

## FROM THE EDITORS

# Advancing China Policy Studies: Global Dialogue, Local Insights, and Collective Problem-Solving

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The study of public policy has entered a transformative era, one defined by rising global complexity, transboundary governance challenges, and the need to move beyond Western-centric theoretical paradigms. This landscape calls for a mode of global dialogue that bridges regional boundaries and local insights that ground theory into governance realities. It further requires a commitment to collective problem-solving that addresses the shared challenges of our interdependent world. In this spirit, China's longstanding practices of policy experimentation, hierarchical coordination and adaptive implementation offer an indispensable empirical setting to reexamine public policy theory for a global age.

This vision finds powerful resonance in the 2<sup>nd</sup> International Conference on China Policy Studies (ICCPs 2025), held from June 6-8, 2025, at Beijing Normal University, China. Co-organized by the School of Government at Beijing Normal University and the Chinese Policy Scholars Group (CPSG), the conference brought together nearly 300 scholars from more than 70 leading institutions worldwide. Under the theme “*Advancing Policy Studies: Addressing Conventional Issues and Emerging Challenges in Global Transformation*,” ICCPS 2025 fostered deep exchanges on how China's policy experience can inform global responses to climate change, digital governance, regional integration, and social development. As the supporting journal for the conference, we are delighted to introduce this issue of *China Policy Journal*. This issue features five outstanding articles on a variety of different topics and authored by scholars from multiple continents. Together, these works strengthen theoretical dialogue between China and the world, produce rigorous evidence on China's policy processes, and explore collaborative solutions to real-world governance challenges.

This issue opens with a contribution by Prof. Gwen Arnold from University of California-Davis, which redefines the normative priorities of contemporary policy research. Titled “Human Agency, Negative Cases, and Public Problem-Solving: Priorities for Public Policy Scholarship in China and Globally in the 21st Century,” Arnold's paper identifies three theoretical and methodological shifts for the field: centering human agency in public policy scholarship, learning from negative policy outcomes, and moving beyond problem diagnosis to analyze how societies collectively solve public problems. Arnold points out that Western policy theories are mostly based on the context of developed democracies, while

China's political system and multi-level governance structure provide a unique perspective for testing and improving the generalizability of policy theories. By challenging the overemphasis on large-scale data, Arnold highlights the unique value of qualitative research in exploring human motivation and behavior logic (Ostrom, 2005). Meanwhile, the study stresses that only by paying attention to negative cases of policy failure can we truly improve the rigor of policy theory and clarify the boundary conditions of policy effectiveness (McConnell, 2010; Bovens & Hart, 2016).

This article breaks through the limitations of Western-centric policy research paradigms, highlights the unique advantages of China's research context, and provides a clear theoretical guidance for global public policy scholarship. It demonstrates how China's layered governance and longstanding experimental tradition provide fertile ground to explain the motivational, relational, and strategic dimensions of policy action (Lipsky, 1980; Kingdon, 1984; Yi et al., 2024).

Next, Shaohua Wei's and Huang Ding's article, "How Do Local Governments Collaborate Across Levels? An Evolutionary Game Theory Analysis of Policy Demonstrations in China" explores the cross-level collaboration mechanism of China's policy demonstration. Research on China's policy experimentation has not only served as a central instrument to policy innovation but also created institutional space for local governments to explore, adjust, and raise effective policy solutions (Heilmann, 2008; Teets & Hasmath, 2020). However, previous research has failed to examine how these cross-level interactions evolve dynamically. Wei and Ding's article fills this gap by developing an evolutionary game model to examine strategic interactions among provincial, municipal and district government. It demonstrates that stable cross-level collaboration emerges from structured provincial leadership, municipal coordinative hub functions, and district-level responsiveness to grassroots feedback, sustained by institutionalized incentives and resource coordination.

This article makes a significant contribution to the understanding of China's policy experimentation and cross-level collaborative governance by illustrating the endogenous evolutionary dynamics of local governance in China. As the advancement of policy experimentation relies on the active participation of local governments at multiple level, this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of policy demonstrations and policy innovation in contemporary China.

The third article, "Integrating Quantity and Quality: Evidence from Water Rights Trading's Dual Policy Effects on Water-Use Efficiency and Water Environmental Quality" by Rui Bao and Jingjing Zeng, uses the difference-in-differences (DID) and synthetic control methods (SCM) to evaluate the implementation effect of China's water rights trading policy. Based on panel data of 31 provinces from 2003 to 2023, the study finds that water rights trading significantly improves water-use efficiency by 25.6% and promotes water quality improvement in some pilot

areas by enhancing water governance intensity. The mechanism test shows that efficiency improvement comes from water use structure optimization, while quality improvement relies on strengthened governance intensity.

Different from previous studies that focus on the quantitative effect of water rights trading (Ma et al., 2020; Zhang et al., 2021), this paper integrates the dual dimensions of water quantity and quality, verifies the effectiveness of market-oriented environmental policy tools, and provides empirical support for water governance in water-scarce regions. The findings that the improvement in water quality associated with strengthened governance efforts, clarify the causal mechanisms and conditional effectiveness of market-oriented environmental instruments, offering robust empirical insights for global water governance.

Shifting the focus to the regional level, the fourth article, “From Fragmentation to Synergy: Financial Policy Coordination in the Western Greater Bay Area” by Xinyu Zhang, Kexin Deng and Bo Wen, uses the mixed research method of a content analysis and in-depth interviews to examine the state of policy coordination in the western Guangdong-Hongkong-Macao Greater Bay Area (GBA)’s financial sector. Based on Institutional Collective Action (ICA) and policy instrument theory (Feiock & Scholz, 2009; Rothwell & Zegveld, 1981), the article constructs a “policy instrument-innovation value chain” analysis framework and finds that the current regional financial policy over-relies on environmental-side instruments, while supply-side and demand-side instruments are seriously insufficient, leading to policy fragmentation and coordination dilemmas. Hence, the authors propose to build a multi-level coordination mechanism to address institutional barriers under the “One Country, Two Systems” framework.

This study builds on the work of cross-sectoral policy coordination and integration (Trein et al, 2019; Bowman and Parsons, 2013; Duit, 2016; Adam et al., 2018) and offers evidence-based insights into how coordinated industrial development might be achieved, shedding light on the mechanisms that drive or impede policy coordination in one of China’s most significant regional integration efforts. This study not only enriches the theoretical research on cross-border regional policy coordination but also provides practical pathways for the high-quality integrated development of the GBA.

The issue closes with a contribution by the editorial team of our sister journal, *Policy Studies Journal*, which calls for a more inclusive global future for policy research. Editor-in-Chief of *Policy Studies Journal*, Prof. Geoboo Song and his colleagues, in their paper titled “Beyond Borders: Empowering Policy Scholarship in China and the Global South,” assess the development dilemma and breakthrough path of policy research in China and the Global South. The article states that China has made remarkable progress in policy research in recent years (Xiao and Yi, 2024; Cao et al., 2025), and reviews the remarkable progress made by Chinese scholars in policy process theories such as the Advocacy Coalition Framework

(ACF) and Punctuated Equilibrium Theory (PET) in recent years (Li & Weible, 2021; Van den Dool & Li, 2023). This article also points out that language barriers, institutional assessment incentives, and academic network isolation are still principal factors negatively impacting Chinese scholars' global participation.

This study argues that strengthening transnational research collaboration, especially South-South cooperation, and China-West academic dialogue, can enrich policy theory perspectives and jointly respond to global challenges such as climate change and public health crises. The authors provide an important roadmap to foster structured and sustained research collaborations and promote the transformation of global policy scholarship to a diversified model. 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 political and institutional contexts.

Together, these five articles in this issue highlight the significant strides China policy studies has made in recent years, both in theoretical innovation and empirical rigor, while also pointing to a vibrant and promising future for the field. They provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to better understand China's public policy, challenge the limits of Western-dominated paradigms, and address shared global challenges. In doing so, they enrich our collective efforts to pursue more inclusive and collaborative policy scholarship.

*China Policy Journal* remains committed to our mission of advancing rigorous and open policy research. We will continue to publish and highlight cutting-edge research on China policy studies, encourage theoretical and methodological innovation, integrates China-focused research into broader public policy debates, and serve as a high-level platform for constructive dialogue between scholars in China and around the world. We extend our sincere gratitude to all authors, reviewers, and editorial board members for their invaluable contributions. We look forward to continuing to build a vibrant, globally engaged community of China policy research.

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