

MIT-Harvard Critical Policy Studies of China

Overarching Theme: 2005-2008

Policy areas to investigate: (1) poverty alleviation; (2) environment and energy; (3) technology & media; (4) reform of state-owned enterprises. We encourage participants to bring the trajectories of gender and ethnic minorities into our discussion of each of the designated policy areas.

Missions

- To build a knowledge interface between those various disciplines in the Humanities, the Social Sciences, and professional schools from the shared angle of our mutual interest in developing an innovative policy studies not confined within the positivist frame of quantitative analysis.
- To build up a knowledge interface between scholars and policy makers and analysts from the PRC. Through structured discussions, we hope to influence the perception of both groups (policy makers and scholars) on three sets of larger issues: (i) governance; (ii) China's role in trans-boundary Asian development policies, and (iii) China's possible contributions to international policy regimes.
- To explore new critical paradigms in Chinese Studies through our exploration of the interface between policies studies and the studies of Chinese history, culture, society, politics, and economy. Critical policy studies defined in our scope has thus far been a missing link in Chinese studies.

¹This is a multi-year & a multi-layered project in terms of its organization, mission statements, and research agendas.

Overarching theme for 2005-2008: "Western Problem Consciousness and Chinese Problems" (西方问题意识与中国问题)

2005-2006 annual theme: The "Public" and "Private" Divide in the Reform Policies of the PRC

2006-2007 annual theme: The Impact of the International Development Aid Organizations on Policy Making and Policy Discourses in the PRC

2007-2008 annual theme: Inequalities and Social Justice

Organizing principle: Each annual theme will serve as the conceptual frame within which discussions of specific policy issues will take place. Frame issues need to crosscut with policy issues. We will keep exploring the same policy areas for the next three years although conceptual frames will change year by year.

In addition, each year, there will be a separate panel devoted to the hottest policy debate of the year. For 2005, the forecast says "the fiscal crisis of local governments."

Rationale for "Western Problem Consciousness and Chinese Problems"

1. What are the problems?

Since policy is about problem solving, identifying the right problems (*wenti*) needs to precede our search for the means of solving them.

2. Are "Western" instruments and Western problem consciousness the answer?

There is currently a debate waged in Chinese policy circles and among Chinese academic scholars about the universal value and applicability of Western paradigms to developing countries. One of our collective strength lies in our interest and expertise in questioning foundational categories and paradigmatic thinking. This overarching theme will enable us to pull ourselves right into the heart of the ongoing debate between Chinese policy makers, intellectuals, and policy analysts.

3. What is "western" and what is "Chinese"?

The *wenti yishi* approach invites us to explore the constructed nature of both "Western" and "Chinese" problem consciousness. Is what is propagated as "western" by China's liberal policy makers the "west" as we understand it from the West? Are the "Chinese problems and categories" advocated by China's New Left "culturally specific"? By addressing the problem of Occidentalism and Chinese exceptionalism, we can push the critical trajectory of this project to the fullest.

4. Should the history of policy culture matter to contemporary policy makers?

This inquiry into the constructedness of problem categories will lead us to emphasize the historical evolution of policy culture and major policy categories in China and the West (US and Western Europe). The theme of "Chinese Problem Consciousness" contains within itself the HISTORY question about policy culture and policy categories. Thus, the axis of *gu* vs. *jin* is as important as the axis of *zhong* vs. *xi*.

5. How do we solve problems?

All the above inquiries are raised with the purpose of problem solution. The discussion of policy options for each designated policy area is our primary goal.

2005-2006 Annual Theme

第三空间与公共地域：转轨政策中的“公营”与“私营”之争 “The Third Space of the ‘Commons’ : The Debate on ‘Public’ and ‘Private’ Capital Investment in the Reform Policies of the PRC”

The central policy move toward deregulation is generating a crisis (or an opportunity) for public good provision in every sector. A space is opened up for private and pseudo-private providers to step in and take over responsibilities that used to fall into the hands of public authorities. This conference aims at exploring policy options that may nurture the emergence of **the third space**, an interstitial domain between the “private” and the “state” (which is often conflated in the Chinese context with the “public” or the “collective”). To make the first step toward such a discussion, we will sort out the conceptual overlaps between terms such as the “state” (*guan* 官), the “public” (*gong* 公), and the “private” (*si* 私). We will also examine the conceptual ambiguity of the “commons” in China. Does it refer to state owned property, or privately owned collective property, collectively owned property, or some other hybrid experimental forms?

At this juncture when the provision of public goods (economic, energy and environmental goods, information and cultural public goods) is up for grabs as the result of deregulation policies, it is urgent to delimit the boundaries defining what should and should not be subject to market forces. Participants in this conference will address the boundaries in question. We will examine the basic terms of the creation of a policy environment that would be most conducive to the emergence of such an interstitial space, the “commons.” No matter how we define “common property” in the Chinese context, it is increasingly obvious that collective public goods are being squeezed between state and private appropriation. We need to discuss what kind of roles can state, collective actors, and private actors play in order to ensure the existence and growth of the third space?

We will start the conference with the discussion of the “public” and “private” conceptual divide, or lack of such a divide, in Chinese, European, and American contexts. This exercise will enable us to locate historically contingent models or experiences that had nurtured the rise of common properties. We then move on to the present. We will examine the crisis of public goods delivery in local states side by side with the experimental practices of new rural cooperatives (新合作社实践). The latter movement provides a fertile ground for our discussion of the “third space,” its utopian ideals, promises and problems encountered thus far.

Next, the conference examines the issue of “common” property. Case studies about different sectors are presented. The SOE reform and the controversy evolving around the Lang Xianping Incident is a case in point. The issue of “common” property is also embedded in the policies of Information Technology and cultural industries. In the latter sector, the shifting boundaries between the “public cultural goods” and commodifiable cultural goods result in volatile and often conflicting policies that threw the media and IT sectors into constant disarray. Because bundled rights and mixed investments has been the norm in reform economy, the question of “common” property is often conflated with

“public” ownership in the cultural sector as well as in other economic sectors. It is time for us to distinguish those two concepts from each other and to highlight the question of the “commons.” We explore the elusiveness of the private/public divide and the possibility of the creation of a third space, the commons, for China.

The other two policy domains we examine are poverty alleviation and energy/environment. In each domain, the state is pulling back. Privatization is the going trend. Where the balance is going to fall and how will the notion of “free access” play itself out in those policy contexts are questions we will address.

To sum up, there are several larger issues at stake for participants of this conference: (1) the possibilities of the third space and policy incentives for local states to grow such a space; (2) Which kinds of public goods should be auctioned and which kinds should not be? (3) Some Chinese critics now argue that at issue is not only the privatization of public goods but also the entitlement and increasing legitimation of private capital and private interests to enter the public domains and to redefine the content of public goods (the privatization of education is a case in point). How should we evaluate this process which some called 私人产权社会化? Many argue that such an emerging scenario demands that the state undergo a transformation from the developmental state to a state that protects the third space from being nibbled away by privatization through legislative measures. Yet liberal thinkers argue the opposite: namely, that there is only partial privatization in China and that the state needs to retreat even further rather than intervene. The thematic focus on the “commons” in this conference will shift the current Chinese debate from the public/private divide to the terrain of “communities” and communal needs and actors. Furthermore, we need to ask what public and private actors can do to preserve that space that should not be claimed by either the “state” or “private” interests.

Annual Theme: 2006-2007

国际发展组织之政策话语对中国政策制定的影响
The Impact of International Development Aid Organizations on Policy Discourses and
Policymaking in the PRC

As in many other developing countries, the development policy discourse in China has been strongly affected by the discourse and perspectives of international organizations providing development assistance, including the World Bank Group (World Bank, IMF, IFC), various UN agencies, regional organizations (e.g., Asian Development Bank), and bilateral aid agencies (e.g., CIDA, AID). Along with their financial and technical assistance, those aid organizations have presented recipient countries with development discourses. To some extent the discourses are explicit, enunciated in key policy and strategy documents issued by the aid organizations. The World Bank and the IMF have tended to play the key roles in defining development orthodoxies in the post-World War II world, but others have also been involved in shaping that discourse. To a considerable extent, however, the discourse is a more implicit one, inherent in aid organizations' selection of development priorities, development methods, benchmarks and performance evaluations. The discourse has undoubtedly changed in crucial ways over the decades, reflecting the learning process among aid organizations and their staffs, the emergence of new development challenges, and an ongoing debate fueled by academic and NGO observers.

Whatever the changes and long-term flexibility in the discourse, many smaller recipient countries, with weak economies and weak state structures, have had essentially no choice but to accept the dominant international discourse-du-jour in order to obtain aid or to sustain an aid relationship. For China, however, the larger economy and stronger state system has given the country a better bargaining position, and the discourse has evolved more in dialogic form. At the same time, given the size of loans and the magnitude of technical assistance tendered, as well as the exposure to advanced study in foreign settings on the part of increasing numbers of Chinese in important policy positions, international and bilateral organizations have exerted significant leverage in changing the terms of policy discourses in China, both in the overall development strategy and in the approaches pursued in a host of policy arenas, from environment and health to high tech and financial systems.

Examining the policy roles played by such international and bilateral aid organizations in China therefore offers a superb opportunity to clarify the cultural aspects of policymaking in two key respects:

- 1) We can identify the "best practice" or "conventional wisdom" discourse approaches of aid organizations in comparison to those in the Chinese policy establishment, isolating both the assumptions behind each approach and the ways in which they are expressed;
- 2) By examining changes in both the aid organizations' and the Chinese policy discourses over time, we can analyze the nature of policy-cultural change in

relation to intra-institutional factors, institutional interactions, the outcomes of policies applied, and the ways those outcomes are perceived and/or interpreted.

Researchers in our group will investigate global policy categories and discourses (e.g., cultural planning strategies, poverty reduction, social capital, development, sustainability, empowerment, and women's participation and equity improvement) promoted by international organizations like the World Bank, IMF, and UNESCO. We will examine the ideological impetus for the rise and revision of each of those global policy discourses, examine their impact on PRC's policy programs, and ask whether Western problem consciousness treats "Chinese problems" effectively. If not, where do the gaps exist? How can they be addressed through different policy options? We will examine each of the following policy areas:

- poverty & rural development
- cultural development
- information and communications technology.
- energy and environment
- gender equity
- public health (HIV/AIDS)

Robert Weller has been working on poverty alleviation and environment policies. He examines issues of environmental policy and its implementation, especially in Tianjin. This will include understanding concepts of 'nature and 'environment' as globalizing constructs interacting with indigenous categories, and how such concepts are in flux among various actors (urban residents, 'floating population, policy-makers, bureaucrats).

Tani Barlow, Margaret Woo, Tan Shen, and a team of women scholars are interested in addressing global paradigms on women's empowerment. Woo has been conducting research on the Marriage Law; and both Tan and Barlow on issues related to female laborers and female migration. We hope to link up to a research group based at Zhejiang University which is currently working on women's role in town development and the advancement of rural women in urban planning, town government, and land management.

Jing Wang and Tim Oakes will conduct research on the impact of UNESCO seminal Our Creative Diversity (The World Commission on Culture and Development, 1995) on provincial and county governments' cultural development strategies. The notion that "culture is understood as the basis of development" was picked up later by the World Bank which promotes cultural development paradigms by stressing the convertibility of cultural capital into economic capital. Policies such as enhancing local cultural identities, broadening participation in cultural life; and promoting international cultural cooperation have been followed by local states in the PRC.

Edward Steinfeld and Edward Cunningham will start a project on policy options for Chinese energy plant managers. This will be a project in collaboration with the MIT Industrial Performance Center. The Center is dedicated to the study of industries in the

United States and throughout the world. They will be working to observe and analyze “strategic, technological, and organizational developments in a broad range of industries and their implications for society and the global economy.” Steven Lewis, a Rice-University based collaborator of ours, has been conducting research on Chinese energy policies and the traffic of policy compradors between the US and the PRC.

Kate Hartford has been researching the evolving strategies and processes of "informationization" (development and application of advanced information and communications technologies, or ICTs) in China, at both the national and local levels. Her project for this workshop will focus on the evolution of concepts of ICTs and their role in broader economic and social change processes, comparing the strategic policy statements and aid approaches of international organizations (particularly the World Bank and the United Nations), with the policy statements and strategies of the Chinese national and local states. In a policy arena where the dominant discourses on both sides have changed quite fundamentally since the 1980s, to what extent is there a convergence of discourse and to what extent are the same terms being deployed with very different meanings and purposes?

Anthony Saich has been conducting researches with a team of colleagues on the social impact of the HIV/AIDS epidemic on poor communities; economic determinants for individual risk behaviors; the link of the epidemic to poverty and rural health provision; models of prevention and care programs; the impact of global trade issues on the access of drugs developed by transnational pharmaceutical companies; the provision of AIDS education.

We will hold an international conference either in Hong Kong or a location in South China (pending on funding possibilities). A more detailed plan about this conference will be made after the 2005 Beijing workshop is over.

Annual Theme: 2007-08

社会公正：如何制衡政策造成的社会不均问题
Inequalities and Social Justice

We will focus our discussion on the above policy areas from this analytical perspective. We will also bring in the trope of the “minorities” into our examination of issues of inequity. It is too early for us to pin down specific research plans at this stage. But we will build this annual theme on the research results derived from the two previous projects outlined above.

We will organize an international conference in a locale in Guangzhou or Yunnan.