

Bureaucratic Land Rush

China's Administrative Battles in the Arena of Climate Change Policy¹

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Explaining Policy Change

It is a remarkable fact that China, a country that throughout its age-old history witnessed periods of traumatic decline caused by the insufficient ability of its political elite to adapt to changing realities, provides us now with the most thrilling occurrences of swift and at times dramatic policy change. The advent of China's new climate change policy, seemingly emerging over night, is one of the most recent and most fascinating of these dynamic changes. Over a period of just a few years, China's government has turned its approach to climate change upside down, moving from a position of dilatory inaction and substantial climate change skepticism to a full-blown and ambitious strategy to put China on a path of energy sustainability and carbon-reduced economic growth. China's leadership backed its newly stated ambitions with a flurry of national energy sustainability targets, climate related legislation, and regulations creating a political momentum with the potential to significantly alter China's economic and social system. How effective these laudable efforts will ultimately be remains to be seen. The astonishing rise of the climate issue to the very top of Beijing's political agenda is in any case unequivocal.

The attempt to explain this trend reversal in China's domestic climate change policy will inevitably and sensibly lead to the discussion of interests. A significant alteration in China's stated national interests regarding the issue of climate change is indeed apparent. Simplified, this revaluation is rooted in two shifts of political assessment: Firstly, an increased sense of China's vulnerability to the potential impacts of global warming causing a heightened awareness regarding the economic costs, social grievances, and political risks associated

with climate change. Secondly, the alignment of emission reduction efforts with the overarching political objective to transform China's broader economic development model in order to secure long-term sustainability of economic growth, social stability, and political legitimacy. Without a doubt, altered national interests lie at the core of China's changing attitude towards climate policies and there is much to be said about the evolution of these shifts. This analysis, however, will look at the phenomenon from a slightly different angle.

For concrete policy change to materialize, the shifts in national interest as stipulated by the national government need to resonate with and be carried by an intricate bureaucratic system consisting of a multitude of self-interested administrative entities in a way that creates an internal dynamic conducive to policy change. The following aims at exploring this resonance, the actions and reactions of China's bureaucratic actors, and their impact on shaping China's emerging climate policy. The account of China's administrative battles in the arena of climate change do not represent an alternative to the interest-centered explanation of policy change, but rather one layer of a multilayered story, an additional piece of a complicated puzzle.

Clandestine Shifts in Power

Shifts in power often occur in an ostentatious fashion, mostly loud and frequently violent. In the age-old business of power shifting, wars and coups d'état are the traditional instruments of choice. In more recent centuries the arsenal has been supplemented with less violent but equally loud methods such as election campaigns. These kinds of power shifts hardly go unnoticed. But they are not the only ways of changing the status

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quo of influence. In fact, well below the threshold of public attention, much more subtle means of shifting power are constantly at work, clandestinely changing the balance of political influence in a quiet but most profound fashion: the continuous administrative battles for bureaucratic turf.

In the arena of domestic politics, populated by a multitude of different players, the paramount organizational self-interest is self-preservation. For organizations that draw their *raison d'être* from their influence within the policy decision-making process, maximizing this influence becomes the overarching objective that guides their actions. And since the game of organizational survival and maximization of political influence is played by a multitude of fiercely competitive government bureaucracies, an intricate system emerges in which bureaucratic actors suspiciously guard their existing spheres of influence, their bureaucratic turf, while remaining vigilant, seeking opportunities to capture additional turf from other bureaucratic actors who may temporarily drop their guard; a system in which the size of your budget and the number of personnel are measures of strength; and a direct channel through which to influence a political decision-maker can serve as a game-changer. The distribution and redistribution of bureaucratic turf is much more than an inconsequential game of organizational narcissism and vanity. The relative degree of influence exerted by different bureaucratic actors carries profound implications for the policy outcomes, which are products of an inter-actor bargaining process. Following this logic, the relative power of bureaucratic entities all but determines the outcome of the bargaining game of domestic decision-making. Alteration of this distribution may occur largely unnoticed, but nevertheless bear immense political implications. In the following, this fact will be illustrated on the particularly colorful example of China's climate change policy.

The phenomenon of "bureaucratic politics", which of course has been most comprehensively and vividly described by Graham Allison² and Morton Halperin,³ is by no means limited to a certain category of political system. While the rules of the game might play out very differently in different political setups, cultural contexts,

or international circumstances, the fundamental characteristics of bureaucratic competition stay comparable in most cases. The People's Republic of China is no exception to this rule. On the contrary, China's policy-making system seems to provide a particularly fertile ground for clandestine turf wars and bureaucratic power shifts. With the adoption of Deng Xiaoping's "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" model in 1978 and the beginning of China's reform period, the characteristically strong centralization of political decision-making gradually made room for an increasingly pluralistic approach, broadening the base of expertise and opinions and thereby incorporating an increasing number of actors. Bureaucratic entities that primarily had been mere implementation agencies in the past suddenly found they had considerable influence over policy-making processes and quickly understood the necessity for justifying and defending this new-found influence. The stage was set for "Bureaucratic politics with Chinese characteristics".

Within a short time period, the sheer number and size of China's government bureaucracies, combined with seemingly constant waves of bureaucratic reshuffling, consolidations, separations, and, most confusing of all, renaming, created a convoluted bureaucratic system that has moved well beyond micro-management exercised by the party leadership. On the other hand, China's top leadership has retained certain channels of control over the development of the bureaucratic structure. Through the agenda-setting and policy prioritization powers of the communist party's central committee, it defines the turf over which bureaucratic entities compete. Through its competence for bureaucratic restructuring, ensured by the party's control over the State Council as chief administrative authority, the party leadership in form of the Politburo of the CPC can also bring bureaucratic rivalries to a temporary conclusion, forcing decisions and thereby consolidating fragmented influence. However, despite the party leadership's instruments of exerting sporadic influence in certain situations, administrative battles over bureaucratic turf often elude the control of the CPC Politburo. A comprehensive understanding of China's government action has therefore become impossible without a certain

degree of awareness regarding the bureaucratic actors involved in the policy-making process, their respective perceptions and interests, as well as the distribution of power between these actors. The inherent dynamism of China's bureaucratic structure, the constant process of pulling and hauling, sometimes small and gradual and sometimes sudden and quite spectacular, deserve the special attention of China observers as well as policy-makers. The story that will unfold when looking at China's changing policy towards climate change through the lens of bureaucratic politics is of course only part of a larger narrative. Ultimately, the combination of all perspectives is necessary to unveil the full picture of China's approach to global warming. But, especially when examining China as a country that has preserved a certain air of secretiveness regarding its internal political processes, the analysis that focuses on the behavior and relationship of bureaucratic actors promises a useful addition to the picture than has been painted so far.

Creation of New Turf

Bureaucratic battles are not fought over a static amount of turf. To conquer additional political influence over one specific policy issue at the cost of another bureaucratic actor is only one way of expanding an entity's bureaucratic clout. Bureaucratic power shifts also occur as a result of a shift in relative political importance of certain policy areas within the domestic political sphere, increasing the significance of certain actors' turf while reducing the importance of others'. The relative importance of specific policy issues is in fact highly volatile in most countries, causing almost constant readjustment of political influence. Occasionally, a third way of altering turf distribution materializes: the emergence of a new political challenge that brings about the discovery of entirely new bureaucratic turf. When new policy challenges surface, they have the potential to trigger profound changes in the distribution of bureaucratic power. Bureaucratic entities become pioneers, participating in what amounts to a bureaucratic land rush, attempting to secure a share of the newly discovered turf.

Over the last decade, China has witnessed such a

bureaucratic land rush caused by the emergence of a new political challenge: The extended period of rapid economic industrialization and exceptional growth has inevitably led to a large degree of environmental degradation, which has, in the words of Elizabeth Economy, "wreaked havoc on China's natural environment."⁴ The exploitation of natural resources as well as the ensuing industrial pollution is causing a series of immense environmental problems from deforestation and desertification to aggravated flooding and unbearable air and water quality. Secondary effects include soaring economic costs for mitigation, adaptation, and recovery that threaten the continuation of China's economic growth path. Rising environmental problems have also led to a decline in public health and individual living standards that then can trigger considerable unrest and potential mass migration. Thus, environmental problems pose a challenge to the very core of the Chinese Communist Party's (CPC) primary objective: that is, retaining power. Since the CPC's central source of political legitimacy has gradually shifted from ideology to performance, the demonstration of political problem-solving capacity has become the basis for the CPC's claim to absolute power. With its wide spectrum of domestic implications and the growing number of public grievances, environmental politics have become one of the most prominent and most pressing test cases for the CPC's problem-solving capacity. In reaction to the emergence of environmental challenges as a veritable threat not only to China's economic development and social stability but also to the CPC's political legitimacy, the Central Party Committee quickly elevated environmental politics to the top of its political agenda. A large area of mostly uncultivated bureaucratic turf was being created with a great number of government bureaucracies eager to stake their claim. Within this broader evolution of China's environmental policy, the matter of climate change due to its special characteristics took a bit longer to catch on. But when it did it caused an astonishing dynamic, going from utterly disregarded to one of the most intensely discussed topics on the policy agenda.

Setting the Stage

Until the late 1980s, the greenhouse effect and the rise of average global temperature were widely

regarded as a purely meteorological phenomenon among China's policy-makers, bearing no immediate consequences for Chinese domestic policy-making. The scientific investigation and monitoring of climate trends was consequently entrusted to the China Meteorological Administration (CMA), a comparably small public service agency originally set up as the meteorological forecast service of the Central Military Committee and later transformed into an administrative body under the State Council. In the absence of a clear political dimension to the climate issue, the CMA initially had an exclusively scientific mandate. The political interest in the topic in China was virtually nonexistent. This means that at the time, there was actually no significant bureaucratic turf to be quarreled over. Unintentionally, then, the CMA had become the first player to step into the arena of climate change policy.

The CMA did not stay alone for long. With the emergence of climate change as an issue of broader international interest and a subject of international negotiations in the late 1980s, the matter touched the sphere of influence of a much more powerful bureaucratic entity, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA). In 1990, an informal inter-ministry group on climate change was formed to ensure a coherent formulation of China's position on climate matters vis-à-vis the outside world. The National Climate Change Coordination Group consisted of four bureaucratic entities: besides the CMA and the MFA, it involved the State Science and Technology Commission (SSTC) and the National Environmental Protection Agency (NEPA). When the Earth Summit of 1992 produced the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) and thereby initiated a formalized process of international climate change negotiations, the MFA established a specialized climate change unit within its Department of Treaty and Law which assumed responsibility for all international climate change negotiations. At this time, the impacts of climate change itself were not considered a threat by mainstream political discourse in China. Rather, the implications of climate change were almost exclusively framed in terms of the potential cost of emission reductions which could threaten China's thriving economic development, and which therefore had to be

prevented under all circumstances. On the other hand, the fear of international isolation after the violent repression of the Tian'anmen Square Protests of 1989 impelled China's leadership to participate in the international climate negotiations, presenting itself as an active part of the international community. The task of mastering this difficult walk on the international tightrope was entrusted to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs—a task, the MFA gladly took on as an opportunity to broaden its policy portfolio.

The MFA was of course the vastly more influential bureaucratic actor in comparison to the CMA and a transfer of overall coordination authority to the MFA could have been expected. However, the scientifically savvy CMA, presumably more accurately predicting the domestic implications and future importance of the climate change issue, was apparently unwilling to forfeit its leadership position in the climate change arena. The CMA had already sharpened its climate change profile and strengthened its position as China's lead bureaucracy on the issue by involving itself in the scientific branch of international climate change negotiations, namely the International Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), established in 1988. Representing China in the IPCC required a scientific expertise that at the time could only be offered by the CMA. Through its scientific expertise and credentials as well as its international experience, the CMA succeeded in retaining its role as the coordinating administration for climate change policy in China and was confirmed as the lead bureaucracy within the National Climate Change Coordination Group. For the CMA, being a small public service agency with very limited political competencies, the emergence of climate change as a political issue had already brought about a significant increase in political influence. However, in the greater scheme of things, the relative political importance of the issue was still very restricted at that time—a fact that soon changed.

Preparing for the Big Rush

During the mid-1990s the issue of climate change catapulted to the very top of the international policy agenda. The entering into force of the UNFCCC in 1994 and the subsequent first Conference of the

Parties in Berlin in 1995 brought the multifaceted implications of changing climate conditions to the forefront of public and political attention. On the international stage, China remained characteristically unmoved and noncommittal, creating a protective barrier against any attempt of external meddling in China's domestic affairs by presenting the developed nations as causers of climate change and rejecting any responsibility on its own part. The insistence on China's moral entitlement to a path of development unimpeded by obligations that developed nations had evaded in the past very effectively insulated China from international demands. Through this firm stance, unyieldingly maintained by the party's political leadership, climate change was effectively taken off the table as an active element of China's foreign policy and as a potential cross-policy bargaining chip to be used in international negotiations. Therefore, the MFA's climate change-related radius of action was in fact comparatively limited from the outset. This setup on the international stage remained largely unchanged even while China's domestic climate agenda embarked on a fundamental transformation. The MFA became a mere custodian of an international stalemate situation, effectively relegating the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to the sidelines of China's domestic climate change arena.

While China's position on the international level remained virtually unchanged, the end of the 1990s saw the first harbingers of the forthcoming changes in China's domestic approach to climate change. The improved quality of scientific data started to provide a less ambiguous picture regarding the fundamental mechanisms of global warming and, even more importantly, a more specific understanding of the potential impacts of climate change. The aspect of potential costs of climate change gradually entered the political debate in China, supplementing the still dominant concern about the potential costs of mitigation. The gradual emergence of climate change as a political challenge that might call for a domestic policy response was facilitated by the coincidental rise of other environmental problems, like heavily polluted rivers and dangerously poor air quality, to the top of China's political agenda. Climate change was included as one aspect of an increasingly

momentous overarching environmental agenda. Some of the bureaucratic actors within China's administrative system picked up on the changing role of the climate issue early on, recognizing climate change an issue of rising importance that could open a wide spectrum of undistributed political responsibilities. The bureaucratic system, keenly attuned to these kinds of shifts, started to react without hesitation.

On the one hand, the emergence of a new policy field presented bureaucratic actors with extraordinary opportunities to expand bureaucratic spheres of influence. On the other hand, the consequent shift of political priorities posed the added danger of losing existing turf. Vacant competencies in the climate change field could potentially overlap with already existing responsibilities and, if taken over by bureaucratic entities that succeeded in winning the upper hand in the climate change arena, these competences would presumably change hands. Since the multi-faceted issue of climate change is of a particularly cross-cutting nature, many players became aware of the opportunities as well as the threats that presented themselves. Several bureaucracies reacted to this situation of uncertainty by creating or fortifying their climate change-related positions. From the Ministry of Water Resources to the State Forestry Administration, the Ministry of Commerce to the Administration of Civil Aviation, a multitude of administrative actors began to explore areas in which their own bureaucratic turf and specific dimensions of the climate change issue converged. Units and departments were formed, expertise built, information gathered, positions formulated, and channels of influence opened. Bureaucracies brought themselves into position. The turf rush was about to start, and being left behind was not an option.

Struggling for the Lead

Considering the phalanx of contenders for becoming the leading authority on climate change, among them some of the largest and most powerful bureaucratic bodies in China, it was fairly certain early on that the CMA would not manage to stand its ground and defend its leadership position. Among the players in a position to gain significant

influence in an expanding policy area of climate change, there were at least two natural front-runners. The powerful State Economic and Trade Commission (SETC) was one obvious choice to take over the lead capacity for climate change policy coordination since it was already entrusted with the overall coordination of China's energy policy, a policy area most intimately entwined with the major issues of climate change. On the other hand, the State Planning Commission (SPC) was in charge of central economic planning and development and since climate change, concerning its impacts as well as its mitigation, was almost exclusively perceived as a potential threat to economic development, the SPC was a possible lead bureaucracy for climate change issues as well.

The comprehensive reorganization of China's bureaucratic structure in 1998 gave a first clue as to which organization would take the reins for China in the field of climate change. During this momentous restructuring effort, the policy area of climate change was certainly still a side-show. Nevertheless, the reform fundamentally rearranged China's institutional setting with regards to climate change. At that time, due to the wild proliferation of administrative units dealing with climate change issues and the absence of guidelines regarding the distribution of responsibilities, Chinese climate change policy had become institutionally fragmented and its content hopelessly incoherent. The division of competencies was entirely unclear, and the CMA, formally still the leading entity on the issue, lacked the necessary capability and authority to coordinate the different bureaucracies. The CPC's political leadership was compelled to step in, using its competency in bureaucratic restructuring to force a decision regarding the distribution of responsibilities. In an attempt to consolidate the institutional setup and to streamline China's climate change policy-making, the National Climate Change Coordination Group was formalized and significantly expanded, forming the National Climate Change Coordination Leading Small Group (CCCLSG) established under the State Council in 1998. Leading Small Groups (LSGs) are a common instrument in Chinese domestic politics employed by the party leadership to coordinate policy decision-making where existing institutional structures prove unable to

bring about coherent results. As the umbrella body to coordinate the policy-making of the bureaucratic entities involved in climate change, the LSG on Climate Change became the designated arena in which actor-specific interests and perceptions would clash and inter-ministerial bargaining take place. At the same time, the establishment of the LSG very visibly elevated the policy issue of climate change to a significantly higher level of importance and prominence. The institutionalization of policy coordination in the form of a LSG was widely viewed as clear sign of a change in policy prioritization at the highest leadership levels. The administrative momentum that had formed around the issue served as a powerful catalyst to push the climate change agenda towards the limelight of China's policy making. The bureaucratic land rush was clearly in full swing.

With the establishment of the LSG, the pending question of which bureaucracy would win the leading position was also settled. During the overarching bureaucratic reshuffle of 1998, the State Planning Commission was reorganized under the name of State Development and Reform Commission (SDRC), taking over several responsibilities from other bureaucracies and becoming an even more powerful entity within the Chinese system. Unsurprisingly, the new SDRC as the main beneficiary of the bureaucratic rearrangement was entrusted with the chairmanship of the Leading Small Group on Climate Change, establishing the SDRC as the lead authority and coordinator of China's climate change policy. The office of the LSG, established as part of the formalization of the group and charged with implementing the Small Groups' day-to-day operations, was located within the bureaucratic structure of the SDRC. The transfer of most climate change competencies to the powerful SDRC was yet another sign of the growing priority given to the issue. At the same time, it was a clear expression of the political framing of climate change. Placing climate change under the authority of a bureaucratic entity whose overarching mission is to safe-guard China's continuous economic development reflects the primary perception of climate change as a threat to the path of economic growth. Establishing the SDRC as a dominant lead organization gave China's climate policy a very narrow focus, framing it as a comparatively one-

dimensional issue of economic development.

As expected, the CMA lost all its coordination competencies in the area of climate change during the 1998 reshuffle. However, due to its scientific merits, it did manage to continue representing China in the IPCC. Notably, the two other members of the original 1990 National Climate Change Coordination Group were both upgraded during the redistribution of bureaucratic responsibilities of 1998. The State Science and Technology Commission became the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), and the National Environmental Protection Agency transformed into the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA). During the following years, both entities made significant efforts to extend their influence in the field of climate change policy with very different results. Equipped with an extensive set of responsibilities in various fields of environmental protection, SEPA appeared to benefit most from the emergence of the new environmental agenda in Chinese domestic politics and to represent an accordingly strong contender for a responsible position regarding issues of climate change. However, reflecting the narrow framing of climate change as an issue of economic development, SEPA was in fact not granted any significant leverage relating to the area of climate change. In contrast, MOST proved to be rather successful in its bid for influence in the climate change arena, which will be explored in more detail in the following sections.

Taking the Biggest Piece

The SDRC's new role as lead organization on climate change was less stable than could have been expected after the major increase of its authority. In fact, the leading role of the SDRC was significantly undermined by the fact that the SETC retained its authority over almost all aspects of China's energy policy. Since climate change mitigation is inextricably linked to the use of fossil fuels, an effective climate change policy is unthinkable without close coordination between these two policy areas. The division of authority over climate change policy and energy policy between two rival bureaucratic entities led to a practical deadlock with regards to climate change mitigation efforts. The small division dealing with

climate change issues within the SDRC was limited internally by the SDRC's strong preoccupation with safeguarding economic growth and externally through its lack of competencies over China's energy strategy firmly controlled and enviously guarded by the SETC. As a result of this unfavorable bureaucratic setup, the development of China's climate change policy was virtually stalled for five years. Ultimately, 2003 marked a spectacular showdown between the long-standing rivals, the SETC and the SDRC. Hopelessly weakened by the 1998 reshuffle, the once powerful SETC lost the game and was being fully disintegrated. Its competencies were distributed among several other bureaucracies. All energy related departments of the SETC were incorporated into the SDRC, consolidating the responsibility for China's energy and climate change policy in one hand for the first time. After the reorganization of 2003, the SDRC was renamed the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC).

Today, the NDRC is without question the most powerful bureaucratic entity in China's climate change policy-making, if not even in China's domestic policy-making in general. At the same time, due to its non-linear development, its growth through partial incorporation of other bureaucracies and its intentionally cross-sectoral setup, the NDRC is a highly fragmented organization. The NDRC features a multitude of different departments holding overlapping competencies as well as a number of internal bureaucratic units characterized by a large degree of institutional independence. Most significantly in the context of climate change, the NDRC never succeeded in integrating the energy-related departments taken over from the disintegrated SETC. Initially, the departments were collectively transformed into the Energy Bureau, which formally fell under the authority of the NDRC but practically acted as a semi-independent agency. This situation was even intensified when the Energy Bureau was further elevated to the status of National Energy Administration (NEA) by the party leadership. The NEA, being a vice-ministerial body with over 100 personnel, now represents a largely independent entity that acts under direct supervision of the State Council's newly established National Energy Commission (NEC) and operates almost entirely

outside the NDRC's hierarchical structure and control. The NEA holds significant policy-making powers over China's energy policy, and has become a central player with veto power over major climate change issues.

Through the bureaucratic reorganization of 2003, the NDRC certainly succeeded in expanding its formal turf. But it failed to consolidate its actual control over this turf. The old struggles over competencies, influence, and perhaps most importantly, the privilege of interpretation regarding the approach to climate change was not abated, but merely internalized. Until today, its institutional fragmentation considerably limits the NDRC's ability to consolidate internal competing views on climate change.

Complexity and Differentiation

During the reorganization of 2003, an additional step was taken to formalize the distribution of bureaucratic turf created by the emergence of climate change as a political issue: the Climate Change LSG was transformed into the National Climate Change Coordination Committee (NCCCC) of the State Council, an administrative body not only charged with inter-ministerial policy coordination but formally representing the ultimate decision-making body regarding China's policy on climate change. The 2003 reshuffle and the establishment of the NCCCC marked a highpoint of the climate agenda's steady ascent towards the top of the political priority list, providing clearly differentiated hierarchies and processes appropriate to the complexity and importance of the topic. This bureaucratic restructuring went hand in hand with a fundamental reevaluation of the political implications of climate change. Traditionally, climate change was understood primarily as a potential inroad for international meddling in China's domestic affairs; mitigation responsibilities were seen as an impediment to China's economic development that had to be deflected. Starting in the early 2000s, China's perception of climate change as a political challenge started to shift, paralleling the differentiation of the corresponding administrative structures.

This mutually reinforcing process of differentiation followed the two trends already introduced in the

first section of this analysis: First, the concrete impact of climate change on China in the form of aggravated extreme weather conditions, floods, and droughts moved to center stage. The actual consequences of climate change were increasingly understood as a tangible threat to China's economic growth and stability. Increasingly detailed scientific impact assessments served as a catalyst for this change of perspective identifying China's particular economic and social vulnerability to the detrimental effects of climate change. As such, the fundamental balance between the costs of mitigation in comparison to the costs of non-mitigation was altered. Second, a clear linkage between a low-carbon development path and the fundamental transformation of China's broader development model was established. In light of China's available natural resources, sources of energy, and environmental degradation, a consensus regarding the unsustainable nature of China's current development model emerged. Ensuring the long-term viability of China's growth path therefore requires a comprehensive economic transformation, which is in many aspects synonymous with a move towards a low-carbon economic structure. While the positive rhetoric, presenting climate mitigation as an opportunity, cannot disguise the continued importance of the costs of emission mitigation as a factor for China's climate policy, the Chinese leadership has certainly developed an interest in putting China on a path toward carbon-reduced development.

The bureaucratic structure as provided by the setup of the NCCCC reflects the diversification and increased complexity of China's interests. It dictates a rather clear pecking-order for the different bureaucracies involved in climate change decision-making. Initially, 15 different government bodies⁵ were awarded membership in the NCCCC, establishing them as the core group of climate change policy-making. The lead spot was of course taken by the newly established NDRC, represented by its freshly appointed chairman Ma Kai. The NDRC's internally fragmented but externally firm leadership over China's climate change policy was thus consolidated. More interesting was the appointment of four institutions to serve as "vice-chairs" of the NCCCC, constituting a second tier of climate change bureaucracies. The NDRC

retained its commanding position; but the creation of a group of vice-chairs produced a potential counterweight to the NDRC's one-dimensional policy focus. This multi-tier setup of bureaucratic authority allowed for a number of bureaucratic actors to exert tangible influence over the policy-making process. This more pluralistic approach reflects the increasingly diversified perception of climate change as a complex political issue. In turn, this institutional setup further reinforced the diversification of political interests and facilitated its translation into policy guidelines over the following years. Consequently, a much more differentiated approach to energy and climate change issues can clearly be observed in the related sections of China's 11th Five-Year Plan (2006-2010),⁶ the China's National Climate Change Programme (CNCCP) formulated in 2007, as well as the expected stipulations of the forthcoming 12th Five-Year Plan (2011-2015)⁷. The formulation of national targets has been accompanied by a veritable avalanche of climate legislation and activities from vehicle efficiency standards to the closing of inefficient power plants, from the year-to-year doubling of installed wind power capacity and the introduction of solar energy feed-in tariffs to increased investments in low-carbon technologies like carbon capture and sequestration. While the adequate implementation of all these measures might be a different story, on the central level something has very obviously changed when it comes to China's approach to climate change.

The 2003 establishment of an integrated structure for policy decision-making on climate change was further solidified in June 2007, when the National Leading Committee on Climate Change was established. The chairmanship of the Committee is exercised by Premier Wen Jiabao directly, raising climate change to the highest administrative level. The restructuring added five more bureaucratic entities to the mix, bringing the total number of actors directly involved in the climate change policy-making process to 20.⁸ Most remarkably, the National Energy Bureau, while officially still placed under the administrative authority of the NDRC, was given a separate spot on the Committee, highlighting its independent character with all the connected difficulties for the coherence of China's climate change policy discussed above.

Dividing the Rest of the Cake

The four administrative players representing the formal "vice-chairs" of China's climate change bureaucracy, in their strife to define and expand their role in China's climate policy vis-à-vis the NDRC's dominant position, provide much of the current dynamic in the continuous development of China's climate agenda. Their strategy and trajectory is likely to have considerable influence on the future of China's climate change policy, justifying a closer look at these four bureaucracies.

The first vice-chair went quite naturally to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. While, in accordance to its mission and expertise, the MFA still has virtually no authority regarding concrete policy initiatives on the domestic level, it developed a pronounced profile regarding international climate negotiations. The MFA further strengthened and formalized its sphere of climate-related influence through the establishment of the MFA's Office of the Special Representative for Climate Change Negotiations. In the past, China's rather one-dimensional and rigid position on the international stage as prescribed by the NDRC granted very restricted political discretion to the MFA regarding climate change issues, limiting its ability to integrate climate change issues into China's larger foreign policy agenda. Accordingly, the potential for tensions between the MFA and NDRC were minimal. However, the last round of climate negotiations in Copenhagen provided a number of signs that this situation might be changing in the future. The emergence of a more differentiated set of China's national interests regarding climate change results in an increasingly complex negotiating position in international talks and the necessity for China to engage much more actively in actual international bargaining and deal-brokering. These new requirements correspond with the traditional sphere of responsibilities of the MFA, giving the Ministry a potential entry point for broadening its role in the realm of climate change and creating increased potential for inter-ministerial tensions. A first hint at this potential trend could be observed during the final phase of the Copenhagen negotiations, when China's Foreign Minister, Yang Jiechi, and especially Vice-Minister He Yafei, involved themselves actively in

the negotiation process, sidestepping the inter-ministerial core negotiation team which was firmly controlled by the NDRC. The further development of the relationship between the NDRC and MFA on the international stage might have considerable influence over the future of China's climate change policy.

The second of the four spots was taken by the State Environmental Protection Agency (SEPA), which was elevated to the rank of a full ministry in 2008 under the name of Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP). On the one hand, the vice-chairmanship of the NCCCC formally establishes the MEP as one of the leading bureaucratic entities in the field of climate change, marking a clear expansion of turf in this arena. On the other hand, reminiscent of the 1998 reshuffle, this formal position was not accompanied by a transfer of corresponding bureaucratic responsibilities. In fact, the MEP once again gained close to no official function in the field of climate change policy-making at all. The MEP therefore remains one of the unknown factors regarding the future development of China's climate change policy-making. Being one of the most dynamic and publicly visible bureaucratic entities in China at the moment, the MEP is certainly increasing its sphere of influence with regard to the broader realm of environmental policy. In the specific field of climate change, however, the MEP has not been able to create a clear profile for itself yet. Through its role as the guardian of environmental compatibility of new projects as well as supervisor and enforcer of environmental regulations, the MEP has channels to broaden its influence in the realm of climate change policy. The development of its role in coming years will likely have a significant impact on the distribution of power among China's climate change bureaucracies.

Perhaps most surprisingly, the third vice-chairmanship was taken by the CMA. After successively being stripped of almost all of its influence in the climate change arena, the Meteorological Administration staged somewhat of a comeback, reemerging as one of the formal second tier organizations within the framework of the NCCCC. It can be assumed that this development is at least partly connected to the influence of one

individual. Qin Dahe, China's most prominent climatologist, came to fame as a member of the 1989 International Antarctica Expedition becoming the first Chinese to reach the South Pole. Due to his standing as one of the world's leading experts of glaciology and cryospheric studies, Qin Dahe was appointed as Co-Chair of the Working Group I of the Fourth Assessment Report of the IPCC in 2002, raising a certain degree of domestic attention for China's contribution to international scientific cooperation on climate change. Shortly after his IPCC appointment, Qin also assumed the post as Director of the CMA, adding significantly to the recognition of the Meteorological Administration as an important voice on climate change issues. Under Qin, the CMA used the platform as China's representative at the IPCC to win back some of its influence in the field of climate change that had been lost.

Cautious Challenger

The fourth and perhaps most interesting vice-chairmanship of the NCCCC was secured by the Ministry of Science and Technology (MOST), reflecting a general push by the MOST to assert itself in the climate change arena. In doing so, the MOST effectively utilized a particular characteristic of climate change as a policy area: political issues of climate change distinguish themselves by being intricately connected to the realm of science and technology. Climate change was a scientific discipline long before it became a policy issue and still most policy decisions in the field of climate change crucially depend on scientific data and insights as well as the availability and feasibility of technology. MOST recognized this predominance of scientific questions as a unique opportunity to significantly expand its sphere of political influence. Much more than the CMA, which was the initial scientific focal point regarding climate change issues, MOST reacted decisively to the emergence of climate change as a policy issue, asserting itself as the leading organization regarding the scientific side of the issue.

A multitude of MOST departments, often in close working-relationships with China's foremost research institutions in the field of climate change, are now intimately involved in climate change

related policy-making. MOST's influence is amplified through cross-linkages of climate change policies with China's national efforts within the UN Agenda 21, administered through the Administrative Centre for China's Agenda 21 (ACCA21), which is set up under the organizational control of MOST. In almost all settings of climate change policy-making, MOST is involved as a counseling agency, thereby exerting sizable influence on the decision-making process. In addition, MOST has become particularly active in the international dimension of climate change, on the one hand as a party to China's delegation in international climate change negotiations, prominently represented by the MOST Office of Global Environmental Affairs, and on the other hand as the coordinating agency of a variety of bilateral and multilateral research initiatives in the field of climate change. MOST's engagement in international research cooperation, an area where MOST can operate somewhat insulated from the oversight of the overpowering NDRC, has proven to be a particularly effective strategy for them to expand their bureaucratic turf. Collaborative programs with international partners that bear most of the costs of climate change-related initiatives are a difficult target for criticism from the side of the NDRC. International cooperative research initiatives even put MOST into a position to stealthily challenge the NDRC on certain specific policy decisions.

An instructive example is the EU-China joint initiative for developing "near-zero emission coal" technology, known as NZEC. Briefly put, NZEC promotes the exploration and testing of Carbon Capture and Storage (CCS) capability in China. The NDRC harbors strong skepticism regarding the entire field of CCS technology. The NDRC consistently highlights the fact that CCS is an extraordinarily investment-intensive technology, which will produce limited benefits and high costs that the Chinese economy is neither able nor willing to bear. As such, the NDRC suspects the strong European advocacy for CCS technology to be a way to push China into commitments it is not prepared to take. However, representing a joint research initiative, NZEC formally falls under the competency of MOST, which seized the opportunity to further strengthen its profile in the field of climate change. The fact that, despite the

NDRC's reluctance, the first phase of the NZEC initiative has been implemented and that the development of CCS technology has subsequently been included in China's National Climate Change Programme in 2007 has to be interpreted as proof of the domestic clout MOST exercises within the realm of climate change. In this respect, MOST is a vivid example for how a bureaucratic entity can utilize its limited field of bureaucratic authority to expand its influence over policy outcomes well beyond its core area of competence. Moreover, the example illustrates that bureaucratic setups and distribution of administrative influence may have a sizable effect on policy-making that in turn directly touches foreign policy interest of other players, in this case the EU. Consequently, a more comprehensive understanding of China's bureaucratic politics might yield information that enhances foreign policy-making vis-à-vis China.

Action and Reaction

Looking at the ever-shifting balance of power, the constant alterations of competencies, and the reshaping of spheres of influence in the bureaucratic arena of China's climate change policy reveals a truly fascinating facet of policy-making. The actions and reactions of a diverse group of bureaucratic players, holding different perspectives and following different objectives, are shaping the complex environment from which policy decisions ultimately emerge. The intricate dynamics of their competition render the premise of centralized decision-making and grand strategy thinking all the more unsatisfying.

Bureaucracies react to the threat of agenda change

The impulses that alter the political and thereby the bureaucratic landscape are manifold. In the case of China's climate change policy, adaptations of political priorities were primarily brought about by increased international attention, leading to a more vigilant if defensive demeanor on the Chinese side, as well as, at a later stage, a genuine alteration of problem perception and national interests caused by an enhanced scientific understanding of the matter and the deriving implications for China's domestic policies. China's climate change bureaucracies reacted to these changes of the political agenda, following their ultimate goal of organizational

self-preservation. They tried to shield themselves against negative effects of turf redistribution by fortifying their spheres of influence and conserving the balance of bureaucratic power. Some were more successful than others.

Bureaucracies act upon the opportunity of agenda change

They attempt to actively shape the domestic policy agenda and to steer the reorientation of political priorities in their favor. The example of China's climate change policy vividly illustrates how bureaucratic actors venture into new territories of bureaucratic turf, trying to build specific expertise that allows them to take on additional responsibilities and thereby to broaden their sphere of influence. Following the particular characteristics of the climate change issue, the close connection to the realm of energy policy, as well as the explicit scientific angle of the matter played a central role in framing climate change as a policy challenge. The MOST is a clear example of a bureaucratic actor exerting influence on framing a problem, shifting the political priorities, and thereby increasing its own importance and competencies. China's climate change bureaucracies acted upon the rise of the climate change issue to the top of the political agenda, following their desire to maximize their influence on policy outcomes. Some were more successful than others.

These two basic patterns of bureaucratic behavior

are highly interdependent. At times, bureaucratic turf wars stall the development of policy solutions as seen in the case of the rivalry between SETC and SDRC. At other times, a bureaucracy's desire to broaden its turf can push the political agenda and override potential veto points, as in the example of the MOST acting as the vanguard of climate change technology development. Regardless, the bureaucratic setup will influence the ultimate policy outcome. The observation of bureaucratic structures, actors' agendas, and changing distributions of administrative influence is of course only one aspect of China's political decision-making regarding climate change. But it is an aspect that is seldom taken into appropriate consideration when explaining China's policy behavior. Regarding its implications for foreign policy vis-à-vis China, the analysis of bureaucratic politics provides a whole tool-kit of potential instruments to be used for effectively pursuing political objectives such as the reduction of global greenhouse gas emissions. A more comprehensive understanding of actors and their agendas opens opportunities for identifying potential chokepoints for policy initiatives, detecting promising ways of framing policy challenges and building trans-governmental⁹ alliances for advocating certain agenda points. All things considered, bureaucratic politics are certainly worth the effort of taking a closer look.

NOTES

¹ Most data used in this article has been gathered during research interviews with EU and Chinese officials, experts and academics in Beijing, February and March 2009, August-October 2009 and March-April 2010. The author would like to sincerely thank all interviewees who graciously shared their knowledge, insights, opinions and time without which this article would not have been possible.

² Allison, Graham T., *Essence of Decision*, 2nd edition with Philip Zelikow (Boston: Little, Brown, 1971), p.294.

³ Clapp, Priscilla and Halperin, Morton, *Bureaucratic Politics and Foreign Policy* (Washington D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 1974).

⁴ Economy, Elizabeth, *The River Runs Black: The Environmental Challenge To China's Future* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2005).

⁵ The fifteen bureaucratic entities of the NCCCC as established in 2003 are the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the China Meteorological Administration, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the China Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Construction, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Finance, the State Forestry Administration, the Ministry of Communication, the Ministry of Water Resources, the State Environmental Protection Administration, the Civil Aviation Administration, and the State Ocean Administration.

⁶ For example, the targets set by the 11th Five-Year Plan include the decrease of energy consumption per unit GDP by 20% as well as the significant increase of renewable energy as part of China's overall energy mix. The renewable target was later quantified as an increase to 15% of total primary energy by 2020.

⁷ For example, the new carbon intensity targets, which were announced prior to the Copenhagen climate summit of 2009 and stipulate a reduction of carbon emissions per unit of GDP by 40-45% by 2020 are expected to be reflected in the 12th Five-Year-Plan.

⁸ The 20 bureaucratic entities of the National Leading Committee on Climate Change as established in 2007 included the partly renamed and restructured original 15 entities (the National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the China Meteorological Administration, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the China Academy of Sciences, the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Finance, the State Forestry Administration, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the Ministry of Water Resources, the Ministry of Environment Protection, the Civil Aviation Administration, and the State Ocean Administration) as well as five additional administrative organs: The Ministry of Land and Resource, the Ministry of Transport, the Ministry of Health, the National Bureau of Statistics, and the National Energy Bureau.

⁹ Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye define trans-governmental relations as "sets of direct interactions among sub-units of different governments that are not controlled or closely guided by the policies of the cabinets or chief executives of those governments." See Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, *Transitional Relations and World Politics* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972).