

**FOREIGN RESIDENTS' INFORMAL  
SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS AND  
MOBILISATION DURING SHANGHAI'S  
COVID-19 LOCKDOWN**

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## Executive Summary

1. As the host to more than 10,000 global multinational companies, Shanghai inevitably has a huge pool of foreign residents and expatriates.
2. The sudden surge in COVID-19 infections since 1 March 2022 has the Shanghai authorities scrambling to institute an immediate major lockdown of parts of the city from 27 March 2022, in line with the country's zero-COVID-19 policy; the swift lockdown left many expatriates stranded.
3. Regular communications kept information flow going amongst foreign residents due possibly to the high density of foreigners in the city. Mutual corroboration amongst foreigners also meant they had an outlet to dispel rumours and alleviate suspicions that information was being officially controlled, given their own trusted sources of information.
4. The expatriates extended self-help to each other's pets as well. Residents and their pets (like dogs) were both quarantined in their residences.
5. Mutual support can also be found in the workplace. Sino-Japanese workforce in some joint venture companies cooperated to keep production going. While Japanese employees were cut off from the production site, their Chinese colleagues have to step up as the main operators in their factories, performing overtime work and resting in sleeping bags on the factory floor.
6. With the spread of the COVID-19, the neighbourhood committees became the frontline personnel in implementing pandemic mitigation measures, taking charge of daily testing for infections, administering tests and curating the records to send to the Chinese Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, thereby becoming the interface between the community and the central authorities.
7. They are also the deliverers of essentials like food ingredients and fresh vegetables to households. Foreigners departing from Shanghai during the lockdown needed to

work with the district committee to obtain a permit to vacate the residence and arrange for COVID-19 tests at a hospital facility before leaving for the airport.

8. Neighbourhood committees also muster strength in numbers to have a bigger voice in obtaining resources, medical services and health care for vulnerable individuals like pregnant women in their communities; migrant workers however did not have access to neighbourhood committees that can speak on their behalf.
9. Some foreign residents were even able to barter trade. State-allocated dairy products, duck and vegetables were still inadequate in terms of diversity of products. Foreign residents utilised digital technology and social media to organise barter trade.
10. The one positive effect of the lockdown for foreign residents is perhaps the opportunity to know their neighbours through *tuangou* and self-mobilisation mechanisms.

# FOREIGN RESIDENTS' INFORMAL SOCIAL ORGANISATIONS AND MOBILISATION DURING SHANGHAI'S COVID-19 LOCKDOWN

LIM Tai Wei\*

## The Shanghai Lockdown and Foreign Residents

- 1.1 Shanghai hosts over 10,000 global multinational companies and a large pool of expatriates and foreign residents.<sup>1</sup> The financial hub was very attractive to foreign residents with its highly developed infrastructures, relatively high quality of life and cosmopolitan feel as well as relatively liberal environment compared to other parts of China, with perhaps the exception of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region.
- 1.2 The lockdown came on 27 March 2022 in the wake of a sudden surge in infections from hundreds to almost 11,500 since 1 March 2022.<sup>2</sup> The Shanghai authorities implemented an immediate major lockdown of parts of the city in line with the zero tolerance COVID-19 policy, giving many expatriates inadequate time to prepare as supermarkets were “flooded with people”.<sup>3</sup> Some residents opined that food shortages and complexities in getting hold of necessities have strengthened community bonding.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Castagnone, Mia, “Coronavirus China: expats in Shanghai ‘stunned’ as lockdown sends ‘floods’ of people scrambling for supplies” dated 30 March 2022 in *South China Morning Post* (SCMP) [downloaded on 30 March 2022], available at [https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3172277/coronavirus-china-expats-shanghai-stunned-lockdown-sends?module=perpetual\\_scroll\\_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3172277](https://www.scmp.com/economy/china-economy/article/3172277/coronavirus-china-expats-shanghai-stunned-lockdown-sends?module=perpetual_scroll_0&pgtype=article&campaign=3172277).

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Birtles, Bill, “Shanghai’s messy COVID-19 lockdown forcing foreign workers to rethink life in China’s financial hub” dated 14 April 2022 in ABC News [downloaded on 14 April 2022], available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-14/chinas-messy-covid-lockdown-in-shanghai/100985952>.

- 1.3 Many residents (including foreigners) were dependent on city officials for food and basic necessities. Waiting for officially organised food deliveries have become an everyday routine. Some foreign residents experienced unique challenges while some picked up new skills during the lockdown. Taiwanese resident Vicky revealed that, at one point of time, she had approximately “three days” supply of food and, like many young Taiwanese, did not know how to cook and therefore had no pots and pans.<sup>5</sup> When her neighbourhood committee left a “huge” bag of vegetables at her residence, she decided to slice some up to make a salad and microwaved the rest.<sup>6</sup>
- 1.4 Foreign expatriates/residents living in wealthier areas had better access to resources. Vicky who resides in western Shanghai’s swanky Jing An district (where the lockdown began on 1 April 2022) felt fortunate that she was safely working from home and not living in the eastside where the lockdown started earlier on 28 March 2022: “I’m pretty lucky. I have a nice one-bedroom apartment in a downtown area. You wouldn’t think your neighbourhood would matter very much in lockdowns, but it does, because if you’re in a nicer neighbourhood, you get better communication, you get better resources. I got my city-gifted free vegetables before everyone else”.<sup>7</sup>
- 1.5 Other testimonies from foreign residents corroborated Vicky’s observations. American citizen Chang Che flew back to China in early March after spending time in the United States and was quarantined for 14 days until 27 March 2022 as part of arrival procedure before experiencing the Shanghai lockdown on 28 March 2022 in Pudong.<sup>8</sup> However, as he lives in Puxi, the lockdown started later on 1 April 2022.<sup>9</sup> He noticed that the Shanghai lockdown was not as strict as that of Shenzhen or Jilin though Shanghai had a *xiaoqu* (小区) - based management of neighbourhood

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<sup>5</sup> Hale, Erin, “Shanghai residents feel strain as lockdown extended indefinitely” dated 6 April 2022 in Al Jazeera [downloaded on 6 April 2022], available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/4/6/shanghai-lockdown-residents-feel-strain>.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Chang, Che and Kaiser Kuo, “Locked down in Shanghai” dated 14 April 2022 in SupChina.com [downloaded on 14 April 2022], available at <https://supchina.com/2022/04/14/locked-down-in-shanghai/>.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

infections before the entire city went into a two-phase lockdown.<sup>10</sup> Pudong was scheduled to open up before Puxi but the plan was changed in favour of an extended dual Pudong-Puxi lockdown.<sup>11</sup>

### **Digital Communities and Mutual Support Groups**

- 2.1 To keep themselves mentally alert while awaiting official food deliveries, some foreign residents like Vicky turned to virtual online activities like livestreamed gym classes and virtual narration of classics like *Alice in Wonderland* with others in the community over a three-hour marathon video chat session; Vicky explained these activities' objectives: "I think mentally it will be difficult, but we are two years into the pandemic, which means everyone's quite equipped at setting up online events. It'll be ok".<sup>12</sup>
- 2.2 Such digital camaraderie was also evident for foreign expatriates of Japanese joint ventures (JVs) based in Shanghai. To keep information exchange flowing, employees of auto parts maker, Gunma's Sanden Corp. that manages the Tianjin Sanden Automotive Air Conditioning Co. in Shanghai, continued to communicate online two times a week with quarantined colleagues to track each other's health situation.<sup>13</sup> Such regular communications kept information flow going amongst foreign residents and this was possible due to the high density of foreigners in the city. Mutual corroboration amongst foreigners also meant they had an outlet to dispel rumours and alleviate suspicions of censored or controlled information, given their own trusted sources of information.
- 2.3 Mutual help extended to the real world and to each other's pets. Residents and their pets (like dogs) were both quarantined in their residences.<sup>14</sup> Expatriates and foreign

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Hale, Erin, "Shanghai residents feel strain as lockdown extended indefinitely".

<sup>13</sup> Tadokoro, Ryuko, "Japanese people living in Shanghai stressed over COVID-19 lockdown" dated 9 April 2022 in Mainichi Japan [downloaded on 9 April 2022], available at <https://mainichi.jp/english/articles/20220409/p2a/00m/0na/007000c>.

<sup>14</sup> Hale, Erin, "Shanghai residents feel strain as lockdown extended indefinitely".

residents were especially sensitive to the well-being of their pets due to incidences of health officials culling pets of infected individuals who were quarantined or of 2020 incidences where neighbours broke into apartments to rescue pets whose owners were in quarantine or unable to make it home.<sup>15</sup>

2.4 In such challenging times, foreign residents supported the needs of each other's pets. After five days of lockdown, Taiwanese resident Vicky permitted her friend's rescue dog, Mocha, to use the toilet in her apartment after Mocha's owner tested positive for COVID-19.<sup>16</sup> Foreign residents in Vicky's circle made a pact to take care of each other's pets if they were quarantined in government facilities.<sup>17</sup>

2.5 Mutual support can also be found in the workplace as Sino-Japanese joint workforce in some JV companies cooperated to keep production going. Cut off from the production sites, Japanese employees worked closely with their Chinese colleagues who stepped up to become the main operators in their JV factories, performing overtime work and resting in sleeping bags on the factory floor.<sup>18</sup> Such Sino-Japanese teamwork kept Japanese industries going in such extraordinary times. Generally, large companies had more resources to cope with the situation than smaller-scale entrepreneurs. For instance, Australian entrepreneur Nicholas Oettinger, a 15-year Shanghai resident, runs factories manufacturing doors and windows but the thought of separating infected children from their parents convinced him to pull out his factory to another country in 2023.<sup>19</sup>

2.6 Mutual pet support and foreign-local workforce cooperation were vital to keep business operations and daily life activities going, especially if the expatriates/foreign residents were tested positive for COVID-19. When stories of infected individuals admitted mandatorily to the Fangcang Shelter Hospital were

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<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Hale, Erin, "Shanghai residents feel strain as lockdown extended indefinitely".

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

<sup>18</sup> Tadokoro, Ryuko, "Japanese people living in Shanghai stressed over COVID-19 lockdown".

<sup>19</sup> Fang, Jason and Joyce Cheng, "Australians under lockdown in Shanghai fear family separation as city reports first COVID deaths" dated 18 April 2022 in ABC News [downloaded on 18 April 2022], available at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2022-04-18/australians-in-shanghai-lockdown-covid-family-separation/100989772>.

shared through the social media, some foreign residents showed sympathies to their local counterparts. For example, a Shanghai resident for a few years, Taiwanese Will Liu (director of a start-up company), shared with *BBC*: “After this epidemic, I found that Shanghai people have more independent thinking and are not afraid to express their own opinions. I began to appreciate Shanghai people expressing their voices because their quality of life was affected. Shanghai is amazing”.<sup>20</sup>

2.7 Will reflected that his biggest fear was not the COVID-19 infection but to stay at the Fangcang shelter hospital; he was unnerved by social media photographs of the hospital’s less than optimal showering infrastructure and less than ideal treatment of families with autistic children.<sup>21</sup> Such videos and images and of clashes between health officials and Shanghai locals forcibly herded to Fangcang made foreign residents like Will fearful of being sent to the hospital.<sup>22</sup>

2.8 Will was especially influenced by WeChat videos put out by Shanghai locals like Leona Cheng and her 13 days in Fangcang isolation facilities, including her description of overcrowding, overflowing/malfunctioning mobile toilets, sleepless nights due to glaring floodlights and smelly environment, makeshift cardboard/plastic materials for privacy and going low on hydration to avoid the toilet.<sup>23</sup> Ironically, individual stories like this did not worry Will but strengthen his love for Shanghai people and its society: “I have found that I love Shanghai more and more, and I am not discriminated against by regional culture ... Shanghai people are more capable of independent thinking, such as the issue of Dragon TV, Shanghai people are not afraid to express their views”.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> BBC News, “‘Foreigners’ under lock and key in Shanghai: From anxiety and doubt to self and longing” dated 21 April 2022 in Newsy Today [downloaded on 21 April 2022], available at <https://www.newsy-today.com/foreigners-under-lock-and-key-in-shanghai-from-anxiety-and-doubt-to-self-and-longing-bbc-news/>.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.



- 2.9 Another foreign resident and long-time fitness business owner in Shanghai, 28-year-old Jerry (an alias) who has been running a fitness business in Shanghai for many years, shared with *BBC* his appreciation of Shanghai people's independent and rational thinking, a reason for his stay in Shanghai: "You asked me if I would leave Shanghai. I thought about this before, but I thought about it later. From a macro perspective, Shanghai can't be closed forever. After all, this is a In the fitness industry, staying in Shanghai is the best choice right now, and I still have a good impression on the people of Shanghai, and the people of Shanghai have a relatively independent and clear judgment of things".<sup>25</sup> The aforementioned cases revealed foreign residents' newfound appreciation of the struggles of Fangcang patients and the long-time economic prospects gave them reasons to stay on and tolerate the inconveniences.
- 2.10 Aside from passively enduring lockdowns, being fearful of Fangcang or coping with shortages, some foreign residents and expatriates have taken the proactive measure of becoming volunteers to help conduct mass testings in Shanghai. The Chinese media highlighted these individuals in their accounts of the lockdown. One example is British-born, four-year Shanghai resident Adam McIlmoyle who volunteered to help the some 300 foreigners in his neighbourhood in Jiading district.<sup>26</sup>
- 2.11 He said: "One evening at the end of the week, they were asking for volunteers to volunteer at the weekend. I was off that weekend, so I decided to ask whether it is OK if I volunteer because I'm a foreigner...It was quite difficult because I had so much protection on. So nobody really know that I was a foreigner anyway. There were a lot of people coming to ask me things. My Chinese is OK. But specific things I just didn't know. I was just like go and ask her. And they were like 'Oh, you are a foreigner.' I did get lots of kids saying 'Thank you.' instead of 'Xiexie'... But it's quite easy to forget that for the last two years, we had no any issue for the COVID so far, apart from showing your tests everywhere".<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> CGTN, "Coronavirus Pandemic: Expats in Shanghai volunteer to help with testing, virus prevention work" dated 9 April 2022 in CGTN [downloaded on 9 April 2022], available at <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2022-04-09/VHJhbnNjcmlwdDY0MzQy/index.html>.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

## Neighbourhood Committees and *Tuangou* Teams

- 3.1 Neighbourhood committee members became important players of the Shanghai lockdown. Before the pandemic, many foreign residents stereotyped neighbourhood *juweihui* committee representatives as “older, matronly woman walking around with a red armband on her arm and getting, sticking her nose in other people’s business, always sort of keeping track of who you’re dating”.<sup>28</sup> When COVID-19 cases surged, the neighbourhood committees essentially became the frontline personnel in implementing pandemic mitigation measures, taking charge of daily testing for infections and curating the records to send to the Centre for Disease Control and Prevention, thereby becoming the interface between the community and the authorities.<sup>29</sup> They played the role of deliverers of essentials like food ingredients and fresh vegetables from household to household.
- 3.2 They are also the contact person for foreigners who wish to depart from Shanghai during the lockdown to obtain a permit to vacate the residence and arrange for COVID-19 tests at a hospital facility before leaving for the airport.<sup>30</sup> Flights also need to be arranged given there is a lack of manpower at the Pudong International Airport, alongside a shortage of flights and, for countries like France, Ambassador Laurent Bili confirmed that there were no French-chartered flights for French citizens as there is no necessity to have one.<sup>31</sup>
- 3.3 Northeast Asian countries like South Korea that were culturally adept with the ways of that region and familiar with the Chinese political systems were more successful in arranging outgoing flights for their citizens. For example, the Republic of Korea

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<sup>28</sup> Chang, Che and Kaiser Kuo, “Locked down in Shanghai”.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Leplâtre, Simon, “Covid-19: In Shanghai, expatriates flee harsh lockdowns” in *Le Monde* dated 14 April 2022 in *Le Monde* [downloaded on 14 April 2022], available at [https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/04/14/covid-19-in-shanghai-expatriates-flee-harsh-lockdowns\\_5980548\\_4.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2022/04/14/covid-19-in-shanghai-expatriates-flee-harsh-lockdowns_5980548_4.html).

<sup>31</sup> Ibid.

(ROK or South Korea) Consulate worked with the Chinese authorities to smoothly repatriate 26 South Korean students back home.<sup>32</sup>

3.4 Neighbourhood committees also muster strength in numbers to have a bigger voice in obtaining resources, medical services and health care for vulnerable individuals like pregnant women in their communities, unlike migrant workers who did not have access to neighbourhood committees that can speak on their behalf.<sup>33</sup> Due to the role of neighbourhood committees (*jūwěihùi* 居委会 or *shèqū wěiyuánhùi* 社区委员会) in this lockdown, they became non-governmental grassroots defenders of residential rights; some foreign residents nicknamed them the “foot soldiers” of the community.<sup>34</sup>

3.5 Interestingly, before the lockdown, foreign residents had little awareness of the existence and role of these neighbourhood committees.<sup>35</sup> In non-extraordinary scenarios, foreign residents perceived them as emergency resource teams that can assist them in times of need, given that they have access to public security officials (*gongan*) and other state departments/teams for support.<sup>36</sup>

3.6 However, the neighbourhood committees have their limitations. Externalities beyond their control may include shortage of food and medical supplies, and separation of children from infected parents. Another limitation is the effectiveness of neighbourhood committees is subject to the cooperation of its residents, without which their ability to get things done will be affected. The diary of a neighbourhood committee worker that reached the public realm told a story of how she was losing control of the situation due to the residents’ hunger, anger at the lack of transparency and medical essentials, and separation of parents from their kids.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jo, He-rim, “Foreign Ministry to send relief goods for Koreans under lockdown in Shanghai” dated 15 April 2022 in Korea Herald [downloaded on 15 April 2022], available at <http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20220415000610>.

<sup>33</sup> Chang, Che and Kaiser Kuo, “Locked down in Shanghai”.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid.

- 3.7 The role of neighbourhood committees was greatly enhanced by their role in pandemic mitigation; residents felt that the discretion of individual neighbourhood committee workers on quarantine matters can be widened, especially since they were on the ground, and receiving signals and needs of the community.<sup>38</sup> As the neighbourhood committees are COVID-19 test results data collectors with constant contact with residents when administering the tests, they have access to vast amounts of local and personal information. Some foreign residents felt they are in the best position to smoothen the sharp edges of China's massive single-minded social mobilisation that its highly centralised government is used to (e.g. administering 25 million tests in the entire city of Shanghai in five hours).<sup>39</sup>
- 3.8 However, other foreign residents were also aware of the reluctance to devolve such powers to the grassroots due to the intense centralisation of Chinese political power. Vice Premier Sun Chunlan 孙春兰 who represents the central government assumed control of Shanghai's pandemic mitigation efforts, a development perceived by some foreign residents as the origins behind the extended lockdowns.<sup>40</sup> Some in the neighbourhood committees are hesitant about assuming the awesome responsibility that came with expanded powers, especially if a wrong judgement/decision was made.<sup>41</sup>
- 3.9 The reluctance of neighbourhood committees to assume greater role has given rise to *tuangou* groups. Chinese and foreign residents organised *tuangou* 团购 teams and committees to purchase food from wholesalers who also provided logistical support. The presence of *tuangou* groups were found in many housing units as neighbourhood mobilisation proliferated when the resident realised that strength through numbers allow them to outbid neighbourhood committees that could not muster such financial or organisational structures (especially for Shanghai residents who did not stay in neighbourhood compounds).<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>38</sup> Ibid.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

3.10 The neighbourhood with *tuangou* groups had no problem with food supply and did not experience food deprivation for 14-20 days unlike the non-*tuangou* neighbourhoods.<sup>43</sup> Some foreign residents were even able to barter trade. For foreign residents who received state-allocated dairy products, duck and vegetables, the supplies were still inadequate in terms of diversity of products. Foreign residents utilised the digital technology of social media to organise barter trade. For example, Cameron Wilson, a veteran Scottish Shanghai resident, articulated: “We gave some vegetables to a family a few days ago and they returned in kind with some butter. People are just doing what they can to get hold of stuff”.<sup>44</sup>

### **Foreign Governmental Support for Their Citizenry**

4.1 Foreign governments were involved as well. Some governments like South Korea announced on 14 April 2022 that they were despatching necessities and relief goods for Korean citizens in Shanghai: “While Shanghai City announced to ease the lockdown measures, some areas are still in lockdown so we are closely monitoring the situation and putting effort to resolve problems for the people in those neighbourhoods”.<sup>45</sup> ROK consulate general in Shanghai and ROK’s ministry of foreign affairs managed to obtain two vehicle passes from the Chinese authorities for disseminating necessities in Shanghai.<sup>46</sup> The South Korean Consulate and the ministry of foreign affairs declared: “The government will continue to supply supplies for the Korean people in difficult situations, and also secure the transportation to guarantee safe return of the people”.<sup>47</sup>

4.2 Other countries like Australian Ambassador to China Graham Fletcher have relied on direct communications with their citizens in Shanghai to assuage their concerns: “Chinese authorities are working hard to reduce case numbers. But we know

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<sup>43</sup> Ibid.

<sup>44</sup> Birtles, Bill, “Shanghai’s messy COVID-19 lockdown forcing foreign workers to rethink life in China’s financial hub”.

<sup>45</sup> Jo, He-rim, “Foreign Ministry to send relief goods for Koreans under lockdown in Shanghai”.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid.

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

lockdowns and other restrictions are having a real impact on all of you there in Shanghai. The confinement and particularly the duration, and what might happen, are understandably very upsetting. Along with other governments with [a] presence in Shanghai, Australia has raised our concerns directly with the Chinese authorities, including about access to food, medical services, or the airport. [Australia had also raised concerns about] the conditions of quarantine facilities, including whether families will be separated. Like others, we are raising these concerns directly with Chinese officials, without always getting the answers we want”.<sup>48</sup>

4.3 Australians (and Westerners in general) in Shanghai seemed most anxious about being separated from their children, an issue taken up by the Australian authorities with their Chinese counterparts over family separation and other strict conditions of lockdown.<sup>49</sup> A Shanghai resident of 20 years, Australian Norman Lau, who has two children aged 11 and 14 reflected this view: “The risks of quarantine, separation from family ... are even scarier than the risk of contracting COVID itself. [Many expats were] frightened by such a potential”.<sup>50</sup>

4.4 Australia escalated its representation to the ministerial level when a representative for the Australian department of foreign affairs and trade said the Australian consulate-general in Shanghai encouraged Australians living in Shanghai to comply with pandemic restrictions: “We will continue to engage with local authorities on COVID-19 response measures, including the implementation of COVID-19 policies in relation to the treatment of families”.<sup>51</sup> Country representatives in Shanghai like the French and British consuls submitted documents to the Chinese government representing more than 30 other countries including Australia to articulate their concerns over the Shanghai lockdown, including separation of parents from their children.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> Fang, Jason and Joyce Cheng, “Australians under lockdown in Shanghai fear family separation as city reports first COVID deaths”.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

4.5 Australian-American English instructor Ender Waters who landed in Shanghai in September 2020 after experiencing half a year of lockdowns in Melbourne opined that the irregularities of food supplies and children separation were the major differences in his experiences in the two cities: “That was never the case in Melbourne [believing there could have been better management of supply chains to make sure everyone had access to food], we [could] always go to the grocery store and get food. [He signed a Western resident-initiated petition against the separation of families that was removed after two days] I think that’s absolutely a very inhumane policy, and I think they [the government] at least partially walked it back. I would say that a lot of people are freaking out. A lot of people are talking about leaving among the foreigners. I think there’s just a kind of a general unpreparedness for this to happen”.<sup>53</sup>

4.6 For some foreign residents, their local prefectural office support also contributed to the efforts. In the Japanese expatriate community, when the lockdown was first effected, there was a large proportion of Gunma prefecture-originated Japanese residents in Shanghai and so local authorities in Japan like Director Dobashi Toru from the Gunma Shanghai Office had to work hard to help those expatriates even as he coped with the rations distribution situation.<sup>54</sup> Dobashi himself resides in western Shanghai as do most of the Japanese expatriates; his priority had been thus focused on vulnerable members of the community like adolescents and the challenge of outdoor restrictions and lack of physical exercise opportunities.<sup>55</sup>

4.7 According to Dobashi, he stocked up 10 kg of rice grains, six bags of frozen boiled dumplings, vegetables and other foodstuffs before the lockdown and calculated that he needed 150g of rice daily.<sup>56</sup> He and other Gunma prefectural government officials tracked their daily needs while fully aware of the need for more diversity

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<sup>53</sup> Ibid.

<sup>54</sup> Tadokoro, Ryuko, “Japanese people living in Shanghai stressed over COVID-19 lockdown”.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid.

of food sources besides carbohydrates like rice (while stoking positive hope for the lockdown to end when the situation reverses).<sup>57</sup>

4.8 Younger expatriates from other parts of the world including hipster urbanites who lead a healthy lifestyle stocked up on what they considered to be their essentials. Young Taiwanese residents like Vicky stored fruits and multivitamins in addition to canned food (especially for youngsters like her who do not cook) before the lockdown.<sup>58</sup> In general, some foreign residents like Chang Che witnessed the mad scramble for vegetables in the initial stage, including the mass purchasing of vegetables (even for previously unpopular ones like celery) and hundreds of eggs per customer while foreigners like Chang prepared for only four days of food.<sup>59</sup> Foreign residents apparently were less able to read the lockdown situation compared to the locals.

4.9 Many had to depend on their informal networks for their daily needs (see Appendix). One positive effect of this lockdown for foreign residents is the opportunity to get to know their neighbours through *tuangou* and self-mobilisation mechanisms, such as the breaking of the silo mentality and the strengthening of foreign residents' empathy for the locals, something that Anna Ashton at the Asia Society and formerly from US-China Business Council has tweeted publicly.

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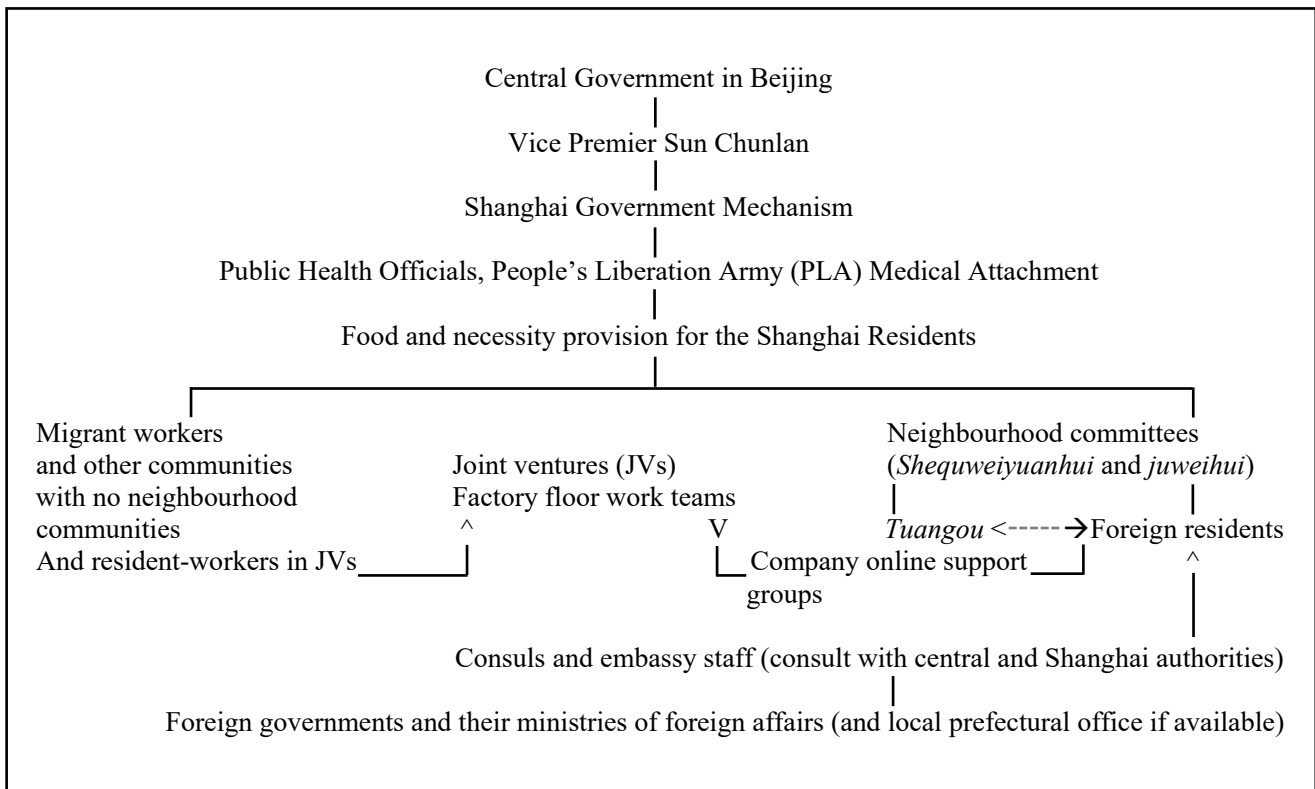
<sup>57</sup> Ibid.

<sup>58</sup> Hale, Erin, "Shanghai residents feel strain as lockdown extended indefinitely".

<sup>59</sup> Chang, Che and Kaiser Kuo, "Locked down in Shanghai".



**APPENDIX THE FORMAL AND INFORMAL HIERARCHIES IN MOBILISING SUPPORT IN THE SHANGHAI LOCKDOWN**



Source: Author's own.

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