

# Evolution of Preventive Measures for COVID-19 in Shanghai

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## 1. News Highlights

In Spring 2022, during the Two Sessions, another wave of COVID-19 entered China. The Omicron variant is highly transmissible and tends to cause less severe illness. More than 90% of the confirmed cases show no symptoms, making it difficult to block the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> On March 14, Shenzhen became China's first first-tier city to go into lockdown.<sup>2</sup> After Shenzhen reopened, the pandemic

in Shanghai started to worsen. As Shanghai has an irreplaceable status in the Chinese economy, its pandemic trend and prevention strategies have attracted the world's attention. Later in this article, we will explore the implication of the oscillation between the two prevention strategies, "Catching the Mouse in the Urn" and the "clear-cut Covid strategy".

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1. "China's Pandemic Outbreak Caused Lockdowns in Various Places, Dynamic Clearing Policy is Facing Challenges," *BBC Zhongwen*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/chinese-news-60735214>; *wenweipo.com*, February 16, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/a/202202/16/AP620c3945e4b036dce99343c5.html>; "Where did Jilin's Pandemic Come From? How Will it Develop? Journalists Reporting Live with Zhao Qinglong, the Chief Expert in Infectious Disease Prevention and Control in Jilin Province," *people.com*, March 18, 2022, <http://jl.people.com.cn/n2/2022/0318/c349771-35180660.html>.
  2. "Shenzhen Becomes the First First-tier City in China to Close Down Its Factories, with Many Industries Facing the Challenge," *Central News Agency (CNA)*, March 14, 2022, <https://www.cna.com.tw/news/acn/202203140279.aspx>.

## 2. Security Implications

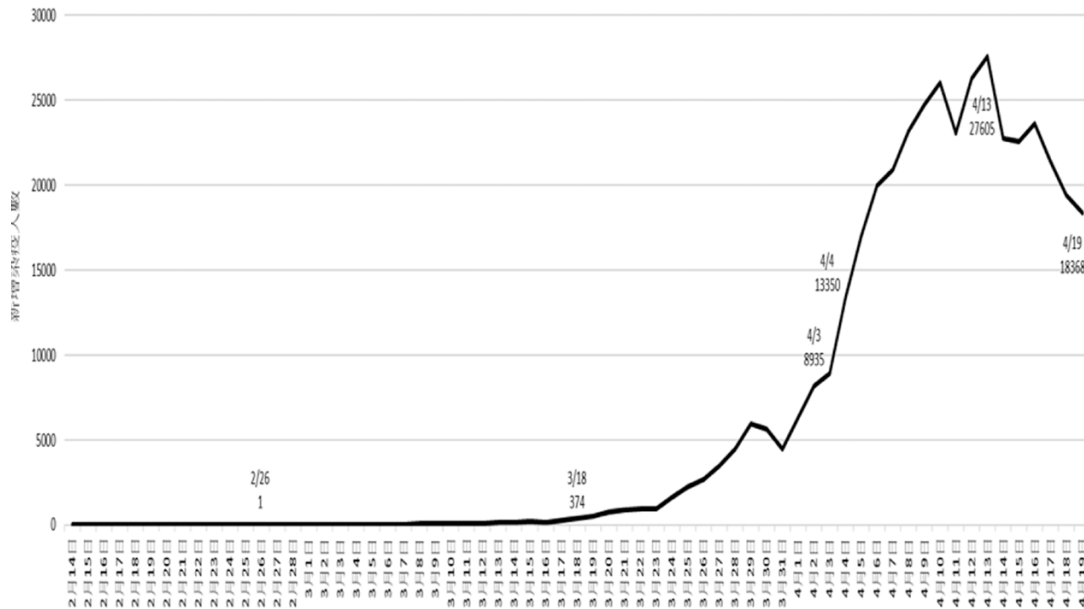
### 1. Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode is no longer effective

Two years since the pandemic began, Shanghai adopted the Precise Prevention and Control mode or “Catching the Mouse in the Urn” strategy with its abundant public health resource: controlling the pandemic by managing confirmed cases based on COVID-19 prevention checklists, rather than the “clear-cut” strategy featuring a complete lockdown and rounds of large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. To maintain its normal economic and social functions, Shanghai has tried hard not to break the urn and to lower the impact of the pandemic on the economy and society.

In fact, Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode has not deviated from the central government's policy of Dynamic Clearing. The Dynamic Clearing policy aims to identify and

isolate the patients as soon as possible to avoid the spread of the pandemic. It implies the central government urges the local government to implement all possible isolation of patients within a short time. This is called Social Clearing. Over the past two years and before the Omicron wave, Shanghai has been able to control the pandemic with the Precise Prevention and Control strategy, without a lockdown or large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. On the other hand, other local governments, which have poor public health resources, are not able to discover and control the cases in the early stages. Therefore, they can't adopt the Precise Prevention and Control strategy like Shanghai. To achieve the goal of Social Dynamic Clearing, most local governments adopt the clear-cut policy unanimously: They would rather “kill a hundred than miss one”. The checklist is maximized and people's daily routines are put on pause to achieve the goal of zero-COVID in a short time.

**Picture 1: Daily confirmed cases of COVID-19 in Shanghai (Feb 14, 2022 to Apr 19, 2022)**



Description: The confirmed cases in this article include patients with or without symptoms. Cases that are tested negative but later show symptoms are not excluded.

Sources: Shanghai Municipal Health Commission, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/yqtb/index.html>

Despite having handled COVID-19 well since its start, Shanghai has fallen short in the new wave of the pandemic since March 2022. Precise Prevention and Control mode has faced a challenge. The case-control and checklists are no longer effective as people infected with the highly transmissible Omicron variant usually show mild or no symptoms, and the number of confirmed cases has rocketed (as shown in Picture 1). This shows, that under the premise of Social

Dynamic Clearing, Shanghai is no longer able to balance the prevention strategy and the normal functioning of the economy and life.

**2. Xi Jinping decided Shanghai has to adopt a clear-cut strategy to achieve the goal of dynamic clearing**

Seen as China’s financial capital, Shanghai has a well-developed financial service industry, manufacturing industry, and high-tech industry. It also controls the

raw materials, exports, and imports in the Yangtze River Delta region. Therefore, the prevention strategy in Shanghai has to be well calculated and carefully deployed. Fairly speaking, compared with other cities, Shanghai cares more about striking a balance between the pandemic prevention and economic activities due to the role it plays in China's economy. Even in late March, when the number of cases was on the rise, Shanghai refused to go into lockdown or adopt large-scale COVID-19 nucleic acid tests. Instead, Shanghai's goal was still to reduce the range of city control and lower the impact on daily operations. However, the Shanghai municipal government suddenly announced on March 27 that the city was to go into a phased lockdown the next day,

with Huangpu River being the border.<sup>3</sup> Shanghai didn't exit lockdown as planned and instead entered a “citywide static management” for the first time, starting a citywide nucleic acid testing.<sup>4</sup>

This article believes that the policy shift reflects the involvement of the Xi Jinping administration in the pandemic while temporarily closing the dispute of the zero-COVID policy versus coexistence. From the Politburo Standing Committee (PSC) meeting on March 17, we can see the stance of the CCP and the senior officials on pandemic prevention: 1. Dynamic Clearing is more advanced than coexistence; 2. Dynamic Clearing is a political issue; thus, we need to firmly oppose the ideas of coexistence the virus or treat COVID like a flu; 3. the central

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3. “Notice on the New Round of Nucleic Acid Tests in the City,” *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 27, 2022, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220327/b9d985cedb<g id="4">4042a</g>2843fb8b<g id="6">108c<g id="7"></g><g id="8"></g>401f</g>4.html>.
  4. As of April 11, the Shanghai government has just announced the first batch of “three zones” . Communities were categorized into three types of zones: lockdown, controlled, and precautionary zones. Different control measures were adopted according to different zones. “The First Batch of the Three Zones List of Shanghai Has been Decided,” *Xinhuanet*, April 11, 2022, [http://www.news.cn/local/2022-04/11/c\\_1128548848.htm](http://www.news.cn/local/2022-04/11/c_1128548848.htm).

government can't ignore the fact that Shanghai hasn't gone into lockdown and has lost patience with their enhanced version of Precise Control.<sup>5</sup>

Due to the prevalence of the Omicron variant, many countries have chosen to coexist with COVID, which is to increase vaccination coverage, classify severe and mild cases to preserve medical resources, and store medical supplies to cope with the pandemic, which has already entered the community, and to alleviate the impact

on economic development. In early March this year, the media reported that the Chinese public health experts and officials will explore new opportunities in adjusting the pandemic prevention strategy and relaxing the policy of Dynamic Clearing. Since local governments have been imposing lockdowns and large-scale tests to meet the goal of Dynamic Clearing,<sup>6</sup> the country is suffering from a lack of resource provision, a broken supply chain, insufficient protection for

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5. Before late March, Shanghai still didn't want to resort to lockdown, but to isolate positive people and allow only negative people to go out. The plan is as follows: First, distinguish between key areas and non-key areas, and arrange nucleic acid testing or rapid antigen screening depending on the level of risk; Second, adopt rolling screening instead of "static" city-wide screening which stops residents' activities; Third, precisely control the infected status of each community through rolling screening. Depending on the different infectious conditions in each community, different control measures will be imposed. "Why are the Districts with Negative Nucleic Acid Test Results still in Lockdown? How to Ensure Transport when Stations in Jiading District are Stopped? Today's Release will Explain in Detail," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 23, 2022, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220323/1700f492a8b24f95922d97a520bf4bff.html>; "Why are Positive Cases Increasing? How to Use the Health Code? Can Masks Protect Against Omicron? Today's Release will Explain in Detail," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 25, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220325/9a9cddc3d6ca4d288ae992d563daf1c6.html>; "City Hall Press Conference Q&A (March 26, 2022)," *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, March 27, 2022, <https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/rdhy/20220327/c8b97e3dd988484b8ddc971.html>.
  6. In terms of policy exploration, according to media reports, in mid-April, the State Council is preparing to make public the Pilot Study on the Optimization of Prevention and Control Measures for COVID-19, adjusting the quarantine control measures from "14 days of centralized isolation + 7 days of home isolation" to "10 days of centralized isolation + 7 days of home isolation". "Xiamen Shortens the Quarantine Period for All Arrivals to 10+7," *Wen Wei Po*, April 14, 2022, <https://www.wenweipo.com/epaper/view/newsDetail/1514299059089838080.html>; "Chief Pandemic Prevention Scientist Zeng Guang: China May Eventually Coexist with COVID-19," *Radio Taiwan International*, March 1, 2022, <https://www.rti.org.tw/news/view/id/2125897>; "Foreign Media Suggests China is Seeking to Relax the 'Zero-Covid' Policy Will some Cities Go Into Coexistence?," *Radio Free Asia*, March 4, 2022, <https://www.rfa.org/cantonese/news/covidpolicy-03042022062248.html>.

citizens, and excessive workloads for local administrations. This harms the goal of achieving economic stability.<sup>7</sup>

However, from the Politburo Standing Committee meeting on March 17 to<sup>8</sup> articles in the *People's Daily* and *Xinhuanet* (the mouthpiece of the CCP) on March 29, we can see Xi Jinping's latest stance on the pandemic in 2022 based on the article published, “‘Always insist on putting people first and life first’ - Review of General Secretary Xi Jinping's command to fight the battle of

pandemic prevention and control and the economic and social development.”<sup>9</sup>

There are four main points: (1) Xi Jinping has always been hands-on during the pandemic, “personally directing and deploying” the fight against the pandemic; (2) Xi believes that in dealing with the Omicron variant, while always “insisting on putting the people and life first”, we should still insist on “dynamic clearing”; (3) he stressed the need for “rapid” local control of the pandemic and the implementation of the requirements of

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7. In early April, Li Keqiang has successively pointed out in the experts and entrepreneur's seminar (April 8), the main responsible local governments seminar (April 11), as well as the State Council Standing Committee (April 13) that "(China) should be highly alert to the complex evolution of the current world situation, the recent domestic outbreak, and unexpected factors, which bring greater uncertainty and challenges to the stable operation of the economy. To cope with the impact of the pandemic, consumption must resume development, encourage local governments to increase the scale of relief, and stabilize more consumer service market entities; the central government is also expected to arrange for banks to lower their standards, which will boost the ability of banks to invest in credit. “Stabilize Economic Fundamentals and Keep the Economy in a Reasonable Range,” *People's Daily Online*, April 9, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0409/c1024-32395003.html>; “Li Keqiang Presided over a Forum of the Main Local Governments in Charge of the Economic Situation, Stressing that Stability Should Take the Lead and Seek Progress Stably to Stabilize Employment and Prices to Support the Economy to Run in a Reasonable Range,” *People's Daily Online*, April 11, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0411/c1024-32396488.html>; “Li Keqiang Presided over the State Council Standing Meeting,” *People's Daily Online*, April 14, 2022, <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0414/c1024-32398501.html>.
8. “Analysis of the Situation of the COVID-19 Pandemic and the Deployment of Strict Control,” *People's Daily Online*, March 18, 2022, [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/18/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20220318\\_1-01.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/18/nw.D110000renmrb_20220318_1-01.htm).
9. “‘Always Insist on Putting People First and Life First’ - Review of General Secretary Xi Jinping's Command to Fight the Battle of Pandemic Prevention and Control and Economic and Social Development,” *People's Daily Online*, March 29, 2022, [http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/29/nw.D110000renmrb\\_20220329\\_3-01.htm](http://paper.people.com.cn/rmrb/html/2022-03/29/nw.D110000renmrb_20220329_3-01.htm).

“early detection, early reporting, early isolation, and early treatment”; and (4) China's pandemic prevention policy has a “systemic advantage” over that of the West in terms of the number of infections and deaths. The four main points share one thing in common: Xi Jinping believes that the quickest way to detect the virus should be implemented as a priority in disease prevention, meaning that even in Shanghai, the economic center of China, lockdown is not impracticable.

On April 2, Sun Chunlan, a member of the Politburo and Vice Premier of the State Council in charge of medical and health affairs, was transferred from Jilin to Shanghai to ensure that the Shanghai authorities would indeed implement the pandemic prevention policy in

accordance with the deployment of the Party Central Committee and the State Council.<sup>10</sup> Secretary of the Party Group and Director of the National Health Commission Ma Xiaowei reiterated the political stance of the Party Central Committee in dealing with the pandemic through Study Times on April 18, after Shanghai had been under lockdown for several days, that the Shanghai authorities must continue to adhere to the current measures to control the pandemic and must not make a mistake in their political stance.<sup>11</sup> Shanghai's subsequent pandemic prevention strategy took a major turn for the worse around the Qingming Festival when a series of political orders led to the fallout from the lockdown.

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10. According to official information, as of April 17, Sun Chunlan was still in Shanghai supervising the frontline fight against the pandemic.” Sun Chun-lan Stressed the Need to Fight as Hard as Possible, to Fight Quickly, and to Contain the Spread of the Pandemic in the Shortest Time Possible,” *Xinhuanet*, April 2, 2022, [http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2022-04/02/c\\_1128528609.htm](http://www.news.cn/politics/leaders/2022-04/02/c_1128528609.htm); “We will Work Together and Fast and Achieve the Goal of Zero-Covid as soon as Possible! Sun Chun-lan Investigated and Guided the Prevention and Control of the Pandemic in Shanghai,” *Shanghai Municipal Health Commission*, April 17, 2022, [https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220417/2c<g id="7"></g>2a1ab7321740ee a80aacdd9bafbf26.html](https://wsjkw.sh.gov.cn/xwfb/20220417/2c<g id=).

11. “Contain the Spread of the Pandemic as quickly as Possible to Firmly Consolidated the Hard-earned Prevention and Control Gains,” *People's Daily Online*, April 18, 2022, <http://theory.people.com.cn/n1/2022/0418/c40531-32401363.html>.



### 3. Trend Observation

#### 1. “Grid-based management” may not be able to fully strengthen the capacity of local administration

Long before the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee of the CCP (October 2013) proposed “grid-based” governance in the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform, some local governments (e.g., Beijing and Xiamen) were exploring community “grid-based” management as part of local governance innovation. However, it is worth noting that the “grid” is also a conduit for party organizations

to infiltrate the local community.<sup>12</sup> To put it simply, the “grid-based” community management means extending China’s local administrative organizations from the community (village) down to each household-based “grid”<sup>13</sup> In other words, community “grid-based” management means that the Chinese government wants to extend the core of local social governance down to the household, which is the basic unit in the society, so that party organizations and the government can grasp the “conflicts and problems” that occur in each “grid” and quickly eliminate them.

Prior to the outbreak of COVID-19, China overall had already become well-versed in developing “grid-based”

12. In the latest plan for community “grid-based” services in Guangzhou, one of the goals is to promote the full coverage of the party organization on the “grid” so that the party organization is rooted in the “grid” and extended to the masses. In addition, the community “grid” structure of Xiamen Gulangyu in 2012 shows that the chief grid leader is the secretary of the community party committee, and the grid leader is a member of the community party committee. “14<sup>th</sup> Five-Year Plan of the Guangzhou City Grid-based Service Management,” *The People’s Government of Guangzhou City*, December 1, 2021, [http://www.gz.gov.cn/zt/jjsswgh/sjzxgh/content/post\\_7942326.html](http://www.gz.gov.cn/zt/jjsswgh/sjzxgh/content/post_7942326.html); Mao Wanlei and Lu Zhikui, “Optimization of ‘Community Grid-based’ Management in Xiamen Comprehensive Reform Area,” *Southeast Academic*, Vol. 4, 2013, p. 78.

13. Take Gulangyu in Xiamen as an example, community “gridization” means roughly dividing the community under the street office into three grids, each grid is further divided into two groups, and each group is finally divided into one grid unit for every few hundred households (ranging from 200 to 300 households); Mao Wanlei and Lu Zhikui, “Optimization of ‘Community Gridization’ Management in Xiamen Comprehensive Reform Area,” *Southeast Academic*, Vol. 4, 2013, pp. 77-83.



communities.<sup>14</sup> At the beginning of the COVID outbreak in 2020, Xi Jinping pointed out the importance of community “grid-based” management in preventing the spread of the pandemic.<sup>15</sup> However, China's well-developed community “grid” focused only on the control aspects of the pandemic, such as strengthening the country’s collection of personal and social intelligence and data, but neglected the social welfare or livelihood protection, such as the deployment and distribution of goods, the classification of patients and how to deliver them to hospitals, the preparation of children for quarantine, and the rights of non-local household registration holders. In short, the administrative capacity of local governments in China has not been enhanced by the “grid-based” approach.

## **2. Shanghai Party Secretary Li Qiang’s career path may not take much of a turn**

Since Jiang Zemin (except Chen Liangyu), the next step in the career path of those who have held the post of Shanghai Party Secretary is to become a Politburo Standing Committee member. Therefore, in 2017, when Li Qiang (born in July 1959, aged 63), a member of the “Zhijiang New Army” (Xi Jinping’s old ministry), was transferred from the post of Party Secretary of Jiangsu Province to replace Han Zheng as Shanghai Party Secretary, attention was drawn to his career development. The fall of Shanghai from the altar as a role model in pandemic prevention has raised concerns about whether this will hurt Li Qiang’s future career. It may not be a concern as explained below:

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14. As early as 2016, foreign media criticized the Chinese government's push for “grid-based” community management for the surveillance and human rights violations it would bring. “British Media: China Regresses to ‘Grid-based Management’ to Monitor Citizens’ Lives,” *BBC Zhongwen*, April 4, 2016, [https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/press\\_review/2016/04/160404\\_press\\_review](https://www.bbc.com/zhongwen/trad/press_review/2016/04/160404_press_review).

15. The Politburo Standing Committee meeting on February 3, 2020 noted that “Local parties and governments should take responsibility for strengthening the grid management of community prevention and control and take more thorough and precise, effective measures to prevent the spread of the pandemic.” “The Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of the CCP Central Committee Held a Meeting to Study the Strengthening of the Prevention and Control of the COVID-19 Outbreak, with Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the CCP Central Committee, Presiding over the Meeting,” *Xinhuanet*, February 3, 2020, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-02/03/c\\_1125527334.htm](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/leaders/2020-02/03/c_1125527334.htm).

First of all, we cannot ignore the fact that since 2020, except for Jiang Chaoliang, the provincial party secretary of Hubei Province, where the pandemic broke out, no major party secretary has stepped down due to the severity of the pandemic. Second, Li Qiang did not disappear from the public eye when Shanghai's pandemic prevention policy was being adjusted or when the pandemic was at its worst, and continued to carry out his usual schedule as Shanghai Party Secretary, such as attending the Standing Committee meetings of the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee or inspecting the pandemic preparation status of each district in Shanghai.<sup>16</sup> Third, Shanghai's Precise Prevention and Control mode shares the same goal as the Dynamic Clearing insisted by the central government. The discrepancy between Shanghai and the central government is at

most the prevention and control strategies, instead of its political stance. Finally, Li Qiang's career started in Zhejiang Province, where he served for a long time, assuming the role of Secretary-General of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee in late 2004, and would have had many business contacts with Xi Jinping, then-Secretary of the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee. Regardless of the actual relationship between Xi Jinping and Li Qiang, it is clear from public information that Li Qiang's career did rise with Xi Jinping's succession in 2012.<sup>17</sup> In the beginning of succession, the top leader of the CCP tends to face a cabinet arranged by and promoted by the previous leader, and "their own people" have often yet to occupy key positions. Even Xi Jinping was not immune to this problem. Therefore, in his third term in office, expected later this year, it will be essential

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16.For more information about Li Qiang's Schedule, please refer to "Comrade Li Qiang's Report" , [www.eastday.com](http://www.eastday.com), <https://sh.eastday.com/liqiang.html>.

17.Li Qiang took over as the acting governor of Zhejiang Province in December 2012 and was subsequently promoted to the minister rank in January 2013. In June 2016, from the governor of Zhejiang Province to the secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee, he officially became a local "hand" . After a short experience as the secretary of the Jiangsu Provincial Party Committee, he was promoted again in October 2017 and has been the Shanghai Municipal Party Committee Secretary since then.

for Xi Jinping to have his own people in the Politburo Standing Committee. As Shanghai Party Secretary, Li Qiang is expected to secure a seat in the Politburo Standing Committee and will be a strong arm for Xi in his third term.

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