

Strategic environmental assessment in China: Motivations, politics, and effectiveness

Da Zhu*, Jiang Ru

The World Bank, USA

Received 24 October 2005; received in revised form 31 January 2007; accepted 19 March 2007

Available online 23 May 2007

Abstract

This paper examines how strategic environmental assessment has been practiced at the national level in China through 2005 and why it has been practiced in the manner observed. Based on literature reviews and interviews carried out in 2005 and 2006, we find that bureaucratic politics between environmental and nonenvironmental ministries has limited the legislation and implementation of strategic environmental assessment to environmental assessment (EA) for a set of government plans defined in the 2003 Environmental Impact Assessment Law. Interviewees from environmental and nonenvironmental ministries and key research institutes have reported that few planning EAs have been performed at the sectoral level. Nonenvironmental ministries have either evaded the 2003 Environmental Impact Assessment Law and have not undertaken required planning EA or have organized planning EA on their own without participation by the State Environmental Protection Administration. The rising tension between the environmental and nonenvironmental ministries has limited the role of planning EA as a participatory decision-making tool. In addition to bureaucratic politics, we find that weak public participation and underemphasis on social analysis in planning EA may have further compromised the utility of planning EA.

© 2007 Elsevier Ltd. All rights reserved.

Keywords: Strategic environmental assessment; China; Bureaucratic politics; Effectiveness

1. Introduction

Strategic environmental assessment (SEA) is a new tool that developing countries can use to evaluate the environmental implications of government policies, plans, and programs (PPPs) in their decision-making processes (Noble and Storey, 2001).¹ It is commonly acknowledged that

properly designed SEA systems and a well-implemented SEA process can help countries integrate environmental factors into policy making at an early stage, but as Alshuwaikhat (2005) notes, developing countries have “only a limited number of fully operational SEA systems.” Key factors that have impeded the effective implementation of SEA in developing countries include the lack of appropriate information, the immediate interests of elected officials, and the complexity and scale of SEA.

Scholars introduced the concept of SEA into China in the early 1990s, and a number of SEA studies were conducted before 2003 (Bao et al., 2005). Nonetheless, SEA did not become a formal administrative practice until the Environmental Impact Assessment (EIA) Law went into effect on September 1, 2003. The 2003 EIA Law required, for the first time, the conduct of environmental assessments (EAs) for a select set of planning activities by government agencies (hereinafter referred to as planning EAs). Planning EAs are a type of SEA, but their scope is limited.

As SEA is still fairly new to China, information about SEA and planning EA practices in China is limited, and as

Acronyms and abbreviations: EA, environmental assessment; EIA, environmental Impact Assessment; ENRC, environmental and natural resources Committee; PPPs, policies, plans, and programs; REA, regional environmental assessment; SEA, strategic environmental assessment; SEPA, State Environmental Protection Administration

*Corresponding author. The World Bank, Washington, DC 20433, USA. Tel.: +1 202 473 5826; fax: +1 202 614 0261.

E-mail address: dzhu@worldbank.org (D. Zhu).

¹SEA can be defined as the formalized, systematic and comprehensive process of evaluating the environmental impacts of a policy, plan or program and its alternatives, including the preparation of a written report on the findings of that evaluation, and using the findings in publicly accountable decision-making (Therivel et al., 1992). For a thorough discussion of SEA and how it is practiced in different countries, see Abaza et al. (2004).

of 2005, few studies on China's SEA efforts had been published in English. Che et al. (2002) discuss the need for and potential for conducting SEA in China, provide summaries of four SEA case studies, and propose suggestions for conducting SEA in China. Xu et al. (2003) propose SEA procedures for China and review a case study of an SEA for wastewater reuse policies in a Chinese city. Bao et al. (2004) present a framework and operational procedures for SEA administration and enforcement, as well as nine SEA case studies. Most recently, Zhu et al. (2005) detail the legal requirements for planning EA set out in the 2003 EIA Law, such as major purposes, key elements, and procedures. In terms of the literature on SEA in Chinese, as Che et al. (2002) note, "Most of [the] research (on SEA in China) has been focused on the concept, theory, and method of SEA." As of 2005, neither the Chinese nor the English literature had paid much attention to the institutional environment within which SEA is conducted. Topics such as the adaptation of SEA concepts, the motivation and politics underlying legally mandated planning EA, and the implications of current institutional arrangements for the effectiveness of planning EA have yet to be examined.

Based on a literature review and 16 interviews conducted in March 2005, June 2005, and May 2006, this paper examines the inadequacies in current research on China's SEA practices and, in particular, explores how SEA has been practiced and why the national government has practiced it in the manner observed. Our focus is limited to the national government largely because of few reported SEA activities at the local government level. Please note also that this paper aims to examine the implementation status of planning EA in China, but is not intended to provoke academic debates on SEA concepts, on what constitutes best practice in SEA, or on EA in general.

We carried out semistructured interviews with 16 interviewees. We asked about (a) interviewees' personal involvement in SEA and planning EA, (b) interviewees' personal observations about planning EA practices in the national government or in their particular ministries, and (c) interviewees' interpretations of why planning EA has been implemented in the way they observed. The 16 interviewees were three top SEA professors from Beijing, Nankai, and Tongji normal universities who have been actively involved in SEA studies and in planning EA projects with various ministries as independent experts; a retired senior official who led the State Environmental Protection Administration's (SEPA's) efforts in relation to passage of the 2003 EIA Law; four senior staff from the Appraisal Center for Environment and Engineering who have organized and participated in SEA training and in planning EA projects²; three midlevel officials from the Ministry of Railway who are in charge of planning, EA

affairs, and SEA training, respectively; a senior official from the Ministry of Transport who oversees EA and planning EA issues in the ministry; two senior researchers from the China Academy of Transportation Science, a research institute affiliated with the Ministry of Transport who are actively engaged in planning EA projects; a senior manager from a private EA consulting firm; and a midlevel official from the Ministry of Agriculture who is involved in SEA training. This paper uses a six-digit number when referring to interviews. The first two digits indicate the year of the interview, the third and fourth digits indicate the month, and the last two digits indicate the individual interview.

In this paper, we first review how SEA concepts were introduced into China. Next we analyze the legislative process that led to the 2003 EIA Law and the motivation and politics underlying the legislation and highlight key characteristics of the law. After that, we examine how the 2003 EIA Law has been implemented through 2005 by highlighting interactions between SEPA and nonenvironmental ministries. We conclude by summarizing our findings.

2. Discussions and research before 2003

The development of SEA in China can be divided into three stages: academic discussions and research before 2003, SEA legislation and the passage of the 2003 EIA Law, and planning EA practices under the law.³ This section focuses on the first stage. SEA is a foreign concept introduced by Chinese scholars. Since the early 1990s, a concept similar to SEA, regional environmental assessment (REA), has been practiced in China to assess the environmental impacts of regional development policies and practices during their planning stages. In addition, Chinese scholars have also classified EIAs for mega-scale projects as SEA practices.

Before 2003, discussions and research on SEA were mainly academically oriented, as there was no legal requirement for conducting SEAs. Many discussions and cases concerned the technical aspects of impact assessment, largely neglecting the stakeholder consultation processes and the systematic integration of environmental factors into policy making. Similarly, REA and EIA for mega-scale construction projects have also emphasized the technical aspects of assessment activities, but no consultative processes have been reported.

2.1. Academic discussions and research

The academic discussions and research have, to some extent, popularized SEA concepts in China. Bao et al.

²The center is affiliated with SEPA and is responsible for technical reviews of EIA reports of large and medium development and construction projects supervised by SEPA.

³Bao et al. (2005) divide the development of SEA in China into three different stages: introduction of the SEA concept (before 1995), systematic research and experiments (1995–2002), and establishment and implementation of SEA (after 2003).

متن کامل مقاله

دریافت فوری ←

ISIArticles

مرجع مقالات تخصصی ایران

- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه تمام متن مقالات انگلیسی
- ✓ امکان دانلود نسخه ترجمه شده مقالات
- ✓ پذیرش سفارش ترجمه تخصصی
- ✓ امکان جستجو در آرشیو جامعی از صدها موضوع و هزاران مقاله
- ✓ امکان دانلود رایگان ۲ صفحه اول هر مقاله
- ✓ امکان پرداخت اینترنتی با کلیه کارت های عضو شتاب
- ✓ دانلود فوری مقاله پس از پرداخت آنلاین
- ✓ پشتیبانی کامل خرید با بهره مندی از سیستم هوشمند رهگیری سفارشات