

DOCTORAL THESIS

A home of one's own: ways of life in privately governed commodity housing estates in urban China

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Date of Award:
2007

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**A Home of One's Own: Ways of Life in Privately Governed
Commodity Housing Estates in Urban China**

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Principal Supervisor: Prof. LI Si-ming

Hong Kong Baptist University

June 2007

ABSTRACT

In the 1980s the People's Republic of China began to introduce a series of housing reforms to transform the state-subsidized urban housing system into a market-based housing economy. As a result of the construction of commodity housing as well as the selling of public housing to sitting tenants, China claims to be a nation of homeowners. The new homeowners of commodity housing, different from the tenants of public housing, have their vested interests in house purchase and in protecting the quality of life in their new neighborhood and the value of their home.

The thesis, based on a research done between 2004 and 2006, analyzes the construction and its socio-spatial processes of commodity housing estates in a suburban area of Guangzhou, Panyu, and examines the responses of the residents to deal with the life in privately governed commodity housing estates. In my account of the transformation of suburban space and the residents' involvement and reaction to it, I argue that the production, negotiation and governance of the new social space is a highly complex process, influenced by the interaction between the real estate business actors, different levels of government and the residents. The residents are exercising autonomy and agency, in their quest to attain status positions and rights of "homeowners" through dealing with the developer and the property management company without the patronage of the *danwei* and the state.

The neighborhood-based virtual communities have emerged to become an

important tool utilized by Chinese urban residents in commodity housing consumption and management in the bewildered market setting in which the developers and the State continue to manipulate rules and regulations to their own advantage. The neighborhood-based virtual communities have been deployed to serve clear, demonstrated needs — information exchange, collective action organization and enhancement of sense of community — thereby improving their positions. Based on a household survey data the thesis tests a hypothesis that living in a housing estate with a neighborhood-based virtual community facilitates community participation. The results of logistic regression analysis suggest that wired status is the most important variable to predict the probability of establishing homeowners' association in a commodity housing estate, indicating the enhancement of community involvement. The neighborhood-based virtual communities have indeed improved the strength of individual homeowners by extending the public sphere and enriching the repertoires of collective action, which signal that civil society is on the rise in urban China.

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