

# On the Integration of People's Assessor System Reform and Criminal Procedure System Reform in China

Xueqi Liu

Law School, Beijing Normal University, China

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**Abstract:** The Peoples Assessor system, as a vital embodiment of judicial democracy, holds significant importance for enhancing judicial credibility and realizing judicial justice. This paper aims to explore the current status and issues of the Peoples Assessor system, propose reform suggestions, and subsequently analyze its relationship with the trial-centered reform of the criminal procedure system, in order to provide reference for the improvement of Chinas criminal procedure system.

**Keywords:** Peoples Assessor; Criminal Procedure System Reform; Trial-Centered Doctrine.

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## 1. Introduction of the Issue

The ongoing and profound evolution of judicial reform represents a cornerstone in the modernization of a nations legal framework, aiming to enhance the fairness, efficiency, and public trustworthiness of its justice system. Within this transformative context, the People's Assessor system stands as a pivotal institutional embodiment of judicial democratization. Its core mandate is to bridge the societal and professional realms of justice by integrating the lived experience, common sense, and collective values of ordinary citizens directly into the formal adjudicative process. In theory, this integration performs a vital dual function: it significantly enhances judicial transparency by making the once-opaque workings of the courtroom accessible to and participatory for the public, while simultaneously promoting substantive fairness by ensuring verdicts are informed not solely by technical legal expertise but also by prevailing social norms and conscience. The presence of lay assessors is intended to act as a bulwark against insular professional bias, a guarantor of procedural openness, and a living symbol that justice is administered in the name of and with the direct participation of the people.

However, a significant and widening chasm persists between the systems noble theoretical aspirations and its practical, on-the-ground implementation. The current operational reality of the People's Assessor system is fraught with numerous structural, procedural, and cultural issues that collectively undermine its efficacy. Chronic problems such as a non-transparent and unrepresentative selection mechanism, inadequate training and legal preparedness for appointed assessors, ambiguous definitions of their adjudicative authority vis-à-vis professional judges, and insufficient safeguards for their independent participation have led to the widespread phenomena of assessors serving as passive, ceremonial figures. This state of "presence without meaningful contribution" fundamentally negates the system's democratic and oversight purposes.

The persistence of these systemic deficiencies carries consequences that extend far beyond the underperformance of the assessor system itself. Crucially, they pose direct and substantial challenges to the success of the concurrent, overarching trial-centered reform of the criminal procedure system. This flagship reform aims to establish the court trial as the undisputed center stage for evidence presentation,

factual determination, and legal adjudication, moving away from an older model reliant on pre-trial files. A weak or tokenistic assessor system directly contradicts this goal. If assessors are not substantively equipped and empowered to actively engage with evidence, scrutinize testimonies, and deliberate meaningfully during trials, then the "trial" cannot be said to be truly "centered" on a robust, participatory process. Instead, it risks remaining a ritual dominated by professionals, failing to harness the lay perspective that the reform seeks to institutionalize. Therefore, diagnosing and remedying the profound issues within the People's Assessor system is not an isolated task but an indispensable prerequisite for the successful realization of a genuinely democratic, transparent, and trial-centric criminal justice system.

## 2. Current Situation and Issues of the People's Assessor System

### 2.1. Current State of Implementation of the People's Assessor System

The enactment of the People's Assessors Law represents a pivotal moment of institutionalization, formally anchoring Chinas system of lay participation in the judiciary within a definitive legal framework. This legislation provides comprehensive stipulations regarding the selection mechanism, qualifications, core duties, specific rights, and corresponding obligations of peoples assessors. It thereby establishes a clear statutory foundation for their involvement in criminal trial proceedings, aiming to standardize their role and enhance the legitimacy of their participation.

Despite this robust legal codification, a significant gap persists between the laws intent and its practical application. The system continues to be hampered by entrenched operational challenges, commonly described as the phenomena of "serving as a mere observer without genuine adjudication, adjudicating without substantial deliberation, and deliberating without reaching conclusive decisions." In practice, this manifests in several ways: assessors may lack sufficient pre-trial access to case materials or substantive legal training, limiting their preparedness; their contributions during courtroom deliberations may be peripheral due to the dominant professional expertise of career judges; and the dynamics within collegiate panels may not always foster an environment where lay perspectives are fully integrated into

the final judgment. These implementation shortcomings effectively undermine the systems core objectives of injecting popular wisdom into the judicial process, exercising a supervisory function over professional judges, and bolstering the perceived fairness and transparency of the courts. Consequently, bridging this implementation gap remains a central challenge for realizing the full potential of the People's Assessor system.

## **2.2. Issues within the People's Assessor System**

### **2.2.1. Inadequate Selection Mechanism**

The foundational process for selecting peoples assessors is critically impaired by the absence of robust institutional safeguards, resulting in a procedure often characterized by arbitrariness and inconsistency. This fundamentally compromises the systems ability to cultivate a pool of assessors that is genuinely broad, diverse, and representative of the wider society. The core of the problem is threefold. First, there exists a profound constitutional and legislative deficiency. The current national Constitution lacks any explicit provision for the Peoples Assessor system, depriving it of the supreme legal authority and foundational mandate necessary for forceful implementation. This absence at the highest legal level inevitably weakens its perceived importance and enforceability in lower courts and administrative bodies. Second, the criteria governing selection are excessively vague and permissive. Relevant laws and regulations fail to stipulate precise, standardized qualifications regarding the necessary knowledge base, cognitive skills, or demographic profiles for candidates. This legislative ambiguity grants individual peoples courts excessive discretionary power during selection, leading to practices that may prioritize convenience or other unstated factors over merit and representativeness, thereby undermining the overall quality and institutional seriousness of the assessor corps. Third, the ideal of a fair and statistically sound random selection process faces severe practical obstacles. Efforts to implement such a system are hindered by fragmented, outdated, and inaccessible databases of potential candidates, creating severe information deficits. The high administrative cost and logistical complexity of sourcing comprehensive and accurate candidate lists further disincentivize thorough randomization. Compounding this is a visible lack of public enthusiasm for the role; civic engagement remains low, and a significant proportion of those contacted express reluctance or outright refusal to serve, often due to a lack of incentives, concerns over personal inconvenience, or insufficient awareness of the roles importance.

### **2.2.2. Insufficient Training and Performance Safeguards**

Once selected, peoples assessors frequently operate at a severe disadvantage due to systemic failures in their preparation and support. The absence of comprehensive, mandatory training in essential legal doctrines and practical trial skills leaves them poorly equipped to fulfill their duties competently. Furthermore, the mechanisms designed to protect and facilitate their performance are underdeveloped, directly negatively impacting the quality and efficacy of their participation. This dual shortfall manifests in several specific ways. First, assessors typically enter the courtroom with a significant relative deficiency in specialized legal knowledge. During closed-door deliberations in collegiate panels, this knowledge gap can create a formidable barrier to meaningful dialogue with professional judges, making it difficult to

establish a "common language" for discussion. Consequently, assessors may hesitate to voice opinions or defer to judicial authority, thus failing to provide the intended lay perspective. Second, the infrastructure for training is crippled by chronic underfunding and low implementation rates. Many basic-level courts, which bear the primary responsibility for organizing training, lack the independent budgetary resources and personnel to conduct effective, regular programs. This results in only a small fraction of serving assessors receiving any substantive post-appointment instruction, leaving the vast majority to navigate complex proceedings with minimal guidance. Third, the framework for safeguarding assessors performance is notably deficient. Many courts, even pilot reform sites, have not established reliable, long-term funding adjustment mechanisms to cover stipends, transportation, and other ancillary costs. A pronounced "work-assessor conflict" emerges, as many employers are unwilling to grant leave for jury service, leading to a high rate of last-minute withdrawals or consistent non-participation due to professional obligations. Most alarmingly, there is a stark lack of legal and institutional remedies for assessors who face risks such as the unauthorized disclosure of personal information, psychological pressure, or threats to their physical safety and property arising from their service, creating a climate of potential vulnerability.

### **2.2.3. Unclear Scope of Adjudicative Authority.**

The precise contours of the decision-making power granted to peoples assessors remain ambiguously defined, creating a fundamental operational ambiguity that prevents them from exerting their intended influence within the judicial process. This vagueness pertains both to the stage of their input and the weight it carries. A primary structural issue is the lack of a clear and operable mechanism to separate questions of fact from questions of law—a distinction crucial for defining the assessors purview under some reform models. While theoretical reforms call for presiding judges to meticulously delineate these issues, in the reality of judicial practice, factual determinations and legal applications are intrinsically and often inseparably intertwined. This makes it practically impossible for judges to provide clear guidance or for assessors to confidently confine their deliberations to a purely "factual" sphere. Moreover, even within their presumed realm of contribution, the specific authority of assessors is not clearly codified or communicated. Without explicit, legally-enshrined parameters detailing their rights and the degree of deference their opinions command, assessors often find themselves in a peripheral position during trials. This ambiguity allows, whether intentionally or not, for their contributions to be easily marginalized or overlooked during final judgment formation. The resulting uncertainty discourages active, confident participation and perpetuates a state where assessors are physically present but functionally limited, thereby stalling the systems core objective of integrating substantive lay judgment into the adjudicative process.

## **3. Reform Recommendations for the People's Assessor System**

### **3.1. Improve the Selection Mechanism**

A fundamental and systematic overhaul of the selection mechanism is the paramount prerequisite for ensuring the foundational integrity, legitimacy, and ultimate effectiveness of the People's Assessor system. Without a selection process

that is inherently fair, transparent, and scientifically defensible, the entire edifice of public participation in justice risks being perceived as—and potentially becoming—a mere formality. The primary objective, therefore, must be to move beyond ad-hoc local practices and institutionalize a nationally coherent process characterized by unimpeachable procedural fairness, complete operational transparency, and verifiable, algorithmically assured randomness. The ultimate goal is to cultivate a diverse, dynamic, and genuinely representative pool of assessors that mirrors the socioeconomic, professional, and demographic tapestry of society at large, thereby ensuring that the "judgment of peers" is a substantive reality rather than a theoretical ideal.

The cornerstone of this transformation must be the legislative mandate and subsequent creation of a unified, secure, and nationally integrated People's Assessor Candidate Information Database. This centralized repository should serve as the sole, authoritative source for all selections, replacing fragmented local lists. Its population should utilize a sophisticated hybrid methodology. The primary engine would be a mandatory, algorithm-driven random selection from the entire national pool of eligible citizens, drawn from linkages with civil registry and household registration data. This core random draw must be strategically complemented by a well-publicized, transparent, and accessible channel for voluntary individual applications and nominations from community organizations. This dual-track approach serves a critical purpose: while random selection guarantees fairness and prevents manipulation, the voluntary channel actively recruits individuals with specific expertise (e.g., scientists, engineers, psychologists, entrepreneurs) or deep community ties, thereby deliberately broadening the demographic and professional base of participants and enhancing the panels' collective intelligence for complex cases.

First, establishing this database necessitates the prior creation of a robust, legally-facilitated inter-departmental information-sharing governance framework. This is a significant logistical and legal challenge that requires moving beyond mere memoranda of understanding. It demands formalized, statutory cooperation protocols between the judiciary, the Ministry of Public Security (for resident identity and household registration data), the Ministry of Civil Affairs (for community and social organization data), and the National Bureau of Statistics. The mechanism must have clear data security, privacy protection, and usage protocols, enabling the secure, efficient, and real-time sharing of verified resident information. This directly solves the historically crippling problem of inaccurate, outdated, or jurisdictionally inaccessible data on permanent and floating populations, which has rendered previous attempts at fair and comprehensive selection futile.

Second, the methodology for random selection itself must undergo a paradigm shift, evolving from a simplistic, "one-size-fits-all" lottery to intelligent, stratified random selection models. Pioneering these advanced models is essential for both fairness and functional efficacy. Advanced software should categorize the master candidate pool based on a sophisticated, multidimensional matrix of factors. These would include static factors like geographic region (province, city, county), urban/rural designation, and broad age cohorts, as well as dynamic or attributed factors like self-identified or verified professional fields (e.g., accounting, information technology, medicine), educational background, and language proficiency. The selection algorithm can then

perform a "stratified random draw." For instance, for a complex commercial fraud case, the system could be weighted to ensure the random selection includes a minimum number of candidates from a pool tagged with financial or business backgrounds. This "targeted randomness" deliberately enhances the potential fact-finding competence of a specific panel for the case at hand while scrupulously preserving the core anti-bias principle of random selection. It actively leverages professional lay insight where most valuable, without resorting to the non-random appointment of "expert assessors," which would undermine the democratic principle.

Third, a significant and sustained investment in digitizing, automating, and intelligently managing the entire selection and service ecosystem is non-negotiable for efficiency, fairness, and credibility. The selection software platform must be a state-of-the-art system with advanced functionalities that minimize human discretion at every turn. Key features must include: automated, real-time conflict-of-interest screening that cross-references selected candidates against digital case details (parties, lawyers, companies); intelligent scheduling algorithms that ensure equitable workload distribution by tracking an individual's service history and implementing "staggered service scheduling" to prevent burnout; full automation of summons delivery via encrypted SMS and email with integrated read-receipt and confirmation tracking; and a secure, public-facing online portal where citizens can verify their status, update contact information, request deferrals, and view public reports on selection statistics. These technological enhancements are crucial for reducing administrative overhead, eliminating bureaucratic bottlenecks, and—most importantly—for building tangible, demonstrable public trust and credibility in the absolute impartiality and modernity of the selection process. Transparency logs and the ability for an independent audit of the algorithm further cement this trust, making the selection mechanism not just a procedural step, but a pillar of institutional legitimacy.

### **3.2. Strengthen Training and Performance Safeguards**

The transformation of People's Assessors from passive observers or symbolic presences into confident, competent, and co-equal participants in the adjudicative process demands the construction of a dedicated, well-resourced, and mandatory ecosystem for continuous professional development and robust personal support. This is a non-negotiable investment in the system's human capital. The strategy must be dual-pronged and mutually reinforcing: first, the implementation of a rigorous, standardized, and ongoing pedagogical curriculum designed to build substantive legal and deliberative competence; and second, the establishment of a comprehensive, legally-enshrined framework of practical, financial, and personal safeguards designed to remove the formidable real-world obstacles that currently deter service and inhibit fearless participation.

First, the training mechanism requires nothing short of a foundational pedagogical reform, moving decisively from sporadic, ad-hoc lectures to a structured, progressive, and lifelong learning continuum. This continuum must be precisely aligned with the evolving complexity of the legal landscape and the specific, graded levels of adjudicative authority granted to assessors in different case types. Curricula, while standardized at a national level to ensure baseline quality and consistency, must allow for intelligent

local adaptation to address regional legal nuances and prevalent case profiles. The core curriculum must extend far beyond an introductory overview of legal principles and courtroom layout. It should encompass multi-tiered modules, including: intensive training on rules of evidence and logical evaluation of witness credibility; the psychology of group deliberation and techniques for mitigating cognitive bias; masterclasses on distinguishing intertwined factual determinations from pure questions of law; and the ethics of judicial conduct. Crucially, theoretical knowledge must be cemented through immersive, practical application. Mandatory practical workshops, high-fidelity mock trials filmed and reviewed with trainers, and guided analyses of anonymized real-case studies are essential. These methods translate abstract knowledge into durable practical trial skills, situational judgment, and the functional confidence necessary for substantive contribution during real deliberations, thereby genuinely transforming latent capability into active performance.

Second, the provision of sustainable, guaranteed funding and unequivocal personal safety protections must be legislated, normalized, and depoliticized. A dedicated, ring-fenced national fund, with allocations pegged to objective metrics like local caseloads and cost-of-living indices, must be established. This ensures every court, regardless of local fiscal health, can provide financial subsidies that meaningfully compensate assessors for their time, travel, childcare, and, critically, for lost income or wages—addressing the primary economic disincentive. Concurrently, a clear and powerful standalone statute, the "People's Assessor Safeguards Act," must be enacted. This law would explicitly and criminalize acts of professional retaliation by employers, provide for expedited legal injunctions against intimidation, guarantee state-funded personal safety measures for assessors in sensitive cases, and establish strict protocols for the protection of their personal and family sensitive information. The statute should mandate comprehensive insurance coverage for accidental injury or property damage related to service and establish a specialized, accessible office for legal recourse and support. This robust framework is designed to decisively eliminate the "work-assessor conflict" and alleviate the security concerns that currently suppress participation, particularly in high-stakes or socially divisive cases.

Third, to instill professionalism, maintain morale, and ensure a dynamic, self-renewing assessor corps, the formalization of a merit-based reward system and a clear, equitable exit mechanism is vital. In collaboration with civil service and judicial authorities, a formal regulation should create a tiered national commendation system. This would include awards for distinguished service, excellence in deliberation, and long-term commitment, conferred in public ceremonies to foster a tangible sense of civic honor and social prestige. Conversely, an equally transparent and fair exit mechanism must be codified. This includes straightforward procedures for honorable voluntary resignation after a term, a fair and judicially reviewable process for removal due to misconduct or incapacity, and automatic disqualification following prolonged, unexcused non-performance. This dual system of formal recognition and clear accountability serves to elevate the public stature of the role, incentivize excellence, provide an honorable off-ramp, and uphold the integrity of the institution, thereby enhancing its overall professionalism and public authority.

### **3.3. Precisely Define and Legally Codify the Scope of Adjudicative Authority**

The ultimate effectiveness and credibility of the People's Assessor system are wholly dependent on the establishment of a clear, unambiguous, and legally codified definition of the assessors role, powers, and procedural position within the judicial panel. Prevailing vagueness, which leads to either reticence or overreach, must be surgically replaced with precise, operational guidelines. These guidelines must perform the dual function of empowering substantive, meaningful contribution while clearly demarcating its boundaries, thereby ensuring assessors are fully integrated into the adjudicative machinery as co-decision-makers for defined matters, not as ornamental participants or amateur judges overstepping into pure legal doctrine.

First, rationalizing and legally codifying the scope of assessor participation is fundamental. Secondary legislation, such as detailed implementing regulations under the People's Assessors Law, must provide a precise, positive list of case types mandating assessor panels. This list should be based on objective criteria: the statutory severity of the alleged crime (e.g., all offenses carrying a potential sentence above a defined threshold); the inherent social impact of the case category (e.g., certain environmental crimes, large-scale fraud affecting public welfare); or upon the formal request of the defendant, exercisable as a procedural right. Crucially, the same legislation must impose a mandatory, non-negotiable annual cap on the number of cases any individual assessor may hear. This cap, informed by sociological research on deliberation fatigue and the preservation of lay perspective, is a critical anti-corruption and anti-professionalization tool. It prevents the emergence of a class of semi-professional "court-resident assessors" who might develop habitual deference to judges or case-hardened biases, thereby guaranteeing a constant rotation of fresh, uncynical lay perspectives, which is the very essence of the system's democratic and cognitive value.

Second, for a distinct category of cases marked by profound social impact, extreme factual complexity, or significant legal controversy, the ad-hoc exploration of larger panels must be formalized into a standard, procedurally triggered option. Pilot programs should be mandated to test and refine rules for "Extended Collegiate Panels," typically comprising five or seven total members. The governing principle must be that lay assessors constitute a clear numerical majority in such panels (e.g., four assessors with three judges, or six assessors with three judges). This structural design is deliberate: it amplifies the collective lay voice in the deliberation room, ensuring that the community's conscience and common sense are the dominant, though not unguided, force in rendering the verdict for society's most difficult cases. Implementation guidelines must explicitly codify that in any collegiate panel, the number of assessors shall never be fewer than two, preventing the isolation and psychological marginalization of a single lay member and fostering a more robust internal dialogue among the assessors themselves before engaging with the judges.

Third, the rights that enable substantive participation must be elevated from customary practice to procedurally enshrined guarantees. A statutory "Participation Charter for People's Assessors" should be promulgated. This charter would explicitly guarantee and detail: the right to timely, complete, and continuous pre-trial access to all case files,

evidence lists, and key exhibits via a secure, user-friendly digital portal; the right to submit written questions for witness examination to the presiding judge, who is obligated to pose them barring clear irrelevance or redundancy; and the right to initiate discussion on any point during closed-door deliberations. The trial workflow must be formally refined to include a mandatory, judge-facilitated pre-trial conference dedicated to the assessors. This session would review the case framework, clarify procedural steps, and explain core legal principles, ensuring assessors enter the trial on a prepared and more equal footing. Finally, the state must assume the logistical burden. This involves providing not just technological tools (dedicated terminals, software training) but also clerical and legal research support to help assessors fulfill their duties. This comprehensive support framework is essential to transform their participation from a well-intentioned formal requirement into a genuinely substantive, effective, and dignified judicial function.

## **4. The Relationship between the People's Assessor System and the Reform of the Criminal Procedure System**

### **4.1. The Role of the Peoples Assessor System in Reforming the Criminal Procedure System**

The enhancement and substantive realization of the People's Assessor system is not merely a parallel initiative but a foundational pillar for the successful advancement of the trial-centered reform of China's criminal procedure system. This reform seeks to shift the locus of procedural gravity to the courtroom, and a robust assessor system directly contributes to this goal by augmenting the adjudicative capacity, legitimacy, and societal rootedness of the trial process itself. By systematically empowering and integrating People's Assessors, the intrinsic fairness, procedural integrity, and public credibility of trials are significantly elevated, thereby operationalizing the core principles of democratic oversight and transparency within the adjudicative framework. First, the system acts as a direct conduit for promoting tangible judicial democracy. It transcends symbolic participation by legally mandating the direct involvement of ordinary citizens in the core function of state power: rendering judgment. Granting assessors voting rights equivalent to those of professional judges transforms this participation from a consultative gesture into an exercise of shared sovereign authority, effectively embedding a strand of direct democracy within the judicial branch. This fundamental role in democratizing justice is a central thesis in scholarly works such as the Analysis of China's Peoples Assessor System, which underscores the institutions critical function in making the judiciary more accessible and representative of the popular will. Second, it is instrumental in realizing a more holistic form of judicial justice. Professional judges bring indispensable expertise in legal doctrine and procedure, while assessors contribute the indispensable "common sense" of the community—prevailing social values, everyday lived experience, and collective conscience. This symbiotic relationship creates a more complete evaluative framework. Assessors help ground legal decisions in societal reality, aiding in the clarification of ambiguous facts and ensuring the application of law remains

connected to a shared sense of fairness, thereby leading to verdicts perceived as more legitimate and just. This complementary function is also a key focus of the aforementioned analysis. Third, the system serves as a structural bulwark against judicial corruption and insularity. By design, it dismantles the monopoly of adjudicative power held by a closed professional cohort. The presence of independent laypersons in the deliberation room creates an inherent internal check, disrupting potential collusion and making improper *ex parte* influences vastly more difficult. Furthermore, their very presence bathes the entire trial process in greater light, promoting openness and making the proceedings less opaque, which in itself is a powerful deterrent to misconduct, a point consistently emphasized in evaluations of the systems prophylactic value.

### **4.2. The Peoples Assessor Systems Promotion of Trial-Centered Doctrine**

The reform of the People's Assessor system and the advancement of the trial-centered doctrine are mutually reinforcing and conceptually intertwined projects. A genuinely substantive assessor system is both a prerequisite for and a natural accelerator of "trial-centeredness." For a trial to be the undisputed center where cases are genuinely decided, the participation within it must be real, not ceremonial. Ensuring the deep, substantive engagement of People's Assessors forces the entire trial process to become more robust, evidence-focused, and transparent. First, this integration profoundly enhances judicial credibility and public trust. The infusion of non-professional, community-based perspectives bridges the perceptual gap between a technical legal system and the public it serves. Verdicts that reflect, or are seen to carefully consider, this lay input are more readily accepted as fair and legitimate, reducing societal distrust. Scholars, as noted in the Analysis of China's Peoples Assessor System, argue that this legitimizing function is perhaps one of the systems most significant contributions, as it builds the social capital necessary for judicial authority to function effectively. Second, it directly drives the reform of archaic trial methods and mentalities. The legal requirement for assessors to perform substantive duties necessitates the abandonment of previous perfunctory practices. It forces the strengthening of collegiate panels as true deliberative bodies, mandates meaningful pre-trial preparation and disclosure so assessors can follow proceedings, and transforms trials from events where evidence is merely presented to forums where it is actively examined and debated. This systemic pressure to make trials comprehensible and engaging for laypersons inherently advances the goals of the trial-centered reform, moving away from a reliance on extra-judicial case files and towards vivified courtroom practice, a transformation highlighted in academic commentary.

### **4.3. The Interaction between the Peoples Assessor System and the Reform of the Criminal Procedure System**

The modernization of the People's Assessor system cannot occur in a vacuum; it demands precise, strategic coordination with other concurrent strands of criminal procedure reform. Its effectiveness is contingent on harmonization with reforms to the evidence system, the defense counsel system, and pre-trial procedures, forming a coherent progressive whole. First, this requires a unified and coherent arrangement of judicial authority across all trial levels. The redefinition of the

assessors role must be synchronized with the overarching restructuring of criminal procedure. A clear, consistent legal definition of their scope of authority—particularly in differentiating, as much as practicable, their focus on fact-finding from the judges primary role in law application—must apply equally in standard three-member panels and the larger seven-member panels used for major cases. This consistency, as explored in works like the Analysis of the Path for Adjusting the Scope of Authority of Peoples Assessors in the Jury System, is essential to prevent confusion and ensure the systems predictable operation. Second, a well-functioning assessor system actively promotes the refinement and maturation of broader litigation rules. The practical need to facilitate meaningful assessor participation creates pressure to rationalize and improve procedural rules. Evidence presentation must become clearer; examination and cross-examination must become more rigorous; and judges instructions must become more precise. Furthermore, the constant presence of lay scrutiny acts as a check on unconscious professional bias, encouraging greater judicial neutrality and procedural regularity. Thus, the assessor system is not just a beneficiary of procedural reform but an active agent for its improvement, a virtuous cycle noted in scholarly discussions on the systems value and its potential for further refinement.

## 5. Conclusion

In conclusion, the comprehensive reform and substantive revitalization of the People's Assessor system is not merely an optional or parallel initiative, but rather a fundamental and indispensable component for the successful realization of the trial-centered reform of the criminal procedure system. These two reform projects are intrinsically synergistic and mutually reinforcing. The effectiveness of the trial-centered doctrine, which seeks to anchor the entire truth-seeking and adjudicative process within the courtroom, is predicated on the presence of an engaged, competent, and empowered body of lay participants. Conversely, the trial-centered framework provides the necessary procedural and evidentiary rigor that enables meaningful lay participation. Therefore, the path forward must involve a concerted and systemic effort to address the core institutional weaknesses that have historically plagued the assessor system.

The strategic blueprint for this revitalization must be multi-pronged and executed with sustained commitment. First, establishing a transparent, equitable, and statistically robust selection mechanism is paramount to create a truly representative pool of assessors, moving beyond tokenism to genuine societal inclusion. Second, implementing a mandatory, rigorous, and ongoing curriculum for legal and procedural training is essential to bridge the knowledge gap and empower assessors with the confidence and skill necessary for substantive deliberation. Third, and most critically, the adjudicative authority of People's Assessors must be clearly, unambiguously, and consistently codified in

law and procedure. This involves precisely defining their role in fact-finding, delineating it from pure legal application where appropriate, and guaranteeing their rights to pre-trial preparation, in-court inquiry, and decisive votes in collegial panels. Only through such clarifications can the detrimental phenomena of ceremonial presence be eradicated.

By systematically implementing these reforms, the quality, efficacy, and legitimacy of People's Assessors participation will be fundamentally enhanced. This transformation will, in turn, generate powerful positive externalities for the entire criminal procedure system. It will inject greater transparency and public scrutiny into trial proceedings, foster verdicts that resonate with both legal standards and societal conceptions of justice, and strengthen the system's inherent checks and balances. Consequently, this will decisively promote the evolution of criminal procedure towards a model that is more just, transparent, democratically legitimate, and ultimately, more trusted by the public it serves.

Looking to the future, the endeavor must not waver. Continuous assessment, piloting of innovative models (such as enlarged panels for complex cases), and the deepening of these reforms are imperative. The goal must be to ensure that the People's Assessor system evolves from a well-intentioned principle into a fully operationalized pillar of modern justice. By doing so, it will unequivocally play a greater and more decisive role in criminal proceedings, thereby making an irreplaceable contribution to the overarching and perpetual mission of realizing substantive judicial justice.

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