Social Forces and Street-level Governance in Shanghai: From Compliance to Participation in Recycling Regulations

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Abstract

This article interrogates the operating logic of China's street-level regulatory state, demonstrating that residents' committees (RCs) assume a role as regulatory intermediaries to enhance the efficiency of local governance. Using Shanghai's new recycling regulations as a case study, it explores the mechanisms by which RCs elicit not only citizens' compliance but also active participation. We show that the central mechanisms derive from the RCs' skilful mobilization of particular social forces, namely *mianzi* and *guanxi*, which are produced within close-knit social networks inside Shanghai's housing estates (*xiaoqu*). We advance three arguments in the study of China's emerging regulatory state. First, we show how informal social forces are employed in regulatory governance at the street level, combining authoritarian control with grassroots participation. Second, the focus on RCs as regulatory intermediaries reveals the important role played by these street-level administrative units in policy implementation. Third, we suggest that the RCs' harnessing of informal social forces is essential not only for successful policy implementation at street level but also for the production of the local state's political legitimacy.

Keywords: social forces; recycling; China; compliance; participation; regulatory intermediaries

The hours between 6:30pm and 8:30pm are busy ones for Shanghai's GN *xiaoqu* 小区 (housing estate). Families members from every apartment descend into the public courtyard with their rubbish, bagged and sorted into different categories, in order to throw it into the communal recycling bins. GN, quiet during the daytime, is re-energized during these two twilight hours and brims with the sounds of

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chattering as volunteers in green tabards instruct confused residents on their rubbish disposal, overseen by the residents' committee members and the occasional plain-clothed official. Residents, volunteers and residents' committee members greet each other and gossip at the brightly decorated recycling points, which are locked and out of use for the rest of the day. For many residents, recycling has become a fun and interesting social event.

We observed this new daily ritual during our fieldwork in Shanghai in June 2019, two weeks before the city's waste separation regulations became law. At that time, several districts in Shanghai had been piloting a new recycling system for household waste for over a year. By 2020, 46 cities across China are required to implement such a system, with all cities in China expected to do so by 2025.[1] Achieving compliance, however, is not easy: how to ensure that the residents sort their rubbish into the correct categories, especially when citizens have no prior experience of recycling and there is a great volume of waste? And can something more ambitious than mere compliance be generated which could help to foster greater legitimacy for China's system of local governance – for example, active and voluntary participation in activities related to recycling?

In 2017, following years of ineffective regulation that failed to effect behavioural change, central government policymakers designated local residents' committees (*juweihui* 居委会; RC hereafter) as the central actors in ensuring compliance. Formally, RCs are autonomous organizations, responsible for managing street-level governance across three or four *xiaoqu*; however, in practice, they are inextricably linked to the structure of government. In the case of Shanghai's new recycling regulations, local RCs have been encouraged to develop a wide toolbox of mechanisms to ensure not only compliance with the new rules but also to elicit a form of active participation in additional, voluntary activities associated with recycling. For instance, not only do many RCs use CCTV cameras and enlist local police to act as symbolic threats, they have also developed unique compliance mechanisms which exploit the *xiaoqu*'s close-knit social environment and the residents' social considerations of *mianzi* 面子 (reputation/self-image), including publicly shaming poorly performing housing blocks and enlisting children to help supervise adults. To elicit participation, these RCs utilize *guanxi* 关系 (reciprocal relationship), which mobilizes residents through interpersonal networks, allowing RCs to recruit and oversee a team of volunteers, instead of using officials, to monitor compliance.[2] Motivated by the social forces of *mianzi* and *guanxi*, residents not only passively comply with but also actively participate in the recycling process.

In the context of the implementation of Shanghai's recycling legislations, we consider the RC as a regulatory intermediary, defined by Kenneth Abbott and colleagues as "any actor that acts directly or indirectly in conjunction with a regulator to affect the behaviour of a target."[3] In our study, the regulator is the

1 MOHURD 2019.
2 Across Shanghai's *xiaoqu*, over 30,000 volunteers were recruited to manage compliance with the recycling regulations (Wang, Hei 2019).
3 Abbott, Levi-Faur and Snidal 2017a, 19.

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Chinese government and the target is the Chinese population. This helps us to understand the role played by RCs in regulatory governance: the RCs' close proximity to the street level gives them direct access to regulatory targets and enables them to perform a number of tasks, including facilitating implementation, monitoring compliance and resolving disputes arising during implementation.[4] At the same time, their relative independence from the Chinese government enables them to adapt the regulations to the specific circumstances of their *xiaoqu*, greatly contributing both to successful implementation and to the development of best practices.[5]

This article explores the techniques employed by RCs to produce both compliance with and participation in Shanghai's recycling regulations. In doing so, we seek to contribute to three areas of scholarship in the field of Chinese regulatory governance. First, we provide an exploration of the way in which informal social norms and social forces are employed in regulatory governance in an authoritarian context, an area which is, to date, relatively understudied. Studies of regulatory governance in China concentrate on economic regulation in order to explain how decentralization contributes to rapid economic development,[6] rather than on social regulation, which explores the various rules governing the behaviour of societal actors. Most studies of social regulation in China discuss styles of environmental management and innovations in environmental policy implementation,[7] the impact of the increasing involvement of environmental actors in regulatory governance (NGOs, citizens and judges) on state–society relations,[8] and the tension between decentralized regulation and authoritarian practices of governance.[9] They reveal the emergence of a unique regulatory style in China, according to which the party-state requires societal participation in regulatory processes while seeking to mitigate the accompanying loss of political control. Consistent with this, we show how this combination of civic engagement and authoritarian control is achieved at the street level by RCs through their deployment of *mianzi* within dense, interpersonal networks of social relations and acquaintances. We suggest that it is these dynamic and informal interactions, rather than stable and formal bureaucratic structures, which form the foundations of regulatory compliance at the street level in China. In this way, we add an important non-Western case to the literature on the use of social forces in regulatory governance.[10]

Second, we employ the Regulator-Intermediary-Target (RIT hereafter) framework developed by Abbott and colleagues to capture the pivotal role of the RC in Chinese grassroots regulatory governance.[11] This framework, which conceives of

4 Ibid., 22.
5 Ibid., 23.
6 Harwit 2008; Hsueh 2011.
7 Ma and Ortolano 2000; Lo, Fryxell and van Rooij 2009.
8 Zhang and Barr 2013; van Rooij, Stern and Fürst 2016.
9 Wang, Shaoguang 2006; Yang 2017.
10 Grasmick, Bursik, Jr. and Kinsey 1991; Cialdini and Goldstein 2004; van Rooij et al. 2017.
11 Abbott, Levi-Faur and Snidal 2017a; 2017b.

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an indirect relationship between the regulator and the target,[12] has not yet been studied in an authoritarian context and might seem an unlikely case, since such polities are commonly thought to rely on coercion and repression to induce behavioural change. Indeed, a popular misunderstanding of Chinese governance is that its government exercises comprehensive top-down control over society. We demonstrate that this is both a simplification and an overstatement. When new regulations are introduced, even an authoritarian government requires intermediaries to operate as a "go-between,"[13] interacting with society at the grassroots level in order to reach every citizen, obtain feedback for policy adjustment and facilitate concrete implementation. Dependence on an RC's capacities as an intermediary leads to its transformation into an arm of the regulator, which empowers the RC to engage with the residents. While much has been written on the RC, its function in the context of regulatory governance has not yet been explored. The RIT framework enables us to capture better the complicated dynamic between state and society at the street level in China, to understand the capacity as well as the limitations of China's modern authoritarian regime when it comes to regulatory governance, and to achieve a more in-depth exploration of manifestations of Chinese regulatory statehood.

Third, we suggest that the RC's harnessing of informal social forces, in particular *guanxi*, is essential not only for successful policy implementation at the street level but also for the production of political legitimacy. We consider legitimacy in terms of output – perceptions of its effectiveness in managing recycling in the *xiaoqu* – and input – its perceived responsiveness to citizens' demands, garnered through participation.[14] The distinction between input and output legitimacy is particularly important for understanding the production of popular consent in Chinese Communist Party (CCP) rule. As Thomas Heberer and Christian Göbel have argued, while the CCP has generally relied on output legitimacy in terms of its provision of material goods to citizens, the development of the RC as a means of fostering local participatory governance in China must be seen as "an attempt to increase input legitimacy, albeit in a very limited and circumscribed fashion."[15] It suggests that there is a recognition that providing material benefits is no longer enough to secure consent in China's political system and that a positive orientation to the structure of rule must be fostered within citizens. One of the ways in which this occurs is through the participatory activities organized by RCs.

It is worth noting that the successful operationalization of social forces in local governance relies partly on the social ecology of the *xiaoqu* and the capability of the RC to engage it. The RC may fail to establish an effective social network in which *guanxi* and *mianzi* can be meaningfully deployed, either in a new

12 Levi-Faur and Starobin 2014.
13 Abbott, Levi-Faur and Snidal 2017a, 19.
14 Scharpf 1999; Schmidt 2013.
15 Heberer and Göbel 2011, 13.

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commercial *xiaoqu* with a relatively short history and where social cohesion is weak, or where the RC itself is inactive. However, while Shanghai residents are increasingly moving into newly built neighbourhoods in which social interaction is less intensive, a majority are still living in old *xiaoqu* (*lao gong fang* 老公房), especially in the old city centre districts.[16] Thus, we suggest that iterations of the model described below, while not found in every *xiaoqu*, are widespread.

Following a discussion of the evolution of recycling norms in Chinese legislation and an elaboration of our methodology, our empirical analysis is advanced in two parts. First, we delineate the duty-motivated and deterrence-motivated compliance mechanisms, demonstrating that the deployment of "social forces," which involves the use of public embarrassment in front of fellow residents, functions as the most significant factor in eliciting behavioural change. The second section demonstrates that RCs harness these social forces to induce not only compliance but also participation in additional and voluntary aspects of the regulations. This expands the regulatory capability of the RCs and enables them to increase input legitimacy. Our research reveals a complex governing strategy at the street level, which relies on both formal and informal sources of power and weaves together both coercive and participatory logics.

Shanghai's Recycling Regulations

Before the 1990s, households were not required to separate their rubbish, and recycling was conducted with a view towards making profit. Materials with a market value, such as glass, paper and metals, were re-sold, much went to landfill or incineration, and plastic recycling facilities operated informally.[17] The idea of recycling first appeared in Chinese domestic policy documents in 1994, in China's "Agenda 21," but with no detailed terms and rules for implementation.[18] In 1996, the National People's Congress (NPC) passed the Law of the PRC on the Prevention and Control of Solid Waste Pollution, which enshrined rubbish separation and household recycling into China's legal codex.[19] In 2004, the Ministry of Housing and Urban–Rural Development (MOHURD) issued its "Criteria for the separation and evaluation of household waste," which for the first time classified rubbish into six categories.[20] In 2007, to consolidate the management system of household waste, the MOHURD issued its "Administrative methods for city waste management."[21] These two regulations sought to involve a variety of non-governmental organizations and corporations in the waste disposal system,

16 "Shanghai Changning jumin jiating 67% zhuzai laogongfang" (67% of households in Changning, Shanghai, live in old apartments; the government is considering the classification of residential areas). *Pengpai*, 11 December 2015, https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_1407623.
17 Goldstein 2017.
18 State Council 1994.
19 NPC 1996.
20 MOHURD 2004.
21 MOHURD 2007.

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with the government issuing licences and conducting inspections. At this point, the role of citizens was deemed to be one of passive compliance.

Since then, studies undertaken both by academics and the Chinese government have found that compliance has been extremely weak and that problems, including an overriding sense of public apathy and low levels of enforcement, have persisted.[22] Surveys conducted in 2014 showed that nearly half of citizens had no idea about the different categories of waste or indeed what could be recycled.[23] According to the NPC Standing Committee's 2017 report on the enforcement of the 1996 law, the problems arising from the way in which the recycling system was established, and how it was managed and enforced, stemmed mostly from an over reliance on the regulator, namely the government.[24] A decision was taken to shift the focus towards public education and public participation; however, beyond the RC, the government has no direct access to residents. Hence, an intermediary was required which could make better contact with targets to inculcate, supervise and monitor new behaviour.

In 2017, the MOHURD issued its "Implementation plan for the separation of household waste," which changed the state's approach in two fundamental ways.[25] First, in contrast to the previous model, which barely mentioned citizens, the document established the importance of citizen participation in the operation of the recycling system by emphasizing "government promotion and public participation." Second, it was proposed that the RC be used to improve citizen participation and volunteering. It was thought that its dual-facing position between government and citizens could enable the RC to manage the implementation process at street level and also feed problems and suggestions for improvement back to the authorities. According to the document, the RC is responsible for "promulgating the regulations," "providing advice" and "monitoring residents" to facilitate the implementation of the policy and to achieve behaviour changes.

Like the rest of China, Shanghai has a huge waste problem. In 2018, the city's 24 million residents produced almost 26,000 tonnes of rubbish daily.[26] Shanghai is the first Chinese city to begin compulsory waste separation and to enshrine it in local legislation.[27] After several rounds of adjustment, Shanghai's citizens must now sort their rubbish into four categories: recyclable rubbish (including plastic and cardboard), hazardous rubbish (batteries and lightbulbs), wet rubbish (compostable rubbish/kitchen rubbish) and dry rubbish (other rubbish).[28] Failure to do so is punishable by a fine.

In Shanghai, four government departments are involved in regulating recycling. The first is the landscaping and city appearance administrative bureau

22 Lin 2018; Peng et al. 2018.
23 Chen, Ziyu, Zhao and Ma 2016.
24 Li 2018.
25 MOHURD 2017.
26 Bo 2019.
27 SPC 2019.
28 SPC 2014.

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(LCAAB), which leads implementation by making plans, setting deadlines and managing interdepartmental cooperation. Second, the civil affairs bureau (CAB) manages relevant educational initiatives, social work, volunteering programmes and social organizations, as well as local Party-building initiatives. Third, the public security bureau (PSB) acts as the enforcement agency, ensuring compliance and penalizing non-compliant residents. The final agency is the subdistrict office, the lowest level of government administration. It is the agency that regularly interacts with RCs, rather than making policy or coordinating from above.

The RC is not formally a government agency. Although the RC has existed since the 1950s, its role in local governance was transformed in the 1980s as market-oriented reformers disbanded the *danwei* 单位 (work unit) system, which had until then been responsible for the distribution of welfare to citizens.[29] Every urban resident has access to a designated RC, which is structured according to the resident's *xiaoqu*. Article 2 of the 1989 Law of the Organization of Residents' Committees defines the RC as "a grassroots autonomous organization for the realization of residents' self-management, self-education and self-service."[30] The RC primarily organizes socially oriented activities and services for residents. It relies on residents' voluntary participation in offering these services, which can include assisting with childcare and support for the elderly, and in organizing diverse leisure activities and public festivals.[31] As one RC member explained, "The government does not require every community to do the same thing. There is innovation in each residential area. We facilitate residents to discuss the management of the community on their own."[32] Residents also rely on the RC for services and assistance such as the distribution of welfare subsidies, the provision of employment and training services, and for resolving issues surrounding household registration.[33] At the same time, the RC is financed by the government, its director and secretary are selected by the government, and the activities it organizes are always in line with the government's social agenda. And the government requires information and feedback from the RC to ensure the development of effective public policy. Thus, the RC constitutes the nuanced, middle layer between government and society, with dependence upon both.[34] According to one RC member, "Our main concern every day is how to satisfy both the 'up' [officers] and the 'down' [residents]."[35]

29 Gui 2008; Heberer 2009.
30 NPC 1989.
31 Bray 2006, 535; Heberer and Göbel 2011.
32 1M1.
33 Tomba 2014, 46.
34 Ibid., 5.
35 Quoted in Gui 2008, 46.

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Methodology

The authors spent two months between May and July in 2019 conducting 56 semi-structured interviews in nine *xiaoqu* belonging to two districts in Shanghai: Changning 长宁, in the historical city centre, and Pudong 浦东, one of the newest districts, which has seen rapid economic development since the 1990s. One year previously, Changning had been selected as a trial district for the development of new approaches to household waste management, while RCs in Pudong were in the final stages of preparations for the regulations entering into force on 1 July 2019. The nine *xiaoqu* are relatively similar, containing apartments aged between 12 and 42 years, and ranging in price from 56,000 yuan (US$7,800) to 86,000 yuan (US$12,000) per square metre, which suggests a relatively wide range of income level, social class and community cohesion. Hence, the two districts and the *xiaoqu* vary across a wide range of factors and together constitute a cross-section of urban Shanghai. We chose not to compare implementation of the regulations across the two districts, focusing instead on using the two field sites to build a generalized picture of recycling in Shanghai. Overall, we found that three *xiaoqu* successfully operated the model described below (two in Changning and one in Pudong); four *xiaoqu* operated elements of it, and two did not operate it at all, either owing to an inactive RC (Changning) or a lack of close-knit community (Pudong).

We began by interviewing the RC members responsible for regulating recycling in all nine of the *xiaoqu*. These interviews lasted between half an hour and two hours, during which we asked the RC members to describe their involvement in the implementation of the recycling regulations, how they interact with local residents, and their relationship to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). We then interviewed randomly selected residents and volunteers, visiting the *xiaoqu* throughout the day so as to cover residents of varying ages, occupations and lifestyles. We asked the residents about their recycling-related activities and also for their views on the recycling regulations and the competency of their RC. One resident invited us to her home to demonstrate to us how she separated her rubbish. Third, we interviewed recycling managers in two *xiaoqu*. These individuals were employed by the local government to conduct the unenviable job of re-sorting residents' poorly sorted waste, for a monthly salary of 900 yuan (US$125). Interviewees also included one official from the Changning district LCAAB, one from the Changning CAB, and three NGO members involved in the recycling process in the two districts.[36] In addition to the interviews, we examined the recycling arrangements in each *xiaoqu*, observing residents and recycling managers as they disposed of their rubbish. Owing to the gendered nature of grassroots participation in community affairs, the majority of the RC respondents, NGO members and volunteers were female, while the government officials

36 O1.

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were male.[37] To balance this, we sought to achieve an even split across the residents we interviewed.

The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and were then transcribed. We mined the texts for descriptions of the ways in which each actor engaged with new regulations and their relationships to the CCP and local RC. We then coded the interview texts according to the conceptual categories of "compliance" and "participation." This analysis is complemented by observations made during the fieldwork. Appendix Table 1 provides a list of the interviewees.

Compliance

The study of compliance has hitherto "been predominantly Western," with no evidence of "whether existing theories and findings also apply elsewhere."[38] This section demonstrates that theories of compliance can indeed be applied in the case of China. The extant literature suggests that compliance motivations fall along a continuum, from duty-oriented to deterrence-oriented.[39] Duty-oriented motivations are based on a sense of moral obligation to "do the right thing" and corresponding regulatory approaches work through the targets' perception of compliance as ethical behaviour.[40] Deterrence-oriented motivations are based on targets' strategic calculations aimed at maximizing expected gains and minimizing losses. Thus, corresponding regulatory approaches employ threats of sanctions and/or provision of material rewards.[41] Scholars of regulation usually regard appeals to social forces (also sometimes referred to as social influences or social licence), which mobilize threats of shame and embarrassment, as a form of deterrence.[42] In contrast to shame or guilt, which is self-imposed through internalized norms, feelings of embarrassment are socially imposed – that is, they occur when one feels to have been judged negatively by significant others (friends, family, employer, etc.).[43] Concomitantly, social psychology scholars have distinguished two types of social norms underlying compliance: descriptive and injunctive, with the former eliciting compliance through social information (observing others and internalizing their behaviour as "correct") and the latter deploying fears of social evaluation (fear of what others might think).[44] In China, social forces are experienced primarily as the pressure to maintain *mianzi* (directly translated as "face").[45] The *mianzi*-driven consideration is most effective in a close-knitted social network of interwoven personal relationships, forming what has been termed China's "acquaintance

37 Chen, Suqiang, Fung and Hung 2017.
38 van Rooij et al. 2017, 73.
39 Lee 2008; 2011; Carter 2016.
40 Malloy 2003.
41 Gray and Shadbegian 2005; Kagan and Scholz 1984; Scholz 1984a; 1984b.
42 Grasmick and Bursik 1990; Grasmick, Bursik, Jr. and Kinsey 1991; Koski and May 2006; May 2005.
43 Grasmick and Bursik 1990.
44 Schultz 1998; Cialdini 2007; Bertoldo and Castro 2016.
45 Hu, Hsien Chin 1944; Ho 1976.

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society."[46] This network of mutual acquaintances and significant others establishes the social basis of the injunctive social norm, generating fear of public embarrassment, which in turn induces behavioural conformity. The *xiaoqu* is the epitome of such a social network. RCs exploit these social forces to achieve compliance with the recycling regulations. In the remainder of this section, we illustrate with empirical evidence the duty- and deterrence-driven approaches to compliance at Shanghai's street level, demonstrating how social forces are essential in eliciting compliance.

Duty

We begin with the idea of duty as it provides the discursive and value-driven foundations upon which compliance is enforced. Our interview data reveal three values that are utilized to instil a sense of civic duty in Shanghai's *xiaoqu*: political values, which frame recycling as the right course of action because the CCP is endorsing it; ecological values, which frame recycling as important in order to protect the environment; and international values, which compare China's waste problem with that of other countries. Each of these three narratives present a normative, ethically oriented argument for compliance.

Perhaps the most common narrative was the idea that Party building (*dangjian* 党建) – improvements in the quality of Party activities and the exercise of strict discipline – is fundamental to the success of the city's recycling programme.[47] According to this narrative, local CCP cadres are considered to be the primary legitimate actors in the implementation process owing to the CCP's ability to unite and mobilize residents. One RC member highlighted the important role Party building plays in legitimizing policy enforcement: "We must advocate that government should play a role in propaganda, organization and guidance. China has a unique feature compared to other countries, namely, Party building. The Party and the government take the leadership, and all work is advocated by our government."[48] Political narratives were popular among residents, with some making reference to Xi Jinping's 习近平 support of recycling: "if Chairman Xi is talking about recycling, it must be right, mustn't it?"[49] Posters bearing Xi Jinping's statements are displayed in both work places and residential areas, supported by slogans such as "hearts come together and the rubbish is separated" (人心聚起来，垃圾分出来 *renxin ju qilai, laji fen chulai*) and recycling-themed artwork depicting happy and harmonious communities on the walls of the public areas in the *xiaoqu*.

Environmental considerations positing recycling as an ethical duty that contributes to the public good were also frequently mentioned by interviewees.

46 Fei 2006; He 2011.
47 Cao 2019.
48 1M1.
49 7V1.

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Residents told us that recycling "benefits the country and the people,"[50] and that it is "a meaningful thing, it should be done."[51] One resident explained that "Everyone should do something for the country towards environmental protection … Yes, I feel obligated. It is your duty when you live in this place."[52] In other words, it is one's social obligation to comply because failure to do so will degrade the environment for all. Environmental narratives are promoted through training sessions conducted by local social organizations as well as through media.

The third set of value-oriented considerations underpinning support for recycling made reference to the international context. Interviewees saw recycling as something that developed nations do and something that China needed to catch up on. Keeping up with developed countries to maintain national honour legitimizes the recycling policy and was regarded as a form of civic duty. One resident explained, "This is not a future problem, we ought to do it now. Because foreign countries are doing it now. We usually see on TV that Japan and South Korea are very mature, but we are just beginning to do something good."[53] An RC member stated that it was embarrassing that Shanghai, as an international city, was performing so badly: "As an international metropolis, Shanghai does not do a good job with its recycling. We should do it properly, like people in Japan and Taiwan. Shanghai is an international city, but can we recycle? … [our lack of recycling] makes us look shameful."[54]

Deterrence

It became mandatory to separate domestic rubbish in Shanghai on 1 July 2019. In order to enforce the new regulations, RCs have developed a wide range of mechanisms to compel citizens to change their behaviour. We divide these mechanisms into two groups: formal mechanisms, which use the new legislation, and informal mechanisms, which deploy the *xiaoqu*'s social network.

The new recycling legislation is of course an important framework for deterrence: citizens who fail to separate their rubbish before disposal now face a fine of up to 200 yuan (approximately US$30). The RCs have strongly welcomed the new legislation: "[For those unwilling to recycle], we let them know that it's law now. It's no longer something for deliberation."[55]

To facilitate enforcement, surveillance systems have been established across the city. In some *xiaoqu*, RCs use video cameras in the communal waste disposal rooms to identify disobedient residents. Committee members then pay a visit to any miscreants to persuade them to comply. Resident CCP members are

50 3R1.
51 2R1.
52 3R2.
53 6R1.
54 1M2.
55 1M1.

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recruited on a voluntary basis to stand beside the communal waste disposal room and supervise the residents, particularly in areas without CCTV facilities. To cut costs and the number of hours for which volunteers are needed, the government has introduced a policy which restricts when residents may dispose of their rubbish (prior to the new regulations, rubbish bins in *xiaoqu* had been accessible all day). Now, residents may only dispose of their rubbish during a designated time period, usually between 7am and 9am, and 7pm and 9pm. Outside of these designated times, the rubbish bins are moved away and the waste disposal rooms locked.

Deterrence not only works through the exercise of sanctions but also through threats of sanctions. For example, the CCTV facility conveys the image of a powerful state with knowledge of every citizen's public move, even when the cameras are not in use. This feeling of being watched leads to self-examination as a disciplinary process.[56] When the RCs assemble residents for training and recycling activities, they "frequently invite police officers from the public security bureau" to demonstrate the authorities' seriousness and determination in enforcing recycling.[57] The police presence functions as a symbol of coercive power, which breeds fear of the severe consequences of disobedience. In fact, few citizens have been fined for non-compliance. In the first two weeks of August, only 19 fines were issued to individuals, compared with 3,668 cases of verbal criticism and education by police officers.[58] Only in cases where a resident persistently refuses to cooperate do RC members summon police or urban management officers. As one RC member explained, "politeness first, force second."[59] RC members cultivate the threat of coercive power in the minds of residents as a first port of call in regulatory enforcement; however, in reality, coercive force is used as a very last resort, when all other resources have been exhausted.

Perhaps the most effective mechanism in eliciting compliance is not the threat of formal sanctions but the fear of being judged negatively by others, generated through "social forces." RCs have developed creative compliance mechanisms that rely on threats of loss of face. Here, we delineate three such mechanisms, which have either been observed during our field work or described to us in interviews.

First, RC members and volunteers stand beside the rubbish bins during the designated times in order to supervise the residents and, as one RC member described it, "When residents bring unseparated garbage, we stretch our hands into the garbage to separate it in front of them … It is summer now, wet garbage is dirty and smelly. We are also residents living here, right? We do such dirty work in the hot weather, and we want nothing in return. In this way, they are moved and are persuaded to change their behaviour."[60] This process, although

56 Foucault 1977, 209.
57 1M1, 4M1, O2.
58 Hu, Yurong 2019.
59 1M1.
60 Ibid.

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presented as assistance, makes residents feel embarrassed and they lose face. Another RC member explained that the RC members and "volunteers are neighbours – rather than cleaners who are paid."[61] This "embarrassing" assistance within a close-knit social network has proved to be very effective at changing residents' behaviour.

Second, some RC members and volunteers encourage their children to participate in the supervision. If a child criticizes an adult for incorrectly disposing of the rubbish, the feeling of embarrassment is even greater since the adult is expected to be the responsible one and to supervise and set an example for the child, not vice versa.[62] Additionally, children, as a symbol of honesty and innocence, carry a particularly strong moral weight. One RC member told us that, "when [the children] are educated [in the recycling regulations], they can also supervise older people … The children are very serious. They're more serious than adults."[63]

Third, some RCs put a board by the entrance of each housing block in the *xiaoqu* to publicize how well each block is doing with its recycling (some even detail the individual households). Every block is overseen by a "block leader" (*louzhang* 楼长), who helps the RC to distribute notices, collect feedback on policy implementation issues, resolve disputes among neighbours and organize the residents to undertake collective tasks. Block leaders help RC members monitor recycling activities in each block. High-performing blocks are awarded a red star, and those who perform poorly are awarded a black star, with results regularly updated and publicly displayed.[64] This strategy motivates residents' sense of honour and compels them to behave better. Block leaders' position of responsibility motivates them even more: one told us, "When we block leaders find that our blocks are on the board as 'black' ones, we're worried to death. This is important to us. *Mianzi* is important to Shanghai people."[65]

The manipulation of social forces to achieve citizens' compliance is common among the RCs in Shanghai's *xiaoqu*, and is an efficient means to change citizens' behaviour, facilitate recycling and enhance output legitimacy. Compared to the exercise of deterrence in the form of penalties or the deployment of police officers, social forces are much more time-consuming to invoke, requiring skills, patience and the maintenance of a network of acquaintances. RCs choose this more difficult route because they need not only superficial compliance from citizens but also long-term cooperation and participation. Hence, RCs cultivate an environment in which citizens participate into the regulatory chain as actors rather than as mere recipients, employing the social forces within the *xiaoqu* to mobilize citizens to engage of their own accord. We now turn to a discussion of this characteristic.

61 Ibid.
62 Ibid.
63 Ibid.
64 This innovation is rooted in the 1990s' practice of awarding red stars to rural families based on their performance in ten criteria of good behaviour, one of which was hygiene and included maintaining "green, clean and beautiful surroundings" (Thøgersen 2000, 139).
65 1M3.

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Participation

In China, participatory governance is important for the regime's input legitimacy. Indeed, in authoritarian states, local authorities are dependent on civic agency – but only on those forms that can be successfully managed from above.[66] In this section, we show that the social networks established by RCs in the *xiaoqu* motivate citizens to engage beyond compliance to participate in the voluntary, additional aspects of the regulatory process. This participation forms the basis of China's authoritarian regulatory state.

Existing studies highlight a wide range of factors that influence an interest in political participation, including means (spare time and money), motive (concern about specific policy matters), internal political efficacy (perception of one's own competence as a political actor), and external political efficacy (perception of whether the political system is responsive to popular demands).[67] Our fieldwork shows that participation can also be stimulated by the social pressure arising from one's position within an interwoven personal network. This is known in China as *guanxi* and can be translated as "reciprocity."[68] This network-driven motivation to participate plays the most important role among all types of motivation with regard to recycling in the *xiaoqu*. Material incentives, ethical considerations, self-realization as a volunteer, the desire to gain respect from fellow residents, and feelings of responsibility all contribute to the achievement of active participation in the recycling regulations, but they are fungible, while participation cannot be achieved without the function of the network and the social pressure it generates. The process of volunteer recruitment provides evidence for this.

RCs are responsible for signing up volunteers, mostly via door-to-door invitations, internal recommendations and Party member mobilization. Only in a few exceptions do RCs put out a general call for volunteers. The reason for this is simple: general calls do not attract residents because the incentive to participate is not sufficiently strong. Instead, successful recruitment relies on RCs' activation of informal networks. Residents explained, "RC members know the people. They know the situation in each household … who may have time, who needs to take care of children so will not be available, they know very well … according to this, they choose to visit some residents, door-to-door, to ask for their assistance."[69] The RCs have two different network chains at their disposal: RC–block leader–volunteers, and RC–Party secretary–volunteers. One RC member explained to us, "At first, we recruit volunteers from among the Party members through the platform of Party classes. And we also seek help from block leaders."[70] The next section elaborates on these two chains of volunteer recruitment and how the RCs use them to reach every resident in the *xiaoqu*.

66 Dimitrov 2014; Owen 2020.
67 Eckstein, Noack and Gniewosz 2013; McAtee and Wolak 2011; Paloniemi and Vainio 2011.
68 Read 2003; Zhu 2010.
69 3R3.
70 7R1.

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RC–block leader–volunteers

As mentioned above, block leaders play an important linking role between RCs and residents. The recruitment of block leaders is coordinated by the RCs. One block leader told us how she was recruited: "RC members encouraged me to be the new block leader when our previous one was getting too old. I said I was super busy: I had to take care of my mum and my children. But they said it just had to be me, it just had to be me. Well, OK … [laughs]."[71] This individual was seen as a very responsible woman, and had been friends with members of the RC for several years – two central considerations for selecting block leaders. These two factors demonstrate that a successful candidate should be seen as able to competently navigate the *xiaoqu* social network.

Block leaders have an even closer relationship with residents than do the RCs. Thus, responsible block leaders with networking skills greatly alleviate the RCs' organizational burden. With the help of block leaders, the large task of volunteer recruitment can be split into several small ones. "We need 40 volunteers in all, which means at least two from each block. Thus, each block leader is responsible for recruiting at least two volunteers."[72] From RC members to block leaders, and from block leaders to volunteers, the recruitment of the volunteers occurs informally and is based on personal relationships.

RC–Party members–volunteers

Residents who are CCP members form another bridge linking RCs to other residents. Although they are distinct in the legislation, in practice RCs and the local Party system are hard to separate, since they share resources, objectives and even the same office within the *xiaoqu*. The Party secretary is always an RC member, and is often also its leader. In contrast to the block leader, Party members fall under the leadership of the Party secretary, making their mobilization by the RC relatively easy. In principle, each Party member must respond to the call for volunteers; however, in practice, personal relationships play a decisive role. One RC member shared: "Yes, we say that Party members should stand on the first line, but it is impossible to make it compulsory. It may be inconvenient for some people, some people may have no time, so it really depends. You can force people to separate their rubbish according to the law, but you can't force them to be volunteers. Force does not work in this matter."[73] As a result, even with the help of the formal Party system, RC members still need to use their informal personal networks to encourage Party members to be volunteers. And, in turn, these Party members then go on to inspire other residents to do the same.

71 1M3.
72 1M1.
73 8M1.

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Input legitimacy is further generated through the volunteer network. In one *xiaoqu*, we came across a group of retired women. Only one of them was a formally designated volunteer; the others were friends who had chosen to accompany her. They were sitting by the recycling bins chatting with each other and greeting the passing residents. When someone came to the bins to dispose of rubbish, all of the women took responsibility for supervision and assistance. Although some were not recruited volunteers, they nevertheless participated as if they were. When we asked the RC about this, we were told: "Now the garbage house is becoming a gathering point. Residents are willing to sit there for a chat. It is turning into a space for their social lives … a platform."[74] This development has exceeded the RC's expectations: participation in recycling is motivated by pressure from an informal governance network; it additionally functions to fit in with residents' social agenda.

Thus, in contrast to the production of output legitimacy as achieved by compliance alone, additional voluntary participation contributes towards both output and input legitimacy – not only creating a clean living environment but also fostering active engagement in community governance, thereby reinforcing RCs as legitimate governing bodies. These comments from one RC member illustrate how the recycling regulations connect the two types of legitimacy: "When we categorize waste, we're not just telling people to sort their rubbish, we're telling them that our ultimate goal is to make our community better. This is very good and the residents are very interested. It's not only trying to help with the rubbish sorting, it's primarily to make our lives better and inspire enthusiasm."[75] Later, the same RC member explained, "Let residents not only feel that recycling is meaningful but also that it is very interesting. We are now thinking about how to make residents feel interested."[76] This encouragement of interest within the residents is an essential part of the RCs' responsibilities and is cultivated through the deployment of the *xiaoqu* social network. It is the social networks and resources that make RCs irreplaceable intermediaries with a pivotal role to play in grassroots regulatory governance, successfully motivating residents to participate, thereby strengthening the overall structure of social control.

Conclusion

This article has shown that social forces are an indispensable tool for RCs in their capacity as regulatory intermediaries in Shanghai's recycling regulations, both in ensuring comprehensive compliance and in eliciting active participation. Compliance is encouraged through sanctions and the threat of sanctions, moral narratives and the fear of losing face, while participation is actualized informally through local social networks. Compliance ensures that all citizens change their

74 7R1.
75 1M1.
76 Ibid.

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behaviour in accordance with the policy and enhances the regime's output legitimacy, while participation transforms this compliance into active engagement in and positive identification with the regulations, bolstering the regime's input legitimacy.

We have shown that the key institution for curating these two dynamics is the RC. As the intermediary between the regulator and the targets, the RC embodies both the top-down structure of the party-state and the bottom-up nature of the local community. This unique organizational logic enables the RC to influence and shape the power structure within the RIT regulatory chain. Through the manipulation of social forces, formal regulations are implemented informally. Moreover, the interaction between RC members and residents consists of the exchange of social expectations, rather than the direct exertion of authority, which leads to the greater independence of citizens and more space for bi-directional influences. This reflects the convergence of authoritarian and grassroots governing styles that is a characteristic of the Chinese regulatory state.

Two further conclusions can be drawn from our findings. First, even authoritarian governments delegate aspects of governance to intermediaries. This demonstrates that theories of regulatory governance that have been developed in the context of democracies do have explanatory power in other locales. At the same time, cultural mechanisms are crucial for the successful uptake of new regulations. In our case, the socially embedded practices of *mianzi* and *guanxi* ensure that citizens both comply with and actively participate in the new recycling regulations. Cultural factors are often overlooked in the literature on regulatory governance, but Shanghai's recycling regulations would have faced substantial hurdles without the weaving of these two important practices into the implementation process. Although social forces are also deployed in the governance of Western countries, we have shown that they play a central role in the Chinese context, serving as the basis of the RCs' governance capacity. The importance of cultural factors shows that while similar forms of regulatory governance may be adopted across contexts, it is not a case of simple transfer of regulatory norms. Instead, the ways in which they are embedded in alternative socio-political contexts, and made meaningful to local actors, are highly context specific. These processes of embedding and meaning-making are important for understanding how regulatory governance works in practice, and are best accessed through in-depth, ethnographic-oriented fieldwork.

Second, the RCs' attempts to produce not only compliance but also participation points to the way in which regulatory governance is being employed to enhance China's overall regime legitimacy. Active participation is important for increasing input legitimacy – that is, the feeling that the local state is an embodiment of the people's will: Shanghai citizens who volunteer their time and engage in additional activities organized by the RCs demonstrably accept CCP authority and parameters of governance. The RCs' task of engaging citizens' interest in recycling by organizing appealing events, framing participation as a social activity and mobilizing informal networks is an essential part of

local authoritarian governance. Thus, rather than constituting a sign of greater delegation and, hence, pluralism in policy processes, regulatory governance can be employed in order to bolster authoritarian rule.

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Conflicts of interest

None.

Biographical notes

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摘要: 本文以上海市垃圾分类为例，考察居委会作为监管理论（RIT 模型）中的媒介，怎么通过非正式手段来制造居民的服从与参与，从而获得输入型合法性（input legitimacy）上的提升。文章分析了政策落实过程所调动的道德资源，行政资源以及社会人情资源，强调对于人情网络的维系和社交压力的塑造，仍然是社区治理所依赖的核心逻辑。

关键词: 基层治理; 中国; 监管型国家; 政治服从; 政治参与

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Appendix

Table 1: **Cited Interviews**

Code	Date	Location	Description
1M1	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 1	RC member
O1	5 June 2019	Sub-district office	Official
7V1	5 June 2019	Xiaoqu 7	Volunteer
3R1	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 3	Resident
2R1	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 2	Resident
3R2	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 3	Resident
6R1	5 June 2019	Xiaoqu 6	Resident
1M2	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 1	RC member
4M1	5 June 2019	Xiaoqu 4	RC member
O2	5 June 2019	LCAAB office	Official
1M3	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 1	RC member
3R3	4 June 2019	Xiaoqu 3	Resident
7R1	5 June 2019	Xiaoqu 7	RC member
8M1	18 June 2019	Xiaoqu 8	RC member

Note:
In order to preserve the anonymity of our interviewees, we have replaced the names of the *xiaoqu* with numbers 1–9.

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