

17 Education policy research in the Peoples' Republic of China

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ABSTRACT

Since the latter part of the twentieth century, we are experiencing a duality: on one hand the way policy is made is highly contextualized and its implementation even more context-dependent, on the other policy travels globally, widespread and profound. Under such scenario, comparative research on education policy studies in various countries is growing in relevance and interest. This contribution, for the first time in the English language, investigates how education policy is researched in the People's Republic of China. It attempts to understand how Chinese education policy researchers are influenced by external forces while struggling with the local relevance of their work. Beginning with the trajectory of public and education policy research in China, it selects articles published in an influential scholarly journal in China during 2003-04 to delineate the *status quo* by looking closely at their themes, authors, perspectives and referencing. It ends up with some discussions of the tensions between the global agenda and the local context.

INTRODUCTION: PUBLIC AND EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH AS AN EMERGING ACADEMIC FIELD

With the increasing presence of policy networks and the geographical and conceptual border crossing of policy elites, efforts to globalise educational institutions has meant that something of a common discourse has become apparent in educational policy. However, rather than a trans-national convergence of policy and practice in educational institutions, what occurs, when global trends are encountered in the local context, is some form of hybridisation (Well 2005). The convergence or divergence one sees in education is the product of conscious adaptation, blind imitation, and pressure to conform (Stromquist 2002). Policies have been transformed many times by the time they reach local educational institutions.

If policy makers remain critical in the borrowing process, adapting the borrowed policy to their needs, the discourse will necessarily change along with its implementation (Well 2005). There is a need to remain critical throughout the policy-making process and object to the lack of reflection on discourse in education policy (NÓvoa and Lawn 2002). Policy researchers play a crucial role when they engage in discourse analysis, to deconstruct the often simplified rhetoric of globalisation, educational reform, and so forth, by critically examining rhetoric or concepts that have become nearly ‘universal’ because of their widespread use, and by highlighting the discourse originating from global elite networks.

This chapter, for the first time in the English language, investigates how education policy is researched in the People’s Republic of China. It attempts to understand how Chinese education policy researchers are influenced by external forces while struggling with their local relevance. Beginning with the trajectory of public and education policy

research in China, it selects articles published in an influential scholarly journal in China during 2003-04 to delineate the *status quo* by looking closely at their themes, authors, perspectives and referencing. It ends up with some discussions of the tensions between the global agenda and the local context.

Policy science originated from societal needs during China's open-door era.¹ In line with China's reform of governance, it has grown to be an important branch of political sciences and public administration in China since the late 1970s. Its emergence and development as a new academic field is closely related to China's ongoing 'professionalisation', 'scientification' and 'democratisation' of governance (Xu 2002: 449).

During its disconnection from the West through the socialist period from the 1950s to 1970s, the communist Chinese government had a longstanding policy research tradition. Usually initiated by the government, the research targeted some specific tasks, commonly began with investigations and experiments in selected points, and resulted in identification of problems and their solutions. Research methods and approaches were simple. Analyses were mainly confined to previous experience (Xu 2002). Research work was conducted by a handful of people, either from the Party or commissioned by the government, whose research was greatly limited not only by their knowledge structure and techniques, but especially by the then political and ideological climates.

By the early 1980s, driven by the then 'emancipation of the mind',² there had been many discussions over the reasons for previous policy-making failures. Academic

circles began to produce research work calling for ‘democratisation of policy-making’ (Meng 1983). On 15 August 1986, Wan (1986), the then vice premier, articulated the tasks required to achieve ‘democratisation’ and ‘scientification’ of policy-making. A number of ministries and the State Council then established research institutes respectively under their jurisdiction to conduct policy research specifically. Western works were translated into Chinese. Chinese textbooks were published (Yuan 1996). Research articles appeared in social science journals. The Chinese Association of Policy Science was founded in 1992. Policy research as a relatively independent branch and a field of inquiry was set high on the agenda of building disciplined inquiry in universities.

Nationwide, departments and institutes of public administration emerged in quick succession. Policy science/analysis became part of undergraduate and postgraduate programs. Outside the national educational system, in accordance with the introduction of civil service, China established its national academies of administration to provide in-service training for civil servants. Policy science/analysis was listed as part of the core courses (Xu 2002: 450-51).

Looking back on the development of policy science in the past one and a half decades, its close correlation with China’s reform stands out. The growth of policy research and the demands for reforms of the old policy-making and administrative systems to improve policy-making efficiency and administration level have complemented each other. Such governmental ‘demands’ have been, and will continue to be, the dynamics

for developing policy research in China, as China faces even more challenges in its social, political and economic development.

As some have emphasised, globalisation is the most fundamental challenge facing education in its history, the precise nature of the challenge, however, will not be uniform across, or even within, different countries. One major problem of the existing literature has been a tendency for arguments about globalisation to be based on sweeping generalisations and abstract theoretical assertions insufficiently connected to detailed examinations of particular historical times and geographical spaces (Yang 2002). Meanwhile, there has been a growing body of literature that discusses the increasingly intensified cross-national travelling of education policy (Seddon 2005), concerned with a process in which knowledge about policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in one political setting is used in the development of policies, administrative arrangements, institutions and ideas in another political setting (Dolowitz and Marsh 2000). Although the concept of policy borrowing is central to much of the work of comparativists (Phillips and Ochs 2003), empirical comparative studies are lacking.

Within such a context, the purpose of this chapter is to document the ways in which global policy agendas are steering education research as a means of shaping socioeconomic development in China. The strategy used here is to review a significant journal over a number of years to document the trends in China's education policy research. The journal is *China Renda Social Science Information Centre-Education*, which selects the best articles from a wide range of education journals nationwide and

reprints them monthly. It has been regarded as the most authoritative collection of journal articles in education in China. In 2003, it opened a new column normally entitled 'educational policy-making and administration'. I have used this column to analyse the main dimensions of education policy research. My review covers all of the 24 issues during 2003-04.

THE STATUS QUO OF EDUCATION POLICY RESEARCH IN CHINA

Policy research in China covers three major domains. The first is conceptual, often called 'disciplinary building' in China. It aims at provision of university undergraduate and postgraduate programs mainly in political sciences, public and business administration, with focuses on systematic exposition of basic concepts, principles, theories and methods in policy science and analysis. Earlier studies were heavily influenced by theories and methods of scientific socialism imported from the former Soviet Union. Since the 1990s, the United States has become a dominant source of influence. Another domain is methodological, centred on approaches and tools employed in policy research, and concentrated particularly in the 1980s. The mainstream is to borrow the methods from natural sciences, mathematics and statistics to study the 'scientificness', feasibility and optimisation of large-scale social planning and projects. The third is strategic, usually organised by various specified governmental departments to find solutions to the economic and social problems they face.

China's policy science within the past one and a half decades has shown some striking features. Firstly, it has aimed focally on how the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government guide and normalise social behaviours, with emphases on the character and functions of public policies to normalise social actions, guide socio-economic development, and adjust social benefits. Current university textbooks and references books listed for the entrance examination into postgraduate programmes demonstrate this clearly: most of the discussions on social and economic factors as policy contexts are brief and vague, while discussions of the nature and characteristics of public policy always stress public policy's function to normalise social behaviours and control.

For example, Zhang Jin-ma (1992: 19-20) defines public policy as 'the code of, or guidance for, individual and group conducts. It takes many forms including law, regulations, administrative decrees, and governmental written or verbal statements, instructions, action plans, and strategies'. Similarly, Chen Qing-yun (1996: 9) insists that 'public policy is the code of conduct made by the government on the basis of the specific goals under certain circumstances in the processes of selecting, synthesizing, allocating and implementing public interests'.

Research on public policy was concerned with how to better reflect the CCP's and the government's existing goals to guide and normalise social behaviours. Much less attention was paid to how policy-makers' intentions, the interests of influential agencies and other stakeholders' impact on policy making.

Secondly, policy research has been classified within the boundaries of public administration, seen as a theoretical tool to upgrade policy-making level and improve policy administration efficiency. This shows partially the political demand for policy science in China. Since the 1980s, profound changes have been taking place in all aspects of Chinese society. While the government was in a situation where social issues were intricate, ever-changing and emerging constantly, the legal system was underdeveloped, civil servants were poorly trained, and the society was ruled more by 'man' than by law.

A priority is thus to reform the outdated policy-making system and methods. Chinese national leaders then identified 'scientification' and 'democratisation' of policy-making as key issues of political reform, in order to upgrade government officials' policy-making level and to build up a systematic policy-making system with clearly defined procedures, support, consultation and evaluation systems to guarantee smooth reform progress (Wan 1986).

To meet such political demands, policy researchers have concentrated their attention on issues at system level and on aspects of normative choices, for example, how to optimise policy plans in policy-making and raise policy implementation level. Empirical studies of the impact of various political factors in the policy process have been largely neglected. Such an orientation is in line with the training of civil servants and the Chinese government's intension to improve its policy-making level.

Thirdly, policy research serves government departments directly, providing them with policy suggestions and interpretations of existing policies. Years of reform have led to significant changes in social, economic and policy structures, especially since the 1990s. In the face of a large number of social problems, Chinese intellectuals have expressed their keenness on policy-related research. Most of their academic training backgrounds were in other fields other than policy science. They work in governmental departments or policy research institutes affiliated to governments, and have easy access to the policy information circulated only within the government. Their research targets specific policies. Research findings are in the form of specific policy analysis reports, policy plans with detailed suggestions, interpretations of specific policies, and historical explanation and analyses of policies. Such research aims for governmental approval and acceptance in order to exert impact on public policy-making.

These features of public policy research in China are all shared by education policy studies, to which we will now turn.

THEMES

China's policy researchers rely heavily on political elites and government departments. Their research is oriented to the intentions and demands of dominant politicians and to the interests of the government departments to which they are affiliated jurisdictionally. Their choices of topics and values are inevitably influenced by political intentions and interests.

Education policy research in China is stressed by the Chinese government as the basis for rational policy-making. As a consequence, it is well planned and highly organised by governmental agencies and professional bodies affiliated to governments. An organisational structure for developing research projects exists at both national and local levels. Policy guidelines for research are formulated by a central authority and research priorities are determined in light of national socioeconomic and educational development goals as well as through central and local mechanisms.

Under the general supervision of the Ministry of Education (MOE), the central mechanism for organising research projects is the National Steering Committee on Educational Research Planning (NSCERP), which is composed of high-ranking educational policy-makers, prominent scholars and educational practitioners. The research structure consists of basically two parallel yet interacting systems of research organisations. One is governmental, including educational research institutes affiliated to education administrations at central and local levels. The other system is composed of professional organisations, with the Chinese Association for Educational Research being the largest. Under this scenario, research orientations, policies, priority fields, funding arrangements and macro-level evaluation are all laid down by central government agencies.

At the top of the structure is the MOE, which formulates five-year and ten-year educational development plans, upon which both educational research policies and priorities are to be based. MOE also allocates funds for educational research projects through two channels: its own departments which sponsor policy-oriented studies, and

the NSCERP for 'MOE-level priority' projects. Within the MOE, the Department of Policy Studies and Legislation, and the Centre for Studies on National Educational Development, focus on macro-level educational planning and long- and medium-term development strategies. The National Institute for Educational Studies, as a research arm of the MOE, formulates research policies, coordinates research projects by local and university-based research institutes, and disseminates research findings.

Priority fields of educational research are determined according to the objectives of the national socioeconomic development programs, based on the practical needs of educational development and reforms, and funded in light of available resources. Priority projects are generally of two types. The first, self-proposed projects by individual institutions and researchers submitted to the NSCERP, are very limited in number. The second, guided projects proposed by the NSCERP, are for nationwide bidding. Applications for priority projects need to be first approved by the administrative heads of the institution where the applicant is employed, screened by the MOE, and then reviewed by the NSCERP for approval. Projects are financed according to their levels of priority, overwhelmingly by governments at different levels.

Superficially, there is a division between various research institutions: university-based research tends to follow along disciplinary lines, while research units within governmental agencies mainly conduct policy-oriented studies for overall planning and macro-level development strategy and management. A closer look reveals the powerful dominance of the government. First, the reputation and amount of funding depend on

the level of the funding by government. Researchers try desperately to win funding from the government, with little time, energy and interest left for self-chosen topics.

Secondly, publication of research outputs in China depends on whether or not they meet the prevailing ideo-political needs. Those meeting the criteria are reprinted by nationally leading journals such as the professional *Renda* Social Science Information Centre or more generally by *Xinghua Digest*. Authors of these selected articles would obtain greater professional recognition and further financial gains. By acknowledging research and researchers in this way, individual policy researchers' topics are often very similar to State priorities and aspirations.

For example, of the 114 articles reprinted by *China Renda Social Science Information Centre-Education* in 2003-04, 25 (21.9 percent) were on educational reforms; 18 (16 percent) on theoretical studies of educational policy; 12 (10.5 percent) on *minban* (private) education including privatisation; 11 (9.6 percent) on educational legislation and legal issues of school activities; 9 (7.9 percent) on regional disparities, rural education and educational development in China's far west; 7 (6.1 percent) respectively on educational investment and school effectiveness including principalship; 5 (4.4 percent) on commercialisation of education; 4 (3.5 percent) respectively on curriculum, equity, teacher education, basic education, and China's collaboration with international organisations including especially the WTO. These topics are precisely in line with the priorities identified by the central government. They also parallel international agendas, showing Chinese policy researchers are sharing global policy experience to resolve their local problems.

RESEARCHERS

Mao Zedong once said metaphorically that China's intellectuals are like hair, which must attach itself to the skin of the ruling class. Dating back to the Spring and Autumn Period (770-475 BC) and the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), the Chinese ancient scholar-gentry were a tool in the service to the ruling class. Rulers commonly attracted a large group of scholars for their own purposes. This was part and parcel of their art of ruling.

With this tradition, Chinese intellectuals have always been aligned with official ideologies (Wang 1996, Misra 1998). Their academic life has, since 1950, been tightly controlled in terms of academic growth and development, research focuses and intellectual and ideological directions. Although there have been increasing opportunities for them to avoid being directly involved in politics within the ongoing reform process, very few have taken advantage of this.

Intellectuals refer to a group of educated people who maintain a sense of distance from, and remain critical towards, the mainstream society. The Chinese equivalent term for intellectual is *zhishi fenzi*. The first two characters mean cognition, thus *zhishi fenzi* are those who have knowledge of the world and themselves. Barmé (1996) questioned the difference between Chinese ancient scholar-gentry and today's intellectuals. While a defining feature of the Western concept of intellectual is its critical spirit, the primary characteristic of China's ancient scholar-gentry was that they were would-be officials

who are willing to die for a ruler who appreciated them. There was a powerful emotional hold that the rulers had over the scholar-gentry class.

Policy researchers in China are today's Chinese intellectuals. They have carried forward some of the traditions of their predecessor-Chinese ancient scholar-gentry. Just as Mao Zedong satirized, Chinese intellectuals have no alternative but to attach themselves to the new 'skin'-the CCP and the government it controls. In a deeply politicised society with a high degree of surveillance and monitoring, most of them are essentially 'hired scribblers'. Like their predecessors, their role has been to integrate people into the existing society, rather than to critique that society. Chinese policy researchers are servants of the national elite. They are, to borrow Bourdieu's pithy aphorism, the 'dominated faction of the dominant class', the elaborators of cultural capital, the shape of which is given to them but which they do not for the most part create.

The 19th century saw the diffusion of the European model of the university throughout much of the world, under conditions of imperialism and colonialism. With the establishment of China's first modern university (Hayhoe 1996), Western intellectual concept and practice were slowly introduced into China. Such an ideal, however, has always been fragile. Chinese policy researchers are facing a similar trend towards an eroding public position of intellectuals, as in Western societies: new forms of political and economic domination in which expert knowledge is increasingly the domain of technicians not 'thinkers', and in which political decisions are made and political morality framed without reference to the intellectuals who were once the source of the important ideas in the public domain (Posner 2001). With the death of ideology, the

ideologues become redundant, and the traditional role of intellectuals, as the voice of integrity and courage to speak out against those in power (Said 1994), is disappearing.

Among the 129 authors of the 114 selected articles, 3 were working in schools, 19 worked in policy research institutes under direct jurisdiction of the central and provincial governments, and 107 were based at universities studying education policy. For these university-based researchers, the professionalisation of intellectual life has shaded into careerism. Being an academic is little different from any other civil service job (Bauman 1987). In this context, the knowledge that has been produced within the formal higher learning system is highly professionalised but less critical. Organic intellectuals, as defined by Gramsci (1999), are becoming rare. Many Chinese policy researchers as intellectuals have retreated from the public sphere and focused on their specialised fields. Their sense of calling is being replaced by a sense of vocation.

Such lack of independent, critical thinking is evidenced by the fact that none of the total 114 reprinted articles specifically on educational policy offered any real criticism of the government. On the contrary, many sang the praises of government policies, while others strove to be the first to express their support. These articles, as research outputs, also show that China's education policy researchers are carefully avoiding highly detailed evaluation of the actual effects of existing policies.

Policy transfer is not an independent process but is part of the wider policy process and shaped by such a process. While policy transfer involves primarily the state, as well as international organisations, with key actors being bureaucrats and politicians, the above

profile of Chinese policy researchers demonstrates their involvement in the import of ideas as well.

PERSPECTIVE

Research perspective illustrates an important part of the present situation of China's education policy studies:³ how Chinese researchers justify their choice and the particular use of methodology and methods. Based on their research outputs, an overwhelming majority of them hold an objectivist view. This perspective is also in line with the official stance. They believe that understandings and values are objectified in the people who are studying. Academic publications and official policy texts have demonstrated this belief clearly: if they go in the right way, they can discover the objective truth.

This stance began to influence educational research in China in the twentieth century and gradually occupied a dominant position (Shi 2004). By the late 1990s, objectivism had been deeply rooted in China's educational research circle, embedded in every aspect of daily work, including researchers' beliefs, their research goals and the way they conduct research.

The following summary by Ding's (2004) following summary serves as a good example,

Major methods in educational research have long been literature review and logical reasoning. With the integration of other disciplines in natural and social sciences and the speed of world process of globalisation, we must conform to international practice and methods, advocate scientifically-based research, normalise our methods and behaviours, improve our research quality in order to achieve scientification of our educational research and serve our educational practice and policy-making.

According to most Chinese policy researchers, the social sciences have historically fallen behind natural sciences in their value orientations and methods. This explains their low efficacy in solving practical problems and in promoting social progress. The emergence of modern natural sciences exposed such flaws and urged people to reform social sciences. They further believe that Marxism accomplished the scientification of social research. Karl Marx is indisputably regarded as the most prominent figure in modern history of social sciences.

However, with a different research tradition for thousands of years, and especially after decades of tight control of the state, the reality of China's education policy research is a mix of traditional Confucian ethical sermon, Chinese interpretation of Marxism, and policy explanation and/or justification in line with governments. China's education policy research relies overwhelmingly on the traditional Chinese way of argumentation. Their findings are often bogged down in a quagmire of empty remarks. Some Chinese policy researchers are dissatisfied with this situation and turn to Western theoretical

constructions, treating the Western as ‘the universal’ and gold standard without really understanding them (Xu 2002: 450).

Based on research methods, among the 114 scholarly articles on China’s education policy carried by *China Renda Social Science Information Centre-Education* during 2003-04, there were 78 commentaries; 15 personal assertions; 5 literature review; 4 descriptive, qualitative (statistical), and comparative respectively; 2 case studies, 1 historical; and 1 project report based on empirical work. It is evident that the overwhelming majority were personal reflections, lacking theoretical contribution and short of tight logical reasoning. This echoes, yet is even worse than, the general situation of China’s educational research (Yang 2005). Many Chinese education policy studies are like fast-food: they can still be welcomed for their suitability to the ideological occasions and for most influential social groups, although they are superficial and far-fetched.

What China’s education policy research circle has demonstrated is similar to what Mazrui (1975: 330) cautioned African countries against many years ago, that is, to adopt a second Western derived orthodox, Marxism-Leninism. The difference in China’s case is that the patterns to be reformed were not imposed by former colonisers, but invited by the Chinese themselves. Interestingly, Mazrui suggested that African countries should develop their indigenous languages and culture in a domestication of the colonial heritage, and should diversify the sources of knowledge they brought into the university drawing upon scholarship from China and other regions.

Internationally, preponderance to positivism and inadequate conceptualisation of the role of subjective perception and judgement has been recognised as a shortfall in the literature (Dolowitz and Marsh 1996). People are becoming dissatisfied with the inability of Western science to describe all that occurs in people's experience of the world. Some have launched passionate attacks on the 'paradigmatic tyranny' of the natural sciences (Rahnema 2001), turning their thoughts to indigenisation. As a movement of self-reflection, indigenisation is a response to the long-term Western domination of social studies (Yeh 1994), and integrates one's reflections on the local into her/his approaches.

The calls for indigenisation have been heard for decades in the greater China region (Yang and Wen 1982, Wang 1996), and recently from a few mainland Chinese education researchers (Lu 2001). While this provides China's social scientists with a unique opportunity, China's education policy studies have displayed a positivist picture, demonstrating that Chinese researchers are attempting to emulate the Western objectivist epistemology. Most of them would agree with Parsons' (1977: 61) view that 'There is not 'natural' or 'cultural' science; there is only science or non-science and all empirical knowledge is scientific in so far as it is valid.'

The shortage of a critical indigenous perspective is common in mainland China's education policy research today. Indigenous Chinese wisdom and the imported Western knowledge have never been on an equal footing in China's education policy research. It is the Western experience that has always been dominant. The introduction of Western theories and methods was, is and will be seen as China's real need. The imported

knowledge, however, is always highly contextualised (Gulbenkian Commission on the Restructuring of the Social Sciences and Wallerstein 1996), and needs to be substantially modified when applied in China. It is here that China's practice has fallen short.

While going much further, the Chinese situation confirms Popkewitz and Lindblad's (2000) criticism towards the literature in general that education policy research tends to accept the discourses of policy as the governing structures for research, and becomes bound to the policy makers' definition of the problem, taking the categories and problem definitions derived from governmental policies as the problems of research without any serious intellectual scrutiny.

REFERENCING

Referencing further illustrates the *status quo* of China's education policy studies, since it is crucial for Chinese education policy researchers to have a thorough knowledge of the subject matter and the ability to understand the intent of previous writers in their fields. Original research reviews the existing literature and adds a new dimension to an ongoing debate. The researcher must have the ability to see through a vast accumulation of factual data and expressed opinion in order to determine the central points of debate. Moreover, referencing demonstrates Chinese policy researchers' knowledge of the local and the global.

This, however, is not the case in China. According to Fan (2000: 42), among the publications of 395 surveyed 'core social science journals' in 1995, only 36.44 percent (2,500 out of 6,823) was listed references. In education, 165 publications included references with a percentage of 26.7. Fan (2000: 55-58) went on to show that 24.4 percent of the referenced literature in educational research were newspaper articles, 32.11 percent translated works (of which an overwhelming proportion was works by Karl Marx, Friedrich Engels and Vladimir Lenin), 27.34 percent Chinese classics and reference books, and 2.75 percent government documents, archives and degree theses. From 1978 to 1995, the number of cited foreign literature did not change much. Over the eighteen years, their percentages ranged from 0 to 1.85 of the total references with only 1 year when there was more than 2 percent (2.12).

In educational research in 1995, 74.31 percent of the cited sources were originally in Chinese, 10.83 percent translated foreign literature, 4.22 percent in foreign languages, and 10.64 percent were unclear in terms of the original language. It remains rare for mainland Chinese educational researchers to publish internationally, even more so in foreign languages.⁴ Few publications produced by Chinese social scientists appear in internationally reputable journals. International publications by mainland China's social scientists increased from 80 in 1985 to 202 in 1996, despite that Chinese governments and universities having taken initiatives in encouraging international publications in social sciences (Fan 2000: 60-62).

The situation of education policy research is very similar. The 114 articles carried by *China Renda Social Science Information Centre-Education* during 2003-04 listed 803

references. On average, each article contained 7.1 references. The most cited were Chinese books (273 in total or 33.99 percent), and the second were Chinese journal articles (206 in total or 25.65 percent). There were 165 (20.54 percent) translated works, among them 159 were from English originally. The references in foreign languages numbered 71 (8.84 percent), among them 67 were in English. The numbers of cited newspaper articles, policy documents, website resources, Marxist works, and Chinese ancient writings were respectively 38 (4.72 percent), 24 (2.98 percent), 16 (1.99 percent), 13 (1.61 percent), and 4 (0.49 percent).

Compared with Fan's (2000) findings, there had been a considerable increase of references cited in each article. Yet, 15 articles did not list any references. The increase of foreign language references was dramatic. Here, the authors were divided. While many did not cite any foreign literature, an increasing number were relying on foreign resources almost exclusively. One article by a returnee included 32 references, all in English. It is also evident that different writers have a striking variety of sources to cite, and different fields of studies have different pools of literature resources. For example, while many rarely cited newspapers references, one author, who did not have any foreign languages, listed 8 out of 13 and 12 out of 22 respectively in his two articles on rural education. Other features included declining citation of Marxist classics and dramatic increase of citation of website resources.

Together with the growing use of Westernised theories illustrated in the above section, the increasing use of English language sources has also resulted from the fact that international organisations, *inter alia* the World Bank, advocate and even enforce

similar policies in China, despite China's strong state. This further shows that Chinese policy makers and researchers now look to other political systems for knowledge and ideas about institutions and policies and about how they work in other jurisdictions.

CONCLUSIONS: DILEMMAS AND DIRECTIONS

Driven by practical problems, China's policy research is in an active state. It has, however, maintained a low theoretical level. Since the 1980s, it has borrowed theories and methods directly from other disciplines and from the West. Many researchers come from scientific socialism, attracted by the rise of policy science. They have brought in the theories and methods from scientific socialism, and applied the philosophical, especially dialectical materialist, theories indiscriminately to interpret policy phenomena, policy-making process, and their relations with socioeconomic contexts. Due to theoretical emptiness and dogmas, their approaches can hardly offer any effective theoretical guidance to China's education policy studies.

The other source is Western (mainly American) policy research and theoretical constructions. Western theories and methods of policy studies flooded into China especially in the 1990s. They have propelled China's policy research forward. Meanwhile, problems are looming large. A clear shortage of comprehensive, systematic study of the imported Western theories and methods has led to superficial, fragmentary understandings of them. In practice, the application of these seemingly 'advanced' theories and methods often ends up with a blunder (Chen 2000). Without deep

knowledge of their localities, indiscriminate use of Western theories and methods has failed to help China define, recognise and formulate policy problems, let alone providing effective solutions (Hu 2000). The identification of wrong problems could be a fatal mistake in policy analysis (Dunn 1988, Dryzek and Riply 1988).

Education policy research in China lacks academic norms. Research outputs are full of subjective and random judgements, without sufficient reflecting on the actuality of policy phenomena and their processes. Policy research endeavour is directly controlled by political ideologies and value orientation (Xu 2002). Here, China has much to learn from the Western policy research norms and the spirit of ‘speaking truth to power’ (Wildavsky 1979, Weimer and Vining 2005).

To extricate itself from such predicaments, China’s policy research needs to understand both the strengths and the limitations of Western theories and methods, resulting from their specific times and spaces, when they are used in the Chinese context, and move towards indigenisation. Instead of making remarks as outsiders, Chinese policy researchers need to develop their unique perspectives and values based on rich local experience. This is an awareness of their local society and culture. Such a sense of locality would allow Chinese policy researchers to seize the initiative in identifying the real needs of their local societies and in setting up their own research agendas and targets.

Following the identification of local needs and research targets, there is a need for a large amount of empirical studies of local policy practice. Due to the uniqueness of

Chinese culture and China's different social structure, international mainstream policy theories and methods, which are based almost entirely on longstanding empirical researches in the West, cannot be simply applied in analysing China's education policies. A major task ahead is to search for locally effective theories and methods. A great quantity of empirical studies of local education policies will pave the way for the development of China's education policy research.

Our turbulent and unpredictable times are also ideal for localised struggles to create new forms of knowledge and power, free from the tyranny of massive and totalising ideologies (Sieber 1981, Hogwood and Peters 1985, Kothari 1987, Brenkman 1987). The above analysis shows that Chinese education policy researchers are far from responding to this momentous challenge. The majority have taken the rationality and progressiveness of science as an obvious fact. Although well positioned by the wealth of unique cultural heritages and the huge demographic and geographical size with sufficient centre of gravity to operate with relative autonomy, the practice of China's education policy studies shows that Chinese social researchers are losing their opportunities to contribute more substantially to nurturing an international knowledge order that reflects and supports the rich diversity in access to knowledge around the world, and that counteracts the tendency towards homogeneity and standardisation fuelled by the interests of technology, communication and commerce.

With absorption of Western knowledge as the pressing matter of the moment, China's real effort is to 'upgrade' academic programs based on Western experience. Despite the conventional posture on Chinese culture and society as both a starting-point and the

final settling place, the wealth of educational knowledge and experience in Chinese rich civilization is often missing in education policy studies. Indigenous Chinese knowledge has been given little opportunity to influence the ideas and practices of policy research. They are seldom presented as established and coherent sets of beliefs, and are largely devalued and even ignored as processes or coherent methods of learning and teaching. Fundamental assumptions of Chinese indigenous knowledge have been excluded by the very nature of the dominant Western paradigm to a surprising extent, despite the enormous potential for a melding of values from Western academic traditions with aspects of the Chinese traditional scholarship (Hayhoe 2001).

Lacking a focus on the local policy context (Steiner-Khamsi 2005), and with a research steering from the global/West, Chinese policy researchers are taking on the Western science rather than negotiating it in relation to their own local customs and tradition. They have actively, and relatively uncritically, engaged with cross-national policy borrowing. I would offer a caution and suggest closer and more critical examination of the trajectories of education policy in China. There is a need to continually – and critically – navigate ‘the local’ within ‘the global’ as policies evolve. This last point about the importance of context-specific differences returns me to my introductory discussion about hybridization, which allows for a combination of elements to make up the final programme package for policy transfer. A best policy practice does not qualify as best practice under changed constellations. The substantive elements of one programme, although successful in one location, may require a fundamentally different delivery mechanism for it to be effective in another. This ‘missing piece’ can be copied or emulated from a second location.

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ENDNOTES

¹ After being closed to international intercourse for decades, China adopted its policy of opening to the outside world at the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China held in December 1978.

² Emancipating the mind has been closely related to the initiation of China's reform and opening program. In 1978 when the Cultural Revolution had just ended, the national economy was on the brink of collapse. Chinese people were expecting that everything distorted and disordered during the Cultural Revolution would be set to rights. However, some individual central leaders stuck to their leftist stand under the banner of the 'two whatevers' (whatever decision Chairman Mao made should be resolutely safeguarded; whatever instructions Chairman Mao gave should be unswervingly carried out), which actually meant to safeguard the mistakes of Mao Zedong in his later years and the erroneous 'Cultural Revolution'. A philosopher at Nanjing University published an article and concluded that the 'two whatevers' were essentially characterized by idealist empiricism, negating the basic Marxist viewpoint that practice is the criterion for judging truth. The article evoked repercussions nationwide, while people clinging to the 'two whatevers' tried to stifle the discussion. At this critical juncture, Deng Xiaoping, strongly supported the discussion, and delivered a speech titled *Emancipating the Mind, Seeking Truth from Facts and Uniting as One in Advancing Forward* at the Central Working Conference held before the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. The speech served both as the best summary of the nationwide debates over the criterion for truth, and as the theme report to the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the

Communist Party of China, which became a turning point in modern China's historical development, for it advocating foci on economic development and instituting the reform and opening program. Indeed, the discussion marked the beginning of modern China's emancipation of the mind.

³ I tend to use terms such as 'perspective' and 'tradition' instead of 'paradigm.' This is because when Kuhn introduced 'paradigm' into the philosophy of science, he used the term in relation to natural sciences. Kuhn's philosophy and his definition of paradigm originated from his observation of the relation between natural and social sciences. He noted the differences between the debates among social scientists and those among natural scientists (Giddens, 1996).

⁴ By the time, it had become much less rare, however, for some of them to publish in Chinese in Hong Kong, Macau, Taiwan and Singapore.