



Invisible Atrocities, part 1

#1 Mao's Great Famine

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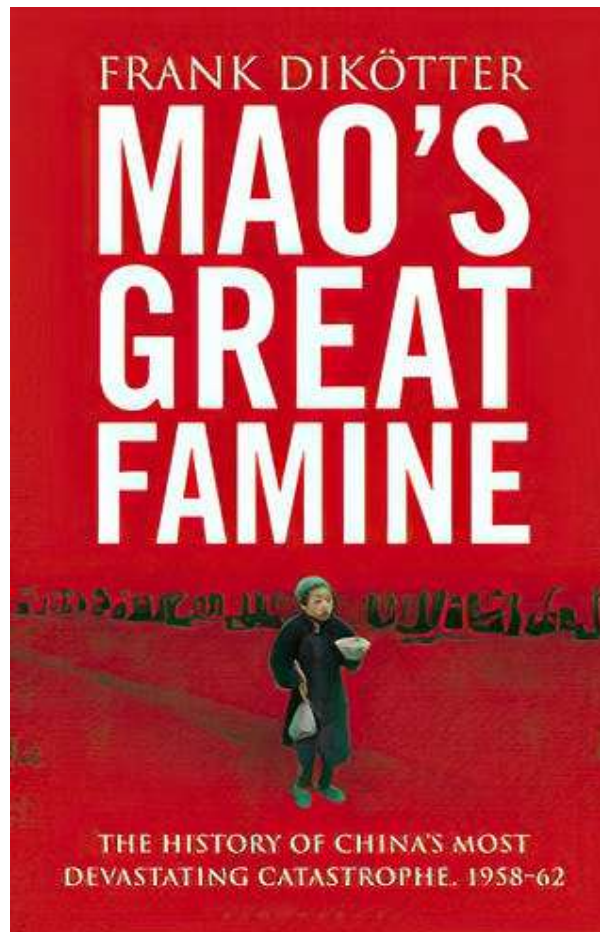
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Two of the worst atrocities – the Holocaust and Mao’s Great Famine – share these features:

1. Both dehumanize the alleged perpetrator.
2. Nobody witnessed them.
3. Nobody mentioned them for decades.
4. There is no evidence they ever happened.
5. Both have attained mythical status.
6. Somebody profits greatly from each narrative.

Mao’s Great Famine

The UK and USA paid Historian Frank Dikotter to write *Mao’s Great Famine*, which claimed that 20% of the population starved to death in 1959-1961. The books’ cover featured a photograph of a starving child. When historians pointed out that the image was taken in 1942, long before the PRC existed, the author admitted he found no images of starvation (let alone deaths) during the Great Leap Forward. Further investigation revealed that Dikotter was a fervent admirer of, and wrote Chiang Kaishek’s biography, and that most of his claims were unsupported by—or contradicted—documentary evidence.



Moscow University historian Boris Borisov humorously applied the same techniques to American statistics as Mao's critics applied to Chinese figures, in *Famine killed 7 Million People in the US*:

Few people have heard about five million American farmers – a million families – whom banks ousted from their land because of debts during the Great Depression. The government did not provide them with land, work, social aid or pensions and every sixth farmer was affected by famine. People were forced to leave their homes and wander without money or belongings in an environment mired in massive unemployment, famine and gangsterism. Market rules were observed strictly: unsold goods could not be given to the poor lest it damage business. They burned crops, dumped them in the ocean, plowed under 10 million hectares of cropland and killed 6.5 million pigs...and The US lost not less than 8,553,000 people from 1931 to 1940.

Afterwards, population growth indices changed twice, instantly. Exactly between 1930-31, the indices drop and stay flat for ten years. No explanation of this phenomenon can be found in the extensive report by the US Department of Commerce's Statistical Abstract of the United States. The US population was 123 million in 1920. At two percent growth it should have been 271 million in 1960

but, since the 1960 population was only 189 million, the government starved eighty-one million people to death in the intervening forty years.

Real famines, of course, are difficult to hide. When one million people starved to death in British colonial Ireland in 1846-47, the world knew immediately and when Churchill starved three million to death in colonial Bengal in 1943, news of the famine raced around the globe. So the notion that eight million Americans starved to death without anyone noticing, or that eleven million Chinese died undetected is just silly.

Looking for trouble

In fact, the US was looking for a famine in China which, though famines had been endemic there for millennia, they planned to blame on Communism.

So desperate for a famine that it actually tried to create one: after China's and Canada's grain harvests failed under a three-year El Nino, Washington embargoed grain shipments to China and assigned the CIA to monitor their success.

The Central Intelligence Agency reported:

4 April 1961: PROSPECTS FOR COMMUNIST CHINA. The Chinese Communist regime is now facing the most serious economic difficulties it has confronted since it concentrated its power over mainland China. As a result of economic mismanagement, and, especially, of two years of unfavorable weather, food production in 1960 was little if any larger than in 1957 at which time there were about 50 million fewer Chinese to feed. Widespread famine does not appear to be at hand, but in some provinces many people are now on a bare subsistence diet and the bitterest suffering lies immediately ahead, in the period before the July harvests. The dislocations caused by the 'Leap Forward' and the removal of Soviet technicians have disrupted China's industrialization program. These difficulties have sharply reduced the rate of economic growth during 1960 and have created a serious balance of payments problem. Public morale, especially in rural areas, is almost certainly at its lowest point since the Communists assumed power, and there have been some instances of open dissidence.

2 May 1962: The future course of events in Communist China will be shaped largely by three highly unpredictable variables: the wisdom and realism of the leadership, the level of agricultural output, and the nature and extent of foreign economic relations. During the past few years all three variables have worked against China. In 1958 the leadership adopted a series of ill-conceived and extremist economic and social programs; in 1959 there occurred the first of

three years of bad crop weather; and in 1960 Soviet economic and technical cooperation was largely suspended. The combination of these three factors has brought economic chaos to the country. Malnutrition is widespread, foreign trade is down and industrial production and development have dropped sharply. No quick recovery from the regime's economic troubles is in sight.

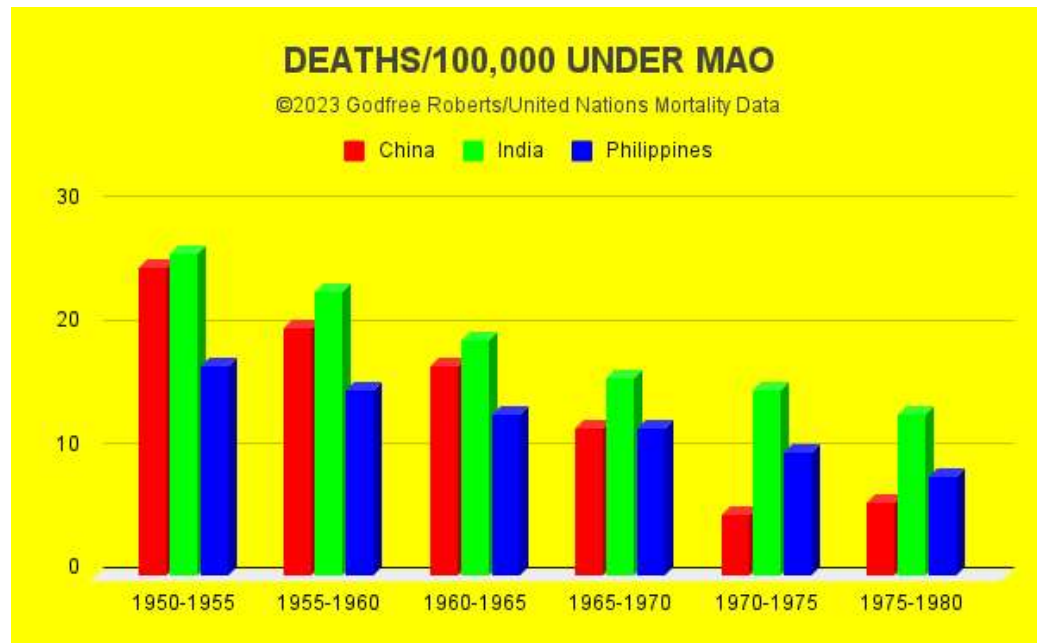
Nor was the CIA the only one who missed the 'great famine'. Though he ridiculed the Great Leap Forward as 'The Great Leap Backward,' Edgar Snow saw no famine either, "Were the 1960 calamities actually as severe as reported in Peking, the worst series of disasters since the nineteenth century, as Chou En-lai had told me? Weather was not the only cause of the disappointing harvest but it was undoubtedly a major cause. With good weather the crops would have been ample; without it, other adverse factors I have cited – some discontent in the communes, bureaucracy, transportation bottlenecks – weighed heavily. Merely from personal observations in 1960 I know that there was no rain in large areas of northern China for 200-300 days. I have mentioned unprecedented floods in central Manchuria where I was marooned in Shenyang for a week..while Northeast China was struck by eleven typhoons–the largest number in fifty years and I saw the Yellow River reduced to a small stream. Throughout 1959-62 many Western press editorials continued referring to 'mass starvation' in China and continued citing no supporting facts. As far as I know, no report by any non-Communist visitor to China provides an authentic instance of starvation during this period. Here I am not speaking of food shortages, or lack of surfeit, to which I have made frequent reference, but of people dying of hunger, which is what 'famine' connotes to most of us, and what I saw in the past".

Historian Mobo Gao says the only suicide in the history of his village occurred during the Great Leap.

A woman hanged herself because of family hardship. The Great Leap Forward years were the only time in anybody's memory that Gao villagers had to pick wild vegetables and grind rice husks into powder to make food. Throughout my twenty years in Gao village, I do not remember any particular time when my family had enough to eat ... as a rural resident, life was always a matter of survival. However, the Great Leap Forward made life even more difficult. Our region was hit very hard by natural disasters for two consecutive years... But during the two years of natural disasters, we got relief grain from the Central Government, the provincial Government, Qingdao City, Shanghai City, and many other regions... Whenever and wherever one place had difficulties, people from different places helped. I remember many peasants told me that if it were not

for the People's Government's help, many people would have starved amid disasters like the one in 1960. By contrast, in Northern Henan Province (where the grain shortage during the Great Leap Forward was supposed to have been severe), five million people starved to death in 1942. The government at that time had done nothing to help the local people.

In the 1990s, on a Guggenheim scholarship, I accompanied Ralph Thaxton, my graduate school advisor, to study the region's famine. When Ralph told them he had come to study the famine, peasants thought that he was studying the famine of 1942-1943. During that 1942-1943 famine, they said, not only did five million people starve, but many had to sell their land, their houses and children before fleeing their home towns. The local and national governments did nothing to help. But nothing like that took place during the Great Leap Forward. Mobo Gao, *Gao Village*.



In Part 2, we'll see the resemblances between the 'Famine' and the 'Holocaust'.