Research on Street-Level Discretion in the West: Past, Present, and the Future

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Abstract Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) led to a major paradigm shift in the study of public administration and bureaucracy. It identified discretion by frontline workers as a critical issue in the study of street-level bureaucracy. Chinese scholars have since 2000 joined research on street-level bureaucracy. Some reviews of the English literature on street-level bureaucracy have been published in China. This paper discusses some major issues in research on street-level discretion in the West, drawing on Hupe and Buffat (*Public Manag Rev* 16(4):548–569, 2014); Maynard-Moody and Portillo (*The Oxford handbook of American bureaucracy*. Oxford University Press, Oxford, pp 255–277, 2010); Portillo and Rudes (*Annu Rev Law Soc Sci* 10:321–334, 2014). Compared with the Chinese reviews noted above, this paper is a more substantial and updated summary and assessment of the literature on street-level discretion. It also raises some issues for future research on frontline discretion in China.

Keywords Lipsky · Street-level bureaucracy · Discretion · Frontline work · Policy implementation

1 Introduction

Street-level bureaucrats refer to frontline staff such as police officers, social workers, teachers, etc. (Lipsky 1980, xii; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 258). Discretion refers to their capacity to follow or deviate from rules and procedures to address client needs and circumstances (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 551). It has been at the center of research on street-level bureaucracy theory (SLBT) in the West

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(Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 265, 271; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 328, 331; Scott 1997, 36, 53; Tummers et al. 2015, 1102). Chinese scholars have since 2000 joined research on SLBT (Cao 2014; Chen and Lu 2013; Gao 2014, 2015; Liang 2006; Wang 2011; Yan and Ding 2014; Ye and Ma 2003). Like those in the West, many of these Chinese publications are qualitative studies. Others are reviews of the English literature on SLBT (e.g., Cao 2014; Wang 2010, 2011; Ye and Ma 2003). There are two published studies of Chinese street-level bureaucracy in the English literature: Zhan et al. (2014) connect contextual factors with work situations, enforcement strategies, and self-assessment of environmental policy implementation officers in a Chinese city; Yan and Liu (2016) investigate the effects of media exemplars on people's perceptions of Chengguan-street vendor conflicts. The growing literature on frontline discretion in China can be improved significantly if it is guided by research questions and paradigms in mainstream research on SLBT.

In this article, I discuss the literature on street-level discretion in the West, drawing on Hupe and Buffat (2014), Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010), and Portillo and Rudes (2014). Compared with the Chinese reviews noted above, this article is a more substantial and updated summary and assessment of the literature on SLBT. It also raises some critical issues for future research on frontline discretion in China. Below, I first summarize the foundational works in SLBT written in the late 1970s and early 1980s by Lipsky and his colleagues. I then describe the developments in research on street-level discretion that have occurred since 1980. Since the English literature on this topic is vast, I shall focus on a few aspects of research on frontline work in this article. Finally, I outline some new directions and unanswered questions in the study of street discretion that appear challenging and profitable for scholars to pursue in future research.

2 Why is SLBT Important?

It is necessary to briefly discuss SLBT before I concentrate on research on street-level discretion. Lipsky's *Street-Level Bureaucracy* (1980) is commonly regarded as the foundational work in SLBT. Some ideas that became part of SLBT had been presented by a number of scholars before 1980 (Pressman and Wildavsky 1979; Prottas 1979; Simon 1946; Smith 1965; Stein 1952; Waldo 1948; Weatherley and Lipsky 1977). For example, Skolnick (1966, 33) wrote that "On the street, the policeman has the greatest potential for discretionary judgment not to invoke the criminal law, a decision of major legal consequences for those involved." Lipsky also highlighted the centrality of frontline public servants in policy implementation in some of his pre-1980 publications (1970, 1976, 1978). Brown (1981) similarly addressed the role of street-level bureaucracy in the delivery of public services. Lipsky's (1980) book is an essential reading for students of public administration because it is perhaps the first full expression of SLBT. In that book, Lipsky stresses a gap between "policy as written" and "policy as performed" (1980, xvii). Thus, street-level work is often "highly scripted", and the work requires "improvisation and responsiveness to the individual case" (xii). A key issue for frontline workers is

“How to treat all citizens alike in their claims on government, and how at the same time to be responsive to the individual case when appropriate’ (xii).

It is not an overstatement to say that Lipsky’s work led to a paradigm shift in the study of bureaucracy, the administrative state, and policy implementation (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 549). Before 1980, street-level discretions were generally not regarded as reasoned and essential judgments. Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 253) claim that at that time, “street-level discretion was seen as a violation of the rule of law or a stochastic element in an orderly process.” In addition, the frontline staff of public agencies were largely ignored or even dismissed by public administration scholars: the administrative state was seen to become so large and powerful that the interests of individual bureaucrats were totally subjugated to those of the bureaucracy (Portillo and Rudes 2014, 322; also Tweedie 1989). Frontline workers were thought to be faceless cogs at the bottom of rationally functioning hierarchal organizations. Kanter and Stein (1979, 176) described frontline workers in bureaucracies as those “rewarded the least, valued the least, and considered the most expendable and replaceable—in a sense, not fully members of the organization at all”.

In contrast, Lipsky stresses power from the bottom up, thereby challenging conventional wisdom and one-dimensional notions of hierarchical rationality in bureaucracy. He turns the study of organizations on its head (1978, 396; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 322) by placing frontline workers’ discretion, judgments, and power at the center of research on the administrative state and policy implementation. Lipsky (1978, 401) argues that policy is an abstraction until it is realized when delivered to citizens and that street-level policy realizations define policy. After Lipsky (1980, xii), many scholars have characterized frontline staff as the “ultimate policymakers”, who have the greatest influence on policy implementation (Brehm and Gates 1997, 202; Hupe and Hill 2007, 280–281, 283; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 321).

Handler (1990, 3–4) eloquently elaborates the importance of street-level discretion for the administrative state: “Despite the masses of legislation, rules, regulations, and administrative orders, most large, complex administrative systems are shot through with discretion from the top policy-makers down to the line staff—the inspectors, social workers, intake officers, police, teachers, health personnel, and even clerks. How they interpret the rules, how they listen to the explanations, how they help the citizen or remain indifferent, all affect the substance and quality of the encounter, an encounter made increasingly important because of our widespread dependence on the modern state.” Gofen (2014, 489; also Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2003, 165; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 256) adds that frontline workers “play a significant role in the public sphere not only with respect to policy implementation but also in a much broader sense: their work holds implications for citizenship and democracy.”

3 Why is There Street-Level Discretion?

Much of research on street-level bureaucracy has focused on discretionary judgments by frontline workers during public service delivery in the West (Portillo and Rudes 2014, 324–325; Tummers et al. 2015, 1099). Street-level discretion

occurs partly because (1) performance tends to be difficult to measure, (2) goal expectations tend to be ambiguous, (3) resources are inadequate to perform tasks, (4) clients are typically non-voluntary, and (5) the demand for services tends to exceed supply (Lipsky 1980, 27, 140, 172; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 258; Vedung 2015, 17–18). Street-level discretion occurs also because the constraints street-level bureaucrats face in policy implementation, which include at least three sorts of action prescriptions: (1) formal rules, stemming from public administration; (2) professional norms, such as occupational guidelines, and (3) expectations from society (i.e., public opinion) (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 556). Thus, reference to general policy does not help very much. Hill (2003, 267) writes that “policy often contains only shadowy guidance for practice, and implementers of policy often work under incomplete, inaccurate, or simply idiosyncratic understanding of what policy means for their everyday work or practice.” Street-level efforts to adjust to local contexts are important for policy effectiveness. Lipsky (1980, 15) summarizes that street-level work involves “complex tasks for which elaboration of rules, guidelines, or instructions cannot circumscribe the alternatives.” Skolnick and Fyfe (1993, 120) argue that discretion—and its potential abuse—is important because it is available to street-level workers when they choose to exercise it.

Watkins-Hayes (2009, 58) argues that when exercising discretion, frontline workers have to “balance their idealistic interpretations of the job with pragmatic realities, creating not a singular professional identity but a variety of interpretations.” Predictably, frontline workers use different coping mechanisms to deal with complexity in policy implementation (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 551–552; Nielsen 2006, 864–866; Vedung 2015, 16; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 324–326). Frontline work involves a “call for sensitive observation and judgment, which are not reducible to programmed formats” (Lipsky 1980, 15). Maynard-Moody and Musheno (2003, 155; also Portillo and Rudes 2014, 325) report that frontline workers first make judgments about clients. They “then apply, bend, or ignore rules and procedures to support their moral reasoning. Identity based normative judgments determine which and how rules, procedures, and policy are applied.” Watkins-Hayes (2009, p. 58) claims that frontline workers have a “discretionary toolkit” at their disposal: “a range of acceptable behaviors to select those tools that would best fit their sense of who they were (and were not) as professionals.”

Both governing bodies and managers have developed rules and procedures “to control their bureaucratic agents” (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 258). However, Ellis (2011, 235) argues that “A plethora of conflicting rules and tasks creates policy and operational ambiguity which, in turn, makes the exercise of discretion not only possible but necessary” among frontline staff (also Brodtkin 1997, 24; Gofen 2014, 490–491; Hill 2003, 267; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 325–326; Oberfield 2010, 739; Riccucci 2005a, 91; Vedung 2015, 18; Prottas 1979, 93). Hupe and Buffat (2014, 555) argue that the exercise of discretion “is both central and permanent for all types of street-level bureaucracies.” Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 259–260) conclude that street-level work “is not only highly discretionary but largely autonomous” (also Brodtkin 1997, 4; Hupe and Buffat 2014, 551; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 323–324; Scott 1997, 37; Soss et al. 2011, 27; Tucker et al. 2015, 4; Vedung 2015, 18).

If street-level discretion is unavoidable, it is unsurprising that some people ask whether or not it is good for the clients of public services. Frontline discretion was viewed unfavorably as either shirking or sabotage before 1980. For example, Pressman and Wildavsky (1979) saw it as the manifestation of policy or implementation failures. In contrast, Lipsky regards deviations as an essential remedy for impractical mandates. Many scholars have supported his view (Tummers et al. 2015; Vedung 2015). However, Brodtkin (1997, 4) characterizes discretion as “axiomatically neither good nor bad.” Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 272) claim that “street-level, policy-shaping role could have both positive and negative results...At this point, there is little empirical evidence that describes the cumulative effect of street-level judgment—positive, negative, or neutral.” Portillo and Rudes (2014, 324) argue that it “is not discretion that is good or bad, but rather how SLBs exercise that discretion.”

In recent years, discretion has almost become a household name in China. China’s Premier Li Keqiang discussed its importance in policy implementation in the PRC in his press conference after the closing meeting of the Fourth Session of China’s 12th National People’s Congress at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing on March 16, 2016 (Li 2016).

4 Recent Developments in the Study of Street-Level Discretion

Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 261) have asserted that with the exceptions of Handler (1986) and Brodtkin (1986), little was added to SLBT in the years following the publication of Brown (1981), Lipsky (1980), and Prottas (1979). This is surprising given the major impact of their works on the study of the administrative state and policy implementation mentioned above. No reasons are given to account for this surprise. It was not until the 1990s that SLBT has become “a vital and generative scholarly confluence and influence at the intersection of public policy and administration, social welfare, criminal justice, and socio-legal studies” (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 261).

This exciting development has occurred in the past few decades partly because “public organizations have become more diverse workplaces, and equal employment and civil rights have become institutionalized within the organizations...the organizational context of much street-level work has changed markedly ever since” (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 255–256). Different practices and norms have emerged. For example, before the 1970s, most public services were provided by large state bureaucracies. There have been since waves of contracting to nonprofit and for-profit service delivery including the contracting-out of imprisonment to the private sector. For-profit businesses, including private security and firms with no prior experience in human service delivery, are now providing a wide range of social programs (Goodsell 2015; Romzek and Johnson 2005). “In 1978, welfare worker was employed by a state agency; now he or she is just as likely to work for a contracted-out for-profit firm.” (Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010, 263).

In addition, before the 1970s, a frontline worker’s encounters with clients and citizens were typically face-to-face. As Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010,

255–256) point out, there were both brief encounters of a traffic officer and driver during a police stop and lengthy contacts between teacher and student, guard and prisoner, or caseworker and client that occurred over months and years. Since the 1970s, some of these encounters have been framed by some form of electronic surveillance. For example, traffic officers run a computer license-plate check before approaching a stopped car. Hupe and Buffat (2014, 554) thus claim that the “street-level dimension of work in the literal sense is possibly disappearing more and more in organizations where computer screens are becoming unavoidable for clients’ data registration and storage” (i.e., screen level bureaucracy instead of street-level bureaucracy). Face-to-face contact is becoming diminishingly relevant, and automatized office technologies and computer systems are increasingly replacing individual actors “for decision-making on benefits or sanctions” (i.e., system-level bureaucracy). Some disability claims workers examine case files but never meet clients (Mashaw 1983); 911-call operators dealt voice-to-voice with distressed citizens (Guy et al. 2008).

The changes in organizations have provided ample opportunities for scholars to broaden the field of inquiry into SLBT. First, while many public administration scholars have continued to focus on street-level bureaucrat archetypes, i.e., police officers, welfare workers, and teachers (Lipsky 1980, xi; Portillo and Rudes 2014, 328–329), others have examined other types of frontline staff, who are not paradigmatic street-level bureaucrats, including environmental inspectors, fire fighters, and medical practitioners (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 553). Yngvesson (1988) studied court clerks. Kinsey and Stalans (1999) explored the world of tax auditors. May and Wood (2003) probed work by building inspectors. Guy et al. (2008) investigated three groups of frontline workers: (1) 911-call operators; (2) attorneys who were public guardians and worked directly with poor families in emotionally taut situations; and (3) correctional officers. Stensöta (2012) focused on public employees granting sick leave benefits in the Swedish Social Insurance Administration. Alden (2015) examined officers and practitioners in the English local authority housing advice services. Chinese scholars have studied frontline staff such as members of neighborhood management in China (Gao 2015) and Chengguan officers (Chen and Lu 2013; Cao 2014; Liang 2006), who are not the street-level bureaucrat archetypes in the literature on SLBT.

Second, as organizations have become more diverse, more cultural customs are influencing frontline workers. Scholars have recognized the importance of the changes in the attitudes among management toward public service delivery. Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 264) point out that “questions of state authority and street-level discretion become more complex. This is especially the case when social policy implementation is contracted out to for-profit firms that have as their primary goal producing value for owners, not service to clients...they tried to shift the work culture from a ‘social work’ concern for individual needs and abilities to a business model focused only on fulfilling the performance expectations in the contract.”

Third, scholars have recognized the importance of values, perceptions, and attitudes among frontline workers toward public service delivery. Skolnick and Fyfe (1993, 90, 92) describe the “working personality” of police officers, a group

identity that creates “recognizable and distinctive rules, customs, perceptions, and interpretations of what they see, along with consequent moral judgments.” For example, the police are on the lookout for people viewed as “symbolic assailants” or “persons whose gestures, language, or attire the police have come to identify as being potentially threatening or dangerous.” (Skolnick and Fyfe 1993, 97) Sandfort (2000, 751) writes that street-level routines create shared knowledge and collective beliefs that, in turn, “have causal implications for how the work is carried out.” Hasenfeld (2000) calls attention to “practice ideologies”, which are enduring types of client classifications, such as diagnostic labels and shared perceptions of client worth (also Portillo and Rudes 2014, 325). Handler (1990, 30) asserts that practice ideologies guide street-level worker responses to people and situations and create self-fulfilling prophecies as workers screen out information that does not correspond to their established categories (also Portillo and Rudes 2014, 324).

5 Some Unanswered Questions in the Study of Street-Level Discretion

There is large room for research on SLBT despite the major advances since 1980 reported above. So far, there are only a few quantitative studies of street-level discretion (e.g., May and Winter 2009; Nielsen 2015; Riccucci et al. 2004). Most policy implementation studies are qualitative in nature (Hupe 2014, 170; Meier et al. 2004, 31; Tummers et al. 2012, 718; Tummers et al. 2015, 1107). In addition, much focus of research on SLBT has been on the significance of individual interests and policy preferences but not on attributes and abilities (Nielsen 2015, 1,024). Unsurprisingly, many important questions about street-level discretion have remained unanswered. I select five issues for discussion below.

First, does management matter with regard to street-level discretion? A large amount of research focuses on the interaction between frontline workers and their managers (Portillo and Rudes 2014, 326). The above discussion suggests that management cannot do much with the exercise of discretion by frontline workers. Some scholars, however, think that senior officials are given more resources, power, and authority to make decisions that limit the discretion and judgment of their subordinates (Tucker et al. 2015, 4). Others argue that management can affect street-level discretion because “institutional practices are supported and legitimated by training, promotions, professional norms, and cultural tropes operating in the organizational settings where they work” (Maynard-Moody and Musheno 2015, 4). Frontline staff “apply familiar strategies and draw upon past experiences” to implement policies (Oberfield 2010, 736, 740; also Keiser 2010, 251). If they are rewarded for what they have done before they will continue their practices. Good appraisals show the choices of supervisors.

Empirical studies have so far examined how the exercise of discretion is related to the signals by political superiors (Keiser and Soss 1998), administrative emphasis of policy objectives (Ewalt and Jennings 2004; Riccucci et al. 2004), and managerial supervision (Brehm and Gates 1997; Riccucci 2005b). These studies have produced mixed results. Some scholars have shown the influence of managers

on street-level discretion in the West (Henderson and Pandey 2013, 16; May and Winter 2009, 467; also Riccucci 2005b). However, others have shown different findings on management influence on the exercise of discretion by frontline workers (Brehm and Gates 1997, 128; Evans 2013, 739; Keiser 2010, 253; Oberfield 2010, 739; Riccucci 2005b, 115; Riccucci et al. 2004, 439).

Second, do demographic characteristics affect the exercise of discretion? Hupe and Buffat (2014, 552) claim that “Empirical variation in behaviour among street-level workers is often seen as related to different demographic characteristics” including racial/ethnic background and gender. Portillo (2010) similarly argues that culturally coded assumptions about social status based on race, sex, and age permeates street-level work in subtle and explicit ways. Maynard-Moody and Portillo (2010, 269) claim that “even though the jobs of the workers were identical and rule-bound, social status affected how street-level bureaucrats described their authority and interactions with citizens and colleagues.” Hupe and Buffat (2014, 552) and Tummers et al. (2015, 1114) similarly assert that individual characteristics such as age and gender can influence ways of coping and need greater attention. Tummers et al. (2015, 1102) thus call for future research efforts to “analyze the antecedents of coping during public service delivery” as one of the “new theoretical venues”.

Specifically, some scholars have claimed that age is related to the exercise of discretion (Nielsen 2015, 1019; Stensöta 2012, 563; Tummers et al. 2012, 725). However, Oberfield (2010, 740) does not think that age would affect how frontline workers make discretionary judgements. There are no good accounts about why age matters or does not matter with regard to street-level discretion. It is possible that young people are less likely to be managers or supervisors and tend to be less experienced in policy implementation. As a result, they are less likely than others to make discretionary judgements. But it is also possible that they are more likely to exercise discretion because they are less familiar with regulations and procedures or because they are young and less mature. Either way, age is a potential predictor of street-level discretion and should be controlled in data analysis.

Gender may matter with regard to the exercise of discretion (Nielsen 2015, 1019; Stensöta 2012, 563; Tummers et al. 2012, 725). Portillo and Rudes (2014, 327) claim that women “regularly discuss rules and use formal statements of bureaucratic authority as the foundation of their organizational authority. This direct engagement with rules provides SLBs with powerful resources to mobilize authority...but it also constrain discretion in ways unique to SLBs social status.” Unsurprisingly, women are found to be more likely than men to be rule followers (Portillo and DeHart-Davis 2009, 339–340; Oberfield 2010, 740). There is apparently little dispute over the gender effect on street-level discretion. Nevertheless, Portillo and Rudes (2014, 328) assert that despite much research, “we still know relatively little” about how gender affects the exercise of discretion in the West.

Third, does education matter with regard to street-level discretion? Some scholars think so (Hupe and Buffat 2014, 552; Riccucci 2005a, 101; Stensöta 2012, 563). Better educated workers are less likely to be rigid rule followers since they are more likely to think independently and be analytic and critical than poorly educated workers. However, Oberfield (2010, 740; also Riccucci et al. 2004, 444) does not

think that education affects how frontline workers make discretionary judgements. Either way, it is a potential predictor of street-level discretion and should be controlled in data analysis.

Fourth, does seniority matter with regard to the exercise of discretion? Seniority refers to the amount of time a frontline worker spends in street-level bureaucracy (Garrow and Grusky 2013, 114; Riccucci 2005a, 101). Hupe and Buffat (2014, 552) claim that the “nature and years of occupational experience” play a role in street-level discretion. It is possible that “work experience promotes adherence to established practices because workers become more entrenched in ways of doing things and more resistant to change” (Garrow and Grusky 2013, 107; also Riccucci et al. 2004). But it is also possible that as new workers do not know what to do in the field and are likely to depend on rules and procedures. They later learn from others and past experiences and thus are more confident and able to make discretionary judgments (Oberfield 2010, 742, 746–748). Either way, it is a potential predictor of street-level discretion (Stensöta 2012, 563) and should be controlled in data analysis.

Finally, do frontline workers frequently exercise discretion during the course of policy implementation? Oberfield (2010, 739) claims that “Although bureaucrats have the potential to act as rule followers or rule deviators in any situation, they may consistently choose one identity.” Only a small number of studies have used quantitative data to address this question. They have produced mixed findings. For example, Tummers, Steijn, and Bekkers (2012, 725) have found the mean for discretion is 4.62 (out of a six-item scale) among 1317 Dutch healthcare professionals, which suggests a high frequency of frontline decision-making. However, Keiser and Soss (1998, 1139) have shown that from 1990 to 1992, “the annual number of good cause claims processed by the states ranged from a low of approximately 0.01 per 1000 AFDC applications (or 1 per 100,000) to a high of approximately 19.26 per 1000 AFDC applications” in the US. In other words, the frequency of discretion is not terribly high. Portillo and Rudes (2014, 324) argue that “extraordinary discretion is the exception, not the norm” and “much of SLBs work is routine rather than discretion” (325).

Oberfield addresses this question differently. He shows (2010, 739) that most street-level bureaucrats in the US began their careers aspiring to be objective rule followers. After 2 years, about 40 % of the police officers saw themselves as discretion users, about 20 % saw themselves as neutral, and only 40 % saw themselves as rule followers. Similarly, after 2 years, about one-third of the social workers saw themselves as discretion users, one-third saw themselves as neutral, and almost 40 % saw themselves as rule followers.

6 Conclusion

Street-level discretion has been and will continue to be an important research subject in the study of public policy and administration. Nearly 20 years ago, Scott (1997, 36) asserted that “To date, however, the study of discretion tends to be limited to normative considerations, much to the exclusion of its empirical

development.” Despite advances in research on SLBT since then, some basic questions on street-level discretion have remained unanswered as noted above. Garrow and Grusky (2013, 122) have claimed that “Most research on street-level bureaucracy has examined how street-level workers use their discretion to respond to shared conditions of work in predictable ways but has largely neglected to consider how and why workers’ discretionary behavior may differ systematically across wider contexts.” Recent reviews of the literature on SLBT (Hupe 2014; Hupe and Hill 2007; Lummers et al. 2015; Maynard-Moody and Portillo 2010; Meyers and Vorsanger 2003; Portillo and Rudes 2014; Rowe 2012) have insufficiently discussed research on the compliance with or departure from protocols among street-level workers, perhaps because knowledge on the issue is limited.

This paper is not intended to be an outlet to lament the state of research on street-level discretion. Rather, it is intended to encourage active participation in the study of SLBT by more public administration scholars because of the knowledge gaps noted above. Research efforts by Chinese scholars will be highly profitable not only because they can draw on existing research on street-level discretion in the West but also because it is time for scholars to examine street-level discretion in “other cultural and political settings” (Nielsen 2015, 1,025; also Hupe 2014, 178). Hopefully, this paper can facilitate scholars in mainland China to increasingly engage in a productive dialog with and conduct their research on street-level discretion as part of the global efforts to advance knowledge in public administration and management, and their endeavors will contribute to SLBT significantly.

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