Book Reviews

In 1950, barely a year after the founding of the PRC, Beijing's first vice mayor inquired, "Were there statistics in the past?"

No matter in liberated areas or in areas under the old regime, we cannot say there were not statistics, just that they were filled with inadequacies. It is not that they did not value statistics … reports and tables, but these materials in all likelihood were incomplete, inaccurate and unsystematic, and therefore they could not serve as the basis for anything. (p. 3)

Only a few years later, the centrally planned economy (as well as other aspects of Mao-era PRC governance) would come to rely mightily upon the collection, compilation and extrapolation of statistical data. Accordingly, the significance of Arunabh Ghosh's fascinating excursus into how this process was inextricably linked to the building of the new Party-state goes well beyond a history of statistics in the PRC to raise deeper issues of epistemology, methodology and politics that will hopefully invite broader debates not only in history, but also across the social sciences about how we know what we think we know about Chinese governing aims and practices over time.

Ghosh begins with three basic approaches to the study of statistics and statistical inference in the 1950s: the ethnographic, the exhaustive and the stochastic. The ethnographic approach, perhaps best typified by Mao's 1927 *Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan*, valorized individual experience at the cost of precision, and frequently relied upon selected modular examples. By contrast, the exhaustive approach practised by most Chinese statisticians during the 1950s focused on "extensiveness across the economy and society, completeness of the statistical system, and objectivity of social facts" (p. 53). With its "fetishization of complete enumeration," the exhaustive approach to socialist statistics was advocated vigorously by Soviet experts in China, and was driven, Ghosh observes, by "the comfort of certainty and the desire to enumerate and account for everything" (pp. 72–73).

Given the limited nature of the PRC's technical resources and trained personnel in the 1950s, the enormity of the challenge posed by a strategy of complete and exhaustive enumeration proved overwhelming. The solution to this dilemma was found, somewhat surprisingly in light of China's heavy reliance on Soviet expertise, in India. Zhou Enlai's 1956 visit to the Indian Statistical Institute brought him into contact with its influential director, Prasanta Chandra Mahalanobis, who had begun preaching the value of pilot surveys and the concept of optimum survey design, and was pioneering a different approach to managing India's vastly decentralized agricultural economy (p. 221). Two State Statistical Bureau (SSB) statisticians – one specializing in industrial, and the other, in agricultural, data – were dispatched to the Indian Statistical Institute for just over a year to learn what they could about stochastic statistical methods. Yet the potential applicability of these lessons for China's SSB was derailed by the start of the Great Leap Forward, an event that would push the use of statistics as a tool of governance beyond its utmost limits.

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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 that 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
XING LU

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