

Mao's Crusade: Politics and Policy Implementation in China's Great Leap Forward. *By Alfred L. Chan.* New York: Oxford University Press, 2001. xiii + 321 pp. Index, bibliography, tables. Cloth, \$65.00. ISBN 0-199-24406-5.

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The Great Leap Forward (GLF) campaign from 1958 to 1960 presents a watershed in the history of post-1949 China. Its catastrophic economic effects and resulting political cleavages among the Chinese leadership indirectly led to the outbreak of the second major political upheaval, the Cultural Revolution, in 1966. Departing from the First Five-Year plan, based on the centralized Soviet economic model, the Chinese government used the GLF to introduce economic development and social progress at high speed by mobilizing the entire Chinese population. Most famous for drastic collectivization measures, production of inferior, useless steel in primitive backyard furnaces, and deception of the public through propaganda, the disastrous policies of the GLF brought famine and economic devastation to China, in particular the countryside. It took the economy several years to recover from this "great leap backward" and to return to the 1958 level of agricultural output.

Despite its enormous impact on the trajectory of postwar Chinese politics and history, until a decade ago the GLF attracted less attention in the literature than the Cultural Revolution. In recent years, the GLF—its political and economic crises, its agents, and its victims—has been explored by political scientists, sociologists, historians, and economists in a considerable number of studies. As a political scientist, Alfred L. Chan approaches the topic of the GLF with general questions about Mao's role and responsibility during the campaign, the formulation of policies in a leader-dominated system, and the failure of the GLF. His leader-oriented approach to analysis of the GLF may appear rather conservative, but more striking is the absence of a theoretical framework: the formulation of a hypothesis and its verification in the course of the book. With reference to the comprehensive treatment of the GLF by Frederick Teiwes and Warren Sun in their 1999 study, *China's Road to Disaster: Mao, Central Politicians, and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward*, Chan, in his introduction, explains that his goal is "to further develop the themes raised by Teiwes and Sun, expanding and substantiating those for which the new materials allow even more nuanced analysis" (p. 8). Unfortunately, apart from failing to offer a new methodological perspective himself, the author never clarifies what exactly these new sources are. His bibliography includes a large amount of recently published Chinese biographical literature documenting the personal experiences of politicians during the GLF, but it does not list any new material from Chinese archives.

Chan's study focuses on the year 1958, which witnessed the most radical policy innovations. A long opening chapter sets the stage by chronicling, in painstaking detail, the policies as they emerged from late 1957 to 1958. The economic goals of the GLF were to raise China's agricultural and heavy-industry output, and the next two chapters discuss the rural and agricultural policies of the Ministry of Agriculture and the industrial policies established by the Ministry of Metallurgy. The final two chapters explore the immediate impact of the GLF at the provincial level through a case study of Guangdong province in southern China. Here, Chan describes the policies that introduced agricultural communes, carried out their remuneration and distribution schemes, and oversaw the often problematic operation of large dining halls. We also learn about the iron and steel campaign in Guangdong, the role of model counties in the rural industrialization program, and the limited success of inspection tours.

The conclusion illustrates the major flaw of this study. In line with the title of his book, Chan has certainly succeeded in showing us "the dominant Mao" (p. 281) and "the improvisational Mao" (p. 283), but his argument pointing to Mao's charismatic personality and use of "a range of strategic and tactical maneuvers to maintain his supremacy, particularly in 1958" (p. 281), is hardly novel. Despite the emphasis on Mao as the driving force behind the GLF, the question of why his political opponents were unable to voice their concerns with more force remains largely unanswered. Another problem with the book is the author's narrow chronological focus on the year 1958. One could argue that in order to evaluate Mao's role in the central decision-making and policy implementation during the GLF, the year 1959, when many new GLF policies were put into practice, should also have been considered.

Despite the lack of a theoretical framework, Chan's description of the events of 1958 is carefully drawn and provides useful information for China specialists with a serious interest in post-1949 history and politics. The list of consulted Chinese newspapers, journals, and secondary sources is impressive. However, the excess of detail means that *Mao's Crusade* will probably be tough sledding for scholars from other disciplines who are interested in China for comparative reasons. Considering the policies in China's current economic reforms and the ongoing tensions they have created among the leadership, business historians might want to look again at the formulation of economic policies and at how relations between policymakers, government institutions, and local cadres worked before economic liberalization. Dali L. Yang's *Calamity and Reform in China: State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change Since the Great Leap Famine* (1996) comes to mind as an excellent study that perceptively analyzes the Great Leap famine and subsequent institutional changes, such as rural decollectivization, that preceded China's rural reforms in the late 1970s and 1980s. Rather than limiting himself to documenting Mao's crusade for power, Chan might have

more usefully elaborated on the argument that the GLF was a complex political event with complex economic consequences.

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