engage in "low-profile resistance" such as gleaning from the collective fields and eating crops before they were fully ripe (*chi qing*). Ultimately, Thaxton argues, these quiet acts of contention enabled the vast majority of citizens of Da Fo to survive, and thus obviated the need for full-scale rebellion.

The assertion that Da Fo's farmers consciously resisted the most extreme policies of the GLF is consistent with a rich literature on China's countryside both before and since the establishment of the People's Republic of China. While some may question whether secretly feeding oneself and one's family from the collective fields during a time of starvation should count as an act of "resistance," Thaxton's work shows that this and other forbidden activities were always carried out in a highly regulated social context imbued with local understandings of justice. It was primarily women, for example, who engaged in *chi qing* and begging. It strikes this reader that these feminized forms of resistance would not have taken the shape that they did in the absence of, on the one hand, the large-scale mobilization of women into agricultural fieldwork, and on the other, distinct notions of social propriety that dictated how state regulations should be evaded. In Da Fo, villagers and leaders alike made conscious decisions about the crisis that were rooted in their world view of justice – a view that at times placed them directly at odds with the conception of justice being implemented by the central leadership.

Although Thaxton effectively builds upon the argument that covert forms of resistance such as *chi qing* did much to undermine the rural collective economy throughout the Mao era, he is less convincing as to whether or not the rural residents of Da Fo themselves came to question the legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party. Even the much more overt and violent forms of retribution that have sprung up during the reform era have remained directed at local leaders for their specific famine-era crimes, rather than directed at the central leadership largely responsible for designing the policies in the first place. With a second volume on Da Fo in progress, one suspects this argument will be fleshed out further in the future.

In the meantime, *Catastrophe and Contention* has made a huge contribution to the study of modern Chinese politics. While it is true that Da Fo may be "one tiny star in the galaxy of China's million villages" (p. 269), Thaxton's deeply researched, passionately engaged, and well-written monograph has done exactly what an excellent case study should: opened up whole new vistas of inquiry. This book will serve as an indispensable resource for scholars and students alike seeking to make sense of a deeply complex period in the People's Republic of China and its on-going imprint on the politics of today.

KIMBERLEY ENS MANNING

Eating Bitterness: New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine
Edited by KIMBERELY ENS MANNING and FELIX WEMHEUER
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2011
ix + 321 pp. $37.95
ISBN 978-0-7748-1727-1 doi:10.1017/S0305741011001299

This fine collection contains an introduction and eleven essays, three of which have previously been published (two of those in Chinese). The first half of the book focuses broadly on ideological aspects of the disastrous Great Leap Forward, from its launch amid considerable fanfare in May 1958 to its dismantlement by Liu Shaoqui and his

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followers from mid-1960. There are chapters on the utopian euphoria and idealism that preceded and initially accompanied the Leap (Richard King, Kimberley Manning), on the associated ideology that made hunger a taboo subject (Felix Wemheuer), and on how the Leap radically socialized housing and dining arrangements (Xin Yi, Wang Yanni).

The remaining chapters are mainly about the ensuing famine. Gao Hua describes the widespread resort to substitute foods during the famine, Chen Yixin offers a comparative analysis of the famine in the neighbouring provinces of Anhui and Jiangsi, Jeremy Brown uses Tianjin, a city of 3.5 million people in 1958, as a case-study of the famine in the city, while Ralph Thaxton and Gao Wangling describe peasant resistance during the famine.

The famine's intensity varied considerably across provinces. This has prompted economists and economic historians to apply statistical techniques to province-level data in attempts at accounting for the variation (for a sophisticated example see Kung and Chen's 2011 article "The tragedy of the Nomenklatura; career incentives and political radicalism during China's Great Leap Famine" in *American Political Science Review*, 105 [1]). A problem with this approach is that the results are only as good as the data, which typically include proxies for the weather and harvest damage and for "institutional" variables such as procurements and political leadership. This prompts Yixin Chen to argue that the famine "is better explained through a detailed study of the stories and data belonging to each province" (p. 221). He accordingly compares the contrasting outcomes in Anhui and Jiangxi provinces. In terms of GDP per head and resource endowments, Jiangxi was admittedly better off than Anhui, but certainly not by enough to explain why the official death rate in Anhui in 1960, the peak year for mortality, was four times that in Jiangxi. In an impressive contribution, Chen focuses on local politics. Anhui was led by a zealot from Hunan whose eagerness to please Beijing led him to divert five million workers from agriculture to irrigation projects, with disastrous consequences for agricultural output. Jiangxi's four leaders, by contrast, had all been born in the province and empathized with its people. This, Chen argues, made all the difference (pp. 212–8).

The role of local agents is a recurring theme in the book. Just as Chen makes the case for the role of province-level politics in Anhui and Jiangxi, Brown explains how in Tianjin municipal and central leaders went to "extraordinary lengths to prevent urban starvation" (p. 247), and Hua notes how "the great majority of cadres shared in the hardship of the masses" (p. 194). Even Thaxton credits local party activists with supporting the peasants. Such responses both depended on and exacerbated the informational gap between the centre and the regions. Hua refers to Beijing's inability to understand the gravity of the problem due to the failure of local agents to report the truth (p. 179), while Thaxton refers to the "deceitful political habits" of regional and district party leaders, and both Wemheuer and Susanne Weigelin-Schwiedrzik highlight the defining moment of Xinyang in October 1960 (pp. 8, 37), when Beijing was finally confronted with the reality of mass famine.

Famines have always prompted the hungry to protest and to resist. Here, and in his formidable monograph *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China* (Cambridge University Press, 2008), Ralph Thaxton highlights how China's peasants tried to cope by robbing unripe standing crops in the fields (*chiqing*) in 1959 and 1960, thereby depriving the authorities of much of the grain harvest. Local cadres often turned a blind eye to a practice common during famines. This perfectly rational response was hardly a panacea, however. For one thing, *chiqing* was at best a seasonal solution to hunger – much like fishing during the Great Irish famine of the 1840s. Second, given that the harvest was poor, "eating nearly all of the wheat crops" risked

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making a desperate situation worse. Third, the history of famines generally tells us that as conditions worsen, too often "the ability of famished villagers to cooperate even in the worst of times" degenerates into opportunism, intra-peasant conflict, and ultimately lethargy and fatalism.

How did the famine end? How come there was no famine in 1962 or 1963 when, if official data are to be believed, agricultural output was no higher than in 1959–61? Doubts about official harvest data in these years must be part of the answer. So must grain imports; in 1961/62 they represented one-quarter of total wheat supplies. Shifting food entitlements and economic pragmatism mattered too. Thaxton marginalizes the role of the policy reforms introduced by Liu Shaoqi and Deng Xiaoping but his claim that class struggle in the form of peasant resistance was the determining factor needs further elaboration to be convincing.

Finally, the book does not advance our understanding of the demographic toll. The editors are content with the claim that "some 15 million to 43 million peasants starved to death" (p. 1), while Ralph Thaxton opts for a toll of "*at least* 30 to 55 million" (p. 260, emphasis added). This is just one sign of how much we still don't know about the Great Leap famine, despite such an excellent collection of essays.

CORMAC Ó GRÁDA

The Chinese Cultural Revolution: A History
PAUL CLARK
Cambridge and New York: Cambridge University Press, 2008
xii + 352 pp. £17.99
ISBN 978-0-521-69786-6

Art in Turmoil: The Chinese Cultural Revolution, 1966–1976
Edited by RICHARD KING
Vancouver: UBC Press, 2010
xii + 282 pp. $32.95
ISBN 978-0-77481543-7 doi:10.1017/S0305741011001305

The reality of what happened during China's Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (*wenhua dageming*) still invokes a frisson of sheer horror from those in the know, particularly the deaths by suicide or torture of many of China's most eminent cultural figures, including famously the artist Pan Tianshou and the writer Lao She. Two recent books focusing on culture during the Cultural Revolution (*wenge*) provide valuable contributions to research on this period, which has largely been insubstantial and infrequent in Anglophone literature and remains a problematic area of research despite continual interest in the subject in the academic and wider community. Despite numerous accounts in literature and also some detailed historical analyses, there has been a gap in the serious study of culture itself during that time, despite its centrality in the title of the movement.

Paul Clark's full and detailed account of various aspects of cultural production and reception in China from 1964 through to the end of the Cultural Revolution (taken as the usual main dating 1966–1976) is largely biased towards opera as a central, reformed cultural form but his book also includes sections on dance, art and architecture, music, film and literature. Clark displays an in-depth level of research on the central role of

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