

PhD Research Project

Supervisor: James Wilsdon

THE SCIENCE OF SCIENTIFIC ADVICE in CHINA

Linked to ongoing research within SPRU on “The Science of Scientific Advice”, SPRU will fund a GTA position. The student will follow a +3 doctoral training pathway, with the first year including appropriate training in research methodologies and concepts key for interdisciplinary social science research in the field of science and technology studies.

In keeping with SPRU practice, the student will have both a supervisor and co-supervisor. In this case these will be James Wilsdon and Andy Stirling who are both professors in SPRU.

The topic for this PhD project is:

“Evidence-based policy with Chinese characteristics: the changing role of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in scientific advice and national policymaking”

This has been chosen as a novel and important topic, highly relevant to the wider themes and questions of the “Science of Scientific Advice” research, but where the in-depth focus of doctoral research would enable the topic to be more fully explored.

The topic was selected in close consultation with our Chinese research partner: the Chinese Academy of Sciences Institute for Policy and Management (CASIPM). Professor Li would also act as an informal co-supervisor, and CASIPM has importantly offered to host the doctoral student for up to one year at their headquarters in Beijing, to enable them to carry out fieldwork on processes of scientific advice within the Chinese system.

The proposed topic reflects a strengthening focus within the Chinese government on the role of evidence (from natural and social sciences) in the policy process. Currently, China’s ‘Medium to Long Term Plan for Science and Technology Development 2006-2015’ (its main blueprint for science and innovation policy) is being reviewed, and there is consequently a great deal of discussion within the Chinese system about how policy processes can be improved, and what lessons can be learnt, adapted and imported from other international systems (Cao et al., 2013). The central involvement of Wilsdon in a recent review of developments in China’s science and innovation system (Bound, Saunders & Wilsdon, 2013) raises a number of research questions which this project would be able to develop and pursue in greater depth.

The role of the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) within Chinese policymaking processes is crucial (Cao, 2004) but poorly understood and little researched outside of China. This PhD project will aim to fill this gap, by using tools, concepts and methods from STS, science policy and political science to systematically analyse the role that CAS has played in recent years, and the extent to which it is now adopting new methods and approaches, which draw on wider international debates about scientific advice and ‘evidence-based’ policy. A related research question is the extent to which CAS resembles or differs from other national academies of science (such as the UK’s Royal Society or US National Academy of Sciences) in the way it understands, interprets and performs its role within Chinese policy debates, cultures and processes?

Selected references:

Bound, K., Saunders, T., Wilsdon, J & Adams, J. (2013) China’s Absorptive State and the prospects for China-UK research and innovation collaboration. London: Nesta

Cao, C. (2004) China’s Scientific Elite London, New York, Routledge

Cao, C. et al (2013) Reforming China’s S&T System, *Science*, 2 August 2013: Vol. 341 no. 6145, pp 460-462

Lentsch, J. & Weingart, P. (Eds.) (2011) *The Politics of Scientific Advice*, Cambridge: CUP

Wilsdon, J. & Keeley, J. (2007) *China: the next science superpower?* London: Demos

