Political Science 244d
Contentious Politics in Contemporary China
Kevin J. O’Brien

Fall 2017
202 Barrows
Wednesday 12-2pm,
Office Hours: By appt. either in
Barrows 712 or 1995 University Ave.

Course Description:

Much political behavior, particularly in countries such as China, does not take place within institutionalized channels. This is mainly because the Party/State aggregates preferences poorly and the popular classes often become frustrated with existing opportunities for participation. Moreover, honest elections occur only at the lowest levels -- if at all -- and many forms of political activity are forbidden. In these circumstances, how do ordinary Chinese press for attention to their grievances and for a modicum of responsiveness? And how do the authorities respond to popular activism, whether it appears on the streets or online? In this seminar, we will read recently-published books and journal articles that bring to light ongoing debates and emerging topics in the literature on protest and repression. We will pay particular attention to forms of contention that are somewhat noisier and more overt than “everyday resistance” yet still fall short of open rebellion.

Course materials:

1) Yongshun Cai, Collective Resistance in China: Why Popular Protests Succeed or Fail (Stanford, 2010) – paperback

2) Xi Chen, Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China (Cambridge, 2012) – paperback

3) Diana Fu, Mobilizing Without the Masses: Control and Contention in China (Cambridge, 2017) – available 10/31/17, paperback

4) Christopher Heurlin, Responsive Authoritarianism: Land, Protests and Policymaking (Cambridge, 2016) – hardcover only, but e-copy available in the UCB library

5) Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China (Cambridge, 2006) – paperback

Course Requirements:

3 seminar papers (30% of final grade) -- Due Monday at 5pm of the three weeks for which a student is responsible. (Copies should be e-mailed to each seminar member and to the instructor). Each paper (no more than 3-4 double-spaced pages) should critically engage the readings assigned for that week. Students may focus on gaps or conflicts in one or more of the readings and may bring in relevant material from other courses. The purpose of these papers is to stimulate class discussion. Papers should not be a summary but rather an effort to highlight an important substantive or theoretical point (or points), a methodological issue, and/or an assumption that underlies or permeates the reading(s). Efforts should be made to explore ways in which the readings relate to each other and how they help us improve our understanding of popular contention and/or Chinese politics. You might also consider how the readings speak to other areas of political science or other areas of the world with which you are familiar. During class, each author will need to be ready to explain (and expand upon) the points he or she raised. Hint: When preparing your papers, pretend you are an overburdened student racing to figure out "why this article or book is so important" the night before your qualifying exams.

1 15-20 page research paper or a take-home essay exam (50% of final grade). Students may also opt to do a take-home exam made up of two essay questions.

Class participation (20% of course grade) -- All students will be expected to participate in class discussions and to come to class prepared to consider the seminar papers for that week.

Aug. 23) Introduction and Ground Rules

Aug. 30) The State of the Field: Review Essays, Typologies and Looking Forward

Peter Lorentzen, “Designing Contentious Politics in Post-1989 China,” Modern China, 35 pp., forthcoming (at the “online first” tab of the journal)


Two Typologies:
Lily Tsai, “Constructive Noncompliance,” Comparative Politics 47:3 (April 2015): 253-79


Class Discussants:

1) 2)

Part I: Debates and Emerging Topics

Sept. 6) Rightful Resistance (and Our Critics)

Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China (Cambridge, 2006) (entire)


Class Discussants:

1) 2)

Sept. 13) Rights Consciousness vs. Rules Consciousness and Legal Consciousness


Lianjiang Li, “Rights Consciousness and Rules Consciousness in Contemporary China,” China Journal 64 (July 2010): 47-68


Class Discussants:

1) 2)

Sept. 20) Protest Leadership: Organizing and Sustaining Contention


Yongshun Cai and Zhiming Sheng, “Homeowner’s Activism in Beijing: Leaders with Mixed Motivations,” China Quarterly 215 (September 2013): 513-32


Discussants:

1) 2)

Sept. 27) Mobilizing Structures and Protest Diffusion: Environmental Organizations, Senior Citizen Societies, Lineage Networks, Religion and Migrants


Class Discussants:

1) 2)

**Oct. 4) Signaling and Information**


Class Discussants:
1) 2)

Oct. 11) Repression, Hard and Soft


Feng Chen and Xin Xu, “‘Active Judiciary’: Judicial Dismantling of Workers’ Collective Action in China,” China Journal 67 (January 2012): 87-108


Class Discussants:
1) 2)

Part 2: Recent Books

October 18) History, Opportunity and Tactics

Xi Chen, Social Protest and Contentious Authoritarianism in China (entire)

Class Discussants:
1) 2)
**Oct. 25**) Instructor Abroad – No Class  (Rescheduled during RRR week or another time convenient for everyone)

**Nov. 1) Why Protests Succeed or Fail**

Yongshun Cai, *Collective Resistance in China* (entire)


Class Discussants:

1)  

2)

**Nov. 8) The Policy Consequences of Protest**

Christopher Heurlin, *Responsive Authoritarianism: Land, Protests and Policymaking* (entire) (only hardcover available to purchase; but UCB library has an e-copy)

Class Discussants:

1)  

2)

**Nov. 15) New Forms of Protest: Cyberprotest, Discourse Competition and Censorship**

Guobin Yang, *China’s Contested Internet* (chapters to be determined)

Rongbin Han, “Defending the Authoritarian Regime Online: China’s ‘Voluntary Fifty-Cent Army,’” *China Quarterly* 224 (December 2015): 1006-25


Class Discussants:

1)  

2)

**Nov. 22) No Class -- Thanksgiving**
Nov. 29) Rethinking What’s Collective About Collective Action

Diana Fu, Mobilizing Without the Masses: Control and Contention in China (Cambridge, 2017) (entire) (available in paperback, 10/31/17)

Class Discussants:
1) 2)

Dec. 6) Are We Making Too Much of Protest? Quiescence, Hegemony and Living with Grievances


Martin King Whyte, “China’s Dormant and Active Social Volcanoes,” China Journal 75 (July 2016): 9-37


Discussants:
1) 2)

Final Papers or Exam Due: December 15