

Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform: Initial Steps toward a New Chinese Countryside, 1976–1981, by Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun. Abingdon: Routledge, 2016. xxiii+350 pp. £110.00 (cloth), £27.99 (paper).

Most of the writing among both Western and Chinese scholars about China's turn to household farming between 1979 and the early 1980s has erroneously depicted an upsurge from below by farmers who allegedly bypassed the Party's sway by quietly distributing collective farmlands into the hands of families. *Paradoxes of Post-Mao Rural Reform* paints a very different picture—and does so very persuasively. Using considerable evidence, it shows that, instead, a complex elite politics underpinned China's return to family farming.

No scholars are better qualified to undertake this study of a crucial period in Chinese politics than Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun. Sun and Teiwes have spent decades intensively researching the history of Chinese Communist Party politics, progressively moving forward in time in one important book after another, from before the establishment of the People's Republic up into the post-Mao period. In this massive undertaking, they have published a number of important works, sometimes separately but often as coauthors. These range from the elite politics that resulted in agricultural cooperatives and collectives in the 1950s, to the disastrous role of the top leadership in shaping the tragedy of the Great Leap Forward, to Lin Biao's extraordinary fall from power, to a wonderful 700-page opus about the last half decade of Mao's rule. Now their impressive history of Chinese politics has reached the Hua Guofeng and early Deng eras—and their research continues to overturn prevailing beliefs.

Chapters 1 and 2 focus on the two-year period of Hua Guofeng's ascendancy. Teiwes and Sun dispute the common assumption among scholars that Deng and Hua were in opposing camps, and they portray Hua Guofeng as a pragmatic reformer with a far better grasp of the rural situation than Deng. (On their argument that Hua was an economic reformer, also see their article in *China Journal* 66 [2011].) Hua did not initially promote contracting land to households, but Sun and Teiwes argue that he adopted a propeasant line, opened up space for decentralization of rural policy initiatives into the hands of provincial leaders, and thus set the stage for the ensuing shift into household farming. Chapter 3 focuses on the secret shift by villagers to household farming during 1978 in two very poor areas of Anhui and Guizhou provinces and the permission subsequently offered there by local officials, by Anhui province's Party secretary Wan Li, and as a temporary measure by Hua Guofeng in 1979.

In 1980, Wan Li was promoted to Beijing as the minister in charge of agriculture. As Chapters 4 and 5 show, starting that year Hu Yaobang, Zhao Ziyang, and Wan Li, in separate and uncoordinated ways, pushed for relaxations in agriculture that would ultimately enable localities to engage in household farming. But they did not specify that household farming should predominate. As Teiwes and Sun

observe about Wan Li: “at no point did he present household contracting as *the* policy direction for the countryside” (101). Nor did Deng Xiaoping play a decisive role; instead, he paid less attention to rural policies and quietly relied on his protégés.

A result was that provincial leaders had to figure out how to proceed. They were reluctant to be out of step with the Party line, but as Sun and Teiwes put it, “in the provinces, on the crucial issue of household farming the problem was not siding with one presumed faction or another in Beijing, but rather the ambiguity of policy coming out of the Party Center” (273). Consequently, different provinces undertook somewhat different policies, and household farming was implemented spottily as policy in some: “as the relaxation of policy gathered apace under the new Deng leadership, the acceptable scope of what qualified as backward areas where household farming could be accepted was contested, but it nevertheless was expanded” (286). This was largely a top-down exercise, not a bottom-up upsurge. But as household farming was adopted by one provincial region after another, there were significant increases in agricultural production in 1982–83, and this validated and imbedded the new farming practices.

In sum, a complex and unplanned interplay between the top leadership and provincial and subprovincial levels of the bureaucratic structure, involving ambiguous directives from reformers at the top who were hesitantly open to household farming and ongoing pressures among provincial and subprovincial officials to react, gradually culminated in the countryside’s near-total abandonment of agricultural collectives. There had been no master plan, no deliberate effort from above to steer all of rural China uniformly down a single path. Yet, due to the nature of Chinese political organization and practices, that is precisely what occurred. Over the course of a four-year period all of rural China was launched into an entirely new agrarian order. It was an extraordinary turning point in PRC history. Teiwes and Sun capture this well, showing the important cumulative details of incremental shifts while never losing sight of the broader scenario. The authors deserve applause.

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Negotiating Rural Land Ownership in Southwest China: State, Village, Family, by Yi Wu. Honolulu: University of Hawai‘i Press, 2016. xvii+282 pp. US\$65.00 (cloth).

This ethnographic study describes how China’s national and local governments, administrative villages, natural villages, and households have interacted to delimit and exercise rights to land from the 1950s up to the present day in Fuyuan County,