

Authoritarian policing with Chinese characteristics: A case study of motorcycle bans in the Pearl River Delta

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Abstract Despite unprecedented economic and social changes over the past three decades, China remains an authoritarian regime. However, the current authoritarian regime differs in many ways from that under Mao. Since the nature of a police force reflects the character of the political regime within which it operates, this paper explores current police practices in China. It argues that policing in China is neither completely authoritarian nor democratic, but best understood as soft-authoritarian. The case study examines policing of a motorcycle ban that was implemented to prevent motorcycle snatch theft in the Pearl River Delta. The police remained authoritarian and used many coercive strategies to push for the motorcycle ban. However, their hard-line strategies were matched by some soft-line persuasive tactics. I argue that changing state-society relations are leading to resistance to hard-authoritarian policing and contributing to soft-authoritarian policing in China.

Introduction

In March 2011, China's top legislator, Wu Bangguo, announced that a socialist system of laws with Chinese characteristics has been established in China. Wu regarded it as a major milestone in the history of the development of a Chinese socialist democratic legal system [1]. Indeed, during its transformation from a planned to a market economy over the past three decades, China has made a great effort to change its legislation. For example, the Police Law of the People's Republic of China was enacted in 1995 as an effort to modernize and establish rule of law for the police. However, how these laws are implemented suggests a different story [2, 3]. Like police forces in many other authoritarian regimes, the main tasks of the Chinese police remains to protect the Chinese Communist party-state and maintain its power [4]. While it is premature to claim that China's police force has been transformed into one that emphasizes professionalization, rule of law, and

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