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## **“There Is No Crisis and It Is Going to Go Away Soon, Anyhow” – Propaganda, Denialism and Revisionism in Debating the Great Leap Forward Famine**

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The Great Leap Forward (GLF) 1958-1961 was meant to be *the* real liberation. The ultimate upheaval that would deliver freedom from the servitude of hunger, want and poverty for all Chinese. China, one of the poorest and least developed countries in the world, was to undergo a gigantic transformation which was to catapult her into true Communism within three years fulfilling Mao’s ‘messianic mission’ of the complete remaking of Chinese society and economy, the creation of the New Man and, ultimately, a New World.<sup>1</sup>

As we know, the Great Leap ended in disaster. What Anthony Garnaut calls a ‘loose consensus’ of GLF research today concludes that the Great Leap caused a famine which claimed the lives of between 24 and 30 million Chinese.<sup>2</sup> This number of casualties was greater than that caused by all fighting in the revolutionary struggle before 1949 or by any natural disaster in Chinese history. With the 50-year moratorium on many archival records from the period finally ending at the turn of the 2010s, the famine has attracted growing attention in recent scholarship. Paradoxically, however, this improved access to sources has actually contributed to deepening divisions, not convergence, in research. Therefore, we are currently witnessing the development of different kinds of revisionist lines of argumentation in academic debates around the Great Leap Forward famine.

This writer shares the loose consensus of current mainstream research: a severe famine causing the death up to 30 million Chinese took place in mainland China 1959-1961 and the famine

was largely man-made, caused by the Great Leap policies and the way the Maoist regime reacted to the famine. However, this chapter does not try to explain the causes of the famine or address the issue of culpability as such. Instead, it outlines the development of GLF famine studies and tries to put revisionism into historical perspective by comparing it with the little-studied way that official propaganda managed popular sentiments throughout the campaign. It is argued here that in many ways denialist revisionism signifies a return to the obfuscation of facts which propaganda used during the famine.

### **“There Is No Crisis and It Is Going to Go Away Soon, Anyhow”**

The current official line about the Great Leap is that a famine did happen during the period, although not in the way or severity that Western research argues. The official explanation for the ‘three years of hardship’, as the famine period is euphemistically called, is bad weather. Sometimes this is combined with blaming the Soviets for reneging on their technological aid programme and making China repay its debts. Other official explanations include blaming excessively eager (“leftist”) local cadres for the disaster or the more vague “wind of communism”, which the Leap generated and which are said to have caused extreme policies. However, all these explanations made their first appearance only late in the disaster or after it. They are therefore not enough to explain how the Communist Party managed public sentiment during the crisis. The following pages will analyse the way this was done in the local press in one of the biggest cities in China, Tianjin.

Like the rest of China, in 1959-1961 the city of Tianjin went through the great food crisis and dearth triggered by Great Leap Forward policies.<sup>3</sup> Severe food shortages occurred in the city and in the Tianjin countryside people were dying of hunger and famine-related diseases as early as 1959. Urban leaders and residents were acutely aware of the situation at least locally and experienced the dearth in their own lives. Their rations were cut time after time and food quality also notably deteriorated so that, at the nadir of the crisis, if the people managed to get anything to

eat at all, they were offered vegetable peels and shoots and low quality grain. Meat practically disappeared and urban residents had to queue for their small food rations for hours, sometimes getting nothing even then. Black markets were common and their prices usurious. By late 1960, an Edema epidemic, caused by general lack of nutrition, had spread throughout the city and hundreds of thousands of urbanites were affected. Urbanites could also see famished peasants, famine refugees who came in their thousands from the Tianjin countryside and other parts of the country, begging for food in the city streets, some even dying there. In the countryside food riots began as early as 1959 and by 1960 they were also taking place in the city. People murdered each other for food in the city *hutongs*. At the height of the famine in late 1960, hundreds of peasants starved to death monthly in villages near Tianjin, according to internal City Party reports.

Food, however, was not the only thing that urbanites lacked. Cotton for clothing was severely rationed, cars ran out of petrol, heaters out of coal, the paper used to print official documents became unbleached pressed pulp owing to the lack of chlorine. Even silk for propaganda banners ran out. The Party was worried about public sentiment, and with good reason. The Party took a number of measures to address the situation including increased propaganda efforts to explain the situation to the city residents. Below, I will offer an analysis of this propaganda response in the *Tianjin Ribao* and the *Tianjin Zhengbao*, the two main organs of the Tianjin City Party Committee and Government. These were an open and a *neibu*, (internal publication with restricted circulation), publication respectively. Together they had a city-wide circulation and readership and therefore they were the Party's primary channels to disseminate famine-related propaganda. Propaganda in Tianjin of course followed formulations from the Central Propaganda Bureau and the Tianjin case therefore tells us also about the general nature and themes of famine-related propaganda in China throughout this period.

The general picture of propaganda from this era is multi-layered and even internally contradictory. Because the famine was never officially acknowledged, talking about it took the

guise of euphemisms and indirect references. Explanations of the evolving situation and of the policies adopted by the party-state to address it were always framed in ways that avoided addressing the real issue, i.e. the real causes of food and other shortages and the severity of the situation. Furthermore, propaganda was always trying to shift the blame for the situation away from the party-state emphasizing individual rather than systemic failures. Propaganda also evolved organically, that is, new explanations for the causes of the dearth were invented as the crisis continued, and grew on the existing ones while the latter were still being used.

Propaganda cannot make reality, but it can give it a spin. Some authors have noted how, during the famine, people were unaware of the enormous scale of the disaster and knew only what was happening close to them.<sup>4</sup> In these cases propaganda and censorship, which always go hand in hand in managing public sentiments in communism, succeeded in their aim of playing down and localising what was actually a nationwide tragedy. This is also what current historical denialism tries to achieve.

### **Dearth Propaganda in Tianjin**

In Tianjin, the first time that food shortages were mentioned in newspapers was June 1958 when the *Zhengbao* clarified the reasons for tightening controls on outflow of foodstuffs. According to the *Zhengbao*, transporting foodstuffs outside the city had caused a serious situation in the city's grain market, which called for swift action. Smuggling food out of the city was blamed on career criminals who in many cases were acting in an organised manner. The *Zhengbao* also complained about how some people were selling their grain tickets and then complaining that their rations were insufficient.<sup>5</sup>

Not only individuals were blamed, but also entire work units, which broke food procurement regulations and bought the foodstuffs they needed on their own. Usually this meant establishing direct trading relations with suburban production brigades and bypassing the monopoly procurement and supply system by buying grain and supplementary food directly from them in cash

or through the barter of industrial goods for food. In Tianjin, the earliest ban on such activities was issued in January 1959. It was explained that the practice created shortages in city markets and only superficially improved the lives of units that committed such acts, while the whole supply system suffered. It was argued that such acts also showed that units did not have the spirit of *chiku* (eating bitterness), the ability to withstand hardship for the revolution.<sup>6</sup>

These early articles already highlighted one of the basic principles of GLF famine propaganda: the food shortages were attributed to micro level causes of individuals' and units' deviant, illegal, immoral and politically incorrect activities, which upset a food supply system that would otherwise have worked fine. Furthermore, it was argued that the same people who complained about the lack of food were the ones breaking the regulations in the first place. Complaining about the situation in public was therefore morally suspicious. Shifting the blame for the shortages from the party-state acted both as a defence of the system and also an attempt to strengthen peer-supervision in order to enforce the rules better. The bans were not very effective, however, as the city had to ban direct procurement activities by work units in the countryside time and again – four times in 1959 alone.

Other central features of dearth propaganda also developed in the early phase of the famine. First, the lack of food was always referred to as “shortages” (*jinzhang*). Depending on the situation, these shortages could be called tense or severe, but never a famine or crisis. The early explanation for these shortages at the end of 1958 included the lack of agricultural manpower and transportation capacity. In Tianjin this first appeared in December 1958, when *Tianjin Ribao* explained the shortages of supplementary foodstuffs (meaning such products as vegetables, meat and fish) in the city markets by referring to the lack of manpower and transportation capacity, which was because agricultural resources were being mobilised for the industrial Great Leap Forward.<sup>7</sup> The same reason was given by the city government, when it cut the flour proportion of urban grain rations in January 1959, blaming the “relatively weak [grain] reserves” on shortages of labour and transport

capacity.<sup>8</sup> This explanation was not in itself untrue, as the industrial Leap and logistical complexities it caused did explain why some food shipments did not arrive at the city in time, or at all, but no explanation was offered as to why such a situation existed in the first place. Attributing food shortages to vague transportation capacity problems begged the question of who was responsible for arranging transportation in a command economy. Yet, this explanation was one of the most honest ones given by the press for shortages during the whole Leap; and even it contained a positive subtext: there was something to transport, but it just could not reach the city markets.

These early explanations for food shortages were often combined. In April 1959, the City Planning Bureau explained in the *Zhengbao* that much of the agricultural labour shortage in Tianjin countryside was actually created by selfish peasants ‘blindly’ migrating in search of better-paid jobs in the cities. According to the bureau, in 1958 some 195,000 people were transferred from agriculture to industry and water works according to the city economic plan but, in addition to this, 127,500 people had become ‘blind migrants’ moving to the city without official authorisation. It was *this* outflow of manpower that had negatively affected agricultural production. The outflow was caused by a low ideological level and the selfishness of some peasants, although some urban companies were also wantonly recruiting workers without a licence.<sup>9</sup> Once again, the subtext was that there would have been enough food if people and units had just stuck to the plan, and not acted selfishly.

The spring and summer of 1959 were a period of moderating the most utopian GLF goals and the political atmosphere also became a little more relaxed. So, when the summer harvest season began in June 1959, the City Party Committee and Government could momentarily admit that there were “national grain difficulties”. This was intended to motivate people to participate enthusiastically in a rush summer harvest campaign. It was ordered that the reasons for grain shortages in the countryside were to be explained in following way: the reason was not that the state had taken too much grain from peasants, but because last autumn’s crop was “*lost, rotten, spoiled,*

*and used in unplanned ways and much of it was wasted and damaged*".<sup>10</sup> Here the blame for shortages was once again attributed to people themselves.

Yet another explanation for shortages entered propaganda in the summer of 1959. This time instead of blaming others, shortages were given a positive spin by attributing them to constantly rising demand and living standards. This argument of "relative shortages" was first used as early as mid-December 1958 when the City Council issued an order on reducing electricity consumption in an all-city campaign explaining that there was not enough power for everyone due to the constantly increasing demand for it. Then in June 1959, the same argument was used when all city units were told to plant oil-bearing crops to satisfy the ever-increasing demand for edible oils.<sup>11</sup> From this moment on, the argument for relative shortages was increasingly used in propaganda. For example, also in June 1959 it was used to justify the new rationing quotas for vegetables in Tianjin.<sup>12</sup> In propaganda, the explanation of relative shortages became the main explanation for shortages until the late 1960, when it was dropped from use. It was a way to tell people that shortages were actually a sign of success showing that economic development was faster than expected and people with better incomes were therefore constantly demanding than supply could keep up with - people had less because they actually had more.

In the late summer of 1959 a more assertive tone could be detected in propaganda. In July 1959 at the Lushan Conference, Mao Zedong had ended the moderation period of the GLF and purged Defence Minister Peng Dehuai for criticising the Leap. The anti-rightist opportunism campaign that followed affected also propaganda on food crisis. In August the city's Party Committee and Government issued instructions on how to carry out the autumn harvest in a swift and thorough way and how complaints about excessively large state procurement was to be dealt with. Units that had complained that "too much" (*sic* in quotation marks) grain had been procured by the state were to be examined. The units that complained for nothing (literally "those who had thought problems") were to be subjected to political education to resolve their incorrect thinking.<sup>13</sup>

Talking about shortages was therefore being politicised so that even mentioning them was regarded as a possible sign of political problems.

With the anti-right campaign, also more assertive propaganda appeared in press. On 20 September 1959 *Tianjin Ribao* ran a *Renmin Ribao* article entitled “Facts refute the slander of general shortages” attacking complains about the dearth head-on. The article claimed that national markets were “thriving”. Supplies of daily commodities were growing, warehouses were full and prices were stable. Assertions of shortages were thus “totally groundless”. It was admitted in a belittling tone that some cities had suffered natural calamities and were therefore having some difficulties in vegetable supply, but here too the Party had taken measures to improve the situation. This was the first time natural disasters were offered as an explanation for shortages, but only in a passing. The article further proclaimed that as China was a large country and its cities’ purchasing power was constantly rising, some temporary and relative shortages could occur as long as productive forces had not yet had time to catch up with demand.<sup>14</sup>

*Tianjin Ribao* added its own commentary to the *Renmin Ribao* column in a front page article entitled “City markets are flourishing” arguing that market supplies in the city had improved considerably, belying the “right conservative slander” about shortages. That said, it was also noted that in order to improve market supplies further, people should get rid of their rightist deviationist thinking and the production and economising campaign should be stepped up in the city.<sup>15</sup> Typical ‘double speak’ was visible here: the market was flourishing, but people should reduce their spending and work more enthusiastically to avert a crisis that officially did not exist. However, this kind of head-on denial of the crisis was visible only in late 1959 under the influence of the anti-right campaign. When the dearth continued and got worse, propaganda switched back to blame-shifting and spin.

One way to shift blame was to propagate slogans, which emphasised individuals’ and work units’ role in dealing with the situation. In this vein, the phrase “relying on one’s own efforts first,



seeking outside help second” was widely used in propaganda. Basically, it laid down the principle that units had to struggle to become self-sufficient in food production and that outside assistance should not be asked for in times of difficulty.<sup>16</sup>

When the crisis continued and worsened, propaganda slogans grew in number and could virtually become the only content in many articles that dealt with the situation. For example, a column in the *Zhengbao* in April 1960 contained no less than twelve such slogans: one had to be “overcautious and hesitant” in using grain, to understand that “small streams grow into big rivers”, to “allow for unforeseen circumstances” in saving grain, to exercise “careful calculation and strict budgeting” in using grain, to be “economic in eating and frugal in using food”, to “put aside reserves a bit more, use foodstuffs a bit less”, to be “frugal in the days of plenty”, to “use grain in a planned manner”, to “save grain”, “have hope” and yet “fill one’s stomach”. Furthermore, using grain had to be “arranged in a planned manner” so that everybody would “eat their fill, eat well, and eat economically”.<sup>17</sup> It was as if such slogans in themselves could fill the empty noodle bowls and bellies.

When shortages continued despite official claims of bumper harvests and production records, propaganda started to developed internal inconsistencies. Indeed, the collapse of any internal consistency of this elaborate web of lies and half-truths was almost inevitable. By the end of 1959, Tianjin people were simultaneously being told that food supplies were better than ever yet they had to reduce their rations and eat vegetable peels to supplement their diets. An article in the *Zhengbao* gives a good example of this. The writer first went through the motions of praising the excellent market situation in the city and then reminded the readers how they had to remember to use vegetables in a planned manner and not waste them. The writer complained that “some people” were still not mindful enough of saving vegetables and were therefore wasting them. When people saw the piles of *baicai*, Chinese cabbage, harvest on street corners<sup>18</sup> they may think that saving was not necessary and eat them with “an open belly”. They wasted *baicai* by peeling away its outer

leaves and throwing them away even though they still contained a lot of nutrition. If vegetable supplies were not managed well by individuals and units, small reductions in supplies here and there could turn “surplus into deficit”, readers were reminded.<sup>19</sup>

Similar articles could be found throughout the famine. As late as the autumn vegetable harvest of 1961 *Zhengbao* told its readers how streets were sending work teams to individual households to educate people on how to handle vegetables correctly. People were told to eat *baicai* first then radishes. When eating *baicai*, one should first eat the outside and only then the inside. People were also told to mix “fresh, dried, and pickled” and have three meals a day “with variation and taste”.<sup>20</sup> If people were not able to do this, who could they blame but themselves? Basically, the Party was teaching people how to eat, implicitly blaming them for their food problems and politicizing the ordinary daily actions of cooking and eating.

Blaming outsiders for food shortages was another recurrent theme in propaganda. It included the “blindly” migrating peasants who entered the city in their thousands to seek food, jobs and shelter. As already noted, their exodus was blamed for negatively affecting agricultural production and thus for creating shortages, but by the spring of 1960 a new theme emerged. This time peasants were also framed as troublemakers in the city itself. This was justified by the worsening food situation in the winter and spring of 1960, which forced city leaders to further cut urban grain rations and curb peasant inflows by conducting a city-wide sweep to check people’s *hukou*, i.e. their household registration papers. To justify the move, the *Zhengbao* blamed the *mangliu* for creating the “mood of shortages” in the city. In April, the *Zhengbao* admitted that there were queues for food in Tianjin, but argued that these were caused by peasants coming to the city attracted by the relatively good grain rations there.<sup>21</sup>

The campaign against the “blindly” migrating peasants continued practically unabated after this. In August 1960 the City People’s Congress noted how they were creating a sense of crisis in the city and argued that the “majority of the people who claim that there is not enough food to eat

are from this group”.<sup>22</sup> Urban residents’ rations were better than in the countryside to be sure, but the spin here focused on this fact, not the fact that in many places in the countryside there was nothing to eat. This made the famine refugees appear selfish and greedy, not, as was often the case, as people driven by survival.

The party centre finally began to acknowledge the disaster in late spring and summer of 1960. Research has not been able to pinpoint any single event that might have led to this change by Mao and other party leaders, and in any case the change was a gradual one. Mao would stick to what he saw as the precious achievements of the Great Leap Forward, such as the people’s commune system, to the very end of his life. However, it is likely that the sheer number of disaster reports from the grassroots forced the change. For example, by the summer of 1960, the biggest cities in China only had grain reserves for a few days. Every day their grain reserves were reported directly to Premier Zhou Enlai. It is therefore highly unlikely that Mao would have been kept in dark about the situation.

What followed from late summer 1960 to 1962 was basically a national disaster management campaign against the famine, although not under that name. The party centre began to move labour away from industry to agriculture and cut back its industrial growth targets drastically. It also started, haltingly, to deliver relief grain to the worst affected parts of the country (or at least those where leaders had the courage to report food shortages), and finally began importing grain from Canada and Australia, mostly to feed the major urban centres. The cities were told to establish clinics to treat their residents suffering from edema and start a large campaign to grow vegetables and produce ersatz food, such as algae grown in urine.

It was in connection with this disaster management campaign that the explanation of natural disasters became more prominent in propaganda, although none of the earlier explanations were discarded. Only the argument of “relative shortages” seems to have now been abandoned. In the Tianjin press, natural disasters started to play a role in propaganda in the summer of 1960. This was

connected to the local anti-drought campaign in the countryside that had been going on since early 1960. For example, in August 1960 the City People's Congress declared that the struggle against the drought had achieved a great victory. Nevertheless, because agriculture had not yet fully recovered from this natural disaster, the province and the city had pushed the slogans of economising on grain consumption and to developing the movement to save grain in the city.<sup>23</sup>

The Party had only good things to say about its own role in the campaign against the drought. At the September meeting of the City People's Congress, the report by the City Agriculture, Forestry and Fishery Office used the drought to underline the great work of the Party and the people's commune system in mitigating the disaster by comparing it to the old society. It was claimed that this year there had not been rain for 300 days, making it a drought not seen in 100 years. Then the report added that "Before the Liberation such a situation would have led to scenes of utter desolation and tragic scenes of famine."<sup>24</sup> However, the report went on, under the leadership of the Communist Party, people were now able to fight the calamity. Here the report was utterly disingenuous. In the autumn of 1960, Tianjin city districts were suffering from a severe Edema epidemic and internal City Party documents revealed that in the villages hundreds of people were dying from starvation each month.

Nevertheless, the report claimed that the city's assistance in the campaign against the drought had been so effective that in the end there had been a bumper summer harvest. The report admitted that in the past two years some locations had suffered grain shortages, and this year's natural calamities had caused definite troubles. Further, agricultural production could not fully satisfy the demands of the economy due to 'technological backwardness'. However, the Party was now taking the right measures in making grain production key in the economy and, in the meanwhile, people should cultivate a spirit of "hard work and thriftiness are glorious, luxury and waste are shameful".<sup>25</sup> The report was very revealing about the internal inconsistencies propaganda had created for itself. While it was claimed that natural disasters had been victoriously overcome

through the efforts of the Party and the masses and that there was a bumper harvest once again, people still had to brace themselves for further cuts in their rations. Such contrived arguments could be found in many articles in *Tianjin Ribao* at this time.

In late 1960 propaganda found yet another group of people to blame for the problems, namely the cadres in charge of local mess halls. It was now decreed that city cadres should go to local mess halls to ensure better management as a key to improving people's nutrition and increase their satisfaction with the Party. *Tianjin Ribao* ran a number of articles on how sent-down cadres had worked miracles at mess halls in the countryside – always with the help of the masses, especially the poor peasants.<sup>26</sup> For example, in October 1960, the newspaper ran an article on its front page on a Wujing County Grain Station, which had sent its personnel to the front line to inspect mess halls in order to help production brigades better to manage grain and to help to improve people's livelihood. Reportedly, this had improved mess hall management notably and now people ate “well and full” saying: “Dispatching cadres, those good managers of ours, is good assistance from the Party.”<sup>27</sup> The subtext here was that food shortages were now attributed to local cadres neglecting their duties. The same explanation could be read in the City Party internal reports on starvation deaths in its counties, where the situation was blamed directly on “bad cadres”. Because the problems were not openly exposed, however, the bad cadre explanation was only implicitly present in propaganda. It was yet another variation in the general theme of blame-shifting and framing the crisis as having micro-level causes.

In 1961, the crisis started to gradually abate. The food situation improved slowly in Tianjin, mostly thanks to the vigorous vegetable growing campaign that had been launched in 1960 and importing foreign grain for the consumption of big cities – which functioned in practice as foreign relief aid. This meant that no new explanations for the crisis were needed, but the natural disaster explanation now became the standard explanation for the crisis, and it also stuck after the famine as the key official explanation for the disaster, now the “three difficult years” of natural calamities.

This, of course, was yet another blame shifting propaganda device, which left out the most obvious explanation for the famine – the Party and its reckless aim of leaping to Communism in three years.

### **Post-Leap explanations the Famine**

The Great Leap Forward was never officially declared over. Nevertheless, most historians believe it ended with the so called 7000 cadre meeting in Beijing in early 1962, which set China on the course of more pragmatic economic policies. However, already in the summer of 1962 Mao started to criticise these policies and his criticism of “right deviation” culminated in the Cultural Revolution in 1966, which Mao used to purge his political opponents, real and imagined. Therefore, during in the Cultural Revolution the failure of the GLF was not discussed and only its so called positive achievements could be mentioned in public. In the West reliable information about what was happening behind the Bamboo Curtain was scarce, and although it was generally known that the food situation had become tight during the Great Leap Forward, the actual size and severity of the famine did not become known while Mao was still alive.

The situation began to change after Mao died in 1976 and Deng Xiaoping’s more reformist party faction defeated its opponents in a power struggle that lasted from Mao’s death to 1981. As a part of this struggle, the Party’s Central Committee approved the *Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China* in June 1981. The Resolution can be compared to Nikita Khrushchev’s famous Secret Speech in the Soviet Communist Party 20<sup>th</sup> Party Congress in 1956 in the way it tried to settle issues in the recent Party history for the benefit of the winning party faction, although in a context where Deng had to maintain an uneasy balance within his own reform-minded faction as well. This led to notable toning down many of many of the harsher criticisms of the Mao era in the Resolution.<sup>28</sup> Nevertheless, the Resolution also contained the official view on what happened in the Great Leap Forward, and it was (and still is) meant to guide future historical studies and official references to the era.

The Resolution officially admitted that the Great Leap Forward was a great failure. As the Resolution put it, it was “*mainly due to the errors of the Great Leap Forward and the struggle against “Right opportunism” together with a succession of natural calamities and the perfidious scrapping of contracts by the Soviet Government that our economy encountered serious difficulties between 1959 and 1961, which caused serious losses to our country and people.*”<sup>29</sup> The Resolution therefore stuck to the explanations for the disaster already devised at the end of the Great Leap Forward, but importantly, it also admitted failure and mistakes by the Party for the first time. However, many of the writers of the Resolution, including Deng Xiaoping, had been active supporters of the Leap at least during its first half, and therefore one could hardly expect harsher, or more detailed, criticism in the Resolution.

Before the early 1980s, Western writers had been kept in dark about the true events in the Great Leap and many ways they were doing the same thing as the citizens of Tianjin – trying to figure out what (if anything) had happened based on very limited information. When the demographic statistics for the Great Leap Forward period were published for the first time in the early 1980s, it sparked the first wave of Western academic research on the Great Leap famine, which was dominated by demographic studies.<sup>30</sup> However, with new information coming from China some authors, like Thomas Bernstein, also tried to explain the political reasons behind the famine.<sup>31</sup> Further, the first general history of Great Leap Forward period, Roderick MacFarquhar’s seminal work *Origins of the Cultural Revolution 2: The Great Leap Forward 1958-1960*,<sup>32</sup> came out in 1983. It became the basic reference works for all Western studies on the political history of the period until the 1990’s. As MacFarquhar argued in his work, the failure of the Great Leap Forward created the rift in the highest party leadership, which then led to the Cultural Revolution

The second wave in research took place in the mid-1990s. The first time the Party officially addressed the famine directly was in 1994 when the *Concise History of the Communist Party of China* was published. This happened yet again under the circumstances where a reformist faction in

the Party leadership needed additional support against conservative opponents and used Party history to refute Maoist economic policy. Not everything had changed, though. This official history repeated the notion of the three years of natural disasters as one of the main reasons for the famine and did not use the word ‘famine’ or even ‘crisis’ when describing the era. Nevertheless, the *Concise History* did admit increased mortality rates and a drop of 10 million people in the population, which amounts to a *de facto* admittance of the famine. The book also offered a new spin to the famine by stating: “This was a sad outcome, contrary to the original hope of enabling people to live better lives sooner and earlier.”<sup>33</sup> As noted by William A. Joseph, explaining the disaster as a “tragedy of good intentions” had become popular in the official discourse in the 1980’s,<sup>34</sup> and the *Concise History* gave it official approval. Although a history book is not as binding a guidance for PRC historians as the formal Central Committee resolution, the official history offers a much more detailed authorized version of the period, and provides a politically correct interpretation of the events. Therefore, it is easy to find this interpretation, for example, in college-level history books.<sup>35</sup>

Soon after the *Concise History* came out the first Western monograph focusing solely on the famine was published. This was Jasper Becker’s *Hungry Ghosts*<sup>36</sup> in 1996, which targeted general Western audiences and did not share the mild excusatory formulations of the *Concise History*. That same year Dali Yang’s work on how the failure of the Leap and the famine contributed to institutional change in China came out, but was much more technical in its nature than Becker’s popular work.<sup>37</sup> After these works, Western studies on the period began to increase in numbers and also the variety of topics grew. Naturally, this also brought new interpretations for the causes and consequences of the famine. For example, in 1999 Frederick C. Teiwes and Warren Sun offered an alternative reading to MacFarquhar of the high politics during the Leap.<sup>38</sup> Other authors focused on the role of the collective agriculture and the role of the command economy in general in the making of the famine.<sup>39</sup> How much Mao knew about the famine and how his decisions contributed to the



disaster also became a topic,<sup>40</sup> however, it has turned to be a fairly elusive task to find the ultimate “smoking gun” for the famine in Mao’s hand.<sup>41</sup>

The third wave in GLF famine studies can be said to have started in the turn of the 2010s and is still going on while this chapter is being written. The reason for this has already been mentioned in the introduction, namely that many archival records from the period have finally been opened after the 50-years moratorium. This has naturally attracted growing attention from a number of contemporary historians and the improved availability of data has also attracted researchers from other social science disciplines to write about the famine. The seminal work of the third wave is arguably Yang Jisheng’s *Tombstone*,<sup>42</sup> a tour de force based on meticulous archival research. *Tombstone* can also be seen as a leap forward in GLF famine research in many ways because it seems to have caused a revisionist counter-mobilisation in PRC establishment historians and netizen history activists as discussed below.

The third wave includes both some new grand histories of the period,<sup>43</sup> edited volumes,<sup>44</sup> and numerous articles which focus on more issue-specific sub-themes of the famine.<sup>45</sup> We can also find translated and abridged archival records of the famine.<sup>46</sup> A growing trend has for example been local histories and studies that try to explain differences in mortality between provinces, localities, rural and urban areas as well as those between different social groups such as the cadres and common people, genders, age cohorts, etc. Here the discrepancy between urban and rural areas has attracted much attention, but differences in vulnerability were also large in other terms.<sup>47</sup> Some authors have also studied local communities’ responses and attempts at self-protection or resistance during the GLF famine.<sup>48</sup>

With all its diversity, most English language and a number of Chinese language studies on the period nevertheless have shared the loose consensus on the famine itself by taking it as a historical fact and the subject of inquiry, although their methodological starting points may differ greatly and although there is for example a notable disagreement over the mortality rates during the

famine.<sup>49</sup> Recently, however, the loose consensus has become under attack, which has resurrected many of the themes we could see in the original GLF propaganda analysed above.

### **“There Was No Crisis and the Party Handled It Just Fine”**

Before the 2010s the official view, as we have seen, accepted the Party’s partial complicity in the famine, while more critical academic research has shared the ‘loose consensus’ that the famine was worse than the official view admitted and mostly caused by man and not natural forces. However, as Anthony Garnaut has shown<sup>50</sup>, especially since Yang Jisheng’s *Tombstone* came out, a new denialist line of writing about the famine has made its appearance in Chinese language academic research and internet discussion forums. The rise of this ‘revisionist’ agenda, as Garnaut calls it, has directly been supported by the Mass Line Education and Practice Movement which was organised in 2013 under then newly appointed Party General Secretary Xi Jinping. That year the movement’s basic ideological rationale was outlined in the Central Committee Document No. Nine, which warned about ‘false ideological trends, positions, and activities’ including ‘Promoting historical nihilism, trying to undermine the history of the CCP and of New China’.<sup>51</sup> Following this, writing about the GLF famine even in the terms of the earlier minimal acknowledgement of the Party’s complicity can be seen as undermining the Party’s authority and legitimacy by downplaying its historical achievements and underlining its mistakes and shortcomings.

A number of Chinese historians, who can be called left revisionists or outright denialists, have taken their cue from this new Party line. These include, for example, Sun Jingxian and Bei Yuan. In his article tellingly entitled “30 million famine deaths are not true” Sun calls the figure of 30 million victims a ‘massive rumour’ and argues that the total death toll from the famine did not exceed 2.5 million.<sup>52</sup> In turn, Bei Yuan has called for ‘new research’ on the famine with an aim of proving wrong the previously approved official figures of 10 million famine victims because it is too high. Bei argues that, by its claims of genocide, Western research is trying to undermine Chinese socialism, but actually socialism is good at correcting its mistakes and was therefore the

reason for recovery from the hardship, not the reason for the disaster in the first place.<sup>53</sup> In the final analysis then, the left revisionists see themselves as defending socialism against its foreign and domestic enemies, often at the expense of historical facts.

As Garnaut argues, at the moment the Party has not yet officially adopted the left revisionist view of history, but condones it. This way, the Party gets ‘alternative fact’ claims planted in public discussion under the guise of academic research, which transmutes the empirical questions of the severity of the famine and culpability for it into matters of opinion. To compare it to some of the other well-known examples of historical denialism, leftist revisionism on the GLF famine resembles closely holocaust denial in Europe,<sup>54</sup> Stalin-era great terror denial in contemporary Russia,<sup>55</sup> and, ironically, Japanese right wing denial of the Nanking Massacre and other Japanese atrocities during the Sino-Japanese War 1937-1945<sup>56</sup>.

### **A Socialist Famine?**

Because of the emergence of the denialist line, Garnaut sees that there is at present a “two-line struggle over the famine”. However, the struggle arguably resembles more a three-way dispute, since at the same time some writers have also begun to take an even more extreme view on the famine departing from the loose consensus. These writers attribute the blame for the famine directly on Stalinist / Maoist type of socialism and usually see it having more victims than ‘only’ the 30 million. To some extent this is not new, since for example all the general histories discussed above do analyse socialist agriculture and agricultural collectivisation, which preceded and formed the organisational basis of the GLF in the countryside, and see it as a major factor behind the famine. However, the more critical writers can be said to be making arguments for a socialist, or a totalitarian, famine that go beyond criticising collective agriculture or other technicalities of the command economy. Obviously, this argument is squarely at odds with the left revisionist arguments.

Scholars who offer this kind of critical structural analysis for the root causes behind the famine include Felix Wemhauer, Yang Jisheng and Frank Dikötter. In his study *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union*, Wemhauer compares the GLF famine to the Stalin-era famine of 1929-1931 in the Soviet Union and argues that they were both ‘great leap famines’ caused by the same Stalinist strategy of building socialism with speedy forced-draft industrialisation based on exploiting the agricultural workforce at any cost. As Wemhauer argues, the famines were therefore about “deadly escalation of the struggle between the socialist governments and the rural societies over grain.”<sup>57</sup> However, there can hardly be Stalinist policy without a Stalinist political system, which the two other studies discussed here emphasise as the ultimate reason for famine more than Wemhauer does.

In this vein, Yang Jisheng takes his analysis in the *Tombstone* a step further and attributes the famine to the whole totalitarian regime under Mao, not only its Stalinist developmental policies. Yang bases his view on Friedrich Hayek and draws his analysis clearly from the classical totalitarian paradigm. Accordingly, Yang treats the Maoist regime as an amalgam of Stalinism and classical Chinese monarchy à la the First Emperor of Qin, to which modern technology had given new reach and capabilities. He further sees the people’s communes as the foundation of the Maoist totalitarian system and ultimately the totalitarian party leadership as *the* systemic cause of the famine.<sup>58</sup>

In his book *The Tragedy of Liberation*, Frank Dikötter follows Yang’s argument and is clearly also inspired by Hayek when he sees people’s communes and the imposition of agrarian socialism as the ‘road to slavery’, the road which caused starvation and outright famine.<sup>59</sup> In terms of explaining the famine, Dikötter’s major contribution lies actually in the way he shows how starvation accompanied collective agriculture even *before* the Great Leap Forward, starting with the formation of the mutual-aid teams after the land reform. Therefore, if the denial and downplaying of the famine forms the ‘leftist’ end of the dispute, the ‘rightist’ end of the dispute is located in the

argument that the GLF famine was a socialist famine caused by the totalitarian Maoist regime and its megalomaniac project of remaking society at any cost. Some might argue, the ultimate goal of the liberation.

### **Conclusion**

The title of this chapter refers to David Satter's sardonic saying about the way the Putinist government has dealt with the history of the communist era atrocities and especially Stalin's great terror in Russia: "It was a long time ago, and it never happened anyway."<sup>60</sup> Basically, China's leftist revisionism on the GLF famine shares the same attitude of denial and dismissal. If the original master frame for propaganda during the GLF was "There is no crisis and it is going to go away soon, anyhow", then the newly emerged denialist master frame can be read as "There was no crisis and the party handled it just fine". Denialism has therefore made history circle back to the days of empty propaganda during the GLF.

Curiously enough, at the same time one can hear the echoes of the Cold War totalitarian paradigm in right revisionist research as well. In some ways it may be inevitable that the role of the whole Stalinist / Maoist political system of the era should come under scrutiny when one is looking for the ultimate reasons for the famine, since the big question about the famine is why the system could not self-correct itself once things started to go wrong. This involves the role of Mao, but also the whole party-state and its ideology. These are of course exactly the questions the original GLF propaganda tried, and the left revisionism still tries, to obfuscate and silence and it is difficult to see that a general consensus could emerge on these issues as long as they remain politically charged. It is therefore likely that the field of GLF famine studies will remain polarized in the future. This, however, should not stop us from researching the period, but instead make us to use the opportunity to be able to get better information about it to build stronger cases for our arguments.

- <sup>1</sup> Lowell Dittmer, *China's Continuous Revolution – The Post-Liberation Epoch 1949-1981*. (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).
- <sup>2</sup> Anthony Garnaut, "Hard Facts and Half-Truths: The New Archival History of China's Great Famine", *China Information* 27 (2013): 223-246.
- <sup>3</sup> A more detailed description of Tianjin during the GLF can be found in my *Managing Famine, Flood and Earthquake in China: Tianjin 1958-1985*. (London: Routledge 2016).
- <sup>4</sup> Chang Jung, *Wild Swans – Three Daughters of China* (London: Flamingo 1993): 311.
- <sup>5</sup> Tianjin Shicheng Zhengbao (hereafter TJZB) Vol. 307, No. 24 (June 16, 1958), "Weihsu shiliang tonggou tongxiao zhengce, jiaqiang kongzhi shiliang wailiu," 13-14.
- <sup>6</sup> TJZB Vol. 339, No. 7 (February 1, 1959), "Shi renmin weiyuanhui guanyu yanjin ge danwei zhijie xiang nongcun renmin gongshe lai gou shucui, zhurou, deng fushipinde tongzhi," 9.
- <sup>7</sup> Tianjin Ribao (hereafter TR) December 8, 1958, "Qianwan-baiji gongying benshi fu shipin," 1
- <sup>8</sup> TJZB Vol. 333, No. 1 (January 5, 1959), "Shi Renminweiyuanhui guanyu diaozheng mianfen dapei gongying bizhongde tongzhi," 10.
- <sup>9</sup> TJZB Vol. 346, No. 14 (April 6, 1959), "Yange zhizhi nongcun laodongli mangmu wailiu," 9-10.
- <sup>10</sup> TJZB Vol. 356, No. 24 (June 15, 1959), "Zhong-Gong Tianjinshi weiyuanhui, shi renminweiyuanhui guanyu qieshi hao xialiang zhenggou he tongxiao gongzuode zhishi," 2-3
- <sup>11</sup> TJZB Vol. 357, No. 25 (June 22, 1959), "Yao qianwan-baiji wancheng gongying youliao zuowudse zhongzhi jihua," 6-7
- <sup>12</sup> TJZB Vol. 358, No. 26 (June 29, 1959), "Shi renmin weiyuanhui guanyu jiaqiang fu shipin guanlide ji xiang guiding," 3
- <sup>13</sup> TJZB Vol. 365, No. 33 (August 17, 1959), "Zhong-Gong Tianjinshi weiyuanhui, shi renminweiyuanhui guanyu shanshi-shanzhongdi zuohao xialiang zhenggou gongzuode zhishi (zhaiyao)," 1-3.
- <sup>14</sup> TR September 9, 1959, "Shishi bodao "shichang gongying quanmian jinzhang" de lanyan", 1.
- <sup>15</sup> TR September 9, 1959, "Dangqian shichang qingkuang zhengzheng-rishang," 1.
- <sup>16</sup> TJZB Vol. 377, No. 45 (November 9, 1959), "Jianjue shixain woshi fushipin quanmian zijide fangzhen," 8-9.
- <sup>17</sup> TJZB Vol. 399, No. 15 (April 11, 1960), "Cong ge fangmian jieyue liangshide xiaofei," 11-12.
- <sup>18</sup> In Tianjin, for the lack of storage capacity autumn *baicai* harvest was piled in street corners for urbanites to take home when the crop arrived in the markets. This created a short-lasting impression of abundant vegetable supplies.
- <sup>19</sup> TJZB Vol. 384, No. 52 (December 28, 1959), "Yao zhuyi shucaide jieyue he shichang guanli," 5-7.
- <sup>20</sup> TJZB Vol 570, No. 23 (December 16, 1961), "Hexi Qu Taibei Lu fenpeizhan yikao qunzhong, jiji zuohao qiucui fenpei he jumin qiucui jiagong zhucun yan zhi gongzuo," 4-6.
- <sup>21</sup> TJZB Vol. 399, No. 15 (April 11, 1960), "Shi renmin weiyuanhui guanyu jixu kaizhan shehui jieyue yundongde baogao," 11-12.
- <sup>22</sup> TJZB Vol. 416, No. 32 (August 8, 1960), "Guanyu jin yibu kaizhanda jieyue liangshi yundongde yijian," 4-5.
- <sup>23</sup> TJZB Vol. 416, No. 32 (August 8, 1960), "Guanyu jin yibu kaizhanda ..." 4-5.
- <sup>24</sup> TJZB Vol. 421, No. 37 (September 12, 1960), "Guanyu jixu shenru guanche yi nongye wei jichude fangzhen quan min da ban nongye, daban liangshide yijian," 2-5
- <sup>25</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>26</sup> TR November 14, 1960, "Shitangde hao guanxia," 3.
- <sup>27</sup> TR October 17, 1960, "Guan hao yong liangshi anpai qunzhong shenghuo," 1.
- <sup>28</sup> The background of the Resolution is discussed in Richard Baum, *Burying Mao – Chinese Politics in the Age of Deng Xiaoping*. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996), 134-137.
- <sup>29</sup> CCP Central Committee (27.6.1981/1991). A Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Funding of the People's Republic of China, 27.6.1981. In *Major Documents of the People's Republic of China (December 1978-1989)*. (Beijing: Beijing Foreign Languages Press), 158.
- <sup>30</sup> Ansley J. Coale, "Population Trends, Population Policy, and Population Studies in China", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Mar., 1981): 85-97; Basil Ashton, Kenneth Hill, Alan Piazza and Robin Zeitz, "Famine in China 1958-61", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 10, No 4 (1984): 613-645; Peng Xizhe, "Demographic Consequences of the Great Leap Forward in China's Provinces", *Population and Development Review*, Vol. 13, No. 4 (Dec., 1987): 639-670.
- <sup>31</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein, "Stalinism, Famine, and Chinese Peasants – Grain Procurements during the Great Leap Forward", *Theory and Society*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (1984): 339-377.
- <sup>32</sup> Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution 2: The Great Leap Forward 1958-1960*. (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983). Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origin of the Cultural Revolution, 3: The Coming of the Cataclysm 1961-1966*. (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1997) is also relevant in this respect.
- <sup>33</sup> Hu Sheng, *A Concise History of the Communist Party of China*. (Beijing: Foreign Languages Press 1994), 565.
- <sup>34</sup> Joseph, William A. "A tragedy of Good Intentions: Post-Mao Views of the Great Leap Forward." *Modern China*, Vol. 12, No. 4 (1986): 419-58.

- <sup>35</sup> See for example Wang, Huilin (ed.), *Zhongguo xiandaishi* (Peking: Gaodeng jiaoyu chubanshe 2003): 169-170.
- <sup>36</sup> Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts – China's Secret Famine* (London: John Murray, 1996).
- <sup>37</sup> Dali L. Yang, *Calamity and Reform in China – State, Rural Society, and Institutional Change since the Great Leap Famine* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).
- <sup>38</sup> Frederick C. Teiwes, and Warren Sun, *China's Road to Disaster – Mao, Central Politicians, and Provincial Leaders in the Unfolding of the Great Leap Forward 1955-1959* (London: M.E. Sharpe, 1999).
- <sup>39</sup> James Kung and Justin Yifu Lin, "The Causes of China's Great Leap Famine, 1959-1961," *Economic Development and Cultural Change* Vol. 52, No. 1 (2003): 51-73; Li Wei and Dennis Tao Yang, "The Great Leap Forward: Anatomy of a Central Planning Disaster", *Journal of Political Economy*, Vol. 113, No. 4 (2005): 840-877.
- <sup>40</sup> Thomas P. Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Willfulness," *The China Quarterly* 186 (2006): 421-445.
- <sup>41</sup> An example of how one of such purported smoking guns is criticized see Garnaut, "Hard facts and half-truths", 237-238. See also Felix Wemheuer, "Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in the People's Republic of China," *The China Quarterly* 201 (2010): 176-194.
- <sup>42</sup> Yang, Jisheng, *Mubei – 1958-1962 Zhongguo dajihuang jishi* (Hong Kong: Tiandi tushu youxiangongsi 2009); in English: Yang Jisheng, *Tombstone – The Untold Story of Mao's Great Famine* (London: Allen Lane 2012).
- <sup>43</sup> Yunhui Lin, *Wutuobang yundong – cong Dayuejin dao dajihuang (1958-1961)*, in *The History of the People's Republic of China*, vol. 4. (Hong Kong: Zhongwen Daxue Chubanshe, 2009); Frank Dikötter, *Mao's Great Famine – The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe, 1958-62* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010).
- <sup>44</sup> Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (eds.), *Eating Bitterness – New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: UBCPress, 2011).
- <sup>45</sup> One way to classify GLF famine research is suggested by Chen Yixin, "Under the Same Maoist Sky: Accounting for Death Rate Discrepancies in Anhui and Jiangxi," in *Eating Bitterness – New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine*, eds. Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (Vancouver: UBCPress, 2011): 197-200. See also Chris Bramall, "Agency and Famine in China's Sichuan Province, 1958-1962", *The China Quarterly* 208 (2011): 991-993.
- <sup>46</sup> Zhou Xun, *Forgotten Voices of Mao's Great Famine, 1958-1962* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2013); Zhou Xun (ed.), *The Great Famine in China, 1958-1962 – a Documentary History* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2012).
- <sup>47</sup> Chris Bramall, "Agency and Famine in China's Sichuan Province, 1958-1962"; Chen Yixin, "Under the Same Maoist Sky"; Li, Lillian M., *Fighting Famine in Northern China: State, Market, and Environmental Decline, 1690s to 1990s* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2007): 357-364; Felix Wemheuer, "Dealing with responsibility for the Great Leap famine"; Cao and Bin Cao Shuji and Bin Yang, "Grain, Local Politics, and the Making of Mao's Famine in Wuwei, 1958-1961," *Modern Asian Studies* Vol. 49, No. 6 (2015): 1675-1703; Jeremy Brown, *City versus Countryside in Mao's China – Negotiating the Divide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012); and Lauri Paltemaa, "Serve the City! Urban Disaster Governance in Tianjin City 1958-1962," *Modern Asian Studies*, Vol. 49, Issue 4 (July 2015): 1143 – 1176.
- <sup>48</sup> Ralph A. Thaxton Jr., *Catastrophe and Contention in Rural China – Mao's Great Leap Forward and the Origins of Righteous Resistance in Da Fo Village* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008); Ralph A. Thaxton Jr., "How the Great Leap Forward Ended in Rural China: Administrative Intervention versus Peasant Resistance", in Kimberley Ens Manning and Felix Wemheuer (eds.), *Eating Bitterness – New Perspectives on China's Great Leap Forward and Famine* (Vancouver: UBCPress, 2011): 251-271.
- <sup>49</sup> The most comprehensive list of different mortality estimates I have been able come across is Li Chengrui and Shang Changfeng, "Sannian kunnan shiqi feizhengchang simang renkou shu yanjiu shuping", *Zhongshiwang* 5.9.2009, [http://www.cssn.cn/ddzg/ddzg\\_ldjs/ddzg\\_jj/200909/t20090905\\_805371.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/ddzg/ddzg_ldjs/ddzg_jj/200909/t20090905_805371.shtml), who list around 70 different estimates in research literature, although their Western research section is not entirely up to date.
- <sup>50</sup> Anthony Garnaut, "The Mass Line on a Massive Famine", *The China Story Journal* (2014), <https://www.thechinastory.org/2014/10/the-mass-line-on-a-massive-famine/>
- <sup>51</sup> <http://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>
- <sup>52</sup> Sun Jingxian, ""Esi sanqianwan" bus hi shishi," *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao* (23 August 2013). Accessed October 13 2016, [http://sscp.cssn.cn/xkpd/xszx/201308/t20130823\\_1115255.html](http://sscp.cssn.cn/xkpd/xszx/201308/t20130823_1115255.html).
- <sup>53</sup> Bei Yuan, ""San nian kunnan shiqi" renkou feizhengchang simang wentide ruogan jiexi," *Zhongguo shehui kexue bao* (24 September 2014). Accessed October 13 2016, [http://www.cssn.cn/sf/bwsf\\_bjtj/201409/t20140924\\_1340589.shtml](http://www.cssn.cn/sf/bwsf_bjtj/201409/t20140924_1340589.shtml).
- <sup>54</sup> Berel Lang, "Six Question on (or about) holocaust Denial," *History and Theory*, Vol. 49, No. 2 (May 2010): 157-168.
- <sup>55</sup> David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway - Russia and the Communist Past* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).
- <sup>56</sup> Kimura Takuji, "Nanking: Denial and Atonement in Contemporary Japan," in Bob Tadashi Wakabayashi (ed.), *The Nanking Atrocity, 1937-38: Complicating the Picture* (London: Berghahn Books 2007): chapter 15.

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- <sup>57</sup> Felix Wemheuer, *Famine Politics in Maoist China and the Soviet Union* (New Haven: Yale University Press 2014): 20.
- <sup>58</sup> Yang discusses totalitarianism especially in his chapters 4 and 14.
- <sup>59</sup> Frank Dikötter, *The Tragedy of Liberation – A History of the Chinese Revolution 1945-1957* (London: Bloomsbury 2013): 207-242. Some of Dikötter's findings and arguments have been criticized as controversial, see Garnaut, "Hard Facts and Half-Truths".
- <sup>60</sup> David Satter, *It Was a Long Time Ago, and It Never Happened Anyway*.