T02P33 / Comparative Public Policy: An Asian Perspective

Topic : T02 / Comparative Public Policy sponsored by Journal of Comparative Policy Analysis

Chair : Wilson Wai Ho Wong (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The main theme of the panel is comparative public policy from an Asian perspective which tries to focus on public policy and administration issues affecting Asian countries in a collaborative and globalized world. With this them in mind, a main objective of this panel is to use Asia as a context for generating useful knowledge in comparative public policy which can be adopted for addressing policy problems by taking into consideration of differences across regions. Its concern matches the theme of the conference very well which recognizes and appreciates the importance and relevancy of the fact that public policy and administration is now functioning in a collaborative manner between government and non-governmental actors which must integrate between a regional context, which is Asia in this panel, and a globalized environment. In doing so, it would like to adopt a comparative perspective with an area focus of Asia to examine how actors, including cities, states and city-states, in Asia are managing their problems, reforms, and concerns in public policy and management in this increasingly challenging and complex environment.

With globalization, comparative public policy is a growing and revitalizing field in the study of public administration and public management. By being comparative, it is not arguing from an extreme angle that Asia is so unique that all Westernized and imported theories are totally irrelevant. It would like to draw attention to the importance of contextual factors of each country and region which inevitably lead to a gap, which is not necessarily unbridgeable, between existing generic theories and the theory and practice of that particular country and region. A comparative perspective is both necessary and desirable for building more comprehensive theories and promoting better practice, which actually have implications beyond Asia on all regions, including the West, the origin of many major theories of public administration and management being applied around the globe. In short, it would like to create public policy knowledge that can bridge regions by clearly identifying contextual variables and understanding their impact on our subject of concern rather than creating some unique knowledge about Asia which cannot travel outside the region.

The panel aims to provide a good opportunity for scholars and experienced practitioners with knowledge and interest on this area to present their findings for promoting cross-facilitation of knowledge. Consistent with the conference theme of being interdisciplinary, the panel encourages paper submissions from all disciplines, including economics, political science, public administration, and law, that are adopting an comparative approach with an area focus on Asia. Topics which explain and examine the theory and practice gaps between Asia and the West, identify the contextual factors leading to those gaps, and importantly, make suggestions for better theory building and integration and more useful practice are particularly welcome.

CALL FOR PAPERS

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The panel aims to provide a good opportunity for scholars and experienced practitioners with knowledge and interest on this area and would like to present their works to attain the above objectives of the panel. The panel

encourages paper submissions from all disciplines, including economics, political science, public administration, and law, that are adopting a comparative approach with an area focus on Asia.

T02P33 / Comparative Public Policy: An Asian Perspective

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Session 1

Thursday, June 29th 10:30 to 12:30 (Li Ka Shing LKS 1 - 2)

Discussants

Shamsul Haque (Department of Political Science, National University of Singapore)

Inclusive Development, Chinese Style

Hongchuan Wang (Tsinghua University)
Shaojie Zhou (Tsinghua University)

Since the economic reforms and opening launched in 1978, China has achieved a high economic growth for nearly four decades as the largest developing and transition economy in the world, from a low-income country to an upper-middle income country. Against the rapid economic growth, China's development inequality is widely recognized. For example, income inequality extensively exists between the rural and urban areas and between the coastal and inland regions. The Gini coefficient, as one conventional measure of income inequality, is higher than 0.45, which is regarded as an alarming level. In addition, along with the high-income inequality, the significant development disparity in various social programs, such as the provision of education and health care. Despite that the high development disparity in China exists for a long time, China has made great progress in poverty reduction, and the development disparity also declined substantially in the past decade, such as income inequality and social programs, i.e., inclusive development. Traditionally, the international community on China studies mainly concerns with China rapid economic growth and tremendous social changes, the inclusive development with Chinese characteristics received less academic concern comparatively. This study aims to present explanations of China's inclusive development and three questions are addressed, including the incentives that China adopts an inclusive development strategy, what the main policy regimes are for the inclusive development and how these policies towards inclusive development are implemented.

This study develops an analytical framework based on political economy from the intercalations of economic growth, social tensions and policy settings towards building a harmonious society. First, in the context of economic growth and social transformation, the ideology of Chinese Communist Party (CCP) aims to build the socialist with Chinese characteristics generates the strong political will to mitigate the social tensions generated by the dramatic social changes along with rapid economic growth and the dissolution of traditional welfare institution in the planned economy through the inclusive development outlook. Second, this study reviews the policy settings for inclusive development from multi-dimensions, including poverty reduction, social programs, and coordination development policies. Third, this study investigates some institutional factors that affect the effectiveness of inclusive development policies from the political capacity and the policy implementation. Finally, this study concludes with the prospects and challenges of inclusive development in the future.

Convergence with Divergence in the Policy Diffusion, Learning and Transfer: Agencification, Quasi-autonomous Agencies and the Urban Renewal Authority in Hong Kong

Wilson Wai Ho Wong (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)
Hau-yin, Raymond YUEN (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

This paper uses agencification as a focal point to examine the dilemma of convergence and divergence in policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer. More precisely, it is argued in this paper that many practices of public policy and management are only converging at an "idea" level and the key elements and effects are often pointing to the exact opposite direction of divergence which is a manifestation of the contextual factors in a local context. Many international practices in public policy and management are spreading and being adopted around the globe through the process of policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer. At a glance, this seems to represent a global trend of international convergence. However, a deeper investigation of the actual implementation and

mechanisms would reveal a very different story and contextual factors, including political, economic and social settings, history, culture and tradition, which varies significantly across countries and regions, often play a key role in explaining such gap.

The theory of agencification is selected to develop the argument and the case of the Urban Renewal Authority in Hong Kong is used for testing and illustration. Hong Kong was once seen as a pure form of ‘administrative state’, with executive power being concentrated in the bureaucracy. However, quasi-autonomous agencies, with statutory power, a long historical pedigree and deep-rooted embeddedness into the governing system, have been established extensively. Quasi-autonomous agency as an institutional choice is an actively pursued and emerging research area. In the public management literature, the creation of specialized, autonomous and contractual agencies is advocated by New Public Management (NPM) in the name of efficiency. NPM argues that the use of agencies has become an ‘international trend’ for the public sector reform. Yet, the extent to which the idea of agency is adopted in actual practice remains doubtful, since policy transfer is usually filtered by functional and political needs of the domestic political-administrative context of a particular regime. This research tests the ‘international convergence’ hypothesis through the theory of agencification by mapping the Urban Renewal Authority in Hong Kong with the ‘tripod model’ as a benchmark for assessing the formal-legal structure of the quasi-autonomous agencies with regards to the three core features of an ideal-typical NPM agency, i.e., disaggregation, autonomization and contractualization. The study in this paper should have implications on the theory of policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer. More specifically, through highlighting the level of divergence under the vague and ambiguous umbrella of convergence, to challenge some of their core assumptions of policy transfer, policy diffusion and policy learning, It questions whether convergence as propelled by forces such as globalization are valid or it is no more than a mirage hiding the latent contextual factors, which still suggests the persisting dominance of forces of localization. This paper should match the central theme of the panel well to generate useful knowledge in comparative public policy which can be adopted for addressing policy problems by taking into consideration of differences across regions.

Capacity for Enforcement: Beijing's Food Safety Regulatory Reform

Wai Hang Yee (University of Hong Kong)

Regulatory scholars are paying increasing attention to enforcement issues in developing countries. This study contends that a main source of enforcement challenge in developing countries concerns the organizational and systemic capacities of the regulatory system, and that deficits in these capacities affect the effectiveness of various enforcement strategies. The study elaborates these relationships and illustrates them with a case study of China’s recent food regulatory reform. Through interviews with frontline regulators from 5 sub-district/township-level regulatory offices in Beijing, the study found that capacity deficits such as inadequate personnel and resource supports, weak professionalism, unfavorable performance evaluation criteria, internal and external coordination problems, biased media-reporting and the abuse of the citizen-complaint system had undermined the enforcement effectiveness of these offices and their use of various enforcement strategies. The findings support our contention and provide valuable lessons for improving the reform.

Providing Healthcare for an Ageing East Asia: A Comparative Study on Finance and Capacity

Mengqi QIN (Saw Swee Hock School of Public Health, NUS)
Wing Kit Chan (School of Government, Sun Yat-sen University)

As part of the Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), all UN Members including East Asia (Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore, China, Hong Kong) have agreed to try to achieve universal health coverage (UHC) by 2030. Making healthcare service affordable, accessible and high quality for people in need is the main characteristics of UHC and therefore the aim of the policy making towards it. The growing number of elderly has the largest demand for healthcare among all age groups especially in East Asia. As a unique region in the world sharing similar policy background in culture, tradition, population structure and economic development etc., East Asian economies are worth a comparison in their policies responding to the growing demand in healthcare service for elderly. This study will use several standardized indicators that are internationally recognized and comparable across boarders for policy performance comparison. Two research questions are to be answered addressing our topic: firstly, how does healthcare service for elderly being paid in East Asia countries; secondly, how is the healthcare service capacity for elderly in East Asia countries? To be specific, health cost sharing arrangement as an indicator will be used to answer the first question; basic hospital access and health worker density proposed by WHO for assessing essential health services will be used to answer the second one. To provide an comprehensive examination of these questions, basic information of East Asian countries such as economic development, population structure, elderly burden of disease will be introduced, while healthcare payment system including health/social insurance, and public health expenditure and healthcare service including basic hospital access and health worker density respectively will be elaborated. By carrying out a comparison study to answer

two research questions raised, a conclusion and policy implication will be provided.

Key words:

Aging, health insurance, health service, East Asia, universal health coverage

Are Policy Diffusion, Policy Learning and Policy Transfer Real? Explaining the Divergence behind Convergence in Global Public Policy and Management Practices

Wilson Wai Ho Wong (The Chinese University of Hong Kong)

In the literature of policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer, it often perceives most government and public organizations are taking real and positive steps in improving themselves to meeting a global standard of performance in various desirable aspects, including efficiency, effectiveness, accountability and transparency. Under this perspective, governments around the globe are converging to a narrow range of forms and patterns. However, there are also theories, arguments and evidence to question this view seriously. This counter argument goes beyond the typical criticism by theories such as institutional isomorphism that the adoption is done for purposes other than the stated goals such as efficiency. It goes to the more extreme end that there is no real adoption at all and adoption can be done only at the “idea” level. This paper uses agencification as a focal point to examine the dilemma of convergence and divergence in policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer. More precisely, it is argued in this paper that many practices of public policy and management are only converging at a minimum level and the key elements and effects are often pointing to the exact opposite direction of divergence which is a manifestation of the contextual factors in a local context. Many international practices in public policy and management are spreading and being adopted around the globe through the process of policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer. At a glance, this seems to represent a global trend of international convergence. However, a deeper investigation of the actual implementation and mechanisms would reveal a very different story and contextual factors, including political, economic and social settings, history, culture and tradition, which varies significantly across countries and regions, often play a key role in explaining such gap. In this paper, through highlighting the level of divergence under the vague and ambiguous umbrella of convergence, it challenges some of their core assumptions supporting the core theories of policy transfer, policy diffusion and policy learning, It questions whether convergence as propelled by forces such as globalization are valid or it is no more than a mirage hiding the latent contextual factors, which still suggests the persisting dominance of forces of localization. The theory of agencification is selected to develop the argument and the case of Hong Kong is used for testing and illustration. With the case study of Hong Kong and a critical review and integration of the related literature, the study in this paper should set up a new framework to bridge the gap between the existing theories of policy diffusion, policy learning and policy transfer and the real-world practices. This paper should match the central theme of the panel well to generate useful knowledge in comparative public policy which can be adopted for addressing policy problems by taking into consideration of differences across regions.