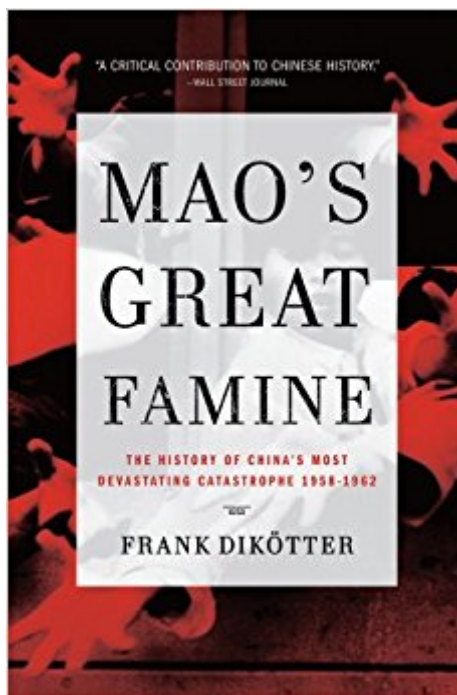




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Mao's Great Famine: The History Of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-1962



Synopsis

An unprecedented, groundbreaking history of China's Great Famine that recasts the era of Mao Zedong and the history of the People's Republic of China. "Between 1958 and 1962, China descended into hell. Mao Zedong threw his country into a frenzy with the Great Leap Forward, an attempt to catch up to and overtake Britain in less than 15 years. The experiment ended in the greatest catastrophe the country had ever known, destroying tens of millions of lives." So opens Frank Dikötter's riveting, magnificently detailed chronicle of an era in Chinese history much speculated about but never before fully documented because access to Communist Party archives has long been restricted to all but the most trusted historians. A new archive law has opened up thousands of central and provincial documents that "fundamentally change the way one can study the Maoist era." Dikötter makes clear, as nobody has before, that far from being the program that would lift the country among the world's superpowers and prove the power of Communism, as Mao imagined, the Great Leap Forward transformed the country in the other direction. It became the site not only of "one of the most deadly mass killings of human history,"--at least 45 million people were worked, starved, or beaten to death--but also of "the greatest demolition of real estate in human history," as up to one-third of all housing was turned into rubble). The experiment was a catastrophe for the natural world as well, as the land was savaged in the maniacal pursuit of steel and other industrial accomplishments. In a powerful meshing of exhaustive research in Chinese archives and narrative drive, Dikötter for the first time links up what happened in the corridors of power--the vicious backstabbing and bullying tactics that took place among party leaders--with the everyday experiences of ordinary people, giving voice to the dead and disenfranchised. His magisterial account recasts the history of the People's Republic of China.

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Customer Reviews

Product Description – “Between 1958 and 1962, China descended into hell. Mao Zedong threw his country into a frenzy with the Great Leap Forward, an attempt to catch up to and overtake Britain in less than 15 years. The experiment ended in the greatest catastrophe the country had ever known, destroying tens of millions of lives.” So opens Frank Dikötter’s riveting, magnificently detailed chronicle of an era in Chinese history much speculated about but never before fully documented because access to Communist Party archives has long been restricted to all but the most trusted historians. A new archive law has opened up thousands of central and provincial documents that “fundamentally change the way one can study the Maoist era.” Dikötter makes clear, as nobody has before, that far from being the program that would lift the country among the world’s superpowers and prove the power of Communism, as Mao imagined, the Great Leap Forward transformed the country in the other direction. It became the site not only of “one of the most deadly mass killings of human history,”--at least 45 million people were worked, starved, or beaten to death--but also of “the greatest demolition of real estate in human history,” as up to one-third of all housing was turned into rubble.

In 1958, Mao Zedong, perhaps influenced by Khrushchev’s boast that the Soviet Union would surpass the U.S. in key aspects of industrial production within 10 years, launched China’s Great Leap Forward. This was a tragically delusional effort to dramatically improve agricultural and industrial production, far beyond any realistic possibility, given China’s limited economic base. The human costs of this folly were catastrophic. Dikötter, professor of modern history of China at the University of London, utilizes newly available material, including Communist Party archives and accounts by individual Chinese citizens, to chronicle these horrors in stomach-churning detail. By the time even Mao recognized his failure in 1962, Dikötter credibly asserts that as many as 45 million Chinese died from starvation, execution, and maltreatment under forced labor. Ultimate responsibility rests with Mao and his indifference to individual human suffering, but Dikötter also condemns other high-ranking party officials who recognized the failures early on but lacked the courage to challenge Mao. This is an important work illustrating the dangers of one individual holding power to force millions to fulfill his personal fantasies. --Jay Freeman --This text refers to an alternate Paperback edition.

This is a very hard read as the subject is about Mao's descent into being history's greatest mass murderer with the dubious credit of having been responsible for the deaths of some 42,000,000 of his own countrymen, women and children. His early aide Li Shaoqi must share some of the blame but since Mao was able to even terrify China's well balanced and excellent diplomat, Zhou en Lai, China premier, into almost endless bouts of inane self criticism. The story is tragic and the figures of the dead place him above even Stalin and Hitler by many millions of deaths. What he did to China should never be forgotten and must be taken into account when we, in the west, try and judge China's current leaders against their precursors. Personally I was fascinated by a minor issue: the allegation (that could lead to the accused's death) that he was a promoter of "splittist tendencies". The phrase was a new one for me but its absurdity belies its viciousness when hurled about by Mao, who really was a monster on a grand scale.

So sad that people can be led blindly by powerful political leaders. He did an injustice to his people, yet they immortalize him in a see-through casket. How morbid. It is an interesting book about a very power hungry man, which the Chinese placed their trust in. All they have to show for it is needless death of thousands of people. How sad.

Must rank as one of the most powerful, moving and yet frightening insights into The Great Leap Forward. Readers cannot help but be distressed by this book for when one tragedy leads to another and then another you cannot read this historical truth without being moved. Of course the tragedies that are revealed involved tens of thousands of citizens leading to the largest human disaster of all time. And this was followed by the Cultural Revolution!

Having examined meticulously the slightest detail, Frank Dikotter opens our eyes and brings into the light the human errors committed by the Communist Party which were exacerbated by the stubbornness of Mao himself; his blind persistence in the dogma of "one finger out of ten" led millions of his people to despair and death, animals of his country to cannibalism, and the infrastructure of China in ruins. His writing style resembles a literature masterpiece and is immensely enjoyable to read.

Extremely well written and informative in my view. This book is a MUST READ for all those who thought the holocaust was bad. Seems to be thoroughly researched. Frank Dikotter deserves a

medal for revealing the extent of this travesty.

The scholarship and research are amazing, but the book is still imminently readable to the average reader. I cannot say enough positive things about Dikotter, and I recommend all of his books.

Dikotter focuses on Mao's Great Leap Forward, his war against the peasantry, and the unprecedented famine that followed. The author has used not only national-level Party archives, but also those at the provincial level. His analysis probably cements Mao's place in history as an even greater mass murderer than Stalin. A necessary read if you want to understand China.

Along with "The Tragedy of Liberation," I think these two books on the communist government of China up to but not including the Cultural Revolution are the best available in English. Dikotter understands his subject, makes very good use of the limited archival material, and is clear about the limits of the available information. Strongly recommended for anyone trying to understand Red China's early years.

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