



State and Agents in China: Disciplining Government Officials

Yongshun Cai

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Chinese government officials have played a crucial role in China's economic development, but they are also responsible for severe problems, including environmental pollution, violation of citizens' rights, failure in governance, and corruption. How does the Chinese Party-state respond when a government official commits a duty-related malfeasance or criminal activity? And how does it balance the potential political costs of disciplining its own agents versus the loss of legitimacy in tolerating their misdeeds? *State and Agents in China* explores how the party-state addresses this dilemma, uncovering the rationale behind the selective disciplining of government officials and its implications for governance in China.

By examining the discipline of state agents, Cai shows how selective punishment becomes the means of balancing the need for and difficulties of disciplining agents, and explains why some erring agents are tolerated while others are punished. Cai finds that the effectiveness of punishing erring officials in China does not depend so much on the Party-state's capacity to detect and punish each erring official but on the threat it creates when the Party-state decides to mete out punishment. Importantly, the book also shows how relaxed discipline allows reform-minded officials to use rule-violating reform measures to address local problems, and how such reform measures have significant implications for the regime's resilience.

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