Confronting Risks in Public Policy—Experiences from China

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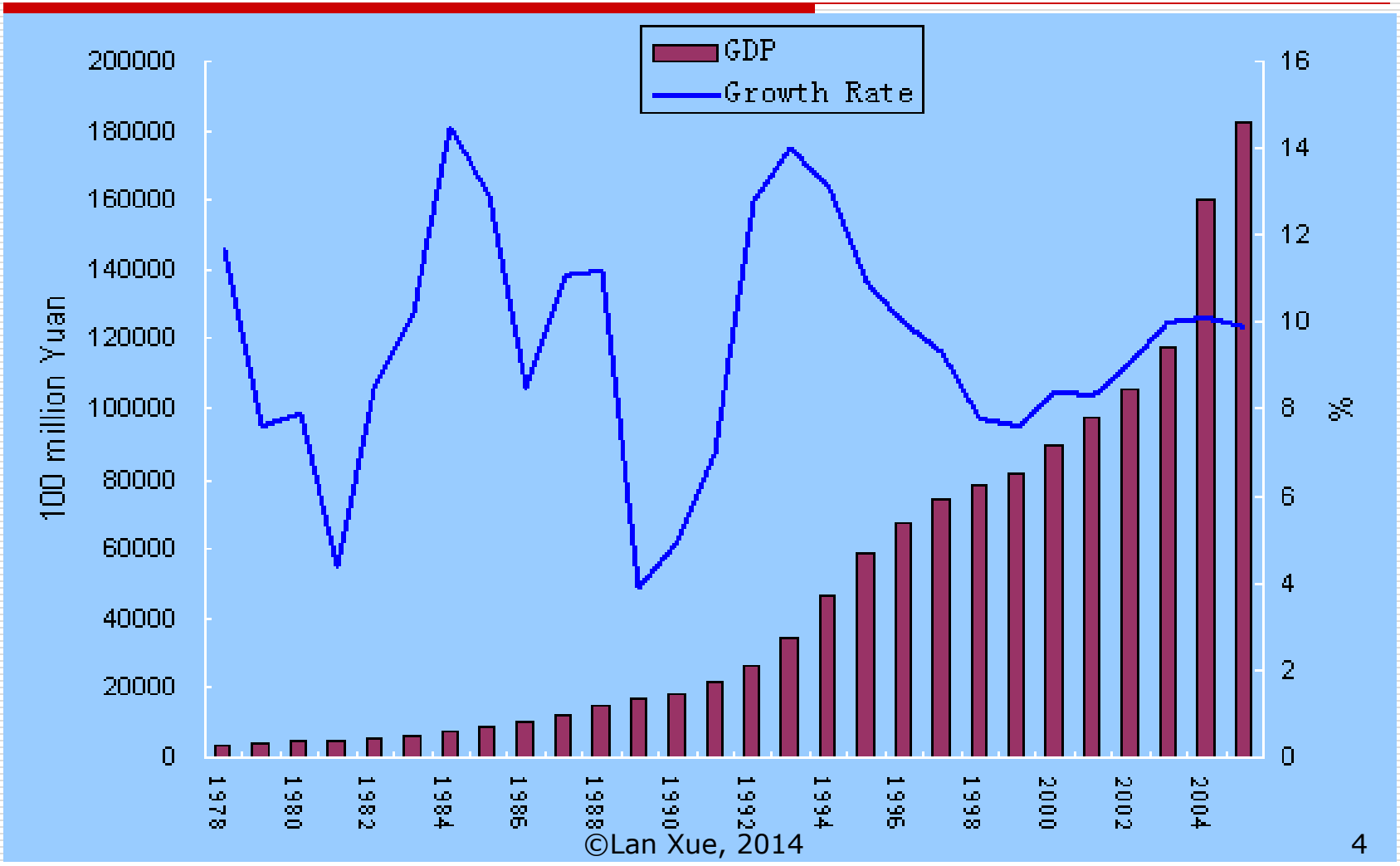
Outline

- I. The changing policy context
- II. The changing policy process
- III. Case 1. NIMBY
- IV. Case 2. GM food
- V. What can be done?

I. The changing policy context

- Economic system reform → on going:
  - Central planning=>market-based;
- Industrial structure →transitioning:
  - Agriculture + Manufacturing=> Manufacturing + Service
- Society →rural migration + globalization:
  - Rural=>Urban
  - Closed=>Open
- Governance →efficiency +participation
  - Personal charisma and authority=>broad participation and rule of law

Economic system: to be completed



Industrial structure-in transition

- Agriculture:
  - 1980=30% => 2000=14.8% => 2013=10%
  - 1981=68.1%=》2009=38.1%
- Manufacturing:
  - 1980=49% => 2000=45.9% => 2013=43.9%
  - 1981=18.3%=>2009=27.8%
- Service:
  - 1980=21% => 2000=39.3% =>2013=46.1%
  - 1981=13.6% =>2009=34.1%

Society—migration + globalization

- Rural =>Urban
  - Urban population 1982=20.6% => 2012=52%
- International Linkage
  - Economy: Self-reliant=>major world trading partners
    - FDI> $60 billion
    - international trade as the percentage of GDP
      - 1978=10% => 2005 =62%
  - Overseas travel:
    - 1998=8.43 M => 2004=28.85 M =>2012>80 M

Governance—efficiency + participation

- Village election and higher level election experiments;
- Administrative and legal systems reforms;
- Broader public participation in the policy process (e.g. public hearing);
- The growth of non-governmental sector;
- Anti-corruption campaigns;
- ……

II. The Changing Policy Process in China

	Traditional model	The new change
Agenda	-Top down -Inside the system	-top down+ bottom up; -- -outside inputs;
Alternatives	-elite bureaucratic organizations; scientists	-elites inside and outside; -International agencies -Popular voices;
Deliberation	-coordination within government agencies	-coordination within gov't; -among interest groups; -public participation
Decision and Implementation	-political mobilization	-market, political and social mobilization;

III. Case 1—NIMBY

Time	Place	# of people	Project	Risks involved	outcome
2007.6.1-6.2	Xiamen	Thousands	PX Plant	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Project cancelled
2009.11.9	Guangzhou	Thousands	Garbage incinerator	Pollution	Tighter risk assessment and environmental control
2011.8.14	Dalian	Twelve thousands	PX Plant	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Project canceled
2012.7.2-7.3	Shifang	Hundreds	Molybdenum Copper refinery	Emissions Risk of accidents	project canceled
2012.7.28	Qidong	over Ten thousands	Paper mill	Water pollution	Project cancelled
2012.10.25-10.26	Ningbo	Hundreds	PX Project	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Project canceled
2013.5.4, 5.16	Kunming	thousands Thousands of people	PX plant PX Project	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Project suspended
2013.5.4-5.5	Pengzhou	Demonstration failed	PX Project	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Local government promised to get the public involved in the decision.
2013.7.12, 7.14	Jiangmen	Thousands	Nuclear waste processing	Pollution, nuclear, Risk of accidents	Project canceled
2014.3.30-4.3	Maoming	Hundreds	PX Project	Pollution, Risk of accidents	Project suspended
14.5.10	Hangzhou	Hundreds	Garbage incinerator	Pollution	Local government has promised to reassess risks

Analysis of the cases

- Most decisions were made without enough public consultations→ flawed process;
- Major reasons for the protest → mixed
  - Concerns for the risks involved
  - Economic reasons (property values, compensations)
- Role of scientists→ ineffective
  - Risk assessment prior to the decisions;
  - Communication with the public afterwards less useful
- Other factors
  - Distrust of local government;
  - Social media; NGO groups;
  - Copy-cat effect nationwide.

IV. Case 2—GM food

- Background
  - China began GMO studies in the 1990s, but commercialization has been very cautious;
  - At present, GMOs grown in China include cotton, tomato, pepper, and papaya; GMO imports included GMO corn, soybean, cotton;
  - Bio-scientists are frustrated in China's policy of not allowing commercialization of GMO researches;
  - There have been debates about pros and cons on GMO in recent years;
  - In July 2013, over 60 academicians wrote a petition letter to the Central government, requesting the loosing of the policy on commercialization on GMOs, generating a new wave of public debate in China on GMO.

Analysis of the case

- Central issues being debated:
  - Science—whether GMO is safe?
    - Different policies in the US and in Europe
  - Globalization—conspiracy by MNC monopolies?
    - seeds of GM food are mostly controlled by Monsanto and MNCs;
  - Trust—should we trust Scientists, or the public figures?
    - Many scientists who are supporting GMOs are doing research in the area and stand to gain financially if commercialization is allowed.
    - Public figures have done philanthropically work in the past.

The process

- Platform for debate
  - Social media, TV programs, traditional media;
- Stakeholders involved
  - Against GMO:
    - star TV host, NGOs, some social scientists
  - For GMO
    - Scientists, popular science writers
  - Neutral
    - Government
  - Confused
    - The general public

Analysis

- Scientists in dilemma:
  - When research and commercialization all need scientists' involvement, how to stay neutral?
- Science vs. science communication:
  - In the presence of uncertainty, science communication is often more important, but…
  - scientists are not willing to come forward
    - Time consuming and the risks of being targeted;
    - Mainstream journalists are not well trained;

- Asymmetric information spread
  - Social media has a selection bias of supporting non-official information;
  - When general public has a low trust in government, they also has a selection bias of willing to believe negative information;
- Government policy behavior
  - Loath for uncertainty;
  - Keen to be seen as caring for public interests
  - Avoiding public controversies.

V. What can be done?

- Improve the general policy process
  - Open and transparent about risks;
  - Structured public engagement;
- Incorporate risk education in science education
  - Improve science literacy, and risk literacy
- Design effective communication strategy
  - Equal dialogue between scientists and general public;
  - Paying special attention to media people
  - Identify trusted public figures and media people
- Make scientists to play their roles
  - Regular and disciplinary-based advocacy;
  - Establish super-review panel of independent scientists which goes beyond disciplines (like military court)
- ……

Thanks !