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Citizens' motivations to coproduce: a Q methodological study on the City Governance Committee in Nanjing, China

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ABSTRACT

This article applies Q methodology to examine citizens' motivations to engage in Chinese city governance, more specifically to participate in the City Governance Committee in Nanjing. We identify three orientations underlying citizens' motivations to engage in coproduction: the optimistic believer, the active expresser, and the commissioned influencer. Our data show that expressive values, self-efficacy, and normative values are important reasons underlying Chinese citizens' engagement in coproduction. The orientations that we have found clearly differ from motivations that are reported in research conducted in a Western context. Our analysis suggests that governors should improve citizens' self-efficacy for coproduction.

KEYWORDS Coproduction; motivations; Chinese city governance; Q methodology

Introduction

In recent years, there have been abundant studies on coproduction (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff 2012). The coproduction literature proposes citizens as active participants in the design and delivery of public services (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017). Coproduction is currently an important practice in policymaking and public service delivery in many Western democracies, and it has been widely practiced in many fields, such as fire protection, public safety and policing, tax collection, care, waste collection, urban regeneration, and education (Alford 2002; Osborne and Strokosch 2013).

The Chinese political system, on which this article focuses, is semi-authoritarian. Citizens traditionally have few opportunities to engage directly in coproducing public policies and services. Government is the only legitimate controller of governance processes, and coproduction is not a common institutionalized practice (Johnson 2014). However, with the increasingly tense relationship between governments and citizens as a consequence of the occurrence of various social conflicts, the popularity of social media that provides more opportunities for citizens to expose government misconduct, and the rising middle class with a high demand for participation and

transparency, governors in various Chinese cities (e.g. Nanjing, Hangzhou, Wenzhou, and Xiamen) have occasionally decided to coproduce public policies and services with citizens with the aim of maintaining social harmony, improving governance quality, or increasing state legitimacy (Li 2018).

Besides requiring government to be willing to engage in coproduction, coproduction requires citizens to be prepared to coproduce. Citizens' motivations to coproduce differ. Misinterpretations of why citizens participate or ignorance of their motivations may be the reason why coproduction fails or does not live up to expectations. Understanding why citizens are willing to invest in coproduction is therefore important. Many studies have been conducted on citizens' motivation to coproduce in Western democracies (a few notable examples: Alford 2002; Parrado et al. 2013; Van Eijk and Steen 2014). Little, however, is known about this topic in non-Western countries. Our study aims to contribute to existing governance and policy literature by adding new knowledge regarding citizens' motivations to engage in coproduction in China. Specifically, we focus on the City Governance Committee (CGC) case in Nanjing, which can be considered to be exemplary of similar initiatives in various other Chinese cities like Hangzhou, Wenzhou, and Xiamen. In this initiative, citizen representatives from private, public, and social organizations¹ in Nanjing city are allowed to engage in coproducing local public policies and services with officials. We address the following research question: *what are the motivations of citizen representatives to engage in coproduction in the Nanjing City Governance Committee, and how can we interpret these motivations?* We use Q methodology to examine citizen representatives' motivations to engage in the CGC initiative.

The remainder of this article is structured as follows. In the next section, the Nanjing CGC case is described. After that, our theoretical framework is introduced. Next, we discuss the way in which we applied the Q methodology to map and categorize motivations. Following that, we present the results of our analyses. The article concludes with a discussion section and a conclusion section.

The City Governance Committee in Nanjing

Nanjing is located in southeast China in the Yangtze River delta. It is the capital of Jiangsu province. The city is one of the 15 sub-provincial cities in the People's Republic of China's administrative structure, enjoying jurisdictional and economic autonomy only slightly less than that of a province. After Shanghai, it is the second largest economic centre in this part of China. Its population is largely middle class. It is widely accepted that governments in the southern part of China, including Nanjing city, are relatively less bureaucratic and more hardworking (see Huang 2019). Nevertheless, the CGC initiative resulted from an escalating, fierce tension between city management officials and vendors. In 2012, an incident, in which an official was killed by a vendor, shocked local governors in Nanjing. The CGC initiative was a response by local governors to these types of tensions.

In March 2013, the Nanjing City Management Bureau issued a notification that invited residents in Nanjing to apply to become a citizen representative on the CGC, a new institution to be established by Nanjing municipality. By 15 April, about 145 citizens had registered and finally 129 of them qualified. On 24 April, 45 citizen representatives were chosen by lottery. In May, Nanjing municipality

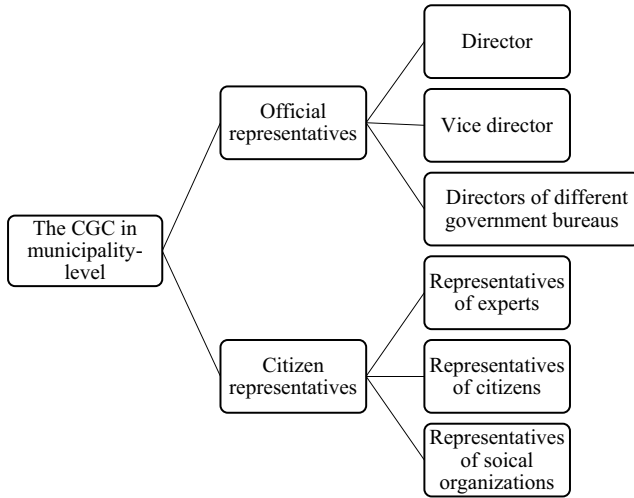


Figure 1. The organizational structure of the CGC established by Nanjing municipality.

formally established the CGC, which was chaired by the mayor. The organizational structure of the CGC is presented in [Figure 1](#). The CGC has 83 representatives, 38 of whom are officials and 45 citizen representatives. Among these 45 representatives, 13 are experts, 19 are from social organizations, and 13 are people that do not represent organizations, for example freelancers or self-employed citizens.² The representatives, from 24 different fields, include lawyers, industry associations, journalists, teachers, governance experts, social organization staff, private sector workers, university students, houseowner association members, and others.

In December 2015, Nanjing municipality issued another notification calling for the recruitment of citizen representatives for the CGC.³ In October 2016, the second CGC was formally established.⁴ Some citizen representatives on the first CGC ended their tenure and some new citizen representatives joined it.

CGC candidates must meet some basic criteria, such as being older than 18 years, being familiar with the general situation in Nanjing, caring about city management, with a household in Nanjing or living in Nanjing for over 5 years, and being interested in seeking truth and in engaging in various activities to safeguard public interests. The candidate nomination and selection processes are elaborated as follows. First, the CGC Coordination Office compiles the nomination tables, and then it releases relevant information in local mainstream media, including candidates' qualifications, nomination procedures, and deadlines for application submission. Second, all candidates who are interested in this programme can submit their application if they receive approval from their organizations or receive two recommendation letters from citizen representatives who have already worked on the CGC. Third, the CGC Coordination Office collects all application data, and the CGC coordinators review the applications. After that, the qualified applicants are chosen through a lottery approach. The lists of the chosen candidates' names are disclosed to the public, and the public are allowed to express their opinions. Fourth, the candidates are formally approved by the

municipality. Citizen representatives are selected every three years. They voluntarily leave the CGC when they finish their three-year tenure, and their longest permitted tenure is six years.

Regarding the selection of themes for discussion in the CGC initiative, first all citizen representatives can voluntarily submit a proposal to the CGC Coordination Office. In this proposal, citizen representatives are allowed to suggest themes and topics that they believe relevant. Second, the Coordination Office selects these topics and establishes the issues to be discussed by the CGC. After Nanjing municipality established the CGC, the district governments and the street-level governments followed this trend and started establishing CGCs in their jurisdictions. Currently, all Nanjing's district governments and street-level governments have established a CGC.

Understanding coproduction in Nanjing

The concept of coproduction has attracted substantial scholarly attention. It can be defined as the practice whereby citizens are involved in the creation and delivery of public policies and services (Brandsen and Honingh 2018; Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017; Parks et al. 1981; Verschuere, Brandsen, and Pestoff, 2012). Some scholars argue that coproduction is something new and adds value to governance and public service delivery, whereas others stress that the implementation of policies and the delivery of public services always require some sort of citizen involvement, implying that coproduction is (and always has been) an integral part of governance and public service delivery (Osborne and Stokosch 2013). These different assertions about coproduction have resulted in conceptual confusion.

Many scholars follow Ostrom's (1996) definition and define coproduction as active citizen participation, especially by citizens who are the direct beneficiaries of public services (Alford 2002). In this way, coproduction differs from more traditional forms of citizen participation, which include forms of (passive) consultation and citizen participation at the input side of government (participation in political parties, voting, organizing, participating in referenda, and so on) (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006). Some authors have suggested that coproduction is a specific form of citizen participation, as it focuses on the output side of the political system – thereby referring primarily to the design and the delivery of services (Brandsen and Honingh 2018). Coproduction distinguishes itself from other forms of participative governance, such as collaborative governance, network governance, and interactive policymaking, which involve interactions between governments, business, and non-governmental organizations in decision making and problem solving, whereas coproduction is reserved by most authors to mean the involvement of citizens and users in public service delivery.

In further defining the coproduction concept, we follow Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia (2017), who describe three developments through which the concept has progressed.

First, coproduction can refer to a wide breadth of activities. Initially, coproduction referred only to traditional public services, such as education, policing, waste collection, budget, and water and energy provision (Ostrom 1996). Increasingly, it has been used to describe the active involvement of citizens in a wider set of governmental activities, such as paying taxes, serving on a jury, and health or safety inspections. This means that coproduction refers not only to public services, but also to public policies.

Second, in relation to the first development, coproduction refers to activities at different stages of the policy and public service cycle, such as commissioning/prioritization, design/creation, delivery, and assessment. Co-commissioning or prioritization refers primarily to activities that identify and prioritize necessary services and users, whereas co-design or co-creation refers primarily to activities that allow citizens to decide how a policy or service is designed (Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015). Co-delivery refers to situations in which different actors work together at the point of delivering a specific service and implementing a policy (Alford 2014), and co-assessment implies that different actors jointly monitor and evaluate services and policies (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017).

Third, coproduction can refer to activities at different levels: individual or organizational. In individual coproduction, it implies that one or more clients/customers and one or more state actors work together, and they contribute their resources to improve service or policy quality (Pestoff 2006). Coproduction can also refer to situations in which different organizations work together to coproduce public policies and public services. These situations are often coined as co-management or co-governance (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006). For instance, governmental organizations and civil society organizations have worked together with the aim of designing a satisfactory cohesion policy in the EU (Batory and Cartwright 2011; Potluka, Špaček, and Remr 2017).

Some authors have argued that these three developments stretch the concept and result in confusion and ambiguities (Brandsen and Honingh 2018). In this study therefore, we have applied a relatively narrow definition. We define coproduction as activities that directly engage individual citizens in the design/creation and the delivery of public policies and services (Osborne and Stokosch 2013; Voorberg, Bekkers, and Tummers 2015). In the CGC case in Nanjing, citizen representatives are involved in developing governance strategies and long-term development plans for Nanjing city. By the end of May 2018, 14 roundtable meetings had been organized by CGC, and official representatives and citizen representatives jointly developed eight decisions that have become formal policies implemented citywide. The decisions cover issues such as car parking, public space, waste recycling, firecracker nuisance (especially during the Chinese Spring Festival), and city landscape. In this article, the coproduction concept refers primarily to the co-design and co-creation of public policies between government officials and citizen representatives of the CGC in city governance.

In the literature on Chinese governance, the concept of coproduction is rarely mentioned. Literature exists on collaborative governance in China (Jing 2015; Li, Ni, and Wei 2021). It refers primarily to collaboration between government and social organizations in delivering public services, mostly through a contracting-out approach (Li and Qiu 2020). One example is that governors in Chinese cities sign contracts with social organizations and allow them to directly provide caring services for elderly people. It has been argued that this contracting relationship has occasionally evolved into a collaborative one, characterized by trust, reciprocity, and interaction (Jing 2015). Thus, it has many similarities with coproduction practices in Western democracies.

The second strand of literature that is worth mentioning relates to online participation in the wide application of various internet-based platforms, such as government-sponsored social media accounts, electronic petition platforms, and online public consultations, which enable citizens to be directly engaged in the design and planning of various

government policies (Jiang, Meng, and Zhang 2019). For instance, governors in many Chinese cities have actively initiated an online platform that allows citizens to directly express their opinions, suggestions, and viewpoints on government policies. Then, they adjust their policy priorities and policy designs to accommodate citizens' demands (Jiang, Meng, and Zhang 2019). This implies the emergence of a new type of participation, whereby governments and citizens jointly co-design and co-create policies and public services.

The most relevant strand of literature is on citizen participation. It is generally accepted that a state-centric model dominates in China and that other actors have limited formal channels to be directly engaged in public policy and public service processes (Li 2018). Although citizens might be occasionally engaged in coproduction processes, their engagement is highly managed by governors (Johnson 2014). Although this literature informs us on the nature of coproduction in China as a relatively new practice and its possible salience, it does not provide insights into citizens' motivation to participate.

With regard to the role and impact of coproduction practices in the context of governmental policymaking and service delivery, the literature provides us with at least four interpretations:

- (1) Coproduction as a way to improve the quality and efficiency of governmental policies and public services (Osborne and Stokosch 2013). As described above, the idea is that involving citizens and their resources will result in better policies and services and reduce costs (Pestoff 2006).
- (2) Coproduction as a channel for citizens to express their preferences and criticisms. In this interpretation, coproduction provides platforms and channels (such as ICT-mediated forums) for citizens to voice their demands or complaints. Especially in authoritarian countries where democratic channels that fulfil this function are absent, and the option to express criticisms is not available, coproduction may be an acceptable and safe alternative for both government and citizens (Johnson 2014; Li 2018).
- (3) Coproduction as a way to foster citizenship (Van Eijk and Steen 2014). In this interpretation, improvements to policies and services are not the most important outcomes of the coproduction process. Rather, coproduction is a learning and socialization process by which participants are educated and develop attitudes and skills that transform them into citizens committed to contributing to future policies and the community as a whole (Alford 2002; He 2018).
- (4) Coproduction as a symbolic political instrument, aimed at gaining legitimacy and citizens' support (Brandsen and Honingh 2018). In this interpretation, coproduction is not about improving policies or services, but about legitimizing government's policies and performance by involving citizens (Nabatchi, Sancino, and Sicilia 2017).

Coproduction can develop into practices that reflect one or more of these interpretations. However, these interpretations are inspired by how governments view coproduction and do not provide insights into the motivations of citizens who participate in coproduction. In this article, we want to contribute to the debate on coproduction by investigating what drives citizens to coproduce, specifically in the Chinese context.

Motivations that influence citizens' engagement in coproduction

Some scholars have investigated citizens' motivations to engage in coproduction (Alford 2002; Parrado et al. 2013; Van Eijk and Steen 2014; Verschuere et al. 2012). Alford (2002) has found various motivations. He concluded that material rewards (such as shopping vouchers, presents, and money) are important in explaining citizens' engagement in coproduction; however, he found that intrinsic factors are the strongest. Alford's (2002) conclusions have been confirmed by various studies (Parrado et al. 2013; Van Eijk and Steen 2014). In general, we have identified five categories of motivations that play important roles in explaining citizens' engagement in coproduction: self-oriented motivations, expressive values, social values, self-efficacy, and normative values. In the following, these five categories are elaborated in detail.

Self-oriented motivations

Citizens who engage in coproduction do not contribute solely to benefit others. Self-oriented motivations, such as the advantages of having more access to services than others or of acquiring more information than others, often underlie citizens' engagement in coproduction (Alford 2002). Van Eijk and Steen (2014) concluded that citizens' decisions to engage in coproduction are driven by material rewards and intangible benefits (such as reputation and popularity). Moreover, Pestoff (2006) argued that material motivations encourage citizens to undertake some easy tasks. If participation becomes too demanding, self-oriented motivations are not enough to guarantee perseverance with coproduction.

Expressive values

It has been found that some intangible rewards, such as the love of expressing different viewpoints and opinions or interest in organizing activities, influence citizens' choices to actively engage in coproduction processes (Alford 2002; Van Eijk and Steen 2014). Expressive values also imply that citizens express their concerns to governments about better policy outcomes (Parrado et al. 2013). In democratic countries, coproduction is often initiated when citizens are dissatisfied with the policies or services provided by government or with the lack of these policies and services. Because local government failed to invest sufficient funding and personnel to provide appropriate social services to children with special educational needs (such as dyslexia or a low IQ) or disabilities (such as a physical disability or cerebral palsy), parents in the Manchester Parent Carer Forum worked closely with schools, volunteers, and specialist providers to coproduce various social service programmes for these families.⁵

Social values

Social values also influence citizens' willingness to engage in coproduction (Alford 2002). They refer to the benefits that coproduction provides in terms of getting a sense of group membership and belonging, being well regarded, or having fun and

experiencing conviviality (Verschuere et al. 2012). A study conducted by Alford (2014) found that citizens in Melbourne engaging in estate management were motivated by a sense of group affiliation and belonging.

Self-efficacy

Some researchers have found that citizens' perceptions regarding their competences to effectively influence governance processes shape their willingness to engage in coproduction (Alford 2014). It has been found that citizens are willing to engage in coproduction when they believe that their efforts are treated seriously by governments or when they believe that they can make a difference (Verschuere et al. 2012). Two survey reports in Italian conducted by Vecchione and Caprara (2009) and a five-nation survey study conducted by Parrado et al. (2013) found that citizens' self-efficacy beliefs influence their willingness to participate in coproduction.

Normative values

From a normative perspective, people conduct prosocial behaviours because they believe they should. Some authors have argued that coproduction corresponds with an active model of citizenship, which implies that coproduction is normatively good and should be encouraged (Alford 2002). Citizens engage in coproduction just because they believe that they are doing something good (Verschuere et al. 2012). Another important normative value is democratically inspired. Citizens engage in coproduction because they believe that their coproduction will enhance democracy (Verschuere et al. 2012). Also, in a study by Cheung, Lo, and Liu (2015), it was found that students' social responsibilities facilitate their engagement in volunteering activities.

In this study, we apply Q methodology to investigate the relative importance of various motivations in explaining citizens' engagement in coproduction. These motivations are translated into statements, which are introduced in the methodology section.

The above-presented motivations are based on Western literature. They refer to citizens' motivations shaped within the highly individualistic Western culture. It might well be that motivations of citizens in China differ, given the prevailing semi-authoritarian political system and the more collective orientation of the Chinese cultural setting. The five categories of motivation are nevertheless useful as a heuristic tool to identify the specific combination of motivations of Chinese citizens, on the assumption that these combinations will manifest a more dominant presence of social value and normative purpose motivations in Chinese citizens as compared to citizens in Western countries.

Method, data, and analysis

In this article, Q methodology is used to unravel dominant motivations to coproduce in Nanjing. The method allows researchers to systematically study people's opinions, viewpoints, and perspectives (Li and Qiu 2020; McKeown and Thomas 2013). It is essentially a mixed method, enabling researchers to analyse perceptual, qualitative data

through factor analysis. Factor analysis is an analytic technique that allows researchers to seek for patterns of respondents' perspectives in relation to a specific topic. We followed the usual four-step Q methodology procedure.

First, we selected a representative set of statements about the topic at hand. Our statement set was established through both an inductive and a deductive approach. We identified 45 items in the literature, related to motivations to coproduce. Then, a focus group was organized, attended by eight citizen CGC representatives. They were selected on the basis of the variety of their backgrounds to ensure a diversity of insights and viewpoints about citizens' motivations to engage with the CGC as input for the discussion. Two participants were from private companies, one from a university, one from the homeowner commission, two from social organizations, one from a state-owned enterprise, and one from social media. The focus group discussion was recorded and subsequently transcribed. We identified in total over 120 statements that describe motivations to coproduce. We finally established a Q set with 35 statements through iterative discussions among the authors and consultations with experts and citizen representatives. We made our decisions about the 35 statements as follows. From a literature review, we first established dimensions and aspects related to every single thematic cluster. Each thematic cluster covered several different dimensions in relation to motivations. For instance, social values cover different dimensions and aspects of motivations, such as respect, participation, social networks, and fun. Second, we connected dimensions with the statements collected and ensured that each key dimension was represented by one statement. Several rounds of discussion among the authors, following iterative adaptations and rearrangements, helped to confirm that all important dimensions relating to a specific key thematic cluster were covered by the 35 statements. Originally, we attempted to assign seven items to each thematic cluster. However, we found this to be impossible because the normative purpose statements were overly present in the debate, so we decided to make this thematic cluster broader compared to the others.

	-4	-3	-2	-1	0	1	2	3	4
1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	
10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	
	19	20	21	22	23	24	25		
		26	27	28	29	30			
			31	32	33				
				34					
				35					

Figure 2. The sorting grid.

Second, respondents were chosen and asked to sort all 35 statements in a normal distribution grid (see Figure 2). The aim of this sorting process is to comprehend the respondent's line of thinking about his/her motivations. The structuring question was: *why do you engage in coproduction in the city of Nanjing?* The scale runs from -4: I totally do not agree with this statement, to +4: I totally agree with this statement.

In a Q methodological study, participants are chosen purposefully, with the aim of including a diverse range of participants (Watts and Stenner 2012). Getting access to Chinese citizens and involving them as respondents in research is very difficult and rarely realized, because of cultural and language barriers. Thanks to the Chinese members of the research team and their contacts with Nanjing municipality, we could obtain the relatively unique data on which the Q sort is based.

We collected our data in two stages. From October to December 2018, we established connections with the coordinator of the CGC in Nanjing municipality through our personal connections and asked him to randomly send our surveys to 50 citizen CGC representatives through WeChat, the best-known social media platform in China. Thirty-two respondents replied, but nine were invalid. We therefore had 23 valid Q sorts. Second, we personally contacted citizen representatives from the city-level CGC one by one from March to May 2019 and eight of them promised to complete our survey. In the end, we had 31 valid Q sorts. Of our 31 respondents, 18 were men and 13 were women. Twenty respondents were over 45 years old, and 27 respondents had over 10 years working experience. They had a variety of occupations, such as teacher, social worker, soldier, lawyer, doctor, and others. The diversity of respondents provided different perspectives regarding their motivations to engage in coproduction in city governance. This helped us to answer our research question. The occupations of the 31 respondents are presented in Figure 3.

Third, the Q sorts were analysed using the software KenQ 1.0.6⁶. First, the software correlates all the Q sorts and clusters respondents who have sorted the statements in a similar way. These data are then presented in unrotated factors, and we extracted seven Centroid Factors,⁷ as this is good practice (Watts and Stenner 2012). KenQ then requires an indication of the Q sorts that load significantly on a particular factor; we used a significance level of $p < 0.05$. With 35 statements, the sorts with $1.96 \times (1/\sqrt{35}) = 0.33$ or higher are significant. We selected three factors for rotation, which

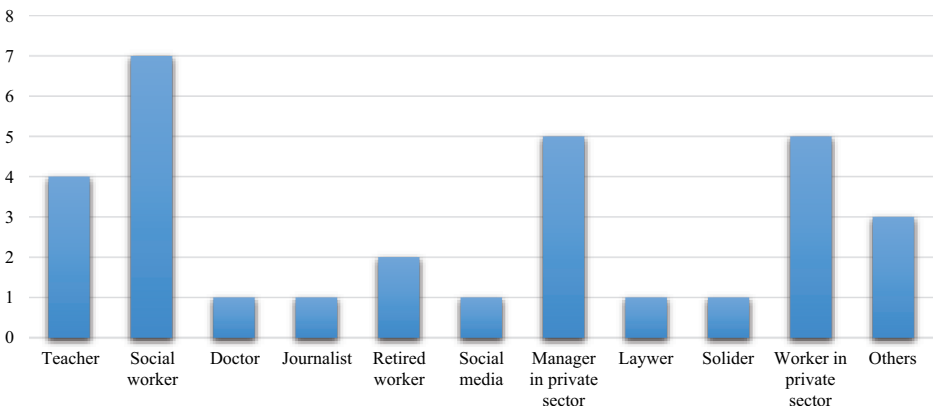


Figure 3. The occupations of 31 respondents.

explained in total 43% of the variation in the dataset, and this is considered adequate (Watts and Stenner 2012). Three factors were chosen as the fourth factor did not explain much variance and the eigenvalues were close to 1.00 or below (1.20 for factor 4). A varimax rotation⁸ was applied, and three factors were used for interpretation.

Fourth, the results were interpreted and described. Emergent factors from the analysis were identified and interpreted by the researchers.

Results

From the factor analysis, three patterns or commonality in motivations between respondents emerged, to which we refer as ‘orientations’. We labelled these orientations, respectively, as the *optimistic believer*, the *active expresser*, and the *commissioned influencer*. The detailed statistical information on three factors is presented in Appendix 1. Appendix 2 presents the factor loading of the 31 respondents, and the significantly loading respondents are flagged. When a respondent loads significantly on an orientation, he/she best represents the given orientation. Appendix 3 shows where the 35 statements are placed on the grid in each of the three orientations. In the following, the three orientations are elaborated in detail.

Orientation 1: optimistic believer

The first orientation, labelled optimistic believer, explains 14% of the studied variances. Nine respondents load on this orientation. This orientation in general shows that respondents are willing to engage in coproduction, but primarily because of the attractiveness of the CGC itself. It consists of statements describing the normative values identified in the literature.

This cluster reveals a rather optimistic attitude to the CGC initiative (S.30, +4; S.35, +3; S.26, +3; S.32, +2; S.33, +2).⁹ Several respondents (respondents 1, 16, 14, and 17) believe that this initiative itself deserves praise. The CGC established by Nanjing municipality provides them with opportunities to have regular face-to-face meetings, conduct fieldwork, and attend workshops with officials. These new experiences make citizens feel excited. Respondent 11’s citation is typical.

The CGC allows citizens to directly engage in city governance. On the one hand, it enables citizens to pool their resources and wisdom in governance processes. On the other hand, it makes it possible for governments to improve the effectiveness of city governance.

The respondents with this orientation agree that social responsibilities are important reasons motivating them to coproduce public policies (S.28, +3; S.27, +2; S.29, +2). Respondent 17 for instance states: ‘*participating in the CGC is a meaningful thing, and the societal relevance of citizen engagement could never be underestimated. I am now working for this meaningful cause*’. Respondent 11 adds: ‘*participating in the governance of public affairs is the responsibility of every individual citizen and we do not have any excuse to shirk it*’.

Respondents in orientation 1 are struggling to cope with self-efficacy values (S.21, +2). On the one hand, they believe that self-efficacy should be important in motivating their engagement in coproduction. On the other hand, they seem dissatisfied with their

self-efficacy in the CGC. As respondent 20 explicitly complains, *‘although we have opportunities to engage in the CGC, but governments do not treat our opinions seriously. I hope this could be changed in the future’*.

Furthermore, respondents disagree that their engagement in the CGC is triggered by self-oriented motivations and social values (S.6, -4; S.7, -3; S.16, -3; S.5, -2; S.14, -2). As respondent 2 and respondent 14 state, *‘our participation should not have any relations with personal gains’*, and *‘although I participate in the CGC, this does not enlarge my social network’*.

Orientation 2: active expresser

The second orientation, labelled active expresser, explains 14% of the studied variances. It is strongly expressed by seven respondents. This orientation assumes that citizens view coproduction as an appropriate platform for them to express other citizens’ concerns and preferences. It has a close connection with the expressive values regarding voicing complains and ideas towards policies and services.

Respondents that load on this orientation stress the relevance of the expressive values (S.9, +4; S.10, +3; S.8, +2; S.12, +2). As we have suggested in the analytic framework section, the expressive values could refer to expressing both citizens’ own opinions and ideas and concerns of others. Here, our respondents overwhelmingly emphasize the importance of expressing the concerns of other citizens to government. As argued by respondent 6, *‘the engagement in the CGC provides me with a very good channel to express the most urgent issues experienced by citizens to higher-level governments’*. Similarly, respondent 13 concurs and states, *‘citizens increasingly take part in political arenas and the main duty of our citizen representatives is to express citizens’ complaints’*.

Like orientation 1, orientation 2 implies that self-efficacy matters for citizen coproduction (S.21, +2; S.22, +1; S.24, +1). However, respondents seem dissatisfied with their self-efficacy in the CGC initiative. As explained by respondent 19:

I hope that the CGC could provide us with more training and learning opportunities, and I believe it is necessary to learn from experiences of other cities and countries. These would be helpful for us [to better collaborate with government].

Respondents in orientation 2 strongly disagree that CGC is an attractive initiative and they do not think that their engagement in the CGC is motivated by self-oriented interests (S.6, -4; S.5, -3; S.35, -3; S.34, -3). As respondent 6 says, *‘I am not a selfish person, and my engagement in the CGC has nothing to do with access to more public services’*; and respondent 13 further emphasizes, *‘the title of citizen representative has no connections with social status’*.

Orientation 3: commissioned influencer

The third orientation, labelled commissioned influencer, was expressed by 10 respondents. It explains 15% of the studied variances, and 10 statements are related to it. This orientation suggests that citizens are committed to influencing government decisions with the aim of achieving a good governance quality. It has a strong connection with both the expressive values and the normative values identified in the literature.

Like in orientation 2, respondents strongly emphasize the relevance of the expressive values. They recognize that Chinese citizens still have limited channels to express their complaints, grievances, and concerns, and the CGC initiative provides them with opportunities for this. As explained by respondent 24, *‘Chinese citizens currently have limited channels to express their opinions and suggestions, and the CGC is a useful platform that allows them to express their concerns’*. Respondent 3 holds an identical position and stresses, *‘voicing the concerns of the public is the only thing I could manage and this is my initial intention and duty for engaging in the CGC’*.

Unlike orientation 2, orientation 3 implies that normative values do matter in motivating citizens’ coproduction in city governance (S.26, +3; S.27, +3; S.29, +2). Respondent 7 contends, *‘as a native resident in Nanjing, I really hope my city would become better and my engagement in the CGC is meaningful for achieving this’*. Likewise, as argued by respondent 24, *‘achieving real changes [in city governance] requires a collaboration between government and citizens. Our [citizen representatives] engagement is useful for achieving this’*.

Like the other two orientations, orientation 3 favours the value of self-efficacy (S.21, +2; S.20, +1; S.23, +1). Our respondents express different viewpoints about this value. Several of them express their dissatisfaction with their efficacy in the CGC. Respondent 31 pessimistically points out, *‘we [citizen representatives] play only a supplementary role, and we could not bring in real policy changes’*. In contrast, some respondents seem to have a relatively positive view of their self-efficacy in coproduction. As respondent 28 states, *‘attending activities organized by the CGC at least provides me with opportunities to allow government to listen to my opinions’*.

Like in the other two orientations, self-oriented motivations do not play an important role in explaining citizens’ engagement in coproduction (S.2, -4; S.4, -3; S.6, -3; S.3, -2). As respondent 29 emphasizes, *‘it is a shame to say that the title of citizen representatives is for accessing public services’*.

Discussion

The relationships between the three orientations that emerged in our analysis and the five types of motivations identified in the literature are presented in [Table 1](#). It can be seen that orientation 1 highly emphasizes normative values, that orientation 2 stresses expressive values, and that orientation 3 favours both normative and expressive values. Also, our analysis has shown that all three orientations have some relations with self-efficacy. Furthermore, it has revealed that social values and self-oriented motivations are not key reasons underlying citizens’ engagement in the CGC.

If we compare the orientations that we have identified in our case, we see that they are based on three categories of motivations as identified in the literature, namely, self-efficacy, normative values, and expressive values. Nevertheless, the combinations that make up the orientations that we have found are specific and give rise to further reflection on the specific nature of coproduction in China and the reasons why citizens participate. This observation is further strengthened by the absence of a number of motivations mentioned in the literature: self-oriented motivations and motivations based on individualistic expressive values and social

Table 1. The relationships between three orientations and five factors identified in the literature

	Orientation 1	Orientation 2	Orientation 3
Naming	Optimistic believer	Active expresser	Commissioned influencer
Self-oriented motivation	-	-	-
Expressive values	-	+	+
Social values	-	-	-
Self-efficacy	+	+	+
Normative values (initiative itself)	+	-	-
Normative values (responsibility)	+	-	+

Note: the notion “+” represents strong relations, and “-” represents with no relations.

values. These findings are in line with our earlier assumption that the cultural differences between the Asian and more specifically the Chinese culture and Western cultures matter.

Insofar as coproduction is focused on the improvement of policies and public services, all the orientations that we found in the Nanjing case are supportive. Moreover, the CGC may be a channel for the expression of demands and criticism, especially as active expressers and commissioned influencers are driven by expressive values. The CGC has the potential also to foster citizenship, because commissioned influencers commit themselves to improving the quality of governance. Furthermore, we have found that, if coproduction is merely about mobilizing support and legitimating existing policies, without providing room for serious contributions or while limiting the space to express demands and complaints, this may result in citizens becoming demotivated. Some citizens’ remarks hint in this direction.

Of course, the orientations found in this initiative are filtered by the way in which Nanjing municipality selected the citizens that were invited to participate. In our case, the CGC initiative was initiated by governors in Nanjing, and it is highly managed by the municipality. In China, as shown in the CGC case, governments often play a dominant role throughout the whole coproduction process, ranging from commissioning, design, and delivery, to evaluation. A key difference in Chinese coproduction compared with that of other countries is that it is essentially state-led and implemented in a top-down approach. This state-led coproduction does not indicate the emergence of a completely new type of governance, as the state still plays a crucially important role in initiating, designing, and delivering public services and making decisions. One of its key features is that the state has intentionally engaged citizens in the planning or design of public services and policies, whereas the traditional approaches to participation allow them to be engaged only in the implementation and evaluation of public services and policies (Zhang 2016). Moreover, in traditional participation in China, local governments are mostly passive implementers enforcing participation approaches designed by higher-level government. State-led coproduction, however, implies that governments see the added value of participation and voluntarily and actively initiate and facilitate participation (Zhong 2018). In Western democracies, coproduction is characterized mostly as citizen self-organizing, implying that citizens initiate and design their own projects, mostly through a bottom-up approach (Brandsen and Honingh 2018). Some authors have found that political culture matters in explaining the variations in coproduction in different contexts (Potluka, Špaček, and Remr 2017). China is a country with a low

participative political culture, and it does not have the tradition of public participation in policymaking and public service delivery (Johnson 2014). Insofar as China has a tradition of citizen participation, it is characterized by top-down-evoked mass mobilization. This is a quite different type of participation from that assumed in the coproduction concept.

The municipality's strict control of the coproduction process has repercussions for the type of citizens that are selected, and the motivations and observations of these citizens. This is one of the reasons why we should be careful about making generalizations and comparisons. The context, but also the very nature of this type of coproduction, is different from the – at first sight – similar phenomenon in Western countries. The state-led coproduction process also has implications for the function fulfilled by coproduction and the prospects for the sustainability of these initiatives. In many Western democracies, coproduction generally plays both a complementary and a supplementary role in governance. It is often an initiative of citizens who aim to remedy the gaps left by inefficient or absent government policies (Brandsen and Pestoff 2006). Such coproduction is widely regarded as a promising approach to better address the grand challenges faced by governors (Brandsen and Honingh 2018). The effectiveness and sustainability of coproduction in Western countries are threatened by the instability of citizen motivation and demotivation as a result of a too meddling government undermining citizens' motivation to coproduce. The strict control of citizen coproduction in our case limits its function to a mere instrumental and legitimizing role. Its added value is limited. Its sustainability will depend largely upon the commitment of local governors and the support of the central state.

To a certain degree, the assertion that coproduction in China might be a different phenomenon may limit the possibilities for Western democracies to learn from it. However, two general lessons can be drawn. Firstly, governments worldwide should treat citizens' motivations seriously to achieve satisfactory coproduction. Second, government support may contribute to the sustainability of coproduction initiatives, provided that it does not limit citizens' voices and that it promotes their self-efficacy.

Conclusion

Our study contributes to current governance and policy literature regarding the topic of coproduction through providing in-depth insights into the motivations for citizen engagement in coproduction in a semi-authoritarian Chinese context. We focus our attention on one exemplary Chinese initiative – the CGC in Nanjing. By applying Q methodology, our study has found three orientations in relation to citizens' motivations to coproduce. The first one is that of the optimistic believer. This orientation is characterized especially by motivations based on normative values. Citizens believe that the CGC is a good initiative and that they have the responsibility to engage in coproduction. The second orientation is that of the active expresser. It highly favours expressive values. The third orientation is that of the commissioned influencer, motivated by expressive and normative values. Clearly, individualistic motivations like getting material or non-material benefits and the opportunities for individualistic self-expression and social values (wanting to engage with others) are far less present.

The orientations that we have found in our study clearly differ from motivations reported in research conducted in a Western context. Although we should be careful about generalizing on the basis of one case, we suggest that these differences may be indicative of cultural and political differences between a Western context and the Chinese context. In China, coproduction occurs in a quite different setting in which governments lead the process and select citizens, impacting on the type and the motivation of citizens and on the nature and the function of the coproduction practice. Of course, further research should substantiate this claim. In the Chinese context, coproducing public policies is uncommon, and it is still difficult to evaluate the performance of the CGC initiative. However, it is certain that more and more Chinese cities nowadays are increasingly developing similar initiatives, which provide citizens in cities such as Hangzhou, Wenzhou, and Xiamen with opportunities to engage in coproduction.

This contribution has practical implications for Chinese governors. As indicated above, the motivations of Chinese citizens are to some extent aligned with the potential that the literature attributes to coproduction. Whether this potential will be realized depends on how Chinese governments will facilitate these initiatives. An important practical implication of our findings is the need to improve citizens' self-efficacy in coproduction. One way to improve citizens' self-efficacy may be to establish feedback mechanisms, which enable participants to transparently track how their inquiries are addressed.

As far as we know, this study is the first to use Q methodology to examine citizens' motivations to engage in coproduction in the Chinese context. A limitation of Q methodology is that it is applied in a single case, as a result of which its conclusions are hard to generalize to a larger population. Research in more cases is needed to see whether the findings in this study are confirmed. Future studies may also be aimed at more longitudinal research into specific cases, mapping how motivations develop during the lifecycle of coproduction processes, and how motivations, relationships, and performance coevolve over time, to better understand the nature of coproduction practices in China.

Notes

1. The term 'social organization' means more or less the same as non-governmental organization (NGO) or non-profit organization (NPO) in Western democracies. It refers primarily to three different types of organizations, namely, social associations (Shehui Tuanti), charity foundations, and social service organizations.
2. <http://jsnews2.jschina.com.cn/system/2013/04/25/017024415.shtml>
3. http://www.nanjing.gov.cn/xxgk/bm/cgj/201601/t20160111_3740132.html
4. <http://www.njdaily.cn/2016/1014/1502094.shtml>
5. <http://manchesterparentcarerforum.org.uk/co-production-in-manchester/>
6. KenQ is software specifically used to conduct Q sort analysis.
7. Centriod factor analysis extracts the largest number of absolute loadings for each factor.
8. Varimax rotation adjusts the coordinates of data resulting from factor analysis with the aim of maximizing the sum of the variances of the squared loadings.
9. The numbers between brackets refer to the statement and the factor score of the statement ranging from -4 to +4.

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Appendix 1. The statistical details of three factors

	Factor-1	Factor-2	Factor-3
Number of Defining Variables	9	7	10
Avg. Rel. Coef.	0.8	0.8	0.8
Composite Reliability	0.973	0.966	0.976
S.E. of Factor Z-scores	0.164	0.184	0.155
Explained variance	14	14	15

Appendix 2. Factor loadings for 31 Qsorts

Q sort	Factor-1	Factor-2	Factor-3
P1	0.486*	0.2311	0.0441
P2	0.5928*	0.1268	0.0895
P3	0.5558	0.1233	0.6173*
P4	0.3049	0.2236	0.1094
P5	0.5421*	0.0206	0.3647
P6	0.1129	0.8278*	0.0353
P7	0.1748	0.358	0.5953*
P8	0.1129	0.8278*	0.0353
P9	0.2948	0.0495	-0.0201
P10	0.3232	0.3235	0.4175
P11	0.7409*	0.2298	0.3377
P12	0.2684	0.466*	0.0196
P13	0.259	0.5608*	0.3531
P14	0.517*	0.2645	0.2285
P15	0.5072	0.5348	0.1801
P16	0.6572*	-0.0689	-0.0317
P17	0.5335*	0.4976	0.1304
P18	0.6933*	-0.3024	0.3442
P19	-0.082	0.4658*	0.2281
P20	0.3868*	-0.2839	0.2361
P21	0.0993	-0.1465	0.4774*
P22	0.0197	0.3655*	0.235
P23	0.2221	0.0872	0.4523*
P24	0.0357	0.3014	0.6482*
P25	-0.0081	0.0659	0.6974*
P26	0.098	0.0002	0.3424*
P27	0.2807	0.2546	0.3539
P28	0.1334	0.1591	0.7532*
P29	0.39	0.1224	0.6839*
P30	0.0463	0.7488*	0.0689
P31	-0.0835	0.1981	0.4455*

Appendix 3. Z-scores of 35 statements with corresponding ranks

Statement	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor
	1	1	2	2	3	3
	Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank
1. In this way I get information about government policies, which is of use to me or my organization.	0.42	12	1.17	6	-0.16	21
2. It helps me to get access to public services.	-0.44	25	-0.49	25	-1.91	35
3. By doing so I develop my problem-solving skills.	-0.22	22	0.14	15	-0.84	28
4. I notice people think I'm important.	-0.5	26	0.15	14	-1.39	32
5. It helps me to be better at my job and results in a higher appreciation by my colleagues and my superiors.	-1.12	31	-1.71	34	0	18
6. People on my neighbourhood and at my work are prepared to do an extra effort for me.	-2.5	35	-2.2	35	-1.44	33
7. It increases my social status.	-2.06	34	-0.89	29	0.27	12
8. I love organizing, and organizing is a real passion.	0.4	13	1.08	7	-0.43	23
9. I want to voice the concerns of the public.	0.58	9	1.86	1	1.5	4
10. I like to have the opportunity to voice what I think is important.	0.25	16	1.69	2	1.84	1
11. It enriches me as a person.	-0.17	21	0.9	9	0.11	16
12. I like the type of activities we undertake.	0.06	18	1.2	5	-0.47	24
13. It makes me feel good to be able to contribute to the quality of city governance.	0.28	14	1.51	3	1.12	6
14. It enlarges my social network.	-0.88	30	-0.28	21	-0.03	19
15. I like participating in public events.	0.27	15	1.48	4	-0.32	22
16. Participation allows me to have direct contact with officials from different agencies.	-1.13	32	-0.17	19	-0.97	30
17. I like having discussions with people from different backgrounds.	-0.84	29	-0.24	20	0.06	17
18. It is fun to engage in the activities of this committee.	0.05	19	-0.03	18	0.25	13
19. I was invited and people apparently appreciate me joining in.	-0.83	28	0.41	11	-0.82	27
20. I can have a say in the decisions of the committee.	-0.42	24	0.1	17	0.49	11
21. I want to see officials treat our opinions seriously.	0.62	8	1.06	8	0.74	8
22. Thanks to my participation government listens to the opinion of the citizens.	-0.52	27	0.65	10	-0.96	29
23. I can help to inform government on the needs and preferences of citizens.	-0.05	20	0.14	16	0.71	9
24. I can contribute to a better implementation of government policies and public services.	0.09	17	0.29	12	-0.1	20
25. We can achieve policy change.	-0.36	23	-0.33	22	-0.58	25
26. It is important to get the governments' attention for urgent issues that are unresolved.	1.49	3	0.17	13	1.74	3
27. We should resolve the many complaints that are voiced about certain public services.	0.49	11	-0.48	24	1.77	2
28. Participation is so important, that I feel I should contribute.	1.75	2	-0.39	23	0.18	14
29. I feel it is my duty to represent the concerns and interest of the citizens.	1.06	6	-0.6	26	1.47	5
30. I believe the effort of the government to start a city governance committee should be rewarded.	1.85	1	-0.64	27	0.13	15
31. It allows for making powerful connections with high placed government officials to make a real change.	-1.49	33	-0.94	30	-1.7	34
32. Roundtable meetings are a very good approach to pool our resources to help government resolve problems.	0.99	7	-0.84	28	0.52	10

(Continued)

(Continued).

Statement	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor	Factor
	1	1	2	2	3	3
	Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank	Z-score	Rank
33. It informs citizens on government policies and services.	1.08	5	-1.19	31	-0.76	26
34. It prevents that citizens become dissatisfied and makes citizens stick to the rules.	0.53	10	-1.34	33	-0.98	31
35. It make clear to the citizens their complaints and concerns are heart and increases trust in government.	1.29	4	-1.24	32	0.94	7