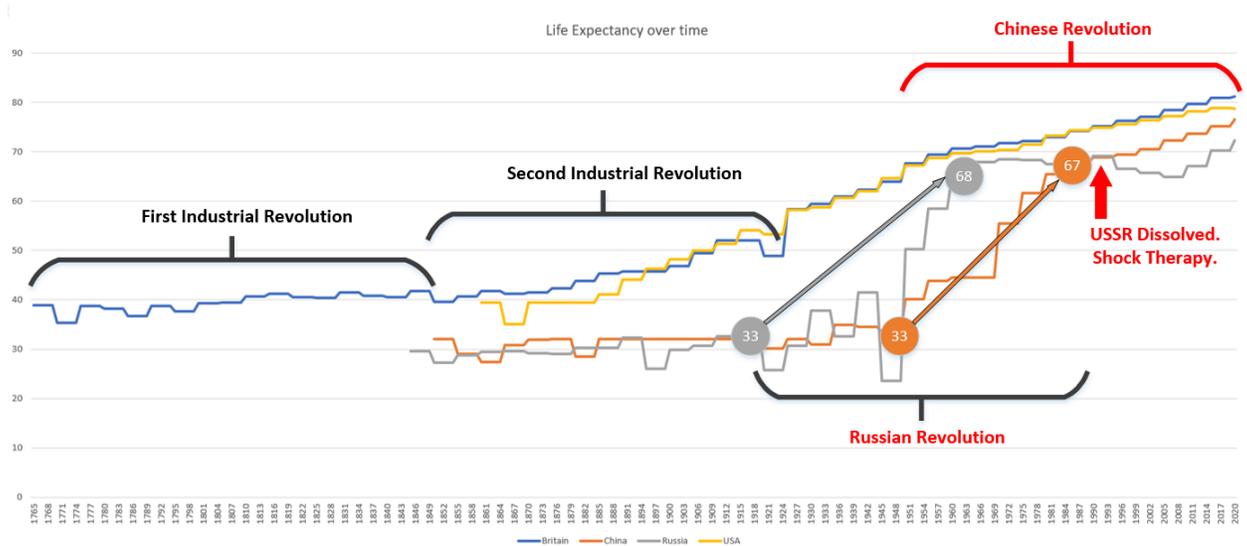


Okay, let's start with some things that are not up for debate.

Between 108 BC and 1911 AD, there were no fewer than 1,828 recorded famines in China, or once nearly every year in one province or another. There was one in 1906-1907 that killed 20-25 million people. The last famine in China was during the Great Leap Forward. Millions of people died during the Great Leap Forward.



<https://preview.redd.it/its-almost-like-marxist-revolutions-are-good-for-the-people-v0-li3965zpe3ta1.png?width=1080&crop=smart&auto=webp&s=d3610aeb552e834fbb00a2f2984adfc3b196fc49>

Here we can see that China's life expectancy doubled, roughly corresponding with Mao's reign.

[NOTE: FIND SOURCES ON CHINA GRAIN PRODUCTION, PUT HERE]

More context on the Great Leap Forward

The Yangtze River is very unstable. It has changed direction more than 26 times (which is fucking crazy). It flooded very badly during the Great Chinese Famine, probably exacerbated by weird El Nino shit. This was a huge fucking disaster.

Why are there no more famines? In part, because China industrialized (remember, the Great Leap Forward was an initiative by Mao to industrialize), and that industrialization led China to gain the technology to dam the Yangtze and Yellow Rivers, which no longer flood. The Great Leap Forward was the last famine in China because industrialization defeated it.

Mitigating factors on the GLF

1. Aforementioned flood. There are also some people who say that there were torrential downpours or droughts, but according to weather data, they are wrong.
2. Misc horrible shit. China lost a huge chunk of its population from the Chinese Revolution, from WWII, from three famines and misc wars during Chiang Kai-Shek's tenure. Many of the people who survived were displaced and needed to be relocated
3. Embargo by USA. The USA was the strongest economy after WWII by a lot, everywhere else was fucked up by war while the USA was untouched, so not being able to trade with them was a huge problem. They also encouraged their allies not to trade with China either.
4. Sino-Soviet Split. China relied on Soviet experts and heavy machinery to industrialize. Khrushchev demanded that China, in essence, become a client state. This was a non-starter for Mao, who would have been torn apart by his people if he compromised on Chinese sovereignty after the Century of Humiliation and Japanese occupation, so he refused. The Soviets then took their heavy machinery and their experts away. This was a big blow to Chinese agriculture.

The death numbers

Okay, I saw somewhere someone mentioned that because the estimates range from 15m to 60 m, the result is probably somewhere around 40m. This is the argument to moderation fallacy. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Argument_to_moderation So keep an open mind.

A. Becker's 30-60 million (per Chen Yizi, Banister)

First of all, Becker is not a historian, he is a journalist. Also, he is not credible.

Review of *Hungry Ghosts*: Alphonse L. MacDonald Source: *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 23, No. 1 (Mar., 1997), pp. 186-188

"As students of population, our main interest is with Becker's treatment of the estimates of how many people died in the famine. Disappointingly, he uses only nine pages out of a text of 312 pages to deal with this topic. The role of the "American demographers" who "uncovered evidence of the greatest political crime in history" (book jacket) and who had discovered (as previously noted) that excess mortality amounted to "at least 30 million," is minimized. Their estimates are dismissed as being "only educated guesses, carried out on the basis of limited information" (p. 266). Reference to those who first published estimates of the demographic impact of the famine, among them Ansley Coale (1981), John Aird (1982), and Basil Ashton et al. (1984), is relegated to brief footnotes. Becker seems unaware of the efforts made by others, notably Gerard Calot (1984a and b). Instead, he quotes Judith Banister's (1987) "estimated 30 million excess deaths during 1958- 1961," proclaiming that hers "is the most reliable estimate we have" (p. 270). Why this is the most reliable estimate is not explained. Becker compares it with others, derived from Chinese sources, scientific publications, official documents, and information provided by a senior party official who had access to official statistics, but who fled the country after 1989. He appears willing to accept some of these estimates, without indicating their validity and reliability or an objective criterion, in preference to the results obtained by Western demographers."

"In general, the methodology used is not in accordance with accepted scientific standards. First, Becker's initial respondents were self-selected, and self-selection never provides complete and unbiased information. Yet the author accepts the validity and reliability of the respondents' experiences without discussion. Second, he provides only data that support his thesis and makes sweeping statements he does not substantiate. In so doing, he provides only a partial and biased description of a complex situation. Third, Becker uses "loaded" language instead of objective terms (compare "starved to death" with "excess mortality"). Because of its methodological flaws, *Hungry Ghosts* cannot qualify as a historical study and certainly not as a scientific study of the causes and consequences of the famine in China during the Great Leap Forward. That distinction should still be reserved for Jean-Luc Domenach (1982) for causes, and Penny Kane (1988) for consequences. "

From *Hungry Ghosts*, *Mao's Secret Famine* by Becker, where your 60 million estimate comes from:

In the early 1980s, Dr Judith Banister undertook a major investigation of China's population statistics which was published in *China's Changing Population*. Taking all the above factors into account, she reached the following conclusion:

Assuming that without the Great Leap Forward policies and experiences China would have maintained its claimed 1957 death rate of 10.8 during the years 1958-1961, the official data imply that those four years saw over 15 million excess deaths attributable to the Great Leap Forward in combination with poor weather conditions. The computerized reconstruction of China's population trends utilized in this book, which assumes under-reporting of deaths in 1957, as well as in all the famine years, results in an estimated 30 million excess deaths during 1958-1961.⁵

This figure, arrived at in 1984, ****is the most reliable estimate we have**** but it is not the only one.

It then goes on to list a bunch of less credible estimates.

The 60 million number comes from a never-released report by Chen Yizi. Chen Yizi was one of the top advisors for, and worked at a think tank promoting, Zhao Ziyang. Zhao Ziyang is the Gorbachev of China, a pro-bourgeois neoliberal who wanted to abolish communism, make China free market capitalist, and reduce it to the same smoking wreck, stripped for parts on behalf of oligarchs, that Gorbachev and Yeltsin turned Russia into. Or in other words, either evil or an idiot.

In short, the source book of the “50-60 million” claim cannot verify the number, has no math to back it up, and ultimately supports 30 million as the most credible number.

Funny little note on Becker's incompetence:

“Even so the famines continued. M. H. Hutton wrote of his journey in 1924 from Sichuan to Guizhou province: ‘The famine conditions in this province are heartrending... Dogs feasting on human flesh. Skeletons in thousands to be seen everywhere. As we journeyed over the road, over and over again our chairbearers had to carry us over dead bodies of people who had died on the road. One very sad sight was a poor victim kneeling before an idol shrine – dead.’”
(excerpt from *Hungry Ghosts*)

Any historian would know that this is untrue, because Southern Chinese people eat dog, and people of all cultures, regardless of taboo, historically choose to eat every last dog rather than starve to death. Obviously!

B. Dikotter (43 million)

I will begin by quoting your Wikipedia page

Dikötter, Chair Professor of Humanities at the [University of Hong Kong](#) and the author of *Mao's Great Famine*, estimated that at least 45 million people died from starvation, overwork and state violence during the Great Leap Forward, claiming his findings to be based on access to recently opened local and provincial party archives.^{[34][35]} His study also stressed that state violence exacerbated the death toll. Dikötter claimed that at least 2.5 million of the victims were beaten or tortured to death.^[36] His approach to the documents, as well as his claim to be the first author to use them, however, have been questioned by some other scholars.^[37] Reviewing *Mao's Great Famine*, historian [Cormac Ó Gráda](#) wrote that "MGF is full of numbers but there are few tables and no graphs. [...] On page after page of MGF, numbers [...] are produced with no discussion of their reliability or provenance: all that seems to matter is that they are 'big'."^[38] Dikötter's high death toll estimate has also been criticized by sociologist [Andrew G. Walder](#) as unsupported by age-specific population data^[39] and by historian Anthony Garnaut who writes that Dikötter's sampling techniques fall short of academic best practices.^[40]

Per Dikötter's wikipedia:

Mao's Great Famine is a 2010 book about the [Great Chinese Famine](#). The book was well received in the popular press and won the [Samuel Johnson Prize](#) in 2011,^[13] but academic reviews were much more critical. In 2010, [Pankaj Mishra](#) described Dikötter's work as "boldly and engagingly revisionist",^[14] leading to a public dispute between the two.^[15] In 2011, [Roderick MacFarquhar](#) said that *Mao's Great Famine* is "Pathbreaking ... a first-class piece of research. ... [Mao] will be remembered as the ruler who initiated and presided over the worst man-made human catastrophe ever. His place in [Chinese history](#) is assured. Dikötter's book will have done much to put him there."^[16] Felix Wemheuer, lecturer in Chinese history and politics at the [University of Vienna](#), in his review of *Mao's Great Famine*, criticized Dikötter for his book's lack of explanation of local variations in destruction and death toll, his ignorance of Mao's efforts to deal with the problems, and his lack of sophisticated arguments due to his political agenda: to reduce Chinese Communism to terror.^[17] [Cormac Ó Gráda](#), famine scholar and professor of economics at [University College Dublin](#), criticised the book as "more like a catalogue of anecdotes about atrocities than a sustained analytic argument", and stated

that it failed to note that "many of the horrors it describes were recurrent features of Chinese history during the previous century or so."^[18] Anthony Garnaut, a social historian of China, said that Dikötter's juxtaposition and sampling techniques fall short of academic best practice, and the allegations Dikötter levels at [Yang Jisheng's](#) work are bewildering. In Garnaut's view, Dikötter selectively uses Yang's archival research to tell "an idiosyncratic vignette of totalitarian folly" without historical context. Garnaut also mentioned Dikötter's neglect of the plain wording of the archival document on which he hangs his case.^[19] According to [Andrew G. Walder](#), Dikötter's high death estimate cannot be reconciled with age-specific population data.^[20]

TL;dr he is not good at math, making shit up, everyone thinks he's a grifter.

To add additional context, Dikötter works for the Hoover Institution, an American conservative anti-communist think tank (founded by President Hoover, aka the conservative who did fucking nothing during the Great Depression and made everything way worse, who was also racist against Chinese and black people). He is literally paid by private corporations and billionaires to make up shit about communism. He is also widely considered to be fucking insane by historians, as he argues (poorly) in his book *Narcotic Culture* that Western imperialism wasn't actually that bad for China and it was more harmful to ban opium than to allow it, and that the Western opium peddlers raping China during the Century of Humiliation were actually totally fine.

Like literally, this guy is so fucking stupid.

"Dikötter's reaction (in Wemheuer 2011) to a critique of his "minimum of 45 million" provides part of the answer. His response was to ask if "a one per cent rate of death is too low to be considered normal... would it really change that much if we doubled it to two per cent?" The answer, most emphatically, is that it would." - Review of "Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine 1958-1962" by Yang Jisheng," by Cormac Ó Gráda

C. Yu Xiguang (55 million)

His work is untranslated unfortunately, but he is Dikötter's friend (cringe) and is also not a historian, he's a lawyer.

D. Mao Yushi (36 million)

Again, not a historian, he is an economist who advocated abolishing communism for free market neoliberalism.

E. Yang Jisheng (36 million) and Banister (30 million)

“Under-recording was pervasive not just before the Great Leap famine, but also during it. Again, Ashton et al., Banister, and others have proposed adjustments. However, estimates of infant and child mortality based on retrospective fertility surveys (Zhao and Reimondos 2012) imply that their corrections may have been on the high side. Bannisters numbers—underpinned by what she candidly describes as an **“arbitrary estimation process”**—suggst that life expectancy at birth reached a minimum at 24.6 years in 1960 (Banister 1987, p. 116) whereas Zhao and Reimondos (2012, pp. 342-43), using much higher-quality data, produce a figure of 32.5 years for 1959-60.. Since the latter’s simulations refer only to six of the worst-effected provinces...the aggregate death total implied by their results is lower than the 30 million proposed by Banister. While the exact death toll exacted by the Great Leap famine will never be known precisely, Zhao and Reimondos’s results make the case for a total much lower—perhaps ten million lower [26 million]—than that proposed by Yang [36 million].

Review of “Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine 1958-1962” by Yang Jisheng,” by Cormac Ó Gráda

Also, Yang Jisheng is not a historian. He studied fucking tractors.

Sun Jingxian, a Chinese mathematician, saw in the book a direct attack of China's political system asserting that Yang had done that by committing a distorted historical investigation.^[15] He argued that Yang made serious methodological errors in his assumption that starvation deaths could be calculated by looking at the difference between the *average* number of deaths for a given period and the *actual* number of deaths for that same year.^[15] Sun believed that this was an absurd mathematical formula and he called the book "extremely deceptive", characterizing it as faulty, inadequate and even fraudulent.^[15] In an academic paper, Sun wrote:^[15]

As a professional mathematician [...] we must seriously point out that from an academic point of view, [Yang's methodology] completely violates the basic principles that modern mathematics must follow when dealing with such problems.^[15]

Additionally, political scientist and historian Yang Songlin disputes several of Yang Jisheng's claims, such as that the Chinese government under-reported deaths or manipulated data.^[16]