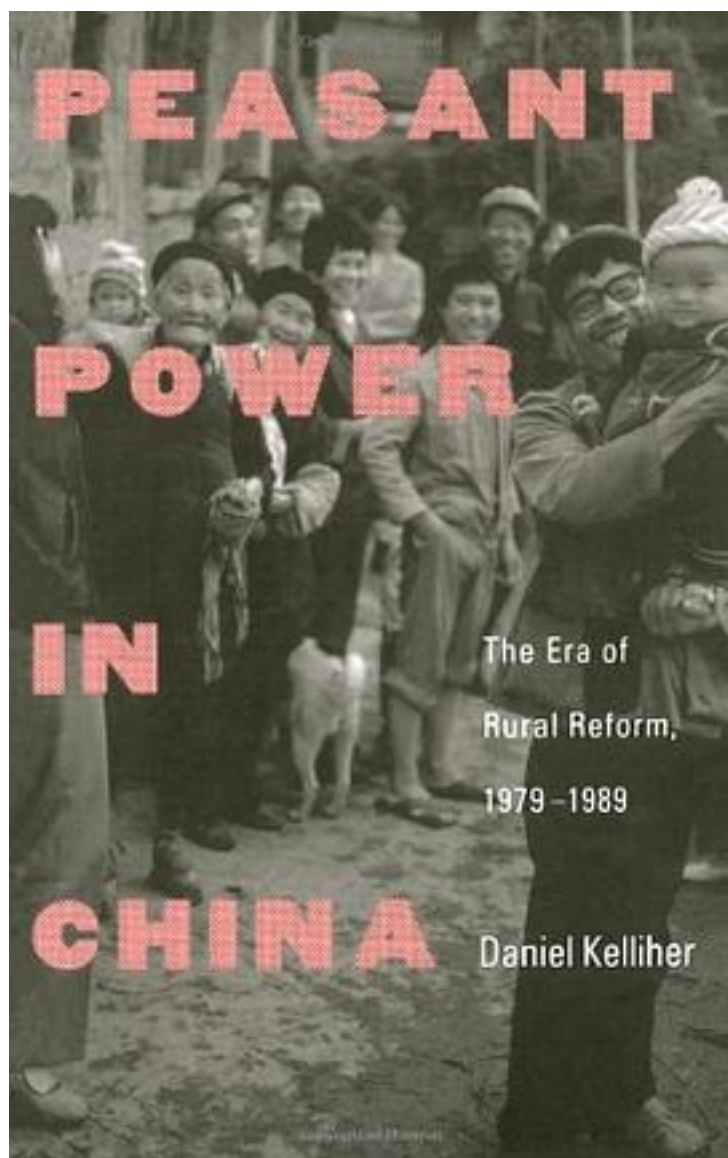


Peasant Power in China



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Between 1979 and 1989, rural life in China was transformed: the communes were dismantled, tiny family farms were created, government domination of commerce and enterprise was eased, and many entrepreneurial ventures were brought to life. China's rural reform was arguably the most massive single act of privatization in history. Although Deng Xiaoping's government claimed credit for the dramatic innovations, Daniel Kelliher shows that it was the peasants themselves—with no organization or legal political voice of their own—who instigated the most radical changes of the reform era.

Drawing on his fieldwork in Hubei Province and neighboring provinces in south-central China, Kelliher traces the origins of reform in three areas—family farming, marketing, and private entrepreneurship—and details the local conspiracies, deceptions, and illegal experiments that peasants used to push state policy in new directions. He also addresses the larger issue of how disenfranchised peasants could affect politics at all under a strong state like that of China. Analyzing the evolution of state socialism in China, Kelliher explains how state ambitions for modernization in the post-Mao era made the state-socialist system vulnerable to rising peasant power. He also shows why the state seized upon economic privatization as a way of securing its political base among the peasantry. The book not only offers a wide-ranging portrait of rural politics in contemporary China but also uses the Chinese case to illuminate state-peasant relations, reform in state socialism, and privatization in other third world nations.

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