

## Governing Neighborhoods in Urban China: Changing State–Society Relations

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In recent years, scholars of Chinese studies and social sciences have focused increasingly on the concept of authoritarian responsiveness. A new strand of literature has emerged to explain why and how authoritarian regimes respond to public opinion. Beibei Tang's informative and excellent book contributes to this literature by investigating everyday politics at the grassroots level of urban neighbourhood governance in China. To elucidate the interactions between urban residents and the state, Tang introduces to us the notion of "hybrid authoritarianism," which emphasizes the involvement of diversified non-state actors and flexible governance practices under tightened political control. In a meticulous examination spanning five chapters, Tang presents a conceptually sound and empirically rich analysis that sheds new light on the party-state's responsiveness and the evolving state–society relations in China.

The book begins with an exploration of the economic and social context that has given rise to hybrid authoritarianism. Chapter one characterizes the diversification of residents' groups in urban neighbourhoods amid marketization while identifying an array of governance issues extending beyond conventional areas of social control, such as public security and birth control. These new issues encompass property management disputes, conflicts over property rights, disagreements with neighbourhood regulations and demands for the provision of services. Then, in chapter two, Tang delves into how the party-state has reshaped neighbourhood governance structures in response to these varied needs. By embracing both state agents (e.g. residents' committees) and non-state actors, including village collectives, homeowner associations, property management companies, recreational activity groups, and volunteers, the state has created a complex intermediary governance space, exemplified by both the "grid governance" scheme in middle-class neighbourhoods and co-governance structures in urbanized neighbourhoods. Tang argues that structural contexts enhance the reach and control of the party-state through party-building and co-option but stresses that the pluralization of decision-makers means that local state agents often use flexible, non-authoritarian methods to "mobilize and balance the participation of and interaction between different actors" (p. 64).

Chapters three and four demonstrate the functions of the intermediary governance space, focusing on conflict resolution and service provision, respectively. Tang's fieldwork reveals that both state agents and residents are motivated to engage in deliberation to address practical issues, and she shows that the involvement of state agents does not necessarily introduce coercion. Instead, state agents act mainly as the "leading coordinator" (p. 73) in resolving conflicts (e.g. land use disputes) between residents and the state. Through multiple communication channels, which are limited in China's formal political system, neighbourhood deliberations achieve realistic resolutions to local conflicts (e.g. putting government-sponsored projects on hold) and produce enduring impact on democratic governance because of public reasoning and the participation of both dominant and marginal groups. Likewise, in the realm of public service provision, diversified non-state and semi-state actors coordinate with one another under state supervision. The case studies of aged care within neighbourhoods illustrate that local state agents have, with adequate funding, delegated policy implementation responsibilities through government purchases of services and have engaged in collaborative practices with market actors and nonprofit organizations.

While the preceding chapters explore the state's role in urban neighbourhood management, Chapter five scrutinizes the perceptions and behaviours of non-state actors. Drawing on Michel Foucault's construct of governmentality, Tang posits that state-sponsored discourse, such as "self-governance," outlines the expected political conduct of citizens and non-state groups. She stresses that non-state actors are not passive recipients of orders from, or victims manipulated by, the party-state; rather, they exhibit a certain degree of autonomous participation, adopting strategies to gain collective benefits by working with state actors. In other words, non-state actors accept the leadership of the party-state while seeking greater autonomy and flexibility in urban neighbourhoods.

In the final chapter, Tang summarizes the five aforementioned key components constituting her hybrid authoritarianism thesis. She concludes that state and non-state actors have become interdependent and avers that they collaborate to shape local state-society relations in China, as government responsiveness facilitates mass mobilization and vice versa. This reciprocal relationship between the state and the masses highlights a departure from the traditional paternalistic governance model that previously dominated the field of Chinese local politics. While existing studies offered a similar argument, albeit one finding that state paternalism still prevailed over social autonomy, Tang, building on her extensive ethnographic work, offers compelling evidence to show that urban neighbourhood governance in China increasingly relies on social participation.

Tang's empirical data, collected over the past fifteen years from different types of urban neighbourhoods and across different regions, is one of this book's greatest strengths. After conducting more than two hundred interviews with local officials, service providers and ordinary residents, Tang amassed a unique and balanced set of on-the-ground information that enabled her to offer a comprehensive and nuanced account of urban neighbourhood governance in China.

For the reasons above, *Governing Neighborhoods in Urban China* will be essential reading for both undergraduate and graduate students of contemporary Chinese society and politics. Additionally, social scientists seeking overarching theories will find the key concept and underlying logic of local governance in this book applicable to other authoritarian contexts. Comparativists will benefit from assessing the differences between "hybrid authoritarianism" and extant varieties of "authoritarianism with adjectives." Sociologists might be interested in the impact of social stratification on participatory autonomy, while China scholars could further investigate how the pluralization of neighbourhood governance affects political trust and regime legitimacy. In essence, Tang's book lays the groundwork for future research and broader debates on the various mechanisms through which authoritarian regimes exert control over society at the local level.

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## Reinventing the Chinese City

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Richard Hu's new book adopts an eye-catching title, *Reinventing the Chinese City*, which arouses curiosity as to what is the old Chinese city and why and how it is being reinvented. By investigating