



WP5

Policy implementation and formation in Chinese cities

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on the basis of our six researchers' findings



Urbachina WP5 'Urban development, traditions and modern lifestyles'

Field research

- Between March 2012 and April 2014, six researchers selected and conducted field research in a total of 20 field sites, 6 in Shanghai, 6 in Chongqing, and 4 each in Huangshan and Kunming. In each city each researcher worked in 2 field sites. The sites were the areas of the jurisdiction of the organ of 'self-government' – a Residents' Committee (RC). Each was selected for its broad range of housing types and life-styles, but making sure it included residents with low and middle-range incomes. One site of the 2 in each city was from a central district, the other from a newly formed peripheral district. We also made sure to include sites of special interest, such as the new public rental housing projects in Chongqing and old alley-way housing areas in Shanghai.

A selected theme

- I thank all six researchers: Luo Pan, Paula Morais, and Zhang Hui, who are here, Jude Howell, Renate Krieg and Wang Xiaoxia who are not, for their tremendous research reports and contributions to our final short and extended briefings, now in the possession of the EC
- What I am offering here is at a more analytic level, that reflects from our findings on how policy implementation and formation seems to work, from the perspective of the final and lowest levels of implementation

Policy implementation by non-state actors

- RCs are, through current local Party committees and retired members of the Party, as well as Youth League members resident in its territory, tasked with mobilizing 'community' through building representatives and volunteer organisers of activities. In other words these non-officials are part of the apparatus of policy implementation. Beside that, property management companies, entirely private, also implement policy. In some cases it is they who also do the policing work of supplementing census information for the territory every year.

Protests and 'Bargaining authoritarianism'

- Lee Ching-kwan and Zhang Yongzhong have uncovered the sizeable apparatus of bargaining with *protestors* at the district and Street levels of cities, coining a term for their activities as yet another kind of authoritarianism, 'bargaining authoritarianism' (2014 'The power of instability: unraveling the micro-foundations of bargaining authoritarianism in China' *American Journal of Sociology* 338(6): 1475-1508)

Lobbying

- The National property management companies' association is a powerful influence on policy
- Networks of city-wide Home-owners' associations are also effective in modifying policy
- They do not include poor-low-and –middle income residents, but these have some well-defined, from above, local, small-scale agency as 'community'

‘Fragmented authoritarianism’

- In 1988 Kenneth Lieberthal formulated a lasting conception of the state in the PRC: ‘fragmented authoritarianism’. (The book of the 1988 conference is Lieberthal, Kenneth G. and Lampton, David M. (eds) (1992) *Bureaucracy, Politics, and Decision-making in Post-Mao China*. University of California Press)
- By fragmented they mean that ministries pursue their own policy agendas with their own systems and the sum of policies at any one time is not a unity; it is centralised inconsistency with weak mechanisms through the centralised Party to achieve consistency and unification

Authoritarianism

- Authoritarian refers to a state centralized by its sole Party, which is the engine of policy-making and implementation.
- But the Party, expanded to include the most successful entrepreneurs under the slogan of the 'three represents' (*san'ge daibiao*) is huge, standing at about 90 out of a total population of some 1400 million, of whom adults must make up between 900 and 1000 million = 10-11% of the total adult population, not including its mass organisations, such as the Youth League.
- So, even within this core body, central policy formation and implementation is not dictatable, but is coordinated inconsistently through variable interpretations of official discourse and policy guidelines.

Authorisation

- Policy is authorization, not dictation. A Professor of real estate management at Chongqing University once told us that no-one in government can do anything without ‘policy’ (*zhengce* was the term he used). In other words, policy is permissive, not just prescriptive.

Policy entrepreneurs

- Andrew Mertha “‘Fragmented Authoritarianism 2.0’; Political pluralization in the Chinese Policy Process’ *China Quarterly* 200, December 2009 pp 995-1012.
- He argues that since 1988 when Lieberthal first proposed this ‘most durable heuristic’, there has been further pluralisation of state agencies of implementation.

Policy entrepreneurs

- But more important is Mertha's addition of plural policy-*making* agencies, not just plurality of implementation. For this Mertha uses a more general political science concept, of 'policy entrepreneurs'. They are 'advocates for proposals or for the prominence of an idea' (here Mertha refers to John Kingdon, *Agendas, Alternatives and Public Policies* Harper Collins 1995 pp 122-3).
- Policy inconsistencies and variation in policy implementation indicate points and room for manoeuvre by officials and cadres to be innovative at the risk of their careers, but also for the advantages of gaining support from below and above for their success

Discretionary mandates

- Mayling Birney (2014 'Decentralisation and veiled corruption under China's rule of mandates', *World Development* 53: 55-67).
- Policy priorities of equal status may conflict with each other, among Ministries and at any level of government and that therefore a choice of priority is forced.
- Stability (*weiwen*) or peace/order (*pingan*) is at the top, but then, for instance, 'development' (=GDP growth) versus 'reducing ecological damage' in a dam project enforce a choice between them

Decisions on priority and policy change

- *involvement of NGOs, journalists and academics in policy-making priority campaigns*

In alliance with official policy entrepreneurs, they can effectively change priorities between conflicting policies

- Plans and policies are as everywhere projections into a future that is desired, and a correction of a present and immediate past.
- In China the language in which these projections are couched is not simply that of 'Chinese characteristics' and the authority of the leadership of the CCP. It is also a technical know-how and statistical calculus of growth of GDP in global comparison. As important a mandate as stability is the mandate of economic performance at the local level, measured in terms of growth. One resident in Kunming complained that RC staff only cared about GDP, not service to the people.
- But since 2014, the target for growth has been reduced by almost half to 7% per annum – the so-called 'new normal'

Targets

- Coming back to the urban grassroots, RCs are each month given targets to complete by their Street office, and they manipulate statistics to show that they have succeeded (Wang Di 2013 'Pratiques et norms de fonctionnement des Comités de residents: consequences et limites d'une gestion par les chiffres' *Perspectives Chinoises* 1: 7-16).
- In his doctoral dissertation based on a former workers' community in inner Shanghai, Yang Chen found that the RC was set a total of 150 tasks a month. Yang Chen (2012) *Mutations sociales et transformations spatiales des quartiers ouvriers de shanghai (1949-2010) : Le cas de la cite ouvriere de caoyang*. Présentée et soutenue à l'EHESS le 16 octobre 2012

Face projects and civilisation

- Targets have to be shown to have been achieved and RC staff are engaged in performances of achievement of targets
- RCs and local branches of the Communist Party and Youth League put on mass mobilisations and propaganda shows about the central policy initiatives in the current discourse of improving civilization and quality, with little attendance but with photo-opportunities for their banners.
- On the other hand, the same Party and League mobilisations did successfully recruit volunteers especially among the relatively younger, *newly retired local population* to help the older and infirm with their shopping or the children of the indigent and late working parents with after-school care and their school homework.

Top-down planning and 'community' formation

- Top-down regulation, policies of economic growth, property development and planning control have caused destruction and loss:
- top-down replacement of work unit with local, territorial administration of social security and a top-down project to develop new senses of neighbourhood in urban 'communities' (*shequ*).

Nevertheless, volunteers and RC staff take initiatives to organise activities and to raise funds for community/neighbourhood schemes such as the ones mentioned.

Implementation itself involves improvisation

- In a new Chongqing suburb a *land requisition officer* complained that the regulations were never detailed enough to deal with particulars, such as the quality of the materials of a requisitioned house or the actual as distinct from the registered composition of a household.
- Because of these complications, Central directives cannot be met, despite the announcements that say everyone is to be treated equally and quickly.
- The same quandaries of improvisation and lack of realism in policies are experienced by RC staff members
- Yet when he or she reports upwards seeking advice or asking for an amended policy there is no reply. He and others in her position are sympathetic to the resettled farmers or residents and try to get them the best deal and provide them a service. Yet they know they cannot do what the policy promises as fully as expected, including their own sense of dutiful expectation of themselves

Planning lacks research

- We talked to many planning officials and they all told us that they had not expected to have to deal with the large numbers of migrant workers who came to rent housing in their districts, enriching the urban residents letting their properties, sometimes in incorporated villages, sometimes in old work-unit housing sold to their original tenants, sometimes relocated central city residents', sometimes villagers' houses and apartments.
- This is surprising after two decades of rural-urban migration. But it is only the most obvious lack of investigation before making policy and plan.

- The huge public rental housing projects in Chongqing, an otherwise enlightened plan for social housing, was not financed sufficiently for the nurseries, primary schools, and clinics not to be immediately overcrowded and thus a spur to move out.
- The policy of public rented relatively inexpensive accommodation in Chongqing depended on the right of tenants to purchase their apartments after a period of five years, and then the option of resale back to the public rental authority, but two years in and the tenants still did not know what the purchasing price would be.
- Tenants who wanted to swap apartments with each other, due to changes in their circumstances were not allowed because this contingency had not been foreseen.

Delayed response to feedback

- On both these questions, local RC and Rental office staff had asked for policy clarification up the hierarchy but so far had received no responses, except on swapping within and between rental housing projects which was made possible in 2014, an exceptional response to feedback after only 2 years – possibly because Chongqing is a special case of experimentation..
- In all cities we found that aside from the wealthy residents' estates there is a chronic lack of maintenance of public facilities and public spaces. Finance had just not been provided, but funds could be found sometimes (on a single occasion only) by the Street

Official research

- ministries with their own figures do not share them with other ministries so that planners and policy-makers are insufficiently informed about social need.
- it is worth noting that there are research offices attached to every ministry and to every level of government in China down from the national, through province-level and to counties (xian) in the countryside and urban districts (qu) in cities.
- But their research appears to be based on cursory visits. The head of one RC was very defensive and unforthcoming to one of our researchers (ZH) until she realized that the researcher was staying several weeks and taking the research seriously and then she became very informative and complained about the number of times researchers from the government had come and made no difference to her work load or anything else she drew to our attention.

Coercive but improvisatory authority

- The result is that central policy makers rely on lower levels to improvise and adapt the policies in their implementation, and to raise funds themselves, from Street and lower levels, to mitigate the lacks in policy-makers' reality checks, in effect becoming policy entrepreneurs

Problems of feedback

- Block representatives, RC staff and local government office staff feed back problems of policy implementation and needs for changes in policy.
- but officials complained of the indefinite delay in acknowledging feedback and making policy changes
- ‘community’ representatives, including block representatives, see it as their function to feed back problems
- but RC staff are increasingly treating their jobs as desk jobs and so feedback is not encouraged, except in one Shanghai RC where staff go on a regularly monthly walk-about. Even then feedback of grievances etc gets no higher-level acknowledgement.

Hierarchy of civilisation, and the market

- notions of the 'market' as everywhere else mean the contracting out of urbanization as a state policy to private organisations, such as property developers and property management companies.
- In low-middle-income community/neighbourhoods this means chronic lack of services of security surveillance and cleaning (not waste disposal) because residents are not willing and often not able to pay the necessary fees for the property-management companies to function as businesses

The top-down but absorbed discourse of civilisation

- I cannot sufficiently stress the ubiquity of the discourse of population quality and its levels of civilization (*wenming* and *wenhua*) so widespread that it is used by urban residents to describe the low quality of migrant worker residents and service providers, or by high-income villa estate residents to describe the low quality of the new rich.
- Of course the descriptions are reversed and otherwise disputed, or just taken for granted, or used ironically. Residents despised as low quality and told off by block representatives for leaving rubbish in public places can retort that this is little rubbish compared to the big rubbish of senior officials using their positions for personal gain.
- This is the discourse of hierarchy that authorises policy and the leadership of the Party

Conclusion

- The Chinese Communist Party is the largest political organization in the world, but its policy-making and implementation has some features that are familiar from studies of large corporations or governments in completely different political systems.
- A study by Kimberly Chong of a very large international consultancy working in China also found large gaps in its management policy, applied to itself through a discourse into which everything had to be fitted, even though it was self-deceiving and the reality was actually much less neat and tidy (2012 Ph D dissertation, Anthropology, London School of Economics).
- Many thanks to Susanna Thornton, who informs me that she found similar parallels in her work in other large private non-Chinese corporations in China.
- What singles China out is that the Party's branches at every level of government and below as well as beyond, in large enterprises, are the chief coordinators and improvisers of local variations in the imperfect and fragmented policy that it makes.