Review on Research of Policy Innovation and Policy Diffusion

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Abstract

Ever since the 1960s, policy innovation has become one of major research subjects in the field of public policy in Western countries and US in particular, and domestic scholars' research on policy innovation begins in the early 21st century. It has made much contribution to policy studies by strengthening their explanation power on the policy practice. Most studies on policy innovation center on such themes as definition and concepts of policy innovation and policy diffusion, variables constraining the policy innovation and its diffusion process, and features and major models of policy innovation and policy diffusion. This article outlines the development of policy innovation and diffusion, reviews the current researches, and on this basis, highlights its implications on China's policy practice and calls on more research effort on this field in China.

Key words

Policy innovation; Policy diffusion; Diffusion mechanism.

1. Introduction

Since the 1960s, Western scholars, especially American scholars, have actively promoted research on policy innovation theories. They have gone through Walker, Rogers, Gray, Glor, and Berry. With the efforts of others, policy innovation theory has been developed rapidly and has become an important content of public policy research. However, domestic scholars' research on policy diffusion started relatively late, beginning in the early 21st century. This article intends to review and analyze the main policy innovation research in the academic community in recent decades from the following three aspects: first, the definition and analysis of the concept and connotation of policy innovation and policy diffusion; second, the policy at home and abroad A review of the results of diffusion research; third, on the basis of the first two, analyze the enlightenment and reference value of policy innovation theory to policy practice and policy research in the process of reform in China.

2. Concept Definition

2.1. Policy Innovation

The research on the diffusion of policy innovation began with the article "The diffusion of innovation between states in the United States" published by American scholar Walker in the well-known journal "American Political Science Review" [1]. There are different interpretations of the term "innovation" in academia, and there are mainly four viewpoints formed: The first type of viewpoint is that innovation is the invention of a new thing that did not exist before. This is a relatively narrow definition of innovation, equating innovation with "invention", that is, creating unprecedented new things and new methods. In the second category, innovation is understood as starting to implement a planned change to something, and this change is brand new to the thing. The third type of view is that innovation refers to the adoption of a new concept and method by an organization. This view distinguishes invention from innovation. Invention refers to the first creation, when an object is created for the first time. Innovation

refers to the early or first use of an advanced concept or method by an organization. The fourth type of view is that innovation is the organization's generation of new projects, products, or services, and the project is new to the organization's environment and has not been involved before.

It can be seen that scholars have different opinions on the definition of "innovation". However, in the research results of policy innovation, the "innovation" referred to by scholars mainly refers to innovation in the context of the fourth perspective. For example, according to Walker, policy innovation refers to the adoption of a new policy by a local government. This new policy means that, regardless of whether the policy has been adopted by other governments, this is the first time the government here has adopted this policy [1]. Boehmake also mentioned that if a policy has never been adopted by a government, then the introduction of the policy can be called policy innovation [2].

2.2. Diffusion of Innovation

The theory of innovation diffusion first appeared in the field of communication, and it is one of the classic theories of communication effect research. It was proposed by E.M.Rogers, one of the most famous communicator scholars in the United States. He believes that "innovation diffusion is a special form of communication, which is the process of disseminating new information among groups through certain communication channels." [3] Lucas also believes that diffusion is a certain kind of innovation invented and created from it. The process of transmission from the origin to the destination of innovation, and the essence of the diffusion process is the interaction and communication between people. The two scholars hold a similar view, that is, both regard innovation diffusion as a process of communication [4].

2.3. Diffusion of Policy Innovation

Policy innovation diffusion, also known as policy diffusion by scholars, is a new concept that emerged after the innovation diffusion theory was introduced into the government policy field around the 1960s to explain the spread of public policies. Many scholars have defined the diffusion of policy innovation. Braun believes that the diffusion of policy innovation is a process in which the government's choice of new policies affects the interaction of other governments [5]. In Strang's view, diffusion is a process in which regions that have adopted a certain policy have an impact on regions that have not adopted a policy [6]. From this point of view, the diffusion of policy innovation has several basic characteristics: one is interaction. Policy diffusion is the process by which a policy is spread from one organization to another and is adopted by the organization. The second is chronology. The initiator of innovation and the recipient of innovation have a prioritized relationship in time. The third is the spatial nature. The governments of neighboring regions or the governments of certain spatial regions have learning value and benchmarking effect on the policy choices of other regional governments, and the diffusion between subjects is regional. Based on the conclusions of the above scholars, this article defines the diffusion of policy innovation as an organization that is the initiator of innovation spreading an innovation policy to other organizations through a certain channel, and this policy has never been adopted by the receiving organization.

3. Literature Review at Home and Abroad

3.1. Review of Foreign Literature

Foreign scholars started their research on innovation diffusion theory early and developed rapidly. At present, there are rich academic results. Throughout a large amount of international literature, scholars' research interests can be roughly divided into three aspects: that is, the research and analysis of why diffusion happens (causes and mechanism), how to diffuse (process stage), and how to diffuse (diffusion model).

3.1.1. Motivation and Mechanism of Policy Innovation Diffusion

The motivation and mechanism of policy innovation diffusion is a hotly discussed topic in the field of policy innovation diffusion research. At present, there have been quite fruitful research results. The so-called innovation diffusion mechanism refers to the reasons and methods that cause an innovation to spread among different governments. Some scholars divide the motivation of policy diffusion into internal factors and external factors. Internal factors include the impetus of policy leaders and the appeals of the people. External factors include the requirements of higher-level instructions, geographical relations, and so on. However, many factors are the result of a combination of internal and external factors, such as the interaction between regional policy makers who have adopted policies and regional policy makers who have not adopted policies. Therefore, this method of splitting the motivation into two has some drawbacks.

Mintrom proposes four mechanisms for the diffusion of public policies: reference to early policy adopters, competition between adjacent regions, emulation between cities with strong economic strength, strong promotion by state governments, etc. [7]. Based on previous research, Heine summarized the diffusion mechanism into four basic categories: emulation, socialization, learning, and externality. This division basically covers all current policy diffusion mechanisms. Learning means that decision makers find effective ways to solve current problems by learning from the successful experience of others. In addition to the advanced nature of the policies that have been adopted, the motivations for decision makers to learn are more complicated, such as promotion pressure. Emulation refers to policymakers copying the behavioral patterns of other governments. Different from learning, it pays more attention to the policy behavior itself, that is, "shape" rather than "god." In other words, in this model, the policy makers adopted a certain policy because of the benefits brought by this policy without fundamentally changing their beliefs. The good results produced by the policy encourage the policy makers to take copying behaviors. Socialization is the process by which decision makers receive certain ideas and internalize them. This process is more stable than other methods. For example, appeals to themes such as "equality between men and women" and "environmental protection" will cause decision-makers with the same values to interact and trigger policy proliferation. Externality refers to the government adopting a certain policy through positive or negative incentives to influence their decision-making. There are two main forms, namely competition and coercion. Competition means that policy makers will measure and compare the economic effects of a certain policy on other subjects, so as to decide whether to adopt this policy. Coercion means that a government is forced to accept a certain policy by other governments. The main types include horizontal direct or indirect coercion (such as commercial regulations, trade agreements, etc.) and vertical direct or indirect coercion (such as through appropriations, policies, etc.). Support and promote policy diffusion) [8].

3.1.2. The Process of Policy Innovation Diffusion

Regarding the diffusion process, scholars hold their own views. Among them, the widely recognized and most cited viewpoint is the "Innovation Diffusion S-curve Theory" proposed by Rogers. It mentioned that the process of innovation diffusion generally consists of five steps: first, the first impression of innovation; second, the attitude towards innovation; third, consider whether to accept innovation; fourth, make a decision; fifth, Finalize the decision. It can be summarized in five words: recognition, persuasion, decision-making, implementation, and confirmation. In the early stage of the dissemination of innovative things, there are few adopters, and the growth rate of adopters is also very slow; when the proportion of adopters in the group reaches a certain range (10%~25%), the speed of diffusion will suddenly accelerate, The diffusion enters the so-called "take-off period"; when it is close to the saturation point, the speed will decrease again [3]. From the perspective of stage theory, Lucas proposed to divide

the policy diffusion process into five stages: policy reinvention, policy development, policy piloting, policy adjustment and modification, and policy integration. These five stages are not linear development. There may be overlap [4]. The Berry couple innovatively applied event history analysis to explore the process of innovation diffusion [9].

3.1.3. The Model of Policy Innovation Diffusion

With the continuous development of research on policy diffusion issues, scholars have put forward a number of basic models of policy diffusion.

Berry summarized the two diffusion models proposed by previous scholars, namely the regional diffusion model and the national interaction model [10]. The regional diffusion model points out that as the number of neighboring states that have adopted policies increases, a state is more likely to adopt a policy. The model can be further subdivided into a neighboring model and a fixed area model. The former assumes that each state has a fixed reference object as a motivation to stimulate innovation, and the latter believes that governments in the same area have the same path of being affected. The national interaction model assumes that there is a nationwide communication network between state officials, in which state officials who have adopted a policy can interact freely and are completely mixed with state officials who have not implemented the new policy. It proposes a hypothesis that the probability of a state official adopting a policy depends on the number of times he interacts with state officials who have passed the policy. The more interactions there are, the greater the probability of adoption.

Walker proposed a leadership-follow-up model. The basic content is to assume that some states are the leaders in adopting a new policy, and other states are vying to imitate the advanced practices of these states. It can be seen from this that this model assumes that there is an incentive for each state to learn and interact with each other, rather than competing with each other. This model is actually just a theoretical hypothesis. In reality, it is difficult to determine which states will become leaders [1].

Welch also summarized the vertical impact model of policy diffusion. The main content is that local governments imitate the innovative practices of national governments. The difference between this model and the leadership-follow-up model is that the driving force of policy diffusion may be the local government's imitating and learning from the national government, or it may be forced to follow up under the authority of the national government. Welch believes that the speed of policy diffusion with federal government incentives is faster than the speed of spontaneous policy diffusion by local governments [11]. Once this model was proposed, it was questioned by some scholars. Critics point out that this model means that the local government controls a small part of the power, most of the power is concentrated in the hands of the federal government, but the innovation and promotion of policies are based on the relatively free disposal power of the local government.

Research on the diffusion of policy innovation by foreign scholars started earlier, with diverse research topics and fruitful research results. Its outstanding contribution is reflected in the following aspects: First, Western scholars regard policy diffusion as an important phenomenon in the field of policy science and incorporate it into the scientific system for research, and have in-depth exploration of its process and characteristics. Second, scholars have comprehensively used quantitative and qualitative methods to conduct empirical research on the phenomenon of policy diffusion, and describe the characteristics of policy diffusion more truly.

Inevitably, there are some limitations in the theories of foreign scholars. First, because American scholars started in this field first, most scholars conducted research under the political and ecological background of the United States or the United Kingdom, and the research objects were limited. The policy diffusion of developing countries represented by China has its own uniqueness, and it is doubtful to what extent their theories can explain our

practice. Second, Western policy innovation diffusion theory lacks a theoretical framework that can lead to consensus [12], which also affects academic exchanges among scholars.

Our country's system, culture, and other aspects are quite different from those of the West. Therefore, while drawing on the advanced experience of the West, the practice of policy innovation and promotion must also pay attention to reasonable adaptations based on its own specific conditions, and not blindly copy it. However, the research conclusions of foreign scholars provide us with strong theoretical support for our research on the diffusion of local policy innovations, and broaden our research horizons. We can completely apply the policy diffusion theory to the research on the promotion process of policy experiment results to describe and analyze the various factors that affect the diffusion of policy experiment results, the operating mechanism and restrictive factors of the diffusion process, and the internal motivations and motivations of the diffusion of innovative policies. Laws and so on.

3.2. Domestic Literature Review

Domestic scholars' research on policy diffusion began at the beginning of the 21st century. In 2004, Wang Yongbing translated a Virginia Gray's "Competition, Emulation, and Policy Innovation", in which the concept of policy innovation and promotion was mentioned [13]. The diffusion of policies has aroused the interest of many scholars, and since then, related research results have sprung up. From the perspective of research topics, their research focuses mainly on the following aspects:

First, a review of the existing theory of policy diffusion in the West. For example, Zhu Yapeng reviewed the policy innovation and diffusion theory of the United States since the 1960s [14]. Chen Fang reviewed the policy diffusion theory from three aspects: basic concepts, theoretical foundations, and research methods, and sorted out three stages of theoretical development: the single-factor theoretical explanation period, the fragmented theoretical explanation period, and the attempt to integrate theoretical explanations. Period [15]. Zhu Xufeng introduced and reviewed the previous policy diffusion literature from four aspects: background, subject, object and media [16].

Second, through the analysis of specific cases, explore the influencing factors and characteristics of policy diffusion. For example, Liu Jia et al. used Event History Analysis (EHA) to explore the characteristics and influencing factors of the "run at most once" reform diffusion [17]. Zhu Xufeng took the urban subsistence allowance system as an example to analyze the diffusion mechanism of policy innovation [18]. Zhou Yayue used the village-level grassroots social governance innovation time as a specific case to analyze the diffusion process of "village sentiments" and combed the diffusion logic [19].

Third, it summarizes the policy diffusion model and mechanism with Chinese characteristics. For example, Wang Puyu summarized the four basic modes of policy diffusion in China: a top-down level diffusion model; a bottom-up policy adoption and promotion model; a diffusion model between regions and departments; Diffusion model into the region [12]. Liu Wei introduced the policy process theory and proposed two different local government diffusion mechanisms: learning for reference and imitating [20].

Fourth, it expounds the overall understanding of China's policy diffusion. Zhou Wang pointed out that China's policy diffusion practice is based on "experiment-promotion". Yan Rong believes that the process of policy diffusion is not completely rational, but bounded rationality [21].

From the perspective of research methods, both qualitative research methods and quantitative research methods have been applied to varying degrees in domestic scholars' research on policy diffusion.

In terms of qualitative research, it mainly focuses on constructing a theoretical framework based on foreign diffusion theories and combining China's specific policy diffusion practices.

This is reflected in the research of scholars such as Zhang Wei[22], Zhang Ke[23], Yu Xiaohong[24], Wang Luozhong[25].

In terms of quantitative research, scholars mainly use event history analysis (EHA) to analyze the diffusion process of a specific policy. Yang Daifu [26], Chen Xinming et al. [27], Ji Jiangxia[28] and others have used EHA research methods.

In general, domestic scholars have achieved relatively fruitful research results in the field of policy diffusion, providing valuable experience for follow-up researchers to carry out research. However, there are still some shortcomings in domestic research, mainly the following points: First, the research on the diffusion of existing policies is mainly concentrated in the fields of economy, technology, and public management, and there is little attention to social policies, especially policies in the health field [25]. Second, it mainly focuses on the motivations and characteristics of policy diffusion, and pays less attention to the iteration of policy diffusion content, that is, keen to explain why the diffusion, but ignores the changes in the policy content before and after diffusion. Third, the analysis of policy diffusion needs to be further strengthened. Researchers usually obtain second-hand information about policy diffusion from the public media, and lack personal experience of policy implementation.

Therefore, future research should start from these aspects, enrich the diffusion research of social policy, analyze the iteration of diffusion content, and strengthen the empirical case study analysis of policy diffusion.

4. Research Limitations and Future Prospects

Policy diffusion involves multiple levels of policy subjects, policy implementation and policy innovation, and is gradually becoming a hotspot of policy research. China is in a period of major transformation opportunities, social contradictions are prominent, and policy activities are extremely active. How to effectively solve various social problems, how to quickly promote the dissemination of new policies in different regions and different government departments, and how to promote the results of the "policy pilot" across the country have become key issues facing the Chinese government. Policy diffusion has had a significant effect on solving this key issue. Although existing studies have explored the conceptual features, influencing factors, diffusion mechanisms and models of policy diffusion, there are still deficiencies and limitations. This study summarizes the current research status, in view of the existing research limitations, combined with the political and economic background of China's transition period, and the characteristics of China's policy activities, it proposes research directions that need to be explored urgently.

Firstly, Existing studies have vaguely expressed the connotation and theoretical basis of policy diffusion, and the boundary of "policy diffusion" needs to be clarified in the future. Some scholars do not distinguish between policy diffusion and policy innovation, policy learning, policy transfer and other concepts. Although there are similarities to some extent, the communication form and logical structure of policy diffusion are still different from the above concepts, to be clearly defined. In addition, when defining policy diffusion, it is necessary to emphasize the consistency of target objects and analytical dimensions. From a theoretical perspective, although the research framework and model have been determined so far, there is no reasonable explanation for the theoretical construction of the connection framework and the model, and the policy diffusion theory lacks a rigorous and systematic logical concept. It is especially important to note that the policy diffusion theory originated from Western countries, while the definition and connotation of China's policy diffusion theory must be rooted in Chinese background and practice. Due to different factors such as political system, culture, and economic development stage, China's policy diffusion theory must have This difference will form a good complement to the current policy diffusion theory.

Secondly, Existing research has insufficient research on the mechanism of policy diffusion. In the quantitative study of diffusion mechanism, individuals are often regarded as the research object, but the observational data is at the system level, leading to controversial conclusions. In addition, the current research focuses on the behavior of policy subjects, and seldom studies the goal-driven and action rules of policy subjects. This is extremely important for understanding the mechanism of different diffusion mechanisms. The differences between Chinese and Western cultures and systems, the educational level of policy subjects, individual characteristics, etc., will all have an impact on the behavioral logic of policy subjects, leading to differences and uniqueness in policy diffusion mechanisms. These are the focal points worthy of follow-up research.

Thirdly, Strengthen the study of the policy diffusion of Chinese Characteristics. In response to the complex social problems in the reform, China's policy practice has been extremely active. "Policy pilots" and central administrative directives are essentially policy diffusion. In addition, with the gradual decentralization of power by the central government, local governments have become more autonomous in their policy activities, forming relatively independent local interests, making unitary Chinese society also have a regional political group similar to the federal system, and have the motivation and prerequisites for policy diffusion. Policy diffusion is proposed based on the Western cultural background. However, there are differences in politics, economy, and culture between China and the West. Therefore, it is necessary to conduct research in combination with China's local policy practice, which is conducive to supplementing the policy diffusion theory. First, it is necessary to determine whether the concept and connotation of policy diffusion defined by the West are applicable to China? What kind of diffusion characteristics does policy diffusion in the Chinese context show? Secondly, the defined influencing factors need to be empirically tested in the Chinese context to determine whether they can play the same role and make a reasonable explanation for China's policy diffusion practices. In this process, further explore new influencing factors and influencing mechanisms, so that it can fully explain the phenomenon of policy diffusion. Then, given that there are few researches on the evaluation of policy diffusion effects, comparative research and grounded theory can be used to construct a policy diffusion evaluation index system to quantitatively analyze the diffusion benefits. Finally, it studies the policy diffusion mechanism and model innovation based on the Chinese context. It is worth noting that the policy system represented by China's innovation policy and green growth policy covers multiple policy attributes such as economy, society, science and technology, and the environment. Use this as a starting point to study the impact of relevant policy characteristics and their interaction effects on policy diffusion. The influence mechanism and action path are important steps to enrich the theory of policy diffusion.

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