

The Campaign for Agricultural Development in the Great Leap Forward: A Study of Policy-Making and Implementation in Liaoning*

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As is well known, the Great Leap Forward (GLF) of 1958–59 was the most intense mobilizational phase in the history of the People's Republic of China and the most concentrated expression of the utopian Maoist developmental model. Yet the adoption of an alternative development strategy to the Stalinist model by decentralization did not bring about material abundance; it led directly to an economic depression from which the country did not recover until 1965. Therefore, the “leap” is worthy of more scholarly attention than it has received.¹ Of particular interest is the role played by the provinces in the policy-making process, the bureaucratic behaviour of the provincial authorities, the way policies were implemented, and the environmental constraints and how they affected policy-making.

This article will focus on a single province, Liaoning, and examine its implementation of rural and agricultural policies in 1958. Liaoning is of special interest because in 1958 it epitomized the perceived shortcomings of the First Five-Year Plan (FFYP) of 1953–57 – the undue emphasis on industry at the expense of agriculture, the preference for capital-intensive rather than labour-intensive methods, and the “bureaucratization” of the industrial organizations. Although this was the result of central planning priorities, even before 1958 there was strong pressure on the province to become self-reliant in food, as tremendous efforts were required by the Central Government to extract grain from grain-surplus provinces.² Mao had personally criticized Liaoning's long-term reliance on the other provinces for grain, meat and vegetables,³ and this alone was a powerful induce-

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1. There are many general accounts of the Great Leap Forward, usually limited to a chapter or section in a monograph. The book by Roderick MacFarquhar is the only book-length study of the “leap.” *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution, Volume 2: The Great Leap Forward, 1958–1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). My *The Dynamics of Policy-Making in China: The Case of the Great Leap Forward, 1958* (unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Toronto, 1988) attempts to address the following key questions: How was mobilization on such a colossal scale possible? How were policies being formulated and implemented? What were the effects of intense mobilization on decision-making and implementation? Why did large-scale mobilization campaigns fail to achieve the desired results? Was the GLF uniquely Chinese? How can it be explained?

2. Kenneth R. Walker, *Food Grain Procurement and Consumption in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), pp. 94–95.

3. Mao Zedong, *Mao Zedong sixiang wansui*. (*Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought!*) (n.p.: 1969), p. 373–74. The text is dated 1961–62, but it seems that 1960 is the more accurate date. See Mao Zedong, *Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought!* (n.p.: 1967), pp. 167–247.

ment for change. Moreover, since the development of Liaoning had been a priority supported by the rest of the country during the FFYP, it was expected that it would begin repaying its debts not only with industrial goods but also by reducing its dependency on other provinces. Therefore the GLF goal of regional autarky meant an overnight reversal in its development strategy. In the end, unlike all other provinces, Liaoning was said even by contemporary accounts to have failed to achieve a GLF in agriculture in 1958.⁴ Hence, a focus on the agricultural campaign in industrialized Liaoning is an ideal way to explore the impact of central policies and priority shifts on the province, the extent the province bent to the visions of the centre, and why and how it failed to achieve them.

Despite their policy differences, by early 1958 a general consensus had crystallized among the top Chinese leaders about the need to accelerate development by using mass mobilization and administrative decentralization.⁵ To forestall opposition, a series of purges affecting 12 provinces began in December 1957 and removed many provincial leaders deemed unreliable by the centre, though they were not accused of opposing the GLF since it had barely begun.⁶ However,

4. For the failure of the agricultural "leap" in Liaoning, see *Liaoning ribao* (hereafter *LNRB*) 8 October and 3 December 1958.

5. On this point, see Kenneth Lieberthal, "The Great Leap Forward and the split in the Yenan leadership," in Roderick MacFarquhar and John K. Fairbank (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, Vol. 14 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), pp. 293 and 298. At the Nanning conference (8–22 January), Mao reintroduced the "leap forward" strategy in economic development. Three Politburo leaders, the premier Zhou Enlai and deputy premiers Chen Yun (commerce minister) and Li Xiannian (finance minister), were chastised for their opposition to the 1956 "leap." Consequently, they retracted their objection to "adventurism," clearing the way for further mobilization and experimentation. See Mao Zedong, *Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought!* (1969), pp. 146 and 395; *Zhongguo Gongchandang jianshi jiangyi* (Concise Teaching Notes on the History of the Communist Party of China), Vol. 2 (hereafter *Jianshi jiangyi*) (Guangdong Renmin chubanshe, 1981), pp. 341–42; *Zhongguo Gongchandang lishi jiangyi* (Teaching Notes on the History of the Communist Party of China), Vol. 2 (hereafter *Lishi jiangyi*) (Shanghai: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), p. 64. Later in 1958, Zhou was in charge of supervising the iron and steel campaign and ensuring that "other activities would give way." Zhou Enlai, *Zhou Enlai xuanji* (Selected Works of Zhou Enlai), Vol. II (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 406. Chen Yun, on the other hand, was the chief architect in drafting two of the three most important documents on decentralization which launched the GLF. See Chen Yun, *Chen Yun tongzhi wengao xuanbian, 1956–1962* (Selected Manuscripts of Comrade Chen Yun, 1956–1962) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1980), pp. 60–69; Nicholas Lardy and Kenneth Lieberthal, *Chen Yun's Strategy for China's Development* (Armonk: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1983), pp. 76–87. This contradicts the widely-shared view that Chen's role in economic decision-making was curtailed after the Third Plenum of September/October 1957. See, for example, Frederick C. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges in China* (White Plains, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1979), pp. 342–46.

6. Teiwes, *Politics and Purges*, pp. 351, 379. According to him, of all the purges and dismissals carried out immediately after the Third Plenum, only Yunnan and Shandong were accused of opposing the GLF specifically, although he also notes that Liaoning was charged with ignoring small industries in 1958. See *ibid.* pp. 351 and 361. When the radicalism of the GLF subsided in 1960–61, several provincial leaders were removed, without public charges, probably for the excesses committed during the "leap." Frederick Teiwes, "Provincial politics in China: themes and variations," in John H. Lindbeck (ed.), *China, Management of a Revolutionary Society* (Seattle & London: University of Washington Press, 1971), p. 132.

in Liaoning and Shandong the axe did not fall until mid-1958. Liaoning lost several important leaders, including both the governor and vice-governor, and the dismissals were more directly linked to central displeasure with its implementation of GLF policies. Hence Liaoning seems to be an atypical case, as most provinces were jealous supporters of various GLF policies in 1958.⁷ This article will explore the circumstances surrounding the purges and the nature of the transgressions.

So far as the policy-making process is concerned, many analysts conclude that the decentralization measures of 1957/1958 led to more provincial autonomy.⁸ However, if the decision-making powers of the provinces were expanded, one would expect that they would exploit them to suit their own perceived needs and well-being. However the GLF principle of "simultaneous development" of agriculture and industry meant that industrial provinces like Liaoning were obliged to promote agriculture and become self-sufficient, and agricultural

7. Sichuan and Guizhou, which were not affected by the purges, were enthusiastic supporters of the GLF. David G. Goodman, *Centre and Province in the People's Republic of China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 93 and 114. Guangdong, under the leadership of "the most Maoist party bureaucrat" Tao Zhu and Zhao Ziyang, was another example. Ezra Vogel, *Canton Under Communism* (New York: Harper Torchbooks, 1976), ch. 6; David L. Shambaugh, *The Making of a Premier* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1984), pp. 18ff. Shambaugh's conclusion that both Tao and Zhao disappeared from public view in the autumn of 1958 because they were opposed to the communes, or that they adopted a wait-and-see tactic before committing themselves, is incorrect. According to the requirements of a "big check-up" campaign which lasted from 15 September to the end of October, the two men had to oversee the promotion of various aspects of the "leap" among the grassroots. For details see my *The Dynamics of Policy-Making*, pp. 422ff and 440ff. Recent revelations about the role of Chinese leaders during the GLF may not always be accurate, for political or other reasons. For instance, an article about Liao Luyan claimed that he maintained his sobriety during the "leap," although numerous contemporary accounts showed exactly the opposite. See *Xinhua yuebao*, No. 4 (1979), p. 65. Another article about Tao Zhu during the GLF emphasized his "pragmatic" role in the retreat from the "leap" policies, completely ignoring his words and deeds in 1958. See *Renmin ribao*, 30 November 1989. Henan and Zhejiang's radicalism is described in Parris Chang, *Power and Policy in China* (University Park & London: The Pennsylvania University Press, 1978 (2nd ed.)), ch. 3.

8. Franz Schurmann's *Ideology and Organization in Communist China* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), was the first to propound the "decentralization thesis." See pp. 176, 183, 208, 262–63. Two recent authors who hold this view are Maurice Meisner, *Mao's China and After* (New York: The Free Press, 1986), p. 229, and Harry Harding, *Organizing China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1981), pp. 176–77, 180–81 and 189. According to Goodman, Sichuan and Guizhou enjoyed a great deal of autonomy in implementing the GLF. See his *Centre and Province*, p. 93. However, in his research into the fiscal relationship between the centre and the provinces, Nicholas Lardy argues that despite the decentralization in the late 1950s, Beijing retained broad planning power and the ability to allocate important resources. By virtue of these, it was able to pursue continuously its goals of reducing regional disparities by drawing from the wealthier provinces to subsidize the less developed provinces. See Nicholas Lardy, "Economic planning in China: central and provincial relations," in *China: A Reassessment of the Economy* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1975), p. 95, and his "Centralization and decentralization in China's fiscal management," *The China Quarterly*, No. 61 (March 1975), pp. 25–60. For a further discussion of the nature and effects of the 1957–58 decentralization, see Nicholas Lardy, *Economic Growth and Distribution in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), ch. 3.

provinces lacking raw materials or industrial foundation were pressed to develop heavy industry. Furthermore, Liaoning was hamstrung by an increasingly interventionist centre – the decentralization in 1958 seemed more apparent than real.

One of the most striking features of policy-making during the “leap” was the numerous, diffuse and contradictory goals that were continuously being mooted throughout 1958, and the extremely short time limit allowed for their attainment. This was epitomized by the slogans of “simultaneous development” and “more, faster, better and more economical.” The central leadership was determined to push development on all fronts, and to maximize all values by striving for speed, quantity, quality and economy concurrently. This made it extremely difficult for Liaoning to set any priorities, but it was under tremendous pressure to show results. Consequently, a great deal of goal displacement and ritualistic bureaucratic behaviour occurred.⁹

Before exploring the above issues, a consideration of the environmental background to the “leap” in Liaoning is in order. In the late 1950s Liaoning was the most urbanized province and the largest heavy industrial centre in the country. The leadership prided itself on these achievements, and expressed the desire to rely on its tested formula which had led to success during the FFYP. Agriculture, on the other hand, was a more secondary concern. As a grain-deficit province, Liaoning relied on substantial imports to feed its large urban population (9.31 million, or 38 per cent of the total population of 24.5 million). Moreover, its many economic crops and industries required a large labour force; throughout the 1950s, other provinces supplied Liaoning with “several tens of thousands” of labourers.¹⁰

Liaoning’s growing season is relatively short: the frost-free period is around 180 to 200 days. Between 1949 and 1957 floods affected an average of 423,000 hectares of land annually; droughts also occurred yearly, but only 9.5 per cent of the total arable land was irrigated. Traditionally, only small quantities of fertilizer were applied, and 40 per cent of all cultivated land was not fertilized at all. The land was ploughed to a depth of only a few inches. Overall, extensive farming

9. Stephen Quick argues that the nature of policy goals structures the implementation process to a large extent. Hence, multiple and ambiguous goals make rational implementation difficult because there is no logical way to set priorities. Since inaction is ruled out by political pressure, the implementers will rely on political criteria in setting priorities and concentrate on the short-run and measurable results. They cannot achieve all the goals and can be blamed for many things; therefore they zealously respond to all the clues from their superiors, but this hypersensitivity may lead to the misrepresentation of the wishes of the national leadership, and inhibits feedback information. See Stephen Quick, “The paradox of popularity: ideological program implementation in Zambia,” in Merilee S. Grindle (ed.), *Politics and Policy Implementation in the Third World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980). See also Eugene Bardach, *The Implementation Game* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1977); Brian Hogwood and B. Guy Peters, *The Pathology of Public Policy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1985); and Robert Nakamura and Frank Smallwood, *The Politics of Policy Implementation* (New York: St Martin Press, 1980).

10. Walker, *Food Grain Procurement and Consumption*, pp. 71, 74, 116–122, and 186; *LNRB*, 28 January 1958 and 26 September 1959.

was the norm.¹¹ All this convinced the Party that water conservancy, irrigation, fertilizer application and other technical reforms could raise agricultural output dramatically, and this was the promise of the GLF. Yet this went against the grain of traditional farming practices. The numerous technical and organizational reforms, haphazardly conceived and implemented, and the Party's attempt to control such things as output, sown acreage, type of crops and timing of agricultural activities, simply alienated the peasantry.

To achieve agricultural self-sufficiency meant an uphill battle. Moreover, the provincial leadership was not unanimous about how manpower and resources should be allocated, especially when the need for trade-offs was taken into account. In addition, the timing and the ways these technical reforms were to be carried out were largely dictated by the centre, irrespective of their suitability to local conditions. All of this imposed tremendous strain on the provincial leadership.

The Great Leap Forward Takes Shape

In contrast to provinces like Guangdong where the GLF strategy took hold early, the initial mobilization for the "leap" in Liaoning was slower and relatively low-key. The severe winter weather, which inhibited agricultural activities, was probably the main factor. However, once the GLF gathered momentum, the provincial authorities had to participate actively. The re-enactment of the Twelve Year National Programme for Agricultural Development 1956–1967 (NPAD) at the Third Plenum (20 September–9 October) was greeted in Liaoning in mid-November by three-level cadre meetings (county, *xiang*, and APC) and discussions among the six million peasants lasting from seven to ten days.¹² This set the stage for the Eighth Planning Conference (19–29 December) which discussed crop diversification and the raising of grain production. Production of grain and cotton in 1958 would reach 7.84 million and 66,700 tonnes (about 20 per cent and 63.5 per cent above 1957) respectively. The number of pigs would reach 6.47 million (two million more than 1957) and self-sufficiency in vegetables would be realized. In addition, irrigation and water conservancy, the expansion of high-yield crops, the application of larger quantities of fertilizers, improved seeds, and improvements in farming techniques were to be implemented.¹³

In the new year, the Liaoning Provincial Party Committee (PPC)

11. See *LNRB*, 25 May, 1 and 26 June 1958.

12. *LNRB*, 17 January 1958. The National Programme for Agricultural Development was a general and long-term programme for rural development and had been instrumental in launching the 1956 "leap forward" and the Great Leap Forward of 1958–1960. For a discussion of why it was resurrected at the Third Plenum (20 September–9 October 1957), see my *The Dynamics of Policy-Making*, pp. 298ff. In Guangdong, an ambitious provincial Ten-Year Plan based on the NPAD had already been drawn up by early November. See *Renmin ribao*, 16 November 1957.

13. *LNRB*, 14 January 1958.

and the Provincial People's Council (PPC) assumed direct command of the agricultural "leap" at a conference for agricultural activists (27 January–4 February). The target for grain was rounded up to eight million tons. By 1962 it would reach ten million tonnes, accomplishing "complete self-sufficiency"; by 1967 the planned 12.5 million tonnes of grain would turn Liaoning into a grain surplus province.¹⁴ This in turn required massive irrigation and the extensive application of fertilizer.

After the delegates had criticized their own alleged conservatism, Wang Zheng, Provincial Party first secretary, was emboldened to announce that Liaoning would fulfil the requirements of the NPAD four years ahead of schedule. It would also achieve self-sufficiency in grain in three years (that is, by 1960 and not 1962), vegetables in one year, pork in two years, and cooking oil in three years. To raise output dramatically, the PPC also decided to expand the acreage devoted to maize. This is a good illustration of goal displacement, with the PPC attempting to substitute quantity for quality, because maize was regarded as an inferior food by the peasants.

These were unpopular decisions, and even the "activists" did not automatically toe the Party line. Some maintained that such haste was unwarranted since there were ten years to implement the NPAD; others argued that a "leap" was impossible without more state funds. Some opposed the expansion of maize cultivation and the unusual practice of carrying out construction in the severe cold of the winter. However, the dissent was smothered when Wang rebuffed the delegates for lacking "revolutionary enthusiasm," and called for struggles against "conservatism."¹⁵

In any event, a meeting of the Standing Committee of the PPC on 15 February went one step further and vowed to achieve the modernization and mechanization of agriculture in five years. Many ambitious goals were made: mechanized farming was to be introduced to over 80 per cent of all farmland and electrification was to extend to 50–60 per cent of the *xiang* during the Second Five-Year Plan period (1958–62). By the end of February, the Provincial Industrial Bureau had already drawn up elaborate plans for acquiring machinery worth ¥20 billion.¹⁶

14. Compare this with recent and more realistic figures of grain production in Liaoning (in million tonnes):

1949	4.06	1965	6.705
1952	5.44	1978	11.170
1956	7.43	1983	14.850

(From *Liaoning sanshiwu nian (Liaoning's 35 Years)* (Shenyang: Liaoning Renmin chubanshe, 1984), p. 208.)

15. *LNRB*, 28 and 30 January, 5 February 1958. In Guangdong, the various prefectural and county committee also convened "oath-taking" conferences in order to create several hundred thousands of activists to act as a leadership nucleus to spearhead the GLF. See *Nanfang ribao*, 10 January 1958.

16. *LNRB*, 21 February, 1 March, and 10 September 1958. These plans required 15,000 large tractors, 200,000 pieces of farm machinery, and all types of engines, power generators, turbines, and so on.

Yet these expensive plans were dropped almost as soon as they were announced as the leaders were reluctant to inject massive resources into the agricultural sector. They also went against the GLF principle of relying on the labour-intensive method. In subsequent months, mechanization was to be implemented by several mass campaigns to refit existing farm implements.

"Wage a bitter struggle for three years and transform the appearance of the province." In the meantime, several central initiatives—the Nanning Conference (8–22 January), the issuing of the Sixty Articles (19 February) and the directive on the Anti-Waste and Anti-Conservatism Campaign (3 March)—further radicalized agricultural policies in Liaoning.¹⁷ In response, a Provincial Rural Work Conference from 2–7 March attended by more than 2,000 senior cadres met to deepen the criticism of "rightist conservatism," to revise production targets, and to drum up support for an "all out" campaign for two months.

On the first day, Du Zhehang, provincial governor and the secretary of the PPC in charge of agriculture, unveiled four ambitious decisions. To begin with, the province would achieve the "three self-sufficiencies" in grain, pork, and vegetables *within the year*. From the autumn Liaoning would discontinue its reliance on state supply of these commodities. Secondly, in two years' time all farmland would be brought under irrigation. Thirdly, the grain target in the NPAD would be achieved in three years. Finally, there would be full mechanization and rural electrification in five years. The mass mobilization approach was deemed essential for the attainment of these objectives. Echoing Mao, Du lashed out at the critics of the "adventurism" of the 1956 "leap," and silenced those who, according to him, claimed that the unfolding GLF was just as much "bragging" as "insanity."

In the ebullient atmosphere of the meeting, pledges by delegates led to the overturn even of some of the PPC's original targets. At the end of the conference Du announced the revised grain target for 1958 to be ten million tonnes with a further target of 13 million tonnes to aim for (48 per cent and 92.6 per cent over the production of 1957, respectively), thereby shortening the time to reach the targets of the NPAD to only two years. To pre-empt opposition, Du warned that the method of "anti-rightist conservatism" would be used against anybody who "dared to mention anti-adventurism."¹⁸

17. At the Nanning Conference (8–22 January), Mao reintroduced the "leap forward" strategy in economic development. He also prepared the country for a projected high tide in production and recaptured Party control over the bureaucracy. See MacFarquhar, *Origins*, pp. 24–29. Like the NPAD, the Sixty Articles was another programmatic statement which ushered in the GLF. The full text is in Mao Zedong, *Long Live Mao Zedong's Thought!* (1967), pp. 29–38. See also *Jiangshi jiangyi*, pp. 341–42 and *Lishi jiangyi*, p. 64. The full text of the anti-waste and anti-conservatism campaign is in *RMRB*, 4 March 1958. See *Lishi jiangyi*, p. 64.

18. *LNRB*, 6 and 8 March 1958.

This conference reveals a great deal about the working of the provincial policy process. The provincial authorities responded to the central initiatives and drew up their own specific policies. Du's authoritative speeches defined and limited the goals and the implementation procedure. His subordinates were not consulted and all disagreements with the new policies were labelled ideological errors.

"Go all out for 60 days." On the heels of the Provincial Rural Work Conference, Du turned directly to the rural cadres and peasants in an "oath-taking" broadcast conference (8 March), urging them to carry out large-scale water conservancy in the next 60 days, and to prepare for spring planting ahead of time. Simultaneously, they were told to carry out "ambushes" on afforestation and the elimination of the "four pests." Cadres were required to eradicate their "bureaucratism and lethargy," to mobilize the masses, and to join them in production. Consequently, mutual challenges by the delegates over the telephone resulted in a new provincial decision to accomplish the targets of the NPAD in only *one* year, down from the two years agreed upon previously.¹⁹

Less than two weeks later the PPC tightened its reins by holding the first appraisal-through-comparison conference (20–25 March) to inspect progress and to press for more "capital construction." Andong Special District, the most advanced, was said to have built more than 5,900 large and small "reservoirs" in the past three months. Andong County proposed the slogan of "working around the clock" and planned to create 380,000 *mu* of paddy fields. The emerging problems of the shortage of labour and material were said to have been resolved by makeshift methods: wooden rails, hanging buckets and water pumps were "invented" to raise labour efficiency.

The idea of using idle labour during the slack season for construction projects was sound. Yet in the context of unrealistic expectations and administrative fiat, it turned out to be counter-productive. The phenomenon of goal displacement was already evident – the sub-provincial units had begun to shift their attention to mere quantity and to doing things just for show. The large number of "reservoirs" claimed to have been built is a good case in point.²⁰ Since the PPC fully endorsed these actions, its subordinates were encouraged to play the game.

Similarly, a meeting of academics, scientists, technicians, and Agricultural Producers' Co-operative (APC) cadres in late March chaired by Du declared unanimously that people could switch to maize as a staple and that yield per *mu* of 4,000 *jīn* was possible. Experts were rarely consulted during the GLF but Du's position on

19. *LNRB*, 9 March 1958.

20. According to the Provincial Waterworks Department, a total of ¥3.3 billion and 2.5 million work days had already been invested in the first months of 1958. Another account claimed that tens of thousands of reservoirs and dams had been constructed. See *LNRB* 25 May and 26 June 1958.

maize was simply rubber-stamped. He now announced that “high-yield crops” would be introduced in two-thirds of all farmland in 1958 (the total area for grain cultivation was 3.6 million hectares). Maize would occupy 1.5 million hectares, and the area devoted to rice paddies would be doubled to 600,300 hectares. Assuming that each hectare would yield at least 10,000 *jin* of maize, Du claimed that 7.5 million tonnes of maize and 3 million tonnes of rice could be harvested—and this *alone* would over-fulfil the grain target of 1958 (ten million tonnes)!²¹ It goes without saying that Du’s calculations were wildly exaggerated, yet this reflects his readiness to play the game: under pressure to raise production dramatically, he was willing to switch to “high-yield crops” in order to satisfy the quantitative requirements.

The introduction of “high-yield crops” brought new problems. First, the assumption that the numerous irrigation projects would supply the large quantities of water required by expanding rice cultivation was faulty. Most planned paddy fields remained dry in 1958 because the so-called irrigation projects failed to store water. Secondly, the peasants knew nothing about the intricate techniques of rice cultivation, but wheat was replaced by large tracts of “new rice regions.” Finally, the people in the province were expected to consume the less desirable grain.²²

Further mobilization during the 60 day campaign. As the time for spring ploughing and sowing approached, the PPC and the PPPC attempted another mobilizational effort at a broadcast meeting on the night of 12 April. After noting the early signs of a serious drought, Du ordered that all sowing be done ten to 15 days earlier as a means of resisting it. Du’s idea of the best way to implement agricultural plans was to break them down for each and every field so that the masses could be told precisely “what kind of crops, how much fertilizer, what kind of technology, how much grain to expect, and how many work points each plot should yield.” Clearly, the masses were at the receiving end of administrative orders, and Du’s insistence that production plans be discussed by them was a mere formality.²³

Yet the spring sowing campaign was thwarted by a drought in most of the provinces. Therefore, when rain finally came on 24 April, a joint PPC/PPPC emergency directive issued on the 26th defined sowing as the “overwhelming central task.” A halt was called to all water conservancy work and other projects to devote all manpower and animal power to sowing.

This was simple common sense but some lower-level officials responded hesitantly. In a *LNRB* editorial (27 April), the PPC took

21. *LNRB*, 2 April 1958.

22. *Ibid.*

23. *LNRB*, 13 April 1958.

pains to explain that it had been “perfectly correct” to devote two-thirds or even all of the labour force to water conservancy previously but sowing must now be done on time. The vehemence with which the editorial argued the priority shift and subsequent developments suggested that the PPC might be split on the issue. One faction must have argued for the continuation of the water conservancy campaign at all costs as it was the wish of the centre; the other group, represented by Du, must have tried to contain water conservancy so that manpower could be returned to other routine but increasingly urgent tasks. In the meantime, conflicting signals were issued in the provincial press.

In any case, the spring drought probably dashed the hope of gaining extra time for inter-planting and multiple-cropping. Faced with this reality, the PPC should have reconsidered its policy of the extensive introduction of rice paddies, but it was determined to push forward. The provincial authorities were not only immersed in the day-to-day administration of agricultural affairs, they had also become much more inflexible.

The amalgamation of the agricultural producers’ co-operatives. It should be noted that a central directive to amalgamate APCs into larger units was issued at the Chengdu Conference held from 9 to 26 March in the form of a “*yijian*” (i.e. suggestion) which was not binding on the provinces.²⁴ Nevertheless, Liaoning took the lead nationally and the merger began in March, beating even the alleged “pace-setter” Henan by one month. As large-scale water conservation, fertilizer collection, and the opening up of paddy fields were beyond the capability of the APCs, many of them sought authorization for amalgamation from the County Party Committees (CPCs).²⁵

By early June, Liaoning announced the completion of the amalgamation. A total of 9,297 were merged into 1,551 large APCs averaging 1,855 households each. Since only the leadership organs at the top were blended together and the division of the harvest was not involved, amalgamation went smoothly. Hence, one county took only three days to merge all its 143 APCs into 33. Many large-scale projects were reported to have been successfully completed thanks to the

24. *Lishi jiangyi*, pp. 64, 67–68.

25. *LNRB*, 20 May and 11 June 1958. The Henan case is described in Chang, *Power and Policy in China*, pp. 80–82. For an interesting account of the origins of the communes, see MacFarquhar, *Origins*, pp. 77–82. The original APCs in Liaoning had an average of 300 households; the merger increased their size to about 2,000 households. In most cases, a top leadership to co-ordinate such activities as water conservancy and fertilizer accumulation was formed. However, savings, investment, the division of harvest, and so on, were still carried out as before. The people’s communes introduced in September were even larger units of about 5,000 households, and all functions of accumulation, distribution, and the assignment of work were subject to the unified decisions by the commune management committee.

amalgamation.²⁶ Therefore, although these large APCs were not yet people's communes, the framework was already there, making the organizational change-over to the communes later in the year almost a casual affair. In any case, the relative ease of amalgamation in Liaoning must have reinforced the central leaders' decision made in August toward communization.

Maintaining the Momentum

Summer hoeing (xiachu). Between May and September, the attention of the PPC shifted to summer hoeing, an activity which included shovelling, fertilizer application, rice transplanting, thinning out of seedlings, irrigation, weeding, pest control and flood prevention.²⁷

From the beginning, the PPC recognized this was not going to be easy. Irrigation and water conservancy had to be resumed and agricultural work was vastly complicated by the introduction, for the first time in many localities, of techniques of multiple cropping, inter-tillage, close planting, and transplantation in the paddy fields, which were foreign to the peasants. In addition, many farm implements were no longer applicable (e.g. for inter-tillage) and new ones had to be either purchased or manufactured.²⁸ A manpower shortage was compounded by the fact that supplies from other provinces had dried up, and desperate industrial enterprises (many in the iron and steel industry) had illegally recruited a large number of peasants. The PPC's panacea, tool reform, and the further mobilization of the masses, including the very young and the old, resolved nothing. Consequently, according to one report, only 5.4 million peasants (out of 15 million) were engaged in agricultural production in 1958.²⁹ Yet many places still assigned 40–50 per cent of their total manpower to water conservancy.

The conflicting and ambiguous signals issued by the PPC were largely responsible for this. For instance, an editorial in the *LNRB* on 24 May urged the formation of "specialized permanent" (year-round) teams to take charge of capital construction. A companion report also described, in a favourable light, localities which had assigned one-third to one-half of their labour to building reservoirs. Consequently, this was thought to be the right thing to do.³⁰

Finally, an editorial on 29 May introduced several modifications and even revealed the drawbacks of the numerous unco-ordinated water conservancy projects. In cases where the reservoirs upstream

26. *LNRB*, 20 May 1958.

27. *LNRB*, 19 June 1958.

28. *LNRB*, 19 May and 19 June 1958.

29. *LNRB*, 19 June, 29 August, 10 September, and 9 December 1958.

30. *LNRB*, 24 May 1958.

had reduced the volume of water so that it was not sufficient to flood the newly-created paddy fields down river, the PPC ordered that rice transplantation should be abandoned and the fields be transferred to maize immediately. Medium-sized projects which had been almost half finished, it ordered, must be completed vigorously before the wet season. Larger projects not yet begun were to be abandoned. Yet these seemingly simple instructions were heavily qualified so that the subordinate units must have been confused.³¹ In any event, the editorial probably represented Du's desire to cut the scale of irrigation and water conservancy in order to return manpower to other agricultural pursuits.

However in early June the progress of summer hoeing was still disappointing. According to the PPC, weed and pest damage was widespread, and the application of fertilizer was inadequate. The work attendance rate was said to be only 50 per cent of the able-bodied, and labour efficiency was low. At other places, large amounts of manpower were still engaged in water conservancy projects. In view of this situation, a PPC directive of 8 June called again for a total mobilization for another 30 days. Government officials, urban dwellers, and students and teachers were ordered to participate in agricultural production. Schools were closed and all meetings were to be cancelled.³²

By mid-June, the labour situation had hardly improved. The 20th meeting of the PPPC (16–17 June) made another appeal to go all-out in support of summer hoeing.³³ At a PPC telephone conference on the evening of the 17th, Du chastized cadres who channelled too much manpower to water conservancy, and repeated the “battle cry” for summer hoeing, the “three self-sufficiencies,” and for 14 million tonnes of grain.³⁴ However, his repeated calls, sometimes in the name of the PPC and sometimes on his own, to restrict the number of labourers for water conservancy, even after the publication of a central directive on 4 June (see below) which praised the water works and ordered the further strengthening of flood-control, had little impact. This apparent defiance of the central order must have annoyed other members of the PPC and drawn the ire of the central authorities. This was probably an immediate cause for his disgrace only shortly afterwards. In early June, the purge began to take its toll on some of the top leaders in the Liaoning PPC and PPPC. Huang

31. *LNRB*, 29 May 1958.

32. *LNRB*, 12 June 1958. The PPPC decided to mobilize 10,000 people to assist in agricultural work in Shenyang's suburbs.

33. *LNRB*, 18 June 1958.

34. *LNRB*, 19 June 1958. The previous grain target was 13 million tonnes, but one should not pay too much attention to this discrepancy. Apart from the ever-increasing targets, at least three sets of production plans were used during the GLF, and leaders never specified which plans they were referring to in their speeches.

Huoqing from Tientsin become the new first secretary of the PPC from 7 June.³⁵

With Du's political demise, his stand on water conservation was reversed by the other leaders in the PPC. On 25 June a joint PPC and PPPC directive demanded another intensification of the irrigation and water conservancy campaign involving everybody. Although this call can be traced to the central directive of 4 June,³⁶ the provincial decisions specifically ordered that networks of reservoirs, check dams, pits and ditches be constructed. It went as far as ordering that if an additional project could be constructed, then it should be done without hesitation. Unlimited requisition from the peasants was approved according to the principle of "relying on the masses." On the other hand, in early July the reconstituted PPC continued to champion the competing goals of summer hoeing, the three self-sufficiencies and grain surplus originally set by Du. Brushing aside the views that the pace of work had been too hectic in the summer heat, the PPC argued that the introduction of a certain "rhythm" in work could replace rest.

However the PPC's confidence was groundless. It turned out that the irrigation and water conservancy projects were primitive concoctions totally useless in alleviating the drought of the summer of 1958,³⁷ but they continued to compete with regular agricultural work for manpower and resources. In some places construction of paddy fields had to be abandoned because of the lack of water, and shortage of manpower meant that other fields were left barren. The PPC's prescription for the first case was to switch to dry crops, and this was at least a decision that might change things. In the latter case, the PPC stated that all barren fields should be planted – crops which did not have sufficient time to mature could be used as silage.³⁸ This really amounted to a non-decision, as the issue at stake, the lack of manpower, was not addressed. Clearly, when confronted by multiple and contradictory goals set up by the centre, the PPC was unable or

35. *LNRB*, 7 June 1958. Kao Chung-yen, *Changes of Personnel in Communist China* (Hong Kong: Union Research Institute, 1970), p. 491. The so-called anti-Party clique, which was said to have been led by Wang Zheng and included Song Li, Du Zheheng, Li Tao, Zhang Lie and Wu Du, was alleged to have formed an "underground PPC" and "underground headquarters" to carry out "splitting" and covert activities to oppose the first secretary, Huang Oudong (elected in September 1956). The group in general was charged with political ambition and cultivating networks of personal loyalties. More specifically, in issues pertaining to industrial development in the GLF, it was charged with the withholding of the irrigation and drainage machinery ordered by the other "fraternal" provinces and with the tearing up of signed contracts. It was also accused of refusing to execute the important tasks of manufacturing metallurgical equipment assigned jointly by the State Economic Commission, the Ministry of Metallurgical Industry, and the First Machinery Ministry. Finally, it was also charged with the large-scale and unilateral reduction of the amount of rolled steel equipment commissioned by the state. These alleged crimes of "departmentalism" were regarded as very serious, as the success of the GLF depended to a large extent on the industrialized provinces. For more details, see *LNRB*, 31 October; 2, 3, 6 and 21 November; and 9 December 1958.

36. *LNRB*, 5 June 1958.

37. Chang, *Power and Policy*, p. 73.

38. *LNRB*, 3 July 1958.

unwilling to sort out the priorities. Its ability to make real decisions was progressively impaired in the rest of 1958. Yet it had to maintain the appearance of being in control, even though its prescriptions were largely irrelevant. Rural policies became immensely complicated after August, so this article will divide the remainder of the year into two sections: the first deals with the problem of communization, and the second with the autumn harvest and the deep ploughing campaign.

High Tide

The movement for people's communes. Since the amalgamation of APCs in Liaoning had already been completed by June, it was only days after the central decision to establish people's communes was issued on 29 August that the PPC announced that the entire province has been communized. However, even though the PPC called for the gradual implementation of all the other elements of the commune, it greatly under-estimated the extent of the opposition.³⁹ To begin with, the peasants resented the pooling of their harvest with poorer villages in the communes. Secondly, since the amount of harvest was unclear, there was fear that grain procurement could be excessive, leaving the peasants with insufficient food and income for the rest of the year. Thirdly, the cadres had finally to face the consequence of wild exaggerations of output throughout the autumn: the volume of procurement rose in direct proportion to the reported increase in production.

The peasants resisted by slaughtering domestic animals and concealing grain throughout the province. The perturbed PPC tried to blame this on Du's decision in May to confiscate all privately-owned animals into the collective; yet it had to admit that indiscriminate slaughter occurred *after* the communes were introduced. In any event, this dashed the hope of being self-sufficient in pork in 1958.⁴⁰

Nevertheless, the PPC stuck to its procurement target, but its methods of "letting politics take command," mass campaigns, and even the dispatch of county work teams to turn in grain were ineffective. Indeed, by 2 December, vice-governor Qiu Youmin had to admit openly that for the second year in a row, the targets for grain procurement were underfulfilled. Furthermore, the output of livestock and vegetables in 1958 had declined.⁴¹

The central directive for the formation of the communes was accompanied by another on launching a socialist and communist education campaign in the winter and spring of 1958–59, which also called for the resolute "dismissal and replacement" (*cheshuan*) of "rightist conservationist" cadres.⁴² The PPC implemented this central

39. *LNRB*, 10 and 16 September 1958.

40. *LNRB*, 14 May and 7 December 1958.

41. *LNRB*, 25 October, 3, 7, 10 and 25 December 1958.

42. *Zhongguo Renmin Gongheguo jagui huibian* (Beijing: Falu chubanshe, 1980), Vol. 8, p. 7.

initiative by issuing its own directive on 18 September. Education was to be carried out through “big blooming, big contending, and big-character posters” whereby the masses would learn the superiority of communism and the communes, resulting in the smashing of “individualism” and “departmentalism.” As an incentive, selected communes were to try out the free supply system of grain, and commune members were permitted to keep a small number of domestic animals.⁴³

Meanwhile, direct intervention by over-zealous central leaders added to the momentum of the GLF. Deng Xiaoping, who was inspecting Liaoning in late September, argued for water conservancy and urged the communes to run extensive experimental plots in order to launch “production-increase satellites” the next year. He was also said to have given a graphic description of the “splendid” future of communist society.⁴⁴ From the province’s point of view, this was a clear sign that the general secretary of the CCP supported and endorsed the commune movement.

Nevertheless, the commune members’ resistance to the mess halls, nurseries, militarization, the new system of labour organization and the distribution system persisted, and according to a conference on 27–31 October, chaired by the Propaganda Department of the PPC, the education campaign for socialism and communism was ineffectual as large meetings and broadcast conferences were nothing more than “bluff and bluster,” and false reporting was pervasive.

To solve these problems, the meeting prescribed more “great debate(s) and education campaign(s) on communism” involving everybody. A rectification campaign directed at “commandism” of the county and commune Party committees was also proposed.⁴⁵ The PPC was not unaware of the problems facing the communes, but insisted in addressing them as problems of thinking. Hence, it followed that education and a higher level of awareness were the remedy. These highly ritualistic methods were ineffective, as a *LNRB* editorial of December admitted: “big blooming, contending, debate, and big-character posters,” had turned into a means for “coercing, commanding and suppressing” the masses in *many* places. Consequently, the masses regarded these “bloomings and contendings” as a synonym for manipulation and punishment.⁴⁶

At any rate, the problems of the communes were again on the agenda of the Second Session of the First Provincial People’s Congress on 2–7 December. In his government work report, Qiu insisted on communist education to consolidate the communes, although he also made some concessions. First, he allowed commune members to own and raise pigs. Secondly, distribution of income based on the original APC was approved. Thirdly, the members would

43. *LNRB*, 20 September 1958.

44. *LNRB*, 26 September 1958.

45. *LNRB*, 5 November 1958.

46. *LNRB*, 4 December 1958.

be allotted an increase in income over the previous year's. Fourthly, the participation in mess halls and nurseries was to be made voluntary; the badly-managed mess halls were either to be made smaller or disbanded.⁴⁷

These were realistic concessions, but they existed at cross purposes with the continued communist educational campaign against "individualism" and "departmentalism." Indeed, the problems of calculating income and distribution for 1958 were so complicated that as late as March 1959, they had not been resolved.⁴⁸ Furthermore, without any central decisions on these matters it was risky to yield too much to the peasants. Even the publication of the Resolution on the communes at the Sixth Plenum (28 November–10 December) proved to be inadequate to deal with the crisis, and the retreat from the original ideals of the communes took a tortuous and see-saw path for many years to come, but this is outside the scope of this study. The following section turns back to the other rural problems faced by the PPC in 1958.

The campaign for autumn harvest (September–October). When the autumn harvest began in late September, an urgent provincial directive called for the mobilization into military units of every man, woman and child, including the elderly. Yet despite the highest priority assigned to harvesting, the directive also urged that many other tasks, such as the production of iron and steel, autumn ploughing, fertilizer application, and the reform in farm implements (the popularization of the cable-drawn plough)⁴⁹ be carried out "vigorously" at the same time. The PPC was still reluctant, or incapable, of choosing between these competing objectives. The only minor exception was water conservancy: it was finally decided that large projects should not commence construction, although water conservation must still be "done well."⁵⁰

And it turned out that harvesting was done carelessly – grain not fully collected began to rot while sitting in the fields. Moreover, threshing, storage and processing had not yet been carried out.⁵¹ By

47. *LNRB*, 3 December 1958.

48. *LNRB*, 5 March 1959.

49. The prototype of this plough was discovered by Tan Zhenlin, secretary of the Chinese Communist Party in charge of agriculture, and he ordered the provinces to popularize it as part of the national drive to mechanize agriculture.

50. *LNRB*, 24 September 1958. Like other provinces, Liaoning was ordered to launch vigorous and relentless mass campaigns to smelt iron and steel using indigenous methods, even though the metallurgy industry was well-established there. Between September and December of 1958, the millions mobilized for this purpose tied up rural manpower and the primitive blast furnaces competed with the major enterprises for labour and resources. The elaborate but futile iron and steel campaigns organized by the PPC demonstrate the extraordinary lengths it would go to execute central order. See *LNRB* 13 October, 1, 12, and 24 November, and 31 December 1958.

51. *LNRB*, 26 September, 8 and 12 October 1958.

early October the PPC realized that a bumper harvest and the “three-sufficiencies” had not materialized.⁵²

On 5 November the PPC took the unusual step of calling for a second autumn harvest, admitting that losses had reached “extremely serious” proportions. Yet it blamed the cadres’ emphasis on ploughing for all these troubles, completely ignoring the fact that it was the numerous activities urged on by itself which created the manpower shortage. Reports of large numbers of old people and children being mobilized to gather the harvest are a strong indication of the extent of the crisis.⁵³ No reports on harvesting are available in the second half of November as snow and cold weather would have normally brought an end to harvesting by then.

The campaign for deep ploughing (October–December). By the end of September it was clear to the provincial authorities that agricultural production was far from the success earlier anticipated. At a PPC meeting on the 27th, Deng Xiaoping pronounced that Liaoning had failed to implement the NPAD and to “liberate its thinking.” Henceforth, he urged that it should revolutionize production in order to achieve a *fanshen* in agriculture.⁵⁴

Deng’s oral instructions led to the launching of the *fanshen* campaign for deep ploughing in the remaining months of 1958.⁵⁵ The PPC now argued that deep ploughing could raise crop yield from one to five times. For the peasants, however, this meant additional and very strenuous work even beyond the strength of most farm animals. Besides, they perceived it to be counterproductive, for it might move infertile sub-soil to the top.⁵⁶ Yet Deng’s order as well as the central directive of 29 August – which redefined deep ploughing as the central task – could not be ignored.⁵⁷ On 6 October, a PPC telephone conference chaired by provincial governor Huang Oudong unveiled the new goals for the mass campaign: three million hectares of farmland would be ploughed to a depth of one to two feet. In places where the topsoil was too thin, matching topsoil from “other places”

52. LNRB, 8 October and 3 December 1958. In fact, Huang Oudong admitted that Liaoning’s performance in agriculture in 1958 was “especially unremarkable,” as the output of grain was *only* 9 million tonnes, far short of the 10 and 13 million tonnes projected earlier. Clearly, even the 9 million tonnes figure was not reliable, because it represents a 30% increase over the production of 1957. In contrast, Guangdong, by referring to the most flimsy evidence, declared that it had fulfilled the requirements of the NPAD nine years ahead of schedule and that its increase in grain output was 180% over 1957.

53. LNRB, 9 and 15 November 1958.

54. LNRB, 1 October 1958. *Fanshen* literally means turning over. Figuratively speaking, it means standing up on one’s feet or freeing oneself from restrictions. The term is used as the title of William Hinton’s well-known book about the pre-1949 Chinese Revolution, (New York: Vintage Books, 1966).

55. Many references mentioned Deng as the initiator of the campaign. See LNRB, 8, 23 and 26 October 1958.

56. LNRB, 22 September and 9 October 1958.

57. *Zhongguo Renmin Gongheguo fagui huibian*, Vol. 8, pp. 11–14.

was to be found to fill it up. Five million people (one-third of all rural inhabitants) and several tens of thousands of animals would be mobilized to toil non-stop for the next 45 days before the soil froze. This, he maintained, would increase yield per *mu* by at least 1,000 *jin*, enabling the province to achieve the “three self-sufficiencies” in 1959 with a handsome surplus.

The labour shortage, he added, could be overcome by organizing labourers into military platoons and teams, by the adoption of various responsibility systems, and by the manufacturing of 500,000 cable-drawn ploughs. Finally, he urged that “all-people debates” revolving around the question “Can deep ploughing increase production?” be carried out. In the same breath, he chided the rural cadres for using “coercion and commandism,” even scolding and beating, to get the masses to do things, and urged them to suppress exaggeration and false reporting.⁵⁸

On the surface, this shows Huang’s determination and resourcefulness in implementing the campaign. However, he had few alternatives in the face of central pressure, and even unworkable policies had to be set in motion vigorously. Confronted by multiple and contradictory goals, policy pronouncements by provincial leaders became progressively more ambiguous. For example, a typical passage in Huang’s speech should capture his vagueness:

It should be made clear that in the rural areas [we should] implement the principle of simultaneous development of industry and agriculture: one hand grasps agriculture and the other grasps industry. But since our province has not *fanshen*, the PPC is of the opinion that the rural areas in our province should put agriculture first, and at the same time implement the principle of simultaneous development of industry and agriculture. The secretaries of the district and county Party committees must keep the leadership of agriculture as the key point. The various district and county Party committees must make detailed arrangements on this winter’s work and make unified, comprehensive and concrete arrangements for autumn harvest, water conservancy, fertilizer accumulation, and iron and steel production. [We must] ensure the completion of urgent tasks. [We must] also grasp iron and steel at the same time, but in the situation of inadequate labour supply, the manpower and animal power from the two battle fronts of deep ploughing and iron and steel should be looked after comprehensively, and arranged rationally....⁵⁹

Since provincial leaders must still maintain the appearance that things were under control, statements like this peppered the pages of the provincial press. On the other hand, as already mentioned, Du did try to set up some priorities—but he was purged for doing it. The contrast between Du and Huang cannot be more stark.

In any case, a telephone conference on 21 October brought nothing but bad news. The progress of deep ploughing, it disclosed, was very slow, and grassroots cadres and commune members strongly resisted

58. LNRB, 8 and 9 October 1958.

59. LNRB, 8 October 1958.

it. In places, soil layers had been disrupted. Very few cable-drawn ploughs had been manufactured, and since quality was neglected, many broke as soon as they were applied. It was a losing battle, and the campaign ground to a total halt in about mid-November.⁶⁰

The PPC was not ignorant of the futility of this exercise, but since mass mobilization was such a core item to the centre it went along regardless of the consequences. In the end, the PPC still insisted that the misadventure had everything to do with people's thinking, and nothing to do with unrealistic targets, the lack of time, material and manpower resources.⁶¹

At the Second Session of the First People's Congress (2–7 December), Qiu boasted that an unprecedented 1.23 million hectares had been ploughed, even though this was a far cry from the original goal (3 million hectares). However, the provincial authorities were unrepentant, and vowed to revive the campaign in the coming spring.⁶²

Summary and Conclusion

This article has traced the evolution of rural and agricultural policy-making in Liaoning in 1958. Like other provinces, Liaoning was subject to a great deal of pressure to raise agricultural production dramatically, even though agriculture was relatively under-developed there. Furthermore, the GLF notion of regional autarky dictated that Liaoning should terminate its long-standing dependence on other provinces for grain and foodstuffs almost immediately, and this translated into the provincial goal of achieving the "three self-sufficiencies" in just one year. However, the objective constraints faced by the province made this a most unlikely proposition.

Once the GLF gathered momentum the provincial authorities had to participate actively. As it turned out, the centre not only controlled the timetable and agenda of rural and agricultural policies, it also hurled initiatives and demands one after the other in rapid succession, thereby imposing numerous contradictory goals on the province. Inevitably, Liaoning's goals shifted continuously as a result. The ambitious initial plan for agricultural mechanization was abandoned in favour of "technical reform." The plan for crop diversification soon gave way to the overwhelming concern with raising the output of grain, leading to the elaborate but futile attempt to introduce large-scale rice cultivation in the province. Moreover, severe goal displacement occurred – the provincial authorities turned to maize in order to satisfy the obsession with quantity.

Nevertheless, the strains of the GLF and disagreements about the priorities and manner by which new policies were implemented drove

60. *LNRB*, 23 October 1958; 15 and 18 November 1958.

61. *LNRB*, 26 October 1958.

62. *LNRB*, 3 December 1958.

a wedge into the provincial leadership. On the issue of irrigation and water conservancy, Du apparently attempted, though unsuccessfully, to return some of the manpower allotted to the numerous water conservancy projects to more routine but urgent agricultural tasks. For this he paid dearly. Yet, during the first half of 1958, he was a zealous promoter of the mobilizational “leap” policies—such as the raising of production targets, amalgamation of collectives, the replacement of wheat with maize—even though this meant steamrolling his subordinates. On the whole, his handling of the GLF showed him to be whimsical, arrogant, and even autocratic, and this might have been a secondary reason for his downfall.

With him gone, the total commitment to water conservancy was reaffirmed. The PPC became ultra-sensitive to the wishes of the centre, and felt obliged to implement all the central whims and policies at once. However, it could not escape the same objective constraints Du had to wrestle with. Increasingly, it was unable to set priorities and make real decisions even though it had to maintain the appearance of being in control. Its pronouncements became even more rhetorical; hence, the same old hackneyed solutions such as the further mobilization of the masses, the encouragement of blooming and contending, the education of people’s thinking, and so on, were put forward over and over again as panaceas. They might be correct ideologically, but they were non-decisions which did virtually nothing to solve the pressing problems at hand.

The PPC’s subordinates, on the other hand, displayed a range of defensive behaviour in order to ward off pressure. When pushed to the limits, they resorted to false reporting, the creation of false models, “tokenism,” stalling for time, and ritualistic compliance. The irony is that the more the provincial authorities attempted to control, the less they actually did.

In the end, unlike provinces such as Guangdong, which could claim “unprecedented” success on the basis of the most flimsy evidence, Liaoning had to admit that it failed to have a GLF in agriculture—the actual output was probably lower than that of 1957. Most other grandiose projects also fell by the wayside.

More importantly, this case study shows that the provincial leadership enjoyed little or no independence in policy-making in 1958. It was hamstrung by the direct central control and interference as well as the multiple and conflicting goals set for it by the centre. All of these led to rather ritualistic implementation. The GLF had brought about more uniformity, not spontaneity and diversity.