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## Hot Water after the Cold War – Water Policy Dynamics in (Semi-)Authoritarian States

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**ABSTRACT:** This introductory article of the special section introduces the central question that the section addresses: do water policy dynamics in (semi-)authoritarian states have specific features as compared to other state forms? The article situates the question in the post-Cold War global water governance dynamics, argues that the state is a useful and required entry point for water policy analysis, explores the meaning of (semi-)authoritarian as a category, and finally introduces the three papers, which are on China, South Africa and Vietnam.

**KEYWORDS:** water policy, state form, (semi-)authoritarian, society-centric, China, South Africa, Vietnam

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### INTRODUCTION: THE CONTEXTUAL NATURE OF POLICY ANALYSIS FRAMEWORKS

This special section of *Water Alternatives* contains four papers on 'water policy dynamics in (semi-)authoritarian states'. This paper introduces the subject matter, and is then followed by three further papers on South Africa, Vietnam and China. Earlier versions were presented at a workshop at ZEF (Center for Development Research), Bonn, Germany, 24-25 March 2009, titled *Water Policy Dynamics in State-Centric Regimes*.<sup>1</sup> There were several reasons for asking whether the analysis of water policy and water governance in (semi-)authoritarian states requires a different approach than in (semi-)democratic states.<sup>2</sup> At a personal level, my short stint of fieldwork on irrigation reform in PR China (Mollinga et al., 2005), and longer engagement in Uzbekistan (Yalcin and Mollinga, 2007), had suggested that a policy analysis perspective that focuses on the public *contestation* of policy formulation and implementation might not carry very far in such situations, as most 'policy work' seemed to happen within state apparatuses. This not only presented methodological difficulties and several degrees of analytical guesswork, but also suggested that the kinds of policy processes at hand were qualitatively different than in, say, Europe or India, two other contexts with which I am familiar, and thus might need different conceptual vocabularies for understanding them.

Grindle's (1999) paper on the biases in Western policy analysis frameworks lifted the question to a more systematic level. She argued that existing policy analysis frameworks tend to incorporate assumptions about the liberal parliamentary democratic state form – notably assumptions about the power and independence of electoral voting, the presence of civil society organisations engaging in the policy process and the upholding of the rule of law. Existing policy analysis frameworks are thus normative in a particular way, and may not be very suitable for application in contexts where some of the assumptions are evidently not fulfilled, and very different state forms prevail. As the paper on

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<sup>1</sup> Three of the papers presented at the workshop are published in this collection, while this introduction is a reworked version of the call for papers and concept notes that were prepared for the workshop by Anjali Bhat and Peter Mollinga. The input of all participants into the workshop discussions and subsequent exchanges is gratefully acknowledged.

<sup>2</sup> I will return to the issue of appropriate categories in detail below.

Vietnam in this collection suggests, the very notion of policy as understood in current policy analysis frameworks, including critical, process-oriented frameworks, may have to be questioned and revised.

The appropriateness of different conceptual frameworks in different contexts is not only a question relevant to academic researchers; it is very much a question relevant in and for water policy practice, too. The title of this collection, *Hot Water after the Cold War*, a phrase coined by James Nickum during the March 2009 workshop, expresses that something happened in the domain of freshwater management and governance in the post-Cold War period as part of globalisation. It is suggested that at the particular juncture of the (early) 1990s, there was a confluence of three 'big ideas' about how to undertake water resources management in a better, more comprehensive and development enhancing way, bundled with financial aid and political and economic reforms.

Two of the three big ideas were related directly to the end of the Cold War, namely the market as the general solution to societal coordination and prioritisation problems, and democracy and freedom Western (more precisely, American neo-liberal)-style. The third big idea was that of sustainability, as internationally profiled, particularly in the 1992 Rio Earth Summit. This surge in the global legitimacy of sustainability as a concept and an objective coincided with the timing of the previous two ideas. The end of the Cold War presented a window of opportunity for the 'rushing in' of ideas from the international donor community into countries on, or being forced onto, a path of water sector structural reform.

For water resources, these three ideas and the discourses associated with them were amalgamated in the concept of IWRM, Integrated Water Resources Management, in the 1990s.<sup>3</sup> An often cited definition is that of the GWP (Global Water Partnership), published in 2000 for the 2<sup>nd</sup> World Water Forum in The Hague<sup>4</sup> – an event that can be taken to represent the moment of 'closure' of the amalgamation process.<sup>5</sup>

The concept was discussed and found applications in many parts of the world, including many countries that were involved in post-Cold War change processes. These not only included, obviously, post-Soviet situations in countries formed out of the USSR and the countries of Eastern Europe, but also other communist countries like China and Vietnam, where structural change processes were already underway, but were being shaped strongly by the breakup of the Soviet Union and changes in the global political economy that ensued. Lastly, there was also the post-apartheid situation in South Africa from 1994 – the downfall of the apartheid regime also significantly influenced by the end of the Cold War. Methodologically, such regime transitions are interesting, as they open up for observation and investigation the logics of the 'old regime', the strategies of the carriers of the 'new regime' and the difficulties of moving from one to the other.

Those propagating new water policy ideas at the global level certainly had great expectations. When the rush encountered the reality of statehood and water resources management in the aforementioned contexts, water policy reform, like many other kinds of reform, was mostly a bumpy ride at the end of history; it was often more like a tracking expedition with a poorly functioning compass, if not a circular walk or an indefinite halt at base camp. At the level of analysis of IWRM policy processes, and global

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<sup>3</sup> ... though, not very neatly. Conca (2005) astutely notes central tension between a universalising planning paradigm, which requires the integration of social, economic, technical and cultural choices, and a marketisation paradigm emphasising market values as the underlying basis for water-related interaction. IWRM, he suggests, has provided an "important conceptual vocabulary" for the struggles between these paradigms. I have suggested that IWRM should be considered a 'boundary concept' and that the amalgamation of sometimes contradictory elements and perspectives is exactly what creates the potential for engaging different constituencies in a single conversation (Mollinga, 2006). However, the merits – or lack thereof – of the IWRM concept are not the focus on this collection – its role in this story is that it is a global concept that is made to travel to distant places.

<sup>4</sup> The definition can be found at [www.gwp.org/en/The-Challenge/What-is-IWRM/](http://www.gwp.org/en/The-Challenge/What-is-IWRM/)

<sup>5</sup> The World Water Forum in The Hague in 2000 can be considered a closure point because it stated that it was now time to move on from a 'world water vision' to 'frameworks for action'. Since then there have been attempts and efforts to formulate national, basin and other level and unit IWRM plans, toolboxes have been designed, capacity building programmes have been started and there is an ongoing search for best practices.

water policy processes more generally, it can be easily, and unsurprisingly, shown that there have been differences in how countries have (not) adopted these reforms due to underlying characteristics in terms of state-society relations, different water resources profiles, different configurations of water management and governance challenges and other factors (Shah et al., 2006; Conca, 2005).

Beyond the diversity of appropriations of and resistances to global policy concepts there is the question as to whether a global policy concept like IWRM is not simply an instrumentalised version of the biased Western policy analysis frameworks that Grindle (1999) criticises. The emphasis in contemporary policy frameworks and intervention approaches on issues like participation, dialogues, advocacy coalitions and decision support systems can be easily understood as the instrumentalised form of the liberal assumptions described.

This train of reasoning readily generates a broad range of additional questions on water policy and globalisation. However, the workshop and this collection that has emerged from it address a more limited set of concerns, the most basic of which can be summarised as follows: what does it matter for water policy (reform) that a country has (had) a semi-authoritarian state form? What does it matter for the *substance* (content), for the *process* (dynamics) and for the *outcomes* (impacts) of water policy? And how should the category of policy as a category be understood in (semi-)authoritarian settings in the first place; are new concepts and conceptual frameworks required? The contextuality of policy analysis frameworks seems a very plausible proposition; however, what determines 'fit' is much less clear.

The large number of words in brackets in the above formulation of focus suggests the exploratory nature of the endeavour. Looking for the right words is very much at the centre of our effort. In the remainder of this introductory paper I discuss in more detail some aspects of this effort at perspective framing, and in the last section introduce the three papers on South Africa, Vietnam and China.

### **THE NATION STATE AS THE STARTING POINT FOR POLICY ANALYSIS**

The presentation above has, without further comment, suggested that the sovereign nation state is a useful unit for analysing water policy dynamics – notwithstanding the intensifying process of water policy globalisation. The primacy of national frameworks in analysing water policy dynamics can be illustrated as follows.

Many nation states, and certainly those that are the subject of analysis in this collection, have strong national programmes for water resources development (be it for irrigation, flood control, navigation, hydropower or water supply and sanitation) as part of nation building and planned development programmes. Water resources development, particularly when it involves the creation of large-scale infrastructure, typically has strong governmental involvement (see the special section of *Water Alternatives* on hydraulic bureaucracies, Volume 2, Issue 3, October 2009). States often assume ownership of water resources and articulate normative frameworks and create organisations for water governance and management at national level. Though there is plurality in normative frameworks and organisations in many cases, local water controversies often necessarily play out in political and legal arenas constituted by the state, such as parliaments, councils and courts. The relative autonomy from state interference that local water communities may strive for generally requires as one of its enabling conditions national legal frameworks that allow it to happen (like, for instance, the recognition of customary water rights).

Fresh water is a localised resource in its use and management. Except for bottled water, it is not a commodity shipped around the globe and subject to the forces of global markets in the same way as many other commodities (for instance agricultural and industrial products that are generated through the use of water), although water use, management and governance are certainly influenced by processes in the global sphere. Moreover, water is a resource that is 'eco-regulated' rather than 'manufactured'. Direct mechanisms of globalisation in the case of fresh water refer to global water law and governance, efforts at which have blossomed after the Cold War; to the commoditisation of water

services, like multinationals running urban water supply companies; to international investment in water infrastructure construction, as seen in dam building; to the internationalisation of water knowledge (climate change being a very evident example); and to the generalisation of technological and landscape models for water resources, such as in eco-friendly water resources use models. All of this impacts the hydrological cycle, which is therefore better conceived as a hydrosocial cycle (Linton, 2008; Swyngedouw, 2009). Nevertheless, basins, aquifers and landscapes continue to be the primary (localised and immobile) units for concrete water use and management activities.<sup>6</sup>

Lastly, when water flows across political borders in transboundary basins and aquifers, nation states are the primary participants in the negotiations that hydropolitics involves. At the global level, nation states sign up to international agreements regarding fresh water and related issues (see the previous issue of this journal of the World Commission on Dams + 10 for examples).

Entering analysis of water policy dynamics at the level of the nation state thus remains useful and required. Government-related policy processes are likely to have a strong presence in such analysis, and are likely to shape significantly processes at both lower and higher levels of water politics, even when interconnections across levels and the number and types of actors involved at each level seem to have become increasingly diverse and complex, and with no necessary hierarchy or sequence (cf. community water groups directly accessing global policy networks for advocacy). Put differently, articulation of the public interest or the common good in water resources management seems to continue to depend to a very important extent on government action at the level of the nation state. For water policy dynamics, state form matters; this collection investigates how this applies to a (semi-)authoritarian state.

### FROM STATE-CENTRIC REGIMES TO (SEMI-)AUTHORITARIAN STATES

The call for papers for the March 2009 workshop used a distinction between society-centric and state-centric categories, as discussed by Grindle (1999), who stated that these categories refer to frameworks adopting either a state-centric or a society-centric explanation of politics, meaning that either the state or groups in society are the primary drivers of political process.<sup>7</sup> Many policy analysis frameworks that adopt a society-centric theory of the state tend to make (implicit) assumptions regarding liberal individual rights and their protection, the maximisation of individual self-interest as a driving economic and social force and the role of the state as a neutral arbiter in regulating the free market and in resolving conflicts between competing social forces to achieve the common good. State-centric theories, in contrast, assume the state to have some level of autonomy from social and economic forces, pursuing its own interests, which can differ from those of societal agents.

When the categories are understood as referring not to analytical *frameworks* but as descriptors of particular policy *regimes*, then in society-centric policy *regimes* a variety of societal actors can be part of the policy process – societies in which advocacy coalitions, as discussed by Jenkins-Smith and Sabatier (1994), are key to understanding policy dynamics are a clear example. State-centric policy regimes are regimes where the state is the dominant actor, and other societal groups (if extant in publicly organised form at all) have very little influence on policy dynamics. Centralised and autocratic regimes are a clear example.

Other usages of state-centric and society-centric categories exist. For instance, in the field of international relations and international political economy, debates on state-centrism relate to the use of the state as an analytical unit in international relations. State-centred and society-centred theoretical

<sup>6</sup> Water is materially globalising, not only through the bottled water trade, but also through polluted fresh water flowing into marine ecosystems and increasing global effects (as well as other ecological 'knock on' effects of changed regional hydrologies), and perhaps most significantly through the human impact on the global water cycle, notably as a result of climate change, potentially involving structural global reallocations of fresh water in time and space.

<sup>7</sup> In Grindle (1999), state-centric and society-centric categories can be read as referring to a particular politics/political regime (that is, ontologically), as well as referring to the nature of the frameworks to explain a particular politics/political regime (that is, epistemologically).

approaches have also been discussed at length in analysing state-society relations in the context of understanding advanced capitalist societies' governance mechanisms (McGrew, 1997).

The notions of weak states and strong states have also been developed to characterise state-society relations, with strong states being able to implement decisions against societal resistance and showing the ability to resist societal demands, and weak states being unable to do either due to societal resistance or a lack of resources (Bertramsen et al., 1990; Krasner, 1978; Skocpol, 1985). McGrew (1997) sees that state-centred approaches may best explain the policies and actions of strong states, while society-centred approaches best explain those of weak states, and that these can be further applied to different styles of policymaking in different sectors where the state has varying impact (Atkinson and Coleman, 1989).

The notion of state centrism was, with hindsight, perhaps unsurprisingly not embraced enthusiastically during the March 2009 workshop, though a clear alternative terminology did not immediately transpire to take its place. For this collection we finally settled on the category (semi-)authoritarian state as referring to a particular state form – a category taken from Jessop's (1982) work on the capitalist state. Box 1 contains an extract from a draft paper for the March 2009 workshop that reviews the debate on defining authoritarianism as a characteristic of states.

Box 1. Defining the (semi-)authoritarian state.

"There are many efforts to define authoritarianism. The distinct feature of authoritarian regimes on which most definitions agree is that of 'limited pluralism' (e.g. Linz, 2000; Merkel, 1999): Democracies are characterized by an almost unbound, institutionalized pluralism, totalitarian regimes in contrast by complete monism. In authoritarian regimes, a certain degree of pluralism (among political parties, civil society organizations, media, etc.) exists that is, however, strictly bounded by the power holders and not accountable [to the general public, PM]. Therefore, it cannot challenge the government. The growing research on authoritarian regimes led to a differentiation reflecting different mechanisms of legitimacy, of access to power, etc. such as if it is a monarchy, a military, a party, or a personalistic regime. (e.g. Geddes, 1999; Merkel 1999; Hadenius and Teorell, 2007). It also showed different degrees in authoritarianism. 'Softer' forms of authoritarianism were labelled as 'semi-authoritarianism' (Ottaway, 2003), 'competitive authoritarianism' (Levitsky and Way, 2002), or 'electoral authoritarianism' (Schedler, 2006). Such (diminished) forms of authoritarianism are characterized by the existence of (to a certain degree meaningful) formal democratic institutions and their systematic undermining by formal as well as informal means. [...] In general, all attempts to define authoritarian regimes define them *ex negativo*: they mainly identify defects of what these regimes do not have in contrast to a democratic regime. This is a major shortcoming. However, to change this, a better understanding of their internal dynamics based on deeper research is necessary".

Source: Sehring (2009)

The brief review in box 1 suggests that the use of the notion of authoritarianism is no less plural than that of a state-centric/centred approach. However, our main concern is not to resolve the debates among political scientists about how to typologise political regimes in general – a debate that will undoubtedly continue with the ongoing evolution of regimes. Instead, our concern is to unravel the specificities of water policy dynamics in regimes that fall in the cluster of categories presented in box 1. Vietnam, PR China and apartheid South Africa, the case studies of this collection, seem to fall clearly within this cluster. Detailed investigation of water policy dynamics in such contexts may also contribute to the positive conceptualisation of the nature of policy regimes in (semi-)authoritarian contexts that Sehring suggests should be undertaken. The term (semi-)authoritarian is further to be preferred over state-centric/centred, as it leaves no room for confusion about whether it refers to a framework or a regime. (Semi-)authoritarian is clearly an ontological category, and leaves open the question used to establish which conceptual frameworks are best suited for analysis.

For the purpose of this exploration and to uncover biases, it was assumed that water policy dynamics in nations with (semi-)authoritarian state forms might have two defining characteristics. The *first* relates to the location or arena of water policy formulation and deliberation. Among a series of location/arena aspects, the strong concentration of policy processes within state apparatuses, involving a highly circumscribed policy elite, would seem a characteristic feature of (semi-)authoritarian state forms. A *second* set of characteristics relates to the mode of articulation or engagement with the global (water) governance sphere. It would seem that in (semi-)authoritarian states the strength of the domestic policy process is high – it is not easily influenced by external, global processes or pressures. Strong disregard of and resistance to global policy ideas and frameworks may be a clear characteristic, but in other cases it may be strategic behaviour towards global (development) agencies, apparently accepting external ideas and concepts but effectively strengthening the domestic agenda.<sup>8</sup>

### THREE PAPERS: WATER POLICY DYNAMICS IN SOUTH AFRICA, VIETNAM AND PR CHINA

The three papers included in this collection not only illustrate and elaborate on the points discussed above, but also question them and raise new issues not anticipated in the original design of the workshop.

An obvious observation that the papers induce is that policy processes are highly contextual in (semi-)authoritarian contexts, as elsewhere. To understand the *whys* and *hows* of policy dynamics, historical, physical and cultural specificities matter. In South Africa, the specific history of post-World War II apartheid, induced by a booming war economy, has defined both the pattern of water resource use and its modes of governance, creating rigidities that may take decades to be structurally transformed. In Vietnam, the history of a communist regime at war has shaped societal development at large, including patterns of water resource infrastructure investment and approaches to liberalisation (see Evers and Benedikter, 2009). Water resources management reform (a category to be questioned as such) has followed a distinct course, deriving, so argues the author, from the specificities of water as a resource and forms of local leadership. In China, the long history of Confucianism and bureaucratic organisation plays a role, as well as the (comparatively speaking) recent history of communist land reform and budget decentralisation. Land reform has created smallholdings that are unlikely to be able to carry prosperous agriculture, with the result that payment for irrigation water at cost recovery level is structurally impossible. Budget decentralisation has put the ability of a central state authority to implement central policy into question.

Given this high level of contextuality, what does it matter that the three cases discussed have a history of (semi-)authoritarianism, and on what counts can they be usefully compared?

The assumption that policy processes in (semi-)authoritarian states happen exclusively in the close(d) circles of government (including the Communist Party in Vietnam and China) seems to be borne out. Policy elites are highly circumscribed and explicitly focused on exclusion, most dramatically in the South African apartheid case. The dynamics within these elite policy circles remains a matter of considerable speculation, also for long term observers.

The papers provide several amendments to this imagery of isolated policymaking in (semi-)authoritarian states. The first is that quite a lot *can* be said about the 'inside' of policymaking, perhaps not easily in process terms, but definitely in structural and compositional terms. Examples are the specific role the Communist Party plays in Vietnam and China, and the composition of the 'hegemonic bloc' and its logic of operation under South African apartheid. After all, policy is what it does; the actions policy generates provide one entry point for analysing its creation.

A second amendment is that the imagery of isolation is partly misleading, as there are exchanges between state and society, only these may not take the form of public consultation and participation in

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<sup>8</sup> Clear examples of this are the attempts of international development agencies to introduce Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) in some of the Central Asian republics.

formulation, or follow the conventional lines of policy implementation (conventional as in instrumental understandings of policy). The Vietnamese case is the strongest example of the latter, as policy (to be understood as 'documents of the state') is deployed rather than implemented. The imagery is that 'policy' in the form of texts and resources is put 'out there' in society, and then a social process is allowed to happen – within certain regime-defined boundaries. A tentative relation between central authority/policy and provincial and local implementation thereof is also found in China, but through different mechanisms. The decentralised nature of the state budget, and the 'responsibility systems' that have been created as a form of central state control, are two such mechanisms, which suggests that critiques of implementation arguing that policy formulation and implementation cannot be separated, but are continuous, iterative and bi-directional (for an example see Rap, 2007) may not be far-reaching enough for situations like Vietnam and China, though it may be apposite in a case like South Africa. When implementation and deployment do indeed refer to qualitatively different processes, Grindle's (1999) suspicion of bias finds support.

One feature that the cases of Vietnam, China and apartheid South Africa clearly have in common is the existence of constraints on the production, sharing and public discussion of reflexive forms of knowledge on water resources management. The papers within this collection do not explicitly discuss this issue, but the South Africa paper induces the observation by describing the sheer explosion of public debate and knowledge production in the post-apartheid period. Simplistic normative assessments should be avoided, but given the importance of knowledge and discourse in social life and transformation, the topic certainly merits further reflection. A decades-long imposition of the Soviet knowledge system on Uzbekistan's irrigated agriculture has led to considerable knowledge loss and loss of creative dynamics, posing considerable constraints for innovation under transition (see Wall, 2008).

The second assumption mentioned above, that (semi-)authoritarian states engage strategically with the global water governance sphere, is also borne out by each of the three cases. China and Vietnam have been very selective in their engagement with global water policy ideas and frameworks, as water policy transformation processes seem to be largely domestically generated and driven. Nevertheless, particularly in the Vietnamese case, there is evidence that such global influence, through donor projects, has played an innovative and constructive role in the reframing of water resources management approaches – almost as controlled experiments. China has also systematically sampled foreign and global ideas, for example through education, and has, according to the author, sometimes uncritically adopted them. In the field of irrigation management, this adoption seems to have been strategic, as in the World Bank-supported SIDD (Self Financed/Managed Irrigation and Drainage Districts) project case discussed in the paper. However, after the termination of the project, the ideas seem to have continued to travel. China has hosted two international conferences on Irrigation Management Turnover (IMT) and Participatory Irrigation Management (PIM) in Wuhan (1994) and Beijing (2002), respectively. As the author notes, many Chinese water policy concepts would allow translation into something approaching IWRM.

The South African case suggests an additional point. While interaction with the global sphere may always be strategic and selective in the case of strong states ((semi-)authoritarian or not), the point is who (which groups) have access to that global sphere and who do not. (Semi-)authoritarian states keep that access circumscribed for some, in a variety of ways, whether the regime is capitalist, communist or otherwise. While the information and communication technology revolution makes it increasingly more difficult to maintain exclusion on the knowledge front, the implications of this for water policy dynamics are not self-evident, as the South African case suggests. Moreover, there seems to be little evidence in the three cases that global water policy concepts and frameworks can effectively be imposed, unless there is significant 'buy-in' by domestic constituencies, the latter making appropriation perhaps a more useful category than imposition.

An unexpected level of comparison found within the three papers is based on their different styles and analytical approaches, that may, I would suggest, in some respects mirror the nature of the state forms and their transformation processes of the past decades. The paper on South Africa draws on a

Marxist political economy perspective, using one framework to analyse changes in state form in a series of phases. In the South Africa paper, state form is a key analytical category, unlike in the Vietnam and China papers. South African (water policy) history is analysed as an ongoing struggle for dominance among a set of actor groups (class groupings), whose (mis)fortunes vary over time and involve changing alliances and different types of power and struggles. This is a society-centric perspective without hidden assumptions about the liberal democratic process, and an approach that seems to reflect the South African political process both in style and substance.

The Vietnam paper addresses a (water policy) transformation process that is much less easily phased and explained in terms of alliances and struggle. To many outside observers the dynamics of Vietnamese (water policy) transformation may appear as enigmatic and apparently contradictory and meandering – certainly even surprising every now and then. This phenomenon may be thought to be due to the general problem of researcher access to policy processes in (semi-)authoritarian contexts, but the paper argues that the explanation lies in the nature of change dynamics itself, and questions the usefulness of policy and reform as analytical categories when understood as purposive, instrumental and strategic action emanating from a central point. When the argument is accepted that change is much more complex, from the perspectives of non-linearity, unpredictability and emergence, than most policy analysis frameworks want to admit, different frameworks are indeed in order. The scepticism that the author argues for subsequently translates into the style of the paper.

The China paper is a careful and considered exploration of water policy discourse and practice in a huge and in some respects strongly decentralised country, where, consequently, water policy dynamics may vary strongly regionally and by sub-sector, the details of which are not easily accessible for research. The paper also strongly suggests that water policy is only partially about water, and instead sometimes primarily about something else. The author calls his paper an essay. Notwithstanding, or maybe because of, his long-standing close engagement with water issues in China, it seems to me that the author is cautioning readers that asking questions may be wiser than suggesting that answers are clear, and particularly that it is important to ask what constitute the right questions.

To conclude, with this collection of papers on water policy dynamics in (semi-)authoritarian states, *Water Alternatives* hopes to induce subsequent contributions that (comparatively) will investigate the relevance of state form for water policy dynamics, or argue against it, critically reflect on categories like policy and reform and analyse (also) critical discourses on water as forms of situated knowledge.

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