

T07P07 / Policy Advice and Policy Advocacy in China

Topic : T07 / Policy Design, Policy Analysis, Expertise and Evaluation

Chair : Xufeng Zhu (Tsinghua University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

As topics intensely discussed since the 1960s, policy advice and policy advocacy have been the essential topics in public policy and political life in Western liberal democracies. It has been traditionally believed that policy advice and advocacy are insufficient and inefficient in China. Since 2013 the Chinese top leadership has started to officially promote the establishment of “New Style Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics”. In this context, think tanks, and other related intellectual organizations, have been a hot topic in China. Recently, policy advice and advocacy have become less politically sensitive than before. However, the mechanisms and dynamics need to be further explored. What are the strategies and methods these policy actors use to promote policy ideas? What are the reasons and consequences of policy advice and policy advocacy in China? What are the determining factors that facilitate or obstruct the success of policy advice and advocacy in China? Empirical quantitative and qualitative researches on this topic are welcome in the panel.

CALL FOR PAPERS

Papers that address any aspects of policy advice and policy advocacy in China are welcome. Topics may include but are not limited to:

- Institutional settings and behavioral strategies in policy advice and policy advocacy.
- The policy analysis professions (experts, scientists, entrepreneurs, NGOers, NPC delegates and others).
- The relationship between the two domains of policy analysis and decision making.
- Roles of consultants, think tanks & evidence-based policy making.
- Roles of interest groups in policy advocacy.
- What are the reasons and consequences of policy advice and policy advocacy in China?

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Session 1

Friday, June 30th 08:15 to 10:15 (Block B 3 - 5)

Discussants

Xun Wu (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology)

How does policy advocacy drive a major policy change in an authoritarian regime? The case of national birth control policy in China (1980–2015)

Wei Li (Huazhong University of Science and Technology)

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

Using a longitudinal study of how policy advocacy drives a major change in China's national birth control policy, we find that the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) can better explain policy stability and change in an authoritarian regime by incorporating the role of interests. The dominant coalition can use its power and resources to hinder the policy-makers' learning and constrain the minority coalitions' influence on policy decisions. The governing party is bounded by its cognition of changes and of how these changes relate to its interests. Policy-oriented learning across belief systems is more likely when minority advocacy coalitions seek to convince the governing party that alternative policy beliefs benefit its short-term political interests while not threatening the legitimacy of its governance.

China's advocacy groups activities: overview of groups' inside and outside lobbying strategies

Emina Popovic (Freie Universitaet Berlin)

While we know relatively a lot about advocacy groups' activities and their importance in democratic political regimes, their role in China is much less clear, as their political activities and influence on a policy-making process are vastly underresearched. Most of the previous related studies only touch upon interest representation while focusing on decision-making in China (e.g. Wang, 2007; Yadav, 2008; Mertha, 2009; Zhou Guanghui 2014), Chinese political economy (Kennedy, 2005), consultative authoritarianism (e.g. Tweets 2013; Lin Shangli, 2014; Truex 2014) etc. On the other hand, studies that tackle advocacy groups mainly focus on normative implications of their influence. Yet, there are few recent studies, which indicate that some of the advocacy groups in China try hard to represent their members and to have their voice heard in the policy-making process. However, very little is known about how those groups influence policy-making, what channels they utilize and what they offer in exchange for access. This study is thus designed to provide better insight into political activities of both citizen groups and business groups and to set the stage for testing plausible hypotheses on interest representation in China. To grow the understanding of groups' contacts with the state institutions, exchange of information among different advocates and their endeavors to mobilize public and influence public opinion, altogether 65 interviews have been conducted. Interviews were focused on inquiring how advocacy groups approach policy-makers, whether they supply them with technical and political information and whether they represent citizen views and policy positions. Except on inside lobbying strategies, groups were asked about their relationship with Medias and the employment of the tactics that increase media and general public attention. An analysis of the interviews reveals extensive use of groups' resources as access goods in exchange for participation in policy making by both types of advocacy groups. However, business groups seem to rely more on inside lobbying while acting as the main supplier of expertise and technical knowledge, whereas for citizen groups, backing by the public is perceived as crucial to accomplishing advocacy goals. The findings suggest that using some of the interest representation concepts and theories, primary information-access exchange logic developed in the Western societies can be useful for explaining China's advocacy groups' political activities.

The problems of modern heritage conservation in China: evidence of policy implementation gaps from Guangzhou

Pui Yi Angela Lee (The University of Hong Kong)

Y.S. Frederick Lee (The University of Hong Kong)

A Nationalist-era vernacular building located on Jinling Terrace, Shishu Road of Yuexiu District in Guangzhou, China was half-demolished in May 2012. After a one-year hiatus triggered by intense media attention and popular concern over this incident, this building was nevertheless completely dismantled in June 2013. Local media then made use of the demolition incident to galvanize the public's attention on the importance of conserving Guangzhou's Modern Heritage assets. The mayor responded to the uproar by adopting a number of politically expedient measures to soothe an agitated public. Such hastily formulated actions, however, have led to unexpected consequences that are, ironically, detrimental to the cause of heritage conservation.

This demolition incident has helped reveal some major policy implementation gaps concerning Modern Heritage conservation in China. This paper will account for the causes and implications of these policy implementation gaps. The role of different policy players—including the experts, local media, planners and the city mayor—in the heritage policy-making and implementation process will be examined. Reasons of experts' failure to make use of their specialized knowledge to facilitate evidence-based policy making will be discussed. A case study approach was adopted, with in-depth interviews conducted to collect primary data to reconstruct the case history. Eighteen interviews were conducted between 2014 and 2016 with 22 informants working in the Municipal Planning Bureau, the Division of Cultural Relics of Guangzhou Administration of Culture, the Cultural Bureau of Yuexiu District, as well as local heritage experts and researchers, journalists and heritage advocates.

I will argue that Guangzhou's heritage experts, in the hastily organized policy formulation phase, had deferred to political pressures emanating from both the mayor and the general public. They, not unwittingly, by-passed an essential step in developing Guangzhou's selection criteria for Modern Heritage. Without the benefits of a professionally-determined cutoff point to decide what should be counted as "historic" or "heritage", many old buildings of questionable conservation value were designated in a haphazard heritage designation exercise. This has led to an impression of gain in the form of a larger reported number of Historic Buildings put under statutory protection. This numerical addition is, however, counter-productive to Guangzhou's long-term conservation efforts because limited resources needed to conserve the most-at-risk heritage assets have been misallocated and that the general public, seeing the consequences of such a misallocation, will start to question, instead of support, future heritage conservation initiatives.

Embracing Scientific Decision Making: The Rise of Think Tank Policy in China

Xufeng Zhu (Tsinghua University)

Embracing Scientific Decision Making: The Rise of Think Tank Policy in China

Lan XUE, Xufeng ZHU, Wanqu HAN

Abstract: Increasingly complex domestic and international affairs have pushed the Chinese government to seek think tanks' intellectual support for "scientific policy making". While a number of authors have explored the mechanisms through which Chinese think tanks influence policy making, little is known about how the Chinese central authorities gradually came to accept and to promote the idea to construct "New-Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics" (NTTCC), i.e. the current policy line on domestic think tank development. Against the backdrop of the evolution of think tanks in China since the beginning of economic reform and opening-up in 1978, this paper traces the development of the new policy line on think tanks and its underlying ideas. The concept of think tanks got introduced into Chinese academic discourse in the 1990s, which also saw the start of studies on such organizations in China. Scholars increasingly considered how Chinese think tanks could explore their own distinct developmental approach, rather than just following Western templates, while global think tank rankings encouraged Chinese domestic think tanks compete with each other. The Global Financial Crisis also made the Chinese leadership realize the shortage of high quality policy analysis by existing think tanks. A window of opportunity for a new policy on think tanks finally opened up when new President Xi Jinping embraced in 2013 a research report on think tanks by the Development Research Center of the State Council. By late 2015, the new policy had led to the selection of 25 'pilot top think tanks' endowed with substantial top-up government funding in support of their research.