

The Authoritarian Commons

Based on six-year fieldwork across China including over 200 in-depth interviews, this book provides an ethnographic account of how hundreds of millions of Chinese homeowners practice democracy in and beyond their condominium complexes. Using interviews, survey data, and a comprehensive examination of laws, policies, and judicial decisions, this book also examines how the party-state in China responds to the risks and benefits brought by neighborhood democratization. Moreover, this book provides a framework to analyze different approaches to the authoritarian dilemma facing neighborhood democratization, which may increase the regime's legitimacy and expose it to the challenge of independent organizations at the same time. Lastly, this book identifies conditions under which neighborhood democratization can succeed.

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The Authoritarian Commons

Neighborhood Democratization in Urban China

SHITONG QIAO

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To my family

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Acknowledgments

The initial spark for this book was a series of messages that my former classmates at Peking University (PKU) Law School posted in late 2017 on their WeChat accounts and in online groups. These former classmates were typical middle-class professionals: averse to most activism and politically reticent. Such traits are common among Chinese of my generation. Having been born in the mid 1980s, we grew up in the midst of China's economic boom and experienced an awakening of rights consciousness but also witnessed an increasingly constrained political environment in the post-1989 context. Thus, we learned to enjoy our growing economic freedoms while carefully avoiding any activity that might be regarded as a confrontational stance against the party-state. And thus, I was surprised to learn, in these online posts, that several of my former classmates were willing not only to establish homeowners' associations (HoAs) but also to take on local government officials in the process. Just for fun, I conducted individual calls with several of the classmates and was amazed by how much such a seemingly trivial matter – the establishment of HoAs – had occupied their attention. Six years later, with more than 200 interviews with homeowner activists, local government employees, and real estate management professionals and dozens of neighborhood visits under my belt, I have come to accept a very different view of Chinese citizens.

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Abbreviations

ACME	average causal mediation effect
BBA	Beijing Bar Association
BJHC	Application Committee for Beijing Association of Homeowners' Associations
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
CCTV	China Central Television
CtR	cooperating to resist
DoJ	Department of Justice
EIE	environmental impact evaluation
GMAO	grassroots mass autonomous organization
HoAs	homeowners' associations
HoCs	homeowners' committees
MCs	management companies
MHC	Ministry of Housing and Construction
MoC	Ministry of Construction
MoCA	Ministry of Civic Affairs
NGO	nongovernmental organization
NIMBY	not in my backyard
NPC	National People's Congress
NPCSC	National People's Congress Standing Committee
PCSC	People's Congress Standing Committee
PRC	People's Republic of China
RCs	residents' committees
RMB	renminbi
SEZ	special economic zone
SHDHC	Shanghai Department of Housing and Construction
SoE	state-owned enterprise
SPC	Supreme People's Court
SZHC	Shenzhen Center of Promoting Transparent and Harmonious Communities