P09 / The Policy Process in China: Formulation, Implementation, and Evaluation in Contemporary Governance

Topic : POLICY, POLITICS AND POLITICAL REGIME

Chair : Yu Du (Jinan University)

GENERAL OBJECTIVES, RESEARCH QUESTIONS AND SCIENTIFIC RELEVANCE

The policy process in China provides an insightful perspective into how public policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated within a unique socio-political system. This panel aims to explore these aspects by focusing on the factors influencing decision-making, the complexities of policy implementation, and the mechanisms of outcome assessment. Through examining each phase of the policy cycle, the panel will uncover how governance in China operates, reflecting the interplay between central authority, local actors, and emerging societal demands. The study of policy-making in China has gained significant attention due to the country's rapid economic transformation and social change. Historically, the policy process in China has been viewed as highly centralized, with the Communist Party of China (CPC) playing a dominant role. However, contemporary research reveals a far more intricate system characterized by both top-down directives and bottom-up experimentation. In addition, the growing emphasis on pilot programs and experimental governance highlights an adaptive policy approach that combines control with flexibility, allowing the government to manage complexity and uncertainty in an evolving environment. The research question guiding this panel is: How do various factors shape the policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation processes within the context of contemporary Chinese governance? To address this question, the panel will explore several hypotheses: (1) Policy formulation in China is characterized by a hybrid approach, blending centralized planning with local-level experimentation. This hypothesis suggests that while the central government sets overarching priorities, local governments have substantial discretion in adapting policies to suit regional contexts; (2) Successful policy implementation relies on incentive alignment, particularly through cadre evaluation systems that tie officials' career advancement to policy outcomes. This highlights the importance of compliance mechanisms and the performance-based incentives that drive implementation at the local level; (3) Policy evaluation serves dual purposes of accountability and legitimacy, where the emphasis often leans towards showcasing positive achievements to reinforce the CPC's legitimacy, which may lead to selective assessments and overreporting of success. These hypotheses will be contextualized through empirical examples from key policy areas such as environmental regulation, poverty alleviation, public health, etc. The scientific relevance of this panel lies in its potential to enhance our understanding of public policy processes in China's context, where governance combines central authority with a level of local adaptability. By drawing on established theoretical frameworks and presenting case studies from contemporary China, the panel aims to bridge the gap between abstract models and real-world policy practices. This approach will contribute valuable insights for scholars and practitioners seeking to comprehend the complexities of governance in China, providing lessons that may be applicable in other contexts of rapid socio-economic transformation.

CALL FOR PAPERS

We invite paper proposals for our panel, The Policy Process in China: Formulation, Implementation, and Evaluation in Contemporary Governance, to be held at the IPPA. This panel seeks to explore the unique dynamics of policy-making in China, where governance operates through a blend of centralised authority and localised adaptation. We encourage scholars to submit papers that address how public policies are formulated, implemented, and evaluated within the Chinese political system, focusing on the interplay between central government directives, local experimentation, and the evolving needs of society.

Potential topics include, but are not limited to:

The hybrid nature of policy formulation in China, where national priorities are set centrally, yet significant local autonomy exists for adapting these policies.
The role of incentive structures, such as cadre evaluation systems, in shaping successful policy implementation at local levels.
The dual function of policy evaluation, which serves both accountability purposes and contributes to reinforcing the Communist Party of China's (CPC) legitimacy, including case studies of selective reporting or

performance-based assessments.
We welcome empirical studies that draw on specific policy areas, such as environmental regulation, poverty alleviation, public health, and more. Papers that offer comparative perspectives or insights from other rapidly transforming socio-political contexts are also highly encouraged.

Submissions should engage with relevant theoretical frameworks, aiming to enhance our understanding of how China's governance combines central control with local flexibility. By contributing to this panel, the authors will help illuminate how contemporary Chinese policy-making responds to complexity and uncertainty, providing lessons for broader applications in public policy analysis.

We look forward to your contributions to a rigorous and insightful discussion of China’s policy processes.

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Session 1

Thursday, July 3rd 10:15 to 12:15 (SME-G2)

Discussants

Adam LIU (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Rongxin LI (Jinan University)

Fatigue in Responsiveness: Information Capacity and Local Governance in China

Rongxin LI (Jinan University)

This paper critically examines the phenomenon of “responsiveness fatigue” within local governments in China, catalyzed by the digital transformation of governance. Through advanced data collection and surveillance systems, the Chinese government has significantly enhanced its capacity to respond to public demands. However, this increased responsiveness has produced unintended consequences, particularly for grassroots governments. Drawing on the concept of “pressured governance,” this study explores how grassroots autonomy has been eroded by the top-down imposition of public demands, resulting in strained capacities and rising governance fatigue. By leveraging vast streams of unfiltered public complaints through platforms such as the 12345 hotline, grassroots officials face a dual burden of addressing these demands while simultaneously adhering to directives from higher authorities. This paper investigates how these conflicting pressures contribute to local governments’ diminishing capacity to process information effectively, leading to strategic and evasive forms of responsiveness. Furthermore, the study draws parallels between China’s governance challenges and the broader global discourse on “democratic fatigue,” examining the sustainability of a high-demand, high-response model in an authoritarian context. In doing so, the paper highlights the tension between public participation and the limited flexibility of local governments, raising critical questions about the future of governance efficiency and legitimacy in China’s evolving political landscape.

Uncovering the Black Box of Bureaucratic Formalism in China's Policy Process: A Survey Experiment Design

Chunyan RAN (Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, Hong Kong, China)

In the context of China's political re-centralization, bureaucratic formalism has become a crucial issue that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of policy implementation. This study is dedicated to exploring its diversity and complexity through an in-depth theoretical framework and a rigorous empirical approach.

I construct a theoretical framework integrating structural and individual perspectives, with a focus on three key dimensions: Visibility, Salience, and Performativity. Visibility, a structural factor, reflects the extent of superior monitoring over bureaucrats' actions. High Visibility may prompt bureaucrats to either act more cautiously or resort to bureaucratic formalism behaviors for a positive impression, while low Visibility could lead to inefficiencies. Salience, also a structural element, refers to the temporary significance of a policy or task. High-salience policies draw more political attention, and the varying perceptions of salience among different actors can trigger bureaucratic formalism tendencies. Performativity, an individual-centered dimension, represents the performance level of bureaucrats during policy implementation. High Performativity might be accompanied by an emphasis on image-building, and low Performativity, resulting from insufficient capabilities or motivation, can contribute to bureaucratic formalism.

For the research method, I employ a survey experimental vignette design involving 300 civil servants in

China. This design enables us to create and present a series of scenarios based on different combinations of the three dimensions. By doing so, it's allowed to observe and analyze how these dimensions influence bureaucratic behavior in policy implementation. The independent variables are the levels of Visibility, Salience, and Performativity, and the dependent variable is bureaucratic formalism, measured by indicators such as excessive focus on procedures, deviation from policy objectives, and perfunctory work attitudes. Additionally, I control for personal, organizational, and policy-related factors to enhance the validity of our findings.

Data analysis will involve descriptive statistics to provide an overview of the data, correlation analysis to explore the relationships between variables, and regression analysis to determine the impact of the three dimensions on bureaucratic formalism. I expect that different levels of Visibility, Salience, and Performativity will interact in complex ways, leading to diverse manifestations of bureaucratic formalism.

This study is expected to contribute to a deeper understanding of bureaucratic formalism in China's political re-centralization context. The research findings can offer practical suggestions for policymakers to develop more targeted strategies to mitigate bureaucratic formalism and improve the overall governance quality.

The Political Economy of Bank Regulation in China

Adam LIU (LKY School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore)

Many see mounting local government debt and the faltering real estate sector as China’s economic Achilles heels. That is only superficially correct. Both are ultimately linked to the same, more fundamental problem: poorly regulated banks that are the source of local debt and housing boom. It’s mind-boggling that, until recent years, many Chinese banks rarely received any regulatory warning or punishment despite massive malpractices. Why? Leveraging the universe of bank punishment records in China (2003-2021) and interviews with Chinese regulators, bankers and officials, I provide a preliminary answer: Before 2015, Chinese leaders purposely sacrificed financial regulatory effectiveness to boost growth, and local political interventions in regulation made things worse. Beijing’s current efforts to ramp up regulatory pressure over the banking system is a Sisyphean battle—it’s impossible to credibly commit to both effective bank regulation and bank-financed growth model.

How to Understand Innovation Policy Governance? Policy Process in China and the European Union from an Institutional Perspective

Marek ?wistak (Jagiellonian University Cracow)

The paper examines the governance of innovation policy in China and the European Union (EU), focusing on how different governance structures impact policy formulation, implementation, and evaluation. It aims to assess how institutional configurations and governance modes shape innovation policy outcomes in these two economic systems.

Innovation appears to be a key element of the competitiveness of individual economies. There is a need for continuous improvement of products, services, processes because of technological developments, changes in consumer preferences and increasing interaction of global markets in order to increase competitiveness. The central role in innovation processes is played by innovation policy, which is a strategic instrument of the state to create favourable conditions for the development of innovation. It influences the formation of an environment in which innovations can develop, covering research and development financing aspects, creating cooperation networks, regulations, fiscal policy, and promoting education.

The paper focuses on following question: How do governance structures in China and the EU support or hinder innovation policy, and what lessons can be drawn from their comparative approaches? The research employs a comparative analysis framework based on governance theory, specifically examining governance modes across six dimensions: legal bindingness, implementation flexibility, regulatory focus, actor involvement, governance hierarchy, and locus of authority. It synthesizes findings from policy documents, academic literature, and case studies to identify key similarities and differences.

The findings highlight fundamental differences in innovation policy governance between China and the EU. China’s governance model is centralized, characterized by strong state intervention, rigid regulatory mechanisms, and a focus on strategic industries identified in long-term national plans. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) plays a dominant role in directing innovation policy, leveraging top-down activities to allocate resources efficiently. While this approach facilitates rapid decision-making and policy implementation, it also has adaptability and bottom-up innovation dynamics. The EU follows a multi-level governance approach, where policy decisions are shared among European institutions, national governments, and regional authorities. However, the fragmented governance structure can lead to

coordination challenges and policy inconsistencies.

Despite these differences, both China and the EU recognize innovation as a central pillar of economic competitiveness and employ various mechanisms to support research, development, and technological advancement. The study suggests that governance structures must be tailored to socio-political contexts to maximize innovation policy effectiveness. China’s centralized model ensures efficiency in resource allocation, while the EU’s decentralized approach promotes adaptability and stakeholder participation. Understanding these governance dynamics is critical for policymakers seeking to design effective innovation policies in diverse institutional environments. This research contributes to the broader discussion on governance and innovation by highlighting the trade-offs between centralization and decentralization in fostering innovation-driven growth.

The Structural Relationships of the Chinese Rural Land Reform Policy Network —A Social Network Analysis Based on the Rural Reform Pilot Zones

Jindi Yang (Beijing Normal University,China)

Yaxuan Zhou (Beijing Normal University,China)

Hongping Lian (Beijing Normal University)

Faced with increasingly complex land development issues, the functioning of China's rural land system can no longer rely on a single entity. The key to effectively formulating rural land reform policies and enhancing land use efficiency lies in the overall planning and coordination among different entities to harness their collective strength. The structural relationships among participating entities also directly affect the effectiveness of policy implementation in rural land reform.This paper adopts a policy network perspective and applies social network analysis. Based on the data of policy documents related to rural land reform since the 2014 "separation of three rights" reform, a quantitative analysis was conducted on the participating entities, statuses, and the overall and individual network patterns within 546 policy texts from both central and local levels. A mapping of the structural relationships among entities involved in China's rural land reform policies was created, exploring each entity's structural position, distribution, and scope of power within the network.Research findings reveal that the entities involved in the rural land reform policies within China's rural reform pilot zones are diverse. The leading role of the agricultural and rural departments is prominent, with the policy network evolving towards a "multi-polar" trend, gradually forming a new pattern of multi-departmental collaborative participation.The statuses of different entities are relatively equal, with power tending to be dispersed and the network structural relationships being complex; there is a strong degree of policy collaboration.It is recommended to improve the policy participation process of core entities and construct a multi-faceted governance model for the operation of China's rural land reform policies; core entities should actively encourage marginal entities to participate in policy operations. Strengthening the internal coordination among government departments and establishing good collaborative relationships between different sectors are suggested to optimize the structural relationships among entities.