

Actors in power networks: an institution framework of historic urban district renovation actors in China

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Abstract

The powers, resources, motivations, and mindsets of actors play a critical role in shaping the conservation, renovation, and redevelopment of historic urban districts, as well as broader contemporary urban issues. Yet, understanding the roles of individuals and institutions remains challenging. Referring to bounded rationality hypothesis and Michael Mann's theory of power networks, this paper proposes a comprehensive analytical framework to examine the actor-institution landscape. It offers a panoramic view of the intricate and often chaotic interconnections among key actors as well as their power resources, institutional affiliations, interrelations, and action logics. This framework is then applied to the case of historic urban district renovation in China, providing insights from an actor-institutionalist perspective, such as the imbalanced power distribution and party-state authority fragmentation.

Key words: Actor; power network; institution; historic urban district; Chinese urban renovation

1. Introduction

Actor constellation plays a crucial role in urban renovation, conservation, and redevelopment. (Neugebauer, 2014, pp. 57–66; Imperiale et al., 2024; Li, 2025) Since the processes and the results of the urban interventions can be largely shaped by different actors' power, resources, motivations, and mindsets (Li, 2025), it is essential to recognize the intentions, capacity, and behaviour pattern of the actors, especially the key actors involved in historic urban district (HUD) transformation. However, it is far from an easy task to describe and understand the diverse array of individuals in real-world urban issues.

The paper adopts an actor-centred institutionalism perspective and bounded-rationality hypothesis, provides a descriptive framework that examines the power resources, interrelations, institutional organization, mindsets, and action logic of key actors based on Michael Mann's philosophy. Then the paper will apply this description framework in the context of residential and commercial-residential-mixed HUD renovation in China, describing the characters of four key power networks, namely political network, local community network, economic network, and expertise network based on extensive theoretical and experimental studies on representative organization studies and renovation cases. In the end, the study offers insights and critical reflections on the power distribution and the actor institutional contexts in the HUD renovation in China as well as the potential and limits of the descriptive framework. The proposed framework and contextual analysis aim to contribute to a foundational understanding for future research in HUD renovation and broader urban governance issues.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Bounded-rational hypothesis and actor-centred institution

HUD renovation and regeneration typically involve a wide array of actors, varying significantly in capacity, mindset, and patterns of action. It is nearly impossible to analyse each individual actor in detail. A more feasible approach is to identify and focus on the shared characteristics, power resources, and decision-making logics that meaningfully influence urban renovation within specific groups of actors.

Several academic hypotheses and theoretical perspectives have been proposed to explain shared behaviours, decision-making patterns, and action logics that extend beyond the individual level. Two of the most influential hypotheses are (1) the rationality hypothesis and (2) the bounded rationality hypothesis. According to the rational hypothesis, individuals are assumed to make a rational choice and "systematically and purposefully do the best they can to achieve their objectives, given the available opportunities," (Mankiw, 2015, p. 6) or to say, actors can "order" the outcomes of the game according to their consistent preferences. (Lucchetti, 2011, p. 5) The "ordering" or "decision-making" always involves a comparison of marginal benefits and marginal costs (Mankiw, 2015, pp. 6–7), mathematically towards maximizing a certain utility or payoff function. While the rationality hypothesis remains prevalent in economic analysis and certain areas of social science, it can be limited when comes to urban studies. In the case of HUD renovation and other complex urban issues, the "bounded rationality" hypothesis (Simon, 1997;

Gigerenzer, 2020) can be a more referential framework. The bounded rationality hypothesis acknowledges that actors often face cognitive constraints (Simon, 1990), and are thus they may be unable to collect all the necessary information, calculate the marginal benefits, costs, and utility, and make an optimized or fully informed decision, even though sometimes they intend to act in a rational manner.

Institutional studies and “actor-centred institution” discussions serve as another referential perspective in understanding actors’ mindsets and behaviours under the bounded rational hypothesis especially when actors are not fully informed or capable of purely rational decision-making. “Institution” can refer not only to organizations or agencies, but to a wider range under the New Institutionalism discourse, including “a set of formal rules, shared norms and understandings, and standard operating practices.” (Sorensen, 2017, p. 251) It can be taken as “the rules of game... that shape human interaction” (North, 1990, pp. 38–40) Douglass North develops an analytical framework for explaining the ways in which institutions and institutional change affect the performance of economies, both at a given time and over time. Institutions exist, he argues, due to the uncertainties involved in human interaction; they are the constraints devised to structure that interaction. Yet, institutions vary widely in their consequences for economic performance; some economies develop institutions that produce growth and development, while others develop institutions that produce stagnation. North first explores the nature of institutions and explains the role of transaction and production costs in their development. The second part of the book deals with institutional change. Institutions create the incentive structure in an economy, and organisations will be created to take advantage of the opportunities provided within a given institutional framework. North argues that the kinds of skills and knowledge fostered by the structure of an economy will shape the direction of change and gradually alter the institutional framework. He then explains how institutional development may lead to a path-dependent pattern of development. In the final part of the book, North explains the implications of this analysis for economic theory and economic history. He indicates how institutional analysis must be incorporated into neo-classical theory and explores the potential for the construction of a dynamic theory of long-term economic change. Douglass C. North is Director of the Center of Political Economy and Professor of Economics and History at Washington University in St. Louis. He is a past president of the Economic History Association and Western Economics Association and a Fellow, American Academy of Arts and Sciences. He has written over sixty articles for a variety of journals and is the author of *The Rise of the Western World: A New Economic History* (CUP, 1973, with R.P. Thomas, which can structure the “courses of actions that a set of actors may choose” (Scharpf, 1997, pp. 38–40) and the departmental identities of actors shape their selective perceptions. Actors are likely to take into consideration the established, customary rules and traditions that form a cultural and normative institutional framework, including but not limited to as their roles in organizational structure, their interpersonal networks, path depending, traditional customs, etc. (Li, 2025) Even though the “rules of game” may not be the only determinant that influences actor choices and renovation results in all cases, they still provide meaningful insights into how social activities are organized and regulated. Moreover, they help render actors’ decisions and behaviours intelligible—and even “predictable” to “those sharing in rule knowledge,” albeit in a “limited conditional sense.” (Burns, Baumgartner and Deville, 1985, p. 256; Scharpf, 1997, p. 40)

2.2. Power network: Michael Mann’s studies

Michael Mann’s “power network” framework (Mann, 2012, pp. 1–33) provides an insightful structure by examining actors’ mindset and behaviour as well as their power and capacity within institutionalized “power networks.” It can be highly referential to urban studies and HUD renovations for (1) it can enable a panoramic description framework out of the complex, chaotic and intertwined interconnections and interactions among diverse actors in the real world; (2) it can shed light on understanding the motivations and mindsets of the actors within social “rules of game;” (3) by situating the actors within the power networks, it can serve as a methodology for studying organizational power (Mann, 2012, p. 6) and help to elucidate actors’ power, resources, and capacities, offering insight into how different actors can shape the real-world activities and impacts including HUD renovation processes and results.

Michael Mann interprets societies as “multiple “overlapping and intersecting socio-spatial networks of power” (Mann, 2012, p. 1) from an “organizational level of analysis.” (Mann, 2012, p. 2) In his studies, these power networks are “overlapping networks of social interactions” as well as “particular organizational means each possesses to attain human goals.” (Mann, 2012, p. 2) The power networks can be authoritative or diffused, intensive or extensive (Mann, 2012, p. 9), while they always feature real connections among people (Collins, 2006, p. 23) and functional

ends and means. (Mann, 2012, p. 12) The overall model presented in Mann's studies can be illustrated in Figure 1. It integrates power, institution, and actor motivation in a single conceptual framework. While it is worth noting that the highlighted "power networks" can only encompass some of "the broadest contours" of the messy human societies. (Mann, 2012, pp. 29-30) Identifying power networks can be tailored according to different scenarios and academic understandings. For example, when Mann applied this methodology framework to national and global history studies, he used identified four fundamental power networks, namely ideology, economy, military, and state(s). However, as for urban issues or HUD renovation at a relatively smaller scale, it remains necessary to re-define and reinterpret the key power networks.

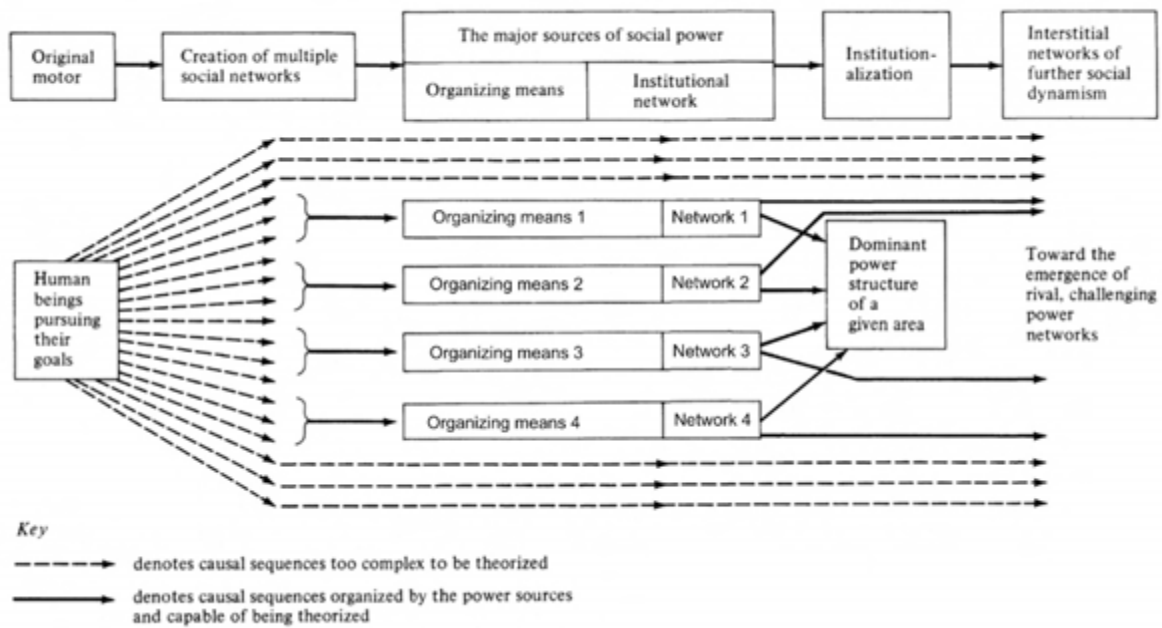


Figure 1: The framework of power network, adapted from (Mann, 2012, p. 29)

3. Create actor power networks in Chinese HUD renovation

3.1. Four key actor power networks in Chinese HUD renovation studies and actions

The paper adapts Michael Mann's theoretical approach to the Chinese residential and commercial-residential-mixed HUD renovation studies and proposes an actor power network framework building on the previous work of Li (2025). Four actor networks are highlighted in these scenarios, namely the political networks, local community networks, economic networks, and expertise networks. Table 1 provides a summary of the interpretation and key actors of each networks in the Chinese HUD renovation context.

Table 1: the four key actor power networks in Chinese HUD renovation studies (key reference (Mann, 2012; Li, 2025))

Power network	Power network interpretation in China	Key actors of the power network in China
Political network	Stem for “the usefulness of centralized, institutionalized, territorialized regulation of many aspect of social relations” (Mann, 2012, p. 26) beyond individuals.	The “party-state” system (Wu and Zhang, 2022) including different levels of government and the Chinese Communist Party (the Party)
Local community network	Stem for the basic requirement and desire on making a better living within a local quarter/ neighbourhood/ jurisdiction	Various local residents and communities in the neighbourhood
Economic network	Stem for “the satisfaction of subsistence needs through the social organization of the extraction, transformation, distribution, and consumption of the objects of the nature” (Mann, 2012, pp. 24–25)	Entrepreneurs, merchants, customers involved in circuits of production, distribution, exchange, and consumption and capital circuits, especially the chengtou platform and property management companies.
Expertise network	Stem for the pursue and recognition of expertise with “social-spatially transcendancy” (Mann, 2012, p. 23)	Professional committees, planning institutes, educational and academic institutes, and some professional-based NGS, etc.

These four power networks interacting with each other can contribute to a foundational framework to understand the actor-institution landscape of HUD renovation in specific contexts, both within and beyond China. In the following sections, we would like to examine each of these four networks, depicting and analysing the power sources, institutional structures, mindsets and motivations of actors in Chinese HUD renovation. This part has been summarized from social governance studies, exemplified by the renowned scholars Zhou Li-an (2017; 2019), Zhou Xueguang (2017), and Wu Fulong (Wu, 2015; Feng, Wu and Zhang, 2022; Wu and Zhang, 2022). The research has also examined extensive HUD renovation case studies in big metropolises (such as Beijing) and small/middle-sized cities (such as Anyang).

3.2.Political Network

The power of the political network, primarily referring to the party-state in China, comes from both the state power, such as the administrative and adjudicatory power granted through the elected People’s Congress, as well as the leadership of the Party. (Li, 2025) Key actors in the political network can possess extensive authority and extensive resources affecting various aspects of social lives including HUD renovation. They are always among the dominant players with “significant discretionary power.” (Zhou, 2019, p. 409) In some cases, their influence can be far-reaching and ambiguously defined, especially when the local states act more as “development leaders” with an “entrepreneurial nature” rather than functioning solely as service-oriented administrators. (Zhao, 2021, p. 157) At the same time, the expansive political power also brings challenges. As the phrase suggests “unlimited power, unlimited responsibility” (Hu and Zhang, 2022, p. 92), heavy political power can lead to the overburden of the governmental systems, especially the ones operating at the grassroots communities.

In response to the challenges of managing a vast territory with diverse social affairs and a large population, the Chinese party-state has established a “hierarchical and multi-scalar” structure (Wu and Zhang, 2022), characterized by a matrix form extending vertically from central (the upper level) to local level (the lower level) and horizontally across a range of function sectors at each level. Scholars (Mertha, 2005; Zhang, 2013, p. 34) have also frequently described the structure of Chinese governance as “tiao (Δ)” and “kuai (Δ). “Tiao,” or “line” in Chinese, refers to vertical clearances among functional bureaucracies;” while “kuai” captures geographic divisions of local governments” at one hierarchical level. In many, if not most, of the real-world cases in China, tiao-tiao management, that a functional sector is under the direct oversight of central or upper-level departments within the same vertical chain, and kuai-kuai management, that a functional sector is directly accountable to local leaders, are deeply intertwined, resulting in a highly intricate management system.

One other essential aspect of this system is that the political promotion of the lower-level governmental officer is always “determined or directly influenced” by the performance evaluation of the upper-level leaders or supervisors (Wei, 2024, p. 148). Such “upward accountability” (Zhou, 2013, p. 12; X. Zhou, 2017, p. 140) mechanism tends to induce a political-performance-orientated or personal-evaluation-oriented tendency in regeneration projects, such as pursuing fast and visible results without threatening social stability (Wang, Wu and Zhang, 2024; Wei, 2024). Since the state apparatus structured in “matrix form” with functional authority division and “the superior authorities have a strong personal influence in performance evaluation, governmental sectors tend to shrink their governance boundaries (Shi, 2022, pp. 209–228) Therefore, when it comes to highly intricated urban issues requiring interdisciplinary and inter-sector cooperation exemplified by HUD regeneration, the strategies or actions are often fragmented into diverse short-term sections within the shrank scopes of different functional authority and the performance indicators can be over-simplified or drop-dimensioned (Shi, 2022; Li, 2025).¹

3.3. Local community network

The power of local community network is primarily derived from the direct rights and interests of the local community members from grassroots level. Real-estate property-related rights and rights as neighbourhood member/ “the public” can be two major categories of the actors in this network. Real-estate property rights, based on the Constitution (National People’s Congress of the PRC., 2018, art. 13) and the Civil Code (National People’s Congress of the PRC, 2020, Article 114, 117& 207), are among the fundamental de jure power bases worldwide. (Li, 2025) In the context of HUD regeneration, there can exist multiple forms of real-estate property related rights (Liu et al., 2014; Li, Song and Lv, 2020), some times even distributed in a highly “fragmented” manner (Shi, 2022, pp. 159–184) resulting from multiple reasons including the path-dependent of Danwei (working unit) collectivism, the housing policy switches, and the influx of migrants since the late 20th century. There are multiple types of housing rights in the Chinese residential and commercial-residential HUDs, including private ownership, public housing (“Zhiguan” public housing, Danwei-owned public housing, military Danwei-owned public housing, etc) 2, tenants in private owned houses, informal temporary. (Wu, 2007; Li, 2025) Beyond real-estate property rights, local communities can also possess power as neighbourhood members or “the public” when comes to non-private affairs such as Hutong alley renovation and courtyard renovation for community outreach, though the legal basis of this right can be vague and controversial.³

Local residents can have various preferences when it comes to detail. While generally speaking, when the basic living conditions in HUDs are still limited, the locals are likely to prioritize the issues directly related to their real estate property and housing conditions over shared courtyards over the improvement of shared courtyards or “public” spaces and services, such as streetscape enhancements. (Shi, 2022, p. 256; Li, 2025) They tend to seek direct and visible benefits and address “practical issues” like expanding their housing space, upgrading basic living facilities such as kitchen and restroom facilities, and improving insulation and drainage. (Li, 2019, p. 50)

¹ As an example, addressing HUD population pressure may be reduced to merely reducing the total population in the quarter, without taking into consideration the micro-scale population imbalances or the further rehabilitation of vacated housing.

² Public housing is a product of the planned economy time in the last century. The de-jure owner of these properties is the local Housing Management Bureau (Zhiguan public housing) or property-owned Danwei (multiple types of danwei housing) and the household can “rent” the houses at a low cost and the lease can function as a “de-facto infinite contract” (Ni, Zhang and Huang, 2017, p. 66) that can be passed to their off-springs. The households of the allotted public housing can not merely be considered as “tenants” and their scope of property-related interests is not clearly-defined in the switch away from the planned economy since the late 20th century.

³ Agreements have not been reached whether the local residents should be considered as “stakeholders” or merely “the public” in this kind of issues. (Zhao, 2015)

They may also make “private intrusion into public space” (Amin, 2008, p. 23; Li, 2021, p. 400), wait for governmental support as “free riders”(Li, 2018, p. 72), and appear to offer “flexible and tactful” arguments (Wei, 2024, p. 156) based on their own interests.⁴

The structure of the local community network is comparatively loosely-organized and holds limited power. In urban conservation contexts, three main types of organizations at grassroots level are commonly observed, namely Neighbourhood Committees (NCs, “”), Owner’s Committees (OCs), and community-based Civil Social Organizations (CSOs). Among them, NCs are always the most fundamental and widespread setting throughout urban China, featuring a dual nature. (Li, 2025) On one hand, they serve as “self-governance” bodies intended to support local residents in “managing their own affairs, educating themselves, and serving own needs.” (Standing Committee of the National People’s Congress (NPC), 2018) On the other hand, they function as grassroots extension of the party-state bureaucracy, especially when implementing tasks delegated by local governments and their agencies. In practice, some NC members may adopt a behaviour logic of “selective policy implementation” (Yang and Yu, 2012, p. 107) among the administrative sub-contracts and diverse local interests.⁵

In addition to these formal organizations, there can also exist informal and implicit institutions in the local communities. For example, there can be small-scale endogenous structures in some HUD courtyards (with multiple families and households) through kinship, prestige, tenancy relationships, and long-term gaming, etc., and there might be a endogenous “leader” or “facilitator” within this structure. (Li, 2025) When it comes to HUD renovation, the courtyard “leaders” in these endogenous structures can serve as important roles during multi-actor negotiations. (Feng et al., 2020, p. 47)

3.4.Economic Network

The power of the economic network lies in the possession, control, or authorized use of diverse forms of resources in the circuits of production, exchange, distribution, etc. (Li, 2025) In the Chinese context, the institutional structure of economic networks is characterized by intricate interactions between state control and capital appreciation especially through market operations. Instead of “the functioning of the government will have to follow market principles,” (Zheng and Huang, 2018, p. 23), the market in China is always “subordinate to the state” and operates “within the boundaries set by the latter.” (Zheng and Huang, 2018, p. 58) and the state can control over key scarce production factors, such as land and natural resources. In HUD renovation, the key production factors, the ownership and use rights of urban construction lands, often playing a dominant role in the practical circuits of economic activity.

As for HUD renovation and redevelopment, the key actors in the economic network always feature a combination of state management and market operation. These entities typically function both as participants in the marketplace and as “operators” extending the influence of local states. Among the most representative organizational forms are Chengtou platforms (urban investment platforms) and venture companies jointly established by developers and local state actors. (Li, 2025) Chengtou platforms are state-owned enterprises “specialized in urban development and investment.” (Feng, Wu and Zhang, 2022, p. 1260) They are always responsible for specific governmental-led projects related to financing, infrastructure construction, urban development, and public sector management. Most, if not all, Chengtou platforms depend significantly on governmental resource injection, operate in alignment with local state objectives, instead of simply prioritizing short-term profit as purely market-driven players. However, the state affiliation cannot exempt them from the rules of financial and production markets. (Li, 2025) Even with local state backing up, Chengtou platforms have to pay attention to their debt risks and cash flow circuits. Therefore, a number of key actors in the economic networks, exemplified by the Chengtou Platform and the venture companies, can feature a dual character of state governance and market functioning.

⁴ As for an example, residents in cramped living spaces may argue the encroached areas as public when seeking governmental funding for yard renovation, yet assert ownership of the additions when requesting compensation for demolition. (Li, 2021, p. 401)

⁵ As an example, Li-Alin, a university scholar, and her team once worked on a Beijing Hutong courtyard improvement in Dashilar. (Li, 2018) At first, the local NC actively supported Li and her team since the NC members wanted to make Li’s renovation as part of their administrative achievements in performance assessment. When they found that the local state would not cover all the expenses and the courtyard residents have to pay around 80% of the renovation cost, they considered it a “thankless task” and might create conflicts with the courtyard residents. So they stopped their support for Li’s renovation project. The switch in the attitude of the local NC indicates their selective priorities in the course of time.

In addition to real-estate property operation entities, HUD renovations may also involve other marketplace-related actors, including actors and companies engaged in creative industries and tourism development as well as local-based business associations and chambers of commerce (Wu, 2014). Similar as the Chengtou platforms, not all of these actors prioritize on the top of the list the monetary profits under a capitalized market, which can be further discussed in more specific cases or scenarios.

3.5. Expertise network

The power of the expertise network comes from the recognition and authority of expertise, the reliable judgement based on professional knowledge, rules, theories, and standards. (Li, 2025) Actors within this network, such as university scholars and industry experts, often share foundations in philosophical orientations, methodological approaches, education backgrounds, or normative principles in their specialized fields and these consensuses can be reflected in academic research, professional practices, and collaborative projects. (Li, 2025) The expertise network may be described as a community with “a certain degree of autonomy” (Chen, 2018, pp. 144–151) grounded in shared professional consensus, typically camped at academic or professional institutions, exemplified by planning institutes, colleges, and universities. Ideally speaking, the actors in the expertise network adhere to their professional standards and ethical norms, though in practice their decisions are often shaped by competing concerns and contextual constraints that need be further examined in specific scenarios.

HUD renovation projects call for the engagement of expertise network actors, particularly those in urban studies, planning, architecture, landscape design, and heritage conservation. Currently in China, they are most likely to take on roles as technical supporters and consultants -- exemplified by the urban planners and conservationists drafting HUD planning plans and proposals for the local states – or as procedure reviewers, such as the Expert Committee, assessing and evaluating the conservation plans. However, in most of the cases, the experts as technical supporters are not collaborators for decision-making and it is local party-state that have the actual power to make the final decisions. (Wei, 2024, p. 147)

In addition to technical supporters and procedure reviewers, actors in the expertise networks have increasing chances to be involved in a growing scope of grassroots-level HUD renovation. For example, urban planners and university scholars in Beijing now have the opportunity to act as “responsible planners,” serving as versatile roles covering “planning issue researcher, planning and design document reviewer, neighbourhood/ community renewal guide, cooperation facilitator and coordinator, public participation organizer” (Tang and Zhang, 2023, p. 140) in various community-building and environmental improvement practices.

3.6. Other Actors

There are also other actors in the renovation that embody the characteristics of multiple power networks depending on the case. NGOs, for example, may play an active role particularly in incremental HUD renovation projects rooted in local communities. NGO members may come from the expertise network, offering skills in design, environmental management, and community engagement, while others may be part of the local community network, such as long-term residents or Neighbourhood Committee workers involved in daily governance and grassroots coordination.

4. Discussion

4.1 Reflections on the Chinese HUD power network

Drawing on the bounded rationality hypothesis and actor-centred institutionalism, the study proposes a theoretical framework to depict and analyse the actors' power, institutional structure, mindsets and behaviour pattern. It may not capture the full complexity of every individual actor, but it can contribute to understanding HUD renovation mechanism from an actor institutional perspective as well as creating explanations for renovation processes and results. Through the identification and analysis of major actor networks in China, the research generates insights into both the contextual features and practical pathways of HUD renovation efforts.

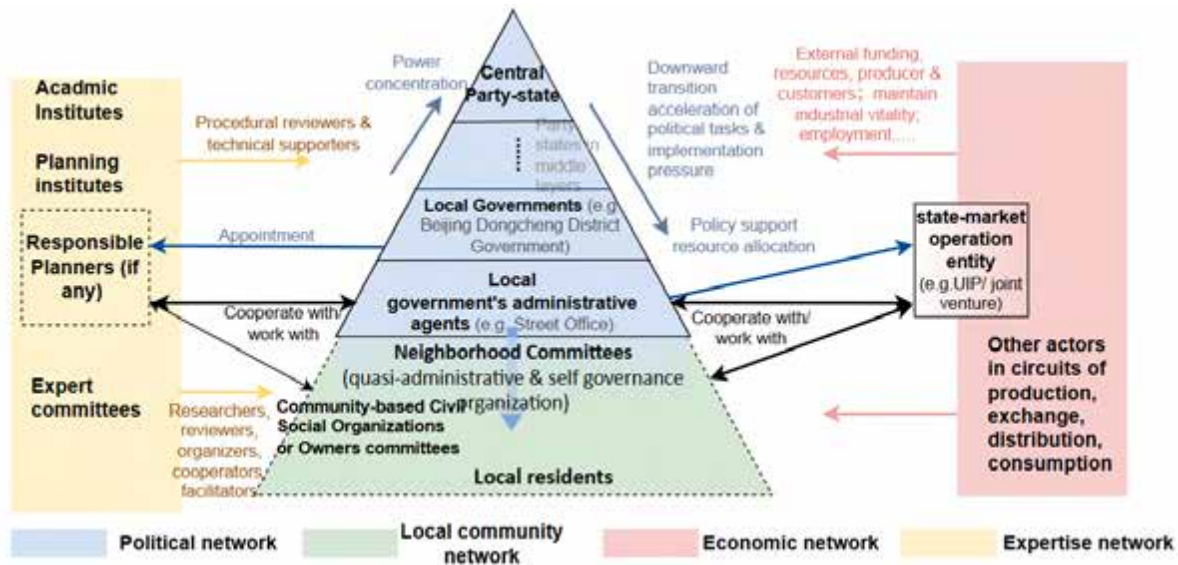


Figure 2 Diagram of the four network interaction in a typical Chinese HUD renovation/regeneration cases

First, party-state institutions in China possess substantial power and resources, enabling them to more readily initiate or promote HUD renewal projects and act as a leading role in major decision-making processes. A number of key actors in other networks, exemplified by the Neighbourhood Committee members (local community network) and Chengtou Platform (economic networks), and even some professional groups (expertise network), often feature dual nature and take into party-state interests into account. Thus it highlights the importance of closely examining the behavioural logics of the party-state institutions. Therefore, promoting inclusive, multi-actor engagement must go hand-in-hand with efforts to strengthen internal motivation within state institutions, for example, by establishing more balanced and context-sensitive performance evaluation criteria within the governmental system. In addition, given the risk of functional fragmentation among different governmental sectors, fostering inter-departmental collaboration may be a key challenge in HUD renovation, particularly in addressing interdisciplinary concerns and achieving holistic improvement.

Further explorations are required on an increasingly inclusive participatory approach, where local communities and professionals play increasingly significant roles in the decision-making process. As we can see, though the other three networks have been largely impacted by the power of the party-state, they still have separate primary thrusts and power sources other than political power and a number of local residents, experts, and business operator have their own mindsets, interests, and insistence beyond or against the pursuit of local governmental political goals and personnel evaluation, and many of them did or do challenged the local party-state decisions through multiple channels based on their rationale or principles. (He, 2016, pp. 88, 133-135, 158-159; Zhang *et al.*, 2019; Wei, 2024) For example, it can be encouraging to see a growing trend of professionals in urban planning, architectural design, and heritage conservation engaging in long-term, locally rooted studies. Rather than serving solely as technical consultants to local authorities, they are more likely to create a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the sites and the local communities and contribute to more resilient, empathetic, and place-sensitive renovation strategies by immersing themselves in the site and developing interpersonal relationships with local residents.

4.2. Reflections on the power network analyse framework

The research creates the four-power network framework and applies it to the context of Chinese HUD regeneration contexts. The framework proves effective in analysing and illustrating the power source and institution-shaped motivation and behaviour patterns of various actors involved. However, its application in the Chinese context reveals that the framework serves more as a preliminary tool for analysing actor participation. While diverse actor networks can be identified, they are often not fully independent in practice. Its application to the Chinese HUD contexts indicates that the framework is just a starting point of the actor participation analysis. Though diverse actor networks can be identified, they are not that independent in real cases. In the Chinese contexts, it is

clear to see that the power of the party-state can always be more determined and dominant than others in the Chinese contexts and actors in other networks can feature dual characters shaped by the pervasive influence of the party-state apparatus. Therefore, further case-specific studies are still required to look into the interactions and negotiations among different networks.

5. Conclusion

The study draws on the bounded rational hypothesis and Mann's power network framework and proposes a descriptive and analytical methodology for examining actor institutions within the context of Chinese HUD renovation. By constructing a panoramic overview of key actors' power bases, organizational structures, and motivations and mindsets, the study identifies several institutional challenges regarding the Chinese HUD renovation, especially the imbalanced power distribution. Although the methodology is applied specifically to the Chinese urban renewal context, it holds potential for broader implementation by categorizing and analysing various types of power networks and their distinctive features in other cases. One of the key strengths of this approach lies in its capacity to interpret actor-related urban dynamics from an integrated and holistic perspective. By examining the institutional mechanisms underlying individual actions, it helps to reveal the structural drivers behind actor decision-making, thereby offering meaningful implications for future institutional design.

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