

Rightful Resistance in Rural China. By KEVIN J. O'BRIEN and LIANJIANG LI. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2006. xvii, 179 pp. \$75.00 (cloth); \$27.99 (paper).
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Every year brings official reports of increasing rural protest in China, such as villagers petitioning higher officials, peaceful demonstrations, as well as violent clashes between protesters and police. Many international journalists and researchers interpret these reports as a warning of impending social instability in the Chinese countryside. Yet, for the moment, these protests do not threaten the authority of the central leadership in Beijing. Indeed, much of the rural resistance is directed at local officials at the village, township, and even county levels, and support for the central leadership is high among rural residents. While the number of reports describing these incidents in great detail continues to increase, few attempt to adequately explain this contradiction or put rural resistance in China into a broader theoretical and empirical framework.

Kevin O'Brien and Lianjiang Li directly address this issue by explaining how rightful resistance in rural China occurs. The authors make an important theoretical contribution to the literature on social protest with rich empirical data from rural China spanning more than a decade of fieldwork. Rightful resistance is the use of the laws, policies, and values of the central leadership to defy local elites who ignore or abuse these laws (p. 2). Rather than stay under the radar and avoid higher officials, rightful resisters seek the attention of higher authorities to legitimize their claims. This definition of rightful resistance applies to social protest in China as well as in other countries. The authors skillfully place the phenomenon within the broader literature and comparative perspective, as they show how rightful resistance can be identified in other contexts, such as apartheid South Africa, the former East Germany, and the American South.

While the authors make a number of important points that advance the study of social movements and political development in China, three are worth noting. First, China is *not* a unified, monolithic single-party system in which the central leadership can fully implement policies throughout China at will. The authors "unpack" the state and demonstrate how the administrative system is a multi-layered structure in which officials at different places in the hierarchy have divergent interests, and these individuals can decide whether to fully carry out beneficial policies such as limitations on fee collection and village elections (p. 51). As a result, a number of policies and laws are unevenly implemented throughout rural China.

Second, this multilayered structure also presents political opportunities for rightful resisters who utilize this gap between the central leadership intentions and actual implementation. Here, the role of information is particularly important. It is difficult for the central leadership to monitor every local official in rural China. Therefore, rightful resisters act as "third parties" or watchdogs to alert higher authorities of local cadre misdeeds (p. 29). The center tolerates rightful resistance because it provides information about local policy violations.

However, the central leadership only allows atomized resistance by individual villagers, but *not* farmers as a group to challenge local officials. Third, violent protest and clashes with police are typically the result of tactical escalation, and only occur after other legal means, such as petitions, have been exhausted. The authors state that rightful resisters “take strong measures only after courteous ones fail at each level” (p. 92).

The authors are also well aware of the limitations and consequences of protest. Many resisters put themselves and their families at risk when they seek the attention of higher authorities. O’Brien and Li present a balanced and a very real picture of the challenges that rightful resisters face. They offer a number of examples in which rightful resisters have been threatened, intimidated, and even beaten by abusive local cadres trying to hide their illegal activities from higher authorities. Still, many resisters continue to press their claims despite these formidable challenges. Thus, O’Brien and Li end on a cautious note. If the central leadership does not deliver on enough of their promises, then there may be a rise in petitions and demonstrations and an eventual escalation in violent protests. In order to maintain political legitimacy in the eyes of rightful resisters, the central leadership needs to close the gap between what they say and what they do (p. 125).

This book is a major contribution to the growing literature on political development in China. It is focused and clearly written, and readers can easily follow where the engaging empirical examples fit into the literature and theoretical framework. I highly recommend it to scholars and students (graduates and undergraduates) who are interested in social movement theory and political protest in China, and its findings should appeal to many others both within and beyond the China field.

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Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture. By AN-YI PAN. Sinica Leidensia Series, vol. 77. Leiden: Brill, 2007. xxiv, 396 pp. \$218.00 (cloth).
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Recent scholarship on Chinese Buddhist art has taken many different approaches, ranging from the examination of broad themes (such as art and political authority) to studies of specific sites (such as Longmen and Dunhuang), specific figures (such as Guanyin), or specific texts (such as the *Lotus Sutra*). An-yi Pan’s *Painting Faith: Li Gonglin and Northern Song Buddhist Culture* takes an altogether different tack and focuses on the art and cultural milieu of a single artist, the eleventh-century Chinese official Li Gonglin (1041–1106). I cannot think of another scholar in the field who has attempted anything similar, and Pan is thus to be commended for the originality of his approach.