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How Do Political Features Influence the Co-Production of Government Projects? A Case Study of a Medium-Sized Chinese City

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Abstract: Co-production is a solution by which the government provides public services. Co-production theory is built upon Western experience and currently focuses on the types of co-production in different policy stages, the barriers and governance strategies for co-production. However, little attention is paid to how political background will influence the co-production process. To fill the gap, we analyzed a case of co-production that occurred in China, and we characterized the political background as consisting of three main political features: political mobility, central–local relations, and performance measurement. Based on an in-depth case study of a government project in a medium-sized Chinese city, the impact and the changes of political features affecting governmental projects in different co-production stages are analyzed and assessed. We find that political features play a critical role in the co-production of China's large government projects and may separately and jointly affect co-production. Government performance measurement affects the co-design and co-implementation of projects. Political mobility and changes in local government and performance measurement also affect the co-implementation continuity of the project. Political focus affects the co-design of projects. Central-local relations influence the support from higher government and the actual practices of lower government in the co-implementation stage.

Keywords: co-production; political features; co-design; co-implementation; project management; China

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1. Introduction

Worldwide, cities have to remain competitive in an increasingly globalized world. Many cities turn to ambitious municipal engineering events or projects to promote urban transformation and obtain a more rational industrial structure as well as better economic and environmental conditions [1]. For example, the project of Pearl River New Town in Guangzhou has highly impacted on the development of local region [2,3]. However, the construction and implementation of projects often requires many resources such as land, local financial support, and private capital participation [4,5]. Simple government investment is inadequate in public goods and service provisions [6,7]. Public authorities need various resources and long-term involvement from multiple stakeholders [8]. Co-production is a solution by which the government can absorb non-government resources, as well as exchange and complement resources in public service provision [9,10]. In the UK, co-production has appeared in civil service reports and in some government programs [11].

Co-production refers to different societal actors cooperating to achieve a common goal [11]. For example, citizens, clients, consumers, volunteers, and community organizations can cooperate to deliver public services [12,13]. Co-production theory originated from Western experience [14,15]. A wide range of public services (e.g., health and social service, water management, and innovation labs) are delivered through co-production in some countries, such the UK and Netherlands [9]. The European Union has funded a considerable number of co-production research projects within its Horizon 2020 program [9].

Currently, scholars mainly focus on the types of co-production in different policy stages (co-design, co-delivery, co-implementation, and co-assessment), the barriers and governance strategies for co-production [9]. However, little attention is paid to how political background will influence the co-production process. Few studies focus on the influence of socio-political context on multiple stakeholders and their interactions. Little attention has been paid to the specific role of politicians [9]. This begs for deeper study, since current insight on co-production is mainly based on Western cases, and no systematic studies are conducted elsewhere. However, what could happen if co-production was applied in a political environment completely different from the Western political background? How will the political context of such a country (like China) affect co-production?

To fill this knowledge gap, we analyzed a case of co-production that occurred in China. The characteristics of China's political background are political centralization, economic decentralization, and a relatively weak civil society. Due to the unique institution system in China [10], co-production activities are bound to be influenced by several political context variables, depending on preferences, leadership, and commitment [12–14]. In this research, we characterized China's political background as consisting of three main political features, including political mobility, central–local relations, and performance measurement. This study will contribute the co-production research by mapping the case within China's political context and complementing the experiences of co-production from the non-Western countries.

The Section 2 reviews key literature on co-production. It elaborates on the definition and mechanism of co-production theory in Western literature. It identifies political features influencing co-production in the Chinese context from three perspectives: Political mobility, central–local relations, and performance measurement. Next, in Methodology, a brief description of the case city is presented, and research methods, data collection, and data analysis are explained. The Results section reports key data and information on the selected case. It proceeds to analyze the influences and effects of varying political features in three different co-production processes. The Discussion and Findings section compares political interventions in other countries with those in China regarding urban development projects. Section 6 concludes with contributions, implications, limitations, and future studies.

2. The Co-Production Concept and the Chinese Political Features

2.1. The Co-Production Concept

Co-production can be defined as "user and community co-production of public services and outcomes is about public service organizations and citizens making better use of each other's assets, resources and contributions to achieve better outcomes or improve efficiency" [15]. Co-production focuses on the delivery of public services and the outcomes improvement from co-production [16]. Brudney and England (1983) distinguish individual, group and collective co-production [17]. Scholars include co-planning, co-design, co-commission, co-delivery, co-assessment activities within the concept of co-production [18]. Co-production does not always involve a direct interaction between public services and citizens [19], but also focus on the citizen's contribution in services delivery [16]. Moreover, co-production not only occur between public sector organizations and citizens but also include the involvement from the third sector organizations, which are funded by public sectors [9]. Co-production is a high-intensity citizen participation, which includes the participation of citizens' attitudes and opinions (voices), and relates to the change of citizens' behaviors, the commitment and actions of citizens [9].

Co-production of projects involves complex political processes [20] and is inevitably influenced by a number of political features [21]. First, politicians and managers of large, state-owned enterprises can influence co-production of projects because they have more resources, knowledge, skills, and administrative power [20]. To serve their interests and political focus, these elite groups are able to influence project selection [22,23]. These politicians influence the participation of multiple actors as well as the cooperation between many institutions and actors [24]. Additionally, politicians' attitudes towards co-production and the role of the citizens in the co-production affect political support and commitment [25]. Sometimes, politicians and governments unexpectedly lose control over co-production of a project, resulting in unpredictable and uncontrollable public behavior. This, in turn, reduces input and participation [26].

Second, organizational structure, cross-section relationships, administrative cultural characteristics, and leadership style also influence co-production of projects [27]. For example, an inclusive organizational culture encourages participation and cultivates collaboration among stakeholders [28]. By contrast, conservative, risk-averse administrative cultures reduce cooperation and weaken participation because they regard citizens as recipients, rather than partners in co-production [29].

Finally, government performance can affect citizen participation in two directions [27]. Short supply from the government can lead the public to take up more responsibility for participating in co-production [30]. At the same time, poor government performance can also weaken public trust and involvement [31].

2.2. The Chinese Political Features

2.2.1. The Impact of Political Mobility on Co-Production Projects

The political hierarchy in China is divided into five levels from top to down, including the central, provincial, prefectural, county, and township government levels [32]. The secretary of the provincial committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the top position at the provincial level, and likewise is the secretary of the municipal committee in a prefectural city [33]. They have more power for allocating resources, making economic decisions, and applying policy tools within their geographical jurisdiction, and hence they play an absolute role in the co-production—especially in project selection [33]. In co-implementation, they directly and strongly affect the extent of the participation and coordination of other departments of a project.

People's congresses at all levels are held every five years in China, leading to periodic job rotations of local officials. The central government frequently reassigns officials from ministries to regional areas or from one place to another [34]. This feature is distinctive of the Chinese political personnel system. Even during non-party congresses, large-scale turnover of government officials is prevalent in different regions and positions [35]. On most occasions, the actual tenure of government officials is typically less than five years [32]. These factors have a particular effect on co-production. For example, each leader develops a political focus within their geographical jurisdiction on the basis of differences in their own ability, preferences, and motivations regarding promotion [36]. When official is removed from office or transfers to another place, replaced officials may re-select co-production projects, thereby affecting the continuity of the co-implementation of projects left behind by their predecessors [32]. Successor officials may neglect or otherwise hold negative views about contracts or policies promised by their predecessors [32]. This leads to frequent changes in the direction of development in cities.

In addition, political mobility can be divided into top-down appointment, bottom-up promotion, and horizontal movement [37]. The impact of leadership mobility on co-production sometimes depends on how leaders move [34]. A previous study found that local officials who are promoted from the same region's ranks are reluctant to reverse their predecessors' policies. The central government officials appointed to local governments tend to deliver the central government's development proposals and instructions, as well as communicate the information between central and local governments. Officials recently

transferred from one area to another prefer to apply their working experiences, approaches, and philosophy from their original working localities to their current positions [38].

2.2.2. The Impact of Central-Local Relations on Co-Production Projects

The relationship between central and local government mainly refers to the power and resource allocation in the national system [39]. It is a unique political relationship in China. There are three main characteristics of China's central–local relations. First, that "central government designs policies" and "local government implements policies" represents the typical central and local relations [38]. In principle, the higher government commands and distributes the administrative work to the lower government, but the lower government is the important executor in the co-production [40]. Local governments are independent sectors in the process of co-implementation, which play the dual roles of "rational people" pursuing their interests and "agents" obeying the instructions of higher governments [41]. Second, the central government has more power and rights in decision making, supervision, assessment, and deployment [7]. In contrast, the lower governments maintain mastery over information about the situation in local areas [42]. The two sides are asymmetric in information and power. Third, there may be differences or conflicts between the central government and local government in terms of goals and interests [41].

These factors may jointly influence the co-production of project in China. The central–local relations influence the support from higher-level government to co-production. In China's co-production process, the state remains the most central place and plays the most critical role [43]. Higher government owns more power and resources [38]. Senior government has substantial influence and plays a decisive role in each step of lower government's co-production project [10]. During the co-production of project, the higher government can be the project organizers, sponsors, event leaders, and promoters in most cases [44]. The central–local relations influence the support and commitment of higher government to the co-production project.

The relationship between the government's upper and lower levels affects local governments' motivation and willingness in co-production [38]. The central government's rewards, incentives, and punishment measures—as well as the target accountability system—affect the local government's motivation for co-production [43]. Due to the local government's weak negotiating ability and political status in relation to the higher-level government, selective, symbolic, and flexible co-production behavior by local government policies may occur [38]. For example, the lower-level government will weaken its co-production behavior if the higher-level government's goal is to damage lower governments' performance and interests [13,45].

2.2.3. The Impact of Performance Measurement on Co-Production Projects

In the process of government performance measurement in China, the higher authorities establish the overall objectives and decompose them into specific tasks. These targets are assigned from top to bottom according to the hierarchy of the government. In the appraisal process, the upper party committee and government are the main body of the assessment, while the lower government and officials are the responsible sectors. The assessment results also affect the policy and support of the local government obtained from the central government [46]. Additionally, the higher-level government takes the performance of the lower-level government into consideration for the promotion of officials [40]. This motivates local officials with regard to finishing their performance.

The party and national government pay more attention to economic development and modernization in China's post-reform era [47]. Therefore, government performance measurement is characterized as economic-centered. This has led to the "Official Promotion Tournament." The promotion of officials closely aligns with local economic growth in the long-term [36]. However, in recent years, the central government has also proposed to transform the mode of development. It advocates a harmonious society with a sustainable and people-oriented development pattern [38]. This means that other factors are gradu-

ally incorporated into government performance measurements, such as environmental regulations and citizen satisfaction.

The assessment by the central government results in horizontal competition among officials as well as local governments [46]. Local officials compete with others in terms of GDP growth and thereby gain acknowledgment from their higher governments. The government performance measurement mechanism influences the selection of a co-production project [12]. In certain cases, the local government may choose co-production projects with good economic benefits and a quick return on investment in order to cater to the assessment preferences of the upper government [48]. Their selection may ignore input from the public and neglect important considerations for urban development [12]. Furthermore, in order to present their achievements during their tenure, local leaders will often select a distinguished co-production project from their predecessors. This can lead to frequent changes of direction for urban development, and also affects the continuity of co-implementation of projects. Table 1 presents the functional mechanism and influences of different political features on co-production of projects.

Table 1. The Influence of Political Features on Co-Production.

	Political Mobility	Central-Local Relations	Performance Measurement
Function and mechanism	• Job rotation of government officials • Differences in leaders' political focus	• Central government designs policy; local government implements policy • Asymmetry of rights and information • Conflict of goals and interests	• Incentives for official promotion • economic-centered
Influences on co-production	• Selection of co-production project • Continuity of co-production project implementation	• The support of the central government for co-production project • The actual implementation by local government of co-production project	• Horizontal competition among officials; local governments • Co-production project selection • Continuity of co-production project

3. Methodology

3.1. Case Study

The case study method emphasizes the study of a phenomenon with in a real-world context and is fit for answering a descriptive or explanatory question [49]. Since this article engages in studying the co-production of projects under the political features. Compared to other quantitative approaches, such as a questionnaire, a case study can address the research question of this study more deeply and explore the underlying mechanism. Local politicians and multiple stakeholders have more knowledge on the co-production of project. Interviews can obtain in-depth reactions from respondents due to the intensive interaction with the respondents. In contrast, limited feedback, as well as superficial and unreliable information may occur in the questionnaire process [50].

3.2. Case Selection

City J (we anonymize the name of City with 'City J', which allows us to openly describe the developments), the object of our case study, is located in H Province (H Province is where City J located.) in the central area of China and has a population of 2,901,300 in the administrative area. There are some reasons why we chose City J for our case study. First, it represents an opportunity to extend knowledge about co-production of project for inland areas and cities. Other regions in China, such as cities in the southeast coastal area, have

typically attracted the most attention in academic studies. Meanwhile, the research on cities of inland areas is inadequate.

Secondly, the social and economic development of City J is representative of average Chinese cities. In 2018, the GDP per capita of City J was CNY 63742 [51], which is close to the national average (CNY 64644) [52]. In 2019, the urbanization rate of City J was 60.1% [51], which is quite close to China's urbanization rate (60.60%) [53]. City J has a population of 600,000 in main urban area. Therefore, City J is a medium-sized city in terms of population size [54]. Among China's 337 prefecture-level cities (a prefecture-level city (Chinese: *dijishi*) is an administrative division of the People's Republic of China (PRC), ranking below a province and above a county), City J is one of the 90 "fourth-tier" cities, based on a Chinese media investigation [55]. City J's size, economic level, and urbanization rate therefore make it an ideal candidate for broadly understanding urban development issues in Chinese cities.

Thirdly, the CAV (we use 'CAV' to represent the project we studied in this article) project in City J aims to upgrade industrial structure, stimulate economic growth, and improve environmental conditions. The CAV project is the local government's strategic experiment to deal with the issues of agriculture, rural areas, and industrial transformation. The case of CAV project at City J represents a common phenomenon by which local governments of Chinese cities are utilizing governmental projects to achieve urban transformation.

3.3. Data Collection and Analysis

First, we completed a content analysis of relevant official documents and reports about the CAV project in City J. The documents (see Appendix A) were either published on the government website of City J or shared by local officials. These documents provided detailed background information and a description of the CAV project since the project creation in 2011. The overview of the research process is given in Figure 1.

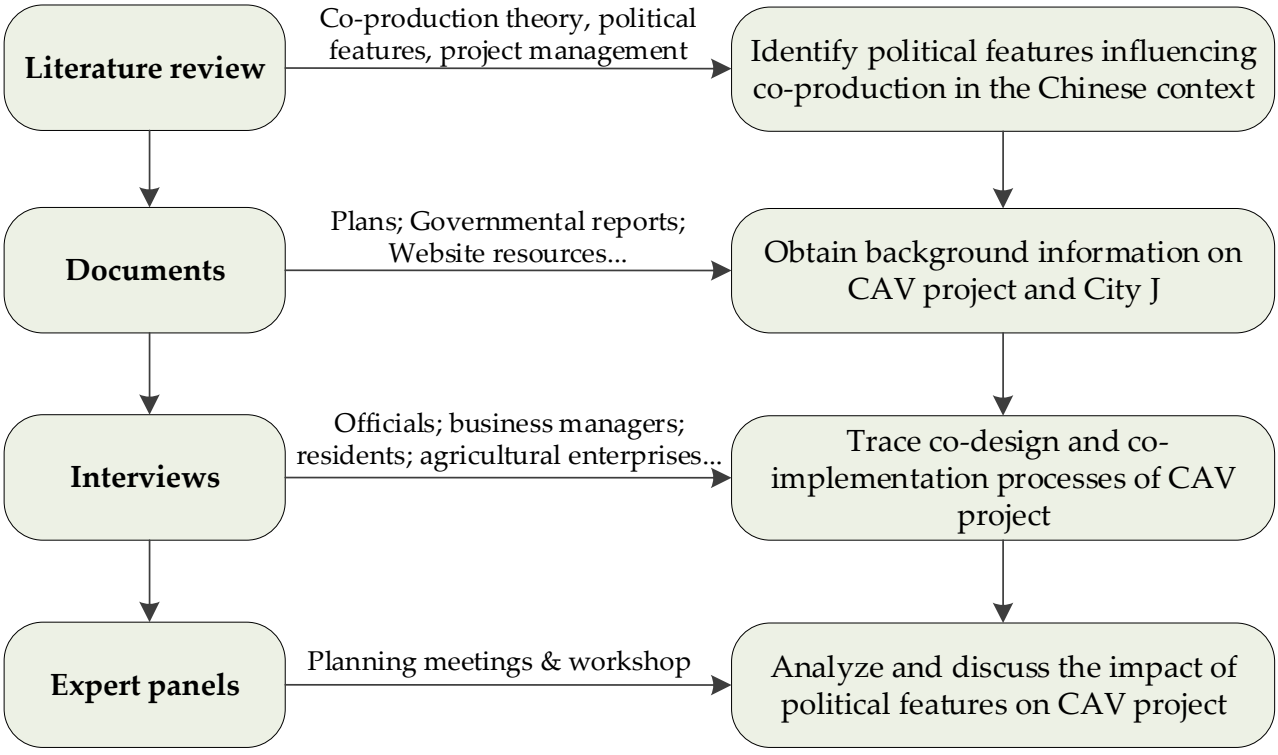


Figure 1. Overview of the research process.

Second, we conducted an in-depth investigation of the CAV project in City J from November 2018 to January 2019. We interviewed the relevant officials involved in the co-production process of the CAV project. These officials worked in the City J's Municipal Committee of Rural Office, Planning Bureau, Planning Survey Design Institute, and elsewhere. We also interviewed managers who worked in local agricultural companies, and we consulted the experts who worked at local research institutions and universities, and farmers while participating in CAV project research. A total of 20 respondents were interviewed (see Appendix B), each interview lasting around 1–1.5 h. We conducted several follow-up interviews with core interviewees to obtain more in-depth information. Detailed descriptions of interviewee positions and working departments are presented in Appendix B. Appendix C shows the questions for semi-structured interviews.

Third, during our investigation period, we invited experts from home and abroad, as well as local government leaders, to discuss the co-production of the CAV project and the urban transformation of City J. We organized and participated in three planned meetings and workshops to analyze and discuss urban development in City J.

In August 2020, we conducted additional telephone interviews with local officials, managers of local agricultural companies, and local farmers to collect updated information on the CAV project.

At last, we coded the data obtained from the documents and interviews and labeled the data sources in Results section to support our evidence and arguments.

4. Results

4.1. A Brief Description of CAV Project in City J

Agricultural land territory in City J comprises 1,020,392.83 hectares, accounting for 82.69% of the city's land area. There are numerous rivers, lakes, and developed water systems in City J as well [56]. City J is the most extensive double-low rapeseed base in the H province, a large national base of high-quality cotton and commodity grain [56]. It is suitable for agricultural production, agricultural product processing, biomedicine, and the forest industry [56] (INT1).

In July 2011, a publication titled "Boiled Agricultural Valley" in the H Province *Daily* caught the attention of the Party Committee secretary of H Provincial (DOC 3). Subsequently, the H Provincial Government selected the Core Area 1 (we use "Core Area 1" and "Core Area 2" to represent two core construction areas of CAV project) as an area in which to demonstrate agricultural modernization. The CAV project was chosen as a provincial development strategy by the H Provincial Government in 2012 (DOC 5). This strategy was implemented in City J. The Municipal Government of City J engaged in building national demonstration zones for realizing agricultural modernization and urban transformation (DOC 3). By relying on the CAV project, City J tried to develop domestic and foreign agricultural markets, improve the production capacity of agricultural products, and build an international organic agricultural production and processing base (DOC 10). The CAV project has two core construction areas in City J: Core Area 1 and Core Area 2, as shown in Figure 2.

4.2. The Roles and Effects of Political Feactures in Different Co-Production Stages

Co-production theory involves multiple facets such as co-design, co-implementation, and co-evaluation. However, the present study does not relate to co-evaluation. Hence, we only discuss political features influencing the co-design and co-implementation stages of the CAV project in City J. In order to accurately reflect the change of the effects and functions of political features in the process of co-implementation, we divided the co-implementation of City J's CAV project into co-implementation 1 and co-implementation 2. Figure 3 shows the main development process of the CAV project.

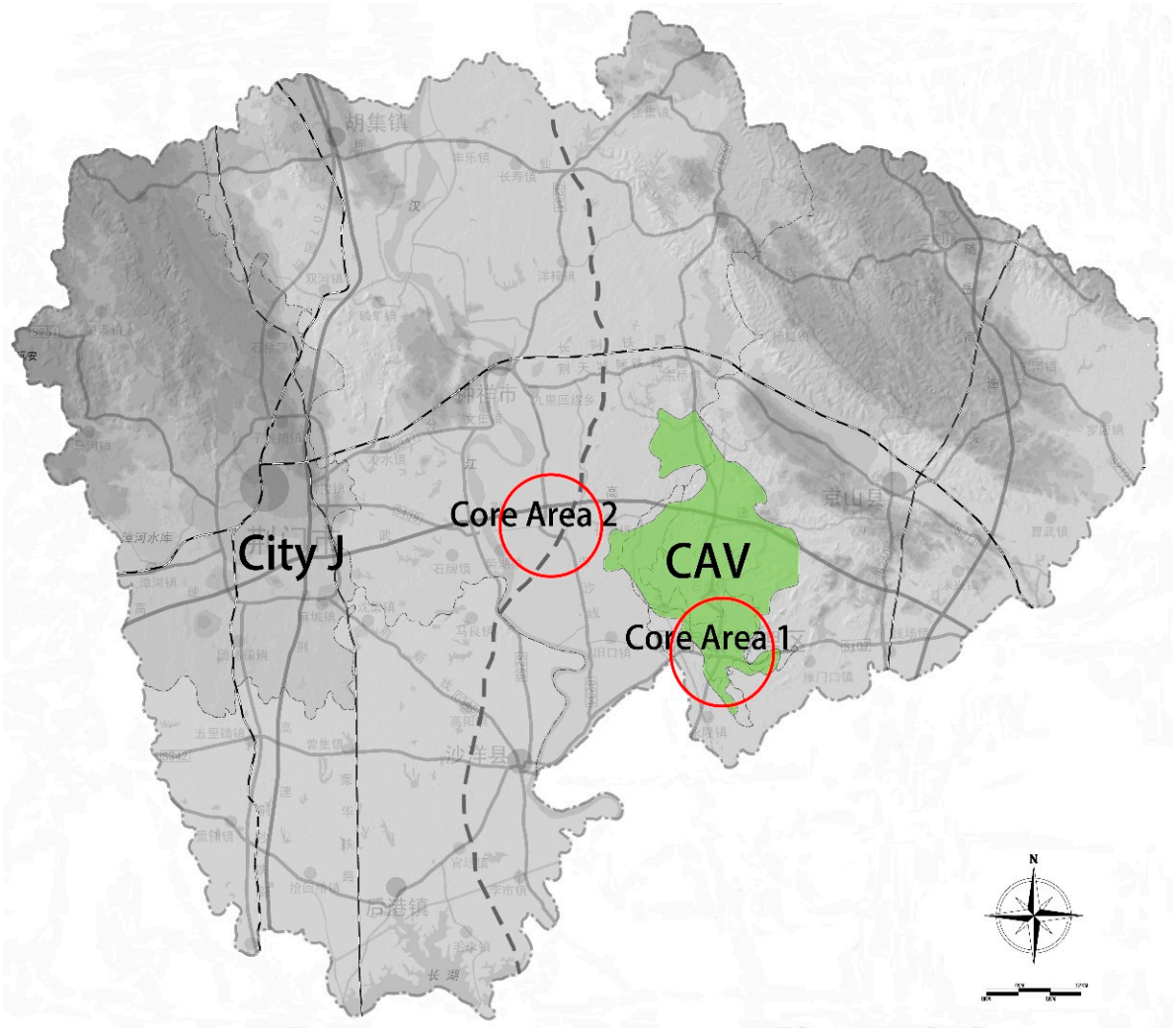


Figure 2. Two Core Areas of CAV Project in City J (Core Area 1 and Core Area 2).

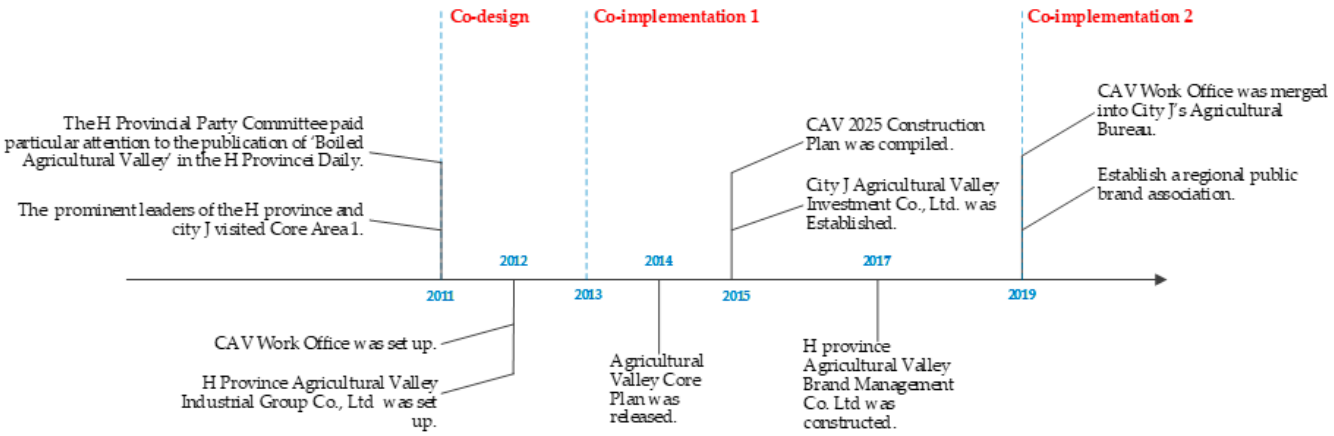


Figure 3. The Development Process of the CAV Project.

4.2.1. Co-Design (2011–2012)

According to the *CAV 2025 Construction Plan*, the project was designed to stimulate City J's economic growth and transform City J into a more sustainable city through developing its modern agriculture. As a result, the CAV project garnered attention and substantial

support from the H Provincial Government and Municipal Government of City J in the co-design stage (DOC 6; INT 5). In 2011, Municipal Government of City J (JMG) added seven administrative posts in the Office of CAV Leading Group (DOC 12). This was a vital measure in supporting the CAV project. Correspondingly, around CNY 2 billion was distributed to Core Area 1 within five years to support the agricultural industry (INT 5). At the same time, various departments in H Province also provided vital support by docking agricultural valley construction. Although the financial input from Municipal Government of City J was limited, JMG also offered strong support in the department coordination and cooperation at local level. Attracted by these preferential terms, many non-local enterprises and banks drew to City J to negotiate cooperation (DOC 8). The fund's input from H Provincial Government provides an essential support in the co-design of CAV. According to the documents, we summarized the key measures of governments in the co-design process of the CAV project, as shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Main Governmental Measures in the Co-Design Process of CAV.

Time	Governmental Measures
Sep, 2011	The secretary of the H Provincial Party Committee and other leading officials from relevant departments conducted an investigation and hosted a symposium in Core Area 1 to discuss the construction of CAV project (DOC 4). These departments of City J include the Social Science Association, Development and Reform Commission, the Agriculture Bureau, the Tourism Bureau, the Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication, and media organizations.
Oct, 2011	A group of experts from the Planning and Design Research Institute of the Ministry of Agriculture, the Oil and Gas Research Institute of the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences, visited Core Area 1 to do fieldwork and to compile the Master Plan of City J National Modern Agriculture Demonstration Area. (DOC 9)
2011	The leaders of City J's Municipal Party Committee led an investigation delegation to Zhejiang and Fujian provinces to study the advanced experiences on the co-production of modern agricultural parks. (DOC 9)
2011	The Municipal Government of City J set up a professional leadership group and a CAV Work Office to construct the CAV project. They are responsible for coordinating the CAV activities between the municipal government and other bureaus. (DOC 7)
Dec, 2011	The Municipal Government of City J signed the Strategic Cooperation Framework Agreement with the Western of H Province Eco-cultural Tourism Circle Investment Co., LTD. It engaged to build "CAV" project into a well-known high-quality cultural tourism area in China. (DOC 9)
Apr, 2012	The H Province Agricultural Valley Industrial Group Co., Ltd. (Agriculture Valley Group) was set up to promote the CAV strategy. It is a wholly state-owned company owned by Municipal Government of City J. (DOC 11)

Therefore, according to feedback from our respondents and document analyses, the most important driving factor in the co-design of the CAV project was the political attention and push from leaders in the government systems due to CAV project satisfied the goals of urban development and sustainable transformation in City J. For this reason, the H Provincial Government and the Municipal Government of City J demonstrated a high degree of consensus in their opinions about the CAV project.

4.2.2. Co-Implementation 1 (2013–2018)

At the stage of co-implementation 1, various political factors had different impacts on the CAV project implementation. First, in 2013, the Secretary of Municipal Party Committee of City J was promoted to the vice Director of the Standing Committee of the H Provincial People's Congress. Additionally, the Secretary of H Provincial Committee of the CPC transferred out of the H province in 2016. These were the core political leaders responsible for pushing the CAV project in previous co-design stage. During their tenure, they attached great importance to the construction of the project (INT 2). However, support for the CAV program began a gradual decline in co-implementation 1 because of the turnover of its two main leaders (INT 2; 5). At the same time, the original intent by the government was to implement the CAV project with the combination of government guidance and market operation (INT 5). H Provincial Government and Municipal Government of City J hoped Core Areas could apply market forces to build a mature agricultural market system in the

implementation of CAV project after the initial investment of co-design (INT 1). Therefore, H Provincial Government and Municipal Government of City J started to reduce their policy and financial support to Core Area 1 in co-implementation 1 stage (INT 5).

The decreasing concerns from political leadership were reflected in the weakening of support for the implementation of the CAV project. First, an associate professor who worked in local university of City J and participated in CAV project research commented that, "Although the government consulted experts' ideas on the implementation of the CAV project, our opinions were not fully adopted." (INT 13)

Second, while the attitude of the higher government towards the CAV project remained supportive in the co-implementation 1 phase overall, but the intensity of this support decreased (INT 5). The local government's support for the development of the CAV project can be guaranteed in land and taxes. However, the support from H Provincial Government had weakened in the co-implementation 1 phase compared with the co-design stage. For example, around CNY 300 to 400 million were invested in City J and Core Area 1 within three years (INT 5). In co-implementation 1 stage, CAV project was supported jointly by Municipal government of City J and Core Areas. Furthermore, some external enterprises attracted by preferential policies in co-design stage had to face with bankruptcy in co-implementation 1 stage due to the inability to adapt to the local market environment and the promised policies input cannot be implemented in co-implementation 1 stage. Many contracted projects cannot be implemented at the end due to financial support, subsidies, and policy supply cannot be guaranteed (INT 7).

Third, the government's performance measurement was both a driving factor and a barrier at co-implementation 1 stage. City J engaged in developing its agricultural industry by promoting the CAV project. CAV project was still an important project of modern agriculture development in City J. The CAV project can solve local farmers' employment problem to a great extent, generate income for farmers and local agricultural enterprises, and make an important contribution to the agricultural income of City J (INT 12; 19). However, the economic benefit of the CAV project was still relatively low with respect to the overall economic contribution of City J [57]. The municipal government of City J concluded that the agricultural industry involved limited economic benefits but significant market risks (INT 5).

4.2.3. Co-Implementation 2 (2019–Now)

According to feedback from our respondents, political mobility, central–local relations, and government performance jointly influenced co-implementation 2 of the CAV project. First, the government's political attention still declined during the co-implementation 2 stage due to the flow of core politicians that occurred in co-implementation 1. Besides, many agricultural projects were not kicked off for lack of interest among companies and insufficient policy support provided by local government. Meanwhile, CAV Office was merged into Agricultural Bureau of City J in 2019 [58]. This is a clear indication that there will be no dedicated section responsible for the CAV project (INT 5).

Second, there were significant advertising costs in establishing the brand of CAV. The chief editor of Media Group of City J told us, "CAV project and Ecological City J was used to be an urban image propaganda of City J. The media departments publicized City J through special issues and public service advertisements." The CAV project has gained popularity and brand recognition in the whole country (INT 6; 9). An officer of Planning Survey Design Institute of City J told us that, "H Provincial Government wants to expand the coverage of CAV brand and use CAV label to refer to the entire H province." This means that the CAV brand will cover the whole H province—not just City J. A professor who works in local university of City J and participated in CAV project research revealed: "CAV brand will be used by higher authority (H Province). This seriously weakens the motivation and commitment of local government to continue to implement CAV project." As a response, the local government of City J gradually reduces the CAV project's promotion which they have operated many years.

Third, agricultural industry resulted in limited economic benefits. However, a large number of labor forces are concentrated in the primary industry. According to the statistical yearbook of H Province, the three industries involved in construction in City J were 11.9%, 47.3%, and 40.8% in 2019 [57]. The proportion of primary industry in industrial construction was quite low. From 2013 to 2018, the GDP of primary industry in City J increased from CNY 17.869 billion to CNY 22.62 billion. The share of agricultural industry in the GDP composition dropped from 15.8 percent to 12.2 percent. The proportion of the labor force of primary industry in the city's employed population dropped from 38.3 percent to 36.25 [59]. Since the CAV project was initially proposed, there was an apparent gap between the actual gained economic benefits from the agricultural sector and the desired urban transformation vision of City J (including modern agriculture and rural tourism) (INT 5; DOC 3 and 10). According to the feedback from the Chief of CAV Work Office, the manager of local agricultural companies and local farmers, we found the CAV project has not formed a mature agricultural market system after years of government investment. It is very hard to improve the agricultural prices (INT 17; 20). At the stage of co-implementation 2, the main business of agricultural valley enterprises still produces mass agricultural products and bulk commodity (INT 17; 18). Agricultural products and flowers with high economic value have not expanded their operation scale, so agricultural economic benefits are still limited (INT 19; 20). Due to the industrial reasons, it is still challenging to develop modern agriculture and build "Garden City" by implementing CAV project. As a result, politicians withdrew their attention and participation. Promised policies cannot be implemented. The support of talents, funds, and sales channels from the governments fell dramatically.

In addition, government performance and development targets in City J have changed from the CAV project (primary industry) to the more attractive GANT project (tertiary industry) (INT 2). In other words, the superior authority and local government are unwilling to continue to provide policy and financial support for an outdated project. The chief of H Province Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation explained, "CAV is still the main project of City J's government and conducted to solve agricultural income and agricultural labor force problems. However, it has to rely more on market and enterprises."

5. Discussion and Findings

The co-production process for CAV project of City J involved three phases: co-design, co-implementation 1, and co-implementation 2. Different political features influenced the co-production of the project in different stages and to different extents. Table 3 summarizes the roles and changes of political features on the project in different co-production stages. This study confirms and complements previous research which has found that co-production in China is government-driven [55]. We found political features greatly influence the co-production process of project [1].

Table 3. The Roles and Effects of Political Features in Different Co-Production Stages.

Co-Production Process Political Factors	Co-Design	Co-Implementation 1		Co-Implementation 2	
Central–local relations	++	+			-
Performance measurement	++	++	-	+	–
Political mobility			–		–

Note: "+" refers to political factors driving the co-production of the CAV project. "-" indicates that political factors are hindering the co-production of the CAV project. The number of symbols represents the strength of the impact.

The positive effect of central–local relations on the co-design process began to decline during co-implementation 1 and became a negative factor during co-implementation 2. The main reason for this dynamic shift was the change in objectives and interests for the CAV project with regard to the higher government (H province government) and lower government (JMG). Actually, the construction of the CAV project did not achieve the anticipated goal of modernizing agriculture. This gradually weakened the support of the

higher government for the project. In addition, the behavior of the higher government affected the interests of the lower government, so the lower government adjusted its implementation of the CAV project accordingly. This study confirms previous studies that rewards and punishments from higher-level governments drives selective implementation of policies at local levels [43]. The case of City J complements the research on the consistency of distribution of goals and interests between the central and local governments [38]. This case indicates that the alignment of interests and objectives between superior and subordinate governments affects the ultimate behavior of both parties to the project.

Government performance measurement shifted from a strong positive effect in the co-design stage to a mixed effect during co-implementation 1. Then, in co-implementation 2, the negative effects outweighed the positive effects. The main reason for this shift was the inconsistency between the goals of the CAV project and the goals of government performance measurement. In recent years, Chinese local governments generally pursue economic growth and rapid development [47], and projects with obvious low economic benefits are not attractive. We find that performance measurement by local government is an essential factor affecting the co-production of project. Previous studies illustrate the positive role of performance measurement in enhancing the outcomes of the co-production of non-pro-fit organizations [60]. Whether the development goals of projects are consistent with the government performance goals also affects the attention and support of leaders. We find that the project would garner more support from leaders and higher-government departments if the goals of the project align with local government performance requirements, and vice versa. Based on the case of City J, we conclude that government performance measurement affects the co-design of project as well as the co-implementation of projects. Therefore, the selection of projects needs to fit with the requirements of government performance measurement.

The CAV project remains an important part of City J's urban development, but now it is never the sole or core project in City J. As in other known cases, project still needs to be fulfilled by the government despite the failure to achieve the original vision for the project, such as some eco-city and public housing projects [61]. It is difficult to substantially change the city's industrial structure while promoting its economic growth simply through operating such projects [1]. Local government continues to operate these projects but may not continue to prioritize them. Furthermore, changing political leadership (such as leaders leave office) also impact the directions of urban development and performance measurement requirements [62].

Due to the frequent turnover of officials and requirements of performance appraisal of officials [33], political mobility influences policy continuity of project. The continuity of policy and support of the project are interrupted when the relevant politicians move on from their current positions. Meanwhile, the construction cycle of project typically lasts a long time (even a few years) and requires continuous (financial) resources and political commitment [12]. Due to political mobility, new leaders may not push old projects as strongly as did their predecessors. New leaders think more about how to build projects that represent their achievements during their own tenure [63,64]. New political leaders would like to apply the experiences in their previous postings to their new positions, such as the community governance reforms in Haicang and Guiyang [65]. It is no surprise that political mobility has a profound impact on the co-design and continuity of co-implementation of projects in China. This leads to the frequent introduction of new government projects by local governments, even when old ones have not been completed. Furthermore, an important finding of this study is political mobility and performance measurement interact to jointly influence co-production. A change in leadership leads to a change in the direction of urban development. Previous research claimed that it is likely to be sufficient if politicians take the role of the "guardian of good governance" and "community mobiliser" in co-design and co-implementation [9]. However, we believe that politicians have a significant influence on the co-production of projects in the political context of China. Long-term political

commitment of core politicians and their leadership are the most determinant factors in the co-production of projects.

6. Conclusions

This study contributes to co-production theory by exploring how political features influence co-production, which has not been done before. We classified the political background into three features (political mobility, central–local relations, and performance measurement) and conducted a case study in a non-Western country. We examined the impact of these three political features on a governmental project of a Chinese city in different co-production stages and found that political features profoundly influence the co-production in the chosen projects. Sometimes, these political features may interact with each other and generate joint effects. These political features influence the co-design and co-implementation of projects through government support for projects, policy and financial resource input, and interdepartmental coordination. At the same time, the political features can be both an advantage and a risk to co-production, depending on the occasion.

The CAV project of City J represents a prevalent urban transformation practice in Chinese cities. Many Chinese cities wish to transform themselves by introducing governmental projects. However, the co-design and co-implementation of these projects are quite complicated. In the co-design and co-implementation phases, governments select and support projects that meet the requirements of performance measurement standards. In the co-implementation stage, the project is supported by the higher government when the goals and interests of the higher and lower levels of government are consistent. In contrast, higher tiers of government will reduce their support for the project when the goals and interests of the higher and lower tiers of government are in conflict. On this occasion, the subordinate governments also altered their actual implementation to protect local interests. Changes of core political leaders can pause or weaken the co-implementation of projects. Projects can be quickly abandoned when political leadership changes or when project goals conflict with government performance goals. In the project implementation stage, a lack of resources (e.g., funds, policies) makes it difficult for the project to realize original ambition levels. Correspondingly, the government's help and support will not be made available if projects are seen to flounder.

The important lesson to be drawn is that government should introduce related policies to deal with the impact of political mobility on project continuity. The selection and implementation of the project should consider the consistency of goals and interests between the senior government and the lower-level government. Long-term political support and commitment are important guarantees for the efficient and continuous implementation of projects. Mitigating the influence of political features on the co-production of projects and strengthening the effective participation of citizens and private sectors are worthwhile considerations for the government. In the actual process of co-production, both the positive and negative effects of political features on co-production of projects should be considered by policymakers. Managers could formulate corresponding policies to promote the positive effects of political features and take measures to reduce the negative effects on the co-production of the project. The co-production processes in China are obviously different from Western countries, where citizens have more power and commission in co-production processes. In China, policymakers should encourage and construct the conditions for grassroots (citizens, farmers) to actively participate in the co-production of governmental projects.

Limitations of this study need to be mentioned. First, the information regarding the impact of political features on co-production was obtained from interviewees who worked in the relevant departments. Therefore, the obtained results may be biased because of the differences in each person's perceptions of political features and co-production of project. Some quantitative approach could be explored to study co-production research in the future. Second, we only investigated the co-production processes of one project in one Chinese city. The findings of City J cannot reveal a complete picture of all the possible

patterns of political influencing on China's co-production. We recognize the need to verify our findings by examining a larger sample of cities. Future research should investigate the co-production of projects in other regions in China, such as in the north. Furthermore, Chinese cities operate in a unique political and administrative system. Therefore, future studies should give more attention to comparative analyses between different countries which have cities which display varying levels of urban development, such as Italy and South Africa.

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Appendix A

Table A1. The documents of CAV Project.

No.	Title
DOC 1	The Master Plan of National Modern Agriculture Demonstration Area (2011–2015)
DOC 2	The CAV 2025 Construction Plan
DOC 3	The Main Task of CAV Core Area
DOC 4	The Speech and Instructions in the Inspection of Core Area 1
DOC 5	The Construction of CAV Project
DOC 6	Preferential Policies on the Construction of CAV Project
DOC 7	Working Responsibilities and Mechanism of CAV Work Office
DOC 8	The Summary of CAV Construction (2012–2016)
DOC 9	The Memorabilia of CAV Project
DOC 10	The Master Plan of CAV Core Area
DOC 11	The profile of Agriculture Valley Group
DOC 12	Implementation Opinions on Accelerating the Construction of "CAV" project in City J
DOC 13	Opinions of CPC H Provincial Committee and H Provincial People's Government on Supporting City J to Accelerate the Establishment of "CAV" project
DOC 14	Reply on the Establishment of the Office of CAV Leading Group in City J

Appendix B

Table A2. Interviewees in City J in 2018, 2019, and 2020.

No.	Departments	Positions	The Interview Topics
INT 1	Planning Survey Design Institute	Vice Dean	CAV project
INT 2	Planning Survey Design Institute	Chief	CAV project
INT 3	Planning Survey Design Institute	Officer	The state quo of CAV project
INT 4	Planning Bureau	Officer	The state quo of CAV project
INT 5	Municipal Committee of Rural Office	Chief	CAV project construction and implementation
INT 6	Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication	Chief 1	Agricultural cultural activities
INT 7	Bureau of Culture Sports Broadcasting Press and Publication	Chief 2	Industrial development and project governance
INT 8	Tourism Bureau	Chief	CAV project and rural tourism
INT 9	The Daily Newspaper Department in Daily Media Group	Editor 1	Promotion and media channels of CAV project
INT 10	The Night Newspaper Department in Daily Media Group	Editor 2	Promotion and media channels of CAV project
INT 11	H Province Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation	Manager	CAV construction and implementation
INT 12	H Province Agriculture Valley Investment Management Corporation	Chief	CAV construction and implementation
INT 13	School of Media, local university	Associate Professor	CAV construction and implementation
INT 14	School of Management, local university	Associate Professor	CAV construction and implementation
INT 15		Resident 1	The characteristics of CAV project
INT 16		Resident 2	The characteristics of CAV project
INT 17	Local Agricultural Company 1	Manager	The enterprise participation in the co-production of CAV
INT 18	Local Agricultural Company 2	Manager	The enterprise participation in the co-production of CAV
INT 19		Local farmer 1	The participation from farmers
INT 20		Local farmer 2	The participation from farmers
Meeting 1	Planning Meeting	Officers of Planning Bureau and Institutes	Feedback on the investigation results of CAV project
Meeting 2	Strategy Planning Conference 2049	Officers of Planning Bureau and Institutes	Discussion on development strategy of City J
Workshop	Experts Workshop	Experts and scholars from home and abroad	CAV project and sustainable urban transformation

Appendix C

Semi-Structured Questions for Interviews

1. Interview with local officials

1.1. How does local government construct the CAV project, and what role does it play?

1.2. How does the government work with enterprises, farmers, and research institutions to build the CAV project?
1.3. Which departments and sectors are involved in the construction of the CAV project?
1.4. How does the government help the farmers and agricultural enterprises to solve problems?
1.5. What are the difficulties in CAV project implementation? What reasons for that?
1.6. What aspects need to be improved in the co-production process of the CAV project?
1.7. What political factors influenced the co-production of the CAV project?
1.8. How did political factors influence the co-production of the CAV project?
1.9. What impact does leadership change on the implementation of CAV project?

2. Interview with local agricultural companies and farmers

2.1. How do you participate in the CAV Project?
2.2. What have you invested in the process of participating, and what have you gained?
2.3. Why do you participate in the CAV project? What factors affect the your willingness to participate in? If participation is not high, what is the reason behind it?
2.4. What difficulties did you encounter in your cooperation and communication with governments, enterprises (farmers), and other research institutes, and how did you solve them?
2.5. How do you cooperate with the government and enterprises (farmers)? What help and support have the government and enterprises provided to you?
2.6. What is the change in your income before and after the construction of CAV project?
2.7. How did your behaviors change in agriculture activities before and after the CAV project?

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