



Policy Evaluation Research in China: Status and Prospects

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Abstract. In recent years, policy evaluation research in China has made considerable progress in terms of policy evaluation connotations, criterion, and methods. But there is still a gap compared with the international cutting-edge policy research results. In further research, Policy researchers need to define policy evaluation more precisely; develop more scientific policy evaluation criteria by referring to the international classification of advanced public policy evaluation criteria; apply and test the more mature and highly recognized policy evaluation methods to the practice of policy evaluation in China.

Keywords: Policy evaluation research; China; status; prospects

1 Introduction

Since the 1980s, Policy science research in China has been more fully developed, and policy evaluation research has been rapidly promoted. Through long-term efforts, the academic community has formed a certain consensus on the principles, systems, connotations, criterion, and methods of public policy evaluation, and the framework of policy evaluation theories and methodological systems with Chinese characteristics has been continuously improved and perfected. However, compared with the international cutting-edge research, there is still a lagging situation. Combing the status of Chinese policy evaluation research and comparing it with international research results can identify the shortcomings of existing research and point out the direction for further research.

2 What are Chinese scholars focusing on?

Currently, in the field of policy evaluation research in China, a number of books have been published that are generally recognized by the academic community; from the publication of journal articles, nearly 3,000 articles have been published on this topic, and nearly 40% of these articles have been published in high level journals, so the quality of research is relatively high. In terms of the current research results, the research focuses on the following aspects:

2.1 Connotation

scholars have discussed the connotation of policy evaluation. Due to the differences in cognitive and analytical perspectives, the international discussion on the connotation of policy evaluation has been quite controversial, and the existing views can be broadly divided into program evaluation theory, effect evaluation theory, and whole process evaluation theory. In China, there are relatively few proponents of the "program evaluation theory," and more scholars tend to view policy evaluation as a judgment of policy effects or a comprehensive review of the policy process. Scholars who hold the "effect evaluation theory" tend to focus on the difference between policy objectives and policy effects, trying to identify the causes through policy effects, so as to judge the value of policies, revise existing policies, and enhance policy effects. The representative figure of this view, Zhang Jinma (1992), a well-known public policy researcher in China, defines policy evaluation as "a series of activities around policy effects, such as specification, measurement, analysis, and recommendation" on this basis. Lai Lifeng (2006) further explores the focus of policy effectiveness measurement and the nature of policy evaluation, stating that policy evaluation is "a political act of judging the effectiveness, efficiency and value of policies according to certain criteria and procedures. In recent years, the whole process evaluation theory has gradually occupied the mainstream in the field of policy evaluation research in China. For example, Yun Jie (2006) argues that policy evaluation is "the process of obtaining relevant information and policy conclusions through partial or comprehensive analysis of the quality and effectiveness of public policies, as well as the elements, links and evaluation methods that constitute the policy system, under a specific policy system and in accordance with certain evaluation criteria and procedures. " Wang Jiandong (2019) and other scholars also point out that policy evaluation is a dynamic process of evaluating policy expectations, content, process and results in a comprehensive manner. This conceptual understanding of paying attention to all aspects of policy programs, policy implementation and policy effects has been widely recognized by the academic community.

2.2 criterion

scholars have also explored the evaluation criteria of the policy. The choice and combination of evaluation criteria can directly affect the credibility of evaluation findings. There has long been a "paradigm debate" between technical and political evaluation in the field of public policy evaluation research, which is particularly evident in the setting of policy evaluation criteria. In terms of the development of policy evaluation criteria, scholars have mostly borrowed the idea of formulating policy evaluation criteria in the West, using technical and socio-political criteria as the basic yardstick for evaluating policies. For example, Xie Ming (2002) argues that when conducting policy evaluation, not only the input-output ratio, the degree and scope of goal achievement, and the impact of the policy on society should be taken as factual criteria, but also whether it meets the interests of most people, facilitates the development of social productivity, promotes people's solidarity, and maintains social stability as

important value criteria; Yun Jie (2006) also pointed out that in addition to the technical criteria that focus on economy, effectiveness, efficiency and work process, it is also necessary to strengthen the measurement of socio-political criteria such as fairness, sociality, scientificity and feasibility. In addition, the seven standards of effectiveness, efficiency, impact, social productivity, responsiveness, social justice, and social sustainability advocated by Ning Sao (2003) and the seven elements of workload, performance, efficiency, adequacy, fairness and appropriateness, and overall social development indicators by Zhang Jinma (2004) are also formulated from these two dimensions. After a comprehensive examination of the scholars' views, we can further divide these criteria according to the policy evaluation segment. The first category is the evaluation criteria of policy programs, such as legality, rationality, fairness, feasibility, appropriateness, and science; the second category is the criteria set for measuring the quality of policy implementation, such as implementation capacity, reflectivity, public participation, and social sustainability; and the third category is the evaluation criteria set based on policy outcomes, including effectiveness, efficiency, impact, responsiveness, and social productivity.

2.3 Methods

The general methods to policy evaluation can be classified as quantitative, qualitative, and mixed approaches. Early policy evaluation studies have been inclined toward technical-level analysis, advocating the application of empirical technical methods to discern the correspondence between policy goal prescriptions and policy outcomes, and thus verify the actual effects of policies. However, with the development of time and the advancement of understanding, scholars began to complain about the "noisy" application of positivist methodology in social sciences, and gradually applied qualitative research methods such as case studies and expert evaluations to policy evaluation. However, it soon became clear that a single qualitative assessment was not conducive to the development of policy evaluation research either. In fact, it was the methodological integration of facts and values that was the main obstacle to the study of policy issues in the social sciences. As a result, researchers began to make various attempts to develop an integrated approach beyond the traditional quantitative and qualitative dichotomies, and the mixed research approach emerged and has since become the main approach in international policy evaluation research. Currently, qualitative assessment methods such as questionnaires, interviews, and case studies, as well as quantitative assessment methods including bibliometric, statistical analysis of patent data, regression measurement, fuzzy analysis, and dynamical model analysis are more common in Chinese policy evaluation studies. In recent years, various policy evaluation methods have become more and more mature, and people have become more and more proficient in applying these methods in empirical studies. In order to better judge the quality of policy programs, Zhang Yongan et al. (2015) used the text mining method to develop a regional science and technology innovation policy evaluation under the PMC index model; Sun Rui et al. (2020) used content analysis and hierarchical analysis (AHP) to quantitatively analyze the text and calculate the evaluation index of the policy for the introduction of young scientific and technological

talents to measure the policy. The evaluation index was calculated to measure the strengths and weaknesses of the policy. To achieve a deeper understanding of policy implementation, Wang Guohong (2007) pointed out the need to emphasize the application of gray prediction methods in policy implementation evaluation; Yi Jiandong (2013) and others used the fuzzy comprehensive evaluation method (PCEM) to conduct a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of policy implementation in China's sports industry. The use of policy effectiveness evaluation methods by Chinese scholars is more mature. Whether it is the before-and-after comparison method, questionnaire survey method and interview method, or the more popular "double difference model" measurement method (DID) in recent years, or the satisfaction analysis method using logistic regression analysis model, etc., they all provide a clearer understanding of the effect of policy implementation from the real changes or people's personal feelings. These methods provide an important contribution to the understanding of the effect of policy implementation from real changes or people's perceptions.

3 Progressiveness and deficiencies of the study

With the unremitting efforts of scholars, the theoretical system of policy evaluation in China has been basically formed. In recent years, policy evaluation researchers in China have gradually recognized the importance of constructing a theoretical framework for policy evaluation with Chinese characteristics. Although the current theoretical framework is still mainly established on the basis of the classical policy evaluation model, certain modifications and innovations have been launched in conjunction with the Chinese reality. For example, Zhao Lixiao (2014) from the Institute of Science and Technology Policy and Management Science, Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) built a framework of stage evaluation criteria covering the whole process of public policy on the basis of Evert Vedung's public policy evaluation model, and proposed a theoretical approach to innovation policy evaluation theory by combining the characteristics of innovation policy evaluation. The proposed theoretical framework is dedicated to the organic combination of facts and values, which not only considers the degree of achievement of policy implementation for the realization of goals, but also places policies in the macro system of social system and social values in a dynamic and balanced way, which has important guiding significance for the development of policy evaluation activities in China.

However, in general, China's policy evaluation research is still at the early stage of learning and exploring, and still needs to learn from the development ideas of international advanced policy evaluation research in terms of connotation definition, criteria selection, index development and method application. Unlike international scholars who are more concerned with policy evaluation in climate, ecology, health, education policy and economy, China's policy evaluation research mainly focuses on sports, poverty alleviation, education and other fields, which is somewhat different from the focus of international attention. In terms of research focus, Chinese scholars have devoted relatively more to the basic theory of policy evaluation and relatively less to specific case studies, but international policy evaluation research is no longer limited

to the definition of basic theory, but includes many expanded introductions to the application areas of policy evaluation theory. This also shows that policy evaluation research in China is still at a preliminary stage, and there is still a certain distance from the formation of a mature, perfect and systematic research paradigm. In terms of the choice of policy evaluation methods, Chinese research is still dominated by qualitative methods, with quantitative methods not fully dominant and relatively little application of mixed research methods, which is also different from international policy evaluation research.

4 Conclusion

This paper provides an understanding of the current understanding of policy evaluation among Chinese scholars by combing and classifying Chinese policy evaluation research, and identifies the existing strengths and weaknesses by comparing the situation with international cutting-edge policy evaluation research. However, as the study places more emphasis on interpreting the views of different scholars. To some extent, quantitative analysis of research texts is neglected, and future improvements are needed on this issue.

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