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Unequal Regionalism: Regional Planning in China and England

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Abstract

This paper responds to the revival of regionalism in the past two decades by showing that such a re-emergence is unequal. Comparing the practice of regional planning in China and England, this paper has demonstrated that the party-state in China and the liberal-democratic state in England have responded differently to this revival and developed different framework for regional administration and planning. These variations have not only elaborated planners' concern about planning practice in a 'context of difference' from social dimension to geographical variations, but also echoed geographers' affirmation that global trends take on different characters in local setting.

Keywords

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This paper is about differences in regional planning between China and England. The past two decades has witnessed the re-emergence of region as a level of planning and policy delivery in different parts of the world. Associated with such resurgence are discussions over regionalism and governance. While planning scholars investigate the impact of this re-emergence on spatial management, resources allocation and relationships with government at various levels, the spatial variations of such a resurgence does not receive sufficient attention. If, according to Alden (2006), the revival of regional planning is a global trend, the differences of this course in various nations are poorly understood.

There has been growing concern about planning practice in a 'context of difference'. In general, current discussions on the topic have focused on three areas: (a) social diversity and 'just cities' (Fainstein, 2005; 2010; Sandercock, 1997); (b) the impact of neoliberalism on social and cultural differences (Drangsland & Haarstad, 2009); and (c) state-society differences (Watson, 2006). At one level, in the Western liberal democratic tradition, these discussions have questioned urban planners' long term beliefs in a consensus-based approach and the use of universal values and principles for making planning decisions.

The discussion of difference will be elaborated by considering how national planning systems and practice are aligned with the specific political and social conditions of a country. This issue appears to be more and more relevant as the circulation of knowledge has intensified in the context of globalisation. China is a country which is considered as a territory that operates in its own logic (Friedmann, 2005). The country is becoming increasingly integrated into the global system; and there are a lot of Chinese students and planners go to the United Kingdom and the United States for planning education and training. When they come back to China, these foreign-educated planners bring new ideas and skills and apply them to local planning practice. Thus, the emphasis on differences does not only alert planners to any misinterpretation of exotic concepts, it also articulates the importance of putting local context into consideration during the formulation of plans.

It is the objective of this paper to provide a comparison of regional planning in England and China which have experienced different development trajectories. In England, the recent resurgence of regional planning is considered as a response to the global neo-liberal project (Amin & Thrift, 1994; Brenner, 1999; Scott, 1998). On the other side of the world, the reassertion of regional planning in China is associated with a reorganisation of state power (Xu, 2008; Li & Wu, 2013). The rejuvenation of regional planning in England since 2004 has suffered retrenchment and regional plans were abolished in 2011, but regional strategic policy making continues through local economic partnerships. In China regional planning continues to play an important role. This paper will offer an in-depth analysis to understand why regional planning has been abolished entirely in one spatial context, but supported favourably in another. The investigation will begin by discussing the role of the state. This focus is a response to Vogel *et al.*'s (2009) investigation of various city-regions in North America, Europe and Asia. While government structure is examined, states and its relationship with regional governance are insufficiently discussed. States are the power for the definition of any political forms and governing structure. Different forms of states generate different political structure and institutional/organisational arrangement and such variations deserve more investigation in the revival of regionalism. Taking a historical

approach, the practice of regional planning will then be put into the political context China and England respectively. In the last section, an investigation on plan making and administration in both nations will be given. The large amount of regional literature on England has provided useful references for this investigation whilst the Chinese case is based on existing literature and research materials collected during various field visits in between 2011 and 2013.

Regional planning and the role of the state

The revival of 'the region' is based on the belief that planning at such a scale would bring a unique perspective to economic development and policy-making (Pearce & Ayres, 2007). Regional planning is thus employed in both China and England to coordinate resources and policies to facilitate efficient allocation of activities, infrastructure and settlement growth. Since regional planning is an exercise that goes beyond the spatial context of a politically defined area and encompasses areas of different administrative set ups, it would be crucial for planning bodies to develop sufficient capacity to plan, coordinate different interests and deliver policies at different levels. This suggests the importance of building appropriate administrative structures to organise the whole process of regional planning from articulating the broader, strategic objectives that support the region's long-term growth, to developing comprehensive plans that could be put into action and assuring local development plans also conform to the regional imperatives. From a management point of view, an effective institutional setting is essential for the development of regional polices and legitimises its authority to control, influence and be involved with planning and development processes.

The quest for sufficient capacity to facilitate regional planning has led to the development of different institutional settings in China and England.[1] While the UK government is committed to decentralising power, China instigated a recentralisation process. These different approaches derived from the different nature of 'the state' in both countries. In this discussion, I do not intend to evaluate the formation of the state or its structure nor will I debate its relationship with capital accumulation. Under the communist regime transitioning to a market-oriented economy, the Chinese state has maintained a party-state – a fusion of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) and state. Unlike in liberal states, such as England, where state action is confined by citizen rights and the division of powers, the CCP dominance legitimises the role of the state and monopolises all powers (Collins & Cottey, 2012). The domination of the CCP suggests its power over all institutions and social forces including the army, the legal and judicial systems, thus giving the party-state "relative autonomy from the forces and classes in Chinese society" (Saich, 2001, p.195). In the public sphere, according to Howell (2007), new legislation has been introduced which selectively recognises groups and organisations with close government ties. This non-negotiable monopoly allows the Chinese state to dominate social and economic processes by exerting its power and control. Conversely, electoral rights and civil liberties in liberal states have allowed individual/social groups to articulate their demands and to have greater influence over policies. Civil society is thus considered as an autonomous sphere where social movements take place.

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[1] The paper concerns regional planning in England. Policy is made for England by the UK government. There are separate arrangements for the other three countries in the UK.

The overarching position of the CCP and its exclusive possession of power have led to a top-down, inductive manner when coordinating social processes. This characteristic has resulted in a 'mono-organisational society' (Rigby, 1978). Although direct plans and orders are no longer used to pursue development goals in the era of economic reform, the party-state still "possesses and enacts a comprehensive, infallible blueprint" of development (Gianfranco, 1990, p.167). In other words, social development is intended to have one purpose. This direct control of social processes through top-down approaches is fundamentally different from a liberal society in which development is driven by plurality and uncoordinated interactions between various private interests.

Investigating the changing structure and operation of liberal-democratic states in the twentieth century, Gianfranco (1990, p.145) suggests one of their distinctive features is that "the political realm remains complementary, and for certain purposes subordinated, to a set of non-political processes". Gianfranco's argument points to the interwoven relationship between states and capitalist development and suggests the Soviet party-state had disconnected itself from the nation's past by fundamentally rejecting the capitalist economic order and class division. This generalisation could be broadly applied to China. Despite Chinese states forming in a very different historical and socio-political context, the communist party-state in Mao's era made a similar move. State ownership, work units, people's communes and the household registration system were good illustrations. Economic reform since 1978 has transformed the rigid, centrally-planned economy into a socialist market economy thus creating a special relationship between the state and capitalist development. Broadly speaking, if, as Marxist state theory suggests, the state is the product of capitalist interests/development in the West, in China it is the all-powerful state that shapes capitalist development (Chu and So, 2010). The overarching concern of the party-state has been the survival of the CCP. Indeed, this intention has been explicitly articulated in many party documents since 2004. This position has led to the general agreement that the country's economic and institutional reforms are aimed at sustaining party leadership rather than building a liberal economy and a democratic society (Gries & Rosen, 2004).

As the above proves, the revival of 'the region' in China and England has been formulated by states of a very different nature and governing mentality. Planning literature suggests that regional planning in England and China has gone through boom periods since the end of World War II (Alden, 2006; Hall, 2007; Wong et al., 2008; Li & Wu, 2012). Generally, while regional planning in both countries during the post-World War II period was driven by different domestic concerns, waves of globalisation since the 1980s and their challenges for European nation-states have been the major force pushing regional planning policies and practices (Brenner, 1999). Regarding the role of the state, while the change of the ruling party in England has affected the nature and practice of regional planning, in China the major force has come from the party-state's self-improvement process – an attempt to sustain its survival. This difference continues to shed light on the future of regional planning in both countries.

Regional planning in China and England: an overview

The post-war boom in regional planning in China and England was embedded in very different political contexts. The domination of the CCP in China has made regional planning, including the scope of planning and definition of regions, subject to the party-state's economic and political agendas rather than party change. Thus, unlike the post-war regional planning in England, which emphasised stable and balanced growth, China's regional planning during Mao's era had two overarching political concerns: (a) the political requirement for a fast transition towards communism; and (b) national security. This resulted in the incorporation of regional planning into the national Five Year Plans. Therefore, Mao's attempt to eliminate disparities between the coastal and inland areas was translated into a radical inland investment strategy. During the First Five Year Plan (1953-1957), for instance, a scheme was introduced which coordinated six economic regions which were allocated about two-third of the 694 industrial projects in the interior regions of China (Paine, 1981). In the mid-1960s, the break-up with the Soviet Union and the intensification of the Cold War with western countries put national security at the top of Chairman Mao's agenda. A three-region scheme was adopted to complement the country's 'Third Front' strategy, which aimed to shift military and important manufacturing industries and investment to the core of the interior area (that is, the 'third front'). The overarching status of regional planning suggested that regional policies were not necessary.

In contrast, the practice of regional planning in England since the post-war era has been driven by shifts in the ruling party. Conservative and Labour parties generally represent bourgeois capitalists and social democrats respectively. Their different perspectives and policy preferences affected the practice of regional planning. In England, regional planning enjoyed a post-war boom. Despite the fact that the Conservative government in the early 1950s had undermined regional initiatives, in the 20 years following the end of WWII their key position was to steer social and economic development. The implementation of William Beveridge's plan (known as the *Beveridge Report* (1942)) for a post-war welfare state had articulated the state's responsibility to promote and protect the British economy and its citizens. Influenced by Keynesian economics, high levels of government intervention, planning and expenditure were established as key elements (Page, 2007; Fraser, 2009). Against this background, regional planning was used to identify problem areas in which new jobs could be created, followed by government physical plans and incentive schemes. As such, the state played an important role in imposing developments/investments in different parts of the country such as new towns, new motorways and nuclear power stations without public consultation in the decision-making process. Despite the prevalence of regional initiatives, they were considered piecemeal, resulting in a lack of comprehensive regional planning (Hall, 2007; Tewdwr-Jones, 2012).

Economic reform began in China in 1978. In comparison to Mao, the new leader at the time – Deng Xiaoping – was considered a pragmatist. Nevertheless, Deng's pragmatism was not without political considerations. Zhu and So (2010) examined the trajectory of China's economic reform and suggest that political disillusionment and material deprivation since the cultural revolution had led the party to a critical political crisis. Deng's initiative of economic reform, therefore, was the solution to prevent the collapse of the party-state. In such a context, the old socialist regional redistribution policies were replaced with economic development policies, with emphasis on fast rather than balanced growth. Associated with this change was a new three belts spatial division – East, Central and West regions, and a

coastal development strategy to facilitate the coastal cities' comparative advantages. At the same time, new initiatives, such as territorial planning (*guotu guihua*), were introduced to strengthen planning at the regional level. These efforts, however, were undermined by profound administrative and economic restructuring at the city level which eventually established cities as economic central places and engines of growth (Lin, 2002; Wu & Gaubatz, 2013). Li and Wu (2012) consider this development led to a demise of regional practices whereby spatial planning was 'downscaled' to the city level. Although the role of the region was weakened, regional planning was not completely dismantled. Continuous attempts were made to formulate plans at the regional level through the national Five Year Plans.

On the other side of the world, Margaret Thatcher's Conservative party had brought significant changes to England, including the practice of regional planning. During the 1970s, the interventionist role of the state and large government expenditure were criticised for their incapacity to deal with high inflation and high employment. Traditional regional planning and policies were considered to be economically inefficient (Cameron, 1974). When Thatcher became Prime Minister in 1979, she decided to address "the perceived evils of the welfare state" by reining in the role of the British state (Fraser, 2009, p.307). Thatcher's governing ideology encompassed three ideas: (a) the rule of law; (b) centralisation; and (c) market orientation (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 1997). In the area of planning, these ideas translated into reducing local discretion in the planning system; transferring decision-making from local areas to the central government; and a commitment to the market and efficiency (Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 1997). While such reforms aimed to stress market-based solutions, regional planning was dismantled after the abolition of strategic planning and other regional planning mechanisms (Hall, 2007). Nevertheless, the growing importance of European directives, as a result of the UK's membership of the European Economic Community, in affecting British policy had ironically sustained regional policy (Hall, 2007). Despite new institutions established later, in John Major's tenure, to tackle regional affairs, regional planning during the Thatcher and Major years was generally considered unnecessary. Planning, as suggested by Tewdwr-Jones and Allmendinger (2007, p.30), was considered "the spatial expression" of uncoordinated bureaucracies.

The success of Thatcherism in the UK and the neo-liberal mentality has created significant global impact. One of the impacts is the rescaling of state territorial organisation and the subsequent emergence of a new regionalism throughout old industrialised countries in Europe (Brenner, 1997, 1999). Across the continent, a re-emergence of regional scale has also been witnessed in China since 2000. Planning scholars have provided detailed accounts about this revival (Xu, 2008; Wong *et al*., 2008; Li & Wu, 2013). Although they generally suggest that such a development is a response to competition stemming from globalisation, the domestic politics between the central and local governments has been overlooked. While it is true that power decentralisation as a result of China's economic reform has increased local governments' autonomy and capacity to respond to global and domestic economic challenges, it also engenders local predatory behaviours, localism and inter- and intra-regional competition. These developments, from the perspective of the central state, are considered as risky to the country's economic and political future. Regional inequality between east and west regions is increasing, posing potential political disintegration in the less developed western region (Wang & Hu, 1999; Fan, 2006; Tong, 2013). At the same time,

growth inequality and aggressive development projects have triggered off protests and demonstrations under the name of 'rights protection'. In the light of sustaining party survival, the state responds to this by pursuing comprehensive, coordinated, balanced and sustainable development (Fan, 2006). On the one hand, efforts have been made to develop the central and west regions through traditional Five Year Plans and the hierarchical system (Tong, 2013). On the other hand, the state has taken a pro-active role to initiate regional plans. This role suggests a recentralisation of state power in steering economic development. Since 2008, the State Council has initiated 18 regional plans (hereafter 'new regional plans'), covering key economic clusters in China including the Pearl River Delta, the Yangji River Delta, Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei Region, Chengdi-Zhongqing City Region and Fujian's Cross Strait Economic Zone. Unlike traditional plans, these new regional plans are more strategic and comprehensive in nature. Regional planning, therefore, is a socio-economic and political project which the party-state uses to legitimise and consolidate its ruling position.

As in China, regional planning was strongly reactivated in England from 1997. This restoration was the joint impact of changes that occurred both outside and inside the UK. For the former, the European Union's initiative on regional cooperation saw a resurgence of a new regionalism. Within the UK, the revival was a direct result of the 'New Labour' government's commitment to coordinating sector policies. Despite this, however, such a revival did not shift the neo-liberal agenda laid down by the Thatcher-Major administrations (Hay, 1999; Allmendinger & Tewdwr-Jones, 2000; Heffernan, 2000). Not only did the nature of regional planning shift from the pursuit of the welfare state project to promote economic growth (Newman & Thornley, 1996), the regional level was also developed as a new tier for government functions. While the 'hollowing out of the state' (Rhodes, 1994), as a result of deregulation, promotion of competition, and an open economy since the1980s, has led to pluralist politics which demand cooperation and partnership building – a shift which is conceptualised as 'from government to governance' (Rhodes, 1996) – the New Labour government had to create a new institutional structure and capacity for spatial planning. Thus, efforts were made to build a comprehensive regional planning framework, which coordinated fragmented actors at different levels, to facilitate economic development, in particular to attract inward investment and to create jobs.

The revival of planning was associated with the government's commitment to devolve political and economic responsibilities to the regions. Initially, ten regional development agencies based on administrative boundaries were set up. Following the debut of the *Planning and Compulsory Purchase Act 2004*, the new Regional Spatial Strategies (RSSs) were introduced for each English region. The aim of the RSS was to establish the vision and long-term development framework for each particular English region for 15 to 20 years. It set targets and policies on cross-boundary matters such as housing, employment and retail development across districts on a regional basis. It avoided repeating the mandate of the national policy that was articulated by the central government. Rather, it brought an understanding of each region and addressed its specific challenges and opportunities. Despite the proactive and coordinated approach to regional planning, a paradigm shift resulting from the election of a coalition government in 2010 led to an abolition of the RSS and the relevant institutional framework. Regional planning in England, once again, had been undermined as a result of government change. Under the new principle of 'localism', the coalition government has made provision under the *Localism Act 2011*, referred to as the 'duty to cooperate' to

ensure that regional issues are coordinated among local authorities. At the same time, spatial planning powers of local planning authorities and local councils, whereby plans are produced through local consultation, have been restored.

This section has put the practice of regional planning into the political context of China and England respectively. While party politics in England has led to ups and downs in regional planning, the domination of the CCP in China has constantly made regional planning a state-agency responsibility to serve its political agenda. Further, whilst the revival of regional planning in England is embedded in the shift from 'government to governance', in China it is driven by the state's attempt to self-improve its ruling capacity – from government to more government. These relationships have not only affected the survival of regional planning and its practice in the two countries, but also its administration. The management of regional planning has affected the implementation process as well as the delivery of desirable outcomes. It is to this topic that the discussion now turns.

Regional planning and its administration in China and England

Unlike England which is divided into nine administrative regions, region has never been a level of administration in China. Different regional schemes have been used by the Chinese state to achieve various objectives at different times. Generally, a three-region scheme of coastal, central and inland (or east, central and west regions) has been used. The Coastal/East region, for instance, is defined by the administrative boundaries of 11 provinces which cover 11 per cent of the country's total area and 38 per cent of the total population (SSB, 2006). The revival of regions in China since 2000, as noted, has presented a more refined scheme defined by economic clusters, comprising 'metropolitan interlocking regions' (Zhou, 1991). While these clusters represent a sub-regional, rather than a true regional, scale, this idea is poorly articulated in conventional discussions about Chinese regions. For example, existing studies have usually reduced a wide variety of spatial plans covering different geographical scales above the urban level to one 'regional' scale. This paper does not intend to conceptualise the idea of the sub-region in China but, for the purpose of this discussion, it should be clarified that the revival of the region in China is pinning it down to the sub-regional level comprising functional 'city-regions'.

China's large land mass and huge population generally means that a sub-region in the country is geographically bigger and more populated than a region in England. Comparing the Greater London and the Pearl River Delta region[2], for example, finds not only the total area of the latter is 34 times bigger than the former, but also its population size is much larger. In 2010, Greater London had a total population of 8.1 million while permanent population in the Pearl River Delta was 56 million (SSB, 2012; Office for National Statistics, 2012). The Pearl River Delta region includes nine cities, including the provincial capital of Guangzhou city and Shenzhen Special Economic Zone.

Compared to the heated discussion about the renaissance of the region in England and its implications for governance, only in recent years have Chinese researchers started to investigate the relationship between regional planning and government administration. The

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[2] Excluding Hong Kong and Macau.

Chinese state's aim to consolidate its ruling position through regional planning has established a vertical channel of administration. This is vividly demonstrated by the active role played by the central state – regional plans are not only initiated by the state council, they are also guided by the political discourse of 'overall planning (*tong chou*)' and implemented through a new vertical channel. The idea of overall planning is a central part of former President Hu Jintao's "scientific perspective of development" (CCP, 2007). In regional planning, it translates into a combination of top-down, coercive power and locally produced powers. The recognition of the latter has allowed a certain degree of negotiation between the central and local state. This change, from a planning perspective, engenders a holistic view of regional planning. The scope of planning is no longer limited to the technical issue of industrialisation and resource allocation; it now covers land use planning, economic restructuring, social and economic transformation and environmental issues. Multiple techniques, such as the central allocation of resources, decentralisation of power, employment of economic incentives, negotiations and utilisation of formal and informal (or institutional and non-institutional) means, are initiated to pursue planning objectives. Despite this heterogeneity and seemingly bottom-up tendency, the techniques are constrained within the framework built up by the central state.

In contrast, the renaissance for regional planning in England was associated with devolution and institutional decentralisation. Driven by the desire to integrate planning, governance and economic development, these actions were associated with substantial institutional restructuring. Such change was considered as a "fundamental reform of territorial management that aimed to … improve integration of different forms of spatial development activity" (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012, p.141). In English regions, this reform included the establishment of Regional Development Agencies (RDAs), the introduction of the RSS and the creation of regional assemblies. Central to this reform was the building of institutional capacity, which attempted to incorporate a wide, diversified range of public and private actors to deliver development plans and projects. Healey's (2006) theory of collaborative planning has provided important conceptual resources for such a process. She argues that collaborative relationships based on understanding and trust between different stakeholders "can collectively address their conflicts and maximise their chances to shape their places and their futures in the open and diffused relationships of contemporary societies" (Healey, 1998, p.1535). In other words, collaboration can build partnerships around a common regional agenda.

The discourse of 'overall planning' and the 'mono-organisational' structure of the Chinese party-state suggest collaboration is mainly pursued in hierarchical relationships between the central state and government tiers; whilst the pluralist democracy in England engendered horizontal networks and a "more interactive set of relationships between state and non-state actors" (Pearce & Ayres, 2006, p.920). In China, the implementation of the Pearl River Delta plan is a case in point. A planning document, entitled the *Planning Outline for the Reform and Development of the Pearl River Delta (2008-2020)* (hereafter the PRD Plan), was formulated by the State Council. The plan highlighted directions and principles as well as 11 development targets, showing clearly what is permitted and what is not. In the absence of regional institutions, local governments within the region developed local legislation and administrative orders to stipulate the leading role of the government in the making, administration and monitoring the facilitation of the PRD plan. For example, *the Guangdong*

Provincial Ordinance for the Implementation of the PRD Plan stipulates the government to take the lead to prepare development proposals which are in line with the development targets (PGG, 2011). Within this framework, Guangzhou city government invited a wider range of actors, such as government authorities of its adjacent cities, scholars, developers and other related organisations, to prepare a plan which pursues spatial cooperation – one of the 11 goals of the PRD plan. Despite this engagement allows the articulation of local needs and harmonisation of conflicts through negotiations, the basic point remains: the decision-making power is always in the hands of the government. This means negotiations are bounded and local initiatives have to be examined and endorsed hierarchically from the city to the provincial levels and then the State Council at the central level for final verdicts. In comparison, partnership building in England is based on extensive stakeholder and community engagement in the planning process. It is considered the core idea of the 'New Labour' Government's planning system reform and the new local development framework (Baker *et al.*, 2007). The requirement for stakeholder involvement is declared in various *Planning Policy Statements*, with the key principles of transparency, accessibility, continuity, early involvement and use of relevant methods outlined (ODPM, 2004a). In the preparation of RSSs, community engagement, which seeks to build partnerships amongst a wide range of stakeholders, is advocated (ODPM, 2004b). The local planning authority is required to prepare and publicise a statement of community involvement as part of the local planning process (CLG, 2008). This statement requires identifying groups involved, the techniques used to engage them, the management of the process and the articulation of local aspirations (CLG, 2008). A study on stakeholder involvement in the preparation of the North West RSS reveals not only a long and continuous period of engagement (three years), but also various methods used for engagement, such as an online forum, focus group meetings and individual discussions (Baker *et al.*, 2009). A democratic and extensive engagement process is considered essential for policy efficacy and to ensure legitimacy (Baker *et al.*, 2007).

Challenges for the collaborative approach include the building of a horizontal network to coordinate different stakeholder groups, and the 'vertical' collaboration of national targets and regional/local needs. In England, planning issues determined by local policies are subject to nationally determined policy aspirations. This is to ensure consistency of planning objectives across regions (Pearce and Ayres, 2006). Local planning authorities were requested to prepare their local development framework in accordance with the RSS for their English region; otherwise, their local plans and policies would be regarded as unsound by an independent inspector (Town Planning Info., 2014). Nevertheless, in the context of a pluralist democracy, this demand has produced divergence between the central state and local governments. Meeting housing targets at the regional level, for example, was a very unpopular regional goal in the RSS because it meant encroaching on green fields or lands designated as green belts, which are valued by the local community. Due to strong resistance from local stakeholders towards regionally-imposed growth on green fields or lands zoned for green belts, local politicians found it difficult to support policies or planning applications that facilitated regionally-imposed policies as they were seen as unfavorable to the local communities in their electorates. Some politicians even advocated for the local community and spoke vehemently against the imposition of the RSS. For instance, as quoted from a report published by the House of Commons (2011, p.7), a Member of Parliament, Chris Skidmore, wrote that: "it is only due to the imposition of 32,800 homes in the local area under the South-West RSS that the green belt has come under threat from being bulldozed".

Thus housing targets were rarely met for political reasons and the RSS was viewed as counterproductive in achieving desirable outcomes.

The top-down nature of regional planning and the central state's strong institutional power has made the divergence of views between the central state and local planning authorities relatively easy to resolve in China. This has been achieved via the central state's institutional and inducement powers, which have significantly increased as a result of reform (Huang, 2002; Yang, 2003; Mertha, 2005). Like England, regional planning in China includes the building of new administrative bodies. However, unlike England, where new regional-level institutions had created 'institutional congestion' so that regional institutions were not able to reconcile the existing network (Tewdwr-Jones, 2012), similar problems have not been found in China. This is explained by the Chinese (regional) institution's vertical chain of command. Under such a setting, administrative bodies are set up at each level of government for collaboration and delivering directives vertically and horizontally to the localities. These institutions are established specially for the purpose of regional planning, and are led by provincial governors, city mayors and heads of equivalent authorities. The implementation and outcomes of regional planning are directly aligned to these people's working performance through a 'cadre responsibility system'. For instance, to implement the PRD Plan, a steering/leading group was established at the provincial level which included the nine cities covered by the plan. Specific task groups for infrastructure construction, public services, industrial patterning, environmental protection and urban-rural planning were also established at the provincial level to organise equivalent authorities at the city level, in which the city mayor is the major person responsible for the coordination and implementation of the plan. In association with this new structure is a reporting and monitoring system, in which regular meetings and workshops are organised for authorities at different levels to report and exchange ideas. The performance of the leading group, various administrative units and principal bureaus is evaluated. At the city level, the mayor is the major person responsible for the coordination and implementation of the regional agenda in his jurisdiction territory. His performance is evaluated through the established cadre responsibility system and the result affects his/her future career in the party and the government. Therefore, unlike in England where stakeholder engagement and collaboration are considered crucial for policy accountability, in China policy accountability is the responsibility of government officials who must attain targets set by government at a higher level.

In England, the practice of bottom-up regional planning, which relied on collaboration and forming partnerships, did not go as smoothly as planned. Initially, the Labour Government's advocacy for elected regional bodies for the English regions was unsuccessful; and as a result less formal 'regional assemblies' comprising local authorities and appointed members were set up. Since the RSSs were prepared by these regional assemblies, many found it difficult to hold appointed officials accountable for the decisions they made. On top of this structural problem, Baker *et al*'s (2010) investigation of stakeholder involvement in RSSs and local spatial plans identified further barriers. A fundamental problem, they argue, is the stakeholders' lack of understanding of the purposes and processes of spatial planning. Potential stakeholders are, therefore, not interested in participating in the process. Moreover, those who are engaged appear to be "reactive rather than strategic in their inputs" (Baker *et al*., 2010, p.591). According to the same research, this was accompanied by a lack of tailormade and innovative approaches to engage different, particularly small, stakeholder

groups to encourage collaboration. These constraints explained the gap between the proposals put forward in the RSS and the view of the local communities in regard to actual implementation. The RSS, therefore, was considered an undemocratic approach to regional planning that failed to take into account local interests and aspirations. Pearce and Ayres's (2006, p.914) assessment on regional assemblies found they were able "to make decisions only where a broad consensus exists". In fact, disagreements between stakeholder groups over planning issues are commonplace (Pearce & Ayres, 2006). This suggests that conflicts of interests are unlikely to transform into agreements/partnerships even with collaborative practices. Indeed, scholars have criticised the lack of understanding of power relations between different stakeholders in communicative planning theory (Tewdwr-Jones & Allmendinger, 1998; Næss, 2001). Baker *et al.*'s (2010) investigation, as noted, has provided strong evidence to support this argument. Interviewing stakeholders engaged in the making of local spatial plans and RSSs, they reveal that the voice of 'parish councils' and 'neighbourhood groups' are always overshadowed by big and influential stakeholder groups, resulting in frustrations and a lack of motivation to engage in the planning process.

In China, the strong state capacity to pursue its regional agenda is further illustrated by its strong inducement powers. Extra funding, policy-making and discretionary powers, as well as land, can be granted to local initiatives approved by the central state. This represents a marked contrast with its English counterparts, where resources (both funding and time as suggested by Baker *et al.*, 2010) allocated for regional planning are very limited and spread amongst different public bodies (Pearce & Ayres, 2006, 2007). Land plays a particularly important role in the Chinese situation. Generally, the amount of land that a city can use for construction is controlled by a land development quota, which is imposed by the central state. The purpose of such a quota is to avoid excessive land development and to protect farmland. On top of the land development quota are a series of control parameters imposed by various ministries that seek to control real estate development and speculation. Local governments at the city level do not welcome these controls as they affect local GDP growth and tax revenue. Since development projects that incorporate the central state's regional agenda are usually excluded from these controls, local governments have strong incentives to collaborate with the central state's regional agenda. This argument is illustrated by the development of Guangzhou city's new railway station. The city's original plan was to develop a new railway station to diversify passenger and freight services and to specialise in certain functions of the old station, which was small in scale and already overloaded. The introduction of the PRD plan had led to major amendments to this plan to conform to the regional advocacy for the promotion of spatial integration. Not only was the primary aim shifted to transit-oriented development, the scale of the plan was also expanded substantially from 11 km^2 to 36 km^2, with extensive commercial, financial and residential land uses.[3] The initiative was considered as a strong local support to the regional agenda, regardless to the opposition from local farmers and controversies over land resumption and compensation. This plan was approved by the State Council; and as a result, and an incentive, not only were loans allocated through state-owned banks, Guangzhou government was also able to develop large areas of land for tax revenue. While central and local authorities cooperate, the local area does not necessarily benefit from the project because state-of-the-art construction may not meet the needs of local residents.

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[3] Interview with a planning scholar at Sun Yat-sen University, Guangzhou, China, 6 September 2012.

Table 1: Regional planning practices in China and England

	China	England
Ideology	'overall planning (*tong chou*)'	collaborative approach across fragmented institutions
Management process	concentrated administration; hierarchical institutional power	managing fragmented governance; extensive engagement and partnership building
Pluralist needs between different parties	harmonise through strong institutional and inducement power	difficult consensus building and reaching agreement
Local incentives	strong; financial, land and discretionary power	weak direct powers relying on influencing other sectors and private investment

Table 1 summarises the major differences in regional planning practices between China and England. The idea of 'overall planning' in China is a big contrast to collaborative planning practices in England; and has given rise to a hierarchical institution for regional planning. Such a system has enabled the Chinese state to consolidate its regional agenda through institutional and inducement powers, in which local governments adapt their planning objectives to conform to the state's visions and development targets. In return, local support is rewarded by allocation of extra funding, resources and even discretionary powers. The employment of such powers, in a broader context, has composed what Heilmann and Perry (2011) considered as 'adaptive governance' in Chinese polity. Conversely, in England the building of partnerships through the collaborative approach is not as smooth as anticipated. Conflicts of interests (a) among different stakeholders; and (b) between central and local governments appear to be difficult, if not impossible, to harmonise. Moreover, the lack of resources is a major constraint for the pursuit of regional planning in England. This explains why local planners lack incentives to implement the regional agenda.

Conclusion

This paper has compared the practice of regional planning in China and England and found that its re-emergence in both countries is uneven. The comparison has explored the challenges of practising regional planning at the national scale; and the capacity of both country's planning system to pursue their respective regional agendas. The differences in the framework for regional planning, its administration and practice, have thus not only demonstrated the Chinese party-state and the English liberal-democratic state's distinctive responses to the 'new regionalism', but also a continuation of traditions in both countries. These spatial variations are paramount in understanding the re-emergence of region as a level of planning, in particular why some nations appreciate better such a spatial level and make substantial momentum but not others.

Obviously, the Chinese and English experiences show regional planning does not take place at the same level ground. The setting of planning targets and priorities is determined by the natural endowment of a particular region, its level of development, harmonisation of interests between stakeholders at different tier and the balance of power between them. Different nature of a state and administrative structure is a vital factor that determines the formulation, management and delivery of plans. In China and other countries where top-down policies dominated, the all-powerful state set the framework/structure for regional planning and national policies set the direction. Regional institutions, therefore, in these countries are usually missing. Conversely, in countries like England with a decentralised structure, regional institutions are established to reconcile the national and different level of local interests, to facilitate negotiation and collaboration between stakeholders with different concerns and bargaining power at various levels. These geographically specific configuration of planning practices and institutions have led to distinctive outcomes. In England, as the Coalition government considered that the regional tier did not produce desirable results and was rather counterproductive, regional institutions are abolished. Government functions have therefore rescaled to the local tier – community and neighbourhood – to improve the effectiveness of policy making and delivery. Whether this shift in England will lead to a desirable outcome is yet to be seen. In China, conversely, the regional tier has served the state's agenda quite well; and it is likely that the importance of regional planning will be increased. Knowledge about these spatially specially institutions, processes and outcomes is vital to the understanding of the practice of regional planning on the ground and its uneven nature.

The variations in regional planning should not lead to the conclusion that one system is better than the other. As this paper has suggested, planning is always contextual. This argument echoes geographers' affirmation that global trends take on different characters in local settings. If regionalism, as scholars suggested, is a response to global neo-liberalism, the different outcomes suggest not only a different play out of such a globalising process, but also different interplays between global and local forces. Although this paper did not directly address these interplays, both China and England's cases have vividly shown that local specific factors affect what happen at the regional scale, and explain how and why there are certain outcomes. Planning outcome, therefore, is determined more by endogenous factors. In other words, localised events and processes shape the formation of region, its planning and management; and produce unequal regionalism.

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