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Bringing the Low-Carbon Agenda to China: A Study in Transnational Policy Diffusion

Andreas HOFEM and Sebastian HEILMANN

Abstract: This study traces the transnational interactions that contributed to introducing the low-carbon economy agenda into Chinese policy-making. A microprocessual two-level analysis (outside-in as well as inside-access) is employed to analyse transnational and domestic exchanges. The study provides evidence that low-carbon agenda-setting – introduced by transnational actors, backed by foreign funding, promoted by policy entrepreneurs from domestic research institutes, propelled by top-level attention, but only gradually and cautiously adopted by the government bureaucracy – can be considered a case of effective transnational diffusion based on converging perceptions of novel policy challenges and options. Opinion leaders and policy-brokers from the government-linked scientific community functioned as effective access points to the Chinese government’s policy agenda.

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Introduction

The Chinese government promotes moving toward a low-carbon economy (LCE, 低碳经济, *ditan jingji*) as a comprehensive solution to the ecological dilemmas posed by China's extraordinary industrial growth. As total energy production has more than tripled since 1978 and coal still accounts for over two-thirds of primary energy production, greenhouse gas emissions have been soaring. In the face of this challenge, Chinese government programmes are emphasizing LCE policies to stem domestic environmental degradation and mitigate global climate change; in doing so, they are crafting a novel approach to combining environmental sustainability with dynamic economic development.

In 2010, thirteen jurisdictions were designated as low-carbon economy pilot zones (LCZs, 低碳经济试点区, *ditan jingji shidianqu*) to explore new ways of creating sustainable development at the local level (NDRC 2010; Zhong and Fu 2010; Xiong 2010). The frequent use of the term “low carbon” in the 12th Five-Year Plan (2011–2015) and the inclusion of binding LCE-related policy targets in national and provincial policy programmes confirm the prominence that LCE has gained in China's development agenda. From subway advertisements and roadside banners to national and local planning documents, low carbon has become a public policy buzzword in China.

But how did LCE enter China's political agenda in the first place? LCE as a novel conception for development originated in Western academia and politics. Low-carbon policies enacted in the European Union, along with active publicity work by European governments – most prominently, the UK – have pushed the topic into the international discussion on sustainable growth.

This study sets out to trace the transnational interactions that brought LCE onto the agenda of Chinese policy-makers. We show that exchanges among transnational networks of environmental policy researchers and initiatives pursued by domestic scientists started a process of popularizing the LCE agenda in China and feeding it into the administrative process. Simultaneously, senior leaders were exposed to the international LCE debate and confronted with increasing demands on China during diplomatic exchanges. Transnational policy and research exchanges, bottom-up LCE initiatives by Chinese think tanks, and diplomacy-driven top-level attention thus coincided and opened a policy window for inserting LCE into the administrative process and into China's overall development agenda. Our analysis highlights communication and

convergence among diverse protagonists, including non-Chinese government bodies and think tanks; international development organizations; Chinese research institutes; subdivisions of the national planning body (National Development and Reform Commission, NDRC); local governments; and individual top-level decision-makers.

Even though foreign actors played a crucial role in initiating exchanges, LCE policy diffusion must not be seen as emulating Western models but rather as an open-ended process: A transferable “international best practice” of building an LCE has not yet been established, and the Chinese policy and research communities are determined to explore and generate novel LCE approaches that are compatible with local circumstances and needs. Learning from abroad does not mean imitating foreign practice, but rather adapting and transforming it.

Our analytical framework draws on recent innovations in the study of China’s policy process, which differs in important respects from social science standard models that are derived from democratic politics. To trace the transnational and domestic interactions that lifted LCE onto the Chinese political agenda, we will employ a “microprocessual two-level analysis” (outside-in as well as inside-access), which was conceived by Heilmann and Schulte-Kulmann (2011) for the study of policy diffusion in the Chinese context. Wang Shaoguang’s “inside-access model” of agenda-setting that stresses the crucial role of policy researchers as advisors and document drafters in China’s polity (Wang 2007) is employed to analyse the bottom-up activities that drew policy-makers’ attention to new concepts and issues. Overall, this study is guided by an understanding of policy change put forward by Kingdon as well as Baumgartner and Jones that focuses on the interplay of actors, problems, proposed solutions and policy windows (Kingdon 1984; Baumgartner and Jones 1993). From this perspective, policy change is driven forward by entrepreneurial actors with tangible interests who are lobbying for a particular approach to public problem-solving and regulation, yet have to find, or shape, opportunities (policy windows) that allow them to feed their proposals into the official agenda.

This study is structured as follows. In the next section, we elaborate on the conceptual roots of LCE as a starting point for policy diffusion. Subsequently, we turn to a detailed analysis of the exchanges between transnational and domestic actors. Then we take a close look at domestic agenda-building. Our conclusions will point to more general insights that

can be obtained from the LCE case to better understand the Chinese policy process.

Beyond scrutiny of Chinese written sources and publications, our empirical findings are based on a series of interviews conducted in the summer and fall of 2011 with Chinese environmental administrators and researchers, Chinese and European non-governmental organizations, European diplomats, and representatives of international development organizations.

The Origins of the LCE Agenda

The term “LCE” first appeared in scientific articles in the second half of the 1990s (Kinzig and Kammen 1998). For public policy-makers, the LCE concept proved to be highly attractive since it suggested a new approach to “ecological modernization” and a vision of reconciling economic growth with environmental sustainability.

A pioneering programme employing the low-carbon headline was a white book on energy policy issued by the UK government in 2003 (DTI 2003). It maps out a strategy to drastically reduce dependence on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions by 2050. Importantly for our study, the white book was the starting point of a sustained effort by UK foreign policy and foreign aid bodies to propagate LCE as a novel approach to reconcile growth with emissions reductions throughout the developing world. The approach was further developed in the *Stern Review*, in which the former World Bank economist Nicholas Stern, in collaboration with British government officials and researchers, laid out the transition to a global LCE as a necessary and feasible strategy to mitigate climate change and facilitate sustainable growth (Stern 2006). As a result, LCE has become a key concept in the international climate change discussion. Multilateral documents on global climate policy call for an LCE-oriented transformation of, for example, growth and consumption patterns, energy production, and technology.

From a strict definitional angle, LCE is a vague *passe-partout* slogan, similar to “sustainable development”, that serves to summarize and legitimate a considerable bandwidth of already existing policies, technologies and development approaches (Pan et al. 2010). A broadly accepted working definition was put forward in a 2009 white paper by the UK Department for International Development (DFID 2009: 58), which

conceives of low-carbon development as “using less carbon for growth”. Areas of low-carbon development are exemplified by

- “using less energy [by] improving the efficiency with which energy is used and moving to low- or zero-carbon energy sources”,
- “protecting and promoting natural resources that store carbon (such as forests and land)”,
- “designing, disseminating and deploying low- or zero-carbon technologies and business models” and
- “policies and incentives which discourage carbon-intensive practices and behaviours”.

Adhering to the principle that “different countries must define the content of their low-carbon policies based on their own national conditions and circumstances” (UNDP and Renmin University 2010: 5), the scope and the specific approaches of a Chinese LCE are shaped and reshaped by transnational and domestic interactions revolving around the LCE agenda.

Transnational Interactions and the Chinese LCE Agenda

The idea of building an LCE originated among Western academics and policy-makers. These actors thereafter also played a traceable role in bringing LCE onto the Chinese policy agenda. UK government units stand out as the pioneering door openers (Interview FQ 2011). British diplomatic and aid officials organized a series of workshops and conferences geared towards “building awareness and capacity” in Chinese climate change policy. The Foreign Office granted funds for LC research and research cooperation. On the occasion of a Sino-UK workshop on climate change organized in 2004 by the British embassy in Beijing, the 2003 UK white book on LC energy policy was presented to an attentive audience of Chinese scientists (Interview ZGY 2011).

Although there had been relevant research in Chinese academia about LC-related topics, the LCE concept broadened the perspective on individual research issues by providing an intuitive umbrella concept (Interview JKJ 2011). A series of additional conferences revolving around LCE were subsequently held and/ or co-funded by UK representative offices in China and propelled the academic discussion. Following the 2004 workshop, LCE was quickly picked up by Chinese scien-

tists. Based on a search in the China Academic Journals database for the period from 2004 to 2011, a rapidly increasing number of scientific publications began to carry the new catchphrase in the titles of their articles, with the effect of reframing existing yet dispersed research efforts as being part of a much more comprehensive and important development strategy (Interview ZGY 2011; Interview ZYM 2011).

However, it was only in 2007 that the Chinese government endorsed LCE officially. In 2007 the Ministry of Science and Technology in collaboration with the Chinese Meteorological Administration and the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) started publishing annual evaluation reports on climate change in China (国家气候变化评估报告, *Guojia qibou bianhua pinggu baogao*) and promoted LCE as a new policy paradigm (*Xinbua wang* 2007). The initial report met with broad public resonance and was understood as a quasi-official endorsement of the LCE concept. Almost simultaneously, LCE-related cooperation schemes between Chinese and European research institutions were intensified and, for the first time, climate policy units of China's national planning body, the NDRC, got involved in the exchanges.

As an exemplary case of transnational collaboration, a study report titled *Changing Climates* was published in 2007 (Chatham House 2007). In preparing this study, E3G (a British non-governmental organization focusing on sustainable development) and Chatham House (a legally independent policy research institute with strong government links) cooperated with Chinese partners, the CASS Institute for Urban and Environmental Studies (CASS-IUE) and the NDRC's Energy Research Institute (NDRC-ERI). Funding, however, was mainly provided by the British Foreign Office. The report ambitiously called for establishing an EU–China free trade agreement for LC technologies, yet also suggested establishing a pilot LCZ (Interview JM 2011). Starting in 2008 the report's recommendations were put into practice in a local cooperation project to develop a low-carbon roadmap for Jilin Municipality, thereby building China's first LCZ.

In effect, transnational cooperation and Chinese research activities had managed to draw broad attention to the LC concept. As soon as government units in the guise of the NDRC and CASS entered the exchanges, the window was opened for pilot programmes on the local level. We will take a close look at the domestic actors in the next section. But let us first further discuss transnational interactions.

In assessing the role of foreign actors, many Chinese interviewees saw one factor as being particularly crucial: the start-up funding supplied by the British Foreign Office in the initial stages of agenda-building. Foreign funding and co-funding served, first, to secure the attention and goodwill of Chinese climate change scientists and research institutes and, second, to launch local cooperation projects (such as the LCZ in Jilin) with the support of national administrative units which themselves did not have sufficient funds but (as will be spelled out below) did have strong bureaucratic incentives to boost the LCE agenda.

The ascension of the LCE agenda is closely linked to a special funding vehicle the Foreign Office has employed that has had a great impact: The Strategic Programme Fund (SPF) has furthered British foreign interests by funding global action on strategic issues since 2003, with climate change and the promotion of LCE being key funding areas. Major Chinese scientists working on LCE stressed the importance of the “unconditional” support of the SPF that did not impose very strict requirements on the Chinese side (Interview JKJ 2011; Interview WY 2011). The Foreign Office used the SPF not just to fund studies, such as the above-mentioned *Changing Climates* report or the subsequent “Jilin Roadmap”. It even set up a more comprehensive “Low Carbon, High Growth Strategic Programme” for the period from 2008 to 2011 and, as of year-end 2011, had funded more than 30 LC-related projects in China (Interview FQ 2011).

While early SPF projects had tried to support “awareness-building”, the focus soon shifted toward providing concrete assistance in explorative implementation and supporting the 13 Chinese LCZs (Interview FQ 2011). In effect, the Foreign Office has positioned itself as the central actor of British climate change and energy diplomacy in China. This is noteworthy because official British development cooperation with China was ceased in 2009 due to the re-classification of China as a middle-income country. In turn, the Foreign Office has acquired an exclusive position in funding large- and small-scale LC projects in China, thus significantly enlarging its policy reach (Interview SWN 2011).

However, all efforts by transnational policy advocates would most probably not have borne fruit without a highly conducive policy window that opened in the second half of the 2000s. This window of opportunity was facilitated by a marked shift in international diplomacy that pushed climate change to a top priority status on the multilateral agenda, linked to the run-up for major conferences such as the 2009 Copenhagen

summit. China had become a participant in negotiations at the Conference of Parties of the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) under the Kyoto Protocol (He 2010; Harris 2011). These negotiations exerted a strong influence on climate policy-making within the Chinese government (Yu 2008: 96–100). Chinese leaders and officials involved in diplomatic exchanges came to be regularly confronted with climate change issues because Chinese contributions and concessions were seen as indispensable for coping with global climate change.

Top-level decision-makers grasped the importance of the new issue at a rather early stage. President Hu Jintao surprised the audience at the APEC summit in autumn 2007 when he addressed the need to build an LCE and develop LC energy technologies to counter global warming (*Renmin wang* 2007). Hu Jintao and several of his colleagues in China's peak decision bodies picked up on the topic in a series of speeches held in 2007 and 2008 (*Xinhua wang* 2009). Although LC rhetoric may be regarded as a token concession to international expectations, the message was very well received inside China. As one interviewee replied, it was only after Hu Jintao's 2007 speech that LCE was broadly debated in China (Interview JKJ 2011). Top-level endorsement not only facilitated public discussion but also spurred Chinese scientists to bring their work on LCE to the attention of policy-makers (Interview SWN 2011; Interview ZYM 2011).

Since 2008 China's LCE agenda has been brought under the purview of a newly established Leadership Small Group for Climate Change Response (应对气候变化领导小组, *Yingdui qibou bianhua lingdao xiaozu*) that is supposed to facilitate interdepartmental coordination similar to cabinet committees in other polities. That this leading group is headed by Premier Wen Jiabao and Vice-Premier Li Keqiang signifies the high level of priority that came to be attached to climate policy by the Chinese government (Interview ZJ 2011). Top-level endorsement also served to overcome existing scepticism that the NDRC had initially displayed toward Western participation in LCE projects. LCE was swiftly reframed in public debate and administrative deliberations. It was not referred to as a conception imposed by Western governments to limit China's growth potential anymore, but rather as an economically feasible alternative to across-the-board emission reductions (Interview JZL 2011).

Domestic Agenda-Setting

Domestic actors were not passive receivers of outside impulses and co-operation incentives. On the contrary, it was domestic actors with their specific interests and privileged access to administrative insiders that worked to funnel transnational inputs onto the Chinese policy agenda. In our context, the term “domestic actors” refers to institutions and individuals that actively contributed not just to the public LCE debate but also to the administrative specification of policies, usually through policy and pilot project task forces. Most discernible in this regard were the NDRC’s Climate Change Response Bureau (发改委应对气候变化司, *Fagaiwei yingdui qihou bianhua si*, short: NDRC Climate Bureau); national-level research bodies under the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS); the Energy Research Institute (ERI); and local governments involved in LCE pilot programmes. Among CASS units, the Institute of Urban Development and the Environment (CASS-IUE) and the Research Centre for Sustainable Development contributed substantially and continually to LCE diffusion. In the Chinese Academy of Sciences (a huge ministerial-level umbrella body covering a great diversity of research institutions in the natural and technical sciences), the Institute of Science & Technology Policy stands out. Besides such quasi-governmental actors, university institutes that conduct LC research – for instance, Qinghua University’s Low Carbon Energy Laboratory – were also involved in preparing pioneering LCE policies.

Starting in the 1980s, an increasingly broad and pluralistic spectrum of government-linked research institutes has gained substantial influence in Chinese policymaking by pre-shaping and pre-formulating the policy choices available to the executive. “Scientific” (protracted consultation- and expert-based) decision-making has come to characterize policy procedures, especially in technically demanding fields such as environmental regulation or technology policy. The number and diversity of think tanks that offer specialized advice to decision-makers and that are selectively invited to participate in policy task forces has grown (Wang 2007: 65–67). Since the early 2000s, State Council rules formally require government bodies, including the NDRC, to consult scientists and experts in preparing policy programmes, laws and regulations. As a consequence, many high-profile research institutions continue to be organizationally and financially attached to ministerial-level government bodies and have come to act as semi-official extensions of the government bureaucracy, especially in policy formulation (but not in implementation). Research

units not only provide training lectures, workshops and background studies to government officials, but also regularly take an active part in drafting primary documents as well as in evaluating and revising secondary policy. The importance of research bodies in climate change policy-making was highlighted by the 2011 founding of the China Research Centre for Climate Change and International Cooperation.

With regard to China's LCE agenda, the CASS-IUE and NDRC-ERI have been particularly prominent drivers of LC research and policy inputs. These institutes and the prominent scientists working in them have contributed heavily to LCE diffusion. They function not just as effective transmitters between transnational cooperation projects and the domestic bureaucracy, but also as pro-active policy entrepreneurs, directing intense efforts at persuasion toward reluctant NDRC administrators. When the LCE agenda was first raised by British counterparts, the NDRC units that had to approve the cooperation projects were sceptical because LCE was then still seen as a foreign-imposed concept that could possibly have detrimental effects on Chinese growth. The feasibility of LCE development was openly called into question and foreign involvement in LC-oriented projects was seen with suspicion.

Non-Chinese experts interviewed for this study suggested that NDRC scepticism was only overcome when top leaders such as Hu Jintao endorsed LCE as a novel approach to be explored in China (Interview SWN 2011; Interview JM 2011; Interview ZGY 2011). However, domestic protagonists involved in internal policy deliberations and high-level government meetings stressed the importance of "bottom-up" efforts at convincing senior leaders to drop their reservations about LCE strategies (Interview JKJ 2011; Interview JM 2011). Leadership endorsement clearly provided the window of opportunity, but policy entrepreneurs among research advisors made determined use of this window to increase the pressure on the administrative bodies that were responsible for approving and implementing LCE projects. Introducing LC pilot zones had already been considered by the NDRC in 2006. But it was the year-long persuasion and lobbying activity by well-connected policy advisors from government-embedded research institutes (such as the NDRC-ERI and CASS-IUE) that laid the groundwork for the eventual breakthrough and for the establishment of China's first LCE pilot (Interview JKJ 2011; Interview JM 2011; Chatham House et al. 2010).

In order to trace and document the contribution of research institutes to LCE agenda-setting, it is important to open the NDRC "black

box” and take a closer look at the bureaucratic units that decide about and process LCE initiatives. The bureaucratic setting in Chinese climate policy underwent a decisive change in 2008 when the low-ranking NDRC Climate Office was upgraded to bureau level. NDRC bureaus are tasked with overseeing broad cross-departmental policy areas and therefore communicate directly with ministerial-level units. When the climate agenda was taken over by a bureau-level unit in the NDRC, LCE policy initiatives met with a much more receptive bureaucratic counterpart. The new NDRC Climate Bureau was explicitly charged with further developing China’s efforts at mitigating climate change, coordinating domestic policies, ensuring compliance with international climate treaties, and supporting international cooperation.

However, the authority of this newcomer body was hampered by a lack of autonomous policy authority and budgetary funds, since almost all major policy issues relevant to climate change (such as energy production, energy conservation or emissions reductions) were already administered and occupied by other NDRC units. Therefore, initially, the bureaucratic status and functions of the NDRC Climate Bureau were weak, its concrete influence on relevant policy areas insignificant. In short, the fledgling NDRC Climate Bureau was in dire need of a domestic policy mission that would allow for more staff, more projects and more funds under its control.

When domestic research institutes proposed ambitious LCE policies and foreign institutions offered project funding, the officials in the NDRC Climate Bureau grasped the opportunity that happened to be in tune with the newly redefined task of international outreach and cooperation in climate research and policy. The critical link was provided by entrepreneurial researcher-advisors who were part of an epistemic community that included domestic administrators as well as foreign aid programmes. Researchers from institutes such as the NDRC-ERI and CASS-IUE thus not only established the connection between foreign funding and domestic bureaucracy, but also provided the Climate Bureau with policy inputs that were based on transnational exchanges and expertise.

When top-level attention to the climate change issue grew and the ambitious targets for emissions reduction in the 11th Five-Year Plan (2006–2010) were communicated as binding and unshakable, research advisors marketed the LCE agenda as a comprehensive policy vision. In a joint proposal, Chinese climate researchers and their foreign counter-

parts and funders suggested establishing one or more LCE Experimental Zones. This proposal gave the NDRC Climate Bureau – which was desperately seeking to broaden its mission and authority – a perfect opportunity at the perfect time to raise its domestic status by launching and coordinating a major new policy programme. In effect, the NDRC Climate Bureau moved to occupy its own policy domain with the help of the Chinese and transnational LCE research community (Interview JZL 2011).

Funding provided by international cooperating units such as the British SPF paved the way for establishing explorative small-scale LC pilot projects. Policy advisors from national research institutes outside the government bureaucracy were again crucial in the stage of project initiation (Interview JM 2011). The NDRC-ERI and CASS-IUE assessed and suggested to the NDRC several cities as potential pilot sites. Strikingly, the final selection of Jilin Municipality as the first pilot site was based on personal connections that a group of researchers had built with the local mayor. When Jilin's mayor took part in a training course at the Central Party School in Beijing, several LCE researchers persuaded him to host the pilot project in his jurisdiction. The NDRC-ERI and CASS-IUE, in close collaboration with E3G and Chatham House, then proceeded to work out a “Low Carbon Roadmap” that was designed to transform Jilin's economic, transport and energy structure with the aim of moving toward an LCE.

The Jilin cooperation project reveals how common interests and joint initiatives by domestic and foreign actors facilitated transnational, cooperative agenda-building. For the local government, the cooperation project presented a valuable opportunity: It could tap into foreign funding with the hope of identifying new local development potential and raising the status of the municipal leadership in the eyes of the central government. NDRC attention allowed the Jilin government to secure political and financial support for major policy changes. Since the success or failure of the local pilot project was uncertain, the NDRC Climate Bureau's officials found themselves in the comfortable position of being able to take a wait-and-see attitude, while project funding and implementation was in the hands of external actors who would have to bear the blame if the project went wrong. For the freshly established Climate Bureau, financial and political risks were thus minimized. When the first positive results became visible, the Bureau claimed the credit for running successful pilot programmes, endorsed Jilin as an “LC Model

Zone” (低碳经济示范区, *Ditan jingji shifanqu*), and approved the establishment of further pilot zones in other regions (Zhu 2009). The LC pilot programme proved to be valuable political capital for both the NDRC Climate Bureau and the Jilin mayor: The State Council Cabinet praised Jilin as a national model for pursuing innovative LCE development (Zhou 2009).

While Jilin stands out as the first city to be officially named an LC Model Zone, several other cooperation projects were undertaken by foreign non-governmental organizations in collaboration with Chinese research institutes and local governments. The World Wide Fund for Nature, for instance, launched an LC project with the municipal government of Baoding that ultimately led to the recognition of Baoding as an NDRC-designated LC Pilot Zone in 2010. Foreign NGO representatives (for example, from the World Resources Institute or the Climate Group) have entered into close formal and informal exchanges and cooperation with LC planning bodies on the national and local levels (Interview ZJ 2011). Since 2008, a broad spectrum of LC activities has been channelled through the NDRC bureaucracy. And the NDRC Climate Bureau has gradually assumed full responsibility for coordinating domestic LC initiatives, thus fortifying its bureaucratic turf, establishing itself as a major new player in Chinese environmental policy, and entrenching LCE firmly in China’s government bureaucracy and policy agenda.

Conclusion

This study provided evidence that LC agenda-setting – introduced by transnational actors, backed by foreign funding, promoted by policy entrepreneurs from domestic research institutes, propelled by top-level attention, but only gradually and cautiously adopted by the government bureaucracy – can be considered a case of effective transnational policy diffusion based on converging perceptions of policy challenges.

Transnational exchanges effectively reshaped the available policy concepts and options. Foreign funding of cooperation projects served as a crucial door-opener to Chinese research institutes as well as to bureaucratic bodies. Government-linked research institutes, through their close association with the national planning body, provided the indispensable inside access to senior officials who were in the position to pave the way for further policy diffusion. By assuming the function of policy-brokers, research institutes and their entrepreneurial heads obtained foreign funds

for LC research, pursued international cooperation projects, lobbied for LC pilots within the government machine, and helped to implement local LC projects. Agenda-building was supported by government units that, as in the case of the NDRC's Climate Bureau, are determined to raise their status within the bureaucracy through policy activism. In addition, international climate diplomacy helped to draw the attention of top leaders to the climate change issue. Their official endorsement opened a window of opportunity for establishing and enriching China's LC agenda.

A striking finding in this case of transnational policy diffusion is how effectively low-profile networks of researchers and officials made use of a policy window to push forward their LC agenda. The influence of government-linked research institutes on shaping and reshaping policy perceptions and options must be acknowledged as a major factor in Chinese politics. Many research institutes maintain excellent relations with the bureaucracy and are involved in policymaking as advisors on a regular basis. In many policy areas, the distinction between government organs and research institutes appears fuzzy because researchers collaborate regularly and intensely with government officials in policy task forces (课题组, *ketizhu*) and document-drafting groups (起草组, *qicaozyu*). These groups are tasked with formulating official development strategies and regulatory programmes. In the fields of environmental protection, climate change, and sustainable development, opinion leaders and policy-brokers from the government-linked scientific community can thus function as effective access points to the Chinese government's policy agenda.

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