RIGHTFUL RESISTANCE IN RURAL CHINA

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"To the study of resistance, this superb book, is akin to the discovery of a major ‘new species.’ ‘Rightful resistance’ may well be the most significant form of popular protest in quasi-authoritarian systems. This closely-reasoned, broadly comparative and innovative book will inspire many new research programs in its wake."

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"In six short but dense chapters, Rightful Resistance in Rural China gives the concept its fullest development and provides a sweeping picture of rural contention in contemporary China. Yet above all, this book marks the authors' systematic and innovative effort to converse with scholars of collective action, and as such, may perhaps best be seen as their gift to sociology. Readers of this journal will delight in it."

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"This slim volume is a little gem. After spending more than a decade researching rural protest in post-reform China, O’Brien and Li have masterfully synthesized their collaborative work in this elegantly written book. While providing substantive new material from recent surveys and interviews, as well as from research by various Chinese scholars, this book is first of all a theoretical contribution to the literature on social protest. As such, it should attract the attention of scholars both within and beyond the China field... In conclusion, the book defines rightful resistance with utmost clarity and rigour. The size of the volume is deceptive: this is a theoretical book, never overburdened with empirical evidence. But nonetheless there is evidence, succinctly recalled where necessary. The same holds for the innovative theoretical advances. Thoroughly familiar with the literature on popular protest, the authors succinctly mention relevant works, wasting no space on secondary digressions. This closely reasoned, clearly argued book is eminently suitable for teaching adoption in the fields of Chinese studies and political science."

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**Rightful Resistance in Rural China**

How can the poor and weak ‘work’ a political system to their advantage? Drawing mainly on interviews and surveys in rural China, Kevin O’Brien and Lianjiang Li show that popular action often hinges on locating and exploiting divisions within the state. Otherwise powerless people use the rhetoric and commitments of the central government to try to fight misconduct by local officials, open up clogged channels of participation, and push back the frontiers of the permissible. This ‘rightful resistance’ has far-reaching implications for our understanding of contentious politics. As O’Brien and Li explore the origins, dynamics, and consequences of rightful resistance, they highlight similarities between collective action in places as varied as China, the former East Germany, and the United States, while suggesting how Chinese experiences speak to issues such as opportunities to protest, claims radicalization, tactical innovation, and the outcomes of contention.

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