

to consolidate their authorities and promote their ideas. Mao Zedong was perhaps an extreme case in this respect.

Guo's study provides students of China studies and the general public with an in-depth reading of Chinese political culture and its effect on Chinese leaders and their political pursuits. But it demands a more profound question. Why has an ideal political leader, a *junzi* as a person and a sage-king as a ruler, never come into being in China, despite the relentless pursuit by literati, the would-be leadership class in China, of *ren* and *li*, and the ceaseless efforts of Chinese scholars to perfect Confucianism in terms of governance? Guo notes that "Chinese political thought does not favour an institutionalized political system ... , but rather relies on a ruler's personal qualities" (p. xiii) for good government. Indeed, given the innate flaws in political thought, fruitless efforts to produce an ideal political leader in over two thousands years, and the ultimate failure to establish a truly "benevolent government" despite repeated revolutions and heroic sacrifices, it is both intriguing and astonishing that Chinese leaders and the general public fail to understand that essentially it is the system, not good people, that matters for a good and accountable government. In this sense, cultural explanations for political outcomes in China and political leaders' behaviour perhaps explain too much, for political decisions and policy are made more often than not in consideration of *realpolitik*, and too little because, as Robert Putnam reveals in his *Making Democracy Work: Civic Traditions in Modern Italy* (Princeton University Press, 1993), political institutions do foster the culture that reinforces the system, although a civic society is vital for political development.

JING HUANG

Chinese Society: Change, Conflict and Resistance. Edited by ELIZABETH J. PERRY and MARK SELDEN. [London and New York: Routledge, 2000. xii + 249 pp. £16.99. ISBN 0-415-22334-2.]

In all likelihood the event with the largest political and social impact in the East-Asian region would be the democratization of China. However, it is also evident that China's political reform, like its economic transition, is taking on the form of a cautious and gradual restructuring. Out of pragmatic reasons – allowing society to *assist* the government in areas where it should not govern, is incapable of governing, or cannot govern – the state has unofficially relaxed its grip over certain social spheres such as women's rights, social welfare and rural poverty. As a result, marked shifts in state–society relations have taken place allowing for greater freedom of association, speech and popular contention. On the other hand, the imprisonment in December 1998 of leaders of the newly established Chinese Democratic Party, and the harsh repression of the *falun gong* leave no doubt about the intentions of the central leadership: the state sets out the boundaries of individual liberties, and these run

along strict political, ethnic and religious divides. The alternating policies of informal toleration and strict control have shaped the dynamics of Chinese popular contention, which sometimes bear striking similarities to other (semi)authoritarian states-in-transition.

This relatively unexplored terrain forms the theme for the volume edited by Perry and Selden. In this sense, they not only address a highly critical issue of social change in China, but also a timely one. To many observers China has reached a crossroads: citizens have gained and become more conscious of their rights, and further stalling of political reforms might foment widespread popular discontent and protest. As Perry and Selden write: "Is Chinese society a ticking time bomb, about to detonate the Communist state? Have the wide-ranging patterns of resistance and pressure for change from below generated a fundamental transformation in popular consciousness or in the state–society relationship?" (p. 13). The various eloquently written contributions in this volume are a measure of this potentially explosive socio-political mixture.

The volume starts off with a solid introduction that gives essential background information on the reforms, and the various social cleavages and sources of conflict. Catering to the needs of students and teachers, the introduction also makes reference to theories and concepts on social movements (framing, resource mobilization, grievance, political opportunities and constraints) and thus provides a good framework for reading the chapters. One theme that runs through the collection is the contradictory role of local authorities in shaping popular contention. While they might be inclined to suppress voices of dissent, local leaders just as often protect, legitimize, and voice popular resistance. We find such cases in the vivid descriptions by Zweig (village officials standing up for the rights of their constituencies that have fallen victim to processes of urbanization, commodification and industrialization); Bulag (Mongol officials that articulate ethnic resistance against the interests of Chinese migrants); C.K. Lee (union cadres siding with increasingly dissatisfied migrant and laid-off workers); White (officials defending farmers that resist the one-child policy); and Jing (local cadres leading villagers in environmental protests against the state).

Looking at the other side of the state–society equation, many chapters also devote their attention to the specific dynamics of popular contention and social movements. Such examples can be found in the contributions by Pei, who notes a shift in the dissident democracy movement from confrontational to more indirect, legal stratagems against the state; Zheng, who describes the impact of social and economic transition in shaping the differentiated resistance strategies of women's groups; Mallee, relating the stories of the millions of migrant farmers whose active resistance effectively eroded the state's control mechanisms over rural society – the *hukou* or registration system; Feuchtwang, writing on the differences between outright political opposition through revitalized religious traditions such as in modern Xinjiang or Tibet, versus the negotiated, less visible religious contention through the preservation of

local deities, temple cults and festivals; and S. Lee and Kleinman, who examine the little-researched, yet, controversial issue of suicide – with particular reference to female suicide – which runs counter not only to modern Chinese moral values, but traditional Confucian and Daoist values as well.

For such a comprehensive volume it is a pity that no contribution explicitly examines the dispersing, heterogenizing implications of globalization on popular protest and grievance. Following Arjun Appadurai, how did global flows of economic, technological, cultural, ethnic, and religious concepts affect local resistance and contention? Which flows propelled by transnational capital proved decisive in moulding social conflict and cleavage in China: those from the West or those from the East – Japan, Hong Kong and Taiwan? One social arena in which global flows have directly shaped state–society relations is the development sector, where international donors intentionally organized civic, voluntary groups that today occupy negotiated, at times contested, spaces in society. Barmé’s contribution is the sole article in the volume that is (more narrowly) devoted to this topic, as he explores the role of Hong Kong and Taiwan media in shaping discourse of urban intelligentsia and artists.

However, these are only minor points of criticism. Through well-researched articles that draw on in-depth fieldwork and ample Chinese and Western sources, this edited volume gives a good overview of the hotspots of Chinese society, that might or might not one day evolve into social movements or cycles of contention. I had long since earmarked this book for reading, and now that I have digested it, I am well satisfied and believe it would make an excellent textbook for courses on modern China, social movements and popular protest.

PETER HO

The Transformation of Rural China. By JONATHAN UNGER. [Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2002. ix + 256 pp. \$23.95. ISBN 0-7656-0552-X.]

This book brings together Jonathan Unger’s wide-ranging research on rural China over the past 30 years. It covers most topics of interest to students of rural politics and society. Four chapters deal with the “Countryside under Mao,” focusing on the 1960s and 1970s, and seven with the reform era. Several of the chapters appeared in earlier versions in journals or as book chapters. The Mao chapters draw heavily on the well-known book, *Chen Village*, which Unger co-authored with Anita Chan and Richard Madsen. The author relies heavily on interviews, gathered initially from refugees in Hong Kong and later from numerous field trips to Guangdong, the south-west, Qinghai and elsewhere, in which he had opportunities to speak to ordinary villagers and local officials, and to engage in local survey research.

Research on rural China is divided into studies of particular locales, which yield rich data but raise questions about ‘generalizability’ –