to health care, environment protection and sustainable development. As the leading evaluation organization, NCSTE aims at providing timely and accurate information for both government agencies and private organizations to assist in their decision-making process. Additionally, it strives to promote dialogues among central and local governments, private sector, and academia.

Mandated by MOST, NCSTE issued China's Science and Evaluation Standards (Standards) in 2001. MOST made the Standards an annex to the government regulation on evaluation management. Since its issuance, the Standards have been well observed in science and technology evaluation in China. It has been selected as the training material on science and technology evaluation. More than 600 people across China have participated in the training workshop on Standards.

NCSTE consists of employees who specialize in areas such as management, system engineering, public policy research and economics. NCSTE also hires consultants to work on various evaluation projects. For example, in 1997, NCSTE conducted evaluations on a number of National Engineering Technology Centers to assess the effectiveness of their management and operations. NSCTE also conducted a policy review and analysis of China's new and high tech industrial development zones, technology transfers in the Sino-Japan computer industry and the role and impact of foreign investment on the development of new technology oriented industries in China.

In recent years, NCSTE has also conducted evaluations of foreign aid. The aid evaluation project teams at NCSTE have studied the relevant OECD development aid policies and the policies on utilization of foreign government loans to China.

As a local partner, NCSTE has conducted joint evaluations with international institutions. For example, NCSTE has evaluated Norwegian Mixed Credits jointly with a Norwegian consulting agency, Institute of Applied Social Science of Norway (FAFO).

NCSTE has had collaborations with many countries in the world, including the US, France, Canada, Japan, New Zealand, UK, Netherlands, Thailand, Korea and India in addition to providing services to the World Bank, the United Nations Development Program and other NGOs. According to Chinese officials, NCSTE has improved management practices at MOST research programs, and the evaluation of science and technology has contributed remarkably to the development of Chinese society by making the policy and decision-making process more objective.

References

Chelimsky, Eleanor & Shadish, Williams R. (1997), Editors. *Evaluation for the 21st Century*. Thousand Oakes, CA: Sage.

Chen, Zhaoying (time unknown). *Making S&T evaluation the tools for government decision-making practice in China*

National Center for Science and Technology Evaluation (2001). *The Uniform Standards for Science and Technology Evaluation*. Beijing, China: China Price Publisher.

People's Daily (November 1, 1999). *China to strengthen evaluation of scientific projects*.

Scriven, Michael (1991). *Evaluation Thesaurus*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.