

Ghosh traces out the bleak fate of the SSB during the Great Leap Forward, when the shift in favour of ethnographic, localized methods of data collection completely undermined the ability of the SSB to gather and aggregate data estimates in any meaningful way. Unified computing methods that were just becoming more widespread a few years before were increasingly derided as “dogmatism run amok.” Yet, as the human scale of the devastation began to become clear, Mao bemoaned the fact that the constant frenetic bursts of activity that characterized the Great Leap had “made it impossible for statistics to keep up” (p. 258). In the end, driven by the twin pressures to reject “dogmatism” and to mobilize the masses to participate in statistical work, concerns over the manner in which data was collected were permitted to take precedence over accuracy. The SSB, like other Mao-era bureaucracies, developed into a system that incentivized the production of numbers, “setting in motion a vicious circle of data production and overproduction” that lacked “any significant technology to check its numbers”; the end result was “a Chinese state that, in spite of generating copious amounts of facts, remained poorly informed” (p. 284).

Although Ghosh’s monograph might appear to be narrowly focused on a highly specialized subfield, it is in fact anything but: it deftly explores deeper questions about how state-making unfolded during the early years of the PRC, how ideology came to permeate every facet of the governing apparatus, and how strategies of enumeration are invariably bound, in complex ways, to the expression of political power. As such, *Making It Count* is an essential addition to any reading list on PRC history, as well to research methods in the social sciences and the humanities.

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*The Rhetoric of Mao Zedong: Transforming China and Its People*

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This is Xing Lu’s third monograph on the history of Chinese rhetoric. Having covered classical antiquity (1998) and the Cultural Revolution (2004), this book explores the rhetoric of Mao Zedong over the course of his lifetime. The author’s stated intention is to understand how Mao transformed China “from a Confucian society characterized by hierarchy and harmony to a socialist state guided by Communist ideology of class struggle and radicalization” (p. 2). Although the author points out that other factors probably also played a role in China’s massive transformation processes during the 20th century, it is to Mao’s rhetoric that she assigns a key role in bringing about these changes through attracting, mobilizing and persuading the Chinese populace. The definition of rhetoric is very broad. Relying on James Crosswhite’s notion of “deep rhetoric,” Lu does not want solely to analyse rhetorical figures but also to understand the transformative potential of his speech and writing in changing historical contexts. Ultimately, the term rhetoric is therefore used interchangeably with notions of persuasion, discourse and even propaganda throughout the book. It proceeds by tracing Mao’s rhetoric in seven chapters that focus on both synchronic and diachronic aspects. These include broader topics, especially “themes,” “theories” and

“styles” of his rhetoric, but also more specific subjects such as his rhetoric regarding class struggle, the “new communist person,” foreign policy and nationalism.

It is the officially published Chinese and English versions of Mao Zedong’s writings that serve as sources for her study, complemented by a few audio recordings. Discussions about alternative versions of these texts are not foregrounded. The “unrehearsed” Mao, as available in the non-official *wansui*-editions of the Cultural Revolution or more recent archival transcripts of his speeches, are not considered. The same goes for distinctions between Mao as (co-)author of written texts or as public speaker, especially in the Yan’an years. This is a real pity. A lot of things could have been explored, for example with regard to the differences between the public and private rhetoric of Mao, that have not yet been stated elsewhere. Digital technology has furthermore opened up a whole new cosmos of possibilities for compiling and comparing these different text corpora.

While the study of Mao Zedong’s rhetoric is doubtlessly a fascinating subject, there is unfortunately little in the volume that would not have already been stated in the multitude of studies on the interrelation of language and politics in recent Chinese history or the dozens of Mao biographies. The first three chapters mainly dwell on well covered subjects such as the young Mao’s notes on Paulsen’s philosophy textbook, the Yan’an talks on literature and arts or an extended summary of his 1942 criticism of overly formalized party rhetoric. Animal metaphors, violence, profanity and Manichean binaries are pointed out as being particularly effective instruments, with which the eloquent party leader turned millions of Chinese people into “mental slaves of his rhetoric” (p. 94). The basic formula of the diachronic chapters is to place early Mao quotations against the background of a general historical context, followed by references to two or three important rhetorical changes over time. The chapters generally end with a brief section that summarizes the argument or hints at legacies for the present. This usually concludes that Mao was neither god nor monster, but a powerful rhetorician who needs to be embedded against the larger canvas of contemporary developments. There is nothing outrageously wrong with this claim or with general statements that Mao was “appropriating Marxist-Leninist theories of social change and combining them with Confucian values of human development” (p. 135). But what is missing is the question of how rhetoric actually manifested itself on the ground. What caused the transformative aspects to take root in practical politics and everyday action? What role was played by different forms of media in transporting the message or the specific modes of studying Mao’s writings? There is no discussion of either the microprocesses of power nor, alternatively, a sustained effort at developing a new model to extend the classic treatment of the subject by David Apter and Tony Saich in *Revolutionary Discourse in Mao’s Republic* (Harvard University Press, 1994) with their emphasis on strategies of exegetical bonding. The book thus aims at analysing the transformative impact of Mao’s speeches, yet without going beyond the officially edited texts.

The conclusion takes the story of Mao’s rhetorical legacy until the era of Xi Jinping and calls on Chinese leaders to expand their repertoire and to break away from abstract vagueness and empty promises of the past to reach out to a public tired of the ever same officialese. Thus, they are to connect not just with the Chinese populace but with the entire world. How the formerly potent and transformative character of Mao’s words seemingly turned into empty rhetoric remains one of the book’s many enigmas.

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