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The function of expert involvement in China's local policy making

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Abstract
Policy making in authoritarian regimes is assumed to be exclusive. The selective use of experts in China questions that assumption. Through three case studies from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, we illustrate experts' functions in China. Local policy makers rely on them as science arbiters and to provide policy legitimization, just like their counterparts in the democracies of the Western world. They also have a function we call an "accountability facilitator," which highlights the uniqueness of expert involvement in China. These cases describe the benefits the Chinese government receives from experts and explain why it is willing to listen to the public in certain circumstances.

KEYWORDS
China, expert involvement, policy design, policy entrepreneurs, policy process, scientific knowledge

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Outside experts have become indispensable to policy making in recent decades, and policy makers have come to appreciate their various contributions. Their academic research findings help identify social problems (Meijer et al., 2013; Straus et al., 2011) and their systematic evaluations help determine the feasibility of policy alternatives and their possible outcomes (Kropp & Wagner, 2010; Radaelli, 1995; Weible, 2008; Weiss, 1977, 1979). Debate between experts from different advocacy coalitions facilitates policy learning and is widely regarded as the catalyst for policy change (Hall, 1993; Sabatier, 1987, 1988). Thus, acting as policy entrepreneurs, these professionals can sometimes recalibrate policy makers' attention and rearrange the public policy agenda (Dunlop, 2016; Jones & Baumgartner, 2005; Kingdon, 1984).

Much of the research in this area comes from democracies. Little is known about what experts can do in authoritarian regimes, where political power is based on the support of a small group of elites instead of legitimation from ordinary citizens (Bueno de Mesquita et al., 2003; Svolik, 2012). Because political participation in authoritarian regimes is usually restricted, manipulated, and controlled (Diamond, 2002; Escriba-Folch, 2013; Schedler, 2002), leaders allow participation in policy making as a means of buying loyalty (Gandhi, 2008; Gandhi & Przeworski, 2006; Truex, 2014b). From this perspective, expert involvement should be rare. Even when such a practice exists, it is likely performative rather than a demonstration of substantive influence (Owen & Bindman, 2019).

The literature on elite cooptation cannot thoroughly explain the case of China where expert involvement is widespread. One of the most profound decisions made by Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s was the resurrection of expertise in policy making. In his words, "Being 'red' means one must strive to be 'expert'… We cannot reconcile ourselves to lagging behind others; if we do, we will not survive" (Gewirtz, 2017, p. 71). The Party could no longer evaluate cadre performance solely based on political loyalty as in the Mao era, knowledge must have equal weight. As a result, experts have played a role in China's policy process since the market reforms began and are particularly visible in cases like the Five-Year Plan and the international climate change negotiations (Hu, 2013; Wubbeke, 2013). Students of Chinese politics have, for decades, made many attempts to determine who they are and why their opinions matter to policy makers (Naughton, 2002; Tanner, 2002; Wubbeke, 2013; Zhu, 2009). But the picture remains incomplete. Most of the previous studies have focused on experts rather than the regime. The unanswered question is, what benefit does the Chinese government receive from consulting experts?

Epistemologically, the function of expert involvement can be decomposed into two dimensions. At the individual level, experts are located in their professions and have scientific knowledge or technical skills. They act as idea brokers and sources of policy legitimation. At the institutional level, experts are political actors who can advocate for, or compete with, policy makers in the policy subsystem. We argue expert involvement is similar at the individual level no matter the type of regime. But the roles experts play vary at the institutional level due to the differences in institutional settings among regime types. In China, the information problem incentivizes policy makers to open the policy process in order to avoid failure in an increasingly complex society. They are nevertheless careful to control the "entrance" of ideas from new policy actors that might distort or challenge an entrenched government agenda. This would be difficult to replicate in the open and inclusive policy processes in some democracies.

As we will see in the cases below, in practice, the individual and institutional levels are not clearly demarcated. Their boundaries depend on the "requirement for scientific knowledge" for, and the "preexisting government position" on, a given social problem. Their different combinations can then be used as ideal types to describe the functions of expert involvement in China. When policy makers open the policy process, we expect an expert to function as a science arbiter and to legitimize a policy just like their counterparts in the democracies. Experts may still publicly voice their opinions when the policy process is closed. Yet, as Ieong and Wu (2020) demonstrated, even when expert involvement is a necessary condition for inducing

government responsiveness, it remains passive and conditional even when policy makers would be held accountable for their decisions because of powerful social discontent. We would describe experts as accountability facilitators in such circumstances, which highlights the uniqueness of expert involvement in China.

In the following sections, after outlining the reasons why authoritarian regimes need expert involvement, we briefly review the literature of China's policy process. We illustrate how experts served the functions mentioned above through three case studies drawn from Hangzhou, Zhejiang province: "Air Pollution Regulations during the G20 Summit," "Local Regulations on App-based Ride-hailing Services," and "Car Ownership Restriction (COR) Policy." We summarize and discuss our findings in the Conclusion.

WHY DO AUTHORITARIAN REGIMES NEED EXPERTS?

Although, theoretically, authoritarian regimes can make policy in an arbitrary manner because they have less checks and balances, policy debate is widespread as recent studies point out (see the summary from Gandhi et al., 2020). Policy legitimacy is not guaranteed and it heavily relies on outcomes for its justification. For authoritarian regimes relying on performance legitimacy (e.g., Singapore, China) (Wong & Huang, 2010; Zhao, 2009), if a policy fails, the ruling party would be in crisis (Baekkeskov & Rubin, 2017).

The first incentive to involve experts is to boost the government's ability to process information and solve problems. As Lindblom (1959, p. 80) pointed out, policy making is never based on comprehensive rationality, "it assumes intellectual capacities and sources of information that men simply do not possess, and it is even more absurd as an approach to policy when the time and money that can be allocated to a policy problem is limited, as is always the case." Policy makers must filter information and concentrate on what is useful in order to make decisions. How policy makers avoid information overload is an under studied topic even in the democracies. In recent research conducted by Walgrave and Dejaeghere (2017) in Belgium, politicians applied various filter mechanisms, such as routine meetings, specialized secretaries, or standard information templates, to "shield them from raw information." The knowledge experts possess provides cues for problem-solving more efficiently than ordinary people without specialized knowledge can achieve (Simon, 1993). Like a doctor diagnosing a patient based on the information he receives, he quickly recalls his expertise and offers a judgment. If the doctor is qualified, his diagnosis will be correct in most cases. Policy making then becomes a parallel process in which experts utilize information (i.e., science knowledge) and spend time developing and extracting what is most valuable. Bureaucratic sectors, concentrated on politics, aggregate preferences based on fine-tuned information, and decide when to stop experts from searching for new policy alternatives (Simon, 1972). We expect policy makers in authoritarian regimes to have the same demand since bounded rationality is human nature. Cases like think tanks in East and Southeast Asia, experts in the Russian budget process, and the expert committee in China's Five-Year Plan, for example, fit the above pattern (Jakobson, 2017; Nachiappan et al., 2010; Qi et al., 2020; Xue et al., 2018).

The second incentive for policy makers to use experts is policy legitimacy. Legitimization refers to "general confidence among the public that a government's power to make binding decisions for the polity is justified and appropriate" (Wallner, 2008, p. 423). Officials can claim their decisions are scientific and evidence based, thereby defending the government's policy position. The value of scientific research today is no longer as Weiss (1977) described it in the 1970s; it does not "indirectly" influence policy outcomes through "enlightenment." Over the decades since, experts have been more frequently invited into the policy process. For example, Christensen and Holst (2017) found the ratio of members from academia in advisory

commissions in Norway had increased from 9% to 27% over the decades. Gornitzka and Sverdrup (2008) argued expert groups played an increasingly important role in the European Union, which is reflected in their significant increases in number between 1975 and 2007 (from 571 to 1237). A similar tendency was also observed by Hunter and Boswell (2015) in the United Kingdom. They argued this trend emerged because these commissions enable experts to "play a substantiating function where they provide evidence or support for the government's preferred course of action—and they play a legitimizing role where they help signal that the government is taking appropriate action to address a problem" in an increasingly complex and knowledge-oriented society (Hunter & Boswell, 2015, p. 11). The extent to which expert involvement serves the same functions in authoritarian settings is open to debate. However, our case studies suggest local government in China applied the same strategies to construct policy legitimacy.

For the reasons mentioned above, we should not be surprised to observe that democracies and authoritarian regimes used expert involvement instrumently in decision making in a similar manner. However, the crucial difference lies in the extent of inclusiveness in the policy process. When experts share a different opinion with policy makers, an inclusive and open policy process provides them various venues to hold government officials accountable—which, if we followed the definition from Bovens (2007, p. 450) "is a relationship between an actor and a forum, in which the actor has an obligation to explain and justify his or her conduct, the forum can post questions and pass judgment, and the actor may face consequences." It is the reason why in authoritarian regimes, as seen in the case of China, policy makers intentionally control the timing for expert involvement to avoid the government agenda being challenged and conditionally make justifications on government decisions, usually only when social discontent is strong. From this perspective, experts as an "instrument" have been more and more emphasized in authoritarian regimes. For example, Xue and others (2018) pointed out that high-quality policy studies are increasingly needed to support decision making (instead of a relaxation in ideological control, or a road toward democratization, which explains the thriving of think tanks in China in recent decades). However, at the same time, experts' "political role" in policy making remains marginalized.

WHAT DO WE KNOW ABOUT CHINA'S POLICY PROCESS?

Compared with democracies, the policy processes in authoritarian regimes are more difficult to study because they are usually opaque. Political scientists tend to assume they consist of competition among the elites behind closed doors. Fortunately, how the preferences of elites are aggregated in China has been described in previous studies. According to the seminal framework from Lieberthal and Oksenberg (1988), it is known as fragmented authoritarianism. Since the Deng era, China's policy is no longer determined by the will of one or several top party leaders. Instead, pushing forward a policy agenda now depends on a process of repeated bargaining, compromise, and negotiation, called consensus building, between different bureaucratic sectors. Policy outcomes tend to be incremental, as party leaders must ensure no unit loses too much.

Although Shirk (1993) claimed China's policy process had become even more fragmented, it remains exclusive and driven by elite interests. The legitimatizing strategy the Chinese government used after beginning the market reform era required the government to be substantially responsive to society's needs (Yang & Zhao, 2014; Zhao, 2009). But identifying social preferences is a difficult task for reasons of media censorship and the lack of political participation (King et al., 2013; Lorentzen, 2013, 2017). These factors, in turn, increase the risk of policy failure and trigger social grievances in an increasingly complex and diversified society (Baekkeskov & Rubin, 2017; Chan & Zhao, 2016; Wallace, 2016).

Recognizing this weakness, the Chinese government's intent is to mitigate the information gap between state and society without political reform. This requires improving its information extraction and analytical capabilities. Examples include local experiments in participative budgetary and an established online platform for collecting public opinion (He & Thøgersen, 2010; Truex, 2014a), an idea which He and Warren (2011) conceptualized as "authoritarian deliberation."

At first glance, this concept seems contradictory. Deliberation is usually combined with democracy. However, He and Warren (2011) regarded deliberation as a mode of communication which does not necessarily bond with institutional checks and balances. Thus, "deliberation can occur under authoritarian conditions when rules use it as a means to form preferences and policies, but do so without institutionalized distributions of powers to those affected" (He & Warren, 2011, pp. 271–272). From this point of view, an expert's involvement is used through a similar logic as authoritarian deliberation in China, even considering the features that distinguish experts from ordinary people. Offering venues for expert involvement is meant to elicit better problem solving; their opinions only matter only when they serve this purpose. For the Chinese government, the ideal is "a high density of venues in which deliberation seems to exert influence, but within the context of government defined agendas and formal government control of outcomes" (He & Warren, 2011, p. 279).

A prominent example is the national Five-Year Plan, regarded as the hallmark of Chinese-style policy making (Heilmann & Melton, 2013). Similar to the policy-making process becoming less centralized, the formation of the Five-Year Plan metamorphosed from its initial "internal collective decision-making mode" in the early 1950s to a "brainstorming-type of decision-making mode" (Hu, 2013, 633). The key difference between the two modes is that the latter featured widespread expert involvement. For example, the 13th Five-Year Plan had an expert committee composed of 56 members from academia, think tanks, NGOs, entrepreneurs, bureaucrats, and the military. The weight of academia was not only overwhelming in number (23 out of 56), it was also impressive. Some prominent members included economists Justin Lin Yifu, Qian Yingyi, and Zhou Qiren.[1] According to Hu Angang, who was also a member of the expert committee, preparing the Five-Year Plan involved 11 steps and required several years to complete. Experts participated primarily in the early and intermediate stages. The first stage involved a mid-term evaluation of the previous Five-Year Plan and early-stage research, which provided the necessary information for the National Development and Reform Commission in drafting policy proposals. The second stage involved the provision of scientific elucidation after top party leaders and high-level bureaucrats reached consensus on the general direction and content of the next Five-Year Plan before it was finalized and implemented (Hu, 2013). The policy making in the Five-Year Plan illustrates how expert involvement and elite bargaining are able to operate simultaneously and in parallel, and how the Chinese government makes use of scientific knowledge to serve its political needs.

Expert involvement in subnational-level policy making is seldom discussed in previous studies (Ahlers, 2019; Teets & Noesselt, 2020). Although local policy making in China is unlikely to involve the scale of expert involvement seen in the Five-Year Plan committee, our case studies suggest local governments consciously seek advice from experts for feasible alternatives and policy legitimation, much like policy makers in democracies, if they foresee the necessity of doing so. Moreover, because local government is relatively easy to access, we are not only able to summarize experts' functions but also to describe how they interact with local government officials during the policy process.

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[1]See http://finance.sina.com.cn/china/20150710/135722650156.shtml

TABLE 1　Ideal types of expert functions in China's local policy making

Dimension	Individual		
	Institutional (policy process open)		Institutional (policy process close)
Ideal types	Science arbiter	Policy legitimation	Accountability facilitator
Requirement for scientific knowledge	High	Moderate	Low
Preexisting government policy position	Weak	Moderate	Strong
Cases	Case 1: G20 Summit	Case 2: App-based ride-hailing service	Case 3: COR

THE IDEAL TYPES OF EXPERT FUNCTIONS IN CHINA

Before moving to the case studies, a brief discussion on the definition of an expert is needed. According to Grundmann (2017), (1) experts are located in the professions and in science; (2) experts possess technical skills, including manual and intellectual skills; and (3) experts are impartial which makes their advice trustworthy. In this article, the experts we refer to are mainly university scholars or researchers from think tanks.[2] But, as Zhu and Xue (2007, p. 453) pointed out, in the context of China, think tanks "should be an 'external brain,' and in some distinct and relevant sense, independent of the government." For that reason, we excluded official policy research institutes as they are part of the bureaucratic system and are often criticized for their lack of scientific knowledge, weak methodological training, and close proximity to power.

　　For local government in China, an expert's function depends on two factors in the policy system. The first is whether scientific knowledge is required; that is, if the social problem involves or necessitates complex scientific knowledge. The second factor is whether a preexisting government policy position exists, or whether policy makers hold a policy position on alternatives. The combination of the above factors constructs three ideal types of expert functions in China's local policy making, as illustrated in Table 1.

　　The first ideal type is the "science arbiter," a concept borrowed from Pielke (2007). When experts act as science arbiters, it means they "focus on issues that can be resolved by science, which may originate in questions raised by decision makers or through debate among decision makers" (Pielke, 2007, pp. 16–17). However, they are not defending specific policy alternatives. If the social problem is highly complex, policy makers tend not to take an early position because they lack the requisite knowledge. Instead, they consult expert opinions before deciding. The second ideal type is "policy legitimation," which happens when policy alternatives are open to debate because stakeholders have conflicting interests. Expert opinions are used as justification to persuade stakeholders to accept the alternative the policy makers prefer. Finally, "accountability facilitator" refers to policy making typical of authoritarian regimes in which a government decision is made in a despotic and arbitrary manner in an exclusive policy process. Because policy makers have stated their policy position and selected a policy alternative, complex knowledge and an expert opinion is not necessary. In such circumstances, as Zhu (2013, p. 288) described, "although experts can air their opinions in various occasions, the decision makers need not listen to them." For policy makers, their first concern is to avoid

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[2]As our cases demonstrated, other professionals such as lawyers and technocrats would sometimes also be invited to participate in the policy-making process.

challenges to the government agenda. However, making decisions behind closed doors does not mean policy makers are completely exempt from accountability; it is conditional and varies case-by-case depending on the pressure from facilitators (Ieong & Wu, 2020). Compared with ordinary citizens, experts' knowledge gives their opinions more weight. As a result, expert involvement is more likely to trigger government accountability in the sense of Bovens's (2007) definition.

DATA AND METHODS

We use three cases—the "air pollution regulations during the G20 Summit, the local regulations on app-based ride-hailing services, and the car ownership restriction policy"—from Hangzhou to illustrate the functions of expert involvement in local policy making. Hangzhou is a municipal city and the provincial capital of Zhejiang province, the second-most wealthy province in China with a gross regional product per capita of 152,465 yuan and a registered population of 10.36 million in 2019.[3] It is livable and tops the list of the 10 happiest cities in China (Shen & Ahlers, 2019). Citizen satisfaction with policy making and implementation could be described as one of Hangzhou's brands. The expert consultant system in Hangzhou should be understood against this background, though its functions vary case-to-case. Although Hangzhou is not the only city implementing such a practice, its perceived successful experience influences many other cities in China and makes Hangzhou a suitable city to answer our research question. Because all the cases come from one location, we cannot only control space and time, but also ensure local socioeconomic conditions (e.g., official turnover, social preferences renewal, shock from external events) did not cause substantial changes within such a short period.

Empirical materials were collected from various sources, including face-to-face interviews, government documents, and media reports. The authors conducted 38 semistructured interviews including local government officials (17) and experts (19) between 2014 and 2016.[4] Each interview lasted at least one hour. To triangulate the responses from multiple parties, the same set of questions was asked.[5] All interview audio files were transcribed manually. Interview transcripts, government documents, and media reports were uploaded into NVivo, a qualitative data analysis software for coding and analysis. Themes were grounded in "functions of Expert Involvement." Analytical memos were also developed when exploring each theme. Based on systematic data analysis, three types of expert involvement in China's local policy making emerged and will be presented in the next section.

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[3]See the Hangzhou Statistical Bulletin 2019, available online at http://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/art/2020/3/20/art_805865_42336875.html

[4]Among the experts, five are from Zhejiang University, three were from Tsinghua University, two were from Wuhan University, two were from Nanjing University, two were from Zhejiang Gongshang University, and the remaining five came from Zhejiang University of Technology, Zhejiang University of Industry, Chinese Academy of Environmental Science, China Environmental Regulation Institute of Ministry of Environmental Protection, and the Hangzhou Association of Lawyers. For the 17 local government officials, five were from the Zhejiang Provincial Environment Protection Bureau, eight were from the Hangzhou Municipal Transportation Bureau, two were from the Hangzhou Municipal Environmental Protection Bureau, and the remaining two were from the Hangzhou Municipal Development and Reform Commission.

[5]Key interview questions about the functions of expert involvement in China's local policy making include: how do you evaluate the specific policy making (probing questions asked for three different policies of G20 Summit, App-based Ride-hailing Services, and Car Ownership Restriction)? What roles did experts or the government play in the specific policy making? What were the key factors in shaping the functions of expert involvement in the specific policy making? Why did you collaborate with government officials or experts in the specific policy making? How did you collaborate with government officials or experts in the specific policy making and what were the challenges/outcomes of such a partnership?

EXPERT INVOLVEMENT AND LOCAL POLICY MAKING: THREE CASES FROM CHINA

Case 1: Air pollution regulations during the 2016 G20 Summit

Background

The 2016 G20 Summit took place in Hangzhou on September 4–5, 2016. Maintaining a "blue sky" during international events is more than an environmental problem, it is also a political task related to China's international image. Before the G20 Summit, like many other cities in China, Hangzhou suffered from serious air pollution. The World Health Organization measures air quality by the number of small particles in the air, known as PM2.5. When PM2.5 is low, the air quality is better, and the sky is bluer. Hangzhou's daily average density of PM2.5 per year was 49 μg/m^3 in 2016. The upper limit of PM2.5 was set at 35 μg in order to ensure the air quality during the G20 Summit satisfied the Grade II standard found in the 2012 Chinese National Ambient Air Quality.[6] Beginning on August 24, 2016, a dynamic evaluation was executed to minimize the gap between the *status quo* and the policy target.

Policy system: High requirement for scientific knowledge and weak preexisting government policy position

Decreasing the density of PM2.5 is a complex scientific problem, so policy makers actively sought assistance from universities and research institutes. "Frankly, it was the first time for Hangzhou municipal government and the Zhejiang provincial government to hold such a big international event and we (the government) had no experiences to conduct temporarily regulation in air pollution."[7] A group of experts from Zhejiang University, Nanjing University, the Chinese Research Academy of Environmental Sciences, and other institutes, were first invited to investigate pollution source sites, set up the pollution sources lists, and share the data with other local governments within Zhejiang province. After collecting data from the pollution sources, the Zhejiang provincial government was still not confident it could control air pollution and decided to invite a second group of experts for consultation; "To learn from the experiences of previous international events, we finally invited the Tsinghua University group of environmental experts who had previously participated in air quality improvement efforts for the events of the 2008 Beijing Olympics Games and 2014 APEC."[8]

The implementation of the air pollution regulation was divided into three stages: a pre-evaluation before August 24, 2016, a dynamic evaluation from August 24 to September 6, and a postevaluation after September 6, 2016. During the period of the dynamic evaluation, the deputy governor of Zhejiang province, the vice minister from the Ministry of Environmental Protection (MEP), and experts met every day in a procedure as follows. Experts collected real-time air quality data and constructed a simulation model for the air quality on the first day. Then a consulting conference for Zhejiang provincial leaders, MEP leaders, and experts took place on the morning of the second day. Before implementation on the third day, local governments within Zhejiang province adjusted their air pollution control measures, according to the experts' advice. Finally, a new cycle began on the fourth day.

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[6]See http://epb.hangzhou.gov.cn/art/2017/6/16/art_1692349_38353529.html

[7]Interview with one official from Hangzhou Municipal Environment Protection Bureau, December 8, 2016.

[8]Interview with one official from Zhejiang Provincial Environment Protection Bureau, November 26, 2016.

The function of expert involvement: Science arbiter

Most expert advice was accepted since the information was based on scientific evidence. For example, air pollution sources in Hangzhou were not only detected locally, but also in other provinces and cities in the Yangtze Delta Area. "We suggested regional urgent emission control must imply if the policy goal was to achieve Grade II National Ambient Air Quality Standards. The MEP then acted as an important regional coordinator for local policy implementation."[9] Key polluting industries, identified as discharging 80% of the measurable air pollution in Shanghai, closed or reduced their production. The coal power plants in Jiangsu province strictly controlled and reduced output by 30%. According to the postevaluation report, the density of PM2.5 began declining on September 1 and reached its lowest scores of 37 and 35 μg on September 4 and 5, respectively, and increased again to above 40 μg after September 9 following the cancellation of the temporary emissions controls.[10]

Local government officials in Zhejiang province also made calculations for policy implementation on their own. "We (experts) also had some disagreements with local governments. For example, we suggested that, in addition to PM2.5, O_3 (another critical indicator of air quality) should also be included and reduced. This suggestion was refused because O_3 was not included in the performance evaluation from the central government."[11] "Fabricating blue sky is the first task, and that is already too much work. Such advice is slightly ideal and we must be practical,"[12] one local official said. As Shen and Ahlers (2019) argued, even though setting air pollution regulations in the G20 Summit was a scientific problem, the policy was implemented in a campaign style. Expert advice was welcomed only when it matched the policy target.

Case 2: Local regulations on app-based ride-hailing services

Background

App-based ride-hailing services, such as Uber and Didi, have become popular transportation alternatives in many Chinese cities in recent years. On July 27, 2016, the Ministry of Transport, along with six other ministries jointly promulgated the *Tentative Measures for the Administration of App-based Ride-Hailing Services*,[13] which stipulated regulations on items such as driver qualifications and vehicles. The Hangzhou government later formulated its own regulations on October 29, 2016.[14] In comparison with Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou, Hangzhou's regulations are less restrictive and more sound. For example, there are no restrictions regarding the drivers' household registration status. Residents can work as ride-hailing service drivers if they have a temporary resident permit in Hangzhou for 12 months or a temporary resident permit in Zhejiang Province for at least six months. Multiple car types are allowed and the policy draft was open for consultation for seven days before being finalized.

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[9]Interview with one expert from Tsinghua University, October 2, 2016.

[10]See http://www.hjkxyj.org.cn/html/2017/12/20171202.htm

[11]Interview with one expert from Tsinghua University, October 2, 2016.

[12]Interview with one official from Zhejiang Provincial Environment Protection Bureau, November 26, 2016.

[13]See http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2016-07/28/content_5095584.htm

[14]See http://www.hangzhou.gov.cn/art/2018/3/1/art_1256295_15681506.html

Policy system: Moderate requirement for scientific knowledge and moderate preexisting government policy position

Like all regulatory policies, any adjustments would affect stakeholders whose interests are potentially contradictory. Residents would welcome more choices in transportation, but taxi drivers would not welcome the competition. The Hangzhou government did not hold a given policy position, but it wanted to make a local policy innovation. The challenge was persuading taxi drivers to accept a less restrictive policy alternative that would facilitate ride-hailing services. Before meeting the representatives from the taxi drivers and app-based ride-hailing providers, on the afternoon of September 18, 2016, eight experts were invited to provide their suggestions for the policy draft in an expert consultation conference. Among the experts, four were from universities, two were from NGOs, and the remaining two were officials from the provincial transportation department and another city.[15] All experts agreed that providing taxi service and ride-hailing services on an equal playing field was the policy target. For this purpose, one expert from the Hangzhou association of lawyers said to, "use internet technology to solve overcrowding, environmental problems, and resources sharing, rather than control the app-based ride-hailing services. What the Hangzhou government should do is relax drivers' household registration status and encourage multiple car types entering into the market."[16] One professor from Zhejiang University added, "The new policy should develop a separate management system for taxi services and app-based ride-hailing services. Customers need to pay more for the latter."[17]

Experts also provided other suggestions on policy timing, legitimation, and localization. One professor from the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Social Sciences stated, "Hangzhou should not only follow the top-level design from the national regulations over ride-hailing services but also local conditions—which are different from other cities—should be considered. For example, severe traffic jams push the Hangzhou government to search for alternatives to relieve congestion. Therefore, a loose regulation that can accelerate the ride-hailing services is a must."[18] An official from the Zhejiang Provincial Transportation Bureau agreed: "Hangzhou government could first adopt a soft regulation in managing ride-hailing services for one year as a trial and make revisions after post-evaluations."[19] Regarding the procedure of policy making, a professor from the Zhejiang University of Industry said, "the policy draft should receive open consultation from the public to gain policy legitimacy."[20]

The function of expert involvement: Policy legitimization

After expert consultation, taxi drivers, and app-based ride-hailing drivers were subsequently invited to meet with local officials over the following two days. Most taxi drivers insisted from the very beginning that Hangzhou should develop metro transportation rather than promote ride-hailing services to cope with traffic jams. They were nevertheless persuaded by local officials after learning that different regulations would be applied according to the car services. One taxi driver stated "I agree with some experts' opinions that separate management systems should apply to taxi services and ride-hailing services since they are mutually exclusive. The

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[15]Data obtained from documents from the Hangzhou Municipal Transportation Bureau.

[16]Interview with one staff of the Hangzhou association of lawyers, September 18, 2016.

[17]Interview with one professor of Zhejiang University, September 18, 2016.

[18]Interview with one professor of the Zhejiang Provincial Institute of Social Science, September 18, 2016.

[19]Interview with one official from the Zhejiang Provincial Transportation Bureau, September 18, 2016.

[20]Interview with one professor from the Zhejiang University of Industry, September 18, 2016.

government should strictly regulate ride-hailing services regarding the price and vehicle types."[21] The policy draft later opened for public feedback between October 10 and 16, 2016. Unsurprisingly, residents were happy to have a new alternative in transportation. One said that, "the government should promote app-based ride-hailing services to push for taxi services reform. Their prices are high because of the monopoly. In the meantime, the app-based ride-hailing services should be established as safe for passengers."[22] An official from the Hangzhou Department of Transportation stated, "after referring to suggestions from experts, it became much easier in policy formation. Most of the stakeholders were willing to accept the new regulations, and the public also supported advice from experts."[23] Compromise among different stakeholders would have been much more challenging to reach without expert opinions to facilitate the legitimization of the government's policy position.

After a one-year trial, the Hangzhou government found its traffic jams were diminished and a riding-hailing service industry was gradually established. On February 8, 2018, the Hangzhou government revised some regulations according to the policy evaluation over the two-year period. For example, the city abolished restrictions on drivers' residential status, which was also suggested by the experts.

Case 3: COR policy

Background

As noted in Case 2, Hangzhou suffered heavy traffic jams before 2015. In 2013, there were 35 days of severe traffic congestion, with an average speed below 20 km/h during rush hour—dangerous air pollution was a side effect. About 40% of the air pollution came from vehicles.[24] Preventing vehicle numbers from increasing became a priority in the government's agenda in 2014. COR was one choice for preventing an increase in the number of vehicles on the road.[25] Beijing, Guangzhou, Shanghai, Guiyang, and Tianjin had already pioneered this effort. In all cases, public criticism emerged, making COR a controversial policy instrument. Learning from the experiences of other cities, local officials decided to give the policy-making process a low profile. Provoking nervous public sentiment would be unwise before the decision was made. As a result, even one week before the regulation was published, an anonymous leading official at the Traffic Congestion Management Office reassured the public that a COR policy was improbable.[26]

Policy system: Low requirement for scientific knowledge and strong preexisting government policy position

The government decided the outcome internally in February of 2014. "It is a very efficient process from a policy decision to policy promulgation," said one official from Hangzhou, "On

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[21]Interview with one taxi driver in Hangzhou, September 18, 2016.

[22]Interview with one citizen in Hangzhou, September 18, 2016.

[23]Interview with one official of the Hangzhou Municipal Transportation Bureau, October 16, 2016.

[24]See https://www.chinadialogue.net/blog/7800--Rising-car-use-and-smog-sullies-China-s-most-photogenic-city/ch

[25]A handful of Chinese cities have launched a vehicle quota system. This system limits the number of newly registered cars per year in a locality; new license plates can only be obtained through participation in an auction or lottery. It is, thus, a permanent constraint on ownership in the first place, therefore also called COR.

[26]See http://www.chinanews.com/gn/2014/03-27/5997796.shtml

March 25, 2014, the municipal government held 11 meetings within one day to seek approval from various departments on the COR policy."[27] On March 25, 2014, at 7 p.m., the *Draft Provisional Regulations for Hangzhou's Automobile Total Amount Control* was announced suddenly during a government press conference, only five hours before it was to take effect. A new Automobile Total Amount Regulation and Control Office (ATARCO) was simultaneously established under the transportation bureau for policy implementation (e.g., operating car plate auctions and lottery). No experts participated in the decision making as the launch of COR would not change. Their involvement might leak out and create obstacles for the government's ultimate decision. But experts were encouraged to provide constructive opinions during the policy's implementation stage.

The function of expert involvement: Accountability facilitator

As expected, the COR policy led to widespread disagreement among the public. Even the nation's official media, Xinhua News, described it to stakeholders as a policy attack without expectations.[28] The Hangzhou government held its immediate response to the outcry until experts became involved and offered reasoned criticism. For example, a professor from Zhejiang University said, "implementing a policy without consultation procedures may destroy government credibility."[29] Another professor from Zhejiang University of Technology observed, "it is not scientific to blindly follow other cities' COR policies; instead of capping the number of vehicles, the government should focus on improving traffic efficiency."[30] A more severe challenge came from a local lawyer, Qunsheng Luo, who wrote a letter to the provincial governor calling for a judicial review, arguing the COR policy violated the procedure of public participation in local policy making.[31] Article 3 in the document entitled, *Decision about Strengthening Municipal Government Rule by Law* and *Provisions on Administrative Decree Management in Zhejiang Province*, stipulates, "the municipal and(or) county government should improve its policy-making process, government decisions which related to public interests should open for consultation."[32] Given this requirement, Luo suggested the provincial government should repeal the COR policy as no public hearing took place before the regulations were made.[33]

   After the Zhejiang Provincial government reviewed the procedure, the Hangzhou government was told to respond to these criticisms within one month. It replied quickly. First, although COR was to be enforced the very next day, the government claimed it was a "temporary" policy draft so a two-week public consultation period began simultaneously. Residents could voice their opinions via mail, fax, email, and the *12345* hotline. The mayor's hotline alone received 313 calls within the first 24 hours after the press conference. "The majority of callers reportedly asked about more practical details of the new regulations for car control in Hangzhou, resulting in meaningful revisions of the draft,"[34] said one official from the Hangzhou Transportation Bureau. By April 9, 2014, the Hangzhou government received 6671 opinions

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[27]Interview with one official of the Hangzhou Transportation Bureau, March 10, 2015.

[28]See http://www.xinhuanet.com/video/2014-03/26/c_119961450.htm

[29]Interview with one professor of Zhejiang University, March 10, 2016.

[30]Interview with one professor of Zhejiang University of Technology, March 12, 2016.

[31]Noting that Qunsheng Luo is a nickname. According to the interview with one official of the Hangzhou Transportation Bureau, Luo is a lawyer. Interview on March 10, 2015.

[32]See http://www.gov.cn/zwgk/2008-06/18/content_1020629.htm

[33]See http://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/system/2014/04/09/019956047.shtml

[34]Interview with one official of the Hangzhou Transportation Bureau, March 10, 2015.

from various channels. Accordingly, the final revision that was formally implemented on May 1 was changed in various particulars, such as the requirements for applying for an enterprise quota and an individual quota, the methods for quota distribution, and the duration of the policy (one year).[35] Second, the government also justified its position using the same law cited by lawyer Luo. One official from the Transportation Bureau explained the government's position:

> Yes, it was right that the government generally should have heard the voices from experts and the public when publishing administrative regulations. However, the provincial document also allowed a quick decision under urgent circumstances. The COR policy is an extraordinary case that is under urgent circumstances, and that was what (the legal documents) we followed.[36]

Although expert involvement did not stop the COR policy, the Hangzhou government was not exempt from accountability and had to justify its decision after procedural faults were revealed. The Hangzhou government had to take the experts' opinions seriously because they could "amplify" the shortcomings in the government's decisions with the scientific and logically reasonable comments which would be difficult for ordinary residents to present. This shows that an unpopular policy like COR could be entirely created behind closed doors, but it would be difficult to implement if enforcement was solely based on coercion.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Expert involvement in China is an interesting puzzle. It challenges our notions of the exclusivity of policy making in authoritarian regimes. In this article, unlike most of the previous studies that focus on experts, we consider the expert's function from the regime's perspective. We argue that function can be divided into two dimensions. At the individual level, an expert can serve as a science arbiter and a credible source of policy legitimization, which is universal regardless of regime type. Bounded rationality is a part of human nature and all types of government policy demand legitimacy. At the institutional level, an expert can act as a political actor, but such a role in policy making will vary depending on the institutional setting in different regimes. In a democracy, as political participation is autonomous and institutionalized, experts have more channels to be policy entrepreneurs. They also have more venues to form coalitions with other social sectors to compete with the government in shifting the policy agenda. In authoritarian regimes, expert involvement is common, but the extent to which they exert influence varies greatly and is highly determined by the policy makers' will and the relevant institutional settings.

We identified three expert functions in China's local policy making: science arbiter, policy legitimation, and accountability facilitator. Which function an expert performed depended on the demand for scientific knowledge and whether policy makers held a position before making their decision. Social problems may require scientific knowledge, or policy makers might need to refer to expert opinion to defend their position. Such experts act as science arbiters or provide learned opinions to legitimize policy, just like their counterparts in democratic countries. However, if experts could move to challenge the government agenda, policy makers would not hesitate to exclude them from policy formulation

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[35]See https://zjnews.zjol.com.cn/system/2014/04/29/019998596.shtml and http://szbz.hangzhou.com.cn/cb/html/2014-04/30/content_1719118.htm

[36]Interview with one official of the Hangzhou Municipal Transportation Bureau, March 10, 2015.

preemptively in order to dominate the government agenda. As seen with the COR policy, through controlling and manipulating who could participate in the policy formation process, policy makers protect the government agenda from challenges from experts and other stakeholders. They transformed it from a question of "to do or not to do" into a problem of "how to do." Even those experts involved in policy implementation were not able to veto or change the government's decisions. The most they could do was force policy makers to justify their decisions.

The above ideal types derived from China's local policy making can be understood in a broader context through a cross-regional comparison with some recent studies derived from other authoritarian contexts. For example, experts such as the "Chicago Boys" in Chile exercised considerable influence over the neoliberal reforms in Latin America during the 1970s, 80s, and 90s. These technocrats were initially appointed to conduct various reforms. Nevertheless, experts can adopt their own policy preferences and significant autonomy powerful enough to bypass their principles in policy making (Clark, 2017). According to Dargent (2015), expert leverage was derived from their knowledge, which provided politicians policy legitimacy in coping with uncertainties and actual crises. Perhaps even more importantly, compared to their counterparts in the United States and Europe, politicians in Latin America lacked the expertise to evaluate the experts' proposals, thereby increasing the politicians' dependency on them. Jones' (2019) examples from the Arab Gulf monarchies provide a striking contrast with the circumstances in Latin America. Experts were hired to consult but failed to rationalize policy making because their jobs inevitably led them to become involved in a "game of thrones" within the palace and governing units. Such jobs are precarious, as any policy proposal may offend influential royal family members. Worse, experts must take the blame for policy failures even when they are not the policy makers.

Local officials in China seem rational and capable when compared with the policy makers in the aforementioned cases. Expert leverage in policy making is therefore moderate. As Almén (2016, 2018) pointed out, experts can sometimes act as political entrepreneurs through their functions of providing expertise, information, legitimacy, and connections, which are similar to our findings from the case studies. But we highlight the dominance of local government in the policy process and consider accountability facilitating to be normal, without taking the aforementioned functions as granted. As seen in the case of the G20 Summit, even when local officials truly needed scientific knowledge to make policy, they knew the weight of expert opinion was conditional on the complexity of the social problem. Thus, they selectively accepted it as they considered the feasibility of the policy suggestions. They did not have "overconfidence and magical thinking" toward the policy outcomes, as Jones (2019) mentioned in the case of Arab Gulf monarchies. Nor did we observe experts in our cases enjoying leverage and autonomy, as in the case of Latin America.

It is beyond the scope of this article to determine why China's local governments use experts in this manner, but we propose two possible reasons. First, previous studies show that education level has a positive correlation with career mobility (Kou & Tsai, 2014). Undergraduate degrees are now common among local government officials, some even have master's or doctoral degrees, and can be regarded as expert officials.[37] This is in keeping with the market reform's push to make cadres both "red and expert."[38] Being an expert official not only means being highly educated but also using one's logic, skill, and intelligence, to understand expert

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[37]For example, Liu Xin, the current mayor of Hangzhou, holds a doctoral degree in engineering from the Harbin Engineering University. Zhang Hongming, the mayor of Hangzhou, 2014–17, holds a master's degree in business management from Xiamen University.

[38]"Red and expert" here means that officials need to combine "redness" with expertise and act as if political rectitude and professional skill were mutually inclusive qualities. See *Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought*, a Red Guard Publication, 1969, available at https://digitalarchive.wilsoncenter.org/collection/733/long-live-mao-zedong-thought-1968

advice. This means judging when to selectively involve experts in the policy process or completely ignoring their advice. It does not mean fully accepting it without a thought. Second, recent studies show government responsiveness in China is a substantial and crucial tool used by the government to legitimize itself and manage societal risk (Dimitrov, 2015; Distelhorst & Hou, 2017). This factor provides local governments with the incentive to seek expert opinions in order to avoid policy failure and to search for local innovations that solve social problems and will help officials succeed in cadre evaluation competitions (Heberer & Trappel, 2013; Teets, 2018; Zhu & Zhao, 2018).

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