Bicycles will tear us apart? Drawbacks of urban governance and cycling promotion in Guangzhou (China)

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Over the last ten years, urban cycling has been reestablished as a popular mode of transportation in cities across China, once known as the “Cycling Kingdom”. This article examines the case of Guangzhou to identify how civic actors are contributing to that change in a transitional circumstance. Rooted in the context of the economic transition, a fundamental shift emerges in the local government’s view of cycling that leads to the initiation of political opportunities for civic pro-cycling actors. The activists try to establish connections with senior governmental officials in order to accumulate certain social capital and gain legitimacy. Their aim is to advance the visibility, practice and public support of both urban cycling and themselves, and they use the central governmental pro-cycling attitude as an umbrella when challenging local governmental anti-cycling decisions/actions. Their semi-institutionalised status, however, has weakened their impact and subjected them to some political risks and uncertainties. This research contributes to specifying the key aspects of the potential conflict and cooperation in order to enhance civic activism and local cycling governance within the particular Chinese transitional political and urban context.

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_All are welcome!_