Notice of the Final Oral Examination
for the Degree of Master of Arts

of

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LL.M. (Renmin University of China, 2016)
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“Regulating Online Ride-hailing Platforms:
Comparing Policy Responses of Beijing and Shanghai to the Business
Conflict and National Policy”

Department of Political Science

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Conducted Remotely

Supervisory Committee:
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Abstract

Existing studies on the formulation of regulations for online ride-hailing platforms merely see the process as a conflict between interest groups. They do not address how policymakers perceive the conflict and act on their own initiative to govern these platforms. This study supplements existing studies by exploring how the metropolitan governments of two Chinese cities, Beijing and Shanghai, perceived the conflict between contending forms of chauffeur businesses and brought in regulations for new platform ventures. This thesis employs a policy change approach in the Chinese authoritarian context and reaches three conclusions. Firstly, it contrasts the formulation of similar policies of two metropolitan governments with the one initially “cracking-down” on platforms and the other working on a “loose” regulatory approach for platforms. The old regulatory regimes for taxi businesses institutionalized the “special interests” of taxi entities and incentivized the two metropolitan governments to adopt similar platform-capping policies to protect taxi entities. Secondly, this thesis finds that the two metropolitan governments disobeyed the central government’s “loose” directives by issuing platform-capping policies, which was also due to a source of friction created by the vested “special interests.” However, the disobedience was not arbitrary, as the local governments combined their capping policies with selectively implementing a central directive of differentiating the markets of ride-hailing platforms and taxi operators. Thirdly, this thesis addresses obstructions to the establishment of “new regulation” that respects the business logic of platforms, which is proposed by the platform coalition. It is the interaction between the vested “special interests” and the fragmentation of authority that makes local governments resistant to new regulations.