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

Spring 2012  
791 Barrows  
Wednesday 12-2pm,  
Office Hours: By Appt. (T, W, Th)  
712 Barrows

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? In this seminar, we will investigate how concepts developed to study social movements and collective action help (or fail to help!) us understand protest in contemporary China. Substantively, we will examine the origins, dynamics and outcomes of contention and the politics of repression and accommodation. We will range from open challenges to authority to "everyday forms of resistance," to actions that are veiled, even questionably political. We will pay particular attention to forms of contention that are somewhat noisier and more overt than "everyday resistance" yet still fall far short of open rebellion.

Course materials:

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

2) Ching Kwan Lee, Against the Law: Labor Protests in China’s Rustbelt and Sunbelt (California, 2007) — paperback

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


7) A packet of book chapters and articles not available on the Web

8) Articles on the web, available through UCB library “electronic journals” tab

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). If there is sufficient demand, 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.

**Jan. 18) Introduction and Ground Rules – Background Reading**


**Jan. 25) Thinking about Contention: Concepts from the Social Movement Literature**

Sidney Tarrow, Power in Movement: Social Movements, Collective Action and Politics (Cambridge, 2011) (entire, but skim chapters 3 and 10 focusing on summaries; pay attention to concepts over empirics and examples)


Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, preface
Class Discussants:

1)  2)  3)

Feb. 1) Thinking About Contention: Forms of Resistance


*Everyday Resistance:*


*More Noisy, Overt Forms of Resistance under State Socialism:*

Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, *Rightful Resistance in Rural China,* “Rightful Resistance,” chapter 1

Jeremy Brooke Straughn, “‘Taking the State at its Word’: The Arts of Consentful Contention in the German Democratic Republic,” *American Journal of Sociology,* 110:6 (May 2005): 1598-1650 (focus on similarities and differences with O’Brien/Li chapter) (on web)


Class Discussants:

1)  2)  3)

Feb. 8) Applying Theories to China: First Cuts

*Social Movement Concepts Meet Chinese Cases*


*Everyday Resistance in China*


Class Discussants:
1) 2) 3)

Feb. 15) Opportunities to Act Up


Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, “Opportunities and Perceptions,” chapter 2 (quasi-structuralists who still want to make room for perceptions)

Teresa Wright, “Student Movements in China and Taiwan,” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 26-53 (opportunities in comparative perspective)


Xi Chen, “Collective Petitioning and Institutional Conversion,” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 54-70 (historical institutionalism comes to the social movement field)


Rachel E. Stern and Kevin J. O’Brien, “Politics at the Boundary: Mixed Signals and the Chinese State,” Modern China (March 2012), forthcoming (on web at Modern China’s “online first” tab)

+ Review Tarrow (pp. 157-79)

Class Discussants:
1) 2) 3)

Feb. 22) Framing and Claiming

Focus on Workers and Their Response to Dislocation
William Hurst, “Mass Frames and Worker Protest,” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 71-87 (a structural, bottom-up take on framing)

Feng Chen, “Worker Leaders and Framing Factory-Based Resistance,” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 88-107 (note contrasts with Hurst article)


Framing by Others

Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, “Boundary-Spanning Claims,” chapter 3


Review Tarrow (pp. 140-56)

Class Discussants:

1)  2)  3)

Feb. 29) Elite Allies?

Michael Lipsky, “Protest as a Political Resource,” American Political Science Review 62:4 (1968): 1144-58 (a classic, too little read these days) (on web)

Find a copy of Zhang Yimou’s film “Qiu Ju Goes to Court” and watch it

The Search for Allies:


Lianjiang Li, “Political Trust in Rural China,” Modern China 30:2 (April 2004): 228-58 (on web)

Transnational Allies?


Not Finding Allies

Ethan Michelson, “Justice from Above or Justice from Below? Lessons from Rural China for the Study of Disputing,” China Quarterly (March 2008) (the most sustained critique of the focus on allies) (on web)

Class Discussants:
1) 2) 3)

Mar. 7) Mobilizing Structures

Space, Cyberspace, and International Linkages


Patricia Thornton, “Manufacturing Dissent in Transnational China: Boomerang, Backfire or Spectacle?” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 179-204

Networks


Yongshun Cai, Collective Resistance in China, chapter 5, pp. 87-109

Organization (or Lack of It)


Review Tarrow (pp. 119-39)

Class Discussants:

1) 2) 3)

Mar. 14) Repertoires of Contention: Taking History Seriously

Charles Tilly, “Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758-1834,” Social Science History 17:2 (Summer 1993): 253-79 (focus on concepts over the detailed empirics) (on web)


Elizabeth J. Perry, “Rural Violence in Socialist China,” China Quarterly 103 (September 1985): 414-40 (on web) (the reactive, proactive, competitive distinction applied to China)


+ Review Tarrow (pp. 37-56, 95-118)

Class Discussants:

1) 2) 3)

Mar. 21) Tactics, Tactical Innovation, and Leadership

Contemporary Tactics – Disruption and Misdirection

Yongshun Cai, Collective Resistance in China, chapters 2, 6, and 7, pp. 21-42, 110-54

Tactical Innovation?

Doug McAdam, “Tactical Innovation and the Pace of Insurgency,” American Sociological Review 48 (December 1983): 735-54 (on web)

Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, “Tactical Escalation,” chapter 4


Leadership


Class Discussants:
1) 2) 3)

Apr. 4) Outcomes


Kevin J. O’Brien and Lianjiang Li, Rightful Resistance in Rural China, “Outcomes” and “Implications for China,” chapters 5 and 6

Yongshun Cai, Collective Resistance in China, chapters 7 and 8, pp. 155-99


Yanfei Sun and Dingxin Zhao, “State-Society Relations and Environmental Campaigns,” in Popular Protest in China, pp. 144-162

+ Review Tarrow (pp. 215-33)

Class Discussants:
1) 2) 3)

Apr. 11) Taking Grievances Seriously


Class Discussants:

1) 2) 3)

**Apr. 18) Regional Comparisons**

Ching Kwan Lee, *Against the Law: Labor Protests in China’s Rustbelt and Sunbelt* (entire)


*Focus on Xinjiang (Before and after the 2009 Riots)*


Justin V. Hastings, “Charting the Course of Uyghur Unrest,” *China Quarterly*, No. 208 (December 2011): 893-912 (on web)

Class Discussants:

1) 2) 3)
Apr. 25) New Forms of Protest: Cyberprotest in China

Guobin Yang, The Power of the Internet in China: Citizen Activism Online (entire)

Class Discussants:

1) 2) 3)