

Beyond Borders: Empowering Policy Scholarship in China and the Global South

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ABSTRACT

Advancing policy scholarship in China and across the Global South requires a dynamic, collaborative research ecosystem that bridges national and disciplinary boundaries. The *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ) has long advanced this goal by integrating diverse policy perspectives to address governance challenges. In his keynote at the

International Conference on China Policy Studies (ICCPS), PSJ Editor-in-Chief Dr. Geoboo Song emphasized the need for adaptable policy process theories and cross-border collaboration. Building on his insights, this paper explores how transnational research collaboration can enrich theory and generate innovative responses to global challenges such as climate change, inequality, and public health. In recent years, Chinese policy scholars have made notable progress in both theoretical and applied policy research, contributing to this growing international dialogue, yet some barriers continue to limit their full participation in the global policy community. Forging enduring partnerships between the Global South and the West is both a strategic necessity and an intellectual imperative for addressing shared policy dilemmas.

Keywords: Research collaboration, comparative policy studies, policy theory development, China, Global South

Más allá de las fronteras: Impulsando la investigación política en China y el Sur Global

RESUMEN

El avance de la investigación política en China y en el Sur Global requiere un ecosistema de investigación dinámico y colaborativo que supere las fronteras nacionales y disciplinarias. La Revista de Estudios Políticos (PSJ) ha impulsado este objetivo desde hace tiempo integrando diversas perspectivas políticas para abordar los desafíos de gobernanza. En su discurso inaugural en la Conferencia Internacional sobre Estudios Políticos de China (ICCPS), el Dr. Geoboo Song, editor jefe de PSJ, enfatizó la necesidad de teorías adaptables sobre procesos políticos y la colaboración transfronteriza. Basándose en sus ideas, este artículo explora cómo la colaboración transnacional en la investigación puede enriquecer la teoría y generar respuestas innovadoras a desafíos globales como el cambio climático, la desigualdad y la salud pública. En los últimos años, los académicos chinos de política han logrado avances notables en la investigación política, tanto teórica como aplicada, contribuyendo a este creciente diálogo internacional. Sin embargo, algunas barreras continúan limitando su plena participación en la comunidad política global. Forjar alianzas duraderas entre el Sur Global y Occidente es tanto una necesidad estratégica como un imperativo intelectual para abordar dilemas políticos compartidos.

Palabras clave: Colaboración en investigación, estudios comparativos de políticas, desarrollo de teoría de políticas, China, Sur Global

超越国界：对中国及全球南方国家的政策研究进行赋能

摘要

推进中国乃至全球南方国家的政策研究，需要一个充满活力、协作互助的研究生态系统，打破国界和学科壁垒。长期以来，《政策研究杂志》(PSJ)致力于整合多元政策视角以应对治理挑战，从而推动这一目标的实现。在中国公共政策研究国际学术会议(ICCPS)的主题演讲中，PSJ主编Geoboo Song博士强调了构建适应性政策过程理论和开展跨边界协作的必要性。本文以Song博士的见解为基础，探究了跨国研究协作如何能丰富理论，并为应对气候变化、不平等和公共卫生等全球挑战提出创新性的解决方案。近年来，中国政策学者在理论和应用政策研究方面均取得了显著进展，为日益活跃的国际对话作贡献，然而，一些障碍仍然限制其充分参与全球政策讨论。建立全球南方国家与西方国家之间持久的伙伴关系，既是战略上的必然选择，也是用于应对共同政策困境的理论需求。

关键词：研究协作，比较政策研究，政策理论发展，中国，全球南方国家

Introduction

In recent years, there have been burgeoning discussions about “Global South issues” within the policy community, notably during the Conference on Policy Process Research (COPPR) meetings, which took place in Denver, Colorado, USA, in January 2023, and in Syracuse, New York, USA, in May 2024. These discussions highlighted the persistent challenges faced by policy scholars from the Global South and underscored the necessity for inclusive

and diverse perspectives in policy research. The editors at the *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ), a leading policy journal in the field, acknowledged these obstacles, prompting immediate and proactive action.

On June 14, 2024, Dr. Geoboo Song, the Editor-in-Chief of the *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ), delivered a keynote address entitled “Bridging Policy Research Across Borders: Challenges and Opportunities for China” at the inaugural International Conference on China Policy Studies (ICCPS) in Bei-

jing, China. This event attracted a large audience of policy scholars, government officials, and academics eager to explore new venues in policy research in China. While Dr. Song's presentation was primarily aimed at policy researchers in China, it also held considerable significance for policy researchers across the Global South, emphasizing the importance of cross-border collaboration and knowledge exchange. Drawing on Dr. Song's keynote speech, we explore key ideas and concepts that could significantly enhance policy scholarship development in China and the Global South. The challenges and opportunities that arise when bridging policy research across international borders, especially on emerging trends, collaborative networks, and innovative methodologies that can enrich policy research in diverse contexts, are a focal point of discussion. Through these efforts, we attempt to foster a global dialogue that encourages mutual learning and understanding, ultimately contributing to more effective and impactful policy research worldwide.

As core members of the PSJ editorial team, we have had the privilege of working closely with scholars from around the world, witnessing firsthand the transformative power of collaborative policy research over the past five years since 2019. Through our interactions, we have witnessed the remarkable diversity of perspectives and innovative approaches that many policy scholars bring to the table. *Policy Studies Journal*, a premier publication outlet for theory-driven policy research, has been at the forefront of delivering cut-

ting-edge research that addresses some of the most pressing global challenges. Our commitment to fostering a robust academic discourse ensures that the journal not only contributes to scholarly debates but also influences practical policymaking on a global scale.

While the journal has increasingly focused on the development of policy theory, theoretical contributions have largely been made through the testing of these theoretical foundations and arguments in diverse policy contexts and across different policy issue areas. Most prominent is the application of policy process theories for environmental and other "commons" problems, which span a wide range of policy topics, including climate change, energy, natural disasters, transportation, environmental regulation, water and land management, immigration, and social welfare (Fagan et al., 2024). Importantly, these focus areas largely reflect the issue attention of governing bodies (at least in the American context), which emphasizes the role of policy research in advising relevant and timely policy issues. This suggests that policy research is becoming more responsive to real-world trends, thereby aligning theory with practice in a way that makes addressing policy issues increasingly relevant for policy scholars.

In today's interconnected world, the challenges we face are increasingly complex, uncertain, and global in nature. Issues such as climate change, public health crises, and economic disparity do not recognize national boundaries. These problems demand a nuanced ap-

proach that takes into account a wide array of social, economic, and political contexts. As such, the need for robust, collaborative policy research has never been greater. Through a shared commitment to knowledge creation and dissemination, we can craft innovative solutions that benefit not just our own nations but the global community as a whole. To advance this goal, our paper examines the development of policy scholarship in China, emphasizing both the progress achieved and the barriers that continue to hinder more meaningful international engagement. While our analysis centers on the Chinese context, the lessons drawn carry broader implications for strengthening policy scholarship across the Global South and offer transformational solutions to global policy dilemmas.

Bridging Policy Research for Global Challenges

Tackling grand challenges, such as extreme weather events, disaster management, immigration crises, and water and food insecurity, requires collaborative and innovative efforts that transcend borders. To achieve this, it is essential to cultivate a conducive environment for collaboration among stakeholders throughout the policy process (Koebele and Crow, 2023; Shen, 2024). Enhancing collaboration can effectively mitigate conflicts centered on diverging policy beliefs, thereby promoting trust, encouraging mutual understanding, and reinforcing the importance of shared objectives that drive long-term cooperation and policy

success. On the more practical applications of these ideas, Mewhirter et al. (2024) argue that the composition of these collaborative networks can constitute a critical element to the initiatives' successes by enhancing legitimacy and public trust via increased representation. Relatedly, Liu (2024) found that policy collaboration between different groups resulted in greater changes in policy adoption and greater favorability toward collaborative attributes.

Policy Studies Journal has been well known for its contributions to policy process theory research for over half a century. This area of research is pivotal, as the pressing global policy issues we face are often fraught with uncertainty, complexity, and the inherently “wicked” nature of such challenges. Wicked problems are those that are dynamic and complex, with no clear cause-and-effect relationship. Further, these problems lack a definitive formulation and solution(s), are connected to other larger problems, and are influenced by multiple divergent perspectives (Tiwale & Wagle, 2024; Churchman, 1967; Rittel & Webber, 1973). In these challenging and ambiguous policy contexts, questions around successful policy development must not only be focused on *what* decisions are made, but also on *how* these decisions are made. As such, the concepts of substantive rationality (which focuses on what decisions are made) and procedural rationality (which focuses on how decisions are made) are informative. *Substantive rationality* exists when a behavior or decision is appropriate for achieving goals in the context of a situation's constraints

and conditions (Simon, 1976), and is oriented around matching outcomes with values such that a decision is considered rational to the extent that it is aligned with the set of values of an individual or group. However, in addressing “wicked” problems in a society, the sets of values held by stakeholders are quite diverse and complicated. *Procedural rationality* thus becomes increasingly important as it (potentially) represents an avenue by which pursuits of substantive rationality can be constrained, allowing policy decisions to be made in ways that are broadly considered to be procedurally fair, leading to greater and broader acceptance of these decisions and, ultimately, greater efficacy in attaining the goals associated with these policy decisions. Indeed, it has been demonstrated that pursuing procedural rationality can debias decision-making (e.g., Pavićević & Keil, 2021), suggesting that this approach can create an environment wherein policy decisions aimed at addressing wicked problems are not only more likely to be made but are also more likely to achieve a relatively broader level of support.

As such, increasing procedural rationality, in practice, via developing and explicating policy process theories across contexts and governance systems, represents an avenue by which complex global challenges can be addressed in a more efficacious manner. More specifically, the increased understanding that policy process theories can enable the development of collaborative policymaking structures that are viewed fairly across a range of stakeholders with diverse sets of goals, there-

by enhancing the likelihood that policy decisions aimed at addressing wicked problems are viewed as both procedurally and substantively rational, and, ultimately, successful.

Importantly, the challenges associated with reconciling diverse perspectives and developing fair processes are not confined to the policymaking process itself. Similar to successful collaboration in policy processes, effective research collaborations must navigate institutional, disciplinary, and epistemic divides. Just as governance networks seek to balance competing priorities and knowledge systems to address wicked problems and achieve shared policy outcomes, global research partnerships must reconcile differences in theoretical frameworks, methodological approaches, and institutional constraints. By sharing knowledge, resources, and expertise across borders, the quality and impact of policy research can be elevated. These collaborative efforts promote cultural exchange and mutual understanding, which are vital for addressing global challenges effectively.

Indeed, there are opportunities for the further development and application of policy process theories in China and the Global South. For example, Van den Dool and Li (2023) examine the utilization of Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) in China and find increasing attention to this theory in the Chinese context. However, the authors note a disconnect between these studies and English-language PET research, indicating both a need and opportunity for developing collaborative research

across these contexts that is informed by scholars in both contexts. Similarly, Li and Weible (2021) examine applications of the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) in China, finding both support for several of the ACF's hypotheses in the Chinese context as well as some distinctions between the Chinese context and ACF findings in Western contexts. These two cases demonstrate that theoretical frameworks such as the ACF and PET not only help explain collaboration among policymakers but also benefit from scholarly collaboration across contexts. While these studies demonstrate the transferability of policy process theories across contexts, they also highlight the need for, and benefits of, collaborations among scholars across cultural contexts to further develop theoretical understandings of the policymaking process and policy change, as well as develop practical solutions to complex global issues. Academics from different cultural and institutional environments utilizing and collaborating around a shared set of theoretical frameworks, such as the ACF or PET, allow for a deeper and more nuanced development of our understanding of the policy process and outcomes both within and across contexts. Thus, the interactions between policy practice and research collaboration become mutually reinforcing, with collaboration among policy actors shaping policy outcomes and scholarly collaborations leading to advances in theories that help explain and improve those outcomes.

Current State of Policy Research in China

China has made remarkable progress in policy research in recent years, from the *Normalization Phase* (2013–2022), when scholars advocated for a curriculum of greater academic rigor, scientifically aligned research paradigms, stronger empirical methods, and more credible publications, to the current *Transformation Stage* (2023–present), which elevated public policy as a subdiscipline and resulted in calls for deeper theoretical innovation and practical contributions (Cao, Xu, Yi, & Zhu, 2025). Throughout our tenure as core members of the PSJ editorial team, we have witnessed Chinese policy scholars, both domestically and internationally, contributing significantly to a broad spectrum of policy theories and substantive policy domains. Their work highlights innovative approaches and invaluable insights. For instance, the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) was employed by Han, Swedlow, and Unger (2014) to analyze hydropower policy change, identifying two competing coalitions with distinct policy beliefs and resource mobilization strategies. Similarly, the Multiple Streams Framework (MSF) was adapted in the Chinese context in a study of homelessness policy, where legal scholars acting as policy entrepreneurs successfully advanced a proposal that was politically appealing to the central government (Cao, Xu, Yi, & Zhu, 2025). Meanwhile, a case study on elder-care policy reveals that policy diffusion in China is far from technocratic.

Instead, it is a political process in which local officials act as entrepreneurs who selectively adopt and scale experimental policies from other regions. These examples are but a few of many that demonstrate how Chinese scholars not only apply Western theories but also refine them to better fit unique political and institutional settings. Empirically, Chinese policy research has diversified significantly in recent years. Key research domains include comparative public policy, economic development, social policy, environmental governance, and innovation policy. These areas reflect both domestic priorities and China's increasing global footprint. Methodologically, the field has grown more rigorous and pluralistic. Quantitative approaches such as correlational analysis and causal inference are widely used, while case studies, interviews, and descriptive statistics remain foundational (Xiao and Yi, 2024).

This growing body of theoretically grounded empirical research has translated into a steady rise in scholarly output, both in domestic journals and (increasingly) in international publications (Xiao and Yi, 2024). In fact, policy scholars in China have published more articles in PSJ than in any other Asian country in recent years. An analysis of publication data from the Web of Science (www.webofscience.com) further illustrates this growing engagement. Between 2019 and 2024, a total of 15 PSJ articles were authored by policy scholars affiliated with Chinese institutions. The annual distribution shows some fluctuation, with two articles published in 2019, five in 2020, one in 2021,

three in 2022, one in 2023, and three in 2024. Though there was a noticeable peak in 2020, the overall trend suggests a steady number of publications.

Despite this meaningful progress, Chinese policy scholars continue to face substantial challenges that hinder their full integration into the global academic community. These challenges manifest at two distinct but interconnected levels: individual constraints that shape scholars' capacity to conduct and disseminate research, and broader environmental barriers embedded in institutional structures and systemic academic practices (Song, 2022; Song, 2024). Understanding these obstacles is crucial for identifying pathways toward a more robust and internationally engaged policy research landscape.

At the individual level, one of the most pervasive difficulties is the ability to formulate research questions that push the boundaries of policy theory while maintaining strong empirical relevance (You et al., 2024). Many Chinese scholars excel in empirical analysis but often struggle with positioning their work within broader theoretical debates that resonate with international audiences. This struggle partly reflects differences in academic traditions. Chinese social science has historically emphasized policy relevance and problem-solving for domestic governance rather than theory-building or abstraction (You et al., 2024; Zang and Chan, 2020). In contrast, leading policy journals, including *Policy Studies Journal* (PSJ), tend to privilege studies that make explicit theoretical contributions—clarifying

causal mechanisms, extending existing frameworks, or testing them across diverse institutional settings (Weible & Cairney, 2018). The expectation of clear theoretical contributions in leading policy journals presents a steep learning curve, requiring scholars not only to engage with Western theoretical frameworks but also to refine their ability to articulate the significance of their findings within these frameworks. Bridging this gap requires Chinese scholars to engage more critically with comparative policy theories, such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF), Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET), and Multiple Streams Framework (MSF), and to explicitly articulate how their empirical cases refine or challenge those frameworks and theories (Li and Weible, 2021; Van den Dool and Li, 2023). Equally important is cultivating an awareness of the “audience expectations” of these journals—identifying what counts as a “theoretical contribution,” how to situate findings within a global context, and how to frame research questions that appeal to readers from different cultural and political contexts (Van den Dool and Li, 2023).

Academic writing and publishing in English remain particularly formidable barriers. While an increasing number of Chinese scholars are proficient in English, the ability to craft a manuscript that satisfies the rhetorical and stylistic expectations of top-tier policy journals remains a persistent challenge (Zhang et al., 2025; Demeter et al., 2025). Writing for an international audience involves more than technical accuracy—it demands clarity, coherence, and a com-

elling argument that aligns with the conventions of global policy discourse. As a result, many otherwise high-quality studies struggle to gain visibility in the most influential policy journals, where editorial and peer review expectations can be unfamiliar and daunting. Studies of non-native English-speaking scholars show that many encounter difficulties in adopting the “authorial stance” expected in Anglophone academic writing, where argumentation is explicit and self-promotional (Flowerdew and Habibie, 2021). To overcome this, successful Chinese authors often seek collaboration with international co-authors, attend academic writing workshops, or engage professional editing and mentoring support; all strategies that have been shown to improve publication success (Hyland, 2023; Demeter et al., 2025). Expanding institutional support for academic writing in English through targeted funding, mentoring, and journal partnerships would significantly enhance Chinese scholars’ capacity to contribute to and shape global policy discourse (Demeter et al., 2025).

Another pressing issue at the individual level is the difficulty in securing research funding, particularly for scholars outside elite institutions. While China has made substantial investments in research and development, funding distribution remains highly skewed, with major grants concentrated in a handful of top-tier universities (Wang et al., 2024). Scholars at less well-resourced institutions often lack the financial support necessary to conduct ambitious empirical studies, access internation-

al research networks, or participate in global conferences. This funding disparity reinforces existing hierarchies within the Chinese academic system, limiting opportunities for early-career researchers and scholars from non-elite backgrounds to establish themselves in the international policy research arena (Wang et al., 2025).

Beyond individual constraints, systemic environmental challenges further complicate the ability of Chinese scholars to engage meaningfully in global policy research (Song 2022, Song 2024). One of the most significant structural barriers is the demanding teaching and administrative workload that many faculty members face. Unlike research-intensive institutions in North America and Europe, where faculty members often receive substantial research time, many Chinese scholars must balance heavy teaching responsibilities with bureaucratic and institutional obligations. This leaves limited time for sustained research engagement, manuscript preparation, and the iterative revision process required for publication in top-tier policy journals.

Institutional incentives for international publication remain another significant challenge. While many Chinese universities have begun prioritizing high-impact journal publications as a measure of academic success, tenure and promotion systems still place substantial weight on domestic publications and government-sponsored research projects (Xu et al., 2021; Lu, 2022; Hyland, 2023). This emphasis discourages some scholars from pursu-

ing international outlets, where review timelines can be lengthy and editorial standards unfamiliar. In some cases, scholars opt for domestic journals with faster turnaround times and more familiar expectations, even when their research has the potential to contribute meaningfully to global policy discussions.

Another key structural challenge is the relative isolation of Chinese scholars from global research networks. While scholars in North America and Europe benefit from well-established international collaborations that facilitate co-authored publications and cross-institutional mentorship, many Chinese researchers face systemic barriers to participating in these academic ecosystems (Demeter et al., 2025; Fang et al, 2022). Language constraints, institutional policies on international mobility, and funding limitations have all contributed to this gap. Without regular engagement in international policy conferences, collaborative research projects, and visiting scholar programs, Chinese scholars struggle to integrate their work into international scholarly debates, limiting both their professional visibility and the global impact of their research.

The structure of academic collaboration in China also presents unique constraints. Apart from many Western institutions, where research is often conducted in interdisciplinary teams and embedded within collaborative lab models, Chinese policy scholars frequently work in relatively isolated academic silos. The hierarchical na-

ture of Chinese academia, where senior faculty exert significant influence over research direction, can also pose serious challenges for early career scholars seeking to pursue innovative, cross-disciplinary, or unconventional research topics (Lu and Smith, 2022; Liu et al., 2024). This dynamic not only affects the diversity of policy research in China but also limits the ability of junior scholars to engage in international collaborative efforts that require flexibility and independent research leadership.

Finally, policy research in China operates within a broader socio-political context that shapes the contours of academic inquiry (Reny, 2016; Ollier-Malaterre et al., 2025; Harlan, 2019). Certain policy areas—particularly those related to governance, political reform, and contentious social issues—are subject to constraints that may limit scholars' ability to engage in open, comparative analyses. While Chinese scholars have made significant contributions in fields such as environmental policy, science and technology policy, public management, and economic development, research in politically sensitive areas may face institutional barriers that restrict data access, limit international collaboration, or discourage the pursuit of politically complex research questions. These constraints can make it difficult for scholars to engage fully in global policy discourse, where comparative political analysis and open empirical inquiry are often foundational to theoretical advancement.

The cumulative effect of these individual and structural challenges is

a research landscape in which Chinese policy scholars, despite their increasing presence in the international arena, remain underrepresented in the most influential policy journals and global scholarly debates. Overcoming these barriers will require both structural reforms within Chinese institutions and greater efforts to facilitate cross-border academic integration. Recognizing and addressing these constraints is essential for ensuring that Chinese policy research can contribute sufficiently to the development of policy scholarship on a global scale.

Opportunities for Collaboration

Global collaboration in policy research has become increasingly crucial as scholars around the globe face common challenges that transcend national borders (Zsuzsanna et al., 2021). In particular, the role of Chinese policy scholars in shaping the international research landscape has been rising considerably during the 21st century, given China's rapid socio-economic transformation and growing influence in global affairs (Bersick & Jörn-Carsten, 2015; Duggan, 2022; Glaser & Saunders, 2002). Strengthening and increasing collaboration initiatives between Chinese and other non-Western policy researchers, and their Western international counterparts, can help better represent diverse perspectives, as well as collective influence in global policy research.

Despite these individual and structural challenges, there are encouraging signs of growing collaboration

between Chinese policy scholars and the international policy community. In recent years, several research networks initiated or co-led by Chinese scholars have started to bridge policy scholars worldwide. Notable among these is the Chinese Policy Scholars Group (CPSG), founded in 2017 through Chinese scholars' participation in the Association for Public Policy Analysis and Management (APPAM), which organizes conference panels, mentoring sessions, and collaborative research among China-focused policy scholars worldwide. The Section on Chinese Public Administration (SCPA) of the American Society for Public Administration (ASPA) and its affiliated journal, *Chinese Public Administration Review* (CPAR), provide an institutionalized venue for scholarly exchange between Chinese and international researchers. The China-America Association for Public Affairs (CAAPA), which co-organizes international conferences, such as the Global Urban Governance and Policy Conference, facilitates cross-border research and professional dialogue. These networks play an increasingly vital role in helping Chinese policy scholars engage with global academic norms, develop co-authorships, and contribute to comparative policy research efforts.

Beyond these formal associations, transnational collaboration initiatives linking China with the Global South and Western institutions have become increasingly prominent. For example, the China-Africa Knowledge Project (CAKP), coordinated by the Social Science Research Council (SSRC), facilitates multiyear collaborative re-

search on China-Africa engagement, pairing China and African scholars to examine governance and development dynamics across regions. Similarly, the China-Global South Project (CGSP) fosters knowledge exchange on energy, climate governance, and development finance, advancing South-South cooperation through a China-centered but globally connected framework.

These collaborative endeavors demonstrate that Chinese policy scholars are becoming active participants in transnational research ecosystems. Yet bibliometric evidence still indicates that, while China's overall participation in international collaborations has expanded significantly, Chinese scholars often occupy fewer lead author or project leadership positions than their Western peers, reflecting persistent structural asymmetries in networked research influence (Wu et al., 2024).

Academic exchange programs also serve as one of the key tools for promoting cross-cultural understanding and fostering international research collaboration. According to Patricio et al. (2018), faculty exchange programs provide numerous mutual opportunities for both host and visiting faculty members to expand their research collaborations and to experience a different academic environment. Similar findings were observed by Mashizume et al. (2020), who categorized cross-cultural academic exchange programs' outcomes into four categories, namely "experience, reaction, learning, and behavior." The "experience" outcome captured participants' general impressions

and challenges faced, “reaction” evaluated their reflection on cultural differences, “learning” measured the extent to which new skills were developed, and “behavior” assessed the changes in professional behavior. The study also highlighted that even short-term international academic exchange programs can lead to positive changes in participants’ personal and professional growth (Mashizume et al., 2020; Witchger, 2015). Overall, a substantial body of research suggests that international academic exchange programs offer significant benefits to their participants. By participating in such programs, faculty members not only advance their personal academic growth but also strengthen institutional ties and promote long-term scholarly engagement and collaboration (Andújar et al., 2015; Bauder, 2015; Bettmann & Prospero, 2012; Hoffman, 2009).

Joint research initiatives create an immense potential for advancing global policy research. For instance, the challenges created by the COVID-19 pandemic have become one of the vivid examples that highlighted the urge for global cooperation to ensure that world communities are able to adopt effective policies to cope with existing and emerging issues (Bennett & Howlett, 1992; Dunlop et al., 2020). This need for collaboration has underscored the value of joint cross-cultural research initiatives, as they not only provide immediate solutions but also contribute to long-term advancements in understanding policy processes. Through these collaborations (joint cross-cultural research initiatives and social inter-

actions), researchers and policymakers can create a diverse mixed-opinion platform that fosters policy learning and policy change, as well as strengthens the connection between the two in the global arena (Dunlop & Claudio, 2022; Moyson et al., 2017). This exchange of perspectives and experiences can help better facilitate the refinement and improvement of existing policy frameworks and theories and enhance the ability to address complex policy challenges (Das et al., 2024; Dusdal & Powell, 2021; Lee et al., 2020).

Collaboration enhances and improves research methods, the foundation of academic inquiry in any field, ensuring that scholars representing diverse communities are enabled to provide meaningful and generalizable inferences to address the complexities of the challenges that exist in public policy research today (Howlett et al., 2017). While traditional research methods have been widely used and proved to be successful, their advancement and the creation of new methods are important to provide innovative solutions to “wicked” problems (Perry & Kenneth, 1986; Sorensen & Torfing, 2018). Jukic et al. (2019) emphasizes the idea of collaborative innovations focusing on the process rather than the outcome by stating that they do not necessarily lead to immediate and automatic improvements; however, they provide opportunities for solving problems in new and different ways. In addition to advancing research methods, cross-cultural collaboration between scholars enhances their understanding of each other’s research environments and creates a

stronger understanding of the existing methods that can further be applied across new policy domains and in different cultural settings (Broesch et al., 2020; Urassa et al., 2021).

Overcoming linguistic barriers and developing specific academic language skills can significantly expand the presence of Chinese and other non-Western policy researchers in the global policy arena. As linguistic barriers often cause a noticeable underrepresentation for non-English-language speaking communities and create serious consequences for building an equitable dialogue in the global policy community, the idea of cross-national collaboration becomes even more prominent (Amano et al., 2021; Carlsson et al., 2024). Even though the existence of such tools as generative AI can help solve some of the issues associated with the lack of the necessary academic language skills, scholars should remain mindful about the potential consequences the use of such tools may have on their work and continue to uphold the highest ethical and professional standards of the field (Kim et al., 2023; Liebrecht et al., 2023). Taking a more proactive approach, such as international and domestic training, despite it being more time-consuming, is hypothesized to yield much better outcomes in the long term (Li & Hu, 2017).

Conclusion

The trajectory of policy research in China has been marked by significant progress, yet substantial challenges remain. Chinese

scholars have increasingly contributed to the global policy discourse, demonstrating both empirical sophistication and theoretical engagement. However, persistent structural and individual-level constraints continue to limit their full integration into international academic networks. Barriers, including the difficulty of publishing in English-language journals, uneven access to research funding, and institutional pressures that prioritize domestic over international scholarship, have slowed the pace of global engagement. Structural challenges, ranging from high teaching loads to limited cross-border collaborations, further exacerbate these difficulties, creating obstacles that scholars must navigate in their pursuit of impactful policy research.

Despite these constraints, the future of Chinese policy scholarship holds immense promise. The evolving academic landscape, coupled with increased government support for internationalization and the expansion of research institutions, presents opportunities for growth and deeper integration into global policy studies. To harness this potential, policy scholars, institutions, and academic networks must work toward cultivating a more inclusive, collaborative, and globally engaged research environment.

Bridging policy research across national borders is essential for overcoming current research constraints. As policy issues become increasingly globalized, knowledge exchange and collaboration between scholars in China, the Global South, and Western in-

stitutions will be critical to developing effective policy solutions. The challenges facing modern governance—ranging from climate change and economic inequality to technological innovation and social justice—demand not only rigorous academic inquiry but also sustained collaboration that transcends national and disciplinary boundaries. Policy research collaborations, both among nations within the Global South and with institutions in the West, are essential for crafting policies that reflect the complexity of our shared challenges. By leveraging these collaborative opportunities, we can integrate diverse perspectives, enhance methodological innovation, and ensure that policy research is both globally informed and locally relevant.

One of the most pressing imperatives for the future is fostering structured and sustained research collaborations. Just as stakeholder networks enhance policymaking by fostering trust and facilitating knowledge-sharing, research networks strengthen policy scholarship by integrating diverse theoretical perspectives and empirical approaches. Establishing formal partnerships between Chinese universities and leading global policy schools could provide the intellectual infrastructure necessary for long-term academic cooperation. Initiatives such as co-authored research projects, faculty and student exchange programs, and joint conferences can serve as powerful mechanisms for overcoming institutional barriers and ensuring that Chinese scholars have the resources and networks needed to thrive in the global academic arena.

Expanding comparative policy studies is another crucial step toward global engagement. While Chinese scholars have increasingly engaged with Western policy theories, their contributions remain underrepresented in international policy debates. By deepening comparative research efforts—particularly through collaborations with scholars from the Global South—China can play a more central role in advancing policy theories that reflect governance realities across diverse institutional and political contexts. This expansion not only enriches global policy scholarship but also ensures that policy research better represents the plurality of governance approaches worldwide.

Investing in the next generation of policy scholars is equally critical. Academic institutions should prioritize mentorship programs, research funding initiatives, and professional development opportunities that equip young scholars with the skills necessary to engage in international policy discourse. Providing early exposure to global research networks through conference participation, collaborative projects, and visiting scholar programs can help bridge the gap between domestic and international policy research communities. By fostering a new generation of scholars' adept at navigating the complexities of global policy research, China can ensure that its policy scholars are at the forefront of theoretical innovation and empirical inquiry.

Furthermore, the Chinese academic community must continue refining institutional policies that incen-

tivize international publication while recognizing the value of cross-border collaborations. While domestic policy journals remain essential venues for national discourse, greater institutional support for global engagement—through targeted funding, tenure and promotion incentives, and reduced bureaucratic barriers—will be crucial in expanding the global reach of Chinese policy research.

Despite the challenges ahead, there is reason for optimism. The increasing presence of Chinese policy research in international journals, the rise of interdisciplinary and applied policy studies, and the willingness of scholars to engage in collaborative research all indicate that the field is on the brink of a new era of academic exchange. As policy challenges become more interconnected, the need for diverse, comparative, and globally integrated policy research has never been greater. Several policy domains stand out as particularly promising areas for collaboration between China, the Global South, and Western policy scholars. In climate governance, China's "pilot first, scale later" approach, exemplified by its carbon trading and green finance pilots, offers rich opportunities for comparative research on market-based environmental policy instruments (Cui et al., 2021; Zhang and Li, 2022). In public health and pandemic preparedness, collaborative studies could build on China's COVID-19 response and evolving role in global health governance to analyze crisis learning, intergovernmental coordination, and policy adaptation across political systems (Wei et al.,

2024; Huang et al., 2024). Urban resilience presents another avenue for cooperation, linking China's resilient-city pilot programs to initiatives in other rapidly urbanizing regions (Bahadur and Tanner, 2021; Zhang et al., 2024). Meanwhile, digital governance and science and technology policy offer new frontiers for cross-regional comparison, as China's digital governance and data regulation frameworks continue to influence global debates on Artificial Intelligence (AI) ethics and digital infrastructure (Qiao-Franco and Zhu, 2024; Liu, 2021). Together, these policy domains illustrate how combining China's extensive policy experimentation and data resources with theoretical and methodological innovations from Western and Global South policy scholarship can broaden the empirical foundations of policy theory and foster a more inclusive and globally engaged policy research.

By taking advantage of the collaborative opportunities described, we can leverage our collective knowledge and expertise to overcome shared challenges and create a brighter future for all. The future of policy scholarship depends not only on individual efforts but on the collective will of scholars, institutions, and academic networks to build a research ecosystem that values inclusion, innovation, and cooperation. China stands at the threshold of becoming a leading force in policy studies, and through strategic collaborations, institutional reform, and investments in emerging scholars, Chinese researchers can play a defining role in shaping the next generation of global policy

scholarship. With deeper engagement, sustained partnerships, and a commitment to knowledge-sharing, the future of policy research in China and beyond holds extraordinary promise.

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