

Translation of sustainability

In our study, the word ‘translation’ is not confined to the translation of one language to others, but rather is used as well both in a general and figurative sense as a term to understand how the socio-political and economic changes resulting from the directives issued by competent international authorities within the architecture of global governance move down from the level of the nation-state to the level of the everyday lives of the citizens. It is hypothesized in our study that the social diffusion and national adaptation of SDGs requires important innovation in both the language and the knowledge translation of sustainability principles and social values. This is proposed as the dual mechanism of sustainability translation.

The issue of transition is broad in scope, giving rise to academic inquiry among political theorists and political scientists into the nature of change on the national polity, while those specializing in environmental governance may be inclined to examine the effectiveness of socio-political and economic changes in response to climate change. Further, sociologists may instead tack towards an analysis of the ramifications of the transition on society and on the whole gamut of people’s everyday lives while international relations specialists may be interested in understanding how different models of transition – through the process of translation – affect the alignment and power of states at the global level and how this, in turn, impacts on the nature of governance in multilateral settings.

What can be agreed upon is that, for an effective response to climate change to take place, meeting the target set in the Paris Agreement, the scale of the change required is enormous and is likely to recast the relationship between the citizen and the state, the practices of businesses, the power and constraints on nation-states in the international political economy, or potentially, as some suggest, the very economic models and ideologies from which global dependency on the combustion of fossil fuels derives (Klein 2013; Mason 2015). What is more, these changes can be expected to occur in many ways and not in uniform ways crossnationally. Thus, the issue of ‘translation’ becomes a focal topic and is explicated below based on two examples, one from China and one from Japan.

We start with a number of questions. How are the directives or other attempts to socialize environmental ethics from the global level of the United Nations, as a platform of global governance, ‘translated’ into the grammar of a national polity? How are they communicated to businesses and citizens? How is it made possible within the strictures and power relations within and between states and non-state actors? What is their cultural or ideological impact? What might this mean towards realizing an effective change? And what may this entail for ordinary citizens of a nation in terms of future socio-economic frameworks and governance? The point of translation, here, is to understand in what forms transition is taking place within nation-states or other social systems and, to that end, how change is being communicated (see Rogers 2010: 35). This indeed is no simple task but is nonetheless necessary in order to

further understand the processes of social, economic and political developments in a time of enormous global challenges to civilization and fundamental and rapid change, whether the global response to climate change is sufficient for the survival of a tolerable quality of life or not. Upon explaining these general points, the discussion then turns to the contributions this study seeks to make to fill the gap in the existing literature.

There is ample evidence to suggest that both China and Japan are committed to transitioning to renewable energy. We argue that effective Multisectoral Interaction (MSI) is an effective means to improve environmental performance and reduce environmental risk. As such, the forging of collaborations and strategic partnerships to maximize social, economic and environmental benefits is essential. To this end, effective communication of environmental management based upon multilateral agreements and international environmental laws is an essential component for the mitigation of environmental risk within a social system (Ji 2018). Of course, a large analytical toolkit deriving from new institutionalism and sociology offers theories of diffusion that demonstrate a number of other elements exist within a social system which aids us in charting the course a polity takes when social systems undergo transition. For instance, rational choice institutionalists may point to the incentive structures placed on agents, historical rules and regularities may be highlighted as constraining forces by historical institutionalists, while the role of cultural norms and socialization on providing pathways for certain types of change over others constitutes a focal point of analysis among sociological institutionalists and sociologists interested in risk management (Schmidt 2008).

Additionally, discursive institutionalists, among others, may emphasize the role of discourse in the process of change (Schmidt 2008) and its link with relational models of diffusion (Wakuta 2015). Moreover, the observation that technologies and governmental strategies of risk management – including the offsetting of responsibility – that proposed solutions to climate risks are reliant upon bear political qualities that impact upon the social lives of citizens (Szerszynski et al. 2013; Asayama 2015; Hook et al. 2017) brings an additional dimension to the study of social, economic and political change. Without seeking to carry out an exhaustive review of this broad range of research, the point here is to highlight how translation plays an important role in the transition a national polity needs to make to a low carbon or otherwise renewable energy system in a short space of time.

One example of ‘translation’ is evident in the communication over the roles expected to be played by the public in achieving the Chinese dream in President Xi’s speech at the 19th National Congress. As seen above, President Xi’s dream purportedly constitutes a form of modernization in which man and nature co-exist harmoniously. The speech represents an admixture of influences from Marxo-Leninism, Maoism, Deng Xiaoping theory, the Three Represents of the CCP but also traditional Chinese philosophy. The discussion here needs to be contextualized by reference to the traditional Confucian conceptions of agency regarding self-cultivation and civic virtue in President Xi’s speech. For such conceptions may extend to behavioural adaptations to formulate management strategies to address environmental risk. That is, as Confucius (551–479 bce) himself proposed, ethical reform towards ‘an ethically and ritually disciplined life’ (Lai 2008: 19), proposals by President Xi over cultivating social norms to promote realizing the Chinese dream may indeed appeal to the revolutionary

sensitivities of party ideology, the relative pragmatism of Deng Xiaoping theory, but also to the traditional conservatism of those with a longer heritage in Chinese politics and elite circles. Of course, such influences are likely to be observable in much of Chinese political thought and discourse. However, a significant development to emerge from the 19th National Congress was for President Xi's name and political ideas to be written into the party's constitution. Not only that, the Congress granted President Xi his own eponymous school of thought and ideological status, which only the previous leaders Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping had accomplished heretofore (Phillips 19 October 2017; Buckley 24 October 2017). President Xi's speech mentioned officially for the first time and detailed Xi Jinping's 'thought on Socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era' or Xi Jinping theory (Xi Jinping sixiang). What role does Xi give to both citizens and businesses to this end?

When the people have faith, the country has power and the nation [minzu] has hope. We must improve people's ideological awareness [sixiang juewu], moral standards, civilized qualities [wenming suyang], and raise the level of civilization of the whole of society. We will launch an extensive education of ideals and faith, deepen publicity and education of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the Chinese dream, carry forward the national spirit and the spirit of the age, strengthen patriotism, collectivism, socialism, and guide people into establishing the correct view of history, national outlook, country and culture. We will implement deeply a citizen morality construction project, promote social ethics, professional ethics, family virtues, individual moral character building, and motivate people to do good, to be filial and concerned about others [xiaolao aiqin], to be loyal to the Motherland, and loyal to the people. We will strengthen and improve ideological and political work and deepen mass activities to build a spiritual civilization.

(Xinhua 27 October 2017, our translation)

It is difficult to envisage a leader of a Group of Seven (G7) nation, for instance, making declarations over the reform of social ethics and morality in such a fashion, though the promotion of behavioural change indeed takes place in different forms and is communicated in different ways. Of particular note here is the influence of li in Chinese philosophy as a kind of behavioural propriety on social agents influencing the normative codes of conduct in society, and a concept deeply embedded in traditional Chinese philosophy. As opposed to related concepts regarding self-cultivation such as ren which loosely relate to a conception of virtue as an innate sense of human interrelatedness and altruistic morality or kindness, li focuses on the socialization of norms to guide and constrain – in other words, govern – the inner self (Lai 2008: 26). Li, therefore, is observable and can be regulated through people's social conduct. Of course, this is in no way to provide a statement of fact regarding the Confucianist thought underpinning President Xi's speech nor to speculate on the reality of reform once implemented. Rather, the point is to highlight how an 'ecological civilization' and 'spiritual civilization' may be informed by such traditional conceptions of agency within a civic or social domain, in which there is space for the government to discuss implementing

a ‘citizen morality construction project’ and to recrudescence historically situated norms to diverge from current development paths such as promoting a modernization in which ‘man and nature’ ‘co-exist’ (Xinhua 27 October 2017), a view traceable to traditional Daoist philosophy and far removed from the initial approach to development taken since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China in 1949 (Hook et al. 2017: 25).

A second example may be seen in the impact of socio-cultural norms at the grassroots level pitted against the vested interests of nuclear power in Japan which are epitomized by the so-called ‘nuclear village’, a term used to denote pro-nuclear advocates within the government, major companies and academia and their close and powerful relationship with information cartels (Kingston 2013; Hook et al. 2017: 37). Japan is heavily reliant on imported gas and oil, largely from a handful of countries in the Middle East and subject to regional competition with China for fossil fuel imports from Russia, and so has championed diversifying sources of gas and oil, risking, at times, damaging its strategic relation with the United States by, for instance, negotiating with Iran over fossil fuel imports (Hook et al. 2012: 301–3). To this end, the state and its affiliates within the nuclear village have long promoted nuclear power as a means to overcome vulnerabilities to the nation’s energy security as well as for mercantilist reasons. However, anti-nuclear norms emanating from the trauma and collective memory of the two atomic bombs that destroyed the cities of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in August 1945, the harrowing and prolonged social impacts of this, as well as knowledge over large nuclear meltdowns such as the Chernobyl disaster of 1986, intensified as a result of the 3.11 catastrophe. This led to popular opposition which played a prominent role in forcing the shutdown of all fifty nuclear reactors in Japan by September 2013, whose restart depended on passing newly introduced and more rigorous safety guidelines (Kingston 2013), in spite of its effect on electricity prices nationwide. In other words, anti-nuclear norms prevailed, at least temporarily, over the enormous top-down pressure from the nuclear village and their cosy relationship with the main sources of media in Japan (Setouchi et al. 2012). This is all the more remarkable because it came with a significant increase of cost to every Japanese household which forced a change in Japanese energy consumption practices.

With this, the Japanese state is promoting wholesale technological innovation to address the issue of environmental (and energy) risk, particularly in the context of ‘National Resilience’ (kokudo kyōjin-ka), a deeply institutionalized initiative which is heavily funded from public and private sectors. As DeWit (2016) points out, in the wake of 3.11, ‘building resilience in both the public and private sectors has become explicitly and powerfully linked with renewable energy systems and their enabling storage and transmission technologies’, with the core market in National Resilience projected to total between JPY11.8 and 13.5 trillion (at the time of writing, approximately US\$105.1–119.3 billion) by 2020. On the one hand, a number of nuclear reactors were restarted as the nuclear lobby has pushed back against popular opposition; on the other, there is abundant evidence that Japan is moving towards renewable energy.

One pertinent example is that the implementation of a feed-in tariff policy in 2011 attracted over 33,000 renewable projects worth approximately US\$2 billion in the first few months alone and was led by local banks and credit unions, while citizen cooperation in trialling related innovations appears to have increased following the 3.11 disaster (DeWit 2012, 2013). What are the main drivers of such change? This may be indicative of an ‘anthropological shock’ over the use of dangerous materials as sources of energy, in which a population who ‘feel they have been subjected to a horrendous event’, unable to forget its impact, ‘will change their future in fundamental and irrevocable ways’ (Beck 2015: 79–80). Additionally, there are suggestions that the rapid development of technological innovations related to renewable energies will lead to what Joseph Schumpeter referred to as the ‘creative destruction’ of old and deeply entrenched economic structures from within; a process which would accelerate market-facilitated responses to climate change and see Japan become a world-leading pioneer of renewable energies (DeWit 2015).

To be clear, creative destruction is a popularized term coined by Austrian economist Joseph Schumpeter which considers technological innovation to be the primary driving-force behind the long-wave cycles of economic expansion to recession originally identified by Russian economist, Nikolai Kondratiev. The central premise for Schumpeter’s account is that technological innovation radically transforms the economic system such that old, entrenched economic structures and powers are destroyed and replaced from within. Thus, technological innovation would bring to power new innovators and new enterprises which represent social norms and attitudes different to those of the previously entrenched economic structures that spread across an economic system. Prime Minister Abe, himself, while stating his determination to make Japan the world’s ‘most innovation-friendly country’ (*mottomo inobēshon-o shiyasui kuni*), has suggested Japan would benefit from becoming more Schumpeterian, while referencing Kondratiev waves/cycles at other public speaking events (Abe 6 October 2013, 17 April 2014, 1 May 2014).

The above two examples demonstrate the importance of ‘translation’ and specifically how transition is communicated. As governments are compelled to follow the metrics set by the UN in responding to climate change, there are varying material factors, governmental mechanisms and unique characteristics of a national polity that can inform the paths of transition to renewable energies and the behavioural adaptation associated with minimizing environmental risk. The example provided for China shows how the state is able to promote, alongside other reforms, a campaign to ‘construct’ moral codes and ethical practices in the individual directly through political conceptions of a ‘sinicized’ and historically situated state-socialism that may facilitate, for instance, lifestyle adaptations in response to climate change. Alternatively, the example given for Japan demonstrates the balance of power between an entrenched nuclear lobby and a population heavily impacted by a series of anthropogenic and humanitarian disasters made possible by nuclear technologies. Here, a combination of popular demand and technological development has promoted a market-driven, and technocratic transition (see also DeWit 2017), whether sufficient or not, to renewables with social consciousness over the social risks associated with environmental hazards and energy consumption countering and challenging the previously established view

of relying on nuclear power to overcome the vulnerabilities of an over-reliance on fossil fuel imports.

To this end, the approach outlined in this study is developed to contribute to academic inquiry regarding the translation of new models of energy politics, using both China and Japan, two very different social systems, as case studies. Further, by implementing structural equation modelling over the communication of renewable energies and discussion over behavioural change from a variety of media sources, our study develops three empirical models to gauge the influence from main sources of information on industrial users and the mass media, and also examines the MSI between these sources. The governance of environmental risks is often characterized by social complexity which requires debate and deliberation over what is at stake and what choices to make in overcoming the issue while, at the same time, is challenged by complex multilevel, multisectoral and multilateral structures and interactions and scientific uncertainty, particular as regards the speed and exact scale of risk (Gilek et al. 2016: 6). Furthermore, it is widely agreed among policymakers, social scientists, civil society organizations and others that effective communication, multi-stakeholder participation and increased involvement of citizens in the processes of deliberation are essential for societies to respond to the effects of climate change and minimize and manage environmental risk (Gilek et al. 2016: 9).

This, too, may necessitate changing roles and responsibilities between various stakeholders of a national polity or even within the transnational context. Therefore, the model proposed here contributes a means by which environmental communication is carried out cross-sectorally within a national polity and cross-nationally. It provides three analytical instruments which may be used as social intervention tools for evidence-based policy-making to measure, monitor and intervene over the issue of transitioning to renewable energy. It also proffers empirical measurements of the level of MSI and links these with the EPI, set by the UN as part of the Millennium Development Goals that preceded the SDGs. It is hoped that this tool will offer policymakers and researchers alike a means to assess MSI among different countries over the diffusion of renewable energies to respond to climate change. Finally, a detailed understanding of the communication of new innovations associated with renewable energy affords researchers further insight into how the directives, targets and norms established by frameworks of global governance are ‘translated’ by each national polity, and therefore comparative insight into the potential and likely pathways of development cross-nationally. In order to discuss how this was carried out, Chapter 7 explains our research methodology.