



ISSN: 2470-6450

中國政策學刊

# China Policy Journal

[www.chinapolicyjournal.org](http://www.chinapolicyjournal.org)

VOLUME 3 NUMBER 1 FALL 2024



# China Policy Journal

Vol. 3, No. 1, Fall 2024 • © 2025 Policy Studies Organization  
ISSN: 2470-6450

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## From the Editors

# Relaunching *China Policy Journal*: A New Era of China Policy Research in a Global Context

Ping Xu & Wenguang Zhang

Welcome to the new edition of the *China Policy Journal*. We are excited to relaunch the journal with a new editorial team, co-sponsored by Beijing Normal University, the Chinese Policy Scholars Group (CPSG), and published by the Policy Studies Organization (PSO). Our editorial team and editorial board are consisted of a group of experienced and talented scholars from China, the United States, and beyond. Together, we are committed to publishing high-quality original research that offers strong theoretical or empirical contribution and deepens our understanding of policy development process and the politics of policy-making in and about China.

We are excited to showcase five high-quality research articles in this issue. Before introducing them, we would like to reflect on the growing importance of China policy research and highlight the areas of research we particularly encourage.

First, as we navigate an era marked by rapid transformation—driven by globalization, technological innovation, environmental crises, and evolving governance structures—the study of public policy has become more essential than ever. In this dynamic context, China's policymaking has drawn increasing global interest. The ongoing trade tensions, geopolitical rivalries, and growing uncertainty in the international order have amplified the pressing need to better understand China's domestic governance and its global policy strategies.

As the world's second-largest economy, China presents a unique context for policy analysis. With a long tradition of statecraft, a unique approach to policy challenges, and decades of dramatic socioeconomic transformation, China offers insights that go beyond Western policy models. Its vast size, institutional complexity, and reform trajectory since 1978 have generated a diverse array of policy innovations. Studying these developments helps offer potential solutions—or important cautionary tales—for addressing pressing global issues such as environmental degradation, climate change, energy sustainability, public health, economic crises, trade disputes, poverty, and inequality.

Over the past two decades, China policy research has gained increasing visibility at international conferences and in scholarly journals. China policy scholars are now more active and engaged in global academic dialogues than ever before. At the same time, China's academic field of public policy is maturing. In

2023, public policy was formally designated as a second-level discipline within the broader category of public administration. This marks a pivotal moment in the field's development, elevating it as a distinct academic discipline within China's higher education system.

The renewed energy in China policy studies—combined with the formal institutionalization of public policy as an academic discipline—reflects a growing demand for rigorous, policy-relevant research. The relaunch of *China Policy Journal* comes at an exciting and timely moment within this broader trend. Our goal is to foster vibrant, interdisciplinary discussions about China's policies—their formation, implementation, consequences, and global relevance.

In this issue of *China Policy Journal*, we feature five original articles that offer insights into China's policy landscape, enhancing our understanding of its governance systems, policymaking processes, and their broader implications.

The first article, "Performance Gaps and Organizational Change: Evidence from Budgetary Growth in Chinese Local Governments" by Ling Zhu and Liang Ma, explores how historical and social performance gaps influence budgetary decisions in Chinese local governments. Using a panel dataset of 287 cities from 2010 to 2016, the authors find that performance gaps related to historical expectations are positively associated with total expenditure growth, while there is an asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship between peer comparison-based performance gaps and public spending growth.

The study provides evidence of performance-based budgeting beyond Western contexts. It also makes an important contribution to the literature on how different types of performance gaps—historical versus peer-based—affect budgeting decisions in Chinese local governments. By challenging linear assumptions found in much of the existing literature (e.g., Nielsen, 2014; Ma, 2016; Hong et al., 2020), the authors offer a more nuanced, boundedly rational model of government responses to performance feedback. The article bridges key areas in performance management, organizational behavior, and public finance, extending classic models of incremental and punctuated budgetary change (Robinson et al., 2007; Zhang, 2019) into the realm of performance-driven decision-making. It offers important empirical evidence that performance feedback matters differently depending on the type of gap and governance context, providing critical insights for both scholars and practitioners as performance-based management expands globally.

Next, Weijie Wang's article, "Power Balance, Institutionalization, and the Governance of Serendipitous Networks—Evidence from Neighborhood Governance in Beijing," explores the governance of serendipitous networks. Research on network governance has traditionally focused on goal-directed networks, where organizations collaborate around shared objectives (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Provan & Kenis, 2008). However, many real-world networks are serendipitous—forming without specific goals, leadership, or central coordination (Kilduff & Tsai,



2003)—and the governance of these emergent networks remains largely underexplored. Wang’s article fills this gap by using data from Beijing’s neighborhood governance to propose a new framework, identifying four distinct governance types: shared governance, inertial governance, insurgent coalition, and lead organization governance.

This article makes a significant contribution by extending traditional governance models to serendipitous networks, where collaboration emerges organically. By applying resource dependence and institutional theories, Wang highlights the role of power dynamics and institutionalization in shaping governance structures. As spontaneous collaboration becomes increasingly common across sectors, this research offers valuable insights into the dynamics of loosely organized, evolving networks, providing a timely advancement in the field of network governance.

Third, “The Income Effect of Job Turnover and its Policy Implications among Migrant Workers in Urban China” by Ming Tian, Qingran Yang, and Huihan Su, explores how job turnover affects the wages of migrant workers in urban China. Using the Heckman model, the authors analyze how the characteristics of previous jobs and job turnover methods influence wage changes. They find that higher previous wages lead to lower marginal wage growth upon job change, and that social capital’s impact on wage growth is insignificant. The article reveals a “ceiling effect” in the secondary labor market for migrant workers, underscoring the importance of human capital in overcoming labor market barriers.

This research makes an important contribution to longstanding debates in labor economics and migration studies, particularly the mixed evidence on whether job turnover leads to upward mobility (e.g., Munasinghe & Sigman, 2004; Gottschalk & Moffitt, 1994; Light & McGarry, 1998). In China, studies have shown that initial rural-to-urban transitions may boost income, but further job changes in urban sectors often yield weaker or negative returns (e.g., Huang, 2009; Wu & Cheng, 2008). This article contributes to labor economics, migration studies, and the political economy of inequality by applying labor market segmentation theory (Doeringer & Piore, 1971) to China’s dual labor system. The finding of a “ceiling effect” in the secondary labor market—where most migrants are concentrated—offers strong empirical support for labor stratification theory and challenges optimistic views of job mobility as a universal path to advancement. By highlighting the limits imposed by structural constraints, including the “Hukou” system, the article provides both theoretical insight and practical implications for improving wage equity and labor mobility in China.

The fourth article, “Bibliometric and Content Analysis of Chinese Public Policy Studies: Trends, Collaborations, and Theoretical Evolution” by Yu Xiao and Hongtao Yi, offers a systematic analysis of Chinese policy studies published in leading policy journals from 2000 to 2024. Using bibliometric and content analysis and by analyzing 155 key articles, the authors examine publication trends, re-

search collaborations, and shifts in theoretical approaches. In doing this, they map the evolution of the field, highlighting changes in theoretical frameworks, research areas, collaboration networks, and methodological approaches. This study builds on prior work (e.g., Li and Zhang 2021; Liu et al. 2022) and offers a more systematic and detailed account of how Chinese scholars have moved from “theory borrowing” to “theorizing from local experience.” Their findings reveal a transition from borrowing theories to developing locally grounded frameworks, alongside a shift from sector-specific analyses to more diverse and integrated policy areas.

Xiao and Yi’s article makes a significant contribution by providing the first comprehensive bibliometric and content analysis of Chinese public policy publications in top international public policy journals. The article fills a critical gap in the literature, offering a roadmap for the future development of Chinese policy studies as an intellectually rich and globally relevant field.

Finally, Qianwei Zhu’s article, “The Evolution of Party–Government Relations and the Impact on Decision-Making in China,” offers a structural-institutional account of decision-making in contemporary China, with a focus on how evolving party–government relations have reshaped administrative authority and the decision-making system in China. This article makes a significant contribution to the field: one of the most enduring questions in the study of Chinese politics is how administrative decisions are actually made within its highly centralized yet institutionally complex system. For decades, scholars have grappled with understanding the inner workings of China’s policy process, often emphasizing elite negotiations, bureaucratic bargaining (Lieberthal & Oksenberg, 1988), or fragmented authoritarianism (Lieberthal & Lampton, 1992; Mertha, 2009). While this rich body of research has focused on how competing interests are coordinated and policy preferences are formed, less attention has been paid to the underlying institutional structures that shape the decision-making process itself—particularly the formal and informal arrangements that guide interaction between the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and the government apparatus.

Zhu introduces a nuanced framework of organizational separation but functional integration—a model in which the Party and state are formally distinct entities, yet deeply intertwined in practice. In doing so, the article highlights how the coexistence of the Chinese Communist Party’s collective deliberation system and the government’s individual responsibility system generates both synergies and tensions in governance. By tracing this transformation from the reform era to the present, this study sheds new light on an enduring paradox in Chinese politics—how centralized leadership is maintained in a system that ostensibly delegates authority. This work adds an important institutional layer to ongoing debates in Chinese political studies and should be essential reading for scholars of authoritarian governance, institutional hybridity, and state capacity.

Together, the five articles in this issue offer a multifaceted overview of the

China's policy landscape. They provide valuable insights for scholars, policymakers, and practitioners seeking to better understand the complexities of China's governance and policy development. We hope this issue will inspire further dialogue and research on these critical topics.

As part of our relaunch, *China Policy Journal* warmly welcomes submissions in a range of formats, including *Original Research Papers*, *Review Articles* and *Short Articles (such as Research Notes and Perspectives)*. We invite contributions on any topic related to policy or China, with particular interests in areas such as: Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and Future Policies, Climate Change—Mitigation, Adaptation, and Policy, Post-COVID Public Health and Policy Interventions, Policies for an Ageing Population and the Silver Economy, Urban-Rural Policy Dynamics in China, Inclusive Governance and AI-Driven Equity, Advances in China's Policy Making Research, Administrative Burdens in China's Public Policy, Experimental Governance in China, Smart Cities: Technology and Policy Integration, E-Government and Bridging the Digital Divide, China's Opening Policy Reassessed in Post-COVID Era, Behavioral Insights in Public Policy: Innovations and Challenges, AI in Policy Formulation and Decision-Making, and Regulation of AI Technologies.

As editors of *China Policy Journal*, our goal is to advance the field of China policy studies by fostering theoretical innovation, encouraging cross-national collaboration, and promoting rigorous, policy-relevant research. We are committed to creating a platform that deepens scholarly exchange, bridges global perspectives, and integrates China-focused research into broader public policy debates. Through this work, we aim to contribute to more effective, inclusive, and evidence-based governance—both within China and in the global policy community.

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## **Relanzamiento de *China Policy Journal*: Una nueva era de la investigación de la política china en un contexto global**

**B**ienvenidos a la nueva edición de *China Policy Journal*. Nos complace relanzar la revista con un nuevo equipo editorial, copatrocinado por la Universidad Normal de Pekín, el Grupo de Académicos de Política China (CPSG) y publicado por la Policy Studies Organization (PSO). Nuestro equipo y consejo editorial están compuestos por un grupo de académicos experimentados y talentosos de China, Estados Unidos y otros países. Juntos, nos comprometemos a publicar investigaciones originales de alta calidad que ofrezcan una sólida contribución teórica o empírica y profundicen nuestra comprensión del proceso de desarrollo de políticas y de la política de formulación de políticas en y sobre China.

Nos complace presentar cinco artículos de investigación de alta calidad en este número. Antes de presentarlos, nos gustaría reflexionar sobre la creciente importancia de la investigación sobre políticas chinas y destacar las áreas de investigación que fomentamos especialmente.

En primer lugar, a medida que transitamos una era marcada por una rápida transformación —impulsada por la globalización, la innovación tecnológica, las crisis ambientales y la evolución de las estructuras de gobernanza—, el estudio de las políticas públicas se ha vuelto más esencial que nunca. En este contexto dinámico, la formulación de políticas de China ha suscitado un creciente interés mundial. Las persistentes tensiones comerciales, las rivalidades geopolíticas y la creciente incertidumbre en el orden internacional han intensificado la apremiante necesidad de comprender mejor la gobernanza interna de China y sus estrategias políticas globales.

Como la segunda economía más grande del mundo, China presenta un contexto único para el análisis de políticas. Con una larga tradición de política exterior, un enfoque único para los desafíos políticos y décadas de drástica transformación socioeconómica, China ofrece perspectivas que trascienden los modelos políticos occidentales. Su vasto tamaño, complejidad institucional y trayectoria de reformas desde 1978 han generado una diversa gama de innovaciones políticas. El estudio de estos desarrollos ayuda a ofrecer posibles soluciones —o importantes advertencias— para abordar problemas globales acuciantes como la degradación ambiental, el cambio climático, la sostenibilidad energética, la salud pública, las crisis económicas, las disputas comerciales, la pobreza y la desigualdad.

En las últimas dos décadas, la investigación sobre políticas chinas ha ganado cada vez más visibilidad en congresos internacionales y revistas académicas. Los investigadores en políticas chinas participan ahora con mayor actividad y participación en diálogos académicos globales que nunca. Al mismo tiempo, el campo académico chino de las políticas públicas está madurando. En 2023, las políticas públicas se designaron formalmente como disciplina de segundo nivel dentro de la categoría más amplia de administración pública. Esto marca un momento crucial en el desarrollo del campo, elevándolo como una disciplina académica diferenciada dentro del sistema de educación superior chino.

El renovado impulso a los estudios sobre políticas chinas, sumado a la institucionalización formal de las políticas públicas como disciplina académica, refleja una creciente demanda de investigación rigurosa y relevante para la formulación de políticas. El relanzamiento de *China Policy Journal* llega en un momento emocionante y oportuno dentro de esta tendencia más amplia. Nuestro objetivo es fomentar debates dinámicos e interdisciplinarios sobre las políticas chinas: su formulación, implementación, consecuencias y relevancia global.

En este número de *China Policy Journal*, presentamos cinco artículos originales que ofrecen perspectivas del panorama político de China, mejorando nues-

tra comprensión de sus sistemas de gobernanza, sus procesos de formulación de políticas y sus implicaciones más amplias.

El primer artículo, “Brechas de Rendimiento y Cambio Organizacional: Evidencia del Crecimiento Presupuestario en los Gobiernos Locales Chinos”, de Ling Zhu y Liang Ma, explora cómo las brechas de rendimiento históricas y sociales influyen en las decisiones presupuestarias de los gobiernos locales chinos. Utilizando un conjunto de datos de panel de 287 ciudades entre 2010 y 2016, los autores concluyen que las brechas de rendimiento relacionadas con las expectativas históricas se asocian positivamente con el crecimiento del gasto total, mientras que existe una relación asimétrica en forma de U invertida entre las brechas de rendimiento basadas en la comparación con pares y el crecimiento del gasto público.

El estudio proporciona evidencia de la presupuestación basada en el desempeño más allá de los contextos occidentales. También realiza una importante contribución a la literatura sobre cómo los diferentes tipos de brechas de desempeño —históricas versus basadas en pares— afectan las decisiones presupuestarias en los gobiernos locales chinos. Al cuestionar los supuestos lineales presentes en gran parte de la literatura existente (p. ej., Nielsen, 2014; Ma, 2016; Hong et al., 2020), los autores ofrecen un modelo más matizado y racionalmente delimitado de las respuestas gubernamentales a la retroalimentación del desempeño. El artículo conecta áreas clave en la gestión del desempeño, el comportamiento organizacional y las finanzas públicas, extendiendo los modelos clásicos de cambio presupuestario incremental y puntual (Robinson et al., 2007; Zhang, 2019) al ámbito de la toma de decisiones impulsada por el desempeño. Ofrece evidencia empírica importante de que la retroalimentación del desempeño importa de manera diferente según el tipo de brecha y el contexto de gobernanza, lo que proporciona perspectivas cruciales tanto para académicos como para profesionales a medida que la gestión basada en el desempeño se expande globalmente.

A continuación, el artículo de Weijie Wang, “Equilibrio de poder, institucionalización y la gobernanza de redes fortuitas: evidencia de la gobernanza vecinal en Pekín”, explora la gobernanza de redes fortuitas. La investigación sobre gobernanza de redes se ha centrado tradicionalmente en redes orientadas a objetivos, donde las organizaciones colaboran en torno a objetivos compartidos (Agranoff y McGuire, 2001; Provan y Kenis, 2008). Sin embargo, muchas redes del mundo real son fortuitas, es decir, se forman sin objetivos específicos, liderazgo ni coordinación central (Kilduff y Tsai, 2003), y la gobernanza de estas redes emergentes sigue siendo poco explorada. El artículo de Wang llena este vacío utilizando datos de la gobernanza vecinal de Pekín para proponer un nuevo marco que identifica cuatro tipos distintos de gobernanza: gobernanza compartida, gobernanza inercial, coalición insurgente y gobernanza de organización líder.

Este artículo realiza una contribución significativa al extender los modelos

tradicionales de gobernanza a redes fortuitas, donde la colaboración surge orgánicamente. Al aplicar las teorías de la dependencia de los recursos e institucionales, Wang destaca el papel de la dinámica de poder y la institucionalización en la configuración de las estructuras de gobernanza. A medida que la colaboración espontánea se vuelve cada vez más común en todos los sectores, esta investigación ofrece valiosas perspectivas sobre la dinámica de las redes flexiblemente organizadas y en evolución, lo que supone un avance oportuno en el campo de la gobernanza de redes.

En tercer lugar, “El efecto de la rotación laboral en los ingresos y sus implicaciones políticas entre los trabajadores migrantes en la China urbana”, de Ming Tian, Qingran Yang y Huihan Su, explora cómo la rotación laboral afecta los salarios de los trabajadores migrantes en la China urbana. Utilizando el modelo de Heckman, la autoría analiza cómo las características de los empleos anteriores y los métodos de rotación laboral influyen en los cambios salariales. Concluyen que unos salarios previos más altos conllevan un menor crecimiento salarial marginal al cambiar de empleo, y que el impacto del capital social en el crecimiento salarial es insignificante. El artículo revela un “efecto techo” en el mercado laboral secundario para los trabajadores migrantes, lo que subraya la importancia del capital humano para superar las barreras del mercado laboral.

Esta investigación realiza una importante contribución a los debates de larga data en la economía laboral y los estudios migratorios, en particular la evidencia mixta sobre si la rotación laboral conduce a la movilidad ascendente (p. ej., Munasinghe y Sigman, 2004; Gottschalk y Moffitt, 1994; Light y McGarry, 1998). En China, los estudios han demostrado que las transiciones iniciales del campo a la ciudad pueden impulsar los ingresos, pero los cambios laborales posteriores en los sectores urbanos a menudo producen retornos más débiles o negativos (p. ej., Huang, 2009; Wu y Cheng, 2008). Este artículo contribuye a la economía laboral, los estudios migratorios y la economía política de la desigualdad al aplicar la teoría de la segmentación del mercado laboral (Doeringer y Piore, 1971) al sistema laboral dual de China. El hallazgo de un “efecto techo” en el mercado laboral secundario, donde se concentra la mayoría de los migrantes, ofrece un sólido respaldo empírico para la teoría de la estratificación laboral y desafía las visiones optimistas de la movilidad laboral como una vía universal para el progreso. Al destacar los límites impuestos por las restricciones estructurales, incluido el sistema “Hukou”, el artículo proporciona una visión teórica y consecuencias prácticas para mejorar la equidad salarial y la movilidad laboral en China.

El cuarto artículo, “Análisis bibliométrico y de contenido de los estudios de políticas públicas chinas: tendencias, colaboraciones y evolución teórica”, de Yu Xiao y Hongtao Yi, ofrece un análisis sistemático de los estudios de políticas chinas publicados en las principales revistas de políticas entre 2000 y 2024. Mediante análisis bibliométrico y de contenido y el análisis de 155 artículos clave, los autores

examinan las tendencias de publicación, las colaboraciones en investigación y los cambios en los enfoques teóricos. Para ello, trazan un mapa de la evolución del campo, destacando los cambios en los marcos teóricos, las áreas de investigación, las redes de colaboración y los enfoques metodológicos. Este estudio se basa en trabajos previos (p. ej., Li y Zhang, 2021; Liu et al., 2022) y ofrece una explicación más sistemática y detallada de cómo los académicos chinos han pasado del “préstamo teórico” a la “teorización a partir de la experiencia local”. Sus hallazgos revelan una transición del préstamo teórico al desarrollo de marcos con base local, junto con una transición de análisis sectoriales a áreas de políticas más diversas e integradas.

El artículo de Xiao y Yi aporta una contribución significativa al proporcionar el primer análisis bibliométrico y de contenido exhaustivo de las publicaciones sobre políticas públicas chinas en las principales revistas internacionales de políticas públicas. El artículo llena un vacío crítico en la literatura, ofreciendo una hoja de ruta para el desarrollo futuro de los estudios sobre políticas chinas como un campo intelectualmente rico y de relevancia global.

Finalmente, el artículo de Qianwei Zhu, “La evolución de las relaciones entre el partido y el gobierno y su impacto en la toma de decisiones en China”, ofrece una perspectiva estructural e institucional de la toma de decisiones en la China contemporánea, centrándose en cómo la evolución de las relaciones entre el partido y el gobierno ha transformado la autoridad administrativa y el sistema de toma de decisiones en China. Este artículo realiza una contribución significativa al campo: una de las preguntas más persistentes en el estudio de la política china es cómo se toman realmente las decisiones administrativas dentro de su sistema altamente centralizado pero institucionalmente complejo. Durante décadas, los académicos han luchado por comprender el funcionamiento interno del proceso político chino, a menudo haciendo hincapié en las negociaciones de las élites, la negociación burocrática (Lieberthal y Oksenberg, 1988) o el autoritarismo fragmentado (Lieberthal y Lampton, 1992; Mertha, 2009). Si bien este rico conjunto de investigaciones se ha centrado en cómo se coordinan los intereses en pugna y se forman las preferencias políticas, se ha prestado menos atención a las estructuras institucionales subyacentes que configuran el propio proceso de toma de decisiones, en particular los acuerdos formales e informales que guían la interacción entre el Partido Comunista Chino (PCC) y el aparato gubernamental.

Zhu presenta un marco matizado de separación organizacional pero integración funcional: un modelo en el que el Partido y el Estado son entidades formalmente distintas, pero profundamente entrelazadas en la práctica. De este modo, el artículo destaca cómo la coexistencia del sistema de deliberación colectiva del Partido Comunista Chino y el sistema de responsabilidad individual del gobierno genera sinergias y tensiones en la gobernanza. Al rastrear esta transformación desde la era de la reforma hasta la actualidad, este estudio arroja nueva luz

sobre una paradoja persistente en la política china: cómo se mantiene el liderazgo centralizado en un sistema que, ostensiblemente, delega autoridad. Este trabajo aporta un importante componente institucional a los debates actuales en los estudios políticos chinos y debería ser una lectura esencial para los investigadores de la gobernanza autoritaria, la hibridez institucional y la capacidad estatal.

En conjunto, los cinco artículos de este número ofrecen una visión multifacética del panorama político de China. Aportan valiosas perspectivas para académicos, responsables políticos y profesionales que buscan comprender mejor las complejidades de la gobernanza y el desarrollo de políticas en China. Esperamos que este número inspire un mayor diálogo e investigación sobre estos temas cruciales.

Como parte de nuestro relanzamiento, *China Policy Journal* da una cálida bienvenida a las presentaciones en una variedad de formatos, incluyendo artículos de investigación originales, artículos de revisión y artículos cortos (como notas de investigación y perspectivas). Invitamos contribuciones sobre cualquier tema relacionado con la política o China, con intereses particulares en áreas como: Objetivos de Desarrollo Sostenible (ODS) y políticas futuras, Cambio climático: mitigación, adaptación y política, Intervenciones políticas y de salud pública posteriores a la COVID-19, Políticas para una población que envejece y la economía plateada, Dinámica de políticas urbanas y rurales en China, Gobernanza inclusiva y equidad impulsada por IA, Avances en la investigación de formulación de políticas en China, Cargas administrativas en las políticas públicas de China, Gobernanza experimental en China, Ciudades inteligentes: integración de tecnología y políticas, Gobierno electrónico y reducción de la brecha digital, Reevaluación de la política de apertura de China en la era posterior a la COVID-19, Perspectivas del comportamiento en políticas públicas: innovaciones y desafíos, IA en la formulación de políticas y la toma de decisiones, y Regulación de las tecnologías de IA.

En la edición de *China Policy Journal*, nuestro objetivo es impulsar el estudio de las políticas chinas fomentando la innovación teórica, fomentando la colaboración transnacional y promoviendo la investigación rigurosa y relevante para la formulación de políticas. Nos comprometemos a crear una plataforma que profundice el intercambio académico, conecte perspectivas globales e integre la investigación centrada en China en debates más amplios sobre políticas públicas. Con esta labor, buscamos contribuir a una gobernanza más eficaz, inclusiva y basada en la evidencia, tanto en China como en la comunidad política global.



# 中国政策研究：刊首语

## 全球视野下中国政策研究的新篇章

### 徐萍 & 章文光

感谢您订阅最新一期的《中国政策研究》。经过一段时间的精心筹备，我们非常高兴以全新的面貌与我们的读者见面。《中国政策研究》创刊于2018年，由美国政策研究组织（Policy Studies Organization, PSO）发起，目前由北京师范大学政府管理学院与留美公共政策学会（Chinese Policy Scholars Group）联合主办。本刊新一届编辑部与编辑委员会汇聚了来自中国、美国及其他地区的顶尖及资深学者。我们致力于发表高质量的英文原创研究，推动政策研究领域在理论与实证方法上的进展，并以加深对中国政策制定过程及其政治逻辑的理解为目标。

本期我们将向读者呈现五篇高质量的研究成果。在展开介绍前，我们希望先简要探讨中国政策研究在国际舞台上日益增长的重要性。

首先，当今世界正处于快速变革之中，全球化进程、技术革新、环境挑战与治理模式的转型交织在一起。在这一背景下，中国的政策制定机制与全球战略日益成为国际关注的焦点。无论是国际贸易摩擦、地缘政治竞争，还是国际秩序的重构，当前的诸多现实议题都凸显出深入理解中国治理逻辑的紧迫性。

作为世界第二大经济体，中国为政策分析提供了独特的视角和背景。凭借悠久的治国之道、独特的政策挑战应对方式、以及数十年来社会经济转型的经验，中国提供了超越西方政策模式的宝贵洞见。中国既有传承千年的治理智慧，也有改革开放四十余年积累的实践经验：从环境治理到气候变化应对，从能源结构调整到公共卫生体系建设，中国的政策探索为应对诸如环境恶化、能源可持续性、公共卫生、经济危机、贸易争端、贫困和不平等等全球性挑战提供了有益参考。

近二十年来，中国政策研究在国际会议和国际学术期刊上的关注度及影响力持续上升。中国政策学者也正以更加积极的姿态参与全球学术对话，推动相关议题进入国际视野。与此同时，国内公共政策学科建设也取得了突破性进展：2023年公共政策正式被设立为二级学科，标志着该领域在中国高等教育体系中确立了其学科地位。政策研究在国际学术舞台上的蓬勃发展，与公共政策学科在国内学科体系中日益突出的地位相得益彰，彼此呼应。这一趋势充分体现了国际与中国学术界对中国政策研究持续增长的关注与需求。

《中国政策研究》期刊的重启恰逢其时。我们的目标是积极推动国内外学术界和政策实践者关于中国政策研究问题的深入对话，涵盖政策制定、执行过程、政策效果，以及中国政策在全球层面的影响力等多个维度。本期收录了五篇原创研究文章，这些文章为中国的政策格局提供了独特见解，有助于加深我们对中国治理体系、政策形成制定机制及其更广泛

影响的理解。

本期首篇论文《绩效落差与组织变革：来自中国地方政府预算增长的证据》(Performance Gaps and Organizational Change: Evidence from Budgetary Growth in Chinese Local Governments; 作者：朱凌、马亮)探讨了预期组织绩效与实际组织绩效之间的绩效差距如何影响中国地方政府预算决策。通过分析2010-2016年中国287个城市的面板数据，作者发现：与历史预期相比的绩效差距与财政总支出增长呈正相关，而基于同行比较的绩效差距与公共支出增长之间则存在不对称的倒U型关系。

该研究提供了西方情境以外的绩效预算的实证证据，并对“不同类型的绩效差距如何影响中国地方政府预算决策”的文献作出重要贡献。通过挑战现有文献中普遍存在的线性假设，作者提出了一个更具细微差别的对政府绩效反馈响应的模型。本文连接了绩效管理、组织行为与公共财政等关键领域，将渐进式与间断式预算变革的经典模型延伸至绩效驱动型决策领域。随着绩效管理在全球范围内的推广，该研究提供了重要实证证据：绩效反馈的影响因差距类型和治理情境而呈现差异，这对学术界和政策制定者都具有重要启示价值。

第二篇论文《权力平衡、制度化与“自发性网络”治理——来自北京社区治理的证据》(Power Balance, Institutionalization, and the Governance of Serendipitous Networks—Evidence from Neighborhood Governance in Beijing; 作者：王伟杰)聚焦自发性网络治理研究。传统网络治理研究主要关注目标导向型网络，即组织围绕共同目标开展协作。然而现实中大量网络属于自发性网络——它们缺乏特定目标、领导机构或中心协调机制，这类自发形成网络的治理机制长期缺乏系统研究。王伟杰教授的研究通过北京社区治理案例填补这一空白，提出包含四种治理类型的新框架：共享治理、惯性治理、创新联盟和主导组织治理。

该研究的学术贡献在于将传统治理模型拓展至自发性网络的领域。作者结合资源依赖理论和制度理论，展示了权力动态和制度化之间的相互作用如何促成不同的治理结构。随着自发协作在各领域日益普遍，该研究为理解松散型组织及自发性网络的运作机制提供了重要视角，同时也为网络治理理论的发展作出了有意义的推动。

第三篇论文《中国城市农民工工作流动的收入效应及其政策启示》(The Income Effect of Job Turnover and its Policy Implications among Migrant Workers in Urban China; 作者：田明、杨清然、速慧涵)探讨了工作变动如何影响中国城市农民工工资水平。通过运用赫克曼模型(Heckman Model)，分析了前一份工作的特征和工作变动方式对工资变化的影响。研究发现，前一份工作收入越高，换工作后的边际工资增长越低，而社会资本对工资增长的影响并不显著。文章揭示了农民工次级劳动力市场中存在的“天花板效应”，凸显人力资本积累对突破劳动力市场壁垒的重要性。

该研究为劳动经济学与人口迁移研究中的一项长期争论——工作变动是否必然带来收入提升——提供了重要的中国情境下的实证依据。既有研究显示，从农村向城市的初次迁移可能提升收入，但在城市内部的后续工作变

动却往往回报有效甚至为负。本文通过将劳动力市场分割理论应用于中国二元劳动力结构，对劳动经济学、移民研究与不平等政治经济学领域作出贡献。研究进一步表明，农民工集中于次级劳动力市场，在结构性障碍（如户籍制度）的限制下面临“晋升瓶颈”。这一发现不仅对劳动力分层理论提供了有力支持，也挑战了职业流动等同于向上流动的主流假设，同时为促进工资公平与提升劳动流动性提出了有价值的政策建议。

第四篇论文《中国政策研究的演变：2000年至2024年的文献计量分析》（*Bibliometric and Content Analysis of Chinese Public Policy Studies: Trends, Collaborations, and Theoretical Evolution*；作者：肖钰、易洪涛），对2000至2024年间发表于顶尖政策期刊的中国政策研究进行了系统分析。通过文献计量与内容分析方法，作者对155篇关键文献展开研究，系统描绘了出版趋势、研究合作网络、政策理论及研究方法的演变轨迹。该研究展示了中国政策研究领域的演变历程，在既有成果基础上，更为系统地描绘了中国政策研究领域的学术演进路径。作者提出中国政策研究领域呈现出双重转变：从理论借鉴到本土化理论构建的范式转换，以及从单一政策领域分析向多元化、整合性政策议题的拓展。

该研究是首项针对国际顶级公共政策期刊中国研究文献的全面文献计量与内容分析，这项奠基性研究不仅为后续学者提供了分析框架，更揭示了中国政策研究从理论移植到本土创新的转型轨迹。

第五篇论文《中国党政关系的演进及其对决策的影响》（*The Evolution of Party Government Relations and the Impact on Decision-Making in China*；作者：竺乾威）探讨了党政关系的历史演变如何重塑行政权威与决策体系。通过系统梳理党政关系的制度逻辑，作者揭示了当代中国决策机制的形成路径。

在中国政治研究中，一个长期未解的核心问题是：在一个高度集权却制度复杂的体制中，政策决策究竟如何产生？数十年来，学者们试图从不同理论视角理解中国政策过程的运作机制。尽管这些前期研究对利益协调与政策偏好形成机制提供了深入解释，但相对忽视了决策过程背后的制度基础，特别是党政关系中正式与非正式制度安排的作用。

竺乾威教授的研究提出了“组织分离、功能整合”的分析框架：党政机构在组织形式上保持区隔，但在决策实践中高度融合。文章深入分析了党政集体决策机制与政府首长负责制的并存状态，展示这种制度设计在治理中所产生的协同效应与制度张力。通过回顾改革开放以来党政关系的演变，该研究为理解中国如何在表面分权的体制中维系高度集中统一的领导体制，提供了新的解释路径。该研究为中国政治研究引入了关键的制度视角，对理解威权治理、制度混合性以及国家能力等议题提供了重要理论贡献。

本期所刊载的五篇论文从多个维度勾勒出中国政策格局的复杂图景，为学者、政策制定者和对中国政策感兴趣的读者们提供了深入理解中国治理与政策演变的宝贵视角。我们也希望这些研究成果能够推动关于相关议题的更深入的对话和讨论。

《中国政策研究》诚邀海内外学者积极投稿，我们接收三种不同类型

的论文：原创型研究论文、综述类论文及短文（包括研究笔记和观点文章）。我们欢迎所有与中国及政策研究相关的投稿，尤其欢迎以下领域的投稿：可持续发展目标（SDGs）与未来政策、气候变化应对政策（减缓、适应与治理）、后疫情时代公共卫生政策干预、老龄化社会与银发经济政策、中国城乡政策动态、包容性治理与人工智能驱动的公平机制、中国政策制定的前沿研究、中国公共政策中的行政负担研究、中国政策试验与创新治理、智慧城市（技术与政策融合）、电子政务与数字鸿沟弥合、后疫情时代中国开放政策再评估、行为科学在公共政策中的创新与挑战、人工智能在政策制定与决策中的应用、人工智能技术监管政策。

作为《中国政策研究》的编辑团队，我们的目标是推动中国政策研究的发展，包括促进理论创新、研究方法创新、鼓励跨国合作以及跨学科合作。我们致力于打造一个深化国际学术交流、连接全球视野、并将中国经验融入更广泛的公共政策讨论的平台。通过这一努力，我们希望为中国及全球公共政策共同体实现更有效、更具包容性、更循证化的治理作出贡献。

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# Performance Gaps and Organizational Change: Evidence from Budgetary Growth in Chinese Local Governments

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## Acknowledgment

This research was supported by the National Social Science Fund of China (grant no. 23&ZD080), and the National Natural Science Foundation of China (grant no. 72342010). We thank the anonymous reviewers for their perceptive comments on our manuscript. All errors remain ours.

## ABSTRACT

Performance gaps, defined as the differences between expected and achieved organizational performance, generate informative feedback for organizations to make subsequent decisions. In this paper, we examine how social and historical performance gaps in the realm of economic development have different effects on the budgetary decisions of Chinese local governments. Using a panel dataset of 287 cities from 2010 to 2016, we find evidence that the performance gap in comparison with the historical expectation is positively related to total expenditure growth, while there is an asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship between the performance gap based on peer comparison and public spending growth. Additional evidence suggests that performance gaps are also associated with the growth of public education spending in a similar way. Our study provides evidence of performance-based budgeting beyond the Western contexts and offers the base for a generalizable theory on how performance information in high-stake accountability systems shapes local governments' spending decisions.

**Keywords:** Performance Gaps, Chinese Local Governments, Budgetary Growth

## **Brechas de desempeño y cambio organizacional: Evidencia del crecimiento presupuestario en los gobiernos locales chinos**

### RESUMEN

Las brechas de desempeño, definidas como las diferencias entre el desempeño organizacional esperado y el alcanzado, generan información útil para que las organizaciones tomen decisiones posteriores. En este artículo, examinamos cómo las brechas de desempeño sociales e históricas en el ámbito del desarrollo económico tienen diferentes efectos en las decisiones presupuestarias de los gobiernos locales chinos. Utilizando un conjunto de datos de panel de 287 ciudades entre 2010 y 2016, encontramos evidencia de que la brecha de desempeño, en comparación con la expectativa histórica, se relaciona positivamente con el crecimiento del gasto total, mientras que existe una relación asimétrica en forma de U invertida entre la brecha de desempeño basada en la comparación con pares y el crecimiento del gasto público. Evidencia adicional sugiere que las brechas de desempeño también se asocian de manera similar con el crecimiento del gasto público en educación. Nuestro estudio proporciona evidencia de la presupuestación basada en el desempeño más allá del contexto occidental y sienta las bases para una teoría generalizable sobre cómo la información sobre el desempeño en los sistemas de rendición de cuentas de alto impacto influye en las decisiones de gasto de los gobiernos locales.

**Palabras clave:** Brechas de desempeño, Gobiernos locales chinos, Crecimiento presupuestario

## **绩效差距与组织变革：来自中国地方政府预算增长的证据**

### 摘要

绩效差距是指预期组织绩效与实际组织绩效之间的差异，它为“组织作出后续决策”一事提供信息反馈。本文研究了经济发展领域中的社会和历史绩效差距如何对中国地方政府预算决策产生不同的影响。通过使用一项包括2010年至2016年287个城市的面板数据集，我们发现，与历史预期相比的绩



效差距与总支出增长呈正相关，而基于同行比较的绩效差距与公共支出增长之间存在不对称的倒U型关系。其他证据表明，绩效差距也以类似的方式与公共教育支出的增长相关。我们的研究为西方情境以外的绩效预算提供了证据，并为关于“高风险问责系统中的绩效信息如何影响地方政府支出决策”的一般化理论提供了基础。

关键词：绩效差距，中国地方政府，预算增长

## Introduction

How public organizations use performance information to inform important decisions is at the heart of public management research. The growing literature on performance gaps suggests that the gap between performance aspirations and actual performance produces feedback that will shape various important government decisions (Greve 2003), such as goal-setting in the public sector (Ma 2016), innovation (Meier et al. 2015, Zhu and Rutherford 2019), and budget adjustment (Flink 2019). Organizations with performance far below their competitors' average achievements, for instance, are more inclined to introduce radical strategies to address performance failures (Greve 1998). It is thus pivotal to examine the impact of performance gaps on key decisions that lead to organizational changes. While a growing number of empirical studies suggest performance gaps significantly affect organizational decisions, much less is known about how different types of performance gaps unfold their impact on organizations. In this paper, we apply the theory of performance gaps

to study budgetary changes in the local government setting.

The literature about the impact of performance gaps on organizational change is primarily examined in the private sector (Shinkle 2012), for which performance metrics are crystal clear and often measured based on firms' market share and profit margins. Public organizations usually pursue ambiguous and multiple goals. Public managers, nevertheless, frequently use performance feedback to inform decision-making and to initiate organizational change (Kroll 2015; Johansen, Kim, and Zhu 2016). Only recently have public management scholars theorized (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015; Hong 2019) and empirically tested the linkage between performance gaps and decision making in hospitals (Salge 2011; Rutherford and Zhu 2019), schools (Rutherford and Meier 2015), federal agencies (Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty, and Fernandez 2017), local governments (Nielsen 2014; Ma 2016; Hong et al. 2020), and budgetary changes (Flink 2019). We join this emerging literature on performance gaps and organizational change by integrating theoretical

insights from the rational organization theory (Cyert and March 1992) and the theory of institutionalization.

Different from most of the existing literature that describes linear relationships between performance gaps and organizational change, we theorize that performance gaps spur changes in a non-linear way. More specifically, we posit that there is a nonlinear relationship between performance gaps and organizational change, because public organizations will evaluate the size of performance gaps and act more actively in eliciting change when performance gaps are large. Compared with the “zone of indifference”, in which organizational performance is around the threshold of performance aspirations, a large absolute performance gap is positively related to organizational change (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). In addition, such nonlinear relationship is expected to be an asymmetric inverted-U shape, because organizational changes under negative performance gaps would be greater than changes under positive performance gaps (the “negativity bias” proposition).

The empirical analysis in this paper draws from a novel multisource panel dataset of 287 cities across 31 Chinese provinces from 2010 to 2016. As for local government budgeting in China, the years from 2010 to 2016 are characterized by both high economic growth and a substantial increase in government borrowing (Tan & Zhao, 2019). This is also the time-period when performance management became increasingly important for

local governments (Liang & Langbein, 2015). In addition, the nationwide budgetary and accounting standards had been kept consistent before 2017, making the fiscal data used in this study comparable.

Focusing on two types of performance gaps, namely historical and social performance gaps, we show that the relationship between performance gaps in the area of economic development and changes in local governments’ budgetary priorities is more complex than what is depicted by the existing literature. Our evidence from Chinese local governments suggests that performance gaps affect budgetary change nonlinearly. The specific form and magnitude of organizational change, moreover, are contingent on different types of performance gaps, managerial tenure, and external contexts. In the context of Chinese local governments, we find that the performance gap in comparison with the historical expectation is positively related to total expenditure growth, while there is an asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship between the performance gap based on social aspiration and public spending growth.

Our study contributes to several important areas of public management research. First, this study adds to the emerging literature on performance gaps and decision-making, as well as renewed scholarly interests in organizational behavior and bounded rationality (e.g., Hong 2020, Wei et al. 2021). Consistent with recent studies in these areas, we find that public organizations

do respond to feedback from performance gaps and adjust their important decisions accordingly. However, we find the heterogeneous patterns of budgetary changes linked to the two different performance gaps, which suggest the links between performance gaps and decision-making are more complex than what is reported by previous studies.

Second, our study contributes new empirical evidence on how performance gaps spur changes in the presence of a high-stake performance appraisal system and short bureaucratic tenure in office. A high-stake performance appraisal system places greater political pressure on local public officials to meet performance targets and to maintain advantageous positions in peer comparison (Liang & Langbein, 2015). A short bureaucratic tenure might press incumbent officials to make changes more quickly (Ma 2016). These local government contexts differ from those in the United States and Western Europe. Our key findings highlight the need to theorize how such different contexts may condition the impact of performance gaps on policy changes.

Third, we contribute to the growing performance-based budgeting literature as our study sits at the intersection of performance management and public finance research. Scholars of public budgeting have long considered the political and economic determinants of budget changes (e.g., population and economic growth, changes in fiscal policies, the role of existing tax and expenditure cap laws, etc.) and describe budget changes as a punctuated equilibrium process featuring both

incremental adjustment and large disruptive changes (Robinson et al. 2007, Zhang 2020). Similar to some recent studies on performance-based budgeting (Flink 2019, and Li et al. 2024), our study shows the viability of applying the public management approach to understand local governments' budget changes.

In the remainder of this paper, we first review the literature and theories on performance gaps and develop theoretical hypotheses of organizational change to be tested in this study. We then briefly introduce the context of local governments in China, followed by the presentation of data and methods used in this study. We report the empirical findings, and discuss theoretical and policy implications of our results.

## **Linking Performance Gaps to Organizational Changes: Theoretical Expectations**

### *Organizational Aspirations and Performance Gaps*

The premise that public organizations are rational, goal-oriented, and path-dependent stems from the behavioral model of public organizations and the theory of bounded rationality (Cyert and March 1992, Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). Based on their concerns about organizational performance, managers search and use performance information to make important decisions on budgetary allocation (Flink 2019), risk-taking and innovation (Hong 2019), and adjusting managerial strategies (Rutherford and

Zhu 2019). As such, decisions are often made as a function of performance gaps, namely the differences between an organization's actual performance and performance aspirations (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). Theories of performance information and goal-setting suggest that managers typically use two types of aspirations (or reference points) in setting organizational goals (Greve 2003). Meier, Favero and Zhu (2015) theorize that two sources of information are often used to construct managers' prior expectations (i.e., aspirations) regarding the desired level of performance. First, the historical performance of the organization is relevant to future decision-making, particularly the performance of the latest period of time (e.g., the previous year). Although organizational circumstances change over time, organizations are most likely to learn from their past performance. Past performance is particularly relevant in organizational decision-making when organizations characterized by bureaucratized routines and inertia operate in a highly stable hierarchy (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). If the organization has explicitly set formal goals, they are often used as historical aspirations.

Second, organizations use the performance of peer organizations in the same service or geographic area to make decisions. Organizations must compete with peers that share the same market niche or are similar in important attributes (e.g., mission, size, structure). These comparable organizations are industrial benchmarks and can be used to inform organizational change. Although an organization might differ

from its peers in many aspects, taken together, they can generate useful information for decision-making (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). For instance, the organization usually uses the average performance of comparable organizations as a proxy for social aspiration.

Organizational aspirations are formed by specific performance metrics, which differ between private and public organizations. For the private sector, profit and revenue are used as key performance indicators to set the bottom line. In the public sector, performance metrics are difficult to set due to goal ambiguity and multiplicity (Rainey and Jung 2015). For public organizations in specific service domains (e.g., schools, hospitals, police departments), performance measurement is usually conducted based on specific policy outcomes (e.g., exam score, death rate, crime rate). In contrast, performance metrics for the whole of government are not well established. A comprehensive performance index composed of several indicators is usually utilized. If there is a consensus on the key performance goals, then they are often prioritized.

Organizations use these historical and social aspirations to set organizational goals and make important changes (Shinkle 2012). These aspirations are compared with actual organizational performance, which generates either positive or negative performance gaps. We define performance gaps as actual performance minus organizational aspirations. As such, and a positive performance gap means an organization produces performance that is above its historical or social aspirations.

Conversely, if an organization's actual performance is below its historical or social aspirations, then the organization is with negative performance gaps (Greve 1998).

### ***Organizational Responses to Performance Gaps***

Performance gaps are informative feedback for shaping future organizational decision-making. Organizations learn from performance feedback, which helps to calibrate strategies and improve organizational performance (Greve 2003). Just like the dashboard to signal driving actions, performance gaps inform managers to change organizational priorities and strategies.

Organizational change is the deviation from the status quo and usually involves risk-taking, which means that organizations are reluctant to initiate strategic changes (Fernandez and Rainey 2006). Particularly for public organizations subject to political control and procedural constraints, organizational change is usually stifled. Public organizations are often stereotyped as bureaucracies resistant to changes and innovations, and only external shocks and organizational discontinuities can provoke major changes.

More recently, scholars have demonstrated that performance gaps may send strong signals that stimulate organizational change, even for large public sector organizations. Although the linkage between performance gaps and organizational change has been extensively examined in the private sector (Greve 1998; Baum et al. 2005; Labianca

et al. 2009), the literature on the public sector is emerging (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015). Prior studies reveal that performance gaps elicit various forms of organizational change in the public sector, including universities (Rutherford and Meier 2015), hospitals (Salge 2011), local governments in different countries (Nielsen 2014; Ma 2016; Min and Oh 2020), and the U.S. federal agencies (Nicholson-Crotty, Nicholson-Crotty, and Fernandez 2017). A few of these empirical studies on performance gaps and organizational change also find that the relationship between performance gaps and organizational change is non-linear and contingent on both the types and magnitude of aspirations (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015).

First, the link between performance gaps and organizational changes differs by the types of performance gaps. Organizations are more likely to initiate substantial changes when performance falls below aspirations, which means that past policies and practices are not successful in achieving performance targets, and organizations may fail without concrete changes. In other words, when organizations are searching for solutions to problems and failures, they are more likely to take the stock of innovation and initiate substantial organizational change. In contrast, the imperative to change is not equivalently high when performance exceeds aspirations, because the organization can still reap benefits from its past successful routines. However, organizational success may also trigger organizational change, since they give resource redundancy, slack, and extra room to try something

new to the organization, which are crucial for its long-term survival. The idea that organizations respond to positive and negative performance gaps (i.e., success and failure, respectively) differently is well-grounded in the prospect theory that decision-makers' responses to negative and positive signals (e.g., losses and returns) are differentiated, and negative signals outperform positive ones in stimulating risk-taking (Kahneman and Tversky 1979).

The “negativity bias” is relevant in examining the differentiating effects of negative and positive performance gaps on organizational change, and we expect negative performance gaps (when performance falls short of the target) to trigger more substantial changes. Some recent empirical studies from both the Western and the Chinese contexts confirm this expectation. For example, Chen (2022, 2024) studies the performance-accountability system in environmental protection, finding that negative performance feedback motivates public organizations' tendency for data manipulation to avoid blame, while positive performance feedback is not associated with such organizational cheating behavior. Similarly, Yu and Chen (2025) explore how performance feedback shapes managerial turnover in Texas public school districts. They find that only negative performance feedback (i.e., receiving a lower performance rating) increases superintendents' turnover.

Second, as both positive and negative performance gaps could trigger organizational change, the mag-

nitude of performance gaps determines when and how organizations are seeking changes. Recent empirical studies on performance gaps and organizational behavior suggest that not all variations in performance gaps will have immediate effects on organizational behavior. Small deviations from performance targets are not sufficient to spur shifts in organizational priorities and changes in management decisions. As such, organizations and/or their managers will stay in the “zone of indifference”. Compared with the “zone of indifference” in which organizational performance is around the threshold of performance aspirations, a large performance gap is more likely to trigger organizational change (Meier, Favero, and Zhu 2015).

The underlying behavioral mechanism for expecting an asymmetric and non-linear relationship between performance gaps and change is relative risk aversion. Performance gaps signal the deviation from performance goals and produce feedback that could lead to changes in the status quo, and decisions that spur organizational changes are often deemed as risky and/or uncertain choices (Deslatte et al. 2021; Nicholson-Crotty et al. 2016). The magnitude of performance gaps thus determines when public managers are willing to endorse organizational changes. When their organizations are just near meeting the performance goals, relative risk aversion will lead the status quo to prevail. As the size of performance gaps increases, the probability of organizational change increases exponentially.

Because we focus on two types of performance gaps, namely organizational performance in comparison with historical and social aspirations, we derive the following two hypotheses for the subsequent empirical analysis. The two hypotheses posit that the relationships between performance gaps and organizational change are non-monotonic, which are different below and above the threshold where performance gaps are zero (Greve 1998). Specifically, we posit an inverted-U relationship between performance gaps and organizational change. When the performance gap measure takes negative values (i.e., performance shortfalls compared with the historical and social reference point), organizational changes are likely to be initiated as responses to failures in achieving performance goals. The positive effect diminishes as the size of performance gaps decreases. When the performance gap measure takes positive values (performance exceeding historical and social reference points), organizations are more likely to be satisfied with the status quo, thus, less likely to initiate changes.

*Hypothesis 1: Historical performance gap is first positively related to organizational change when it is low (negative); after a certain threshold, the relationship turns negative.*

*Hypothesis 2: Social performance gap is firstly positively related to organizational change when it is low (negative); after a certain threshold, the relationship turns negative.*

## **Empirical Context: Local Governments and Economic Development in China**

While the above hypotheses can be tested in various contexts, we use the case of Chinese local governments in this study for three reasons. First, local governments in China are responsible for implementing various important policies, and they are keen in achieving policy targets to avoid blame and to earn credits (Ma 2016). The changing dynamics of local governments in China thus give an ideal context for examining the effects of performance gaps on organizational change.

Second, the existing literature about performance gaps and organizational change is predominantly documented in private and/or public sectors in Western countries, but our understanding is largely limited in other country contexts. Given the crucial impacts of managerial context on organizational strategies and performance (O'Toole and Meier 2015), it is intriguing to test these hypotheses in a different country context.

Third, the emerging empirical literature on performance gaps and organizational decisions largely focuses on service organizations or public agencies that enjoy a great deal of bureaucratic discretion in decision-making. In American universities, hospitals, and federal agencies, decisions are often made by career civil servants who do not face pressures from term limits. The Chinese local governments, however,

provide a novel context, whereby there is a high-stake performance appraisal system coupled with a short bureaucratic tenure in office (Rothstein 2014). Hence, it is more likely to observe short-term organizational changes as responses to different performance gaps.

### ***High-Stake Performance Management in Chinese Local Governments***

China is governed by a unitary system, with only one ruling party (Chinese Communist Party, CCP) and five tiers of governments, including the central government (State Council) and four local layers (province, prefecture<sup>1</sup>, county, and township). The party committee parallels the government at each level, with the former having the last word in decision-making. The People's Congress at each level is the legislative institution and composed of elected deputies, but its role in electing government leaders is rather symbolic. The party committee appoints party secretaries and government heads of the jurisdictions one level below, and they are under formal performance appraisal and procedural scrutiny. Despite the term of office being five years for party and state cadres and maximum two terms according to the state and party constitutions, in practice, most leave their positions after less than five years.

Cadre promotion is largely merit-based and performance-oriented, although political patronage, nepotism, and factionalism are often seen in the

practice of political appointments and promotions. The performance metrics of local government are comprehensive, covering economic, social, and environmental aspects (Gao 2010). Among them, economic growth (e.g., annual GDP growth rate) is the top priority (Chen et al. 2017), and can be used as the key performance goal of local governments (Ma 2016). Local governments compete fiercely with each other to attract foreign direct investments, upgrade industries, and boost economic growth, which help to earn career opportunities for local officials (Su et al. 2012). The short time horizon and age restrictions over cadre promotion incentivize local officials to progress quickly. Otherwise, they will be left behind with thin career opportunities (Kou and Tsai 2014). As such, performance appraisal becomes high-stake practices in Chinese local governments. Feedback from performance gaps is often associated with immediate changes in decisions, because local government officials are incentivized to solve the problem and/or to maintain their competitive advantages in a short run.

Chinese local governments, as those in many other countries, are general-purpose governments characterized by the developmental state, managing a wide range of functions that relate to policymaking and public goods provision. Despite China adopts the unitary and centralized government system, in reality, it is often described as “fragmented authoritarianism” (Lieber-

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1 There are 15 cities (e.g., Xiamen) directly under the control of the State Council and enjoy sub-provincial authority.



thal 2004). Chinese local governments are highly decentralized to measure and improve economic performance, and they have strong autonomy and discretion to leverage strategies and policy instruments to initiate organizational changes. Although performance indicators for Chinese local governments are abundant (Zuo 2015), performance in economic development is the most important indicator (Ma 2016). Given the hierarchical structure of the personnel management institution, which means only a few candidates can be cherry-picked to higher levels, local governments compete with peers at the same level in the same jurisdiction (e.g., prefecture-level and above cities in the same province) (Ang 2017).

It is economic growth relative to sister cities that matters in performance evaluation and cadre promotion of mayors and party secretaries, which suggests that local officials are very concerned about social performance gap (Chen et al. 2017). Local governments with more competitors in a jurisdiction are thus more strongly incentivized to climb the ladder of career advancement. A recent study shows that spatial competition among local governments is primarily driven by strategic interactions among cities within the same province instead of geographic proximity (Yu, Zhou, and Zhu 2016). In other words, the number of prefecture-level and above cities in a province can be used as a proxy of inter-jurisdictional competition (Lü and Landry 2014). Local officials also pay attention to relative performance to their predecessors, which are a more comparable bench-

mark to gauge their competence (Li and Zhou 2005). In that case, historical performance gap also matters.

### *Budgeting for Career Incentives*

Local governments are impelled to glean fiscal revenues to energize economic growth, particularly to attract fiscal transfer from the central government (Su et al. 2012). The lion's share of fiscal resources for local governments is primarily acquired from land revenues through selling state-owned land and soaring real estate prices (Chen and Kung 2016). Fiscal resources are usually expended in fixed-asset investments to upgrade industrial and urban infrastructures, which are eye-catching and help to boost economic growth (Chen and Kung 2016). Given soft constraints and negligent discipline of public budgeting, local governments often arbitrarily manipulate fiscal expenditures to align them with career concerns (Wang 2017). For instance, county party secretaries and government heads are more inclined to increase fiscal expenditures "at crucial points during their tenure to improve the prospect of political advancement," i.e., in the third and fourth years in office (Guo 2009, 630).

Since fiscal resources are strategically important for local economic growth and cadre career advancement, it is reasonable to examine whether and how performance gaps affect the change of fiscal expenditures. Specifically we focus on two aspects of budgetary change, budgetary spending growth and the change of public education spending (see our Online Appendix). The growth of budgetary expenditure helps to boost

economic growth, but it may also cumulate mountainous debts and give rise to financial risks. Local governments may only risk growing budgetary spending when they experience negative performance gaps. Governments may also increase budgetary expenditure once they achieve historical aspirations or outperform competitors.

Public education is a long-term investment in human capital, and the benefits to economic growth is promising albeit not immediate. Myopic leaders thirsty for short-term economic growth are reluctant to devote their scarce revenue to public education, which makes it largely underinvested (Lin 2013). The central government of China pledged to increase its budget on compulsory education to account for 4 percent of national GDP in 1993, an international standard adopted by many countries, but it was not until nearly 20 years later (in 2012), that the target was met.<sup>2</sup> Still, several local governments have been lagging behind in securing education expenditure, despite it being a national legislative mandate.

Compulsory education accounts for a large proportion of government spending, and it is particularly challenging for local governments under budgetary austerity to meet the mandatory target of financing education. In our sample of prefecture-level and above cities, for instance, the median public education spending as a share of budgetary expenditure is about 18 percent, suggesting nearly one-fifth of

public money is dedicated to this policy task. Whenever local governments are delegated with fiscal decentralization, however, they are inclined to spend less on public education (Wang, Zheng, and Zhao 2012). Given the conflicting incentives of government expenditure on public education, we expect performance gaps will be related to the increment of education share in total spending in the same way of budgetary expenditure growth.

## Research Design

### *Panel Data on Chinese Local Governments*

We apply a panel data design by pooling data on 287 prefecture-level and above Chinese cities from 2010 to 2016 (except for four municipalities at the provincial level, e.g., Beijing). Drawing from multiple archival sources (e.g., annual reports of local governments, the Chinese Statistical Yearbooks, and resumes of municipal party secretaries and mayors, etc.), this novel panel dataset offers the possibility to examine how performance gaps at a given time shape local governments' change-related budgetary decisions in subsequent periods.

### *Measuring Performance Gaps Based on Economic Development*

We focus on the annual GDP growth rate as the key performance goal of local governments, which is used to develop historical and social aspirations

2 China to spend 4% of GDP on education. *China Daily*, October 4, 2012, [http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-10/04/content\\_15796868.htm](http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/business/2012-10/04/content_15796868.htm).

and performance gaps. We use the performance goal of the past year as our proxy of historical aspiration, which is subtracted from the actual economic growth rate of the past year to form the historical performance gap. Because Chinese local governments explicitly set their goals for economic development, and we can observe the actual

economic growth rate for a year, our empirical contexts make it possible to accurately measure the size of performance gaps based on historical aspiration. We operationalize performance gaps by subtracting the aspiration level from a city's actual performance based on the economic growth rate.

$$\text{Performance Gap} = \text{Actual Performance} - \text{Performance Aspiration Level} \quad (1)$$

For example, the city of Zhuhai in Guangdong province set its goal in economic development at a growth rate of 9 percent in the year 2013. In that year, Zhuhai City achieved the actual growth rate of 10.55 percent, resulting in a historical performance gap of 1.55 percent (10.55-9). When setting explicit goals in economic development, some Chinese cities have specified a range of economic growth rate, instead of targeting a specific number. For example, Dalian, a city in the Liaoning Province, specified a GDP growth rate of 6.5-7 percent as its goal in 2016. In such cases, we use the mean of the lower and upper bounds, herein the case of Dalian, 6.75 percent, as the aspiration level. Based on our operationalization, a positive measurement score refers to the scenario whereby a city achieved its performance goal set in the previous year, while a negative measurement score refers to the scenario whereby a city failed to achieve a better GDP growth rate compared with the previous year.

Since prefecture-level and above cities mainly compete with other equivalent cities in the same province, we use the average economic growth rate

within each province to gauge social aspiration, which is used to calculate social performance gap. For instance, the mayors of Luoyang, Shangqiu, and Xuchang in Henan province did not set specific goals, but instead aimed to be above the provincial average level of GDP growth by one to two percentages in 2011. Again in the case of Zhuhai city, the average economic growth rate of the other 20 cities in Guangdong province is 10.73 percent, and its social performance gap is -0.18 percent (10.55-10.73). In other words, Zhuhai city had a below-average performance in 2011 based on how it compared with its peer cities within the same province.

The data on performance goals are from the government work reports delivered by mayors to the municipal People's Congress, while the data on actual economic growth rates are from the China City Statistical Yearbooks in the accompanying years. To compare the differentiating effects of positive and negative performance gaps, we also develop two spline functions to code the variables (Greve 1998). A positive performance gap is coded as its actual value when it is above zero, while it equals

to zero when it is zero or below zero. By the same token, a negative performance gap equals to its actual value when it is below zero, but it is coded as zero when it is zero or above zero.

### *Measuring Budgetary Change*

We use the annual growth rate of budgetary expenditure to measure changes in local governments' important fiscal decisions. Government budget is usually approved by the municipal People's Congress during its annual convention, in which the annual government report, including performance goals to be achieved, is also presented by the mayor. It is calculated by budgetary expenditure of one year ( $t$ ) minus that of the previous year ( $t-1$ ), which is then divided by budgetary expenditure of the previous year ( $t-1$ ). The data are from the *China City Statistical Yearbooks* in the accompanying years. In all the subsequent empirical models, we also take a log transformation of the annual percent change in budgetary expenditure, as such, our empirical models focus on city-year observations with only spending increase, and we excluded a few cases (less than 5 percent of the sample), whereby cities exercised budget cuts.<sup>3</sup> The resulting dependent variable ranges from -0.5097 to 6.093. The negative values correspond with small expenditure growth, while the positive values refer to more substantial expenditure growth.

### *Control Variables*

We control for variables that may affect the annual change of budgetary expenditure. First, government spending is usually in line with changes in revenue capacity, and we control for an annual growth rate of budgetary revenue. Second, we control for mayor tenure in office, as existing studies suggest that local political turnover affects both economic growth and budgetary decisions (Wu et al. 2020). In our empirical models, we include the time in office of mayors and its squared term, since it is found to affect government expenditure in a nonlinear way (Guo 2009). Both party secretaries and mayors are municipal leaders, but mayors are in charge of economic growth and set government targets. We also include inter-jurisdictional competition in the model since it may trigger stronger competition among prefecture-level and above cities in the same province. We follow the literature to use the total number of prefecture-level and above cities in a province to measure inter-jurisdictional competition (Lü and Landry 2014).

### *Model Specification*

Our dataset is a panel dataset that contains large cross-sectional units ( $N$ ) and a relatively short time span ( $T$ ). Our intention is to explain the annual change of budgetary expenditure, and we are primarily interested in within-city variation instead of cross-city variation.

3 During the period of our study, the majority of Chinese cities increased budgetary expenditures due to the common trend of rapid economic growth. By doing so, we narrowed the variance of the dependent variable and thus underestimated its relationship with our independent variables. As a robustness check, we included the cities that exercised budget cuts, and the results are comparable to draw the same conclusion.

Given this substantive consideration, we specify panel data models including city-level fixed effects (Zhu 2013).<sup>4</sup> Fixed-effects models help to take into account unobservable confounding factors at the city level that might affect both economic growth and budget changes. For example, beyond managing goals defined based on economic development, Chinese cities engage in inter-jurisdiction competition among other performance dimensions, such as health, education, and environmental governance (Chen and Jia 2021). Unobserved heterogeneity due to these aspects is absorbed by city-fixed effects. Time-invariant city characteristics such as the administrative rank of cities (e.g., sub-provincial, the provincial capital, and prefecture-level) are also absorbed by city-fixed effect. To account for cross-city heterogeneity, we include heteroskedastic panel-corrected standard error, using cities as the panel units. To further consider the dynamic nature of budget data, which are often described as a strongly autoregressive (inertial) process (DeBoef and Granato 1997; Robinson, Flink, and King 2014), we add a first-order serial correlation parameter (AR1) in our panel model specification.<sup>5</sup>

As a robustness check, we estimate two additional models by dropping the AR1 specification and adding a lagged dependent variable.<sup>6</sup> The sub-

stantive results regarding both historical and social performance gaps largely hold, and the regression coefficients are relatively smaller than expected. Given that our data contain large  $N$  and small  $T$ , the model specification with city-level fixed effects and a lagged dependent variable is not ideal. Despite these limitations, our results are somewhat robust, even controlling for the lagged dependent variable.

Because the hypothesis we developed requires nonlinear specifications, we estimate panel regression models by a few steps. The first set of models includes only linear terms of the two performance gaps to show some baseline relationships between performance gaps at time  $t$  and local governments' changing budget allocation in the subsequent time periods. We then add a squared term of the two performance gaps measures to verify if there is an inverted U-shaped relationship between performance gaps and budgetary change. As a robustness check, we estimate an alternative set of panel models using a spline function.

## Findings

### *Performance Gaps and Changes in Total Budgetary Expenditures*

**T**able 1 reports the descriptive statistics of key variables included in the empirical analysis. As

4 Hausman Test suggests that the difference in regression coefficients between fixed and random effects models is systematic, and we need to include city fixed effects in the model specification.

5 The panel unit-root test rejects the null hypothesis of a panel unit root and our dependent variable is panel stationary. We use heteroskedastic panel corrected standard errors with an AR1 term in model estimates.

6 The model estimates are cut to save space but are upon request from the authors.

shown in Table 1, the Chinese cities included in this study vary substantially in terms of performance gaps in economic development (historical and social gaps) and changes in their budgetary expenditures. Based on our sample, we observe that Chinese cities experienced substantially different levels of economic development between 2010 and 2016. The best-performing city had enjoyed an annual growth rate of 13 percent in its GDP, while the lowest-performing city experienced a decrease in GDP by more than 40 percent. Based on the

peer-comparison (i.e., social performance aspiration), the largest positive performance gap is roughly 21, while the largest negative performance gap is roughly -26. Turning to log budgetary expenditure changes, we observe that the total city budgetary expenditure changes range from -5.097 to 6.093. For both dependent variables, negative values refer to small expenditure increases, while positive values correspond to more substantial increases in budgetary expenditure.

**Table 1.** The Descriptive Statistics of Variables

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Expenditure growth (log)	1,352	2.669	0.737	-5.097	6.093
Historical Performance Gap (PG)	1,348	-0.860	3.499	-40.95	13
Historical PG (squared)	1,348	12.977	57.465	0	1676.903
Historical PG (negative)	1,348	-1.585	2.800	-40.95	0
Historical PG (positive)	1,348	0.725	1.451	0	13
Social Performance Gap	1,410	0.000	2.666	-26.429	21.066
Social PG (squared)	1,410	7.105	34.008	0	698.497
Social PG (negative)	1,410	-0.777	1.868	-26.429	0
Social PG (positive)	1,410	0.777	1.554	0	21.066
Tenure	1,415	2.700	1.628	1	12
Tenure (squared)	1,415	9.938	12.364	1	144
Competition	1,414	13.124	4.121	1	21
Revenue growth (log)	1,315	2.744	0.833	-3.471	5.167

As posited in the hypotheses, we expect that historical and social performance gaps affect organizational change with different magnitude; and there are nonlinear relationships between the two performance gaps and organizational changes. We first included square terms of performance gap

measures in the models. We then use spline function, as an alternative model specification, to examine the different effects of negative and positive performance gaps on budgetary change. Both specifications generate similar substantive conclusions.

**Table 2.** Performance Gaps and Logged Budgetary Expenditure Growth: Fixed-effects Panel Data Model Estimates

Variable	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6
Historical PG	0.039*** (0.008)		0.053*** (0.009)			
Historical PG (squared)	-0.002 (0.001)		-0.0001 (0.001)			
Social PG		-0.018* (0.010)	-0.048*** (0.012)			
Social PG (squared)		-0.008*** (0.002)	-0.007*** (0.002)			
Historical PG (negative)				0.052*** (0.012)		0.050*** (0.013)
Historical PG (positive)				0.028* (0.015)		0.057*** (0.015)
Social PG (negative)					0.052*** (0.017)	0.009 (0.019)
Social PG (positive)					0.081*** (0.017)	-0.104*** (0.018)
Tenure	0.057* (0.030)	0.084*** (0.030)	0.044 (0.030)	0.058* (0.030)	0.084*** (0.030)	0.045 (0.031)
Tenure (squared)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.007 (0.004)	-0.001 (0.004)	-0.003 (0.004)	-0.07* (0.004)	-0.002 (0.004)
Competition	0.170** (0.083)	0.169* (0.088)	0.177** (0.086)	0.171** (0.083)	0.171* (0.088)	0.178** (0.086)
Revenue growth (log)	0.406*** (0.030)	0.448*** (0.026)	0.387*** (0.030)	0.406*** (0.030)	0.446*** (0.026)	0.385*** (0.031)
Constant	-0.319 (0.919)	-0.461 (0.965)	-0.277 (0.950)	-0.324 (0.919)	-0.422 (0.970)	-0.241 (0.944)
N	1224	1271	1218	1224	1271	1218
R <sup>2</sup>	0.451	0.405	0.479	0.451	0.400	0.476

Notes:

1. The dependent variable is logged budgetary expenditure growth. Heteroskedastic panels corrected standard errors are in parentheses.
2. Significance levels: \* p<0.10, \*\* p<0.05, \*\*\* p<0.01.

As shown in Table 2, the coefficients for the square terms of the historical performance gap measure are statistically insignificant in Models 1 and 3. Thus, we do not observe a nonlinear relationship between the historical performance gap and changes in total budgetary expenditures. The coefficients for the linear terms, however, are positive and statistically significant, suggesting a larger historical performance gap (i.e., decreases in GPD growth from last year) is associated with a higher growth rate of budgetary expenditure. Nevertheless, the results in Models 2 and 3 show that both the linear and squared terms of the social performance gap measure are statistically significant, meaning that there is an asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship between social performance gaps and annual changes in total budgetary decisions. We find partial support to H1.

We further qualify the main findings in Table 2-Model 3 by considering the possibility that there might be an endogenous relationship between performance gaps and budgetary changes in Chinese cities. We re-estimate Table 2-Model 3 using the two-step Generalized Method of Moments (GMM) and report this robustness check in the Appendix. Specifically, we use the Arellano-Bond linear dynamic panel-data model, which is a panel data econometric model suitable for panel data with large  $N$  (i.e., a large number of spatial units) and small  $T$  (i.e., a short time period). Although it is not a panacea to the endogeneity issues, especially endogeneity due to omitted confounding factors, the GMM approach allows us

to model performance gap variables as endogenous regressors by leveraging lagged variables as instruments and including a lagged dependent variable.

As Table A1 shows, the GMM specification produces coefficient signs consistent with those reported in Table 2-Model 3 (fixed effects panel regression). While specifying performance gaps as endogenous regressors produces greater coefficient values than those in Table 2-Model 3, we still reach the same substantive conclusions regarding how performance gaps are linked to budgetary changes.

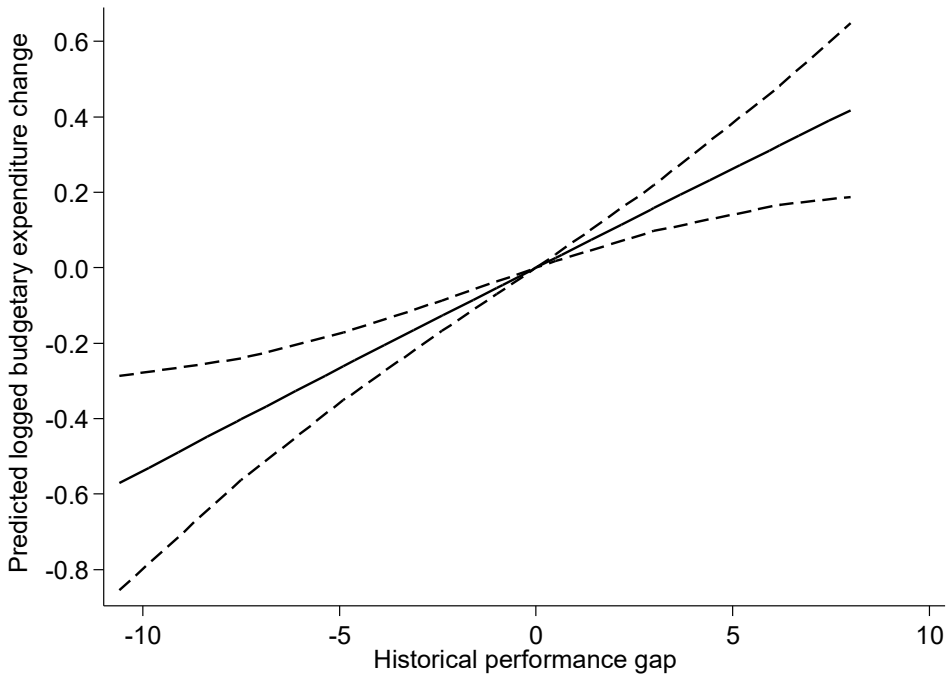
Furthermore, we use a spline function to compare the differential effects of positive and negative performance gaps, and the results are reported in Models 4-6. Both the negative and positive historical performance gaps are positively related to budgetary spending change, and the results are substantially consistent with the linear relationships reported in Models 1 and 3. We find that a negative social performance gap is positively related to fiscal expenditure growth, while a positive social performance gap is negatively related to budgetary spending change. In other words, the social performance gap is nonlinearly associated with organizational change.

Figure 1 visualizes the relationship between the historical performance gap and changes in total budgetary expenditures. In Figure 1, we predict log annual changes in budgetary expenditures across the full of the historical performance gap measure, holding all other control variables constant. Us-



ing the reference point when the performance gap is zero, we observe that positive and negative historical performance gaps are associated with logged budgetary changes in a linear way. In other words, the effects of historical performance gaps do not split between positive and negative gap values. Furthermore, looking at the substantive effects of historical performance gaps, we find that Chinese cities are more likely to undertake large increases in their to-

tal budgetary expenditures when economic development exceeds the goal (i.e., the previous year's growth rate). Conversely, we observe incremental increases in total budgetary expenditures among those that experienced economic slow-down. In other words, we find that positive historical gaps reinforce budgetary expenditures. The results imply that local governments in China are likely to initiate more substantial expenditure growth when they out-



**Figure 1.** The Relationship Between Historical Performance Gap and Logged Budgetary Expenditure Growth

Notes:

1. The dependent variable is measured as logged budgetary expenditure growth, whereby negative values refer to incremental budgetary increases, and positive values refer to large expenditure growth.
2. The solid line refers to the mean predicted logged budgetary expenditure growth. The reference value is when historical performance gap is zero. The dashed lines refer to the lower and upper bounds of the 95% confidence intervals.
3. The estimates are based on Model 3 in Table 2, and the results are similar if we use Model 6.

perform their economic development goals than when they underperform compared with the historical aspiration. Our empirical results support the slack proposition of organizational change. In other words, a positive performance gap generates abundant room for more substantial organizational changes.

In Figure 2, we visualize the relationship between social performance gaps and logged changes in local budgetary expenditures. Figure 2 shows an asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship between social performance gaps and total budgetary changes. We add the scatter plots in Figures A1 and A2, showing the bivariate correlations between logged growth in total spending and the two performance gap measures. These figures show that our models do not capture a linear relationship between spending change and performance gaps, and instead, they support our nonlinear hypotheses.

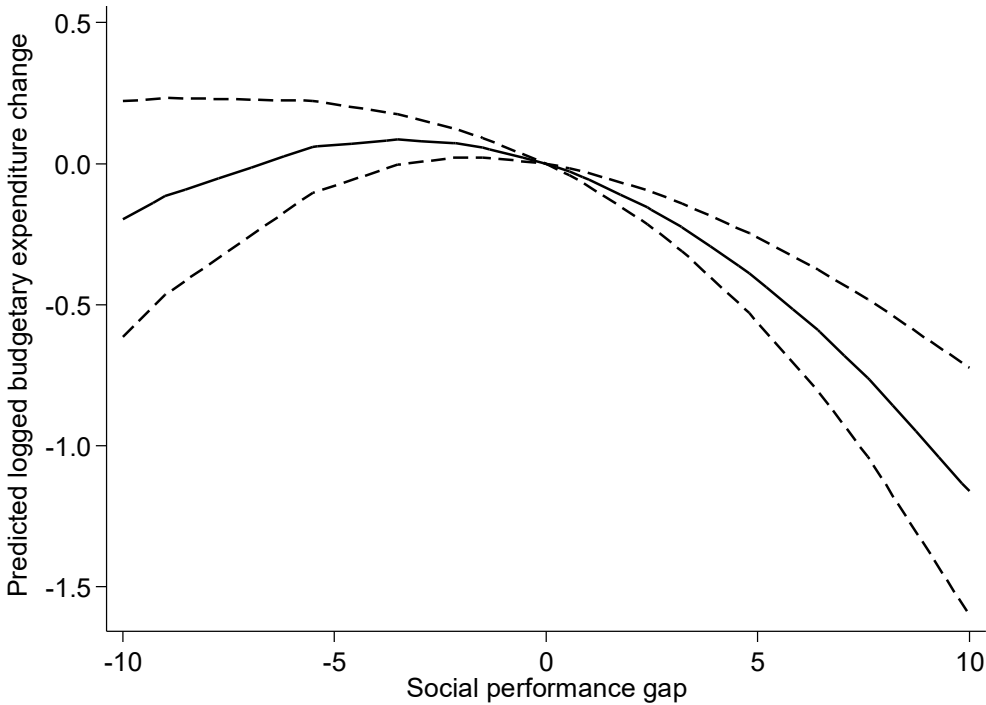
The asymmetric inverted U-shaped relationship suggests that Chinese local governments are most likely to have small increases in total budgetary expenditures when the social performance gap is near zero, which means they would take “satisfying” strategies when they have about average economic growth rate, compared with their sister cities within the same province. The predicted logged budget changes are near zero when the social performance gap is either negative or positive, suggesting they would be less likely to substantially increase total expenditures if the economic growth rate is too low or too high. This finding suggests that

when considering peer competition, local governments are quite risk-averse in initiating big budgetary changes.

Turning to the control variables, the results are mixed. We find that tenure in office of mayors is positively related to fiscal spending change, while the nonlinear relationship is not supported in most models (except for Model 5). The results are somewhat different from prior studies of counties in China (Guo 2009), which can in part be attributed to different loci of attention and discretion between prefecture- and county-level officials. In line with our expectation, inter-jurisdictional competition is positively associated with the growth of fiscal spending, suggesting local officials are keen in growing fiscal expenditures in a circumstance with fiercer peer competition. The results confirm that the growth of budgetary revenue is positively related to expenditure growth. In Table A2, we include two models by adding the total population as the control variable, which produces consistent findings to what we report in the main models.

## Concluding Discussions

While public management scholars have recently begun to explore how performance gaps shape managerial decisions, little is known regarding the relative importance of different types of performance gaps. In this paper, we develop a theoretical framework and specific hypotheses to explain the nonlinear relationships between historical and social performance gaps and or-



**Figure 2.** The Nonlinear Relationship Between Social Performance Gap and Logged Budgetary Expenditure Change

Notes:

1. The dependent variable is measured as logged budgetary expenditure growth, whereby negative values refer to incremental budgetary increases, and positive values refer to large expenditure growth.
2. The reference value is when the social performance gap is zero. The dashed lines refer to the lower and upper bounds of 95% confidence intervals.
3. The estimates are based on Model 3 in Table 2, and the results are similar if we use Model 6.

ganizational change. We contend that both social and historical performance gaps will affect organizational change, and the effects of these two types of performance gaps are different. We use the empirical context of Chinese local governments and performance in economic development to empirically test the hypotheses. We find evidence for the differential effects of negative and positive performance gaps, which echoes recent findings from other country

contexts such as Nielsen's (2014) study based on Danish schools and the study on American federal agencies by Nicholson-Crotty et al. (2016). Nevertheless, our findings differ from the two aforementioned empirical studies in that we find support to both the slack argument and the crisis hypothesis of organizational change. Chinese municipalities that exceeded performance goals in local economic development are more likely to increase budgets in the sub-

sequent year. Cities that experienced performance shortfalls are less likely to increase budgetary expenditures. Our findings complement the existing literature that reports evidence for the crisis hypothesis (i.e., failures in achieving performance goals would trigger more salient organizational changes) (Chen 2022, 2024; Yu and Chen 2025). As most of the existing empirical studies focus on managerial (individual) decision-making, we add to the literature by showing the differential effects of negative and positive performance gaps on important collective decisions, such as budgetary decisions.

Our study also adds to the emerging empirical literature on performance gaps and organizational change by showing how historical and social performance gaps shape organizational change in different ways (Hong 2019; Wei et al. 2021). We find that historical performance gap based on economic development is positively associated with budgetary changes in a linear way, but the relationship of social performance gap and organizational change takes an inverted U-shape. We measure historical performance gap as the difference between actual performance and prior goal. We observe that local governments succeeding in hitting the performance target are more confident in their capabilities to sustain the momentum, which boosts organizational change. In contrast, governments missing the target may rethink the appropriateness of their prior fiscal decisions, thus exercising some budget cuts. Such organizational changes are consistent with existing studies that report chang-

ing goal-setting behavior as responses to negative performance gaps in the context of Chinese local governments. For example, Ma (2016) finds that Chinese provinces failing to achieve economic development goals are most likely to lower the performance target for the future. Such adjustment of performance goals is often coupled with more conservative fiscal decisions in the subsequent year.

Meanwhile, we find that Chinese local governments change their budgetary expenditures differently as responses to social performance gaps. China has a top-down performance evaluation and personnel appointment system in which local officials' performance is usually compared with peers' (Yu, Zhou, and Zhu 2016). As such, social performance gaps have salient effects on local officials' career prospects. Peers' performance is a benchmark or yardstick by which local officials' performance is evaluated. Once local governments outperform peers with the lion's share of premium standing, they are reluctant to change their successful strategies. We find that cities exceeding the average peer growth rate even cut their budget. In contrast, for governments lagging behind peers with a large disparity, it is usually unrealistic to catch up in a short period, and they thus give up on initiating organizational change.

Our study adds to the literature on performance-based budgeting with insights into how different performance feedback shapes local governments' budgetary changes. It is a fruitful way

to integrate theories of performance gaps and decision making into the study on local governments' fiscal decisions. In this regard, our study bridges the two literatures.

This study is limited in several aspects, and we call for future studies to replicate and extend our findings. First, Chinese cities are situated in substantially different political and managerial contexts from cities in many Western countries. While Chinese cities are similar to general-purpose local governments that handle multiple policy-making and public service functions, economic development is deemed as the most important priority across the nation. China also has a top-down high-stake performance appraisal regime, whereby local government officials' career (promotion) prospects are directly tied to their performance in the economic realm. City managers in other countries (e.g., the U.S.) might be elected officials who are accountable for more heterogeneous preferences and interests of local constituents. Because of the salience of economic development indicators and the high-stake performance appraisal system in Chinese, we are able to observe salient short-term (annual) budgetary changes corresponding to gaps in economic performance. It is possible that in more decentralized political and managerial contexts, the relationships between gaps in economic performance and budgetary changes might differ. For instance, budgetary changes might become more incremental in a decentralized system. With these considerations, the findings reported in this study

should not be over-generalized. While the GDP growth rate is the most salient performance indicator used in the Chinese performance appraisal system, city governments do not just compete in economic development. The theoretical framework and empirical design of our study can be generalizable to further explore how local governments might respond to performance gaps based on other performance indicators (e.g., education, service provision, environmental indicators, etc.) by changing the budgetary spending.

Our empirical analysis is limited to how performance gaps affect changes in local governments' total budgetary spending. We do not further consider shifts in budgetary/spending priorities and potential tradeoffs between different spending areas. It is conceivable that, in stimulating economic growth, governments could also reprioritize their budgetary spending, such as cutting spending in human service areas (e.g., education and health care) while increasing spending in infrastructure investment and science and technology innovation. A natural extension to our study would be to examine if local governments change their spending priorities as responses to performance feedback, especially negative one.

Furthermore, we focused on how local governments might adjust their annual budgetary expenditures as responses to historical and social performance gaps. Although fiscal decisions constitute a critical decision aspect of local governments, these are merely the starting points to explore how local

governments may react to performance shortfalls and surpluses. Organizational change is a multi-faceted concept that can be measured and studied based on different empirical indicators. A natural extension to our study could be to examine other types of organizational changes that do not directly relate to budgetary changes. For example, there could be government reorganizations, new policies that support technology innovation, and policy changes that support foreign trade and foreign direct investment. These policy shifts might also be used as local governments' strategies to boost economic development. Moreover, Despite economic growth is the predominant performance target

at the local level, government officials have to fulfill other task imperatives equivalently, if not more important (Ang 2017). Environmental protection, for instance, has been increasingly prioritized in the government agenda in recent years due to exacerbating air and water pollution (Huang 2024). It is thus meaningful to examine performance gaps in a multitasking circumstance and include other performance metrics. Lastly, we call for future research incorporating other important theories (e.g., goal setting, resource dependency) to deepen our understanding of performance feedback and organizational change.

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**APPENDIXES****Table A1: Robustness Check Based on GMM Specification**

Variable	Fixed Effects Model (Table 2-Model 3)	GMM
Historical PG	0.0529*** (0.009)	0.0751*** (0.196)
Historical PG (squared)	-0.0001 (0.001)	0.005 (0.002)
Social PG	-0.048*** (0.012)	-0.079*** (0.026)
Social PG (squared)	-0.007*** (0.002)	-0.015*** (0.004)
Tenure	0.044 (0.030)	0.009 (0.007)
Tenure (squared)	-0.001 (0.004)	0.001 (0.008)
Competition	0.177** (0.086)	-0.301 (0.315)
Revenue growth (log)	0.387*** (0.030)	0.346 (0.059)
Constant	-0.277 (0.950)	5.999 (4.242)
Lagged DV	--	-0.076 (0.067)
<i>N</i>	1218	637
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.479	

Notes:

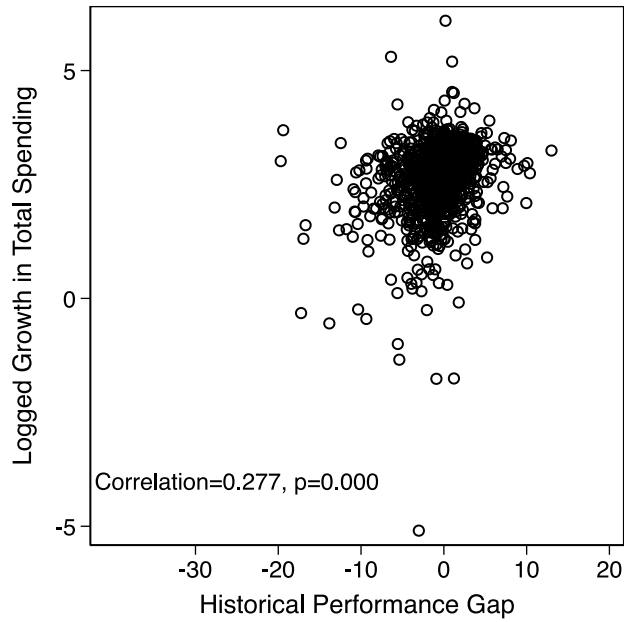
1. The dependent variable is logged budgetary expenditure growth.
2. Significance levels: \*  $p < 0.10$ , \*\*  $p < 0.05$ .

**Table A2:** Empirical Results Adding City Population (in Millions) as an Additional Control Variable

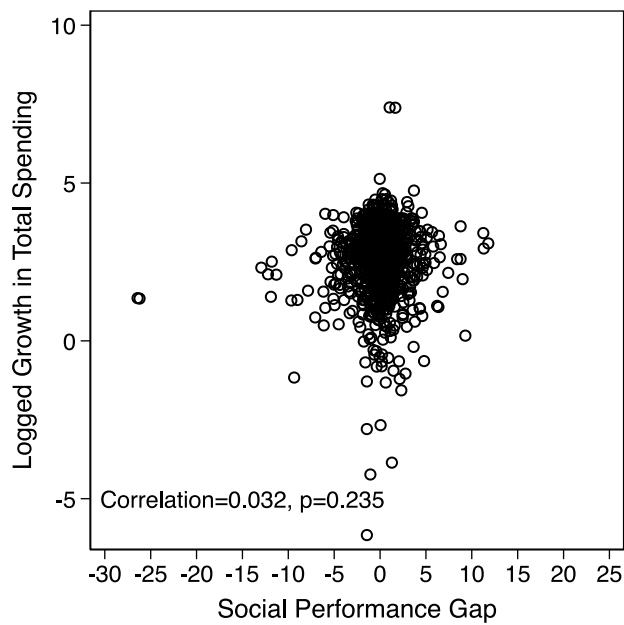
Variable	DV: Logged Growth in Total Spending (Robustness Check for Table 2-Model 3)
Historical PG	0.053*** (0.009)
Historical PG (squared)	-0.0001 (0.001)
Social PG	-0.048*** (0.012)
Social PG (squared)	-0.007*** (0.002)
Tenure	0.045 (0.030)
Tenure (squared)	-0.001 (0.004)
Competition	0.177** (0.086)
Revenue growth (log)	0.387*** (0.030)
Population (in Millions)	0.001** (0.0005)
Constant	-0.277 (0.950)
<i>N</i>	1,218
<i>R</i> <sup>2</sup>	0.480

Notes:

1. Significance Levels: \*\*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*  $p < 0.10$ .
2. Both models are estimated, including city-fixed effects.



**Figure A1:** Bivariate Correlation between Logged Growth in Total Spending and Historical Performance Gaps



**Figure A2:** Bivariate Correlation Between Logged Growth in Total Spending and Social Performance Gaps

# **Power Balance, Institutionalization, and the Governance of Serendipitous Networks—Evidence from Neighborhood Governance in Beijing**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Research on network governance has primarily focused on “goal-directed” networks, leaving the governance of serendipitous networks underexplored. Drawing on resource dependence theory and institutional theory, this paper proposes a new framework to explain the formation of different governance structures. It identifies the balance of power and the degree of institutionalization as key variables shaping organizational interactions, leading to distinct governance structures. Using evidence from neighborhood governance networks in Beijing, the study demonstrates how the interplay between power dynamics and institutionalization gives rise to four governance structures: shared governance, inertial governance, insurgent coalition domination, and lead organization governance. This research advances our understanding of serendipitous network governance and offers new insights into the reciprocal relationship between power and institutionalization.

**Keywords:** serendipitous networks, power balance, institutionalization, neighborhood governance

# **Equilibrio de poder, institucionalización y gobernanza de redes fortuitas: evidencia de la gobernanza vecinal en Beijing**

## **RESUMEN**

La investigación sobre gobernanza de redes se ha centrado principalmente en las redes orientadas a objetivos, dejando poco explorada la gobernanza de las redes fortuitas. Basándose en la teoría de la dependencia de recursos y la teoría institucional, este artículo propone un nuevo marco para explicar la formación de diferen-

tes estructuras de gobernanza. Identifica el equilibrio de poder y el grado de institucionalización como variables clave que configuran las interacciones organizacionales, dando lugar a distintas estructuras de gobernanza. Utilizando evidencia de las redes de gobernanza vecinal en Pekín, el estudio demuestra cómo la interacción entre la dinámica de poder y la institucionalización da lugar a cuatro estructuras de gobernanza: gobernanza compartida, gobernanza inercial, dominio de la coalición insurgente y gobernanza de la organización líder. Esta investigación profundiza en nuestra comprensión de la gobernanza de redes fortuitas y ofrece nuevas perspectivas sobre la relación recíproca entre poder e institucionalización.

**Palabras clave:** redes fortuitas, equilibrio de poder, institucionalización, gobernanza vecinal

## 权力平衡、制度化与“自发性网络”治理——来自北京社区治理的证据

### 摘要

网络治理研究主要聚焦于“目标导向”网络，而“自发性网络” (serendipitous networks) 治理尚未得到充分探究。基于资源依赖理论和制度理论，本文提出一项新框架来解释不同治理结构的形成。本文将权力平衡和制度化程度确定为影响组织互动的关键变量，从而产生不同的治理结构。本研究利用北京社区治理网络的证据，展示了权力动态和制度化之间的相互作用如何产生四种治理结构：共享治理、惯性治理、叛乱联盟主导、以及领导组织治理。本研究加深了我们对“自发性网络”治理的理解，并为权力和制度化之间的相互关系提供了新的见解。

关键词：自发性网络，权力平衡，制度化，社区治理

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### Introduction

**I**nterorganizational networks often involve organizations from the public, business, and nonprofit sectors.

In some networks, these organizations share goals and work together voluntarily, while in others, they may come into play with “different role positions and carry different weights” (Agranoff



& McGuire, 2001, p. 315). With different authorities and resources, organizations in networks may occupy different power positions. Powerful organizations may dominate networks and advance their agenda (Purdy, 2012). Klijn and Teisman (1997) conceptualized the complex interactions between all involved actors as “games” in which actors try to maximize their interests and influence. These games often result in different governance structures in these networks.

The internal governance structure of a network produces a significant effect on its functioning and effectiveness by shaping the allocation of resources and coordination of joint effort (Provan & Kenis, 2008; Raab et al., 2015). Governance structure, sometimes referred to as governance mode, encompasses “the use of institutions and structures of authority and collaboration to allocate resources and to coordinate and control joint action across the network as a whole” (Provan & Kenis, 2008, p. 231). It determines how decisions are made, how resources are allocated, and how conflicts are resolved in networks. Despite its critical importance, early network research often assumed that the structures of governance networks are uniform (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Since then, scholars have deepened our understanding of forms of governance structure and their relationships with network effectiveness. For example, Provan and Kenis (2008) identified three forms of governance structures: shared network governance, lead organization governance, and network administrative organization governance. Subsequent research

has largely focused on how governance structures, particularly network administrative organizations, affect network effectiveness (Saz-Carranza et al., 2016). However, existing literature has primarily focused on the governance structures of “goal-directed” or “purpose-oriented” networks, overlooking the vast number of less structured, serendipitous networks.

Goal-directed networks have relatively clear network-level goals identified and agreed on by network members (Nowell & Milward, 2022). However, in practice, network members often come together not around clear, specific goals but around a broader shared purpose, such as addressing homelessness in a metropolitan area or responding to natural disasters (Carboni et al., 2019). Network purpose is the “collective cognitive construct to close the gap between an observed and a desired condition or satisfy the unrealized needs” (Carboni et al., 2019, p. 212). Recognizing this distinction, scholars have started to use the term “purpose-oriented networks” to describe networks that are oriented towards a common purpose rather than explicit goals (Nowell & Milward, 2022). In contrast, a large number of networks, which are characterized as “serendipitous networks,” do not have clear goals or even a common purpose to drive the process of interaction. In serendipitous networks, individual actors make important choices, such as who to connect with or what to transact, without the guidance from any central network agent. Network members “form ties or partnerships based on their own interests” (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003, p. 90).

The distinction between purpose-oriented networks and serendipitous networks has important implications for the governance structures. For example, serendipitous networks, driven by random variation, selection, and retention processes, usually do not have external administrative organizations or even a lead organization to govern these networks. As a result, the governance typologies proposed by Provan and Kenis (2008) may not adequately capture the governance structures of serendipitous networks. Despite their prevalence, little research has explored how such networks are governed. This gap in our understanding is particularly critical given the widespread presence of serendipitous networks in real-world settings.

This paper addresses this gap by proposing a new framework to explain how power dynamics and institutionalization influence the governance structures of serendipitous networks. Drawing on empirical data from neighborhood governance networks in Beijing, China, this study develops four ideal types of governance structures: shared governance, inertial governance, insurgent domination, and lead organization governance. By examining the governance of serendipitous networks, this research contributes to a more nuanced understanding of network governance beyond goal-directed and purpose-oriented networks.

## **Neighborhood Governance Networks in Beijing**

The empirical context of this study is neighborhood governance networks in Beijing. China's urban neighborhoods used to be firmly controlled by the government in the planned economy era. Street Offices (SOs) were the lowest level of government. Residents' Committees (RCs) were the most basic unit of social organization and were controlled by the SOs. Housing was provided by state-owned enterprises or local governments. The public housing system could hardly keep up with people's increasingly higher standards of living and thus could not be sustained. Housing Reform, an important part of China's overall economic reform, was launched in the late 1990s, and a real estate market was created. Commercially developed neighborhoods have become the main type of neighborhoods in most cities. New types of neighborhood organizations, such as Homeowners' Associations, have become important stakeholders in neighborhood governance, significantly changing the governance of urban neighborhoods.

In China's rapidly growing housing market, urban residents purchase their own homes and have the legal right to form Homeowners' Associations (HOAs) to manage communal properties and protect their property rights. However, weak enforcement of the Property Rights Law allows developers and other entities to exploit communal spaces for financial gain. As a result, while HOAs are legally intended

to play a key role in decision-making regarding communal properties, homeowners often face significant obstacles in establishing them. Even when HOAs are successfully formed, their influence remains severely limited due to a lack of political and economic resources compared to local governments and business interests. China's political system offers citizens few opportunities to vote and provides limited institutional mechanisms for holding local officials accountable. Although homeowners can seek legal recourse to defend their rights, the legal system is often inaccessible to ordinary citizens and vulnerable to manipulation, as demonstrated in one of our cases. Additionally, HOAs typically have far fewer economic resources than developers or property management firms. While they may generate some revenue from property management fees or renting communal spaces, their financial capacity is usually insignificant in comparison. Beyond these structural challenges, limited political engagement opportunities contribute to a lack of democratic experience among homeowners. Many residents exhibit a passive "authoritarian personality," often hesitating to question government decisions or advocate for their collective interests (W. Wang et al., 2017). This further weakens the ability of HOAs to function effectively as representatives of homeowners' rights.

The RCs and the SOs, who used to be the dominant players in neighborhood governance, still have the public authority in these commercial-developed neighborhoods. The RCs, which are supposed to be "self-management,

self-education and self-service mass organizations," are actually firmly controlled by Street Offices. They are responsible for a variety of administrative functions, such as family planning and neighborhood safety. Like many other levels of government in China, their primary goal is to maintain social stability. SOs are the lowest level of government in urban areas. Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics (2023) showed that, as of 2022, the City of Beijing had 165 SOs overseeing 3,431 RCs. Though SOs usually cover a larger area and may have dozens of neighborhoods, current laws and regulations give SOs a direct role in neighborhood governance. According to the regulation in Beijing, homeowners must form their HOAs under the direction of SOs. They must first establish a preparatory group and then submit a formal letter of application to SOs. SOs then designate the head of the preparatory group, who is usually the director of the RC in the neighborhood. Homeowners also have to submit all their application materials to SOs. Therefore, SOs and RCs have considerable influence over the process of establishing HOAs—they can affect how fast and smooth the entire process goes. Of course, the scope of their authority goes far beyond this—when homeowners have conflicts with developers or property management firms over properties, SOs work as mediators and even arbitrators according to Chinese laws. Therefore, SOs and RCs are very powerful players mainly because of their political authority.

Business organizations, including developers and property manage-

ment firms (PMFs), also play a crucial role in commercially developed neighborhoods. Developers construct properties and sell homes to buyers, and in theory, they should exit these neighborhoods once all units are sold. In practice, however, their interests remain deeply embedded. Weak enforcement of the Property Rights Law provides developers with numerous loopholes to exploit. To maximize profits, developers often exaggerate apartment sizes or leave unresolved construction quality issues. Many also hire their own subsidiary companies as property management firms, imposing high fees that do not match service quality. These PMFs frequently collaborate with developers to conceal construction defects.

Business organizations wield significant economic power. The booming real estate industry in China is highly profitable, enabling developers—both large industry giants and smaller firms—to mobilize substantial financial resources. This economic power can easily translate into political influence. As Lindblom (1977) noted, business interests possess both structural and instrumental power. Their structural power stems from their role as a primary tax base, with local governments in China heavily reliant on real estate development for revenue. Consequently, local governments often form informal pro-growth coalitions with developers (T. Zhang, 2002). Meanwhile, developers' instrumental power arises from bribery and the exchange of interests with local government officials, further entrenching their influence.

The previous governance structure has been changed greatly, with new players actively engaging in neighborhood affairs. Although there have been some laws and regulations on the legitimate roles of these players and their relations, these laws are either incomplete or not well enforced. In many cases, common understandings of roles and interorganizational relationships have not been reached. Government, business, and civic organizations have diverse institutional logics, interests, goals, and sources of legitimacy in neighborhood affairs, and they actively participate in these affairs in order to maximize their interests. Although these organizations operate within neighborhoods, they are driven by their own interests rather than a shared goal or purpose. They form ties primarily to advance their own influence, resulting in serendipitous networks. Neighborhood governance in China is highly spontaneous and loosely structured, making it an ideal setting to study how different governance structures emerge within such networks.

The transformation of neighborhood governance in China has drawn significant scholarly attention, particularly regarding the role of homeowners as a new and influential actor in neighborhood governance. Researchers have examined various aspects of homeowners' participation, from their impact on democratic engagement to their role in shaping power dynamics at the neighborhood level. Several studies highlight the role of homeowners' participation in governance. Wang, Li, and Cooper (2017) found that involve-

ment in neighborhood affairs helps homeowners develop democratic skills, increase awareness of property and political rights, and cultivate a stronger sense of community. From a coproduction perspective, Zhang and Li (2024) demonstrated that homeowners are more likely than nonowners to report public service complaints to the government, thereby contributing to improved neighborhood governance. This tendency is likely driven by homeowners' greater knowledge of government processes and their motivation to protect property values. Another stream of research explores the effectiveness of homeowners' associations (HOAs) in representing homeowners' interests. Studies suggest that factors such as the level of homeowner participation in neighborhood affairs significantly influence an HOA's ability to advocate for residents (Guan & Liu, 2021; F. Wang, 2014). Beyond individual homeowner participation, scholars have also examined the broader power shifts in neighborhood governance. Yip and Zheng (2024) analyzed how the emergence of HOAs reshapes power relations at the neighborhood level, revealing its political implications.

While these studies offer valuable insights into the role of homeowners, they largely adopt an actor-based perspective, focusing on individual or organizational agency. What remains missing is a network perspective—one that views governance as a dynamic system of interdependent actors, including government agencies, community organizations, private businesses, and citizens, who collaborate, negotiate, and

compete to shape policies and manage local issues. Given the widespread application of the network perspective in urban governance research (Blanco, 2013; Da Cruz et al., 2019; Davidson et al., 2019), this gap is particularly striking and warrants further exploration.

## **Research Design and Data Collection**

This paper employs the comparative case method as the major research design. Since the major objective was to study the governance structure in each neighborhood governance network, the unit of analysis is the network. The success of the comparative case method depends on obtaining cases that vary in governance structures so that meaningful comparisons can be conducted. The relative frequency distribution of each governance structure is not important (Ragin, 2009). King, Keohane, and Verba (1994) argued that random sampling might worsen the problem of selection bias in small-N studies. Therefore, this research adopted snowball sampling in order to get cases that varied in their governance structures. Through the director of a local nonprofit organization specializing in homeowners' rights protection in Beijing, I was able to connect with the first seven neighborhoods located in different parts of Beijing. I visited each of them and then asked them to recommend neighborhoods with similar or different governance structures. I stopped data collection after visiting 22 neighborhoods because I felt that I had reached the point of data sat-

uration (Small, 2009). Additional cases provided little new information on governance structures or power dynamics at that point. Different types of cases allowed me to compare the interorganizational power relations and degree of institutionalization and see how these differences give rise to different modes of governance structures.

My research methods are qualitative. In order to gain a comprehensive understanding of inter-organizational power relations and institutionalization, I conducted interviews with homeowner activists, government officials from both RCs and SOs, and property management firm executives. Each interview lasted 90-120 minutes. In order to collect network data, I asked interviewees to nominate the organizations that they often collaborated with on neighborhood affairs. The nomination was then verified in subsequent interviews. If there were inconsistencies, I asked interviewees to clarify how they collaborated and determined whether it counted as a collaborative relationship. Since collaboration is mutual in nature, in the end, 22 symmetrical collaborative networks were constructed based on the network data. Network data analysis was conducted by using UCINET. I also used participant observation to collect data. I attended HOAs' meetings to collect information on their governance, their relationships with other players in neighborhood governance, and other issues to answer the above research questions.

## **Theoretical Framework**

**H**ow can we understand the interactions of organizations in serendipitous networks, which may further affect the internal governance structures of these networks? Given the lack of a common purpose or a clear goal, organizations are driven by their interests (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Klijn and Teisman (1997) characterized the situation like this as "games" in which actors try to maximize their interests and influence. Whether or not organizations succeed in advancing their interests, however, is likely to be influenced by their power relative to other network members, and whether collaboration is institutionalized as the legitimate way of conducting business.

Power has long been recognized as an important variable in explaining inter-organizational interactions (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001; Choi & Robertson, 2014; Emerson, 1962; Gray & Hay, 1986). Benson (1975) argues that interactions between organizations must be explained ultimately at the level of resource acquisition. Emerson (1962) developed a novel idea of the source of power—he argued that power resides in the other's dependency: the power of A over B is equal to the dependence of B on A. Pfeffer and Salancik (1978) further developed this exchange-based view of power into a theory of resource dependence in order to analyze inter-organizational power and organizations' management of their environments. This theory generally argues that organizations that have critical resources that are not available from

anywhere else will have more power over dependent organizations, and they thus may take advantage of their power when interacting with others. Hardy and Phillips (1998) developed a broader view of power and identified three sources of inter-organizational power—formal authority, control of critical resources, and discursive legitimacy. Formal authority refers to “the recognized, legitimate right to make a decision” (p. 219); for example, government agencies usually enjoy this form of power. The control of critical resources becomes one source of power due to the dependence of other organizations on these resources, which is consistent with resource dependence theory. Resources may include money, personnel, information, or technologies that can be used to influence other organizations. Organizations with discursive legitimacy have power because they are considered to have the expertise and legitimacy to speak about a specific issue. For example, Greenpeace is often considered to have discursive legitimacy in environmental issues. These different sources are not mutually exclusive, and one organization may possess authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy simultaneously. This broader view of power provides a more fine-grained framework to analyze power relations in organizational domains.

Agranoff and McGuire (2001) argued that power should be the center of any general network management theory because it has important implications for the patterns of interactions in networks. A balanced power distribution is favorable for interest repre-

sentation, deliberation, and achieving cooperative participation (Choi & Robertson, 2013; Hardy & Phillips, 1998). In contrast, imbalanced power distribution may lead to a number of negative outcomes. Powerful organizations with more authority, resources, or discursive legitimacy may use their power to exclude certain stakeholders, silence different voices, and advance their own interests. Organizations in weaker power positions may take different measures to mitigate power imbalances. Emerson (1962) maintained that organizations may reduce their dependence on a certain organization by exploring alternative sources of resources or by building coalitions with others to change the relative distribution of resources. Hardy and Phillips (1998) proposed four strategies that organizations can use in their engagement with other organizations: collaboration, compliance, contestation, and contention. For example, in the UK refugee system, the Refugee Legal Center became a separate organization because of government support and also received funding from the government, so it chose “compliance” as its strategy to interact with the government.

The use of power to advance interests in networks, however, is not unchecked. Network members’ values, norms, beliefs, and taken-for-granted assumptions, particularly whether they accept collaboration as the appropriate or legitimate way of doing things, affect the use or effectiveness of power. Institutional theory recognizes that organizations are embedded in an “institutional” context that prescribes appropriate and

socially legitimate ways of doing things (Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Greenwood et al., 2014). Institutions structure our behaviors, lead us to interpret the world in certain ways, and, more importantly, shape our understanding of what the “legitimate” ways of doing things are (Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Phillips et al., 2000). The institutional context exerts profound influence over organizational forms and structures, the diffusion of innovation, and organizational survival (Kennedy & Fiss, 2009; Meyer & Rowan, 1977; Tolbert & Zucker, 1983; Westphal et al., 1997).

Institutional theory gives us a fresh perspective on collaborative governance as a new institution. The institutionalization of collaborative governance is defined as the wide acceptance of collaborations between governments, businesses, and nonprofit organizations as a legitimate way of governing complex modern societies. The past few decades have witnessed the gradual hollowing out of the state and the transformation from government to governance in response to a wide range of societal changes (Milward & Provan, 2000; Rhodes, 1997). Contextual change provides opportunities and incentives for organizations to question rather than replicate scripted patterns of behaviors (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). People may question the ineffective or inefficient government-centered approach of governing and start to regard cross-sector collaboration as the standard approach to tackle the so-called “wicked problems”—for example, we have reached the point where “it is difficult to imagine successfully addressing

global problems, such as the AIDS pandemic or terrorism, and domestic concerns, such as the educational achievement gap between income classes and races, without some sort of cross-sector understanding, agreement, and collaboration” (Bryson et al., 2006).

In any specific cases of collaboration, the degree of institutionalization may vary. The reason is that collaboration happens in a context where various aspects of it need to be negotiated, including the definition of the problem, the appropriate roles and scope of an organization, and the legitimate responses to the problem (Benson, 1975; Phillips et al., 2000; Thomson & Perry, 2006). The negotiations may lead to institutionalization because they touch on fundamental and complex issues and thus may give rise to new rules, norms, and understandings (Lawrence et al., 2002). Although through repeated interactions, organizations may reach shared understandings of these critical aspects of collaboration and develop common rules regarding problem and role definitions, these practices and behavioral patterns are not equally institutionalized (Barley & Tolbert, 1997). The degree of institutionalization may depend on “how long an institution has been in place and on how widely and deeply it is accepted by members of a collective” (Barley & Tolbert, 1997, p. 96). Lawrence et al. (2002) argued that collaboration has institutional effects because it facilitates the structuration process described by DiMaggio and Powell (1983): The intensity of inter organizational interactions increases, coalitions can form, information can be



exchanged, and mutual awareness of involvement can develop.

Lowly institutionalized collaboration may have a high possibility of internal conflicts, especially when organizations come from different sectors. They may act on their own knowledge or scripts, which are deeply influenced by the institutional logic of their sectors in the process of institutionalization (Alexander, 1998; Barley & Tolbert, 1997; Phillips et al., 2000). Member organizations have not yet reached a common understanding of key aspects such as problem definitions, the appropriate roles and scope of an organization, coordination procedures, and interorganizational relationships. Without sufficient negotiations to reconcile these different institutional logics, conflicts may ensue. The lack of wide support and legitimacy in these key aspects of collaboration may cause a number of problems. For example, different problem definitions imply different solutions and stakeholders. Black and Rose (2002) studied the case of the mental health community and found that an organization attempted to redefine the mental health problem as a social problem rather than a “disease” as it is conventionally defined. This new definition clearly implied a new solution and needed to incorporate new stakeholders, greatly changing the existing distribution of resources and power in the domain. Even if there are clear definitions of the problem and who should be involved, consensus on the proper roles of each participant is also critical. Clear definitions of the role and position of an organization in a domain directly af-

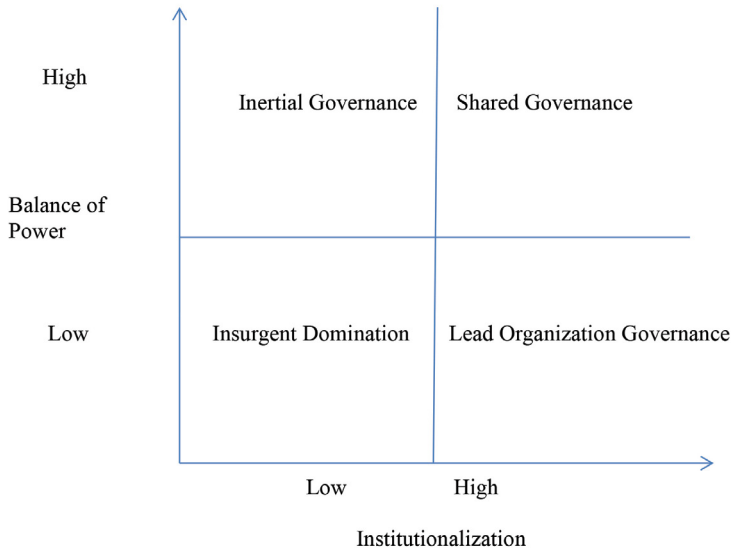
fect its resources. Benson (1975) pointed out that “authority and money flow to an agency on the basis of its sphere of activities—services provided, clients served, and so forth” (p. 236). Conflicts will arise if an organization’s sphere of activities is encroached upon by other organizations.

## **A Typology of Governance Structure**

Based on my fieldwork and the theoretical framework outlined above, two dimensions, the balance of power and the degree of institutionalization, were identified as two critical factors that may affect interactions between organizations and governance structures. The degree of institutionalization describes the degree to which members of governance networks have reached common understandings of problem definition, the roles of each member, and the direction(s) to go. Based on DiMaggio and Powell (1983), three indicators were used to evaluate the degree of institutionalization of collaborative networks. The first indicator is role definition, which assesses whether organizations have been founded to take their legally defined roles in neighborhood governance. The second indicator is role acceptance, which evaluates the degree to which organizations respect role definitions and accept other organizations to fulfill their respective roles. The third indicator is the density of relationships, which measures how closely organizations share information and work together. We would expect that in high-institution-

alized neighborhoods, through repeated negotiations, governance structures, and inter-organizational relationships are clearly defined and widely accepted. The governance structures thus enjoy high legitimacy, and the possibility of inter-organizational conflicts is low. The balance of power describes the degree to which the distribution of power in a network is balanced. The analysis will consider three sources of power: authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy (Hardy & Phillips, 1998), as

well as organizations' capabilities to use these sources of power to their advantage. We would generally expect that if power is balanced in a neighborhood network, organizations are more likely to compromise with one another in order to solve conflicts; in contrast, some organizations may dominate neighborhood governance if power is highly unbalanced. The interactions between the two dimensions thus give rise to a 2×2 typology of governance structures, as Figure 2.1 shows.



*Figure 1. A Typology of Internal Governance Structures*

### **Shared Governance (High power balance, high degree of institutionalization)**

If power is relatively balanced in an interorganizational network, meaning that the distribution of authority, resources, and discursive legitimacy is roughly even, then it is hard to exclude any organizations in the governance of these networks, and each organization

has the opportunity to participate. In the meantime, if these organizations also have a high degree of consensus on problem definition, the roles of each organization, and the future directions of collaboration, the possibility of conflicts may be low, and each organization will take on what they need to do. Under these conditions, a shared governance structure may emerge.

The Shang-Di neighborhood is a good case of shared governance. This neighborhood was developed soon after China's Housing Reform and was one of the first few commercially developed neighborhoods in Beijing. This project was just one of the many projects that the developer, a large state-owned real estate development firm, built. This project was not a major source of revenue, and the developer pulled out of the neighborhood soon after all units were sold. Therefore, the developer did not use its economic resources to gain influence or power in this neighborhood. All members of the RC were also property owners, so they were very supportive of establishing the HOA. The SO did not set too many obstacles either, so the political authority did not become a major barrier. Led by some visionary homeowners who were lawyers, scholars, and high-level managers in multinational companies, homeowners soon established one of the first few HOAs in Beijing. They also did several experiments, including establishing a monitoring committee to monitor the work of the HOA, to enhance the organizational capacity. The HOA firmly held the position as the legitimate representative of homeowners in the governance network. They used a bidding process to hire a property management firm to provide property management services. Public, business, and civic organizations had relatively equal power in this network, and no organization had the power to exclude or marginalize others.

In addition, organizations effectively negotiated their roles and responsibilities, developing a mutual under-

standing and respect for each other's domains. For example, unlike some Residents' Committees who saw HOAs as a competitor and trouble, the director of their RC told me that:

*"Some people hold a negative view of HOAs, thinking that they messed things up. Some say they are different from us (RC), (but) I don't think so. I think they are similar to us. HOAs are established because people need them. I think HOA members bring us some fresh air. For example, Mr. Guo (HOA director) is a professional manager, and he shares with me some good management experience... We want (all organizations) to use each other's strengths and work together to make things better."*

Similarly, Mr. Guo, the HOA director, stated that the HOA and RC had a good working relationship, although they did not agree on everything:

*"The HOA and RC complement each other: sometimes the RC takes the initiative to do something that they are not supposed to do, (in this circumstance) I usually take a step back; of course, when they fail to do what is supposed to, I will take the lead."*

The property manager also had a very clear understanding of their role:

*"Legally, we are the service provider, and the HOA is the service receiver. As the provider, we listen to their needs. As a property*

*management firm, our responsibility is to serve the homeowners. Of course, we serve for fees. Sometimes, when problems arise and do not cost too much, I ask my boss if we should use our money and labor to solve the problems. My main objective is to do our job well."*

As DiMaggio and Powell (1983) pointed out, another indicator of high institutionalization is the increase in the extent of interaction among organizations in the field. A network analysis was conducted, and the density score of the network was 1, suggesting that every organization cooperated with everyone else.

As the above discussion indicates, the relative balance of power in this network made it possible for all members to participate. A high degree of institutionalization led all organizations to focus on what they were supposed to do. As a result, a shared governance structure was formed, as Figure 2 indicates. The network had a high-density score of 1 and a low centralization score of 0, suggesting it was a completely decentralized network. In this neighborhood, organizations respected each other and collaborated effectively. For example, the HOA always invited leaders from the RC and the property management firm to attend their regular meetings in order to enhance mutual understanding.

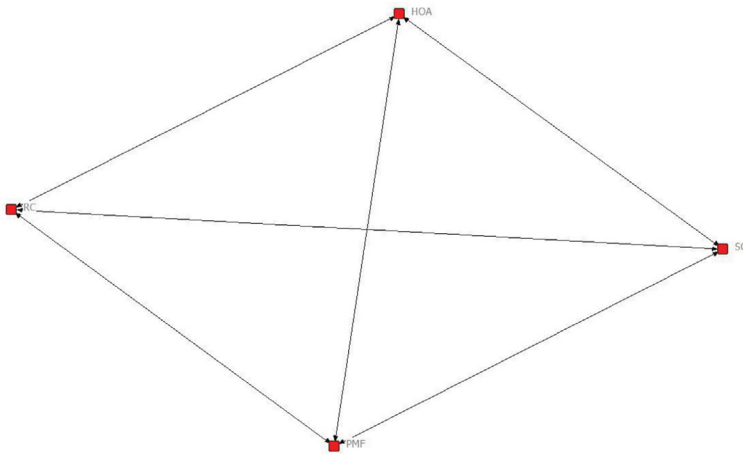


Figure 2. The Network of Shang-Di Neighborhood

### **Inertial governance (High power balance, low degree of institutionalization)**

**A** second governance structure is inertial governance, which arises when power is balanced

but the degree of institutionalization is low. Under this circumstance, the distribution of power, which may come from different sources, is relative even. All organizations have the opportunity to participate. However, the definitions of problems and the roles and scopes of

each organization are not well negotiated or accepted. The lack of common understanding means that the legitimacy of the governance structures is relatively low. Organizations may thus have conflicts with one another. However, the relatively even distribution of power makes it very difficult for any organization to impose its preferences on other organizations. As a result, organizations are often unable to act solely based on what they believe is right or necessary. This may lead to disengagement or minimal effort in collaboration.

Feng-Dan neighborhood was a case in point. It was a high-end neighborhood with both apartment buildings and single-home houses. The power distribution in the neighborhood was relatively balanced, and no organization had the capability to exclude others. Some homeowners who owned single-home houses were high-level government officials and had powerful political connections. Therefore, homeowners successfully established their HOAs in 2005 with minimal resistance from the RC or SO. The HOA became the legal representative of homeowners and successfully hired a property management firm through bidding. However, as time went by, many HOA members lost their commitments to their HOAs, and the HOA became weaker and weaker in terms of organizational capacity. Although the RC and SO did not obstruct homeowners from establishing their HOA, they later stepped in to fill the vacuum left by its weakness, gradually playing a more influential role in the neighborhood. The property management firm was hired by the

HOA, but they had the expertise and economic resources to manage properties and even to evade the HOA's monitoring. The property management firm even challenged the weaker HOA frequently after being hired.

The degree of institutionalization was low in this network, especially regarding the roles of each organization. First, homeowners themselves were not clear about the role of the HOA, which, to some degree, weakened the organizational capacity of the HOA. The HOA failed to serve as the legal representative of homeowners. For example, as one HOA member said: *"Our HOA could not work because people have very different opinions. We could not hold any meetings because people keep quarreling (in these meetings)."* When asked why the property management firm dared to challenge the HOA, given that it was hired by the HOA, the interviewee explained, *"This has nothing to do with the fact that they were hired by us. Our HOA is too weak. We do not have a consensus; internally, homeowners have too many different opinions."* Second, even if the property management firm and the local government understood their roles, in many cases, they did not do what they were supposed to do, and sometimes they intentionally engaged in extra-role behaviors. For example, decision-making regarding property management and hiring property management firms should be the HOA's responsibility, and the RC and SO only had a vague legal role in facilitating this process. The SO, however, managed to manipulate the bidding process and hired a property management firm that was ranked

third or fourth by homeowners. Unlike the one in the Shang-Di neighborhood, the property management firm did not see itself merely as a service provider and, therefore, did not feel obligated to listen to homeowners' needs. One HOA member complained that the management firm charged high management fees but failed to fulfill their responsibilities:

*"We told them that homeowners were not satisfied with their work, but they simply did not listen to us. In their eyes, we (HOA) are just nothing...we are really pathetic. It is like we should kneel ourselves to beg them to work: please do your job, and you can charge as much money as you want."*

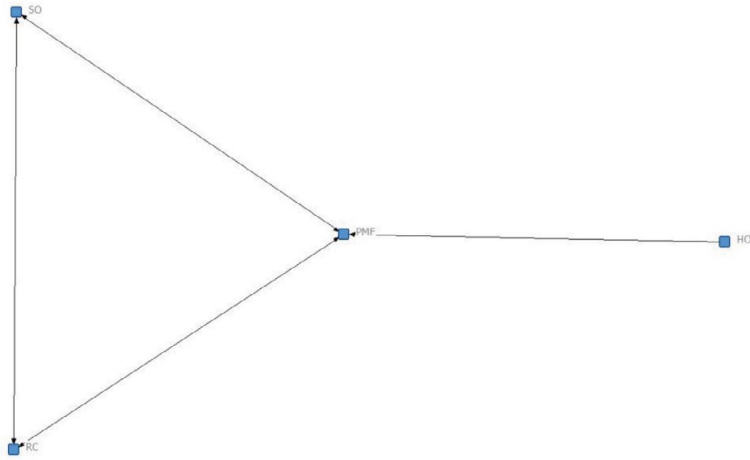
Another indicator of the low degree of institutionalization was the low-density score of 0.583, which showed that only 58.3% of all possible collaborative relationships existed in this network. The organizations were not collaborating closely with one another, resulting in an inertial governance structure. Figure 2.3 shows the network structure.

In this neighborhood, although conflicts between organizations may arise due to the low degree of institutionalization, the relatively balanced power structure reduces the possibility or severity of conflicts. As much as some organizations wanted to impose their problem or role definitions on others, they did not have the power to do so. For example, even though the SO once manipulated the bidding process, it could not completely marginal-

ize the HOA on neighborhood affairs. The relatively balanced power structure created a deadlock in this network. Organizations gradually lost interest in collaborating with one another. They exerted only minimal effort to fulfill their responsibilities or cooperate with one another, resulting in the so-called collaboration inertia (Huxham & Vangen, 2000). Benson (1975, p. 235) argued that this type of non-cooperative network is frequently encountered because "none can muster power sufficient to dictate terms to the others."

### **Insurgent Domination (low balance of power, low degree of institutionalization)**

**I**mbalanced power distribution and low institutionalization can give rise to a third type of governance structure: insurgent domination. Research suggests that asymmetrical power relations within a network can lead to various issues, such as the exclusion of certain members and the marginalization of diverse perspectives (Agranoff & McGuire, 2001). In such networks, powerful organizations often dominate governance and may even form coalitions to consolidate their advantage (Cook, 1977). Low institutionalization exacerbates power struggles in these imbalanced networks, as organizations lack a shared understanding of the core issues and their respective roles. However, this lack of structure does not disadvantage everyone; some organizations exploit vague problem definitions and role ambiguity to engage in extra-role behaviors that serve their interests. One



**Figure 3.** The Network of Feng-Dan Neighborhood

key strategy for these insurgent organizations is to form coalitions, securing their dominance and entrenching a governance structure that is difficult to dismantle. While powerful organizations can coerce weaker ones into accepting their terms, the major flaw of this governance model is its fundamental lack of legitimacy.

Rong-Feng exemplifies insurgent domination. In this case, the developer was a small firm with no established track record in real estate development. Consequently, it depended heavily on the revenues generated from this neighborhood, reinforcing its drive to maintain control. To maximize their revenue, the developer established a subsidiary company to take charge of property management in Rong-Feng. They charged high property management fees while providing inferior services. The developer also sold homeowners' communal properties for tens of millions without giving homeowners any compensation. To maintain the revenues, the developer used its econom-

ic resources and political connections to influence local governments' decision-making. The RC and SO had the political authority to at least help homeowners protect their communal properties, but they chose to work closely with the developer. The reasons were, first, the RC occupied 300 square meters of office space that was homeowners' communal property; second, the developer had powerful political connections in higher-level governments. Though homeowners were led by some experienced activists, they were much weaker and had almost no economic or political resources compared with business and government organizations.

To make things worse, the degree of institutionalization was very low in this neighborhood. The imbalanced power dynamics undermined any basis for negotiating roles and interorganizational relationships. The developer and property management firm apparently did not see themselves just as service providers because they seriously violated homeowners' property rights.

Homeowners wanted to establish their HOA in order to better represent their interests and protect their property rights. However, the RC and SO were not cooperative partly because of their fundamentally different problem definitions from homeowners'. They saw homeowners' organizing as a threat to social stability. For example, one official at the SO told me:

*"The HOA is a good thing, but it is not very compatible with the contemporary Chinese political system. People in high-end neighborhoods are better because they can accept this. In some other neighborhoods, it's OK if you don't tell these homeowners. Once you tell them that these (communal) properties are theirs, then they want these properties, but they did not know how to orderly claim and use these properties... Social stability is gone."*

This government official clearly saw stability as a priority and worried that homeowners' organizing may cause instability. One interviewee at the Rong-Feng neighborhood told me that:

*"The government always held us up whenever we took one step forward. Once I went to the SO, the deputy director said, 'This homeowner from Rong-Feng came to create troubles again.' They could not care less about our interests."*

The fundamental difference in problem definition became another source of conflicts between homeowners and local governments, making it

even harder for homeowners to gain governments' support. Both the business interests and local governments benefited from violating homeowners' property rights. Therefore, neither of them had the incentive to clarify the roles of each organization or seek an agreement on problem and role definitions that all parties could accept. Instead, they formed a coalition in order to gain absolute power over homeowners. Homeowners, who were the legitimate property owners, were too weak to effectively challenge the coalition. They were thus excluded from the governance of their neighborhood. "Insurgent" organizations with little legitimacy dominated, resulting in this insurgent domination governance structure. As Figure 2.4 shows, there were clearly two cliques of organizations in the network. One was made up of the business interest and local governments, including the developer, property management firm, the RC, and the SO. The other clique comprised the HOA and its consultant firm. The network density score was only 0.47, which was much lower than the density scores of the previous two networks.

### **Lead Organization Governance (low balance of power, high degree of institution)**

**T**he last governance structure is lead organization governance, which is formed under the conditions of low balance of power and high degree of institutionalization. As the above discussion suggests, asymmetrical power relationships are like-



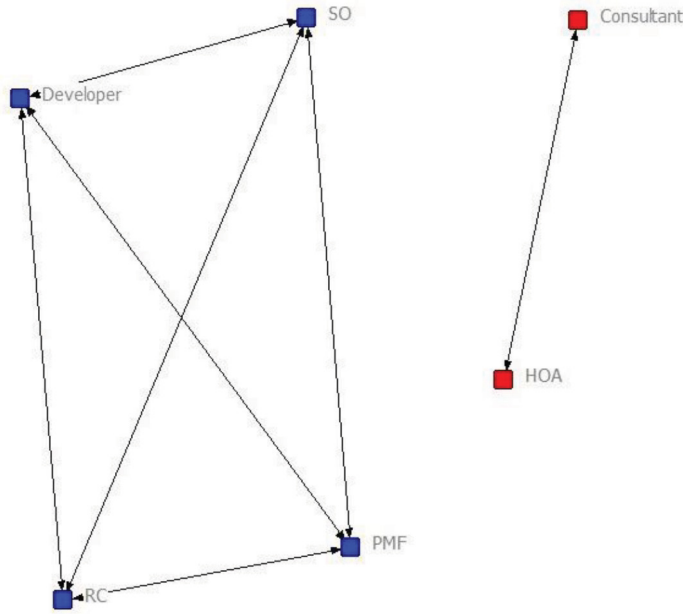


Figure 4. The Network of Rong-Feng Neighborhood

ly to cause powerful organizations to dominate network governance. However, a high degree of institutionalization and shared understanding of role and problem definitions may check the use of power and keep powerful organizations from infringing upon others' sphere of activities. Therefore, powerful organizations may have significant influence in a network, but they usually do not impose their problem and role definitions on weaker organizations. The governance structure has a high degree of legitimacy.

Chao-Yang Garden had this lead organization governance structure. Chao-Yang Garden was developed by a Hong Kong developer soon after China's housing reform in 1998. It was a high-end neighborhood that had been originally developed for foreigners in Beijing. The developer pulled out of the

neighborhood after all units were sold and maintained little influence in the neighborhood. The RC and SO had the political authority to monitor the HOA, but they could not benefit much from engaging in neighborhood affairs. They thus chose to be neutral. The HOA was established in 2001 and was one of the first few HOAs in Beijing. As the representative of homeowners, the HOA was led by some experienced activists and had been working well since it was founded. The HOA successfully hired property management firms on its terms through bidding processes and designed a good mechanism to share revenues with property management firms. The HOA had the upper hand in its relationship with the property management firm. With plenty of economic resources, the HOA hired a full-time secretary to take care of daily affairs. In this neighborhood, the HOA was the

most powerful organization with both economic resources and discursive legitimacy. The HOA even declined RC's request for some funding to support cultural activities, citing that this was not the HOA's responsibility.

This network was highly institutionalized, with clearly defined roles, problem definitions, and interorganizational relationships. The RC and SO recognized that the HOA was solely responsible for property-related decisions and chose not to intervene, instead focusing on their own responsibilities, such as delivering social services. The property management firm, hired by the influential HOA, also had a clear understanding of its role. Viewing itself as a service provider and the HOA as its employer, the firm maintained full financial transparency and worked closely with homeowners. As the representative of homeowners, the HOA held well-organized regular meetings to make property management decisions. Figure 2.5 illustrates this network's high level of collaboration, reflected in a density score of 0.73, indicating strong interorganizational cooperation.

Although the figure cannot show the power relations between organizations, my fieldwork suggested the HOA played a central role. It controlled not only discursive legitimacy but also considerable economic resources, which made it the most powerful player in the network. However, it did not infringe upon others' sphere of activities or impose its problem and role definitions on others. It generally respected other organizations but firmly defended its

legal roles. Compared with the above-mentioned "insurgent domination" governance structure, this governance structure also has an imbalanced power structure; however, one key difference is that the high degree of institutionalization becomes an institutional force that helps to regulate how organizations interact with each other and stop the most powerful one from infringing upon others' sphere. This type of governance is accepted by organizations and has legitimacy.

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

Drawing on resource dependence theory and institutional theory and based on neighborhood governance networks in Beijing, this paper develops a new framework to explain how different types of governance structures are formed. The balance of power and degree of institutionalization are two important variables that affect how organizations interact with one another, resulting in four different governance structures: shared governance, inertial governance, insurgent coalition domination, and lead organization governance. Table 1 presents a summary of the four neighborhood governance networks representing four types of governance structures. The balance of power determines who can participate in neighborhood governance, but the degree of institutionalization checks and balances the use of power. Shared governance and lead organization governance exhibit higher levels of network density, suggesting a healthy level of collaboration among organizations.

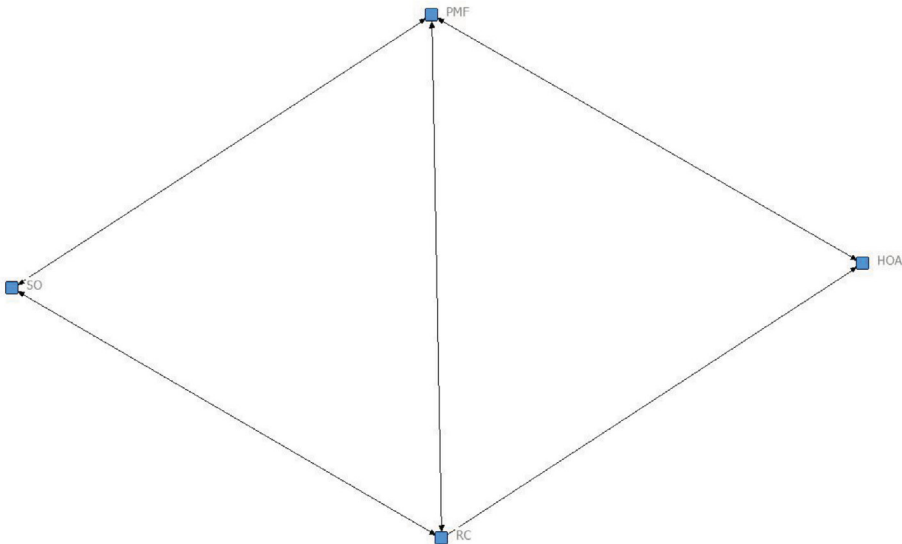


Figure 5. The Network of Chao-Yang Garden

Table 1. A summary of four governance structures

Neighborhood Name	Power balance	Institutionalization	Network density	Governance structure
Shang-Di	Balanced	High	1	Shared Governance
Feng-Dan	Balanced	Low	0.583	Inertial Governance
Rong-Feng	Imbalanced	Low	0.47	Insurgent Domination
Chao-Yang Garden	Imbalanced	High	0.73	Lead organization governance

One key contribution of this paper is that it deepens our understanding of the governance structures of serendipitous networks. The governance structure of serendipitous networks is a surprisingly understudied area (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Serendipitous networks are more common in the real world than goal-directed networks, yet they are often left unstudied in the public administration literature. Provan and

Kenis (2008) studied the governance structure of goal-directed networks, but their typology may not work for serendipitous networks in which the network change is primarily driven by serendipity (Kilduff & Tsai, 2003). Organizations usually interact with others on the basis of their interests and take a “tit-for-tat” strategy. The behaviors of organizations are not planned and are affected by various circumstances. Therefore, the

framework developed in this paper may deepen our understanding of how organizations interact with one another in serendipitous settings and fill a critical gap in the current literature. It may provide building blocks for further theoretical development.

Another contribution of this paper is that it furthers the research on the relationship between power and the institutionalization process. Previous research has studied the relationship between power and institutionalization (Phillips et al., 2000). The basic argument is that the rules, interpretations and problem definitions of powerful members are more likely to be institutionalized (Phillips et al., 2000). Some scholars went so far as to argue that institutionalization is a political process that reflects the interests of powerful members (Maguire et al., 2004; Seo & Creed, 2002). Despite its theoretical insight, this argument ignores the possible effect of institutionalization on power dynamics. This research studies different modes in which power may interact with the institutionalization process and highlights a reciprocal relationship: a high degree of institutionalization may also serve as a check to power use. The shared normative beliefs about the roles and scopes of each organization, as well as taken-for-granted assumptions, may force organizations to conform to these normative beliefs and constrain or even stop powerful organizations from infringing upon the sphere of activities of other organizations.

Drawing on institutional theory and resource dependence theory, this research offers valuable practical in-

sights. According to institutional theory, Alexander (1998, p. 349) argued that “actors” knowledge of their social context is the basis for the dual interaction between social structures and action. In other words, actors rely on social knowledge or scripts shaped by their previous institutional logic, and their actions, in turn, influence how they engage with other organizations. This knowledge plays a crucial mediating role in interorganizational dynamics. To institutionalize collaboration as a new governance approach, it is essential to raise awareness among all involved actors. Alexander (1998, p. 349) emphasized the importance of “enlightening potential participants in an interorganizational system with an awareness of their interdependence and revealing to them their potential mutual objectives and common goals.” In the context of neighborhood governance in China, RCs and SOs are often deeply influenced by government-driven institutional logic, making it difficult for them to adapt to a collaborative governance model. Raising their awareness of how property rights define the limits of their authority can help shift their perspective, encouraging them to see HOAs as partners rather than challengers. However, education and awareness-raising are not straightforward solutions, nor do they always succeed. As Benson (1975) noted, agreements on collaboration—such as defining problems and roles—are only achievable when an organization does not perceive its interests as being threatened.

Another key practical implication is that the four ideal types of gov-

ernance networks can serve as valuable benchmarks for practitioners assessing their own governance structures. By comparing their neighborhood governance to these models, practitioners can quickly identify strengths, weaknesses, and areas for improvement, particularly in terms of power balance and institutionalization. For instance, a balanced distribution of power is a critical factor in fostering meaningful participation in neighborhood governance. From this perspective, homeowners seeking to establish HOAs and local officials aiming to mediate neighborhood conflicts can use these ideal types to evaluate whether power dynamics are skewed and whether adjustments are necessary. If power is overly concentrated in certain organizations, they may need to encourage broader participation or break entrenched alliances to foster a more equitable governance structure. Conversely, if governance is too fragmented or unstructured, forming strategic alliances could help build stability and coordination. By applying these ideal types as diagnostic tools, practitioners can move beyond trial-and-error approaches and instead make more informed, strategic decisions to enhance governance effectiveness and collaboration in their neighborhoods.

This paper also has some limitations. One is that, like all typologies, the four types of governance structures are ideal types, which may not be able to

capture all the nuances in reality. In the real world, some neighborhoods may not fit neatly, and their boundaries are more blurred. The typologies developed in this paper are by no means an exhaustive or perfect reflection of all governance structures in reality. The goal is to deepen our understanding of how governance structures are formed from the perspective of power balance and institutionalization. I would argue that this framework is useful in explaining existing governance structures and predicting what structures may arise, but unfortunately, there will be a margin of error, and in some cases, the margin may be significant. Another limitation is that the networks under study were quite small—each network had about 4 to 7 organizations. The relationships between organizations may increase exponentially as more organizations are involved in networks. Large networks may have different patterns of interactions between organizations. Therefore, caution is needed when generalizing the conclusions to larger networks. Third, as a qualitative research, it is hard for this paper to provide “airtight proof for a causal inference” (Odell, 2001, p. 176) due to the fact that this method cannot control all possible causal factors. The strength of this paper is not to establish a causal relationship in any sense but to explore the “mechanisms” through which governance structures arise.

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# **The Income Effect of Job Turnover and its Policy Implications among Migrant Workers in Urban China**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Scholars have not reached an agreement about the impact of job turnover on wage change, especially about the patterns of job change and the impact of the previous job on wages. The existing studies have taken more account of individual factors such as human capital or social capital, rather than the special labor market structure of a floating population. In this paper, the Heckman model is used to analyze the impact of the characteristics of the previous job and the way of job turnover influences wage change and explore how human capital and social capital work for the mobility of migrant workers in a segmented labor market. Our results show that the higher the previous wage rate, the lower the marginal wage growth when changing jobs, while the impact of social capital on wage growth is insignificant. Wage growth has a significant effect on jobs requiring a college and above education, but its effect is insignificant for jobs without such requirements. These phenomena originate from the “Ceiling Effect” in the wages of the migrant workers in the secondary labor market. Migrant workers have been bound in the labor force structure due to the strong homogeneity of their social relationships. Only the workers who have enough human capital can successfully overcome this barrier.

**Keywords:** Job turnover, wage rate, migrant workers, labor market segmentation

# **El efecto de la rotación laboral en los ingresos y sus implicaciones políticas entre los trabajadores migrantes en la China urbana**

## **RESUMEN**

Los académicos no han llegado a un acuerdo sobre el impacto de la rotación laboral en el cambio salarial, especialmente sobre el impacto de la rotación laboral. Los estudios existentes han tomado más en cuenta factores individuales como el capital humano o el

capital social, en lugar de la estructura especial del mercado laboral de una población flotante. En este artículo, se utiliza el modelo de Heckman para analizar el impacto de las características del trabajo anterior y la forma en que la rotación laboral influye en el cambio salarial y explorar cómo el capital humano y el capital social funcionan para la movilidad de los trabajadores migrantes en un mercado laboral segmentado. Nuestros resultados muestran que cuanto mayor es la tasa salarial anterior, menor es el crecimiento salarial marginal al cambiar de trabajo, mientras que el impacto del capital social en el crecimiento salarial es insignificante. El crecimiento salarial tiene un efecto significativo en los trabajos que requieren una educación universitaria o superior, pero su efecto es insignificante para los trabajos que no requieren tales requisitos. Estos fenómenos se originan a partir del “efecto techo” en los salarios de los trabajadores migrantes en el mercado laboral secundario. Los trabajadores migrantes han estado atados a la estructura de la fuerza laboral debido a la fuerte homogeneidad de sus relaciones sociales. Solo los trabajadores que tienen suficiente capital humano pueden superar con éxito esta barrera.

**Palabras clave:** Rotación laboral, tasa salarial, trabajadores migrantes, segmentación del mercado laboral

## 中国城市农民工工作流动的收入效应及其政策启示

### 摘要

摘要：关于工作变动对工资变化的影响尚不存在学术定论，尤其是关于农民工作变动方式及前一份工作对收入的影响。现有研究更多考虑了人力资本或社会资本等个体因素，而较少考虑流动人口的特殊劳动力市场结构。本文利用Heckman模型来分析前一份工作的特征和工作变动方式对工资变化的影响，并探究在分割的劳动力市场中，人力资本和社会资本是如何为农民工的流动发挥作用的。研究结果表明，前一份工作的工资率越高，工作变动时的边际工资增长越低，而社会资本对工资增长的影响并不显著。工资增长对要求大学及以上学历的工作有显著影响，而对没有这种要求的工作影响不显著。这些现象源于农民工在二级劳动力市场工资的“天花板效应”。农民工由于社会关系的同质性较强而被束缚在劳动力结构中。只有拥有足够人力资本的工人才能成功突破这一障碍。

关键词：工作流动，工资率，农民工，劳动力市场分割

## 1. Introduction

As a driving force of China's urbanization, the number of rural-urban migrant workers has continuously increased since the early 1990s. By 2021, the total number of migrant workers was 29.56 million, accounting for 39.60% of China's total employment.<sup>[1]</sup> However, it is difficult for migrant workers to be fully integrated into urban societies due to a variety of institutional barriers, and their careers are generally associated with low income and frequent job turnovers.<sup>[2-5]</sup> From a macro perspective, there is obvious income inequality in China, especially urban-rural income inequality and east-west income inequality. Urban-rural income inequality prevents rural migrant workers from enjoying the same public resources, educational resources, and social benefits as urban employees. Migrant workers usually have fewer opportunities than urban employees for income growth or promotion without turnovers.<sup>[6]</sup> Income inequality between the East and the West makes migrant workers in the East have better development platforms, more development opportunities and more available positions than those in the Central and Western regions, and their possibilities for promotion are much greater than those in the Central and Western regions.<sup>[7]</sup> Studies have verified that migrant workers tend to change their jobs due to low wages or little skill enhancement in their previous jobs.<sup>[8, 9]</sup>

Research on whether job turnover can increase the wages of migrant workers is far from conclusive. Empiri-

cal studies found both positive<sup>[10, 11]</sup> and insignificant or even negative impacts.<sup>[12-14]</sup> Most existing research tends to explain these findings from the perspective of human capital or social capital without considering China's special labor market structure. A well-developed market environment is critical to the function of human capital and social capital. In a split labor market, the function of those factors is weakened. In addition, studies usually ignore the effects of the characteristics of workers' former jobs and their way of changing jobs on income. On the one hand, workers' decision to change jobs should be based on the trade-offs between the last job and the next job by comparing their wage rate, duration, occupation types, etc. On the other hand, workers' experience in their former jobs is one of the guiding factors for their employers. Research on these issues can provide insights for improving labor market policies and enhancing the income of migrant workers.

## 2. Literature Review

In the academic world, there have been many studies analyzing the impact of job changes on wage rates, with different results obtained by different scholars in different countries. Based on the analysis using the American National Longitudinal Survey data for young employees between 1979 and 2004, Munasinghe and Sigman found that workers with fewer job changes earned higher wages, and the impact of changing jobs became more significant after workers accumulated more work

experience.<sup>[15]</sup> Gottschalk and Moffitt found that job change could not bring wages up for American workers during the 1980s and the mid-1990s.<sup>[16]</sup> Light and McGarry showed that job change is negatively associated with wage rates, and workers with stable jobs usually earn more money.<sup>[17]</sup> With regard to the conditions of job change, Mattila argued that unemployment could be an important factor that determined the impact of job change on wage levels.<sup>[18]</sup> A worker's wage rate would increase significantly if he/she already had a job, while his/her return of job change would become insignificant if he/she had no job when taking a new job. A job change caused by economic and personal factors raises the wage rate, while a job change due to family factors has little impact on the wage rate, and a job dismissal has a negative impact on the wage rate.<sup>[19]</sup> Age should also be taken into account when explaining the effect of job change on wages. Young workers have wages increased after a job change, while such an effect diminishes for older workers.<sup>[20, 21]</sup>

Research on labor markets in Germany and the United Kingdom has found that job changes can lead to wage increases for low-income earners, with little change in income for middle- and high-income earners.<sup>[22]</sup> Research on EU countries found that occupational mobility is strongly associated with earnings mobility, and occupation movers are more likely than job movers to experience a downward rather than an upward earnings transition; by contrast, changing occupation voluntarily is more often followed by an upward wage transition.<sup>[23]</sup>

In China, some studies verified that the initial job change from agriculture to urban sectors could bring a remarkable income increase, but the following job changes among the urban sectors could not make significant changes.<sup>[5, 13]</sup> Moreover, an individual's job change frequency could be negatively related to the wage rates of migrant workers.<sup>[12]</sup> Other studies have found that job changes could contribute to higher wage rates.<sup>[9-10]</sup> Huang Qian found that an intra-sector job change has a positive effect on low-income workers, but a negative effect on high-income ones.<sup>[24]</sup> An inter-sector job change has a negative effect on wage rate among all groups. Wu and Cheng showed that the average wage of workers who resign from their former jobs is higher than that of the workers who are fired.<sup>[25]</sup> From the perspective of gender, Lv and Yao found that an initial job change of male migrant workers due to professional or family reasons could raise the wage rate in their new positions, while the wage change of female workers was much less in comparison with their male peers.<sup>[26]</sup>

Furthermore, some studies found that migrant workers with higher job stability earn more than those with lower job stability.<sup>[11]</sup> According to Li and Tian, job stability is beneficial to wage increases for migrant workers, but the benefits vary by workers' initial income level.<sup>[27]</sup> The marginal effect of job stability is diminishing for low and high-income workers but increasing for middle-income workers.<sup>[28]</sup>

With the continuous advancement

of market-oriented reform, China's labor market structure has gradually changed into a dual labor market structure, mainly manifested as the dual division of the urban labor market and the dual opposition of urban and rural areas.<sup>[29]</sup> According to different standards, the labor market can be divided into different sectors, such as public employment sector and private employment sector, skilled employment sector and unskilled employment sector, and urban household employment sector and foreign population employment sector.<sup>[30-31]</sup> A number of studies have analyzed the earnings of workers in this context. By analyzing the longitudinal survey data of the China Family Panel Studies (CFPS) between 2014 and 2020, Ma found that the wages of informal workers are generally lower than those of regular workers, and the discrimination against informal workers in the private sector is more serious than that in the public sector, which will lead to an increasing wage gap between informal workers and regular workers.<sup>[32]</sup> Wang found that China's labor market has regional differences and is segmented by industry, which hinders the process of labor market integration and is not conducive to the increase of migrant workers' income.<sup>[33]</sup> Cai argued that the household registration system hinders labor mobility and migration. At the same time, the government has relaxed the control on labor flow related to the rural household registration system.<sup>[34]</sup>

To date, there is no consensus on the impact of job changes on income. This is due to, on the one hand, the dif-

fering characteristics of labor markets, which result in variations in the income effects of job changes and a lack of comparability between different labor markets. On the other hand, previous studies have not fully considered the impact of the characteristics of the previous job on income changes, nor have they adequately addressed the influence of different ways of job changing on income variations. Taking migrant workers in urban China as an example, this study examines the impact of job changes and different ways of job change on income variations in China's unique dual labor market. Since wage changes include both changes in the wage itself and changes in the magnitude of wage increases, the study in this paper consists of the following two parts: This paper first uses the Mincer wage determination model<sup>[35]</sup> to analyze the impact of job changes on wages, and then applies the Heckman two-step model<sup>[36, 37]</sup> to analyze the impact of ways of job change and the characteristics of the previous job on the magnitude of wage change. Finally, policy recommendations are proposed based on the characteristics of the Chinese urban labor market.

### **3. Theoretical Analysis and Hypothesis Setting**

**H**uman capital theory provides the most powerful explanation of the relationship between a job change and wage rates, even though some studies have considerably different findings. Human capital theory shows that job turnover reduces the return of specific human capital, and

workers seldom obtain the same level of earnings after a job change, while the return of general human capital might be higher after a job change, as general human capital is not affected by job change. Therefore, the overall effects depend on concrete conditions.<sup>[38, 39]</sup> However, both job-search theory<sup>[40, 41]</sup> and job-matching theory<sup>[42, 43]</sup> indicate the positive impact of a job change on wage rates. When searching for new jobs, workers usually look for better positions, which may return higher productivity based on their own human capital. Even without any general human capital investment, a worker's wage in the new position can increase due to his/her working experience and a better searching strategy from familiarity with the labor market.

Specifically, the work experience accumulated by workers in their original jobs can help them better understand the supply and demand of the labor market and clearly know their positioning and advantages in the labor market, so as to find the next higher-paying position more efficiently and accurately. As for the channels of job hunting, they can obtain information through social networks, offline job fairs, industry forums, etc., and they can also strive for recommendations through the contacts they have accumulated in their previous jobs. In addition, job matching theory focuses on the fit between workers and jobs. In order to give full play to their knowledge, skills and advantages, workers are more inclined to find jobs that match their human capital.<sup>[42, 43]</sup> New employers also tend to pay these highly qualified peo-

ple more to make them willing to stay at the company. Therefore, this paper puts forward hypothesis 1.

**H1: Job changes have a significant positive impact on the wage rate.**

Human capital theory also focuses on the relationship between education and wages, emphasizing the important role that education plays in increasing human capital.<sup>[44]</sup> The theory argues that educational attainment enhances workers' knowledge and skills, increasing their human capital and adapting them to the demands of different jobs. On the one hand, highly educated people have a deeper specialized knowledge base. Their knowledge system allows them to adapt to jobs with high comprehensive thresholds, which usually pay higher salaries. On the other hand, people with higher education have better learning and information-processing ability. After job-hopping, they can master new knowledge and skills faster and adapt to the new environment more quickly. They will also get promoted faster and get higher salaries because of their educational advantage.<sup>[45]</sup> Therefore, this paper puts forward hypothesis 2.

**H2: Education level has a significant positive impact on income after job-hopping.**

When it comes to how the characteristics of the former job affect income, there are two well-known theories: bad jobs theory and entry port theory.<sup>[28]</sup> Bad jobs theory shows that precarious employment not only has immediate implications for individual incomes and



working conditions, but is also related to poor prospects for workers' future.<sup>[46]</sup> Entry port theory emphasizes that "bad jobs," while bringing some economic disadvantage in the short run, may constitute a route out of unemployment in the long term.<sup>[47, 48]</sup>

The characteristics of the previous job mainly include the wage of the previous job, the age of the worker at the time of job change and the duration of the last job.<sup>[49]</sup> Whether the salary of the previous job has reached the psychological expectation of the worker can affect the willingness of the worker to change jobs. And the higher the salary in the previous job, the more difficult it is for workers to get higher pay when they move within the industry, and the less likely there is to be a change in wages. The age of the worker at the time of job change reflects the status of the worker, such as whether he is married, whether he has children and the strength of labor output. Companies are more willing to invest in young workers because of their strong learning ability and high potential. Older workers have more experience, but also face problems such as lack of energy, and companies will be more cautious in setting wages. The duration of the previous job, i.e., the current working years. The longer this period, the more experience workers have accumulated in the field, and the higher the loyalty of workers to their positions. This makes it easy for them to gain recognition with new employers.

For job change patterns, Addison and Portugal referred to the main ones mentioned in the quarterly Labour

Force Survey(s): open advertisement, referral by friends, relatives or local friends, and self-employment.<sup>[50]</sup> These modes are mainly divided into external mode and internal mode. The former includes social networks and workers' networks, while the latter refers to the spontaneous movement of workers. The survey shows that different ways of moving jobs affect workers' wages. Therefore, this paper puts forward hypothesis 3.

**H3: The characteristics of the previous job and job change patterns have a significant effect on wage changes.**

## **4. Data and Methodology**

### **4.1. Data**

Data were obtained from a national survey among migrant workers in nine cities (Table 1). A total of 2,448 questionnaires were collected from June 2010 to September 2012. After removing the records with missing values, there were 2,271 observations left. The survey defined migrant workers as the population whose hukou (a household registration and residence permit in China, codified in 1958) is in a rural area, but has worked in the city for six months or more. Due to the high mobility of this group, it was challenging to select and finalize the sample. To make the sample more representative, we included both city communities and industrial zones (i.e., Industrial Parks as well as Economic and Technological Development Zones) at a ratio of 2:1, respec-

tively.\* Although the reasons for these migrant workers flowing into the city from the countryside are more than job changes, they have a high reference value because they have worked in the city for six months or more. When conduct-

ing the survey, a stratified random sampling approach was designed based on the distribution of migrant population in different cities, which was recorded by the Population Census in 2005.

**Table 1.** Summary of the Sample Characteristics

Variables		Observations	Share (%)
Location	Beijing	307	13.52
	Wenzhou	260	11.45
	Dongguan	280	12.33
	Qingdao	376	16.56
	Wuxi	227	10.00
	Shenyang	193	8.50
	Changsha	214	9.42
	Zhengzhou	221	9.73
	Wuhan	193	8.50
Gender	Male	1377	60.63
	Female	894	39.37
Education level	Elementary school and below	271	11.93
	Junior high school	850	37.43
	Senior high school or vocational training	644	28.36
	College education and above	506	22.28
Marriage status	Single	1118	49.23
	Married and others	1153	50.77
Type of source regions	City	208	9.16
	County town and small town	810	35.69
	Village	1252	55.15
Job change	Never changed	696	31.18
	Changed once	685	31.75
	Changed twice	508	21.58
	Changed for three times	229	9.20
	Changed for over three times	153	6.29
Age	Mean	Min	Max
	30.20	14	69
Working experience (years)		7.34	0.33 35.66

\* According to National Bureau of Statistics of China (2014), 35.5% of migrant workers in urban area worked and lived in the Industrial Zones, and the rest worked and lived in the other regions of an urban area, which is referred to as “city communities.” To be consistent with this distribution pattern, we sampled migrant workers from city communities and specialized industrial zones at a ratio of 2:1, respectively. In city communities, survey conductors randomly selected and visited residential addresses. If migrant workers were present at the selected addresses, they were asked to fill out the survey questionnaire. In Industrial Zones, enterprises were randomly selected. Survey conductors then visited the selected enterprises and recruited survey participants.

Migrant workers have the highest mobility among all the labor groups in China <sup>[5]</sup>. In our sample, 68.82% of migrant workers had changed jobs one or more times after moving to the urban sector, among whom 31.75% had changed once, 21.58% twice, and 15.49% three or more times. When the migrant workers were asked about the reasons for changing their last job, over a third (35.8%) of the respondents attributed it to unattractive income. One-

fifth wanted to change their working environment (18.86%).

Nearly a quarter (25.41%) of the migrant workers intended to change their current jobs, and 41.77% of them had job change experience due to a higher expectation for their wage. Unattractive income is obviously the major cause of frequent job changes among migrant workers. So, whether job change significantly raises their wages is a valid research question.

**Table 2.** Frequency of the reasons for job change

	Reason for changing the previous job		Reason for the intention of job change	
	n	%	n	%
Completion of the project or unemployment	414	13.46	28	4.85
Current wage lower than expectation	1101	35.8	241	41.77
Learn new knowledge and skills	187	6.08	72	12.48
Change an environment	580	18.86	101	17.5
Unstable or laborious job	298	9.69	87	15.08
No social security	13	0.42	1	0.18
Family and children's education	225	7.32	20	3.46
Interpersonal relationship	56	1.82	5	0.87
Others	201	6.54	22	3.81

#### **4.2. The Impact of Job Change**

We use the ordinary least square (OLS) regression model to examine the factors that affect the wage rate of migrant workers, especially the job change factor. Control variables related to job change are added to the model in order to rule out the effects of job change patterns. Following the Mincerian wage

function,<sup>[35]</sup> we divided the control variables into four groups – demographic characteristics, social capital characteristics, firm attributes, and geographical variables. A dummy variable, indicating whether the migrant worker has changed his/her job before, was also included in the model. The model is shown as follows:

$$\ln W_i = \alpha + \beta T_i + \gamma X_i + \delta_i \quad (1)$$

In this equation,  $\ln W_i$  is the logarithm of the monthly wage of worker  $i$ .  $T_i$  is a dummy variable indicating whether worker  $i$  has changed his/her job before.  $\beta$  is the frequency of job change or times of change in a given period.  $X_i$  is a vector of control variables affecting wage rate. The demographic variables such as gender, age, marital status, and education level are controlled. The variables related to social capital include the number of local friends in the host city, ways of obtaining a current job, and year of entry. Firm attributes include industry type, occupation, and pension participation. There are also three geographical variables, i.e., the characteristics of the origin city (Type – rural or urban area, and regional character – Eastern China, Western China or Middle China) and destination city (size and regional character), the size of the in-flow city, and the nature of the source, including the region of hometown and the urban-rural characteristics.

These control variables reflect the multisectoral structure of the labor market. Demographic variables and social capital variables account for the basic information and status of the floating population. Firm attributes reflect whether migrants belong to the public sector or the private sector and whether they belong to the technical sector or the non-technical sector. Geographical variables reflect whether the floating population belongs to the urban household sector or the foreign population sector.

### 4.3. *The Impact of Method of Job Change*

This study explores how the wage rate is affected by the type of last job and the way job changes are done by using the Heckman model. The Heckman selection model is mainly used to solve the problem of biased conclusions due to the non-randomness of the sample selection and is suitable for cases in which part of the sample is unobservable due to the survey design. In this study, not all of the respondents in our survey sample have experienced job change, which means there exists non-randomness in sample selection. For those having job change experience, the frequency of job change also varies. Our analysis could be biased if the observations were excluded without job change experience, since that worker's job changes do not happen randomly, but are triggered by various factors. Meanwhile, the Heckman model is used for regression where the explanatory variables are binary variables. The explanatory variables in this study contain two subsets, i.e., workers' demographic characteristics and other control variables, which meet the conditions of applicability. Thus, we used the Two-stage Sample Selection Estimator<sup>[36, 37]</sup> to solve the incidental truncation problem. The first stage is to employ the Probit model (Type II Tobit) to predict workers' job change and then use the Inverse Mills Ratio (IMR) of the predicted value from the first stage to examine how the type of last job and the way of job change affect workers' wage rate.

In the first step of the model, using “job change” as an explanatory variable in a Probit equation:

$$P_{k,i} = 1[a_k Z_i + \mu_{k,i} > 0] \quad (2)$$

In the function,  $P_{k,i}$  is the dummy variable indicating whether the worker  $i$  has experienced the  $k$ th job change or not.  $1[\ ]$  is an indicator function and  $Z_i$  is a set of explanation variables.  $\mu_{k,i}$  is the error term.  $Z_i$  includes two subsets of variables. One subset is the demographic characteristics of the workers, including gender (female = 1), age (six dummy variables are used – 25-30 years old, 30-35 years old, 35-40 years old, 40-45 years old, 45-50 years old, 50 years old or above), marital status (married = 1), education (three dummy variables are used – middle school, high school, and college and above), and residential register type (rural = 1). The other subset is the other control variables such as income, working years from leaving hometown, and hierarchy of the

The model of the first stage is shown below:

destination city (includes two dummy variables – province capital and prefectural cities, using Municipality as the control group). In addition, the dummy variables indicating the location of the destination city are also added in the first stage, including Middle China and Western China, and the dummy variables indicating the attribute of the origin city, including county, town, and rural area, using city as the control group, are added in the subset of other control variables, too.

In the second stage, the Inverse Mills Ratio is calculated based on the predicted values of the first stage and then plugged in the second stage function (function 3 and 4) as the independent variable.

$$\Delta w_i = w_{i,1} - w_{i,0} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 X_2 + \gamma X_3 + \phi \lambda_i + \mu_i \quad (3)$$

$$g w_i = (w_{i,1} - w_{i,0}) / w_{i,0} = \alpha + \beta_1 X_i + \beta_2 X_2 + \gamma X_3 + \phi \lambda_i + \mu_i \quad (4)$$

The dependent variable in equation (3) is the amount of wage growth and that in equation (4) is the growth of wages.  $X_i$  is a set of variables describing the characteristics of a worker's last job, such as wage and working duration, and both of them are continuous variables.  $X_2$  is a set of variables indicating the way their job changes, such as the age at the point of job change, mean of job change, and whether they change their positions and sectors. If

the job change is inter-sector, the dummy variable equals 1, while the dummy variable is 0 if it is an intra-sector job change. Change of position is classified into three categories – promotion, unchanged, and demotion, and we set the demotion as a control group. Ways of job change<sup>[50]</sup> include open advertisement, referral by friends, relatives or local friends, and self-employment. We set the open advertisement as the control group.  $X_3$  is a set of control vari-

ables, including gender, age, education attainment, hukou status, years of job change, and the characteristics of their hometown.

The characteristics of the last job, including salary levels and duration of work, are continuous variables. Change of industry has two values – inter-industrial shift and Intra-industrial shift, and the latter is defined as 0. Change of occupation is divided into three categories: declining, unchanged and rising according to the occupational status given by Li,<sup>[51]</sup> and declining is set as 0. Means of job change include open recruitment, introduction by intermediary organizations, referral by friends, relatives, or local friends, individual entrepreneurship and others, among which the open recruitment is set as 0. is the Inverse Mills Ratio calculated from equation (2).

## 5. Results

### 5.1. *The impact of job change on the wage rate*

Based on our analysis, the monthly wage rate of Chinese migrant workers was 2,712.94 CNY. Those who have never experienced a job change had the lowest wage rate (2,456.26 CNY), while those who have changed their job twice had a wage rate of 3,185.76 CNY per month. For those having changed jobs at least three times, their wage rate was slightly lower than the former group but still higher than those having changed once or never changed. For those who have changed their jobs several times, their average wage increased with each job change (Table 3).

**Table 3.** Average monthly wage by the frequency of job change (yuan)

	All	Never changed	Once	Twice	Three times	Four times	Over four times
<b>Current job</b>	2712.94	2456.26	2619.10	3185.76	2732.11	2729.41	2925.00
<b>First previous job</b>	1739.04		1556.15	1816.34	1832.06	2034.71	2592.24
<b>Second previous job</b>	1369.22			1200.66	1464.79	1643.53	2043.97
<b>Third previous job</b>	1172.62				980.14	1271.65	1761.55
<b>Fourth previous job</b>	1167.90					1041.41	1353.28
<b>Fifth previous job</b>	920.63						920.63

According to the regression results in Table 4, Adj. R-squared is 0.2938, and Prob>F=0, meaning the fitting effect is

ideal. Demographic and human capital variables generally have significant impacts on migrant workers' current

wage rate. The wage rate of males is higher than that of females. Taking the age group of 20 years old or younger as the reference group, we found that the impact of age is positive up to 35, then it becomes insignificant, and finally it turns negative after 50. The overall impact of age resembles an inverted “U” curve.

Compared with those having only elementary education or below, junior or senior high school graduates do not earn significantly higher wages, but college and above graduates gain more return from their human capital. Occupation has a significant influence, too. Compared with those general workers, self-employed businessmen, professionals, and managers have higher wages, and their differences are statistically significant. Venders, salesmen, administrative staff, and junior technicians have incomes that are not significantly different from those of general workers. These occupations also reflect professional skills and their returns.

With regard to social capital factors, we found that the flowing variable friendship with local people has a significant impact on the wage rate, but it is statistically significant only when one has nine or more friends. It also showed that social capital has a direct impact on income. This can also be partially confirmed by the way in which the job is obtained. Compared with public information, job referral from an intermediary agency on income has no significant impact, and neither does the job referral by friends or other migrant workers. However, the referral of local

friends in the city has a positive impact on workers’ income. The highest level of workers’ income is achieved through personal entrepreneurship.

Compared with the employees in the manufacturing industry, those working in the traditional service industry (such as the retailing and catering industry) have lower wage rates, and those in the construction industry have higher wages. No significant difference was found between other industries and manufacturing.

With regard to geographical variables, the nature of one’s hometown (rural or urban) does not have a significant difference in affecting one’s wage rate. However, great variation was found among those from the four regions in China. Compared with those from East China, migrant workers from Central and West China have lower wage rates, while those from the Northeast have similar earnings. Central and Western workers have disadvantages in competing with their Eastern counterparts. Compared with those flowing into the East, migrant workers flowing into the Center have lower wage levels. In addition, no significant wage gap exists between Chinese cities in our sample, except that those working in Beijing have higher incomes.

Table 4 shows that the adjusted R square of Model 1 is 0.3083. Other things being equal, job change has a significant impact on the current wage level. Compared with those without such change, those who have taken other jobs have higher wages. On the other hand, working time at the current job

has a significant influence. While controlling the other variables, the longer time one works, the higher income he or she can get. This raises a question: How would changing jobs be more conducive to the increase in wages?

**Table 4.** Examine wage rate with selected determinants (Model I)

		Wage rate (logged)	Coef.	Std. Err.
Job change	(No change = 0)	Change	0.08043***	0.024773
	Gender (Male=0)	Female	-0.22742***	0.023159
	Age	20-25	0.05803	0.042215
	(20 and below=0)	25-30	0.18655***	0.049865
		30-35	0.20890***	0.059113
		35-40	0.12514**	0.062582
		40-45	0.02855	0.064448
		45-50	0.05051	0.067321
		>50	-0.28228***	0.073033
	Marital status	Married	0.05175	0.033665
Demos- graphic variables and Human capital	Education level (Elementary educa- tion or below =0)	Junior high school	0.01486	0.037806
		Senior high school	0.05260	0.041893
		College and above	0.15262***	0.051667
	Occupations (Worker=0)	Vender and trader	0.19946	0.133576
		Salesman	0.14999	0.144847
		Administrative staff	0.20198	0.136396
		Junior technician	0.26744*	0.138690
		Businessman (self-em- ployed)	0.28063**	0.134928
		Professional and tech- nician	0.63139***	0.140330
		Manager	0.61023***	0.143926
		Other	0.82856***	0.174535
Social capital variables	Number of local friends (None=0)	1-2	0.00980	0.031581
		3-5	0.03178	0.030703
		6-8	0.05241	0.041813
		9 and more	0.10136***	0.033556



		Job agency	-0.02850	0.057584
	Means of obtaining the current job (Public information=0)	Introduction by relatives or fellow-townsmen	-0.00081	0.027774
		Introduction by local friends	0.08433*	0.047777
		Entrepreneurship	0.17528***	0.051418
		Other 0	0.10061*	0.059168
	Working years of current job		0.00848**	0.003365
		Agriculture and mining	0.02067	0.082115
		Construction	-0.14024*	0.084861
		Retail, catering, other service industry	0.02067	0.087526
Firm attributes	Industry (Manufacturing=0)	Information, finance, and other modern services, education, research, health, etc.	-0.15076*	0.090385
Institutional Factor	Hukou (Agricultural household=0)	Non-agricultural household	-0.04749	0.034050
	Contribution to pension (Yes=0)	Participation in local pension scheme	0.11807***	0.025883
	Original region (East=0)	Middle	-0.07833***	0.026357
		West	-0.03248	0.032817
Geographical variables	Characteristics of origin (City=0)	County Town	-0.07371	0.046850
		Small Town	-0.11301**	0.045975
		Township	-0.11770***	0.044717
	Destination (East=0)	Middle	-0.10138**	0.044587
	City hierarchy (First-tier city=0)	Provincial capital	-0.01826	0.049297
		Prefectural city	-0.14750***	0.035673
Constant			<b>7.50897</b>	0.160584

Note: the table does not give statistically insignificant variables (\*significance at 0.05 level,

\*\*significance at 0.01 level, \*\*\*significance at 0.001 level)

### ***5.2. How a job is changed can influence an increase in wages?***

After verifying that the workflow is conducive to wage increase, the Heckman model was used to analyze the way that job is changed and the impact of the previous job characteristics on wage change. The regression results are shown in Table 5. The table respectively reports the results of the regression based on the outcome equation and the regression based on the selection equation. The effective condition of the Heckman model is that the  $\lambda$  value is not zero and is statistically significant. The  $\lambda$  values estimated for the two model samples were 0.07693 and 0.04013, respectively, and were significant at the 1% significance level, so the Heckman model was effective. The overall fit statistic of the model. Wald chi2 (35) is equal to 789.14 and is significant at the 1% significance level, indicating that the overall regression effect of the model is still good.

According to the results of model (3) and (4), in the case of controlling other variables, the characteristics of the previous job and the majority of the variables in the ways of changing jobs have a significant impact on income changes. No matter whether in model (3) or model (4), compared with open recruitment, individual entrepreneurship has the largest positive effect on either absolute wage increase or its relative change. A job change found through one's social network does not necessarily bring more benefits than public recruitment or the introduction of an intermediary agency.

One's occupational change affects his or her wage change, too. Compared with occupational downward mobility, occupational stability has a significant positive impact on one's wage change, and the effect of occupational downward mobility is even stronger. However, no significant differences are found for relative wage change.

One's previous job also affects his or her wage change. For both absolute and relative wage rates, the higher the wage of the previous job, the smaller the wage change due to a job change. The age at the time of replacement work has a significant impact. The lower the age, the greater the benefits of job change, and the job change places older workers at a disadvantage position.

Whether it is for relative income or for absolute income, the duration of the previous job has a significant impact on wage changes. The longer the duration of the last job, the greater the salary increase brought by the job change. The income level of the previous job also has a negative impact on the absolute wage, but no effect on the relative wage changes.

While controlling other variables, females gain less than males from a job change, and so do older workers relative to younger ones. Education level has a significant impact; compared with primary education or below, a college degree or above can substantially increase the wage rate, but a high school diploma does not have the same effect. Those from East China have more opportunities to benefit from a job change than those from Central and West Chi-

na. Compared to workers from cities, workers from the countryside usually experience negative changes in income. This reflects the disadvantages of the population from the western region and from rural areas in the labor market. Finally, the impact of the hukou is not significant.

In addition, the period of job change has a significant impact on both absolute wage change and relative wage

change. Compared with job changes after 2009, the benefit of changing jobs has become far more notable, since the year 2008 was the time that the China's economy encountered the global financial crisis. This performance is more pronounced in the absolute income model because the absolute income has changed even more under the same wage growth rate as the overall wage level increases.

**Table 5.** Regression results of job change and its attributes on wage change.

terms	Independent variables	Model 3		Model 4	
		Coef.	Std. Err.	Coef.	Std. Err.
Ways to change job (Public recruitment=0)	Intermediary agency	0.0209	0.0594	0.4965	0.5118
	Introduction by relatives or fellow townsmen	0.0258	0.0286	0.2445	0.2463
	Introduction by local friends	0.0256	0.0502	0.5829	0.4325
	Individual entrepreneurship	0.3461***	0.0430	2.3019***	0.3686
	Others	0.1906***	0.0620	1.3293**	0.5339
Industrial change (Inter-industrial change=0)	Intra-industrial change	-0.0189	0.0277	-0.4193*	0.2384
Occupational status (downward mobility=0)	Stability	0.0641	0.0393	-0.0393	0.3383
	Ascendency	0.0718*	0.0417	0.3668	0.3582
Wage of the previous job		-0.0002***	9.16E-06	-0.0005***	7.88E-05
Age of job change		-0.0051***	0.0018	-0.0132	0.0156
Duration of the previous job		0.0478***	0.0041	0.2329***	0.0352
Year of job change (After 2009=0)	Before 2003	0.2579***	0.0036	2.3003***	0.4092
	2003-2007	0.0840**	0.0475	0.2139	0.2831
	2008-2009	0.0176	0.0329	0.0151	0.2591
Gender (male=0)	Female	-0.1391***	0.0258	-0.3750*	0.2226

Marriage status (Unmarried=0)	Married	0.0629**	0.0313	-0.3755	0.2694
Education level (Primary school or below=0)	Junior high school	0.0238	0.0390	0.1127	0.3358
	Senior high school	0.0351	0.0427	0.2614	0.3673
	College and above	0.1811***	0.0530	0.1264	0.4564
Hukou (Agricultural household=0)	Non-agricultural household	-0.004	0.0403	0.4721	0.3468
Source region (East=0)	Central	-0.0317	0.0263	-0.0230	0.2264
	West	-0.0710**	0.0344	-0.4912*	0.2963
Urban or Rural (Urban=0)	County city	-0.1103**	0.0563	-0.5917	0.4844
	Township	-0.1521***	0.0555	-0.8823*	0.4772
	Rural	-0.1232**	0.0538	-0.6157	0.4630
_cons		36.0193***	7.1926	430.1615***	61.6850
<b>Results of the Heckman Model</b>					
		Model 3		Model 4	
Gender (male=0)	Female	-0.0791***	0.02538	-0.0798***	0.02537
age		-0.0176***	0.00194	-0.0177***	0.00194
Education level (Primary school or below=0)	Junior high school	0.0296	0.04191	0.0301	0.04189
	Senior high school	0.0527	0.04481	0.0517	0.04479
	College and above	-0.0845	0.05219	-0.0846	0.05217
Hukou (Agricultural household=0)	Non-agricultural household	-0.1100***	0.03465	-0.1097***	0.03464
Working years out of hometown		0.0506***	0.00241	0.0507***	0.00241
Marriage status (Unmarried=0)	Married	0.0129	0.03334	0.0164	0.03331
Municipality level (province level=0)	Provincial capital	-0.1507***	0.03915	-0.1491***	0.03913
	Prefecture-level	-0.0690*	0.03745	-0.0698*	0.03743
_cons		-0.6644***	0.07964	-0.6606***	0.07961
Mills	Lambda	0.0401	0.07798	0.0769	0.66967
Rho		0.0661		0.0147	
Sigma		0.6075		5.2231	
Wald chi2 (23)		856.1000		228.9500	
Prob > chi2		0		0	

Note: the table does not give statistically insignificant variables (\*significance at 0.05 level, \*\*significance at 0.01 level, \*\*\*significance at 0.001 level)

## **6. Conclusion and Policy implications**

**T**his paper confirmed that job change has played a significant role in promoting the wages of the floating population, which is consistent with many other research findings. At the same time, the Heckman model demonstrated that the way in which a job is changed and the characteristics of the previous job have a significant impact on wage change. The effects of control variables such as age, education level, gender, etc., are consistent with the findings in other studies.<sup>[19-2226]</sup> In addition, the income drop in cross-industry job change indicates the loss of dedicated human capital.<sup>[21]</sup>

This research also contributes some important findings to the literature. First, compared with open recruitment, the way a job is found and secured through social relations has little effect on the change of income, and the impact of social capital is insignificant. However, a new job obtained by individual entrepreneurs can effectively lift their income level. Second, the higher the income level of the previous job, the lower the wage growth from the job change. Third, the level of education has the most significant positive effect on income after job change. These three results are related to the special labor market in which the floating population is located.

China's labor market is a multi-divisional market. There are clear divisions between public ownership and non-public ownership, non-technical

market and professional technology market, urban household labor market, and foreign population labor market.<sup>[30-31]</sup> The floating population is basically employed in the secondary labor market of non-public and non-technical industries, and it is difficult to break through to the primary labor market. Even within state-owned enterprises and institutions, there are two distinct employment systems and income distribution mechanisms both within and outside the system, using "in-code" and "non-in-code" methods.<sup>[52]</sup> In labor-intensive industrial sectors or links, state-owned enterprises and institutions often recruit employees from the market in a non-formulated form, or reach employment agreements with labor dispatch companies through labor intermediaries. In such a secondary labor market, there is a "glass ceiling" in the wages of the floating population,<sup>[5]</sup> and it is difficult to break through after reaching a certain level. This is why the higher the salary level of the previous job, the lower the income growth from a job change. From the perspective of social relations, their influence is not significant because the social relations of the floating population are dominated by strong relationships and have high homogeneity. These relationships are basically in the same or similar classes and are limited to the secondary labor market. It is difficult to obtain a higher level of labor market relations, and it is also not easy to make a breakthrough. From the perspective of human capital, only when it reaches a certain level (up to a college degree or above), the impact is significant, and it can break through

the restrictions of the secondary labor market.

One last important conclusion is that the longer the duration of the previous job, the greater the benefit of the job change. The results seem to be inconsistent with the conclusion that job change has a positive effect on wage income. The actual situation is that on the one hand, when job duration reaches a certain limit, it is difficult for income to increase without promotion. At this time, a job change is conducive to the increase in wages; on the other hand, when a migrant worker has taken a certain job for a long period of time, the accumulated experience and skills are recognized by the next employer, so frequent job change is not ideal for income increase. This also shows that for the floating population, wage growth is sticky within the enterprise. The wages of the floating population will not grow with an increase of work experience in one company. However, through job change, past experience and skills may be recognized by new companies. From this point of view, the job change of the floating population is the result of rational choice. This also explains why some studies believe that the working stability of the floating population has a positive effect on wage growth, and some other studies have concluded that job change will help to increase the income of the floating population.

The policy implications of this study are as follows:

Firstly, promote the integration of the labor market. Accelerate the establishment of a unified human resource market for both urban and rural areas to coordinate urban and rural employment. By leveraging legal governance and competitive mechanisms, we can break down occupational heredity and encourage individuals to achieve career advancement through their own efforts.

Secondly, eliminate obstacles posed by the household registration system. Reform the household registration system to reduce mobility barriers between urban and rural areas, lower the threshold for settling in cities, and facilitate the orderly transition of farmers who have stable employment and reside in towns into urban residents.

Thirdly, improve the social support system. The government and society should provide more vocational training and educational opportunities to help the workforce upgrade their skills and enhance their employment competitiveness. At the same time, the social security system should be improved to ensure that the workforce receives basic living and medical security during their mobility.

Fourthly, enhance the quality of the workforce. With economic development and the upgrading of industrial structures, the demand for highly skilled talents is increasing. Laborers need to continuously upgrade their skill levels and comprehensive qualities to adapt to market changes.

**Acknowledgments:** This work was supported by National Natural Science Foundation of China (grant numbers: 42371197 and 41871129).

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# The Evolution of Chinese Policy Studies: A Bibliometric Analysis from 2000 to 2024

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## ABSTRACT

Despite extensive literature on Chinese public administration, there is a notable gap in providing comprehensive syntheses focusing specifically on Chinese public policy research. To address this gap, we analyzed 155 key articles published in leading policy journals from 2000 to June 2024. Utilizing bibliometric and content analysis, this study maps publication trends, collaboration networks, evolving research focus, influential theoretical foundations, and methodological applications. Our findings highlight a transition in Chinese policy research from theory borrowing to theorizing, and from descriptive analyses focusing on social policy to a multifaceted approach across different policy domains. Chinese policy studies increasingly leverage local experiences to enrich and contribute to policy theory. Finally, our findings underscore the need for rigorous research designs examining emerging policy issues to advance the field further.

**Keywords:** Chinese Policy Studies, Bibliometric Analysis, Policy Implementation, Theoretical Evolution, Methodological Application

# La evolución de los estudios de política china: Un análisis bibliométrico de 2000 a 2024

## RESUMEN

A pesar de la extensa literatura sobre la administración pública china, existe una notable carencia en la elaboración de síntesis exhaustivas centradas específicamente en la investigación sobre políticas públicas chinas. Para abordar esta carencia, analizamos 155 artículos clave publicados en importantes revistas de política entre 2000 y junio de 2024. Mediante análisis bibliométrico y de contenido, este estudio mapea las tendencias de publicación, las redes de colaboración, la evolución del enfoque de investigación, los fundamentos teóricos influyentes y las aplicaciones metodológicas. Nuestros hallazgos destacan una transición en la investigación sobre políticas chinas desde la adopción de teorías a la teorización, y desde análisis descriptivos centrados en la política social a un enfoque multifacético en diferentes ámbitos de la política. Los estudios de política china aprovechan cada vez más las experiencias locales para enriquecer y contribuir a la teoría de políticas. Finalmente, nuestros hallazgos subrayan la necesidad de diseños de investigación rigurosos que examinen cuestiones políticas emergentes para impulsar el campo.

**Palabras clave:** Estudios de política china, Análisis bibliométrico, Implementación de políticas, Evolución teórica, Aplicación metodológica

# 中国政策研究的演变：2000年至2024年的文献计量分析

## 摘要

尽管关于中国公共行政的文献有很多，但在“聚焦于中国公共政策研究的全面综述”方面存在明显的空白。为了填补该研究空白，我们分析了2000年至2024年6月期间发表在主要政策期刊上的155篇重要论文。本研究运用文献计量法和内容分析法，描绘了出版趋势、协作网络、不断发展的研究重点、有影响力的理论基础、以及方法论应用。我们的研究结果强调了中国政策研究从理论借鉴到理论化的转变，从侧重于社会政策的描述性分析转变到涵盖不同政策领域的多层面方法。中国政策研究越来越多地利用本土经验来丰富政策理

论并对其作贡献。最后，我们的研究结果强调，需要严谨的研究设计来分析新兴的政策问题，以进一步推动该领域的发展。

关键词：中国政策研究，文献计量分析，政策实施，理论演变，方法论应用

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## 1. Introduction

Chinese policy research has gained increasing scholarly attention due to China's unique political system and intricate policy-making processes (Li and Zhang, 2021; Yang and Yi, 2023; Zhang et al., 2018). The growing presence of such studies in leading international journals reflects the theoretical and practical significance of understanding China's governance mechanisms (Li and Zhang, 2021; Kim et al., 2019). Scholars in this field examine the applicability and limitations of Western policy theories across different institutional contexts while developing new theoretical frameworks inspired by China's unique institutional setting (Li and Zhang, 2021; Liu et al., 2022).

Existing literature reviews on Chinese policy studies predominantly fall into two distinct yet interconnected categories. The first synthesizes research within specific policy domains or evaluates the application of established Western policy theories in China, such as studies on technology policy (Sun and Zhang, 2008), circular economy policy (Cui and Zhang, 2018), and policy innovation theory (Zhao and Gu, 2022). These reviews test theoretic-

cal boundaries and highlight the need for theoretical adaptation in China. The second stream, embedded within public administration scholarship, provides broader insights into Chinese policy research development through comprehensive analyses of publication patterns, research themes, and intellectual influences (Zhang et al. 2017; Kim et al. 2019; Li and Zhang 2021).

Despite existing contributions, a systematic review of Chinese policy studies is still lacking. Most reviews focus on Chinese public administration broadly, without specifically identifying policy studies as an independent field. Consequently, we lack a clear understanding of this field's evolution, particularly how research priorities and theoretical frameworks have shifted alongside China's changing governance challenges. This gap is especially relevant following the recent recognition of Public Policy as a formal subdiscipline within Public Administration in China. Moreover, key elements like influential scholars, research networks, and major themes across policy journals remain underexplored.

To address the gap, we conduct a comprehensive analysis of Chinese policy research by examining 155 articles published in leading policy jour-

nals from 2000 to June 2024. The study employs bibliometric analysis to map the field's intellectual structure, while applying content analysis to examine research characteristics, including analytical levels, data sources, and methodological approaches. This comprehensive examination aims to illuminate the development trajectory and future directions of Chinese policy studies.

The next section critically reviews existing literature on the development of Chinese public policy research as a field. Section 3 outlines data collection and analytical procedures. Sections 4 and 5 present findings on publication trends, collaboration networks, thematic developments, theoretical orientations, and methodological approaches. Finally, we look ahead to the future of Chinese policy studies.

## **2. Literature Review on Chinese Public Policy and Public Administration Research**

Most literature reviews on Chinese policy studies focus on specific policy domains or the application of Western policy theories to China's context, offering insights into how these frameworks are adapted to the country's unique institutional environments. For example, Cui and Zhang (2018) used a bibliometric review to trace the co-evolution of circular economy policy and academic research in China, revealing strong policy-research feedback loops over time. In the area of science and technology policy, Sun and Zhang (2008, 2016) identified the national innovation system and industrial

policy tools as dominant themes, based largely on qualitative analysis of core journal articles. Zhao and Gu (2022) reviewed the development of policy innovation theory in the Chinese context, highlighting how concepts such as incremental and collaborative innovation have been adapted and expanded through local governance practices.

A second body of literature approaches Chinese policy research from within the broader framework of public administration. Rather than focusing on specific policy sectors, these studies take a disciplinary lens to examine how policy-related scholarship has evolved in China, especially in terms of publication trends, research themes, and methodological choices. Liu and Li (2013) reviewed publications in Chinese Public Administration, analyzing scholars' backgrounds, thematic shifts, and methodological shortcomings. Zhang et al. (2017) investigated the growing contributions of mainland scholars in international public administration journals, identifying emerging collaboration patterns. Kim et al. (2019) further examined trends in publication volume, geographic distribution, and qualitative dominance in top English-language journals. Li and Zhang (2021) conducted a systematic review of Chinese research in nine leading public administration journals between 2002 and 2020, revealing that most studies applied or extended Western theories.

Most recently, Yang and Yi (2023) offered a valuable synthesis of the frontiers of policy process research in China, identifying five key areas: agenda-setting, decision-making, ex-

perimentation, implementation, and diffusion. However, while their study highlights the emerging research directions, it does not provide a comprehensive mapping of the field’s intellectual structure, theoretical foundations, and institutional dynamics.

**Table 1.** Review of Key Literature on Chinese Policy and Public Administration Research

Article	Coverage	Area	Conclusion
Yang and Yi, 2023	Frontiers of Policy Process Research in China	Public Policy	Five important studies: agenda setting, decision-making, policy experimentation, policy implementation, and policy diffusion
Li and Zhang, 2021	Chinese Public Administration Research in top PA Journal	Public Administration	Contributed in theory testing and extension.
Kim et al., 2019	Publications in Top English Journals from Mainland China (1996–2016)	Public Administration	Important topic: social development and administrative reform; Qualitative method dominates.
Zhang et al., 2017	Chinese Public Administration Research from the Social Science Citation Index database (2000–2014)	Public Administration	Mainland China scholars play an important role in Chinese public administration studies.
Wu et al., 2013	Research published in top PA journals of mainland China and Taiwan (1998–2007)	Public Administration	Chinese policy scholars lack attention to research methods

Note: This table is adapted from Kim et al., (2019), and Li and Zhang (2021).

Despite these valuable contributions, the field lacks a systematic synthesis that captures the intellectual landscape of Chinese public policy studies as a distinct field. Domain-specific reviews often illuminate how Western theories are adapted to China’s institutional reality, yet they remain fragmented and narrowly scoped. Conversely, public administration reviews address broader disciplinary trends but seldom engage with public policy as a theoretically instinct domain. Even recent efforts, such as Yang and Yi’s (2023) synthesis of policy process research, are centered on a specific thematic subfield and do not attempt to map the broader structure, scope, or evolution of Chinese public policy studies.

The limited attention to public policy as a cohesive field is understandable, given its traditional status as a

subfield within public administration in China. However, recent institutional changes underscore the need for a more focused assessment. In May 2023, the Academic Degrees Committee of the State Council officially elevated Public Policy as a secondary discipline under Public Administration. This institutional elevation reflects not only the growing relevance of policy expertise in China's governance system but also the academic community's recognition of public policy as an independent domain of inquiry. In this context, a systematic review of the field's development—encompassing its research themes, theoretical orientations, methodological trends, and patterns of scholarly collaboration—has become both timely and necessary for consolidating knowledge and guiding future scholarship.

### 3. Methodology

To comprehensively understand the intellectual structure of Chinese policy research, this study

employs a mixed-methods design, combining quantitative bibliometric analysis with qualitative content analysis.

#### 3.1 Article Selection

Our systematic review focuses on articles published in nine high-impact, peer-reviewed journals in public policy. These journals were carefully selected based on their sustained academic influence and established contribution to advancing theoretical and methodological innovations in public policy research. The journals include: *Review of Policy Research*, *Policy and Society*, *Policy and Politics*, *Climate Policy*, *Journal of European Public Policy*, *Policy Studies Journal*, *Journal of Policy Analysis and Management*, *Journal of Public Policy*, and *Policy Sciences*. Table 2 shows the latest impact factors of these journals, providing a comprehensive view of their recent academic influence.

Table 2. Policy Journals Impact Factor (2019–2023)

Journal Name	2023 JIF	2022 JIF	2021 JIF	2020 JIF	2019 JIF
<i>Policy and Society</i>	5.700	9.300	10.104	4.231	3.050
<i>Climate Policy</i>	5.300	7.100	6.056	5.085	4.011
<i>Journal of European Public Policy</i>	4.600	4.200	4.366	7.399	4.177
<i>Policy and Politics</i>	4.300	4.700	3.297	3.750	3.069
<i>Policy Studies Journal</i>	4.100	3.800	4.775	5.141	3.797
<i>Policy Sciences</i>	3.800	5.300	5.121	3.846	3.609
<i>Journal of Policy Analysis and Management</i>	2.600	3.800	4.585	4.714	5.018
<i>Review of Policy Research</i>	2.300	2.100	2.328	2.000	1.548
<i>Journal of Public Policy</i>	1.900	2.400	2.611	2.517	1.750



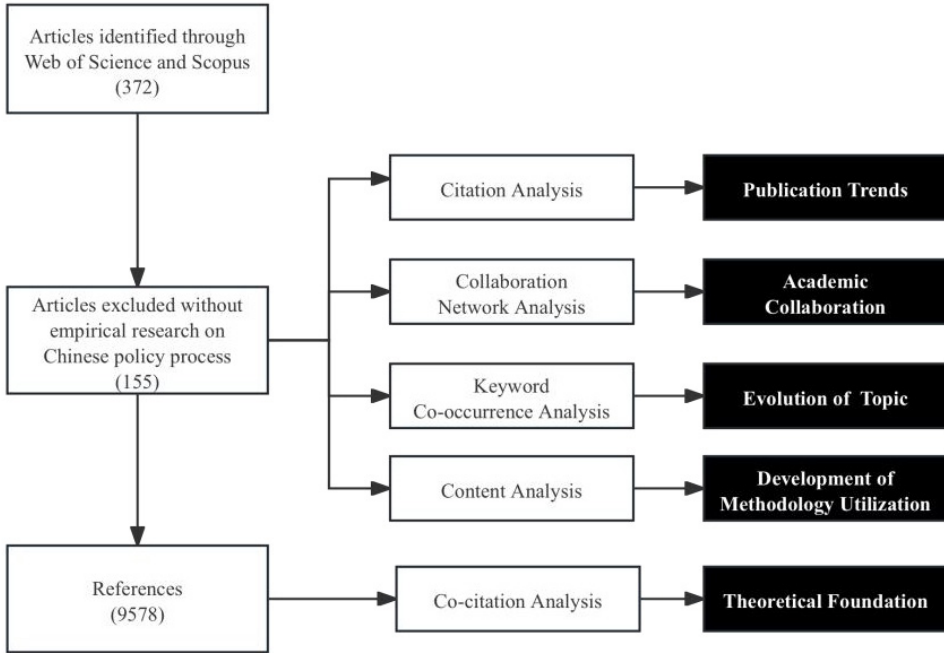
This dataset was established in June 2024. We employed a systematic two-stage screening process to identify relevant literature. In the first stage, we conducted a comprehensive search across Scopus and Web of Science databases, using the keywords “China” or “Chinese” to screen titles, abstracts, and keywords of publications from 2000 to 2024. The year 2000 was chosen as the starting point for this analysis because it marks a significant juncture in China’s modern policy-making landscape, coinciding with China’s rapid economic expansion and increased integration into global systems following its entry into the World Trade Organization in 2001. This period heralded substantial shifts in the policy process, making it a critical era for studying the evolution of Chinese policy research. It was also the year when China’s first public policy school was established (Zhang & Chan, 2020). This preliminary search yielded 372 articles.

Subsequently, through careful reading of abstracts and methodological sections, we refined our sample to 155 articles that focused primarily on Chinese policies, rather than articles that merely mentioned Chinese policy as contextual background or examples. We extracted and compiled detailed bibliometric data, including publication titles, author affiliations, source titles, publication types, abstracts, publication years, author keywords, citation counts, and references, storing all information in BibTeX format. From our dataset of 155 articles, we identified 156 institutions, 317 keywords, and 9,578 references.

### **3.2 Bibliometric and Content Analysis**

Our analysis consists of four main steps as shown in Figure 1, utilizing a mixed-methods framework that integrates both quantitative and qualitative analyses to offer a comprehensive understanding of the field. Bibliometric analysis, through quantitative analysis of publication counts, citation data, and other metrics, helps evaluate field development, key contributors, intellectual structure, and evolutionary trends. We utilized the bibliometrix package in R, which provides a comprehensive set of tools, following the science mapping workflow. First of all, we begin with descriptive statistics to identify publication trends and key contributors. Building on the document X attribute matrix, we further develop a network matrix that includes collaboration, keyword co-occurrence, and co-citation of references.

Institutional collaborations are one of the primary forms of scientific cooperation that enhances institutional influence and accelerates knowledge dissemination (Ye et al., 2012). Evidence shows collaborative research receives higher citations (Presser, 1980), partially supporting its quality-enhancing effects. Analysis of institutional collaboration networks reveals how knowledge production is organized and evolves within a field. Institutional collaboration refers to the co-authorship of publications by researchers affiliated with different institutions, indicating formal or informal research partnerships. To represent these collaborative



*Figure 1.* Research Procedure

ties, we construct a network where each node denotes a distinct institution, and connections are formed when researchers from different institutions co-author a paper. The intensity of each link—measured by its weight—reflects the number of joint publications between the institutions. This network is particularly crucial for Chinese policy studies, as it facilitates a dialog between indigenous policy practices and international theoretical frameworks. For analytical robustness and to focus on major patterns, we only include institutions ranking in the top 10% by publication volume. The Walktrap clustering algorithm is employed to discern major collaboration clusters, thereby enhancing our understanding of institutional collaboration patterns.

Next, we turned to analyzing research themes using keyword co-oc-

currence networks. Keywords can succinctly summarize critical content from articles and serve as valuable text-mining material (Li et al., 2016). Keyword co-occurrence refers to the phenomenon where two keywords appear together within the same article, suggesting a potential conceptual or thematic association between them. To transform co-occurrence relationships into a structured form, we built a network in which each node corresponds to a unique keyword. An edge is established between two nodes if the corresponding keywords appear together in at least one article. The strength of such a connection—represented by edge weight—reflects how many times the keyword pair co-occurs across all articles in the dataset (Law et al., 1998). Unlike word clouds that display isolated keyword frequencies, co-occurrence

networks reveal how research topics are interrelated, uncovering latent conceptual linkages and the overall thematic architecture of the field (Lozano et al., 2019). After refinement and standardization of the keyword list, we identified 317 keywords in the selected articles. To highlight dominant themes, we retained 53 keywords appearing at least three times. Using the Walktrap clustering algorithm, we revealed key themes. Additionally, we examined temporal trends of the top ten keywords by frequency, excluding geographic terms, to trace the thematic evolution of the field.

Third, we conducted a co-citation analysis of references to understand the key theoretical foundations underlying these themes. Co-citation occurs when two published articles jointly cite some earlier publications as references (Small, 1973). From our dataset of 155 articles, we obtained 9,578 references and calculated their citation frequencies. Since the citation frequency of an article indicates its influence on field development (Chabowski et al., 2011), we selected the top 51 most cited references (cited >4 times, top 0.5%). To visualize the intellectual linkages among these highly cited works, we constructed a co-citation network in which each node represents a cited article. A tie is formed between two nodes if they are co-cited by the same source article, and the strength of the tie corresponds to the number of times the pair is co-cited across the dataset. Using the bibliometric package, we generated this network and applied the Walktrap clustering algorithm to identify theoretical clusters. This network reveals how foundational

studies group together, providing insight into the major conceptual building blocks of Chinese policy research.

Finally, to complement these quantitative analyses with qualitative insights, we conducted content analysis following established frameworks in Chinese public administration research (Li and Zhang, 2021). Our coding scheme systematically categorized articles based on multiple dimensions: case type (single or comparative), government level (national, provincial, and local), study type (empirical or theoretical), methodology (quantitative, qualitative, or mixed), data sources, and policy areas.

By combining these analytical tools, we provide a comprehensive examination of the development, current state, and future directions of Chinese policy research. This multi-faceted approach allows us to identify trends in publication, research topics, theoretical contributions, and methodological approaches, while also providing insights into the intellectual structure of the field and its evolution over time.

#### **4. Dynamics of the Field: Publication Trends and Collaboration**

**T**his section analyzes the publication trend and collaborative patterns in Chinese policy research. Tracking these patterns helps reveal how the field has developed over time and identifies the major institutional actors contributing to its development.

#### **4.1 Publication Trends and Key Contributors**

From 2000 to June 2024, Chinese policy research has exhibited remarkable growth, publishing 155 articles across nine leading public policy journals, with an average annual growth rate of 7.36% and 20.2 citations per article. While all analyses in this study rely on data collected through June 2024, Figure 2 has been separately updated to reflect publication counts through December 2024 to avoid the false impression of a sharp decline in the final year. Analysis of publication patterns reveals three distinct developmental phases, each characterized by unique dynamics and trends in research output.

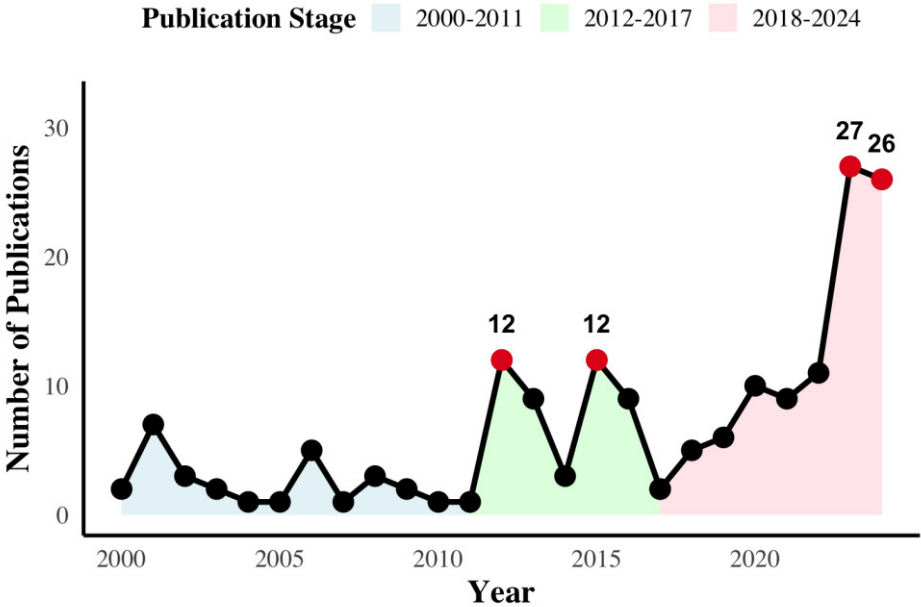
**The Initial Phase (2000–2011)** laid the foundation for Chinese policy research, characterized by modest and fluctuating publication numbers that reflected the field's exploratory nature. During this period, annual publications ranged from as few as one article to occasional peaks of seven articles (2001) and five articles (2006). The inconsistent output, averaging 2.4 articles annually, suggests that research was still developing, with scholars gradually establishing their presence in the international academic community.

**The Expansion Phase (2012–2017)** was marked by substantial growth in publications. There were two notable peaks of 12 publications each in 2012 and 2015, with an impressive average of 7.8 articles annually. Even its least productive year outperformed most years in the initial phase (2000–2001). This demonstrates the field's growing

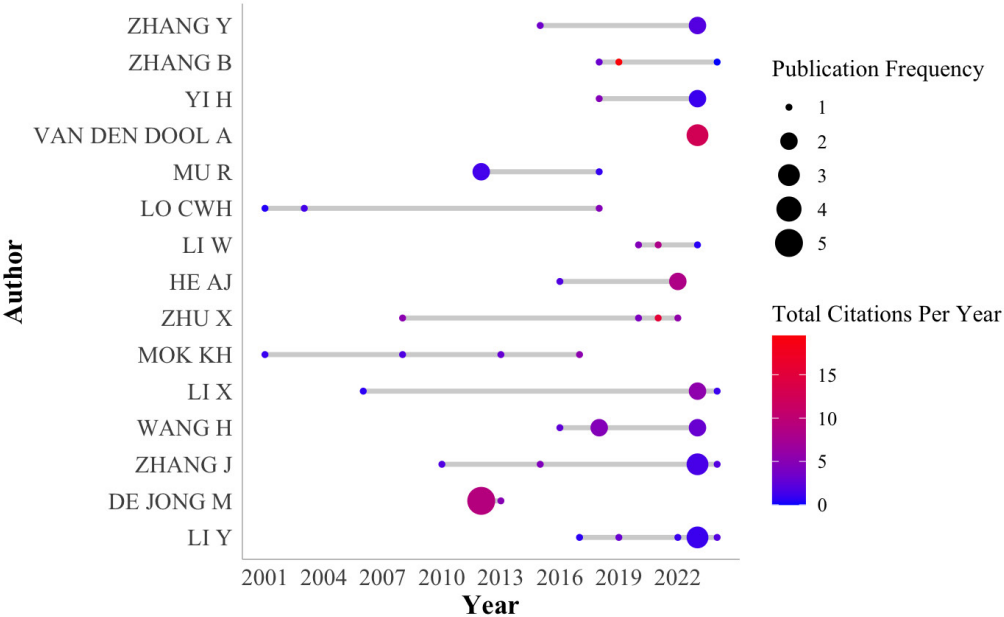
maturity and increasing international recognition. This phase aligns with the post-2008 global financial crisis era, during which the Chinese government launched large-scale stimulus programs and expanded policy experimentation. China's relatively effective response to the crisis, together with growing scholarly interest in state capacity, fiscal intervention, and crisis governance, contributed to increased attention to implementation, budgeting, and innovation in the Chinese context.

**The Current Phase (2018–2024)** represents a maturing stage for this area, characterized by both stability and groundbreaking achievements. During this period, there was an unprecedented growth in the number of published papers, reaching an extraordinary peak of 27 in 2023. This phase has maintained a strong baseline of at least five publications per year, with a high average of 11.3 publications per year. The strong performance from 2020 to 2024, with an average of 13.6 publications per year, is particularly impressive, highlighting the growing momentum and wide-ranging scope of the field. This continuing high level of production signals not only rising research capacity and institutional support but also a growing international interest in Chinese policy research.

The distribution of publications across journals reveals variations, reflecting different editorial focuses and research priorities within Chinese policy studies. *Review of Policy Research* published the most Chinese public policy research articles (46), making up



**Figure 2.** Publication Trend in Top Public Policy Journals (2000–2024)  
(Red highlights the top three peak years; different colors indicate distinct development stages. Data for 2024 has been updated through December for this figure only, to ensure clarity in year-on-year comparisons. Other figures and analyses reflect data through June 2024.)



**Figure 3.** Publication Activity and Citation Rate Over Time by Top 15 Most Prolific Authors

about 30% of total publications. This is followed by *Policy and Society* (28), *Policy and Politics* (15), and *Climate Policy* (15). Among the nine journals, *Journal of European Public Policy* published the fewest related articles (1), possibly due to its focus on European policy research. The only article in that journal compared public governance preferences for AI technology across Germany, UK, India, Chile, and China (Ehret, 2022).

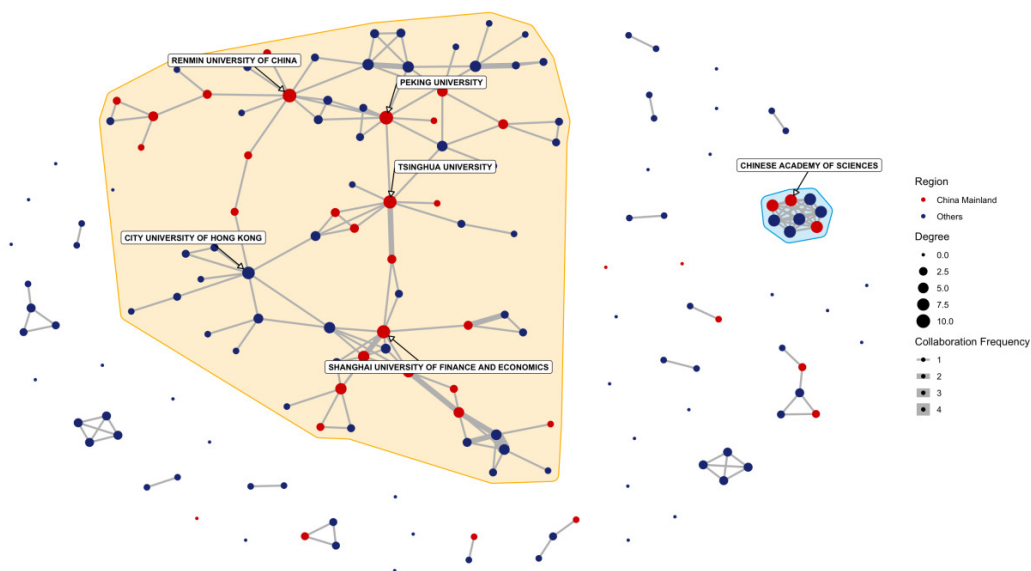
As Figure 3 shows, we can observe a complex dynamic of scholarly contribution and impact in Chinese policy studies. Among the field's contributors, several scholars stand out for their significant influence. Zhu Xufeng has maintained a consistent scholarly impact from 2008–2022, with four publications totaling 189 citations that examine policy innovation through intergovernmental relations (Zhu and Zhao, 2021) and official mobility patterns (Zhu and Meng, 2020). Yanwei Li is the most prolific scholar, with seven publications addressing critical issues, including crisis response mechanisms (Ye et al., 2023; Tan et al., 2023) and public participation dynamics (Li et al., 2022). Other notable contributors include Martin de Jong, whose 2012 publications on infrastructure governance and regional development had 118 citations, and emerging scholars such as Sun et al. (2019), whose study on China's green credit policy is now the most cited in the field. This pattern of sustained scholarly engagement and high-impact individual contributions indicates an evolving and increasingly dynamic research landscape within Chinese policy studies.

## 4.2 Collaborative Network

In Chinese public policy research, scholars from mainland China and Hong Kong (China) have been remarkably active, publishing 60 and 17 articles respectively. Scholars from the United States and Singapore also made significant contributions, publishing 10 and 7 articles respectively. Among universities, Tsinghua University published the most articles at 17. This is followed by City University of Hong Kong, Peking University, and Renmin University of China, each publishing 9 articles. Internationally, the National University of Singapore and the Delft University of Technology stood out as the most productive contributors.

The institutional collaboration network in Chinese policy research demonstrates a vibrant academic exchange ecosystem. As shown in Figure 4, the structure of collaboration spans regional and international boundaries, enhancing the depth and breadth of the field. The number of linked components (156) and the existence of numerous small clusters indicate a highly specialized and diverse research community. While dominant institutions are evident, the presence of numerous smaller actors highlights the field's openness to niche expertise and innovative perspectives. It is surprising that mainland Chinese institutions account for only 24.3% of this network, which underscores the global nature of research collaboration in Chinese policy studies.

There are two major clusters of collaboration in Chinese policy studies. The largest collaborative cluster is an-



**Figure 4.** Institutional Collaboration Networks in Chinese Policy Studies  
(Red = Mainland China; Blue = Others. Node size shows degree, edge width shows collaboration frequency. Labels are shown only for the top five institutions by collaboration frequency.)

chored by several core Chinese institutions that function as critical bridges of collaboration. At its center are leading academic institutions, including Peking University, Renmin University of China, Shanghai University of Finance and Economics, and Tsinghua University. Peking University and Tsinghua University focus primarily on environmental policy and policy innovation. The City University of Hong Kong also holds a critical position within the cluster, facilitating cooperation across geographical boundaries. The international dimension of this cluster is further strengthened by the active participation of institutions such as the National University of Singapore, Delft University of Technology, and the University of Southern California. These international nodes play significant roles in fostering collaborative research efforts,

contributing to the globalization of Chinese policy research, and enabling comparative policy perspectives.

The second-largest cluster, centered around the Chinese Academy of Sciences, demonstrates a more focused research agenda concentrated on social policies in developing countries. This cluster's distinctive contribution is exemplified by influential studies such as Wang et al.'s (2016) examination of Social-Emotional Learning (SEL) programs and their impact on reducing student dropout rates in rural Chinese middle schools. This work highlights how institutional collaboration can produce research with direct policy implications for addressing social challenges.

This collaborative network has made significant contributions to Chinese policy research by not only pro-

ducing numerous publications but also fostering multidimensional dialogue between scholars from different governance and policy contexts. This cross-institutional exchange integrates diverse theoretical perspectives, methodological approaches, and comparative insights into the study of Chinese policies. Collaboration between institutions within and beyond China has enriched the field by allowing researchers to examine Chinese policy practices through multiple analytical lenses, facilitating a more nuanced understanding of China's unique policy processes and implementation mechanisms while connecting these insights to broader theoretical discussions in policy studies.

## 5. Evolution of the Field: Research Focuses, Theories, and Methods

As the field continues to grow, there is a shift in research focus, alongside advancements in theoretical depth and methodological rigor.

### 5.1 Core Themes in Policy Research

Through clustering analysis of the keyword co-occurrence network, our study identifies three prominent thematic clusters that have shaped the discourse in Chinese policy research. Each cluster represents a distinct but interconnected realm of inquiry that reflects broader shifts in the intellectual contours of the field.

#### Governance and Policymaking

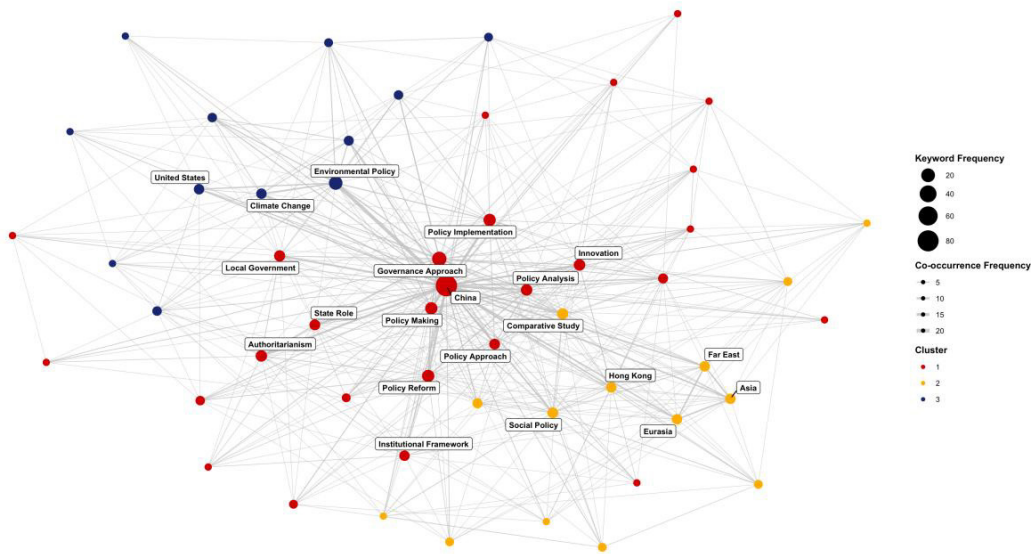
This red cluster includes keywords such

as “Governance Approach,” “Policy Implementation,” “Policy Making,” “Innovation,” “Authoritarianism,” and “State Role.” This dominant cluster captures China's unique institutional contexts, where policymaking occurs within the “nomenklatura system”—a hierarchical bureaucratic structure under Party leadership (Hammond, 2013). Within this arrangement, policy entrepreneurs operate through a “technically infeasible strategy” (Zhu, 2008), navigating between political constraints and implementation innovations. As Wang et al. (2013) articulated, the principle of “crossing the river by feeling the stones” (*mozhe shitou guohe*) has become institutionalized as a defining characteristic of Chinese policymaking, reflecting an incremental and experimental approach to policy innovation within the authoritarian governance framework. This policymaking approach simultaneously maintains the stability of China's political system while providing room for policy innovation.

#### Comparative Social Policy

The yellow cluster explores commonalities and differences in social policy evolution between China and other regions, including “Asia,” “Far East,” and “Eurasia.” These keywords suggest a macro-geographic and regional research perspective that involves policy comparisons between different contexts. The comparative perspective manifests at multiple levels and through various methodological approaches. For instance, Lee (2006) compared welfare restructuring models in China and Singapore. This comparative approach





**Figure 5.** Co-occurrence Network of Keywords in Chinese Policy Research (2000-2024)

(Top 53 of 317 keywords. Node size = frequency; edge width = co-occurrence; color = cluster (Walktrap). Labels shown for frequency > 6.)

illuminates common mechanisms of policy evolution across different institutional settings. At the same time, it also highlights China's distinctive policy innovation patterns. Shi (2012) analyzes the “pilot-expansion” model in the social policy domain, demonstrating China's unique mechanisms of policy learning and diffusion. Notably, different colored clusters show interconnections. Hammond (2013) analyzed China's unique policy entrepreneurship behavior in social policy and examined it within the context of the East Asian development model.

### Environmental Policy

The blue cluster studies China's environmental and climate policy development, particularly focusing on sustainability transitions and market-based environmental policy implementation.

A key research focus is policy experimentation, which combines top-down and bottom-up mechanisms to test and evaluate policy innovations. Notable examples include pilot programs for carbon emissions trading schemes and low-carbon city initiatives (Zhang, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). Research in this cluster examines the dynamic interactions between central and local governments in policy design and implementation, highlighting how this relationship shapes environmental outcomes (Liu et al., 2018; Zhu and Zhao, 2021). The research reveals the complexities of China's multi-level governance system and its implications for environmental policy effectiveness.

### 5.2 The Evolution of Research Focus

To further capture the dynamic trajectory of Chinese policy research, we an-

alyzed changes in keyword frequency across different periods (as shown in Figure 6). The focus of Chinese policy research has evolved from dispersed to concentrated, from singular to pluralistic.

**In the initial stage (2000–2011),** scholars used comparative approaches to capture commonalities and characteristics of China's institutional environment in social policies (Midgley and Tang, 2002; Saunders, 2006). During this period, keywords were sparse and infrequent, indicating the field was in the initial stages, with academic discussion not yet mature. However, it is worth noting that these three keywords remain ongoing themes in Chinese policy research (3-8 times/year), reflecting an enduring tradition of positioning Chinese policy research within a comparative framework.

**The expansion phase (2012–2017)** witnessed a diversification of research themes. The research on environmental policy has grown significantly (increasing from 3 to 10 occurrences annually), emerging as a major research focus. This reflects the increasing importance of environmental governance in China's policy agenda (Zhang, 2015; Wang et al., 2015). Moreover, research on policymaking and policy reform still gradually increased (2-6 times annually). Innovation emerged as a new keyword (2-4 times), reflecting a growing interest in China's policy innovation practices (Lee and Restrepo, 2015; Li, 2017). Alongside this, several new policy theories and mechanism-oriented keywords also gained prominence, such

as “authoritarianism,” “policy making,” “local government,” and “policy implementation.” It signals an academic shift from macro-institutional description toward the analysis of policy dynamics and implementation processes (Howlett, 2014; Mei & Liu, 2014).

**The advancement phase (2018–2024)** manifested deeper and more systematic research characteristics. Environmental policy research continued to heat up (12-13 times), becoming one of the main research topics. Research on policy implementation and policymaking increased significantly (5-10 times), indicating deeper research into policy processes. Research related to authoritarianism, local government, and state role notably increased in this phase (2-5 times), reflecting a deeper examination of the Chinese political system (Zhu and Zhao, 2021; Li and Ma, 2019; Zhu and Meng, 2020). Governance approach research also peaked (7-11 times/year), showing continuous and systematic interest in understanding China's governance mechanisms (Tang et al., 2018). During this period, research emphasizes the integration of theory and practice, and in-depth policy evaluation. This is reflected in the steady rise of “environmental policy” (12 to 19), as well as notable increases in keywords such as “policy implementation,” “policy making,” “governance approach,” and “state role.” These keywords reflect the growing use of policy theoretical frameworks to analyze China's environmental policy. For instance, Bailey et al. (2023) applied the Policy Conflict Framework to analyze policy conflicts in shale development in China.

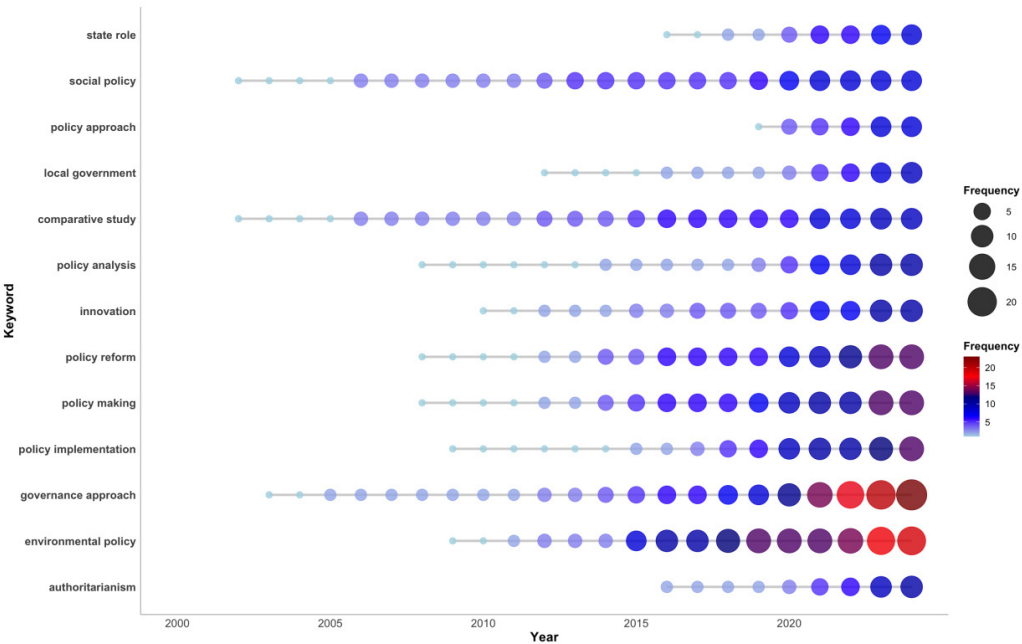


Figure 6. Keyword Trends in Chinese Policy Research (2000–2024)

(Trends of selected keywords (n > 8) from 317 keywords, excluding geographic terms, are shown. Color and size of points indicate keyword frequency.)

These trend changes reflect how Chinese policy research focus has gradually expanded from early institutional comparison and social policy to broader fields, particularly specific issues like environmental governance and policy implementation, with significant improvement in both depth and breadth of research. Meanwhile, this evolution also reflects the development trajectory of Chinese policy practice itself, especially the continuous advancement in areas like environmental governance and policy innovation.

5.3 Most-Studied Policy Theories

The co-citation network in Chinese policy research provides insight into the theoretical foundations shaping Chinese policy research. Through cluster analy-

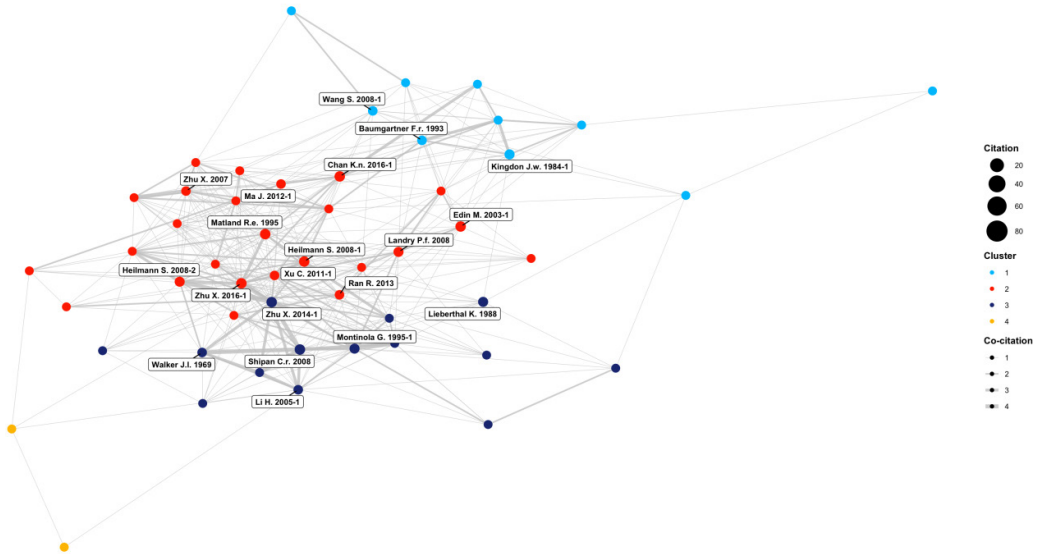
sis of the 51 most frequently cited references (cited more than four times), we identified four main theoretical clusters. In this network, edges represent co-citation relationships between references, with thicker links indicating stronger connections, and node size representing total citation frequency. The clusters are color-coded according to Walktrap community detection results.

Policy Change

The light blue cluster in the upper right represents the theoretical foundations of policy change under China’s unique political system, consisting of Western policy process theories and institutional analysis of transition countries. Western policy process theory is mainly based on two frameworks: the Multiple

Streams Framework proposed by Kingdon (1984), which argues that policy change stems from the intersection of the problem stream, policy stream, and politics streams; second, the Punctu-

ated Equilibrium Theory proposed by Baumgartner and Jones (1993), which explains the coexistence of stability and drastic changes in the policy process.



**Figure 7.** The Co-citation Network of Top 51 References

(The top 0.5% most cited references were selected. Node size reflects citation frequency; edge width indicates co-citation; node color denotes clusters identified via the Walktrap algorithm. Labels are shown for co-citation > 4 for clarity.)

Alongside these Western policy process frameworks, this cluster also integrates institutional analysis of transitional economies. For example, Wang (2008) used the Double Movement theory to emphasize the state's role in offsetting market excesses. Shirk (1993) followed a rational choice institutional approach to explain how China maintained authoritarian control amid market reforms. Additionally, Pei (2006) proposed the developmental autocracy theory, highlighting the potential "trapped transition" in gradualist reform, emphasizing how the regime retains economic levers to ensure po-

litical survival. Together, these theories contribute significantly to Chinese policy studies by bridging the gap between Western theoretical frameworks and China's institutional context. The cluster provides frameworks for understanding Chinese policy change, explaining both general patterns through Western policy process theories and the unique logic through transitional state institutional analysis.

## Policy Implementation

The central red cluster offers a comprehensive theoretical framework to illuminate the dynamics of China's policy

experimentation and implementation under its decentralized authoritarian system. The first strand of literature focuses on central-local relations, including decentralized authoritarianism (Xu, 2011; Landry, 2008) and state capacity (Edin, 2003). These studies investigate how the central government uses personnel management and performance targets to incentivize local compliance while maintaining hierarchical control. However, this approach yields varying results across policy domains (Heilmann, 2008b).

The second component concentrates on policy implementation mechanisms, such as the ambiguity-conflict model (Matland, 1995), which explains how ambiguity and conflict affect policy outcomes. Other works emphasize incentive structures (Ran, 2013), social accountability (Ma, 2012), and information acquisition (Chan and Zhao, 2016), offering a nuanced view of why policy implementation often diverges from central intent. The third dimension of this cluster explores policy experimentation as a key governance strategy. Studies emphasize how local pilots are scaled up to national policies (Heilmann, 2008a), how cadre mobility incentivizes innovation (Zhu & Zhang, 2016), and how think tanks inform adaptive learning (Zhu & Xue, 2007). While these themes are also relevant to policy diffusion, its primary focus lies in the unique institutional and incentive structures that shape Chinese implementation practices.

The red cluster illuminates the intricate mechanisms through which China's decentralized authoritarian

system shapes its unique policy experimentation, implementation challenges, and adaptive governance.

### **Policy Diffusion**

The middle dark blue cluster represents theories of policy diffusion and policy innovation, allowing researchers to better understand the internal logic and external influences on policy change. First, Walker (1969) laid the early theoretical foundation for policy innovation. Berry and Berry (1990) outlined policy diffusion theory, including internal determinants and regional diffusion models (Berry and Berry, 1990). Shipan and Volden (2008) further refined four diffusion mechanisms: learning, competition, coercion, and imitation.

Chinese scholars have extended these ideas to the domestic context. Montinola et al. (1995) characterized China's federalism as "Chinese-style," emphasizing local experimentation under central oversight. Zhou (2010) examined bureaucratic collusion and informal rules in diffusion processes. Zhu (2014) proposed two unique diffusion modes: mandatory diffusion, driven by top-down directives, and tournament diffusion, where localities innovate to outperform peers under performance-based competition. These studies reveal how formal and informal institutions jointly shape policy diffusion in a hierarchical political setting. As Mei's (2020) research shows, this characteristic is particularly evident in major crisis responses (such as COVID-19), where policy mix must align with rooted policy style to maintain consistency and effectiveness.

By combining these theories, researchers can delve deeper into the factors behind policy diffusion and explore how to effectively promote policy innovation in China.

### **Incentive Structure**

The bottom yellow cluster focuses on how incentive structures influence policy processes. North (1990) argues that institutional frameworks create incentive structures that shape organizational behavior and economic performance through path-dependent patterns. Tang et al. (2018) combine policy feedback theory with official ranking tournament logic, analyzing how China's Mandatory Target System (MTS) fosters provincial competition in environmental performance. Their findings suggest that performance benchmarking serves as an institutional mechanism for vertical accountability and innovation diffusion.

This theoretical cluster significantly contributes to understanding how institutional mechanisms and performance metrics can drive governance outcomes. It bridges classic institutional theory with contemporary Chinese governance practices, showing how formal institutional structures shape bureaucratic behavior and performance.

### **5.4 Most-Used Research Methods**

Chinese policy research primarily focuses on specific policies or single cases (82.47%), exploring implementation details and policy evaluation of specific policies in the Chinese context. Comparative research, which examines policy subsystems across different contexts,

typically employs qualitative methods. Early comparative studies primarily focused on social welfare policy across different countries or regions (Lee, 2006; Saunders, 2006; Midgley and Tang, 2002).

Regarding government levels in Chinese policy research, national-level studies account for 80.31%, provincial-level studies for 11.04%, and local-level studies for only 8.65%. The study by Ma et al. (2012) is one of the few local-level studies, using the Hangzhou subway construction disaster as a case to explore the strategic behaviors involved in balancing public values. Overall, there is a pronounced focus on national-level analysis in Chinese policy research, with relatively few studies delving into local policies.

The field is largely empirical in orientation, with 90.9% of studies drawing on primary or secondary data to assess policy effects. Only 9.1% of articles are theoretical essays. Documents are the most used data source, appearing in approximately 61.6% of studies. Survey, interview, and other sources are also widely used, and 37% of studies incorporate two or more data types, enhancing both validity and robustness.

Thematic areas span a wide range of sectors, including education, environmental protection, public health, and digital governance. Environmental policy is particularly prominent, accounting for 20.8% of the studies. For instance, Guo (2023) applied a mixed-methods approach to evaluate low-carbon city pilot projects, showing how financial incentives and monitor-

ing mechanisms shape urban climate action.

Regarding research methodologies, there is a balanced use of qualitative and quantitative approaches. Recent years have seen a notable increase in experimental and quasi-experimental designs. For instance, Zeng and Huang (2024) utilized randomized controlled trials to examine bureaucrats' trust biases toward think tank reports, while Shen et al. (2024) conducted field experiments to investigate the behavior of migrant children participating in social health insurance. They provide greater internal validity, offering valuable insights into policy effects.

Qualitative methods remain critical for understanding contextual and institutional dimensions. Scholars rely on case studies, document analysis, interviews, and process tracing to uncover how policies are formulated, contested, and implemented. Qualitative Comparative Analysis (QCA) is frequently applied; for example, Li and Ma (2019) used QCA to investigate the factors influencing regulations in the ride-hailing sector.

An emerging strength in the field is the increasing use of mixed-method designs, which integrate qualitative depth with quantitative precision. For example, Xiao et al. (2019) combined fiscal data and political analysis to assess budgetary resource allocation in Hong Kong (China), while Gu et al. (2020) blended discourse analysis with interviews to explore the role of language politics in shaping regional identity. Such integrative designs offer

a more holistic understanding of complex policy dynamics in China's evolving governance environment.

## 6. Discussion

Our research systematically mapped the landscape of Chinese policy studies through a mixed-methods design combining bibliometric and content analysis. Our findings reveal a gradual shift from adopting Western theories to developing contextually grounded theoretical approaches, accompanied by a growing emphasis on implementation mechanisms and performance-based governance. For example, the concept of “experimental implementation” reflects how policy is adapted through local trials under hierarchical authority—an arrangement formalized as “experimentation under hierarchy” (Heilmann, 2008a; Zhu & Zhang, 2016; Zhu & Xue, 2007).

Unlike previous reviews that focused broadly on public administration or individual policy areas, this study provides a more fine-grained understanding of how theories have been selectively adapted, reinterpreted, and operationalized in the Chinese context. While earlier literature reviews such as those by Li and Zhang (2021) have provided a foundational understanding of public administration, our analysis extends this by integrating more recent studies that reflect the latest developments in policy research, particularly in areas such as environmental governance, policy experimentation, and bureaucratic incentive systems.

Our findings also underscore the importance of collaborative dynamics in shaping the research landscape of Chinese policy studies. The analysis reveals an intricate network of domestic and international collaborations that have fostered a rich scholarly exchange, thereby enhancing the methodological sophistication and theoretical diversity of the field. Moreover, the increasing integration of Western policy theoretical frameworks with Chinese institutional realities suggests a growing convergence between local relevance and global theoretical contribution—positioning Chinese policy studies as a potential source of conceptual innovation within the broader international policy discourse.

At the same time, the analysis has several limitations. One limitation is the potential underrepresentation of non-English publications. Non-English articles may offer different perspectives on local policy issues. As a significant proportion of Chinese policy research is published in Chinese-language journals, especially in fields closely tied to domestic discourse, our findings may underrepresent the full scope of scholarly activity. Future research should incorporate Chinese-language sources and interdisciplinary outlets to construct a more inclusive and comprehensive understanding of the field. Additionally, as the field continues to evolve, ongoing reviews will be necessary to capture the latest theoretical and methodological advancements.

The findings also raise broader implications for future research. The

evolution of Chinese public policy studies—particularly the growing focus on adaptive policy implementation and performance-based accountability mechanisms—offers new insights into how policy processes operate in centralized, non-Western contexts. For example, the widespread use of local experimentation as a means of policy refinement under hierarchical control (Heilmann, 2008) and the influence of cadre evaluation systems on local officials' innovation incentives (Zhu & Zhang, 2016) reveal implementation dynamics that differ substantially from those theorized in Western, electoral democracies. These developments highlight the need to pluralize the theoretical foundations of public policy (Howlett, 2013), by incorporating institutionally embedded approaches that reflect the diversity of political systems. Chinese policy studies offer a foundation for constructing alternative theoretical approaches to policy design and implementation in non-Western political systems. Future research could build on these insights to develop generalizable theories of policy processes across diverse contexts.

For policymakers, the insights derived from this review suggest that adopting a more localized approach to policy formulation and implementation may lead to more effective governance. The study highlights the benefits of aligning policy design with the nuanced realities of China's political and administrative contexts, suggesting that such alignment could enhance the efficacy and responsiveness of public policies.



## 7. Conclusion

This study employs a comprehensive mixed-methods approach to examining the evolution and current state of Chinese policy research in top public policy journals from 2000 to 2024. Through citation analysis, collaboration network analysis, co-citation analysis, keyword co-occurrence analysis, and content analysis, the research provides a systematic understanding of publication patterns, theoretical foundations, research themes, and methodological developments in Chinese policy studies.

We identified three developmental phases: an initial exploratory phase (2000–2011), an expansion phase (2012–2017), and an advancement phase (2018–2024). The field has shown steady growth in publications, demonstrating increasing international scholarly interest in Chinese policy studies. The institutional collaboration network analysis highlights the emergence of two major research clusters. The academic institutions in Mainland China and Hong Kong (China) serving as central nodes in fostering international academic exchanges. This collaborative pattern reflects the field's increasing internationalization while maintaining strong regional characteristics.

Chinese policy research has crystallized around three pivotal themes: the intricate policy-making processes within China's unique political system, the comparison of social policies across regions, and environmental and climate policy in China. These thematic areas have shifted from broad, dispersed be-

ginnings to a focused and multifaceted exploration of governance, policy implementation, and central-local dynamics, illustrating a clear trajectory towards a more consolidated and systematic inquiry.

The theoretical foundations encompass foundational theories of policy change under China's unique political regime, policy implementation distinct to China, and theories related to policy diffusion and innovation, with a particular emphasis on incentive structures within governance. Each of these theoretical clusters contributes to a nuanced understanding of the policy process in China. The methodological evolution in Chinese policy studies reflects a significant shift towards integrating both qualitative and quantitative approaches. Initially reliant on qualitative analyses, the field now robustly employs mixed methods that enhance empirical rigor. This methodological sophistication allows researchers to dissect complex policy issues with greater precision, providing deeper insights into the mechanisms of policy implementation and the broader implications of China's practices.

Additionally, future research should address the current imbalance between national and local-level studies, as local policy implementation and innovation remain understudied despite their crucial role in China's policy process. The increasing application of experimental methods and mixed-method approaches opens new opportunities for more rigorous policy evaluation and impact assessment. Fur-

thermore, as China's role in global governance continues to evolve, research examining the interaction between domestic and international policy processes becomes increasingly important.

These findings and future directions suggest that Chinese policy research is maturing as a field, characterized by theoretical sophistication, methodological innovation, and growing collaboration. The field's evolution

reflects both the increasing complexity of China's policy challenges and the development of more nuanced analytical approaches to understanding these challenges. As global policy issues become more interconnected, the continued development of Chinese policy research will contribute valuable insights to both theoretical advancement and practical policymaking in China and beyond.

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# The Evolution of Party–Government Relations and the Impact on Decision-Making in China

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## ABSTRACT

The administrative decision-making of the Chinese government needs to be understood from the perspective of the relationship between the Party and the government. Since the reform and opening-up period, this relationship has transformed from a unified Party–government structure to the separation of the Party and the government, followed by the strengthening of the Party’s comprehensive and centralized leadership. This transformation has influenced the administrative decision-making system of the Chinese government. In this paper, we describe and analyze this transformation process and its impact on the government’s decision-making system. The research indicates that the mainstream model is one where the Party and the government are organizationally separate but functionally integrated. Both the Party and the government have their own decision-making systems: the Party operates under a collective deliberation system, while the government follows a system of individual responsibility led by its head. Owing to the functional integration of the Party and the government, as well as the Party’s leadership position and significant role in the decision-making process, the Chinese government in practice operates under a decision-making system that combines both the individual responsibility system and the collective deliberation system. However, the way in which these two systems are integrated varies across different local governments. Overall, this system helps the Party exercise leadership over major decision-making issues but also raises concerns about decision-making efficiency and accountability.

**Keywords:** Party–Government Relations, Organizational System, Decision-Making System

# La evolución de las relaciones entre el Partido y el Gobierno y su impacto en la toma de decisiones en China

## RESUMEN

La toma de decisiones administrativas del gobierno chino debe comprenderse desde la perspectiva de la relación entre el Partido y el gobierno. Desde el período de reforma y apertura, esta relación se ha transformado desde una estructura unificada entre el Partido y el Gobierno hasta la separación del Partido y el Gobierno, seguida del fortalecimiento del liderazgo integral y centralizado del Partido. Esta transformación ha influido en el sistema de toma de decisiones administrativas del gobierno chino. En este artículo, describimos y analizamos este proceso de transformación y su impacto en el sistema de toma de decisiones del gobierno. La investigación indica que el modelo dominante es aquel en el que el Partido y el Gobierno están separados organizativamente, pero integrados funcionalmente. Tanto el Partido como el Gobierno tienen sus propios sistemas de toma de decisiones: el Partido opera bajo un sistema de deliberación colectiva, mientras que el Gobierno sigue un sistema de responsabilidad individual liderado por su líder. Debido a la integración funcional del Partido y el gobierno, así como a la posición de liderazgo del Partido y su importante papel en el proceso de toma de decisiones, el gobierno chino, en la práctica, opera bajo un sistema de toma de decisiones que combina tanto el sistema de responsabilidad individual como el de deliberación colectiva. Sin embargo, la integración de estos dos sistemas varía según los distintos gobiernos locales. En general, este sistema ayuda al Partido a ejercer liderazgo en asuntos importantes de toma de decisiones, pero también plantea inquietudes sobre la eficiencia y la rendición de cuentas en la toma de decisiones.

**Palabras clave:** Relaciones entre partidos y gobierno, sistema organizativo, sistema de toma de decisiones

## 中国党政关系的演变及其对决策的影响

### 摘要

中国政府的行政决策需要从党政关系的角度去加以理解。改革开放后，党政关系经历了一个从党政一体到党政分开再到加强党的全面集中领导的变化。这一变化影响了中国政府的行政决策体制。本文阐述并分析了这一变化的过程及其对政

府决策体制的影响。研究表明，党政组织分立、职能合一的模式是一个主流模式，党和政府都有自己的一套决策体系，党实行合议制，政府实行首长负责制。由于党政职能合一以及党的领导地位和在决策过程中的重要作用，中国政府事实上实行的是一种将首长制和合议制两者相结合的决策体制，但在两者如何结合上，地方政府的决策过程又呈现了不同的特点。总的来说，这一体制有助于党对重大决策问题的领导，但也会产生决策效率和决策责任的问题。

关键词：党政关系，组织系统，决策

China is a centralized unitary state, where government decisions have a decisive impact on societal development. The importance of government decision-making, therefore, is self-evident. However, how exactly are these decisions made? This has always been an intriguing question. Scholars of Chinese government decision-making have focused predominantly on the decision-making process and analyzed how decision-makers and stakeholders interact, how policy issues emerge, and how policies are implemented. These studies typically approach the topic from a dynamic and functional perspective. In contrast, in this paper, we adopt a static institutional perspective and argue that the decision-making system (or structure) determines how decisions operate. For example, China's constitution stipulates that the government follows a system of individual responsibility led by its head, which gives the head of government a decisive role in decision-making processes. However, China is also a country led by the Communist Party, which operates under a collective deliberation system that differs from the govern-

ment's individual responsibility system. Since China follows a Party-government integrated governance model, the Party intervenes in government decision-making. How has the evolving Party-government relationship affected government decision-making? How do these two distinct decision-making systems function within the decision-making process? What issues does their relationship create? How do they influence final decisions? In practice, what kind of decision-making system does the Chinese government actually implement? These are the key questions that we seek to explore. The study is primarily descriptive, with the aim to first clarify what this system entails, as there has been little research in this area. On the basis of this description, we then conduct an analysis and draw relevant conclusions.

## **I. Party-Government Relations and Their Reform**

The Party-government relationship is the core relationship of China's political system. As the Party is the supreme leader and gov-

ernment departments exercise their administrative powers under the Party's leadership, changes in the Party-government relationship profoundly affect the government's decision-making process. To understand the administrative decision-making of the Chinese government, we must examine it from the perspective of Party-government relations.

The relationship between the Party and the government has undergone several changes since the founding of the People's Republic of China. This period can be divided into three phases.

The first phase lasted from the founding of the PRC in 1949 to the beginning of the reform and opening-up period in 1978. This was a period of highly centralized power within both the Party and the government. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, China's political system largely followed the Soviet model. The basic characteristics of the Soviet model are as follows:

All power belongs to the Soviets, with the Supreme Soviet, as the representative assembly, having the highest power. This is similar in form to Western countries, where the highest power is concentrated in the parliament. Unlike the case in Western countries, the Soviets are under the leadership of the Party, with the Party being the highest authority because it is the creator of the new state. In the design of Party and state organizations, the Party and government departments are integrated, with the Party being the highest decision maker. The concentration of power in the Party is determined by the historical conditions at the time. First, at

the establishment of the Soviet regime, the country faced several years of war and required a strong command center, which naturally fell to the Party. Second, the planned economy system was implemented after the establishment of the Soviet Union. This system is fundamentally different from a market economy system. It operates from top to bottom and requires central departments to plan and command, which necessitates the concentration of power in the central departments of the Party and the state. Furthermore, the Leninist Party-building ideology was practiced. Lenin believed that the Communist Party was the vanguard to directly execute power and stated that the Communist Party, after coming to power, "does not share power with anyone" (Lenin, 1994, p. 191). Power was held by the Communist Party.

The fundamental characteristics of the Soviet model were also reflected in the political system established after the founding of the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Constitution of the PRC designates the National People's Congress as the highest organ of state power, but the preamble of the Constitution explicitly affirms the leadership position of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) of China. The PRC also adopted a centralized unitary system, which is manifested primarily in the following two aspects: 1. In the relationship between the central and local governments, local governments are subordinate to the central government; 2. In the relationship between the Party and the government, power is concentrated in the Party. As Mao Zedong

noted, “In terms of organization, this should be reflected in two aspects: First, in the interrelations among various organizations at the same level, the Party leads all aspects—industry, agriculture, commerce, education, military, government, and the Party itself. It is not parallel to these sectors, let alone in opposition to them. Second, in the relationship between higher and lower levels, subordinates must obey superiors, and the entire Party must obey the Central Committee” (CCP documentary, 1979, p. 222). Mao further stated, “Major policies are decided by the Politburo, and specific arrangements are made by the Secretariat. There is only one ‘political design institute,’ not two. Both major policies and their implementation are unified—the Party and the government are not separate. Specific execution and detailed decision-making fall under government institutions and their Party groups” (Mao, 1993, p. 268).

Here, Mao essentially outlines the most important features of this political system. In this paper, we refer to this characteristic as the “one-core, two-tier” structural model. “One-core” refers to a single “political design institute” and means that major policies are determined by the Party. “Two-tier” refers to the two organizations of the Party and the government, where in terms of organizational structure, the government is subordinate to the Party’s leadership. Furthermore, within government departments, there are two components, administrative bodies and Party groups, with the Party groups serving as the leadership and decision-making centers (Zhu, 2021, p. 126).

This centralized system encountered some issues in its later operation, primarily in the relationship between the central and local levels. The concentration of power at the central level led to passivity and inactivity at the local level. Thus, in the mid-1950s, Mao Zedong raised the issue of balancing the initiative at both the central and local levels. In *On the Ten Major Relationships*, he stated, “On the premise of consolidating the unified leadership of the central government, we should expand the authority of local governments to some extent, grant them more independence, and allow them to handle more matters” (Mao, 1977, p. 275). Similarly, at the 8<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP (1956), Deng Xiaoping noted the main shortcomings in the administrative relationship between the central and local governments: “Inappropriate and excessive centralization is not only reflected in economic, cultural, and other state administrative affairs but also in the Party’s work” (Deng 1994, pp. 198-199). Deng believed that there should be an appropriate division of power between the central and local governments: “Matters of national significance and those requiring unified decisions across the country should be handled by central organizations to maintain the Party’s centralized unity. Matters of a local nature and those that should be decided by local governments should be handled by local organizations to facilitate policies suited to local conditions” (Deng 1994, pp. 227-228). However, at that time, neither Mao Zedong nor Deng Xiaoping discussed the issue of separating powers between the Party and the government.

The second phase, from 1978 to 1988, was a period of relatively decentralized power. The decentralization during this period was intended to support adaptation to the changes brought by the reform and opening-up policies. Although a market economy system was not yet fully established during this period, markets had begun to emerge, goods were starting to circulate, and the planned economy system was beginning to be broken down. Diverse interests also started to appear. As a result, the highly centralized system could not respond effectively to these new circumstances. As Deng Xiaoping noted, "Our leadership at all levels is involved in many matters that should not be managed, cannot be managed well, or are beyond our capacity. These matters, if properly regulated and delegated, could be handled well at lower levels, such as enterprises, institutions, and social units, allowing them to handle them genuinely under democratic centralism. However, if all of these are brought to the Party and government leadership organs, especially to the central departments, it becomes very difficult to handle. No one has such magical powers to deal with such burdensome and unfamiliar matters" (Deng, 1982, p. 288). Deng Xiaoping suggested that "excessive centralization of power increasingly fails to adapt to the development of socialist undertakings" (Deng, 1982, p. 289). He defined excessive centralization of power as "under the slogan of strengthening the unified leadership of the Party, inappropriately and uncritically concentrating all power in Party committees, with the power of

Party committees often concentrated in several secretaries, especially in the first secretary. Everything requires the first secretary's leadership and decision. The unified leadership of the Party often becomes personal leadership" (Deng 1982, pp. 288-289).

Deng Xiaoping also noted the reasons for this problem, stating, "In the past, power was divided between the central and local authorities several times, but each time it did not involve how to divide the political power between the Party and the government, economic organizations, mass organizations, etc." (Deng, 1982, p. 289). Based on this understanding, Deng Xiaoping proposed political system reform, stating, "The content of the reform, first, is to separate the Party and the government, resolving how the Party can effectively lead. This is the key and should be given the top priority. The second content is to decentralize power, resolving the relationship between the central and local authorities, and at the same time, each level of the local authorities also has the issue of power decentralization. The third content is streamlining institutions, which is related to power decentralization" (Deng, 1993, p. 177).

The report of the 13th National Congress of the CCP implemented Deng Xiaoping's idea of separating the Party and the government, considering it the key to political system reform. According to the report, the separation of the Party and the government refers to the separation of their functions, namely, the functions of Party organizations and state power, where the

Party should ensure that government organizations fully perform their functions. The Party's leadership is political leadership and concerns the establishment of leading political principles, political directions and major decisions and the recommendation of important cadres to state power organizations. As the main means of political leadership, legal procedures ensure that the Party's propositions become the national will. The main responsibility of local Party committees is to make decisions on major local issues, in addition to implementing the instructions of the Party Central Committee, the State Council, and superior Party and government organizations.

The measures taken in this reform are as follows: 1. Party committees at all levels no longer appoint full-time secretaries or standing committee members who do not hold government positions but are responsible for government work; 2. Party committee office institutions should be few and efficient. Departments that overlap with government institutions should be abolished, and the administrative affairs they currently manage should be transferred to relevant government departments; 3. The Party groups of government departments are responsible to the Party committees that approved their establishment, which is not conducive to the unified and efficient operation of government work and should be gradually abolished; 4. The Party's disciplinary inspection committees should not handle cases in violations of law and discipline but should focus on managing Party discipline and assisting Party commit-

tees in managing Party conduct (CCP documentary, 1987).

The third phase, from 1989 to the present, has been marked by a renewed concentration of power, particularly in the Party, which has led to a re-emphasis on Party-government integration and the strengthening of the Party's centralized and unified leadership. A key feature of this period was the establishment of a market economy system. However, the diversification of interests brought about by the market economy led society to become increasingly pluralistic. The social structure evolved from a state-dominated system to a tripartite model consisting of the state, society, and the market. This newly emerging decentralization created a need for renewed centralization. The Party-government separation reforms weakened the Party's functions and authority and thereby affected its leadership position, which led to the discontinuation of these reforms. In later development, some local governments instead began reforms to integrate the Party and the government.

A typical example is the reform in Shunde, Guangdong Province. Under this reform, the originally separate systems of the Party and the government were merged, such that some Party leaders concurrently held administrative leadership positions. The Party and the government were integrated with the justification that their separation at the grassroots level was not conducive to improving work efficiency. This reform effectively broke the previous situation of separate Party and

government organizations (including before the reform and opening-up). If the original separation of the Party and the government referred mainly to the separation of their functions, then the reform in Shunde merged the Party and the government departments at the organizational level to achieve an actual unity of organizations. To some extent, this reflected a more direct integration of the Party and the government than had previously existed. Because they belonged to the same organization, the different functions of the Party and government departments became functions within the same organization's structure.

The 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China began to emphasize the importance of “adhering to the Party's leadership in all work” (CCP documentary, 2017). The Chinese Communist Party oversees all aspects of the government, the military, as well as education and society, exerting influence nationwide in every direction. After the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress, the reform of the relationship between the Party and the government, which began with the eighth institutional reform (the eighth and ninth institutional reforms began to use the term “institutional reform of the Party and state”), was explicitly aimed at strengthening the comprehensive leadership of the Party's centralized unity. The reform measures include the following:

The three major functional departments of the Party directly manage administrative affairs: that is, the Organization Department manages civil servants; the Propaganda Depart-

ment manages publishing, news, and film-related matters; and the United Front Work Department assumes the functions of the Religious Affairs Bureau and the National Ethnic Affairs Commission. These affairs originally belonged to the government system.

The reform also promotes the integration of Party and government institutions. For example, the newly established National Supervisory Commission integrates the responsibilities of the former Supervision Ministry and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, whereas the Supreme People's Procuratorate, along with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, investigates and handles corruption, bribery, dereliction of duty, and other corruption-related responsibilities to strengthen the centralized and unified leadership of the Party in anticorruption work.

The leadership system was reformed via the transformation of the Central Leading Group for Comprehensively Deepening Reform into committees to conduct top-level design, overall planning, coordination, overall promotion, and the supervision and implementation of relevant matters.

Party's central decision-making and coordinating institutions, such as the Central Comprehensive Law-based Governance Committee, the Central Audit Committee, and the Central Education Work Leading Group, were also established. Their responsibilities include leading the related affairs in their respective fields. For instance, the Comprehensive Law-based Gover-



nance Committee is responsible for the top-level design, overall planning, coordination, overall promotion, and supervision and implementation of comprehensive law-based governance. These committees have offices in relevant departments. For example, the office of the Comprehensive Law-based Governance Committee is located in the Ministry of Justice, and the Secretariat of the Central Education Work Leading Group is located in the Ministry of Education.

The 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress once again emphasized that “the Party is the highest political leadership. It is necessary to adhere to the leadership of the Party in all areas of state governance” (CCP documentary 2022). The ninth institutional reform (2023) after the 20<sup>th</sup> National Congress also reflects the strengthening of the Party’s comprehensive and centralized leadership. For example, this reform led to the establishment of two committees, the Central Financial Committee and the Central Science and Technology Committee, to strengthen the Party Central Committee’s centralized and unified leadership in finance and science and technology. For example, a new central functional department, the Central Social Work Department, has been established within the Party’s organizational system and is responsible for coordinating and guiding people’s petitions and coordinating the promotion of Party building to lead grassroots governance and grassroots political power construction, among other tasks. Thus, the Communist Party’s functional departments have increased from three (Organization Department, Publicity

Department, United Front Work Department) to four.

The transitions from Party-government integration to separation and then back to strengthened Party leadership were motivated by the same fundamental objective: to enhance the Party’s leadership role. The original intention behind the Party-government separation reforms was also to strengthen the Party’s leadership. The reintegration of Party-government functions and the shift toward comprehensive Party leadership were simply considered better alternatives. Nevertheless, these changes have had a significant effect on China’s government decision-making system.

## **II. Changes in the Relationship between the Party and the Government and the Impact on the Decision-making System**

**D**ecision-making is an organizational function and behavior inherently connected to organizations. From the perspective of the relationship between the Party and the government, Party and government organizations can be divided into two types. The first type is organizational separation and functional unity; namely, the Party and government are two independent organizations with their own decision-making systems. The functions (i.e., decision-making matters) of these two organizations are cross-corresponding. As mentioned above, the personnel departments of the government are responsible for the Party’s organization departments, where there is no sep-

aration in terms of functions. This is the organizational structure adopted since the founding of the PRC.

From the perspective of decision-making, after the reform and opening-up, the Party's organizations adopted a deliberative system, which means that in decision-making, the final decision is made through voting based on the principle of majority rule. Such a decision-making system was adopted not only to prevent the excessive concentration of power in individuals but also because the Party's organization is deliberative rather than executive. One of the tasks of Party organizations is to determine major political guidelines and significant issues. Discussions do not need to be rapid; speed is not important. Instead, a wide range of opinions and thorough consideration are needed. Therefore, the Party's decision-making system adopts a deliberative form. The government organization is different; the government is an executive body that emphasizes speed and efficiency in execution. Therefore, the 1982 Constitution stipulates the implementation of a system of chief executive responsibility in China's government system. The so-called chief executive responsibility system means that in the decision-making process, the chief executive has the decision-making power. This also means that decisions are not made through voting. Unlike the decision-making system of Party organizations, where each person has an equal vote, in the government decision-making system, participants ultimately follow the chief executive's decision. Although there may be discussions before

the decision, there is no voting mechanism, and the final decision is made by the chief executive.

Under the reform of separating the Party from the government, the organizations remain separate, with two separate systems for the Party and the government, and the functions of the Party and the government are separated. Therefore, the separation of the Party from the government means the separation of the functions of the Party and the government, that is, the separation of Party affairs and administrative affairs. The Party manages mainly Party affairs, while administrative affairs are managed by the government. As Deng Xiaoping noted, "[We must] truly establish a strong and effective working system from the State Council to local governments at all levels. In the future, all matters within the scope of government authority will be discussed, decided, and promulgated by the State Council and local governments at all levels, and will no longer be directed and decided by the Central Committee of the Party and local Party committees" (Deng, 1983, p. 299). Although Deng Xiaoping discussed this issue mainly from the perspective of opposing the excessive concentration of power, from the perspective of decision-making, such separation also helps improve the efficiency of decision-making because there is a division of labor in terms of decision-making objects and matters.

In the original system, Party affairs and administrative affairs were not separated, and there was no distinction between them. After the reform, first,

administrative affairs were managed by the government, which supported increased specialization, and second, decisions were made by the chief executive, which could improve decision-making efficiency. However, one issue here is that the separation of the Party from the government was intended to enhance the Party's leadership, and one aspect of Party leadership is the leading of major decisions, as emphasized in the 13<sup>th</sup> Congress report. Therefore, do major decisions also include significant decisions regarding administrative affairs? If the Party does not participate, then how is Party leadership reflected? Second, what kinds of matters constitute major decisions? In fact, these questions were not clearly addressed at the time and lacked operational guidance. Therefore, the return from the separation of the Party and the government to the unity of the Party and the government may have been partly intended to address these questions.

The second type of Party and government organizations concerns organizational integration, with unified functions. This is a form that emerged during the return to the unity of the Party and the government and occurred mainly at the grassroots level. A typical example here is the reform of "Party-government linkages" conducted in Shunde, Guangdong Province, which demonstrates the unity of the Party and the government, with the Party replacing the government's role. The reform characteristics are specifically manifested as follows: 1. The boundaries between Party and government departments and joint Party and government offic-

es are broken. The reform reduced the original 41 Party and government departments to 16 (six Party departments, ten government departments). All Party committee departments are jointly located with government agencies, and district Party committees are jointly located with district governments. The propaganda department of the district is also the cultural, sports, and tourism bureau, and the district political and legal committee is jointly located with the judicial bureau. 2. The two offices are integrated, with leaders simultaneously managing Party and government affairs. Most of the newly established "departments" are concurrently held by deputy secretaries of the district committee, members of the district committee, and deputy district heads, with the original heads of "departments" all becoming deputy positions.

This form of organizational integration and unified functions can also be found at the township level in China and presents characteristics similar to those of the reform in Shunde. Initially, it involves the integration of Party and government functions. After integration, the government structure usually consists of 3–5 agencies, with typical agency settings being the Party and government office, the office of economic development, and the office of social affairs. For example, in Hubei, the original internal agencies at the township level are abolished and merged with the comprehensive Party and government office, the office of economic development, and the office of social affairs. "The most prominent feature of Hubei's township reform is

the actual unity of the Party and the government” (Chi, 2006, p. 17). Here, unity refers to the integration of Party and government organizations, which naturally leads to the integration of Party and government functions. Second, Party and government leadership positions are integrated, with secretaries concurrently serving as township mayors or chairpersons of township people’s congresses. For example, under the reform in Zhejiang, town Party committees have 1 secretary and 2 to 3 deputy secretaries (with one serving as township mayor and one serving as secretary of the discipline inspection commission); the chairperson of the township people’s congress is concurrently held by the Party committee secretary. Township Party and government leaders advocate for cross-appointment, and they can concurrently hold leadership positions in internal township institutions without the appointment of assistant township mayors (Hangzhou, 2001).

Although Shunde’s reform entailed a return to the mainstream model of organizational separation and unified functions in 2018, this structural model still exists. In the recent round of institutional reforms, the “five offices, one station, two centers” model (including the Party and government office, the office of economic development, the office of social affairs, the office of planning and construction, and the comprehensive law enforcement office, the station for retired service services and guarantee work, and the Party and mass service center and the comprehensive convenience service center),

which essentially represents this model, has been widely adopted at the township level. Shunde’s model ultimately returned to the model of organizational separation and functional unification, but the township model remains. This may be because townships are grassroots executive institutions in the true sense and the unity of the Party and government offers advantages in terms of policy implementation.

The model of joint office between the Party and the government is one way the structure of integrated organization and unified function has evolved. Article 5 of the “Regulations on the Work of Party Organs of the Communist Party of China (Trial)” passed in 2017 stipulates that “based on work needs, Party organs can merge or jointly set up with government agencies with similar responsibilities.” In 2018, the “Plan for Deepening the Reform of Party and State Institutions” emphasized that “cities and counties should make greater efforts to merge or jointly set up Party and government agencies.” Thus, in the eighth round of institutional reform, institutions with joint offices of the Party and government were established. For example, by integrating the responsibilities of the Supervision Ministry and the National Anti-Corruption Bureau, the Supreme People’s Procuratorate established the National Supervisory Commission to work jointly with the Central Commission for Discipline Inspection, perform both disciplinary and supervisory duties, and implement a single set of working structures and two agency names. Such structures have also been established at

the local level. For example, in Shanxi Province, the county Party committee's political and legal committee jointly worked with the county judicial bureau, and the county petition bureau was incorporated into the county Party committee's political and legal committee under the 2022 institutional reform. The county Party committee office and the county government office also work jointly (Zhong, 2022).

The integration of the organizational and functional roles is one form of governance where Party departments replace governmental departments in direct administrative management. Unlike the case in the previous model where both Party and governmental organizations were involved, here, only the Party organization is present, but it oversees administrative affairs. The reforms in 2018 merged the National Civil Service Bureau into the Central Organization Department, under which the unified management of civil servants was established. This included aspects such as recruitment, deployment, assessment, rewards, training, and welfare. Similarly, the Central Propaganda Department took charge of managing news, publishing, and film work; setting policies and supervising their implementation; and coordinating industry development. Additionally, the Central United Front Work Department assumed leadership over the State Ethnic Affairs Commission and managed religious affairs, ensuring alignment with socialism and absorbing the State Administration for Religious Affairs. The external branding of the State Administration for Religious Affairs was

retained by the Central United Front Work Department.

Although the reforms in Shunde and townships were driven mainly by the goal of improving efficiency, while the integration of Party and government offices was aimed primarily at strengthening the Party's leadership, from a decision-making perspective, these models share similarities. The consolidation of Party and government organizations for decision-making raises two issues. First, the Party and the government are two organizations with different functions that are subject to different constraints. Party activities are governed by internal regulations, while the government adheres to national laws. The pathway through which the Party influences state institutions should be as follows: "Party regulations adjust the behavior of Party organizations and members within state organs, indirectly affecting the governance of state affairs and thereby becoming an invisible regulatory system within state organizational operations" (Qin & Chen, 2018). However, owing to the Party's special status, its influence on decision-making often involves the direct exertion of power.

Second, the decision-making systems differ. The Party operates on a collective decision-making basis, whereas the government follows a system where decisions are made by leaders. The examples mentioned above usually take the form of governmental organizations (except the direct Party administration of the government). In such integrated organizations, how are decisions ulti-

mately made? Since such decisions pertain to the government, they should be made according to a leader-based system. However, the “Regulations on the Work of Party Committees of the Communist Party of China (Trial)” (2015) stipulate a collective leadership system within Party groups in administrative organs, where decisions must be made through voting. As administrative heads are usually Party group members, they cannot exercise decision-making authority here. The result of the Party group’s decision-making process may not align with the true intent of the administrative head. Consequently, decision-making processes often “sacrifice the decision-making power vested in the constitution to the Party” (Qin & Chen, 2018). Regarding specific administrative management by Party organs, such as the Organization Department managing civil servants, these organizations face a practical dilemma. Despite ideally requiring a leader-based decision-making system for efficiency, the nature of these organizations as Party entities dictates a collective decision-making system.

### **III. The New Developments in Decision-Making Systems: “Interim Regulations on Major Administrative Decision-making Procedures” and Their Implementation**

**A**lthough the organizational structures of the Party and the government are different, they are still interrelated in terms of decision-making systems. From the per-

spective of organizational separation, a question is how to maintain the system of chief executive responsibility in the administrative organization’s decision-making process. One viewpoint holds that China’s system of chief executive responsibility is characterized by collective decision-making, which makes it a form of democratic centralism. However, this analysis highlights an institutional problem: the conflict between the collective decision-making system implemented by the Party committees within government departments and the system of chief executive responsibility within administrative departments. The core issue is how to ensure that the system of chief executive responsibility truly allows the chief executive to make decisions while also ensuring the leadership of the Party.

The existence of Party committees within government departments is intended to provide leadership and supervision and ensure that governmental work aligns with the Party’s intentions. This creates a decision-making system different from that of administrative departments. The solution proposed at the Thirteenth National Party Congress involved two approaches: first, abolishing Party departments that duplicate the functions of government agencies and transferring their administrative affairs to relevant government departments (for example, the Political and Legal Affairs Committee was temporarily abolished); and second, abolishing Party groups within government agencies, as “the existing Party groups in various government departments are each responsible to the Party committee that

approved their establishment, which is not conducive to the unity and efficiency of government work, and should be gradually abolished.” However, if these two methods were implemented, how would the Party then exercise leadership over the government? How would this leadership be manifested?

The outcome of the reform eventually revealed that the returned Party departments overlapped with governmental functional departments, with government departments retaining Party groups. This institutional contradiction in decision-making persists, even though it may not be manifested in every decision-making process. The crux lies in how to truly implement the system of chief executive responsibility in decision-making processes.

The solution requires the revision of the scope of decision-making and the functions of Party and government organizations. Although the Thirteenth Party’s Congress proposed the separation of Party and government functions, it still emphasized the leadership of the Party in major decisions. Major decisions encompass significant issues, such as major policies, as discussed by Mao Zedong. However, how major issues are defined remains unclear, as they are not confined to Party affairs but also include administrative matters.

The “Interim Regulations on Major Administrative Decision-making Procedures” issued in 2019, for the first time, listed major administrative decision-making matters, including the formulation of major public policies

and measures in various fields, such as public services, market regulation, social management, and environmental protection. These matters provide a general overview of government functions, which are further detailed on the basis of local realities and jurisdiction.

With respect to decision-making systems and procedures, the principles outlined in the regulations emphasize the comprehensive leadership of the Party in major administrative decision-making processes, which aligns with the Party’s line, principles, policies, and decisions throughout the process. However, how to adhere to and strengthen the comprehensive leadership of the Party remains a question.

The regulations stipulate that draft decisions must be discussed at the executive meeting or general meeting of the decision-making body, and the administrative chief makes the final decision on the basis of collective discussions. If the chief’s decision differs from the majority opinion, he must explain the reasons. The regulations also require reporting to the same-level Party committee for consultation and approval before major administrative decisions are made. This indicates that the ultimate decision-making authority lies with the Party, even though the decision is ultimately announced and executed in the name of the government. In conclusion, according to the principle of unified responsibility, who bears the responsibility for these decisions?

Although the “Regulations” stipulate the procedures for major decisions, the existence of the CCP’s “Reg-

ulations on Party Committees” has led to different interpretations and understandings at the local level in the process of implementing the “Regulations.” We can observe various local regulations on major administrative decision-making established by county-level governments on the basis of the “Regulations.” Two different patterns can be identified.

One pattern follows the conception of the “Regulations” and emphasizes the role of government leaders. For example, the “Decision-making Procedure Regulations of Dawu County People’s Government on ‘Three Importance and One Major’” (Dawu, 2022) state, “The executive meetings or general meetings of the county government for studying and deciding on ‘Three Importance and One Major’ matters are generally convened and presided over by the county magistrate. When discussing and deciding on ‘Three Importance and One Major’ matters, there must be over two-thirds of the attendees present. The draft of ‘Three Importance and One Major’ matters shall be discussed at the executive meetings or general meetings of the county government. The principal leaders of the county government shall make decisions based on collective discussions. Before the decision on ‘Three Importance and One Major’ matters is issued, it shall be submitted to the county party committee for approval or reporting as required” (Dawu, 2022). This statement aligns with the “Regulations.” Here, the role of the chief executive is evident, although the “Regulations” do not explicitly state whether the chief executive is permitted to disagree with the majority

opinion, which is a feature of the chief executive system. However, ultimately, decision-making must still be reported to the same-level Party committee for consultation and reporting.

Another approach emphasizes the role of the county government’s Party committee in decision-making without involving the role of the administrative chief. For example, the “Implementation Measures of Zhijin County Committee of the Communist Party of China for Implementing the Collective Decision-making System of ‘Three Importance and One Major’” matters stipulates that the decision-making of such matters is generally collectively undertaken at the meetings of the county government’s Party committee or executive meetings. The decision-making process for “Three Importance and One Major” matters is collective discussion and decision-making according to the meeting’s agenda. Meetings to discuss “Three Importance and One Major” matters must be attended by more than two-thirds of the members of the Party committee, and approval requires a majority vote from more than half of the members present (Zhijin, 2023). Here, the collective decision-making system of the Party replaces the chief executive responsibility of the government.

It is interesting to note the case of Ziyang County. In 2017, before the issuance of the “Regulations,” the Ziyang County Committee of the Communist Party of China promulgated a notice titled “Implementation Measures of the Ziyang County Committee of the Communist Party of China for Imple-



menting the Collective Decision-making System of “Three Importance and One Major.” These measures indicate that decision-making meetings are to be convened and presided over by the county Party secretary or other members of the standing committee on the basis of suggestions. Topics related to county government departments should first be discussed in the county government’s executive meetings to formulate specific opinions, which are then submitted in the name of the county government’s Party committee. Decision-making meetings are generally convened and chaired by the county Party secretary, and more than two-thirds of the members of the county standing committee are required to attend. At these meetings, decisions are made by means such as oral voting, raising hands, anonymous voting, or named voting, and are approved if the votes in favor exceed half of the members present. This document indicates that decisions on the “Three Importance and One Major” matters are made by the Party organization through voting (Ziyang, 2017). This model clearly replaces the government with the Party, which, to some extent, responds to the emphasis in the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CCP (2017) on “upholding the Party’s leadership over all work.”

After the issuance of the “Regulations” in 2019, Ziyang County issued a revised notice titled “Implementation Measures of the Ziyang County People’s Government for Implementing the Collective Decision-making System of ‘Three Importance and One Major’” matters in the name of the government.

The notice stated that all “Three Importance and One Major” matters within the jurisdiction of the county government, except in cases of major emergencies, should be collectively discussed and decided upon at meetings of the county government’s Party committee or executive meetings. These meetings are generally convened and chaired by the county magistrate, and more than two-thirds of the government’s leading members are required to attend. Leaders express their opinions at these meetings, important matters are decided through voting, and approval requires the support of more than half of the attending members (Ziyang, 2022).

The variation observed in Ziyang County indicates a shift in decision-making authority from the Party committee to the county government’s Party committee or executive meetings, with the convener being the county magistrate. However, it is not specified that the convener makes decisions on the basis of collective discussions; instead, decisions are made through voting. In this context, Ziyang County’s approach is the same as that of Zhijin County. The difference, however, is that in Ziyang County, the convener is the county magistrate, whereas in Zhijin County, the convener appears in the form of a Party group.

The emphasis on the Party committee’s role is based on the “Regulations on Party Committees,” which define the Party committee as the leading organ in various social organizations and institutions, including the government, and one of its functions, as outlined in Article 10, is to discuss and decide on major

issues within its jurisdiction. These major issues include “Three Importance and One Major” matters. According to Article 21, decisions on these major issues should be made through collective discussions by Party committee members based on the principle of the minority obeying the majority.

Here, we consider two different decision-making approaches. The Dawu model accurately reflects the intent of the “Regulations” in 2019, where the administrative chief makes decisions on the basis of collective discussions at government meetings (note that this is not the government Party committee meeting). The Zhijin model involves the government Party committee making decisions according to the principle of the minority obeying the majority. In this case, the administrative chief typically holds only one vote in the voting process. However, even in this scenario, the intentions of the administrative chief are generally upheld because, according to the “Party Committee Regulations” (Article 7), the Party committee secretary is usually the main leader of the unit, which means that the county magistrate is usually also the secretary of the county government’s Party committee. Therefore, in general circumstances, his intentions can be implemented because, within the existing organizational culture, the opinion of the top leader is usually respected. However, the voting procedure cannot guarantee that each decision reflects the intention of the administrative chief. Therefore, under such circumstances, the system of chief executive responsibility is not fully realized,

especially with consideration of the rare scenario where the chief executive is not a Party member.

#### **IV. Brief Conclusion**

On the basis of the descriptions and analyses above, we can draw several conclusions. First, from the perspective of the relationship between the Party and the government, despite the existence of reforms separating their functions, the model of separate Party and government organizations with unified functions has become mainstream (excluding grassroots townships). Second, the separation of the Party and government organizations has led to a situation in which each has its own decision-making system and mechanism. However, owing to the unified functions where both the Party and the government are involved in making decisions on major issues, conflicts between the two different decision-making systems (i.e., collective decision-making and the chief executive system) and challenges regarding how to connect the two have arisen. Third, the coexistence of the Party and government regulations is the reason for the differing practices in the decision-making process of local governments, which results in diverse characteristics at the county level. There are practices such as those of Dawu County, which emphasize the chief executive system, and practices such as those of Zhijin County, which emphasize collective decision-making by the Party committee. The collective decision-making adopted by the Party committee and the

chief executive system adopted by the government are reconciled according to the method in which the administrative chief concurrently serves as the Party committee secretary. However, although in general circumstances, the opinion of the top leader is usually respected, the intention of the chief executive cannot be fully realized. Fourth, China's government decision-making system is not theoretically a system of chief executive responsibility; it is a decision-making system that combines the chief executive system and collec-

tive decision-making. The role of the administrative chief varies depending on the decision-making process. Finally, the advantages of this system lie in ensuring Party leadership, but its drawbacks include the potential impact on the efficiency of decision-making and issues regarding who ultimately bears the responsibility for the decision. When the intention of the administrative chief is not realized, yet he is still held accountable for the decision, the principle of accountability is violated.

## Note

- \* “Three Importance and One Major” refers to important issues to be decided, important cadres to be appointed and dismissed, important projects to be deployed, and large amount of funds to be used. When decision concerned with these matters, it must be made on the basis of collective discussion. ‘Three Importance and One Major,’ as a part of political discipline, originated from the six session of the 14<sup>th</sup> party’s central committee of discipline in 1996.

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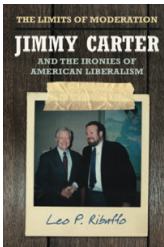
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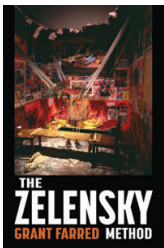
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## The Limits of Moderation: Jimmy Carter and the Ironies of American Liberalism by Leo P. Ribuffo

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The Limits of Moderation: Jimmy Carter and the Ironies of American Liberalism is not a finished product. And yet, even in this unfinished stage, this book is a close and careful history of a short yet transformative period in American political history, when big changes were afoot.



## The Zelensky Method by Grant Farred

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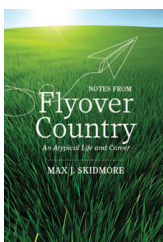
Locating Russian's war within a global context, The Zelensky Method is unsparing in its critique of those nations, who have refused to condemn Russia's invasion and are doing everything they can to prevent economic sanctions from being imposed on the Kremlin.



## Sinking into the Honey Trap: The Case of the Israeli-Palestinian Conflict by Daniel Bar-Tal, Barbara Doron, Translator

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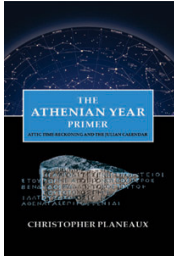
Sinking into the Honey Trap by Daniel Bar-Tal discusses how politics led Israel to advancing the occupation, and of the deterioration of democracy and morality that accelerates the growth of an authoritarian regime with nationalism and religiosity.



## Notes From Flyover Country: An Atypical Life & Career by Max J. Skidmore

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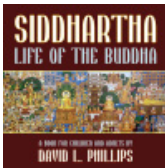
In this remarkable book, Skidmore discusses his “atypical life and career,” and includes work from his long life in academe. Essays deal with the principles and creation of constitutions, anti-government attitudes, the influence of language usage on politics, and church-state relations.



## The Athenian Year Primer: Attic Time-Reckoning and the Julian Calendar by Christopher Planeaux

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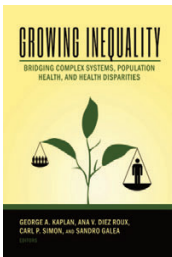
The ability to translate ancient Athenian calendar references into precise Julian-Gregorian dates will not only assist Ancient Historians and Classicists to date numerous historical events with much greater accuracy but also aid epigraphists in the restorations of numerous Attic inscriptions.



## Siddhartha: Life of the Buddha by David L. Phillips, contributions by Venerable Sitagu Sayadaw

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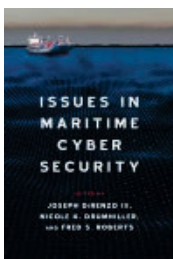
Siddhartha: Life of the Buddha is an illustrated story for adults and children about the Buddha's birth, enlightenment and work for social justice. It includes illustrations from Pagan, Burma which are provided by Rev. Sitagu Sayadaw.



## Growing Inequality: Bridging Complex Systems, Population Health, and Health Disparities Editors: George A. Kaplan, Ana V. Diez Roux, Carl P. Simon, and Sandro Galea

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Why is America's health is poorer than the health of other wealthy countries and why health inequities persist despite our efforts? In this book, researchers report on groundbreaking insights to simulate how these determinants come together to produce levels of population health and disparities and test new solutions.



## Issues in Maritime Cyber Security Edited by Dr. Joe DiRenzo III, Dr. Nicole K. Drumhiller, and Dr. Fred S. Roberts

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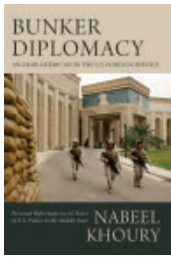
The complexity of making MTS safe from cyber attack is daunting and the need for all stakeholders in both government (at all levels) and private industry to be involved in cyber security is more significant than ever as the use of the MTS continues to grow.



## Female Emancipation and Masonic Membership: An Essential Collection By Guillermo De Los Reyes Heredia

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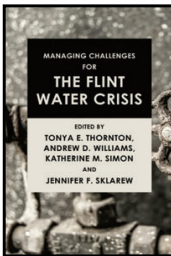
Female Emancipation and Masonic Membership: An Essential Combination is a collection of essays on Freemasonry and gender that promotes a transatlantic discussion of the study of the history of women and Freemasonry and their contribution in different countries.



## Bunker Diplomacy: An Arab-American in the U.S. Foreign Service by Nabeel Khoury

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After twenty-five years in the Foreign Service, Dr. Nabeel A. Khoury retired from the U.S. Department of State in 2013 with the rank of Minister Counselor. In his last overseas posting, Khoury served as deputy chief of mission at the U.S. embassy in Yemen (2004-2007).



## Managing Challenges for the Flint Water Crisis Edited by Tonya E. Thornton, Andrew D. Williams, Katherine M. Simon, Jennifer F. Sklarew

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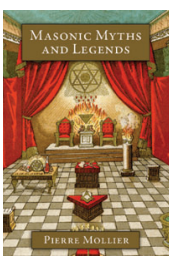
This edited volume examines several public management and intergovernmental failures, with particular attention on social, political, and financial impacts. Understanding disaster meaning, even causality, is essential to the problem-solving process.



## User-Centric Design by Dr. Diane Stottlemeyer

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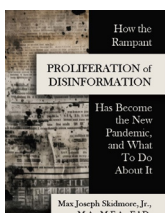
User-centric strategy can improve by using tools to manage performance using specific techniques. User-centric design is based on and centered around the users. They are an essential part of the design process and should have a say in what they want and need from the application based on behavior and performance.



## Masonic Myths and Legends by Pierre Mollier

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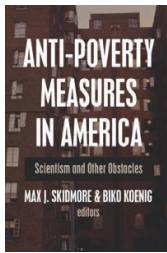
Freemasonry is one of the few organizations whose teaching method is still based on symbols. It presents these symbols by inserting them into legends that are told to its members in initiation ceremonies. But its history itself has also given rise to a whole mythology.



## How the Rampant Proliferation of Disinformation has Become the New Pandemic by Max Joseph Skidmore Jr.

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This work examines the causes of the overwhelming tidal wave of fake news, misinformation, disinformation, and propaganda, and the increase in information illiteracy and mistrust in higher education and traditional, vetted news outlets that make fact-checking a priority

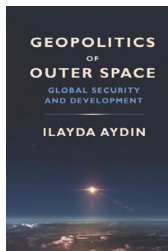


## Anti-Poverty Measures in America: Scientism and Other Obstacles

Editors, Max J. Skidmore and Biko Koenig

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Anti-Poverty Measures in America brings together a remarkable collection of essays dealing with the inhibiting effects of scientism, an over-dependence on scientific methodology that is prevalent in the social sciences, and other obstacles to anti-poverty legislation.

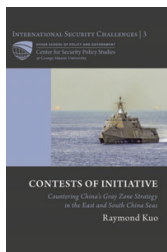


## Geopolitics of Outer Space: Global Security and Development

by Ilayda Aydin

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A desire for increased security and rapid development is driving nation-states to engage in an intensifying competition for the unique assets of space. This book analyses the Chinese-American space discourse from the lenses of international relations theory, history and political psychology to explore these questions.

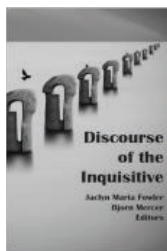


## Contests of Initiative: Countering China's Gray Zone Strategy in the East and South China Seas

by Dr. Raymond Kuo

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China is engaged in a widespread assertion of sovereignty in the South and East China Seas. It employs a “gray zone” strategy: using coercive but sub-conventional military power to drive off challengers and prevent escalation, while simultaneously seizing territory and asserting maritime control.



## Discourse of the Inquisitive

Editors: Jaclyn Maria Fowler and Bjorn Mercer

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Good communication skills are necessary for articulating learning, especially in online classrooms. It is often through writing that learners demonstrate their ability to analyze and synthesize the new concepts presented in the classroom.



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