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Adaptation under scrutiny: peering through the lens of community governance in China

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ADAPTATION UNDER SCRUTINY: PEERING THROUGH THE LENS OF COMMUNITY GOVERNANCE IN CHINA

There is a current of thinking that contends that the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has been remarkably adroit at adapting governance structures, practices and strategies to ensure its survival. Indeed, this process has been so adroit as to outmanoeuvre any fundamental challenge to its rule and to subtly subdue social protests. Moreover, such durability has been premised not just on the use of coercive means but also on soft measures of co-optation, extended consultation, and strategic widening of social and political space. This adaptation has involved changes in the way the Party/state relates to society, and specifically moves to `professionalise' front-line welfare work, harness the energies of `citizens' and outsource service provision to non-governmental players.

This paper argues first that adaptation has unintended consequences that can detract from achieving the purposes of adaptive policies and leave untouched crucial problems of social cohesion and inequalities that can threaten stability. Second, it contends that the structural fault-lines of institutionalised inequality, marketization, and professionalization along with certain pathologies of Leninist authoritarianism can undermine the goals of adaptation, generating unintended outcomes, but not necessarily regime crisis.

The paper develops this argument through the lens of urban community governance, that is, the policies, measures and practices introduced over the last two decades to refashion the way the Chinese Party/state governs society, focussing in particular on residents' committee level. In doing so it weaves together the hitherto separate areas of study on community governance and authoritarian adaptation, casting a fresh look at processes of change at the micro-level of the community. It begins by reviewing the literature around adaptation and the CCP, and then sketches the socio-economic background to community governance reforms, the key institutional changes and challenges posed. It then draws on the findings of qualitative research in two neighbourhoods of Shanghai to illustrate the complexities of addressing issues of participation and social cohesion through reform of residents' committees. It then analyses the structural fault-lines and contradictions in policy goals and practice that confront local residents and cadres in trying to refashion local governance institutions. In the conclusion it draws together the key findings and considers the implications of adaptation for averting crisis and enhancing legitimacy and the durability of the CCP.

This paper draws on 40 semi-structured interviews conducted on a random basis with residents, 10 interviews with residents' committee members, and town governor in two neighbourhoods of Shanghai, one centrally located and one on the periphery in 2012 and 2013, as well as interviews with academics[i]. The research formed part of a larger EU project examining urban development in Shanghai, Kunming, Chongqing and Hangzhou[ii]. Members of the research team used a common set of open-ended questions to guide the research in the two neighbourhoods they each studied[iii]. Semi-structured interviews are particularly useful in capturing complexity, depth and nuance inherent in processes of change (Mason, 2002: 65). The sample does not claim to be representative but provides insights into adaptive governance at community level that were found across the wider project and echo findings in other studies.

<u>Adaptation and enduring authoritarianism</u>

An emerging body of literature contends that the CCP has proved remarkably resilient, not least because of its ability to adapt, experiment and innovate whilst retaining control. Nathan (2003:14-15) explains the Party's continued rule in terms of input institutions such as competitive village elections, channels for directing citizens' grievances, and more independent mass media. Reforms aimed at increasing public participation through public hearings or participatory budgeting, or measures to enhance state accountability such as the 1989 Administrative Litigation Act are but some of the mechanisms used by the Party to demonstrate responsiveness and boost legitimacy (He and Thogersen, 2010). Heilmann and Perry (2011) similarly argue that the continuing rule of the CCP contrasted to the rapid collapse of the Soviet Union owes much to the Party's willingness to experiment and to creative adaptive capacities, which trace their heritage to Maoist guerrilla tactics during revolutionary struggle. Wang, too, (2009:370) contends that `deep-seated one-size-does-not-fit-all pragmatism' underpins the CCP's resilience.

Shambaugh (2008) relates the Party's resilience to internal changes in the Party and other social, economic, and institutional reforms which have bolstered its capacity to rule. He argues that adaptive reforms lead to a constant cycle of reform and readjustment but holds back from concluding that this will yield only positive outcomes. In his words, `Just as atrophy is not an exorable process leading to ultimate collapse, neither does adaptation lead to the happy land of political stability and sustainability' (Shambaugh 2008: 177). Adopting a softer approach to social unrest is part of this repertoire of adaptive governance. By engaging

protestors in dialogue, mediating conflicts as soon as they emerge (Su and He 2010) and channelling workers' grievances through legal mechanisms based on individual rights (Friedman and Lee 2010), the CCP has subtly managed to reduce the risk of instability arising from social grievances. As writers such as O'Brien (2009), Perry (2009) and Wasserstrom (2009), Florini et al (2012) contend, China is far from being on the brink of collapse. In Perry's words (2009:20), `So long as the central state responds sympathetically yet shrewdly to the grievances expressed in widespread protest, it emerges strengthened rather than weakened'. Thus, the resilience and adaptation literature suggests that the CCP can maintain power as long as it keeps adapting in a dynamic way so as to dilute, deflect and contain discontent. The prospects of regime change lie in an unimaginable distant future.

Whilst adaptation may at times succeed in thwarting the development of alternative power bases and secure sufficient stability to maintain a modified form of rule, it can also backfire, causing more contestation, widening societal fissures and increasing social alienation. Such backfiring is not just because of `new expectations and problems' created by reform processes that then trigger readjustment, as Shambaugh (2008: 177) hints at, but rather because the adaptive processes confront underlying structural processes, deep-seated inequalities and institutional pathologies. The process of creative adaptation may resolve immediate socio-economic problems that threaten to disrupt social order but it can also aggravate or generate new contradictions that limit the success of adaptation. This may be usefully explored through the lens of community governance, a field that has experienced considerable institutional adaptation and innovation over the last twenty years, yet has rarely been discussed within the framework of authoritarian resilience and adaptation.

II Background on Community Governance Reforms

As with village elections in rural areas, community governance reforms were in part a response to the perceived need to maintain social stability in urban areas[iv]. In the pre-reform period the primary institution for social cohesion, order and welfare was the urban `*danwe*i' or work-unit. It was here that most state enterprise employees lived their lives, worked and received welfare benefits such as pensions, health care and education. Those not belonging to a work-unit fell under the umbrella of the residents' committee (*jumin weiyuanhui*)[v]. These committees were quasi-governmental, social institutions that undertook state functions such as distributing welfare, family planning, monitoring migrants, resolving disputes and assisting unemployed youth find work. The committees were composed of volunteers, often

retired and older women, who served as intermediary conduits between residents and the street committee (*jiedao weiyuanhui)*, the lowest level of government (Heberer 2009: 492; Heberer and Goebel 2011: 78-80; Benewick, Tong and Howell 2004; Read 2000; Bray, 2005: 185; Choate, 1998; Pan 2007).

Increasing rural-urban migration, privatisation of property and the collapse of the work-unit (*danwei*), were changing the social fabric of cities, creating new spatial and socio-economic inequalities and splintering social cohesion. Local governance at street committee level and below struggled to keep pace with the changing demands of a rapidly shifting local populace (Li 2008:135). As Read (2000: 811) notes, officials recognised that residents' committees had become `sclerotic, overly authoritarian, underfunded and isolated from their communities', and no longer fit for purpose. The working style, institutional structures, functions and rationale of local governance needed to change to cope with new demands and maintain social order. Just as communitarianism in the USA and the `Third Way' under New Labour in the UK turned to notions of community, so too the CCP sought to bring the community more firmly into local governance processes (Bray 2006).

It was against this backdrop that the CCP introduced top-down reforms to create new institutions of local urban governance. To this end it resuscitated the concept of `community' from the annals of pre-liberation anthropology, drawing on the exemplary work of Fei Xiaotong, who translated `community' (*shequ)* as a society in a spatially defined area (Xu 2008: 634; Bray, 2006; Bray, 2005: 181-183; Li 2008). This concept of a community was institutionalised in the 1989 Organic Law on Urban Residents` Committee Organisation, which delimited the boundaries of a community as an area broader than the old residents' committee but smaller than the street committee, comprising between 100 and 700 households according to Article 6 (Heberer 2009: 493; Bray, 2006: 334; Choate 1998; Read 2000:807-8). Below the community are the residents' committees which in turn provide the focal point for smaller residential sub-neighbourhoods (*xiaoqu*). The 1989 Law forms the legal basis for community governance policies and principles encapsulated in the official discourse of `self-management, self-education and self-service', the `three selfs'. This was followed in May 1991 with a national plan for constructing communities in all cities (Yan and Gao, 2005:225). The `community' (*shequ*) is thus a legally constituted, territorially limited and administratively defined concept that is distinct from sociological conceptions of community as self-formed groups such as community of scholars or eco-warriors.

As in many reform processes the CCP granted selected localities permission to experiment between 1991 and 1995 and devise different models of community governance (Yan and Gao, 2005: 225; Heilmann, 2009). Experiments began first in Shanghai, Shenyang and Wuhan, the Shenyang model being more `bottom-up' than the `administrative penetration' model of Shanghai (Lu and Li 2008: 182; Bray , 2005: 183-1990, 2006; Xu 2008: 637). Following further experimentation in 26 selected urban districts, the central government issued `Opinions on the Urge of Community Construction in the Whole Country' in 2000. One year later the idea of community and community construction was included in the 10th Economic and Social Plan[vi]. With the laying-off of millions of state workers from the mid-1990s, the role of the community in governing laid-off workers and migrants grew in importance (Bray, 2006: 536). It was during the period of Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao (2002-2012), when issues of social development and `harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*) were emphasised, that the idea of community-building was pushed forward even further in policy and research (Xu 2008: 637).

The `three selfs' principles of community governance heralded both a re-working of state-society relations at the local level, and new institutions and practices. In the new system the relationship between residents' committees and street committees was to become one of `guidance' rather than leadership, signalling greater autonomy for communities. The use of the concept of `self' signifies an attempt to reduce the dependence of individual citizens on the state, and to shift residents' allegiance and identity from the work-unit to the community. It is part of a broader strategy of state and welfare reform, whereby certain welfare functions are offloaded onto the market and society, and communities become part of new governance techniques as the front-line of welfare provision, taking on a much wider range of functions (Bray 2006:533; Heberer 2009). Ultimately it signals a more indirect role for the state whereby it regulates rather than commands, paralleling the direction of market reforms.

These principles inform the new institutional arrangements that have emerged in the process of local governance reform. The essential building-blocks of these institutional adaptations are the notion of the citizen as an independent actor in public affairs, the administrative conceptualisation of the community, the spatial re-ordering of governance through the creation of new community centres, community elections and the cultivation of a new type of personnel, namely, the professional social worker. Adaptation has also led to an expansion of governing institutions at community level such as property management committees, property owners' committees, and sub-contracted non-governmental community

organisations. The new-fangled community centres serve as the central locus of citizen interaction with the state, with counters corresponding to governmental functions such as welfare assistance, family planning and employment.

Apart from creating new structures, the adaptation of local governance has also entailed changes in staffing. While previous residents' committees were run by volunteers and retired cadres, who often held their positions indefinitely, in the new system there has been a concerted effort to deploy more educated retired people with organisational experience and younger people in their 30s or 40s. While some laid-off state workers from the mid-1990s were assigned positions in residents' committees as `social workers' in cities such as Shanghai and Shenyang，local governments have increasingly appointed graduate-trained social workers to work in the street and residents' committees, increasing their salaries and compensation as an incentive (Lu and Li, 2008: 183; Pan 2007; Yu 2008a; Bray 2006:539)[vii]. Elections to the residents' committee on a three-yearly basis have also been introduced to draw popular leaders into governance positions, thereby strengthening potentially the legitimacy of the local Party/state, as done with village elections. Experiments with residents' committee elections started in 1999 in Shanghai (Gui et al, 2006) and by 2006 40 per cent of committees held direct elections (Chen, Cooper and Sun 2009). There are thus at least four types of community governance persons at the neighbourhood level: professional social workers, who serve as community construction workers (Yan and Gao, 2005: 225), elected representatives, volunteers, and cadres, the first two of these being recent innovations. As will be seen in the next section, the introduction of community elections and professional social workers has not always led to outcomes positive for the local state, fostering instead increased alienation and distrust.

This shift from a top-down approach towards a more citizen-driven, seemingly more inclusive way of governing communities poses potential challenges on behavioural and political fronts. In the case of residents, community governance requires them to play a more active role in community affairs. It assumes the availability of time, capacity to self-organise, willingness to participate, and identification with the community. As for state cadres, Party leaders and members, this implies shifting from commanding people to guiding people, from mobilising residents through campaigns to cultivating their capacities to help themselves, from determining people's needs to being responsive，and `co-governing' with market and social organisations (Li 2008: 139). Yet granting greater autonomy to communities carries

political risks of oppositional organising and as Florini et al (2012: 178) note, of `divergent normative directions'. To mitigate this risk the Party from the late 1990s has strengthened Party-building in grassroots communities, thereby setting a limit on citizen autonomy (Li 2008: 135; Bray 2006: 535; Yu 2008b:4) and ensuring co-governance remains under the leadership of the Party. As will be seen in the next section, adaptation does not always lead to outcomes that enhance social cohesion and social stability.

III.   Community Governance In Practice

This section outlines the contours of institutional adaptation in community governance in two Shanghai neighbourhoods, whilst the subsequent section examines the unintended consequences of residents' committee reforms as regards self-governance goals..

Shanghai, with a population of 23 million, 19 districts, 99 street committees and 3,661 residents' committees, has been a pioneer in the administrative restructuring of local governance. In particular it devised the `two levels of government, three levels of management, and four levels of networks' framework of local governance, whereby the street committee served as the lowest level of government administration and the residents' committee as the lowest level of implementation (Li 2008; Yu 2008a,b; Gui et al 2006). As Gui et al (2006:12-13) noted, these arrangements strengthened the administrative role of residents' committees, whilst the Articles 1 and 2 of the 1989 Organic Law underlined their self-governing nature, a contradiction that was to be surmounted through the development of residents' committee elections.

The two small residential areas (*xiaoqu*) investigated are referred to as Neighbourhood 1 (NH1) and Neighbourhood 2 (NH2). NH1 is an old, established area in central Shanghai and one of 19 residents' committees under the street committee, covering around 5,000 residents. NH2 is a newly constructed peripheral area with a similar population size in one of three towns in the fast-growing area on the east side of Huangpu river. The architecture of NH1 reflects its multiple layers of history: ramshackled wooden buildings in narrow, winding allies (*lilong*); spacious French villas that were forcefully divided up for multiple occupancy during the Cultural Revolution; and six storeyed workers' blocks constructed after Liberation[viii]. It was an area undergoing massive demographic change as young family members moved out, developers purchased old houses for gentrification, and as migrants poured in, renting accommodation at rates that far outweighed the actual costs to owners. With its central location and convenience for shopping, welfare facilities and transport,

residents were in general satisfied with their environment, their main concerns revolving around dog excrement, the hanging of laundry, and migrants[ix].

The main focus of the residents' committee over the last decade had been the elderly and migrants, the latter constituting half of the population. In the former case this required organising services to cover the gap left by young people, who had moved away; in the latter case it was a matter of social monitoring and control. Such was the influx of migrants that the Public Security department assigned three additional cadres to work in the committee. The community government also allocated an additional established position to tackle youth unemployment. Altogether the residents' committee had eight full-time, salaried staff members, including the Director and Party Secretary, who was the highest authority, six social workers, and four part-time, voluntary, `non-desk' committee members.

Established in 2006, NH2 is a newly constructed, territorial and administrative community built on a grid system to accommodate mainly evicted villagers resettled after the demolition of their village for an international event. The neighbourhood falls under a community government (*shequ*) that in turn answers to the nearby town authorities. Around two thirds of the town's population were non-Shanghai residents and a similar number had been evicted from elsewhere[x]. The urban landscape was dominated by newly built high-rise buildings and lacked the historical layers of architecture of NH1. Compared to residents in the rickety wooden buildings in NH1, NH2 residents enjoyed more spacious accommodation with indoor and private bathroom, toilet and kitchen, a marked improvement on their previous living conditions. However, public transport connections were inadequate, and shopping for food and household necessities was inconvenient. Residents were nostalgic for the neighbourliness and intimacy that the spatial configuration of their former village housing allowed and that the anonymous high-rises seemed to deny[xi]. As in NH1, their main concerns centred on the management of dog excrement, rubbish, laundry drying, and migrants.

Both residential areas (*xiaoqu*) have undergone processes of institutional adaptation and innovation. Taking first NH1, the district in which it was located had been merged with another district in 2011, leading to changes in institutional structure. Before the merger, NH1 had a tri-partite structure of governance, made up of the Party branch, resident's committee and social work office. Under this arrangement the Party was responsible for Party matters only; the residents' committee represented the residents; and the social work office carried out daily administrative work related to government functions. The community government

assigned social workers to work in the social work office, most of whom did not live in the community. Residents' committee members were elected by residents, non-salaried (apart from the committee head) and required to live in the community[xii]. Residents' committee's responsibilities included supervising the social workers and reflecting the residents' views to the committee. There was considerable overlap between the members of the Party committee, social work office and residents' committee.

After 2011 a bipartite structure of Party Committee and residents' committee was introduced to match governance arrangements in the larger district. The key difference was that the social work office and the residents' committee were merged. As only one of the former social workers lived in the community, the remaining social workers were hired back in as residents' committee members, their salaries covered by the community government. Furthermore, the Party secretary, who had hitherto lived in the neighbourhood, now came from outside[xiii]. The main community governance institutions in NH1 were thus the Party committee and network of resident Party members, residents' committee and a volunteer network, the housing management office and the district community centre that was located near the district government offices. Though the community centre created spaces for residents to organise and participate in social and cultural activities, the administrative re-organisation, as will be discussed below, weakened the connective tissue between the neighbourhood and residents.

In NH2, the main political institutions were the Party committee and network of resident Party members, the residents' committee and a network of volunteers, and the property management committee. The residents' committee sought to operate in the new mould of community governance, promoting self-management, self-supervision, self-service and self-education. Committee members were elected by residents every three years and their salaries covered by the town government. NH2 also had a new community centre that offered a one-stop system of servicing residents. This organised social activities for residents such as local opera, talks, dancing; provided space for residents to organise cultural and recreational activities; sub-contracted niche services to non-governmental community organisations; and provided rooms for Party members and activities[xiv]. The residents' committee had created spaces for residents to participate, but these addressed mainly the needs of older people than the young, middle-aged or parents with young children, which some interviewees would have wished for.

This new community had a highly organised capillary system of volunteers, mainly retired, older women, and Party cells that served as the `eyes and ears' of the neighbourhood. Given the potential for social unrest amongst a forcefully resettled community that had experienced the `violence' of destructive development (Sargeson 2013), Party-building took on particular significance in NH2. Altogether there were 96 residents' representatives, 48 block leaders and 391 volunteers, as well as 250 Party members. The residents' committee and Party committee assigned tasks to the volunteer and Party member networks, and the elected block leaders. Block leaders acted as a bridge between the block residents and residents' committee[xv], informing them about recent in-migration and new pregnancies. In NH 2 there were 100 regular volunteers, tasked with night patrols, removing rubbish, liaising between residents and the committee, assisting with community elections, or nominating `civilised blocks' (*wenming lou*).

These adaptations in the institutional architecture required changes for both citizens and Party/state cadres. In NH 2, for example, the town governor expected Party members and community cells to function as `Party citizens', serving as a model of self-governing, volunteering in the community and taking the lead. The residents' committee also saw its role as shifting residents from a relationship of state dependence to one of resourcefulness, initiative and community engagement. In this new scenario the state was to guide and respond to people's needs, resonant of the expectations for cadres during the Yenan period and Maoist decades to be `exemplars, pastors and technical experts' (Bray, 2005: 56-65). As will be seen in the next section, community governance reforms had unintended consequences as they confronted the fault-lines of adaptive governance.

IV.   Fault-lines of adaptive community governance

Insights from the two Shanghai neighbourhoods reveal the institutional, socio-economic and political fault-lines that are likely to rupture state attempts to re-fashion community governance and how the failure to reform in one area can affect another. Adaptation does not occur in a vacuum. Deep-seated processes of marketization, urbanisation and structural inequalities mean that altering state-society relations at the community level cannot be easily engineered. Enduring inequalities relating to the residence permit system (*hukou*) that divides rural and urban residents and aspects of reforms such as the professionalization of residents' committee work can thwart intended goals. The political fault-line of an authoritarian state seeking to entrench its control over society runs against the grain of community self-

governance. This section examines how community governance reforms at residents' committee level have unintended consequences, such as reinforcing social exclusion, alienation and reluctant participation, rendering it difficult to achieve greater social cohesion and engagement by residents in public affairs.

In analysing the field-data the following framework was used to identify whether shifts towards self-governance were occurring or not. The purpose of the community governance reforms was ostensibly to promote self-governance and greater state responsiveness to the needs of the community. If the street and residents' committees did adopt a more guiding rather than commanding role, then it could be expected that residents' committees would attend more to residents' needs rather than instructions from the street committee or higher level. The residents' committee would make available space and resources for citizens to organise themselves. If citizens were becoming less dependent on the state, then they would take the initiative to organise themselves and become more active in community affairs, whether this be setting up property owners' committees, social and cultural activities, or participating in community elections by standing as candidates, nominating candidates, and voting. The resident's committee and Party networks would give residents leeway to organise themselves rather than mobilising participation from above, leading to greater social cohesion and inclusiveness. Alternatively, if the reforms were not achieving their self-governance goals, then the residents' committee would continue to prioritise targets set from above. It would mobilise residents to volunteer and participate, whilst the Party would strengthen its presence in the community. Residents would not take the initiative to engage in community affairs or actively participate in elections.

Social exclusion

The institutionalised categorical inequality[xvi] of the residence permit system weakens attempts to mould a new type of citizen who participates in community affairs, and embodies values of solidarity, propriety and loyalty to the state. Specifically, migrants without a Shanghai residence permit are excluded from participation in community politics and urban welfare benefits. They can neither vote for the residents' committee nor stand for election. Their position as outsiders is reinforced through specific government routines of monitoring and surveillance and negative attitudes of residents. In both neighbourhoods the residents' committee was tasked with monitoring their presence, checking their behaviour and numbers. Migrants serve as a convenient scapegoat for social problems in the neighbourhood, as their

rural backgrounds are seen as equipping them poorly for urban living. The residence permit system that positions migrants as outsiders in the community institutionalises the gap between urban and migrant residents, contributing to social tension and widening social fissures.

Tensions emerging from the rapid changes in the composition of the neighbourhood, and in particular rural migrants, were evident in NH1 and NH2 and were a common refrain in other project field-sites in Shanghai. Such perceptions are well reflected in the following statements of interviewees in NH2:

`Some people who have poor quality throw their rubbish from the upper floors of the building. It is difficult to deal with such public problems since neighbours are not familiar with each other. There are a lot of migrant workers in this community and they have poor habits. They pay no attention to public hygiene and they throw their rubbish in a disordered way'[xvii].

Similarly,

`There are too many newcomers renting rooms in the neighbourhood, which upsets me…Some are even drug addicts…It's not very safe here. …The residents' committee should strengthen control over strangers'[xviii].

It falls upon community leaders, volunteers and Party members to inculcate migrants into the norms of modern urban life that enmesh everyday routines such as drying laundry or household rubbish disposal[xix]. In both communities the presence of migrants was seen as a disturbing factor that lowered the status of the community. However this did not stop residents from extracting considerable profits from migrants when renting rooms. For migrants, community governance was not about social inclusion but rather surveillance, taming, and monitoring. They were the `barbarian other' that had to be disciplined into urban modernity. Whilst Read's Beijing study (2000) points to the role of residents' committees in fostering social integration, in NH1 and NH2 residents' committees' efforts to foster volunteerism did not apply to migrants living in the area, who were rather to be surveilled and monitored. Subject to a rampage of institutional measures and negative social attitudes, migrants had few expectations of urban integration. As one migrant interviewee explained, `It's not about liking or disliking [the neighbourhood]. It's about finding somewhere to live near my work'[xx]. Their only voluntary contact with the residents' committee was when

obtaining temporary registration or gaining access to school for their children. These findings were echoed also in the other Shanghai neighbourhoods studied in the EU project (Feuchtwang 2014). The fault-line of institutionalised categorical inequality contradicted the inclusive rhetoric of community governance, curbing the prospects of moulding new forms of inclusive citizenship and greater social cohesion, and instead reinforcing rural-urban cleavages. It illustrates well how the absence of fundamental reform of the hukou system had a knock-on effect on community governance reforms.

Distance and alienation

The narrow scope of work of the residents' committee, its lack of relevance to many residents and professionalization contributed to a sense of detachment and distance from the revamped community structures. In the two Shanghai research sites the sub-divisions of tasks within residents' committee and working sub-groups predominantly reflected the needs of higher-level governmental departments that treated the residents' committee like their `legs to run affairs' Xu (2008 : 641; Heberer 2011:68).   The residents' committee focussed its work on meeting targets from the street committee relating to welfare needs, care of the elderly, security, propaganda, mediation, youth employment and surveillance of migrants. As a former committee member commented, the residents' committee could never be `a totally independent kingdom' as its staff relied on the street committee for their salaries and were required to perform tasks from above[xxi].

In both neighbourhoods the activities of the community centres were for the elderly, vulnerable groups requiring assistance, and retired cadres, rather than for young and working people[xxii]. In NH2, for example, the community centre had eleven service counters providing 18 different service functions such as health insurance, trade union affairs, cable TV fees, employment, all deriving from higher-level government departments. The functions of community centres in both sites were pre-determined from above rather than being arrived at through a process of consultation from below. As a result, several interviewees pointed out that certain needs within the community, such as those of youth, parents or working people, were not catered for[xxiii].

The town authorities had set up community centres within easy reach of residents so they could provide opportunities for `a community of strangers to get to know each other', thus promoting social cohesion and community identity. However, residents did not see the community centres as a focal point in their lives. For example, when asked how they spent

their leisure time, very few in either neighbourhood referred to the community centre as a venue for leisure activities, citing instead meeting friends and families in their homes or local parks, shopping, excursions. For those who were not dependent on welfare benefits or other services, the residents' committee was irrelevant, affecting in turn their enthusiasm for participating in public affairs. As one resident typically commented, `I don't have much contact with the residents' committee. They don't care about ordinary people, only about former cadres, the old and the poor'[xxiv].

The professionalization of community governance intensified the sense of alienation and anomie in the two research sites, which was in turn reflected in the low levels of participation in community elections, as discussed later. In NH1, for example, residents reported a more general detachment from the new residents' committee, which lacked the intimacy and familiarity of the previous one that had been staffed primarily by local residents. As a former residents' committee member commented,

"They [committee members] just come to work, leave work, take their salary, and don't try to go into the masses to understand the situation of local residents. They rely on us old retired men and women to do their work for them. When they are at work, the residents are at work. And when the residents come home, they go home. So the residents never see them and don't know who they are. ……The new committee members just think it is a job and the thought to serve the people is much lower compared with the old ones. They rarely take the initiative to contact with the masses and prefer to stay in the office waiting for the complaints and requests. In short, residents don't know them well and they are not popular."

Moreover, the professionalization of the residents' committee meant that the previously non-salaried committee members no longer had a supervisory role in relation to salaried social workers. Their role was reduced to `assisting' the social workers, `taking notes' at meetings with residents out of office hours. As the interviewee phrased it, "If it were not for us old people, they [the social workers] would not be able to do their work"

Several of the NH1 residents interviewed echoed similar sentiments of nostalgia for the former residents' committee. As one resident put it:

"I don't have much contact with the resident's committee. I don't like the new residents' committee. They are always changing and are not as good as before. They can't solve problems. The people in the old residents' committee had lived here for a long time and

knew everyone's names; now, they move on to another job or to another residents' committee. They don't go into the allies and expect you to go to their office. They don't live here and don't know the residents. They are like cadres. They are not eager to help. Before, the old residents' committee used to come around and sweep the streets publicly so everyone knew them; now they don't. They are distant in their heart and life and don't serve the people. They are graduates and from other organisations". So ironically whilst residents often saw the retired, older women of the residents' committees as intrusive and busy-bodying, residents in NH1 yearned for more engaged and active committee members who cared about community affairs[xxv].

The rationale of appointing young, educated, professional social workers to work in the residents' committee was backfiring. Though they might have better `quality' in terms of education, their ways of working generated indifference, alienation, and centrifugal tendencies. Though the residents' committee was encouraging young people to stand as candidates and social workers to reach out, the new social workers who resided elsewhere lacked familiarity with the community. They were ill equipped to foster a sense of belonging and ownership amongst local residents. Expertise without intimacy was not working.

Reluctant participation

The pressures of marketization, commodification and intensified work rhythms have limited the time and energy available to residents to engage in politics and community affairs, contributing to the sense of distance from the residents' committee and lack of interest in participation. Getting people to participate has proved much harder than leaders expected. As the Party secretary of NH2 residents' committee lamented, "I can do the administration and we can solve conflicts but the hardest thing is getting people to participate. The main problem is that people do not have the time to be concerned with community affairs". With the separation of places of work and residence and the pressures of a profit-driven market economy, time was a prized resource for residents.

Time, along with the feelings of distance from the residents' committee, contributed to low levels of volunteering[xxvi] and participation in residents' committee elections in both neighbourhoods. In NH1 there was a network of 70 volunteers, of whom around 25 were reportedly active. These volunteers were also the leaders of various lanes and performed tasks for the residents' committee such as gathering information about residents, monitoring the living arrangements of migrants and organising activities such as the World Trade Summit. In

NH1, participation rates in community elections had reportedly fallen in recent years to 20-30 per cent, reflecting a high degree of apathy, indifference and mistrust[xxvii]. Nevertheless, just under half of interviewees had voted, though all recounted considerable scepticism about the process. As one put it, "I voted but …it is a bit fake. They appoint the people really'[xxviii]. Or, as another commented, `We voted…. But the candidates do not give any speeches. We are not happy with the process. The candidates are appointed so all you can do is tick a box or not'. Interviewees reported variously about being unfamiliar with candidates, lacking adequate information, and generally distrusting the process.

A former residents' committee member commented that the reluctance to participate reflected a failure of the committee leaders to `put energy into organising the elections', partly because the burden of targets from above meant they could not devote time to engaging residents in community affairs. However, it was also the case that the weak social connections between the committee and residents meant that it could not press residents to give candidates face or return social obligations, as reported in other studies (Gui et al, 2006: 15-17). Residents interviewed in NH1 did not have a sense of personal obligation to the committee stemming from services rendered or social bonds, not least because members rarely ventured beyond their offices and mostly lived outside the area. The reluctance of residents to participate in neighbourhood affairs in the two research sites echoed similar findings in the EU project (Feuchtwang 2014) and other studies (Gui et al 2006, 17-18; Heberer and Goebel 2011:71-88; 116-151; Wang and Feng 2004). For example, a survey of Shanghai neighbourhoods by Wu et al (2008) found low participation rates in residents' committee elections, despite high voting rates as many votes were cast by proxy through block leaders.

These fault-lines of institutionalised categorical inequality, marketization, and professionalization cannot alone explain the lack of residents' enthusiasm for greater opportunities to engage in the community or the slow pace of behavioural change in front-line community leaders. Institutional adaptation is more fundamentally hamstrung by the pathologies of an authoritarian state needing to reconcile a desire to liberalise politically to a sufficient degree to re-organise social welfare and foster social cohesion with a deep-seated impulse to maintain control and survive politically. As in most authoritarian states there is a careful trade-off to be made between social control and autonomous citizen engagement. On the one hand the idea of community governance seeks to harness societal resources and encourage participation in community affairs. On the other hand, for Party leaders there is always the risk that self-governance could encourage citizens to challenge Party rule, leading

to social chaos. For this reason self-governance has to be carefully engineered to ensure that it unleashes sufficient energy to foster citizen engagement but without giving citizens full play to determine local affairs or oppose the government. The persisting social control is manifested in Party control over residents' committee elections and selection of property owners' committees and in strengthening of Party networks of volunteers, patterns that were evident too in the other project field-sites.

Elections

Strengthening the leadership role of the Party in the community has taken precedence over instituting genuinely democratic elections to the residents' committee or building a community (Yan and Gao 2005:230). As Gui et al (2006: 21-23) point out in an earlier study, community elections were more about recruiting personnel for the Party than promoting goals of self-governance. This becomes most apparent in the way community elections are organised so that the final choice of candidates has to be approved by the Party at street committee level (Pan 2007: 220-255; Heberer 2011: 67-68; 71). As a former residents' committee leader in NH1 recounted, "Of course the street committee and the Party have the authority to make the final decision about the candidate list, but the opinion of residents is respected as long as the candidate does not have very big political problems". Furthermore, the organisational department of the resident's committee selected the director of the residents' committee.

As in NH1 an election committee made up of predominantly Party members organised the elections in NH2. Party members, block leaders and volunteers were deployed to distribute information about candidates and encourage resident's representatives to nominate candidates. So in NH2 there were 15 candidates nominated for seven positions. Residents' representatives, who overlapped with the block leaders, voted for nine candidates from the list of fifteen. As in NH1 a *cha'e* system was used, whereby one or two more candidates than positions were selected. So in the end residents voted from nine candidates to fill seven positions. Only residents with a permanent resident permit were permitted to vote, excluding both migrants and those evicted households that had not yet transferred their permits because of pending disputes over land compensation. A *cha'e* system was also used to choose block leaders. In this way residents from 62 flats could select two out of four candidates, one of whom would be block leader and the other the residents' representative.

Property owners' committees

Many researchers refer to property-owners' associations as exemplars of autonomy. However, in practice, they still require government authorisation and few are democratically elected or capable of acting independently, and when they are, they are usually in high-cost housing (Merle 2014, Read 2012). As there were no private high-rise buildings in NH1, any issues relating to housing were addressed by the property management committee (*gongguan suo),* which charged a small fee for the maintenance and repairs of houses. However, in a high-rise block near to NH1 and under the same street committee, residents had formed a property-owners' association to negotiate with the property company and push it to make transparent its accounts. In order to hold elections for the committee, residents had first to lodge a file with the government to gain approval; once approved, the process was organised from above rather than by the residents[xxix]. A similar tale of government authorisation applied in NH2. At the time of interview, a property owners' association had not yet been formed in NH2 as it had been split administratively in 2011 and the town authorities had not yet decided the budget for each sub-neighbourhood. Its establishment was clearly dependent on approval from above and subject to Party leadership. Though numerous interviewees expressed a desire for such an association in order to hold the property management company to account and resolve issues such as transparency in use of deposits, they had not yet set up their own independent association. The process was clearly to be engineered from above. As a senior official explained, "The property owners' committee has to accept the leadership of the residents' committee…If you want to set up a property owners' committee, it's not easy because you don't know who is going to be suitable to do so. The residents' committee will monitor this process. Each residents' committee has a Party cell and the independent property owners' committee needs to have the support of the Party cell and the residents' committee so it can carry out its activities efficiently'. The interweaving of Party systems of control into the new fabric of community governance thus undermines the goal of promoting active resourceful citizens.

Party networks

While community governance calls for greater citizen involvement, it is matched by the extension of Party networks into the community that provide a Leninist-style mechanism for the Party/state to filter policy down and relay concerns upwards to higher leaders[xxx]. In both Shanghai research sites the Party Secretary was the highest authority in the residents'

committee and was appointed and remunerated by the street committee rather than by local Party members or residents. In NH1 the residents' committee had three Party sub-branches with around 180 members. The general Party branch comprised nine members, who were also residents' committee members or local activists. Most volunteers and block leaders were also Party members. In the case of NH2, the building of new institutions of community governance was paralleled by the establishment of thick Party networks, with Party members similarly overlapping in positions of responsibility. Party members were to be leading agents in fostering a new form of community governance that valued self-governance, volunteering, and knowledge. When block leaders were first `elected' in NH2, the candidates were selected and appointed by the local Party committee.

Party networks were mobilised to meet environmental targets. For example, in NH2 the property management committee and the residents' committee initiated an incentive scheme in 2011 to `raise the standards' of cleanliness in the neighbourhood, by organising random inspection teams to award points to the best kept blocks in the neighbourhood. To this end they drew upon a network of Party volunteers to mobilise reluctant residents to participate. Such mechanisms of participation echoed a long trajectory of state-led campaigns to `civilise' society from above such as awards for `five good households', whereby the Party assumes the mantel of moral authority towards those it governs, who in turn passively participate. Institutional innovation such as new one-stop community centres or community elections did little to diffuse residents' apathy and cynicism when residents' committee leaders and street committee cadres seemed to continue with old mobilising governance styles.

Broader political concerns of regime stability thus clash with and undermine reforms aimed at enhancing residents' engagement and initiative in community affairs. The reluctance of the Party/state in the two field-sites to let residents nominate candidates for community elections or allow property owners to set up and run their own committees is closely related to the pathology of a deeply entrenched Leninist style of governing that is not easily reconciled with a more bottom-up approach to community governance. The Leninist notion of an elite vanguard of Party workers collides with the more democratic notion of active citizenship. Such an approach posits a divide between a vanguard elite of advanced workers (in the Maoist period) or advanced citizens (in the post-Deng period), who possess particular qualities such as Party loyalty, probity, education and popularity, and a mass of citizens (and non-citizens in the case of migrants), who supposedly lack such qualities, particularly education. By stressing certain features such as `quality' (*suzhi)*, education, success, physical

ability, barriers to entry are erected which keep out those who do not fulfil such criteria. None of the interviewees in either research site showed any interested in standing as candidates, citing their lack of capabilities or knowledge as a key reason. The elitist, closed Party recruitment system and continued Party dominance over election processes, enable the Party to control its reputation by cultivating potential leaders who are popular, educated and competent. As the Party Secretary in NH2 recounted, `Party members are models for the community and are generally of a higher quality than ordinary people'.

Thus the pathologies of Leninist authoritarianism incline the Party-state to preserve its hold over society whilst maintaining the appearance of adapting to become more participatory and inclusive. These learned routines and patterns of institutional behaviour are almost compulsive and prevent an authentic realisation of self-governance.

Conclusion

This article set out to argue through the lens of community governance that adaptation has unintended consequences such as reinforcing social exclusion, alienation and reluctant participation that can detract from achieving adaptive policy goals. In leaving untouched issues of social cohesion and inequality, adaptation does not guarantee stability and legitimacy. It suggested that unintended consequences were not just because of new expectations and problems but also because adaptation confronts structural issues, deep-seated, institutionalised inequality, trade-offs of professionalization, and authoritarian pathologies. These rupture state attempts to re-fashion community governance, engendering social exclusion, indifference and alienation rather than nurturing independent, engaged residents eager to participate in public life. These general effects were evident in both neighbourhoods of Shanghai and indeed resonated with findings in all the EU project sites and are echoed in studies of other cities.

Though top-down reforms of residents' committees generated new institutions, like community centres and social workers, committees functioned more effectively as implementing vehicles for welfare than as a catalyst for self-governance. The appointment of professional social workers dented the connective tissue that had previously bound resident committee leaders to their communities. Added to this, the pathologies of Leninist authoritarianism proved an enduring constraint on enthusing residents to engage independently in community affairs. In both communities residents retreated into apathy and passivity, either because they did not require the services of the committee or because the

pressures of intensified work and the reality of Party domination reduced any incentive to engage in public affairs. Contradictory goals of enhancing self-governance whilst extending Party control over society reinforce resident's apathy and cynicism. Adaptive community governance neither leads by default to enhanced civic engagement nor more responsive governance. It may maintain a sufficient level of social order to avert chaos but its unintended consequences lead neither inevitably to either crisis or enhanced legitimacy.

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[i] Interviews and places are anonymised at the request of interviewees.

[ii] The project on Urban Development, Traditions and Modern Life-styles in China was led by Professor Steffen Feuchtwang, LSE and covered 20 neighbourhoods, of which six were in Shanghai.

ii. These interview protocols addressed issues such as governance arrangements, elections, relations with residents' committees, volunteering, property owners' committee, property management committee, key problems in neighbourhood, open spaces, leisure, security and satisfaction with residential area.

[iv] As Read (2000:812) notes, a key impetus to the new 1989 law on residents' committees was `increasing disorder in the cities'.

[v] As Bray (2006:536) notes, in 1992 more than 90 per cent of urban workers belonged to a work-unit.

[vi] As Yan and Gao (2005: 226) note, the NPC and CCP formally recognised the importance of community construction in 1998, paving the way for its inclusion in the next 5 Year Plan.

[vii] With the expansion of social work from the late 1990s as part of a more general overhaul of the welfare system, the number of qualified social workers increased over fourfold from 4,192 in 2008 to 19,525 in 2012 (China Statistics Yearbook 2013). On the distinctive features of social work in China see Hutchings and Taylor 2007.

[viii] For an excellent anthropological study of a Shanghai neighbourhood see Pan 2007.

[ix] See also Forrest and Yip's Guangzhou study (2007: 55) on the importance to residents of convenience for shopping and transport.

[x] In 2012 9 out of 23 million (40%) Shanghai residents were migrants .

[xi] See Smith (2014: 376-7) for similar sentiments about the mutuality of rural living and the anomie of city life.

[xii] See Liu (2011: 74) and Pan (2007) on social workers in Shanghai.

[xiii] Heberer and Goebel (2011: 81) note the same phenomenon.

[xiv] Visit to NH1,2 community centres, April 2013.

[xv] Bray (2006: 541) describes a similar set-up of mainly Party activists in Shenyang.

[xvi] Tilly (2007: 111) defines categorical inequality as `organised differences in advantages by gender, race, nationality, ethnicity, religion, community, and similar classification systems'.

[xvii] Interviewee 7, NH2.

[xviii] Interviewee 5, NH2.

[xix] The 2001 10th Economic and Social Five Year Plan positions community building as a modernising project (see Yan and Gao (2005: 227). Also, Tomba's Shenyang study (2014:158) on residents' perceptions of `quality' residents.

[xx] Interviewee 12, NH1.

[xxi] See also Wang (2013: 9) on a Beijing residents' committee norms and practices.

[xxii] Interview, resident, NH2, April 2013. See also Wang (2013).

[xxiii] See also, Lu and Li's study of Shenyang and Shanghai on this point (2008: 191), Heberer and Goebel (2011:97) and Wang on Beijing (2013:11).

[xxiv] Interviewee 11, NH1.

[xxv] Read (2000:815-816) found similar contradictory perceptions of residents' committees.

[xxvi] In 2005 only 3% of all urban inhabitants participated in voluntary activities (Renmin Ribao 06.12.2006 cited in Heberer 2009: 500). See also Forrest and Yip's (2007:60) research on neighbourhoods in Guangzhou and Pan's (2007) study of a Shanghai neighbourhood for similar findings.

[xxvii] Former resident committee member, NH1, 13.04.13

[xxviii] Interviewee 3, NH1.

[xxx] See Yu (2008: 93-4, 101-3) and Bray (2005:185) on the role of the Party.