

**CENTER FOR STRATEGIC AND  
INTERNATIONAL STUDIES (CSIS)  
FREEMAN CHAIR IN CHINA STUDIES**

**RURAL DISCONTENT, RULE OF LAW  
AND SOCIAL UNREST IN CHINA:  
IMPLICATIONS FOR U.S. POLICY**

**WELCOME AND OPENING REMARKS: 9:00 – 9:15 A.M.**

**CARL MINZNER,  
VISITING COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS  
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**PANEL I 9:15 – 10:30 A.M.**

**MODERATOR AND INTRODUCTIONS:  
XIAOQING LU, RESEARCH ASSOCIATE,  
FREEMAN CHAIR, CSIS**



**PANEL:  
CARL MINZNER,  
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**KEVIN O'BRIEN,  
BEDFORD PROFESSOR OF POLITICAL SCIENCE;  
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**TUESDAY, DECEMBER 5, 2006  
CSIS, WASHINGTON, D.C.**

*Transcript by:  
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CARL MINZNER: Hello. I would just like to welcome all of you to our conference today on "Rural Discontent, Social Unrest and the Rule of Law in China." My name is Carl Minzner. I'm a Council on Foreign Relations fellow, currently based here at CSIS. I'm currently also standing in for Bates Gill, the Freeman Chair here at CSIS. He unfortunately is in China and cannot attend today, but he would very much like to extend all of you a warm welcome as well.

One of the key subjects of our conference today is social unrest in China. Social unrest is rising in China. Senior officials last year announced the total number of mass incidents rose from about 8,700 in 1993 to about 74,000 in 2004. This includes riots, protests, demonstrations, and strikes. Earlier this year the Ministry of Public Security sources announced that the total number of public order disturbances, a slightly different categorization, rose by about 6.6 percent to 87,000 from 2004 to 2005.

Chinese authorities are highly concerned with social unrest. This is the single issue that keeps top Chinese leaders up late at night. In 2005, Central Party and State Council authorities issued an internal directive that makes reducing social unrest a major priority for 2006. Concerns over social unrest motivate many of the key central domestic policy directives on, for example, judicial reform, harmonious society, and the new socialist countryside campaign announced earlier this year, focused on reducing rural and urban economic disparities.

The concerns over social unrest also motivate some of the very limited efforts of political reform that we've seen over the past decade or so, including central support for increased levels of citizen participation in the selection of local officials, as well as support for the creation of rural economic cooperative organizations.

The issue of social unrest is critical, not only for us that seek to understand the domestic political future of China, but also for those us who are interested in the future role of China on the world stage. For people who would like to know what role China may play in the next 10 or 15 years, it's very critical whether China is a stable or unstable state.

So we're very fortunate today to have three of the nation's top experts on these issues here to discuss these questions. We have Professor Kevin O'Brien from University of California, Berkeley. We have Professor Liebman from Columbia Law School. And we have Dr. Scott Tanner from RAND. They will be helping understand, respectively, protest leadership in rural China; Chinese efforts at court reforms; and the U.S. interests in social unrest and social instability in China. I will also be presenting on the origins of social unrest and social discontent in China.

We are also very lucky to have procured at the very last minute the services of Mr. Dennis Wilder, who is the Senior Director for East Asian Affairs at the National Security Council. He will be presenting our keynote remarks at 12:30.

Now, I would just like to make one announcement here which is that all of the talks in the morning are not only on the record; we in fact will be transcribing them and they will be placed on the CSIS website within a couple of weeks. However, that's not the case for Mr. Wilder's remarks. Mr. Wilder's remarks are explicitly off the record and not for attribution. So for those of you who are from the press, I ask you to abide by that.

Now, before we get to the presentations, I would also like to extend a very special note of thanks to our CSIS staff, Xiaoqing Lu and Savina Rupani and Eve Cary, without whom the entire organization for this conference wouldn't have been possible. So thank you guys very much.

Now I would like to introduce Xiaoqing Lu, who will be moderating our first panel.

XIAOQING LU: Hi, I'm Xiaoqing. I'm a research associate at the Freeman Chair. I'm here to moderate this panel on behalf of Dr. Bates Gill, who is in China right now. Anyway, thanks again for coming to our event today. We will now spend the next hour or so with our two distinguished panelists today, Mr. Carl Minzner and Professor Kevin O'Brien.

Carl Minzner is a Council on Foreign Relations International Affairs Fellow and he currently serves as a visiting fellow at CSIS. Previously he was senior counsel at the Congressional Executive Commission on China, where he researched and reported issues such as local governance, civil society, access to justice, and internal migration in China. At CSIS right now, Carl is working on a monograph on social unrest in China.

Professor O'Brien is Bedford Professor of Political Science and chair of the Center for Chinese Studies at UC Berkeley. As most of us know, Professor O'Brien is a noted authority of rural protests in China. Also he has just got his new book out titled, "Rightful Resistance in Rural China."

Today Carl will share with us his thoughts on origins of Chinese social unrest, and Professor O'Brien will talk about protest leadership in rural China. We have about one hour and 15 minutes for this panel. So at about 10:55, 11:00, we will take a coffee break.

Okay, without further ado, let's start our discussion. Carl, do you want to start first?

CARL MINZNER: Thank you very much, Xiaoqing. As Xiaoqing mentioned, the subject of my presentation today is the origins of social unrest in China. And let me just give you a very brief summary of some of my key points. First, I'm going to argue that rising social unrest in China is linked to the existing political controls that the Communist Party uses to govern society. Instead of channeling citizen discontent into

formal legal and political institutions, they funnel it into increasing levels of street protests and collective petitions.

Second, I'm going to discuss the consequences of this trend, namely an increasing number of collective citizen petitions directed at higher and higher levels of the Chinese bureaucracy, increasing levels of radicalism among Chinese citizen petitioners, as well as the atrophy and the stagnation of the formal Chinese legal system.

Third, I'm going to speculate on the importance of some of these trends for U.S. and Chinese policy makers.

Since the last two points overlap with the work of the other three panelists, I'm just going to very briefly touch on those issues which they will address in much deeper and penetrating analysis.

My talk today, as Xiaoqing mentioned, is also the subject of a larger paper that I'm working on for CSIS on this subject of social unrest, and it will be distributed by CSIS in another couple weeks. And we'll email it to all of you who RSVP'd to the event today.

Let me move on to the first point - the origins of social unrest in China. What are the causes of social unrest in China? Well, some of them are very individual causes: clan or ethnic conflicts in specific areas. Others are linked to some of the broader socioeconomic transitions that China is going through: environmental protests over pollution of farmland linked to increasing levels of industrialization, or problems linked to the rapid urbanization that China is experiencing. Since the late 1990s for example, government seizures of village land and urban housing for development projects has become increasingly important as a source of citizen protests and petitions.

But apart from individual or economic reasons for rising citizen protests, increased social unrest in China is also linked to a core governance problem at the heart of the Chinese state, namely, how Chinese citizens choose to resolve their grievances against local officials. This ties into work that I have done on the Chinese *xinfang*, or letters and visits, or petitioning system.

This system is a quasi-formal system that heavily overlaps with the legal system in terms of providing citizens a channel to try and petition higher-level Party authorities to intervene in the resolution of their specific disputes. It has very deep historical roots in the Chinese imperial system – concepts of petitioning the emperor for justice, for example. The system provides little redress for citizens in practice. One survey suggests that less than .2 percent of petitions are in fact actually addressed. But citizens heavily use it. Chinese citizens commonly choose to petition higher-level Party authorities as a means of resolving their grievances. Just one statistic: Chinese citizens presented 12.7 million petitions to county-level and higher-level *xinfang* bureaus in 2005. In contrast, the entire Chinese court system heard about 8 million courts cases in the same year, of

which about half were criminal cases in which the state brings a criminal charge against a citizen.

So what are these petitions? Well, individual petitions can be as simple as one aggrieved individual going from bureau to bureau, from year to year, from decade to decade in search of a core Party official to exercise his personal power to intervene in their dispute. Collective petitions are more political in nature. They can involve hundreds or thousands of individuals using processions or demonstrations to present their grievances to higher Party officials. Collective petitions are generally counted within that category of mass incidents that I discussed in the very introduction. They can also easily turn into riots or violent protests, particularly when they're faced with stiff local police resistance. According to Chinese statistics, these collective petitions are precisely the category of petitions that have been growing most explosively over the last decade or 15 years.

So understanding rising citizen unrest in China requires us in part to figure out why citizens are increasingly choosing to resort to the *xinfang* system and to collective petitioning of higher-level Party officials as a means to resolve their grievances against local officials. In my view, there is a two-part answer.

First, it's not clear that any of the other alternatives available to them are necessarily any better. At the level of local government in China, political and legal power is highly concentrated in one institution. That's the local Party committee. Even more specifically, it is concentrated in the body of a single person - the local Party secretary who chairs that committee. Local Party authorities enjoy extensive control over the media, over local courts, over local legislatures, over village committees. The local Party committee enjoys a voice over which judges serve within their area. The local Party secretary himself may chair the local People's Congress for his area, which is the local legislature. And he himself may head the election commission that screens candidates who serve on local village committees.

Consequently, if you are an aggrieved citizen who seeks to complain of an injustice against you on the part of local officials, such as, for example, the seizure of your land, it's highly likely that behind the decision which you seek to complain of, stands the local Party secretary in your area or somebody tightly affiliated with him.

Now, imagine yourself in the shoes of an aggrieved Chinese citizen who has had his land seized for a local development project supported by local Party officials. Hiring a lawyer is expensive. Success in local court is uncertain anyway, given the network of influence that local Party officials enjoy over the courts. It's not entirely certain that going through the local machinery of government necessarily generates any better alternative for you than, say, mounting a direct petition or direct protest to the local Party official, or perhaps better yet, somebody who outranks him. That's the first answer as to why you might pursue petitioning, is because local institutions don't necessarily offer you a better alternative.

But there's a second reason as well, which is that there are actually incentives present in the Chinese bureaucracy which not only encourage the resort to petitioning, but actually encourage citizens to resort to larger-scale petitioning. The Chinese bureaucracy uses so-called responsibility systems, or *xinfang gongzuo zeren zhuijiu zhi* – that discipline local Party officials for outbreaks of social unrest, such as collective petitions directed to higher-level Party authorities.

This can be a little hard to understand in the abstract, so let me give you a specific example. Anhui provincial regulations issued in 2003 discipline local Party officials by giving them formal criticism for mass petitions of 50 or more petitioners who go to provincial authorities, or 20 or more petitioners who go to Beijing. Mass petitions of a hundred or more individuals who go to the provincial capital or 30 or more individuals who go to Beijing result in the suspension of local Party officials.

Other responsibility systems used by other localities resemble the Anhui ones. They use escalating levels of disciplinary sanctions against local Party officials who experience more frequent or more numerous protests, or protests that are directed at higher levels of the Chinese bureaucracy.

This means that successfully mobilizing a large number of disgruntled peasants to show up at a higher level of government gives aggrieved citizens a direct political tool to compel sanctions on those local Party officials who are not subject to a range of independent judicial or democratic checks on their behavior. Even just a credible threat to mount a mass petition can give citizens a negotiating chip to use with local officials in arguing for increased compensation or changed policies. Moreover, since those responsibility systems apply escalating levels of punishment on local leaders for mass petitions that are greater in size, you have an incentive structure that effectively incentivizes citizens to engage in larger and larger protest actions.

Okay, so that is the first part - the reasons behind increased levels of social unrest? Now let's talk about the consequences of the dynamic. There are four.

First, as I mentioned, the conflicting incentive structure facing citizen protesters and local Party officials appears to be fueling a destabilizing cycle of escalating citizen protests and increasing stiff local government response. Unsurprisingly, the numbers and size of mass petitions have been going up over the last decade as these responsibility systems have become more and more widespread, and they're increasingly directed at higher and higher levels of government. But since these responsibility systems link career sanctions of local Party officials to the incidence of petitioning and collective protests, they create strong incentives for local officials to employ a wide range of abusive tactics against petitioners who express their discontent to higher-level officials. If you want more information on this you can read the Human Rights Watch report issued last year that details the kidnapping and abduction of petitioners by many local officials in an effort to forestall some of these protest actions.

The second point is this dynamic, increasing citizen protest on one side, increasing state repression on the other, appears to be leading to the evolution and emergence of a new set of protest leaders who can operate in this very harsh environment, conduct mass petitions, but also operate in an underground environment to withstand some of that state repression. This is very, very well detailed in Professor O'Brien's book – for purchase outside – on rightful resistance, which discusses this trend.

Let's move onto the third point. This dynamic appears to be breeding the growth of radicalism among citizen petitioners. Petitioners arrive in Beijing filled with the hope that the central government can actually address their grievances. According to one survey by Yu Jianrong, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, 95 percent of surveyed petitioners who arrive in Beijing believe that the central government will welcome their petitions. But within one week it radically shifts, and 50 percent of them think that the central government represses and fears them. This pushes them to sort of more extreme forms of behavior. Seventy percent of these surveyed petitioners, when asked what they will do if their petitioning fails, say they will return to the grassroots to organize the masses. Fifty percent of them say that they will "do something to frighten the cadres." Again, you can see how this is the result of the destructive incentive structure that the Chinese institutions themselves create.

Fourth point. This dynamic appears to be leading to the disuse or atrophy of formal legal channels. This relates to work that Professor Ben Liebman has done. The total number of administrative law cases and civil law cases have been stagnating or declining over recent years, precisely as the number of mass protests and mass petitions has been going up. So citizens are choosing other forms, other venues for their grievances.

Let me summarize. China's authoritarian controls are themselves generating social unrest. Local politics is not breeding a new crop of labor, church or NGO leaders who gain experience in forming and leading progressively more open, independent and organized political opposition groups. Chinese dissidents who do this, such as the 1998 Democracy Party activists, end up in jail. Rather, Chinese local politics is breeding the reverse - radicalized local activists who are becoming better at operating underground, using decentralized organizational structures, and launching larger and larger mass petitions at higher levels of government.

I don't know exactly what this means for the future. This is open for speculation. I would very much like to hear everybody else's ideas. But for me, it doesn't appear to be setting the stage for the emergence of moderate political opposition forces that might help China undertake a peaceful political transition in the future.

Let me move on to the implications of rising social unrest in China and the dynamic I just discussed for U.S. and Chinese policymakers. This is a subject that Scot Tanner will cover in a little more detail, so I'm just going to throw out one or two brief ideas.

First, for Chinese policymakers, I think that it implies that some move away from centralized one Party political controls, particularly at the local level of government, may be necessary to ensure the long-term stability of the Chinese state. This doesn't necessarily mean full-out Western democratization – although, for me personally, it's hard to get away from the idea that a more independent judiciary and some greater level of electoral controls are necessary. But other things that you could imagine would be importation of elements from, say, Hong-Kong involving truly independent anti-corruption institutions, or pressing forward with steps that the Chinese authorities themselves have taken, such as the creation of rural agricultural cooperatives.

Whatever you do, it seems to me that to effectively address citizen unrest, to channel citizen discontent back from the streets into the formal legal and political system, the key thing you have to do at some point is to address the fact that power over all of the formal, political, and legal levers of power at the local level are currently monopolized by local Party committees and secretaries. This of course just goes to the core structure of the Chinese state and how it is set up. And it's definitely something that the Chinese authorities themselves have been very unwilling to do.

For U.S. leaders, I think the role of Chinese authoritarian controls as a source for rising social unrest offers U.S. officials an opportunity to address their self-professed goals of political liberalization and human rights in a more effective and direct manner. I would almost suggest that this should be the number-one talking point for these issues for, say, executive branch members who are engaged in human rights dialogue with their Chinese counterparts or congressional staff members who are preparing members for a delegation to China. I myself am a little bit doubtful as to whether the discussion of how and if Chinese political and judicial practices do or don't comport with international law or Western standards has a strong impact on Beijing's domestic policies. But I do know that legions of Chinese officials and academics are desperately searching for any way possible to reduce the numbers of mass incidents and the level of social unrest.

If American officials can demonstrate that the gradual implementation of an independent judiciary, of free electoral mechanisms, and more independent civil society organizations can actually reduce levels of social unrest gradually over time as they're implemented, this is going to hit a very, very deep chord with one of the core interests of Chinese officials. As for specific program ideas, I would tend to direct attention towards the concrete, away from more abstract, normative ideas of democratization and toward much more concrete problems such as over-concentration of this political power in the hands of local Party elites and how to correct this.

Naturally, the above analysis is going to have little impact on American officials who actually think that increasing social unrest in China is a good thing, or who just don't care about it. And it's also not likely to sway those Chinese officials who are fundamentally committed to the concept of the Communist Party as the source of all legitimacy in China. But for those American and Chinese officials who believe that an internally stable, politically open China is a good thing, recognizing the institutional reasons for growing social unrest in China, specifically the political controls that the

Party itself it uses to govern, may offer a way to shift the discussion over political liberalization and human rights. It might be possible to shift this discussion away from a me-good/you-bad discussion to a more useful, cooperative one that centers on the need for gradual liberalization of centralized Party control over China's political and legal system in order to shift the resolution of citizen grievances away from street protests into other channels.

Thank you.

MS. LU: Thank you very much, Carl. (Applause.)

Mr. O'Brien, you have 20 minutes to talk about protest leadership in rural China. Thank you.

**KEVIN O'BRIEN:** I'd like to start by thanking Carl for organizing this workshop. Even though I grew up in the DC suburbs, I don't get back to Washington all that often, and I can't think of three people who I'd like to hear talk about their latest ideas on social unrest more than Ben, Scot, and Carl.

The title of the paper I'm presenting today is "Protest Leadership in Rural China." It's an outgrowth of a book Lianjiang Li and I recently published called "Rightful Resistance in Rural China;" in fact, you can think of it as the last chapter we never got around to writing because we didn't have enough data at the time, nor a good enough theoretical hook to hang it on. That's all to the good for our purposes today, because it means the paper is very straightforward. In it, we try to do only three things. First, we describe what protest leaders in the Chinese countryside do. Second, we explain a couple different ways that villagers become protest leaders. Lastly, we discuss the sometimes surprising effects that repression has on protest leaders.

The paper is based on archival sources and interviews that we've been conducting since 1994. Our field sites over the years have included seven provinces, but the most important source was a series of interviews that Lianjiang Li and Yu Jianrong of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences did with about three dozen protest leaders in Hunan in the spring of 2003.

First, let me clarify what we mean by protest leaders. In this paper "protest leaders" refers to individuals who initiate group petitions, mass demonstrations, and other types of collective action that target political power holders. In the Chinese press and parlance, these people are called all sorts of things, from peasant leaders and peasant heroes, by those who like them, to *dingzihu* (nail-like villagers) and troublemakers, by those who don't.

So, what do protest leaders do? We've come across seven main roles, none of them all that surprising, except perhaps to social scientists who are allergic to anything that smacks of "great man theories of history" or too much attention to the idiosyncrasies of personality: protest leaders lead the charge, shape collective claims, recruit core activists,

mobilize new followers, orchestrate acts of contention, plan protest campaigns, and organize cross-community efforts.

I don't have time to discuss how protest leaders play each one of these roles; you can find that and a lot of juicy stories in the paper. But, let me give you a handful of examples. First, leading the charge. Take Hong Jifa, a protest leader in Hengyang, Hunan. He was doing housework one day when he heard indignant neighbors shouting "robbers" and "thieves" as some township cadres who had come to collect yet another unauthorized fee. He rushed to the scene and found that an elderly villager who had refused to pay up had been knocked to the ground by the tax collectors, Hong began arguing with the taxmen and demanded they stop collecting illegal fees and compensate the old man for his injuries. Dozens of villagers joined in jeering the officials and before long a brawl had broken out that ended with angry protesters hitting a tax collector over the head with a flashlight and overturning two government jeeps.

Leading the charge is often critical to the onset of collective action, partly because the person out front usually shoulders the brunt of any repression. In this case, for example, Hong Jifa was later sentenced to three years in jail, while other villagers involved in the clash went unpunished.

Another role played by protest leaders is shaping collective claims. Here, protest leaders construct an interpretation of the nature and source of a grievance that can be used to mobilize popular action. Liao Zhehui was well-known in Hunan for his efforts to publicize central policies that limited taxes and fees. In 1998, he explained to a group of villagers, while they were dining in a restaurant, how they had been overtaxed by the township. His fellow diners were so grateful that they insisted on paying his bill and then proceeded to use the copies of central documents he gave them to lodge complaints about over taxation. How did this seemingly innocent information-sharing jump-start mobilization. Well, much like "framing" elsewhere, Liao Zhehui did several key things: He helped villagers express their discontent with over-taxation in the officially-approved language as "excessive peasant burdens;" he blamed the problem on local cadres who violated central policies; and he helped persuade his fellow diners that their claim was lawful and that it just might receive the backing of the central government.

I'll skip ahead in the paper a bit now, and talk briefly about how protest leaders plan acts of contention and coordinate protest campaigns. Most simply, rural activists raise money, arrange transportation, liaise with other activists, establish communication links (as high-tech as mobile phones and as low-tech as gongs or fireworks), set the time and place of gatherings, and decide whether and how to negotiate with the authorities. My favorite story here involves a land expropriation complaint in which protest leaders in Hebei mobilized hundred of villagers to travel to Beijing. The county authorities got wind of this plan and deployed hundreds of police at railway ticket counters, long distance bus stations, and major intersections outside Beijing to stop the complainants from reaching the city. But protest leaders got wind of this and sent off dozens of small teams of bicyclists who only reassembled after they had passed the checkpoints the police had set up around Beijing. In the end, hundreds of petitioners made it to the State

Council's Letters and Visits Bureau in central Beijing. Almost reminds me of the movie "The Great Escape" wasn't it? Only the bicyclists (or was it the rowers) who got through?

On to our next big question: How do villagers become protest leaders? We found that protest leaders emerge in two main ways. First, long-time public figures (like retired cadres, clan elders, or school teachers) initiate popular action on their own or in response to requests from other villagers. This standing up on behalf of others typically happens because local influentials may share the grievance of other villagers and because they want to demonstrate their high moral standards and confirm their status as community leaders.

A second path to leadership arises when ordinary villagers evolve into protest leaders after efforts to seek redress for a personal grievance fails. This is sometimes a tactical move, designed to mobilize community support in the hope that this will elicit concessions on a person's original private grievance. Often it occurs after a previously inactive villager is sensitized to actionable misconduct after learning of a potentially beneficial policy that's not being properly implemented. A politically inactive villager, Ling Xuewen, while he was working as a bricklayer in Changsha, learned that it was illegal to levy a per capita slaughter tax, irrespective of whether a farmer raised livestock. After driving a team of township tax collectors from his home by citing the relevant regulation, he learned that his younger brother had been forced to pay the same slaughter tax, he became angry, and started to mobilize other villagers to protest. He copied the relevant regulations on a large piece of paper and pasted it on a wall outside the township office building. From this moment on he started down what he called a "no-return road to collective petitioning" which soon enough put him at the head of a series of multi-village clashes with township officials.

Most of the stories we gathered about how protest leaders emerge sound pretty idiosyncratic at first. But we did find some factors that seem to regularly contribute to the making of protest leaders. First, their demographic make-up. Our interviews and some surveys we've done over the past decade suggest that protest leaders are predominately male, often middle-aged or older, better educated than most, and neither the richest nor the poorest in the village. Many have also served in the army.

Protest leaders also, as you might expect, tend to be highly assertive, a tad self-righteous, and inclined to weigh risks and benefits a bit differently than most of us. Here are a few quotations: "I'm not fearful of officials and I don't hesitate to object to any official who has done something wrong." "I can't stand the powerful and influential bullying the powerless and weak and I like to stand up for the weak." "I'm not afraid of suffering a beating, arrest, or death in the course of upholding justice."

Many protest leaders have also had very disheartening experiences with the authorities. Zhou Decai, a protest leader from Henan, for instance, led a demonstration in support of the student movement in 1989, was expelled from middle school, and lost his opportunity to take the university entrance exams. Zhang Dean, the moving force behind

the 1993 Renshou protest, was labeled a “rightist” and expelled from the army during the anti-rightist campaign in the late 1950s. On the other side, some protest leaders we’ve encountered have had past experiences that left them feeling empowered and capable. For example, serving in the army or being a urban migrant workers can leave you confident that you’re more knowledgeable about the outside world and what your rights are.

What about the last question I posed at the very top: how do protest leaders respond to repression? Does repression work? Well, at least in the short term, jailing an activist certainly takes a troublemaker off the streets. And intimidation, fines, beatings, property seizure and public humiliation can also damp down protest, particularly when they appear to be (or are) condoned by higher authorities.

But what we’ve been struck by of late is that repression also backfires more often than you might think. Instead of deactivating protest leaders, it may transform occasional and opportunistic petitioners’ representatives into dedicated and committed activists. It does this largely by enhancing a protest leader’s popular support.

Popular support often grows in the wake of repression because it provides a kind of proof that a person is public-spirited and is truly taking action on behalf of the wider community. Even jailing may not put an end to a protest leader acting up, when it enhances the prestige, honor, and social recognition of the person who’s detained. On the day one 73-year old protest leader from Sichuan was due to be released, nearly 20,000 of his supporters gathered for a welcome-home ceremony. In Hunan, one of the men behind a massive protest received a hero’s welcome when he was released from prison in 2004, with villagers dispatching seven vehicles to pick him up in Changsha and setting off fireworks when he and his entourage reached home. And a boost in prestige can lead to even more popular action, when a protest leader becomes more determined to persist and not let his followers down. Donations commonly flow in as do offers of protection. This can involve villagers offering their champions funding for future protests, meals and places to hide, tipping them off when the police are nearby, or serving as lookouts. With this much popular support, the likelihood of success may seem high enough to continue pursuing a claim, despite the obvious risks.

So, in conclusion, protest leaders perform a number of tasks. Some of them are long-time community leaders and others are newcomers who feel driven to act up. And repression may have the somewhat surprising effect (at least to political opportunity theorists) of leading to more protest, not less.

Let me close on a small coda: Lianjiang and I are the first to admit that protest leaders only make up a tiny fraction of the rural population. But their prominence may be an indicator of wider discontent. The appearance of peasant leaders, peasant heroes, and rights defenders in many places would not have been possible unless aggrieved villagers sought them out and enthusiastically followed them once they took up a cause. And protest leaders would find it difficult to persist and organize new episodes of contention (in the face of repression) without support in the community. That rural people often hold in high esteem precisely those whom officials wish to see isolated and

ostracized is probably the main reason why the authorities find the presence of protest leaders in the countryside so alarming.

I'll stop there.

MS. LU: Thank you very much. (Applause.)

Thank you for two of our panelists. This is very, very interesting presentations. Now we will open up to the floor for questions and answers, and we have about 35 minutes. When ask question, please identify yourself by stating your name and affiliation.

I guess I will start with the first question. To Professor O'Brien: I want to ask you one more question regarding the protest leaders in rural China. In your study, do you find those leaders are in themselves as proto-democratic leaders, Thomas Jefferson figures, or are they as authoritarian as the Chinese leader officials that they are protesting?

MR. O'BRIEN: Well, some of them, more and more, are appealing to things like constitutional principles and to other sorts of norms that may suggest that they're in favor of regime change, but what strikes me the most is that most of them are clearing working within the hegemony. They're working within the system. They're just asking for the enforcement of the kinds of rights and privileges and laws that already exist on the books.

So these are people who really do work within the reform paradigm. Most of them are not revolutionaries. Only a handful are and their feeling is that if we can just get the system to live up to what it is, we can redress an enormous number of the grievances we face.

In personality, they tend to be very, very strong figures and to organize people is not something that's done all that easily. So, even their use of claims, whether they're sincere or whether they're strategic, right now they are clearly working within the system. They don't talk about democracy much. They don't talk about the constitution. They don't talk about things that don't give them any leverage because they feel there are plenty of things that do give them leverage and they can make use of those to just get their *hefa quanyi*, their legitimate rights and interests, paid attention to.

So democracy is not a big word for them, and organization is not a big word for them. They won't even use the word organization. Once group we deal with, he says he just has troops, *dui wu*, because he doesn't want to use the word *zuzhi*. because once you use "organization" it provides a reason for you to be repressed. So right now they try to stay outside of any of those big issues that can just bring trouble on their head.

MS. LU: Very interesting.

Carl do you have something to? Okay. I guess we'll open up. Yes, please?

Q: I'm Kathryn Mohrman from the Hopkins-Nanjing Center. I'd be curious to know how the central government's talk about harmonious society and all these other things is playing with regard to these local protests.

MS. LU: This is a question to?

Q: Either one.

MR MINZNER: There are a couple of components to the whole harmonious society campaign. Part of it is aimed at strengthening systems of dispute resolution such as the courts or mediation committees that might offer a way to channel some of these issues of citizen discontent back into other institutions.

But, interestingly, the other thing that I'm seeing is that the harmonious society campaign has been linked specifically to increased implementation of responsibility systems, particularly those *xinfa* responsibility systems, so it's a very paradoxical thing. On the one hand, central authorities are saying, up with mediation; more pressure on courts to resolve disputes, but the other thing we're going to do is we're going to really, really, really, really punish any local officials who experience mass protests. So it looks to me like it's actually a very conflicted kind of response and may actually be further fueling the dynamic that I just discussed.

Certainly there's nothing I've seen in the harmonious society campaign that suggests there's any move towards an independent judiciary or real relaxation on that core issue of Party control.

Q: I guess I was also thinking, do the local people feel that a harmonious society is anything other than just a nice label? Do they believe this really is designed to help them?

MR. O'BRIEN: I think you can raise expectations, but the more savvy kind of protest leaders we deal with realize that it doesn't produce any kind of commitments that trumps unity and stability, or stability above all.

So you have all these kind of slogans floating out there that people may float, but whether it will actually work in prosecuting a claim is another thing. The people I'm dealing with tend to be much more tangible. They're looking at laws, policies, commitments that really are something that you can use.

I like to tell one story. In one village I worked in, there's a legal affairs office and we said, oh, this is wonderful; they've set it up for the villagers to tell them what their rights are. We found out that wasn't true at all. It was a former cadre who had set up for the cadres to find out if the cadres had to pay attention to the complaints that were being made or whether they can engage in repression or not.

So there's a lack of legal knowledge out in the countryside, but the more savvy village protest leaders are trying to trip up officials over the rhetoric that the regime provides them with. And I haven't heard a lot of harmonious society actually providing anything that limits what an official can do, compared to, like, the language of citizenship, for example, which can be very problematic.

One village I worked in, they used a language of – so this was a village where they'd carried out forced abortions and these villages put up on a sign: "We're citizens. Return us our citizenship rights. We're not slaves. We're not labor power. Even less are we slaves." And their argument – and these cadres were afraid to tear this sign down. They let the sign sit up for six months. They were waiting for the summer rains to wear it off because they knew if they got rid of this sign, people would protest even more. And this was a village where forced abortions had been carried out two or three years before.

So something like the language of citizenship seems to confuse village cadres. I haven't yet seen that harmonious society provides a wedge to use against a cadre who's saying, I just have carry out the birth control policy or have to what the cadre responsibility system tells me I have to do.

MS. LU: Susan?

Q: I would like to know more about the protest leaders. I remember Hu Jianwong (ph) said there are many former PLA people and he also said there were no, in Jianwong (ph), it wasn't clan leaders who's leading these. Is that correct in every case? And I know some of the hot topics would be, for example, religion and I wonder if as time has gone by – now it's been a decade and a half since you've been looking at it – have you noticed anything like that happening? I know the government would worry about that a lot.

MR. O'BRIEN: Yeah, I've been doing a little of work of recruitment to underground protestant churches now, which is another issue that not exactly contention, but some of the same kind of mechanisms are at work. I don't know as much about clan elders getting involved. We've heard about it, mostly in the south. This is where the "your village" phenomenon comes into place. There are 7 (hundred thousand), 800,000 villages. I work in 15 or 20 of them and they've not been a big issue.

Another issue has to do with women. People often ask us: What about women's issues and women's rights and things like that, and we just haven't happened to come across –

Q: (Off-mike.)

MR. O'BRIEN: And also connection up with public intellectuals we're starting to see in various places; people coming down from the cities and getting involved. There have been a number of cases. It just happens the villages I work in have not had this.

And as you get into more post-material kind of issues – I have students working on the environmental movement now, the women’s movement. We’re starting to see more international linkages, more NGO kind of linkages, but on the kind of questions I was dealing with, in relatively poor places when we were doing this work they didn’t have that kind of access. They were just trying to find anybody who could help them out anywhere in the hierarchy.

So, the clan elders – I worked in one Muslim village where the clan elders were clearly the important people. They were religious leaders, actually, and clan elders, and the village cadres were basically the errand boys of the mosque, of the temple association. So you see that here and there, but we don’t have a lot of information yet.

MS. LU: Jeff, you had a question?

Q: Are the local officials –

MS. LU: Can you –

Q: Are the local officials drawn from the local communities, and how long do they tend to be in office or are they kind of rotated out over fixed periods of time?  
Thanks.

MS. LU: Please identify yourself.

Q: Jeff Baron from the Foreign Relations Committee.

MS. LU: Thank you.

MR. MINZNER: I’ll take it here.

My understanding – and if anyone can correct me, that’d be great too – is that the county level and higher officials are rotated on a regular basis, so your top Party secretary on the county level will be subject to the personnel rotation system. They’ll be there two or three years.

Township officials are different. Those guys are often left in place for a very long period of time.

MR. O’BRIEN: Those township officials have a hope being promoted. Village cadres, it’s very rare to get out of the village. You’re not officially on the state payroll. You’re not officially a cadre if you work in the village.

So, one of the big questions with village elections and this form of protest that we’re looking at is, do they start to align themselves more with villagers or do they remain the targets of village grievances?

And at this point, the villagers, village cadres and the township cadres are the main targets of village cadres, so they tend to be on the other side, though in some cases, they've lined up with villagers against higher levels as well. And there's some evidence that even village elections have helped cause that to happen. That it's caused you to look down a little more than to look up and to become – the call them shianfong tosu (ph), leaders of collective complaints.

MS. LU: Anyone else have a question? Yes please, this gentleman.

Q: Hi, everybody, my name is Mike Enos (ph). I had a question concerning – you mentioned that some of the local officials are getting chastised, as it were, by the higher Party for – (off mike). Are you seeing a trend, by the local officials, to either somehow underreport these incidents or kick them down the rope? Is that there that underreporting going on?

MR. MINZNER: Absolutely. This is, in fact, one of the main problems that central officials face. Local officials, since they have got control over the media, judiciary, legislature, all these institutions, can basically cover up numbers. There are massive inclinations to cover up, not just sort of local protests in your area, but any incidents of environmental damage or a wide range of other things.

That's why these collective petitions to higher levels are an effort on the part of local citizens to do an end run around these types of controls. And that's also why local officials, in an effort to shut down that channel of collective petitions to higher levels, will dispatch the so-called retrievers to, say, the provincial or the national capital, in an effort to, as Professor O'Brien has mentioned, intercept people before they actually reach them and prevent them from presenting their grievances.

MR. O'BRIEN: And that end run is tolerated or even condoned sometimes by higher levels in the interest of getting information about local officials who are driving the people to rebel. There's a Chinese term: guambi nimfi (ph).

So, it's an explicit monitoring effort, and if you travel with higher level officials, they are sending these signals out. And the problem with local protest leaders is they're getting conflicting cues: act up against these people to help us monitor, create a sandwich strategy to hold these officials in line, but also don't organize, don't complain about things that we at the center aren't giving you, like the birth control policy or the huko (ph) policy. You can't complain about those sorts of things; you can only complain about misconduct by local officials.

So at a time when decentralization is taking place, where there's less direct control over officials, they have given out very strong signals that want lower-level people, ordinary people, to control local officials indirectly and provide them information. At the same time, they also are concerned about this leading to rebellion in a different path; instead of the officials driving the rebellion, turning the protest leaders into social movement leaders. It's a very careful game they're trying to play.

And village elections is also a part of exactly the same process of making people feeling included, to blowing off steam, and then, at the same time, controlling these local officials and satisfying them. And a lot of people we deal with are quite satisfied. They get a few crumbs, they get a little bit of redress, and they go back home as a hero and that legitimizes the system, and from the center's viewpoint, undermines more serious kinds of protest. But it's a very finely balanced game they have to play with how to control these local officials.

MR. MINZNER: That's the tricky thing. People in the United States often have a picture of the China as a one-Party state. One sometimes thinks the people at the top control everything. But in a one-Party state, particularly where you're reliant on local officials to control things, local officials really have the ability to choke off a wide range of information to central officials. People at the top are often information starved. They don't really know what's going on and they rely on protests as an information channel to tell them that something is seriously wrong or there's a real problem with a particular official or policy.

MR. O'BRIEN: I mean, the best example I like of this, I had a story in 1992. I was traveling with ministry officials in a village in Fujian (ph) and its people wouldn't give us the election results, and this ministry official, sujiang (ph), said, I'm your boss's boss's boss's boss's boss. Give him the results. And this village cadre said, because you're my boss's boss's boss's boss, go to hell." It's was pretty amazing to have a sujiang stood up to by this village cadre in front of a bunch of people. And his view was, you just can't do anything to do me. You're just too far away. You can't reach down all the way to me. And if I'm going to disguise the results, we're not going to help you find them out. And the ministry official backed off.

MS. LU: Interesting.

We have another question. Yes, please.

Q: Excuse me – I'm Bert Keidel from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I'm interested in both of your reaction to these questions.

In discussing what the Chinese actually might do, and therefore how the U.S. might become involved in what they might do, you seem to emphasize, Carl, the sort of a quasi-democratic trend and active NGO, more liberalized permissions and so forth. How does that square with the notion that a lot of these protests are over changes that are almost inevitable? Many of them are just and justified changes that have to take – some of them correct misdistributions of power or good fortune in the past and that, therefore, if you increase the expectations that whatever you don't like is going to be fixed if you just get out there and protest, increasing channels for protest without, at the same time, increasing information about what is legal and legitimate to do and what is not, and also without actually putting your emphasis on repression of true corruption, wouldn't that lead to greater problems in this time of transition and therefore your discussion about the

need for stronger agents and independent agents looking into corruption is really, perhaps, so important?

So, I wonder, how you sort of can, on the one hand, talk about to Americans sounds just fine, but which, in this kind of topsy-turvy change period, really could be even disruptive?

And then my second question has to do with this, what you say is a contradiction, and it comes out in both of your comments, that if you have the responsibility system at the local level, it gives protesters a sort of leverage. At the same time that you're raising expectations that they should be able to do something and increasing conflict resolution mechanisms, why isn't that sort of a positive combination because if local officials recognize that the repression backfires, they have a very strong incentive to actually explore some of the usefulness of the kinds of conflict resolution systems that are being, at least in principle, encouraged?

So those are my two questions.

MS. LU: Thank you.

MR. MINZNER: Two very good questions. Let me try to start with the last one, which is what's the problem with the responsibility systems?

One problem is that it pits the interests of Party officials against citizens in a very concrete way. It pushes officials to engage in higher levels of repression. One reason that that is the case is the issue of short term versus long term concerns. The thinking of a local Party official regarding the use of repression may be that he's going to be in office for three years. Jailing these protest leaders right now might forestall a protest or stop it from emerging on my watch. Using repression is a cheap way of handling citizen discontent for any individual local Party official. But those broader changes that I was talking about are system-oriented changes that require opening up other channels. That is just a much longer term investment beyond the time horizon of any individual local Party secretary.

The other reason why the responsibility systems are destructive is information overload. Think of the first wave of 10 petitioners who show up at the provincial or the county level in a collective petition. At that point, the 10 collective petitioners appear like a serious problem to provincial officials. They're like, okay, well, we've got to take care of that.

As soon as that happens, petitioners themselves start to learn, well, 10 is the magic number, so more and more people start to learn, hmm, what I really need to do to get my issue addressed is to put together larger and larger numbers of people. So then everyone starts to organize groups of 10 petitioners. At that point, groups of 10 petitioners don't appear to be as serious a problem, and then at that point it becomes the group of a 100 petitioners that starts to be the squeaky wheel that gets the grease.

So you end up with a crowding-out effect where you need to more and more, larger and larger protest activities and larger and larger, more extreme actions in order to actually be the thing that triggers the attention of the central Party officials that you need to intervene in your local dispute. It's not necessarily based so much on the pure legitimacy of your grievance, as to whether or not you can attract the attention of the Party officials.

MR. O'BRIEN: There's a saying in China that, "A big disturbance gets a big solution. A small disturbance gets a small solution. And no disturbance gets no solution." And there's pretty good evidence that that's true.

MR. O'BRIEN: One other thing on your first question is that the arguments you just made about if we address any of these issues it's going to lead to something being even bigger happening, is exactly what local officials say to their higher ups about why we should not address any of these issues, why we should stick with the iron fist over the velvet glove.

We are seeing evidence right now that what is happening is ordinary people are not being satisfied. They're not getting the results they want. They realize they don't have allies in the system and they're moving away from these indirect, relatively moderate forms of protest that relied on finding people above you to help prosecute your claims to much more direct forms of protest in which they're very confrontational and they meet people face to face and they demand dialogues with school teachers, with 50 people standing around them, demanding that tuition be returned them right on the spot.

So we're seeing a ratcheting up, not so much via the responsibility system, but in terms of just failure that these really are rebels in the name of the czar. The czar isn't on your side. He's not your intercessor. And we're seeing a loss of faith and trust in the people at the higher levels that will help them out and a sense, we need to rely on our selves and our own mobilizational strength. That is quite dangerous. You're moving away from a game where there was three parties involved to a more simple us-against-them game.

One of the most ominous things we hear people saying now in the countryside is that, "All crows are equally black." And what that means is all officials are the same. And five, 10 years ago they were not talking that way. They were saying the center is our savior. The village is our enemy. Now there's more and more people, after they fail, are realizing it's us against them and are starting to push. And that actually proves to the local cadres, and then to higher levels, that we better go back to repression.

MS LU: Bert, do you have something to add?

Q: I was in Hunan and Henan in rural counties this June and, sure, you don't get to go exactly at once, but I picked these counties myself for my research, and the model that you describe, of this upwardly spiraling problem, really says you have incompetent

cadres. And there are so many examples in the counties I've been over the last 25 years in China where you have – just a lot of work is done to meet local needs, to know what the problems are. You ask about, what did you do when you built this highway, and there you find a lot of stories and, in the cases that I see, there are a lot of good solutions. And it brings us up to the question of just how widespread is this phenomenon, even the big numbers that we've seen in a country as large as China?

And how many really independent sort of surveys are there of counties around the country where things are solved well because you have, really, a sense of what's going on? And you go to the nub of, well, what's this protest about, and, yeah, that's legitimate, or, what's this one? Wait a minute, fella, you know, you're way off base – and deal with them separately and actually get buy in from the community because they see they need a road or they need a village enterprise and those kinds of things.

So, how do we know what's really characteristic of China from anecdotes of spiraling upward? I just –

MR. MINZNER: You're right. One of the problems with these numbers is that they are very sensitive for the Chinese government and aren't necessarily very good. So, exactly how serious this trend is, I can't quite say. The numbers that do exist are going up. The Chinese officials themselves, when they're talking about this, always list this as their top concern and say "Things are getting worse."

There is an Ministry of Public Security study just released last year which notes that mass protests are getting more organized, are getting more frequent, and are getting more serious. So, I just have to go on what they're saying.

You also raised the interesting question of which protests are legitimate and which ones aren't legitimate? There's often a tendency in the West to look at groups that are protesting and think these are all good guys because they're all against the government. But that's not the key question. The real problem is that any society, particularly one that's in transition, is going to have a lot of social tension and problems. And the question is where these tensions get funneled. Do you gradually start to shift these tensions into some kind of evolutionary cycle that generates more and more stable political or legal institutions or time? Or, does it turn into something that brews and simmers under the surface until the point where you want to take effective change, it's too late and just everything erupts.

That's the question facing China.

MR. O'BRIEN: On your point, too: One good thing that's happening in our field is the survey researchers are now moving in and Ethan Michelson at Indiana and Pierre Landry at Yale are both doing studies where they're studying these kinds of question on a much broader palette.

And, of course, what they're finding is that most people lump their claims at some point. And what I have followed is the people who keep prosecuting it all the way up in one of the worst places in China to expose what this phenomenon looks like. But if we look at it nationwide, which we're just starting to do, along the way, most people give up and fall out of this category and, to some extent, that's a success.

But there's one other thing to think about, too. There are structural issues going on. The end of the agricultural tax, the township government financial squeeze is horrible, so they're told to build roads but not to raise taxes. It's impossible.

You don't want to demonize these village cadres. They are put in a horrible squeeze and sometimes – (audio break) – there's enough money in the village or township coffers to do it, but there are other places now where, we haven't seen it yet, but this tax repeal policy seems to be taking hold. And then the ending of the agricultural tax seems to be taking hold and these township governments have to be very poor.

MS. LU: Dr. Tanner has a question.

Q: Okay, this is on – Carl and Kevin, I'm reminded of something recently when I was thinking about passing of our colleague Fred Wakeman. One of the most interesting insights I remember from a couple of his books on policing and social order in China during the Republican era, was that the system got so obsessed with rooting out Communists and suspected leftists that it got to be just really lousy at doing basic policing and law enforcement and things like that.

Well, I don't want to focus just on that. I wanted to broaden it a little bit and say in what ways do you see the system – the allocation of resources in these villages – being skewed by the need to deal with unrest, whether it's by buying it off, whether it's by paying more police officers, whether it's by cutting taxes that, as Kevin as just pointed out, they actually need for some of the things that they're going to be doing? To steal an argument from some of Bert's writings, whether it's backing off of what Bert might argue would be needed development, redevelopment or reallocation of land in certain areas. How is this system being skewed by the effort to try and deal with and contain unrest?

MR. MINZNER: Exactly like you said, local Party officials can choose to repress collective petitions or they can just buy them off. There's a good book – *Feichang Zishu* – where a local Party secretary who wrote a book on his experiences notes that some other local Party secretaries have essentially run their jurisdictions into bankruptcy because they've used, say, their entire development budget to buy off citizen protestors while they are in office, so that the officials don't actually experience problems on their watch.

MR. O'BRIEN: I'm thinking of moving into the area of repression, encroaching on your territory, in looking at some of these issues. I don't have too much insight.

Q: There's plenty of it to share.

MR. O'BRIEN: I don't have too much insight on the question, other than to say that the thing that has always fascinated me is just how weak the police are in Chinese villages. They only exist at the township level. You have to call them in. It's a bit of a problem for you if you do have to call them in and that causes great difficulties for village cadres to need the police. And that people defy the policy on a regular basis and I've never quite understood why it's so easy to defy the police or tax collectors, when they show up to collect money. It's still done face to face, door to door.

When I tell people in Chinese villages that I just send in my taxes every April 15<sup>th</sup>, they can't believe it. There it's done face to face, and the people come to your door and you say, it's raining today; I'm not going to pay. Then they come the next day: It's sunny today; I'm not going to pay. And the police and the tax collectors just go away.

And there's a lot of physical violence in villages, too, both ways. We hear more about the beatings of people. You don't hear as much about the beatings of police which are going on all the time. It's a very unmediated kind of relationship. It's not institutionalized at all. And I get the sense that bringing in the police is a very costly thing to do, that everybody does at the last moment and these new local thugs that we've been hearing about who've been brought in to put down protest, it's really a sign that things are getting completely out of control on both sides.

And what amazes me as much as anything is – my friends who study Indonesia say, well, what about the army in the village? I say, what do you mean the army in the village? There's no army in the village. There's no police. There's nobody. There's one public security official, maybe. So it's a big job to bring in the police and they don't have nearly as much authority as you might imagine when they show up there.

MS. LU: Okay, we still have time for some last questions, so will take them all together and then – okay.

Yes, please.

Q: Thank you. I'm not the expert that most of the people in this room are and I'm a learning a lot. I was in China last month because I'm on the board of a business that has big operations in China and the question is, do we increase or do we hold or do we decrease?

My question for you is this: We were told by senior Chinese officials in Shanghai and Beijing that the Chinese government plans in the next 10 years – it's a breathtaking number – to relocate 250 million people from the rural areas to the smaller cities and to get the people out of the peasant life. Do you think that there will be additional social unrest if this happens and what impact will it have on these local leaders and on the Communist Party in Beijing?

MS. LU: Would you please also identify yourself?

Q: My name is Judith Hope and I'm professor at Georgetown Law School.

MS. LU: Thank you and there is a question over there, right? Okay.

Q: Thank you. Zack Berra (sp), SAIC. You touched on very briefly – and obviously, it's not as important in rural areas as it is in urban areas – but can you speak at all to the impact that technology, or the future proliferation of technology, may have on organizing and protest?

MS. LU: Okay, let's take one more question.

Q: Hi, this is Suay Yong (ph) from Bridging Nations. I just wondered whether these protest leaders, have they ever tried to resort to the national media? Is it accessible or is visible?

MS. LU: Okay, we have those three questions.

MR. MINZNER: All right, I'll just take the first one. I'd be interested to see what those officials are saying. I have a feeling they may actually be taking credit for a steady trend of citizens themselves who are relocating from rural areas to urban areas as employment opportunities in cities are attracting more and more rural citizens to urban areas.

You have roughly 150 million migrant workers in China today. I don't know how many of them will actually end up settling permanently in the urban areas as opposed to simply moving back and forth. But over 10 years I could imagine that you might be seeing something the order of the numbers you mentioned.

Particularly for people who follow social unrest trends, I think you've hit on a really interesting question. Many of the things we're talking about are rural sources of unrest. But China is currently in a stage of rapid urbanization. As I mentioned at the beginning, you're seeing many protests in China now taking place among the migrant community in urban areas.

Probably starting in another month, you're going to start seeing reports in the media of migrant workers not able to get their wages owed to them. They will be trying to go back home for Chinese New Year's and some group of 50 will go up to the top of a building in Shanghai, Beijing, or other major city and is threaten to commit suicide in order to recover the wages owed to them. It happens every year.

This raises questions regarding a greater trend – which is, as China moves towards a more urban country, what happens to social unrest? And I'm not sure. I don't know whether that means whether you start to see some of these social protest patterns replicate themselves in urban areas more frequently, or whether that, because of the

heightened sensitivity of Chinese officials when it comes to any kind of unrest in urban areas, this means they start taking issues of political liberalization much more seriously.

I could imagine that over that time period you talked about, systematic discontent between a dispossessed migrant community and an established urban one might become a more and more serious issue for social unrest.

MR. O'BRIEN: Ah, the relocation question. I think that's the right question for people are being moved around by dam building and this leads to lots of issues.

On most people in the countryside, they're not being relocated. They're flowing themselves toward those cities. And the villages I go to, we ask their population and then we find out later that one-third of the people aren't there; mostly young men, or hotan (ph).

On information, I think information is one of the very most important things. We actually talked about this a bit in the book, and we started to focus on – (unintelligible) – concrete ways that people find out what their rights are and also the way they organize protests. And in the countryside, cell phones have made a big difference. Fax and internet have not really gotten there in a big way, but the one that's most important is photocopying. Photocopying is available in every town, every county, almost every township and people can photocopy documents. And one of the good things that used to happen is that when you go to an official and you say there's this policy, this law, he'd say, there's no such thing. And now, you've got a red-headed document photocopied right on the right paper. It looks so perfect. You say, this is not a jobbed (ph) document; this is a real document. And that's been something that's been very helpful for the people.

Also using cell phones to arrange rescues of leaders and all these kind of things are happening. And I think one of the big questions we have is, what are the techniques by which people become aware of their rights? Also, what are the techniques by which they organize?

And one protest leader we know of, I've seen it, he has a telephone tree. He's got 50 different people scattered all around the county, right on this telephone tree. He's information central for getting all the information about what's going on. So it's made a big difference.

On the national media, it's an important question. Ben dealt with it in his work. The people we look at are – one village I work in, they're trying to hire a lawyer – they've been trying for 10 years – and hire a journalist to come to their village and do a report. They'd love to get on Jiaodian Fangtan (sp) or the provincial version of the "60 Minutes"-like shows that expose egregious horrors. It's very hard to do. There's a lot of villages, a lot of grievances. Most of them can't do it. They even rely on people like us.

They just go to anybody who's more powerful than the people that they're contesting with and try to get their support. And the media, journalists, lawyers are all the kinds of people who may be able to them attention. And often the things that have been done are just wrong, so obviously wrong, if the center wants to make a case about it, they just start publishing one or two of these stories about and in the next few weeks there are protests about that issue all around the country, because they've been signaled that this is a legitimate topic to take on.

So, it's a very careful decision the media makes when they take on something like this. And when they do, people are watching very closely.

MS. LU: Okay, thank you very much. Thank you both for your insightful discussion and presentation. We are running out of time here, so we will stop right here and break for 10 minutes for coffee.

(End of session.)