

The Great Famine: The People and Mao Zedong

by

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Mao's Hope towards the Great Leap Forward

The Great Leap Forward was a 5-year plan with the intention of having an economic reconstruction to “surpass” the Western civilization. Chairman Mao wanted to use the Soviet model that has been used to reference the 5-year plan and would be a more vibrant and successful than the Soviet model. China has been going through many efforts of improving as a whole where they transitioned from socialism to communism. Propaganda was used everywhere in China to have people join the movement. Chairman Mao took advantage of the vast population to help turn China into an industrial communist society. He mainly focused on improving the economy in agriculture with the help of farmers in the countryside.¹ Chairman Mao formed the Great Leap Forward based on the Theory of Produces Forces. This is a concept commonly used in communism and Marxism that emphasizes on setting a goal of achieving prosperity in a socialist economy before real communism occurs. In January 1958, Chairman Mao attended a meeting in Nanjing and unveiled the Great Leap Forward. During his reveal, he explained how the main focus in this 5-year plan was to have expeditious growth on China’s agriculture and industry. He hoped the Great Leap Forward would rival western democracy. He wanted to achieve this goal by flooding the labor force with cheap labor and avoiding the need to rely on importing goods such as heavy machinery from other places.² The Great Leap Forward started out with great harvest and high peasant enthusiasm. However, the 5-year plan didn’t work as Chairman Mao planned as one year passed since the start of the Great Leap Forward. The communes had each household keep a steel furnace in their backyard. The peasants were

¹ Great Leap Forward (1958-1961). Accessed May 8, 2019.
<https://chinese posters.net/themes/great-leap-forward.php>.

² "Great Leap Forward," Great Leap Forward - New World Encyclopedia. Accessed May 8, 2019,
https://www.newworldencyclopedia.org/entry/Great_Leap_Forward.

required to melt all their steels but since they started to run out of steel to melt, they had no choice to melt their tools. With the lack of tools like scythes, it was difficult for the peasants to harvest their crops. The quotas were not being met which led to false reports being submitted to the government regarding the harvest. Since ALL livestock, vegetables, and cash crops were used to make ends meet, there were little to no food for the peasants to eat which led many deaths due to starvation. Some people even resorted to cannibalism to survive. The news of people suffering due to the failure of the Great Leap Forward has reached Chairman Mao when the peasants would send him letters in hope of receiving help. However, Chairman Mao has refused to acknowledge that his 5-year plan has many flaws which led to many people in China to suffer. He would send light warnings to the commune leaders but didn't do anything else to help the peasants. By the time Chairman Mao faced reality, it was already 1962, where the Great Leap Forward ended. An estimate of fifteen to forty million people passed away due to starvation during the famine between the years 1959 to 1961. Jasper Becker, a journalist, explored China and conducted many interviews regarding China's dark history. In his book, *Hungry Ghost*, he writes about the famine that people in China went through during the Great Leap Forward. The plan was intended to exceed the Western civilization while having an economic reconstruction.

Peasants Reactions towards the Implication

The year of 1958 was the beginning of the darkest times for people of China especially the farmers in villages. Autumn had begun that year and crops were flourishing with goods. However, they were not being harvested by the peasants in communes because many were too occupied with the operation of steel production in their backyards or other tasks assigned to them by the higher ups. In some communes, many fields were rotting because the peasants didn't have their tools like the scythes to harvest. The peasant's tools were melted for the purpose of steel production due to the new rules made from the government for the Great Leap Forward.³ With the lack of steel, Mao decided to focus on grain harvesting in the fields. All their hard work were taken from authorities to be delivered to the state and be tallied up every month in reports to see if the quota was met. Liu Lian, a professor at the Agricultural University, was sent to Xushui in Heibei province with hundreds of her colleagues to collect information and support the beginning of the Great Leap Forward in 1958. During her stay in Xushui, she learned that local cadres were over-enthusiastic about the 5-year plan and reported false production figures to the government. The excitement made peasants ignorant during the high tide of egalitarianism and split the cloth of the co-operative store according to each of their own needs. In her point of view, she saw the steel campaign and the deep plowing as 'disastrously destructive'. She wrote in one of her memoirs that she protested against the smashing of a water wheel in order to meet the quota for the steel campaign. However, local cadres didn't want to resort to destroying the water wheel since they need it, but they had no choice because if they didn't meet the quota, it would cause disastrous results for the village. Liu Lian tried to let herself be seen as a good

³ Jasper Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, (New York, John Murray, 1996), 85.

Marxist-Leninist. She wanted to be seen as someone who attempted to prevent the catastrophic results due to the policies made for the Great Leap Forward by the Party. She would attempt to remind the local cadres of their duties for the villagers and the village's economic resources. However, in the end, the government's power was too strong and she became silent due to the political pressure.⁴ During the autumn season of 1959, the grain harvest has dropped drastically compared to the results in 1958. The grain harvest has dropped at least 30 million tonnes, but the province officials reported numbers that were way higher than it actually was to the government. In order to make their false reports to appear true, the local officials would require all the grain they could find. Although, the false numbers they report were too high that even after taking possession of everything they set their sights on, including ALL livestock, vegetables, and cash crops was not enough. They would invade every house in the province and search thoroughly because Chairman Mao stated that grain was not the only quotas to be met. There were also quotas for pigs, chickens, ducks, and eggs to be met. Many peasants were victims of this brutal and violent campaign where they were tortured and even beaten to death in order to meet the quota Chairman Mao set.⁵

With the resources being cut for the steel quota, this caused a shortage of food so the only source of food for people in the communes was the kitchen. Some communes had communal dining halls set up but many of the peasants squatted on the ground to eat. As the famine went on, the peasants were allowed to eat with their families in their huts instead of being restricted to eat only at dining halls. Usually, the biggest house in the commune would become the kitchen

⁴ Felix Wemheuer, "Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in the People's Republic of China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 201 (2010): 182.

⁵ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 93

where food would be cooked in large pots to feed the peasants.⁶ As Jasper Becker referred to in *Hungry Ghosts*, there would be a designated chef sent by the government to be in the kitchen and serve food twice a day at a specific time. The food was first to come, first to serve. The chef would bang a piece of metal hanging on a rope only at 11 a.m. and 4 p.m. to signify that food is ready. The peasants would begin to line up with their own bowls to receive their portion of soup. The soup would be a thin gruel consisting of the leaves of sweet potatoes and turnips, ground corn stalks, wild grasses, and any other ingredients that the peasants could find. While waiting on line for their turn, many people would shove each other and usually, the youngsters would overpower the elderly to the side. There were pros and cons of being in the front of the line. Being in the front would guarantee a portion of the soup but risked being served nothing but water. However, being in the back would risk of the soup running out and would have nothing to eat.⁷

Everyone was not given a fair amount of soup. Peasants who were seen as “rich” were given the least amount and was usually the first group of people to die. However, peasants who were unable to physically keep up with the manual labor were given no soup and would starve to death. Within families, the members would combine in their portions and the head of the family (which usually is the husband) would decide how much soup each person in the family would get. The families believed that female children shall surrender their soup to the elderly and be the first to be “sacrificed”. They have the least value since they would be given to another family after marriage if they were to survive. However, a common practice by the peasants in communes would be to hide the dead bodies from the authorities so they can claim an extra

⁶ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 106

⁷ *Thirty Years in the Countryside - True Records of Economic and Social Development in Fengyang Agricultural Region*, (Research Centre for Rural Development), 170.

portion of soup.⁸ During the first winter season, people began to panic knowing that there would be little to no food left for them to eat. The leaders needed the peasants to continue working on their tasks, even if they had to take advantage of the peasant's fears to obey their orders. They threatened to kill people by depriving them of their access to food and having them starve to death. They had peasants focus on working and abandon those who are sick so the old and young are left to die since they are not useful.⁹ In Henan, lies a small village in the Guanshan county. In the village, there was an elderly woman named Liu Xiaohua at the age of sixty-five. She was recalling the memories of the past where she and people around her were suffering the famine. Due to the lack of resources, everyone was only wearing thin and filthy rag that was patched with bits of grass and/or stuffed with straw. Although, some survivors seemed healthy on the outside with their faces bloated their bodies were actually swollen due to edema. Meanwhile, all the other peasants are all sticks and bones since they have nothing much to eat. There would be a muddy path that was leading to her village and surrounding it was unburied corpses scattered. The reason why the dead bodies were everywhere was that no one had the strength to bury them. Those who were still alive would struggle to walk so they would slowly crawl on their hands and knees seek for anything edible. People at the pond would look for frogs to eat or attempt to gather weed. People were so hungry that they would eat anything, even if they had to eat something that should be forbidden and become cannibalizes. She witnessed a widow of a rich peasant being punished and was buried alive with her children. Later that night, she knew that some peasants went to cut the flesh of the corpses to eat it.¹⁰ Meanwhile, Harry Wu, Veteran U.S.-based dissident and rights campaigner, participated in an interview about his personal

⁸ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 3

⁹ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 111

¹⁰ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 1

experiences with cannibalism during the Great Famine. There are labor camps where some prisoners get “special privileges” like receiving more grain than the regular amount, gaining permission to have their relatives visit them and things like that. Prisoners gain these rewards due to special tasks that they perform. There was a labor camp located in Gansu where there were more than 3,000 “rightists” inside. One of these prisoners was the “Rightist” Wei Changhai. His task to receive his “special privileges” was to sell dead bodies. Harry Wu knew a guy who had a similar job to Wei Changhai in his labor camp. Harry would talk about how this guy would drive his truck daily to sell bodies. This guy along with all the other people doing the same task had more than enough grain to eat. These people would appear healthy and strong, unlike the others who were starving to death and would fall down any second. Sometimes during the guy’s daily work, Harry would go with him. Harry and the guy asked the brigade leader for the reason behind the selling dead bodies. The brigade leader brought them to the graveyard to show them the answer to their question. Harry explained in the interview that the graveyard was just a huge area of wasteland where people would dig up pits to only throw bodies in and to cover them up again. The condition of the bodies was ‘ghastly chaos’. There would be bodies with a broken arm, missing leg, and clothes nowhere to be found on them. The brigade leader dug one up to show a body with its clothing ripped open and the chest cut open. The body would have no flesh remaining and was only a skeleton with skin. When Harry looked inside the body, he realized that the heart, liver, and lungs were not there. It can be seen that the only reason for this was that people would resort to eating the flesh of the dead as Liu Xiaohua witnessed in her village. Harry Wu was part of the Laogai Research Foundation and he found a report written in the 2000s by the head of the Anhui police department. In this report, it was stated that there had been 1,289

cases of cannibalism reported in 1960 at Anhui province. During the Great Famine, cases regarding cannibalism were considered “special cases”. An example of these “special cases” was located in Maiji commune at Xinmin village. There was a common peasant called Ma Waiyou. In the report, he ate his own wife, Chen Zaxi, by digging her body from the grave and simply cooked it. Another case was located in Houxiyan village where Yang Wenyi and Yuan Shuying were guilty of cannibalism. They dug up eight children’s bodies and cooked their flesh to eat. Meanwhile, there was a secret report carried out by the Chinese Communist Party with the knowledge of Chairman Mao where a person called Liu Chuan in Xihe commune was killed and eaten. There were plenty more reports related to this and therefore, the Great Famine was also an era of cannibalism to Harry Wu.¹¹

For a few months during 1958, men and women were actually separated in different housing. This first took place in the Xushui commune, which is located in Hebei. Later on, many other communes like Henan, Hunan, and Anhui had their men and women living separately. According to interviews that Becker conducted, there is a commune in Anhui that had men and women live in opposite ends of the commune. The commune leaders separated them because they believed that this would benefit the production as there would be no distraction for the peasants to focus only on attending meetings and working on fields. The commune leaders didn’t want people to be occupied thinking about their loved ones. The government’s goal for this separation was to destroy families as an institution. However, Mao believed that allowing men and women to meet twice a month would suffice for the purpose of procreation.¹² Meanwhile, the elderly were placed in “happiness homes”, which is similar to the concept of retirement

¹¹ Shi Shan, *Interview: China's Great Famine Years 'Were an Era of Cannibalism'* (Radio Free Asia: 2013), <https://www.rfa.org/english/news/china/cannibalism-11222013104349.html>. Accessed April 21, 2019.

¹² Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 105

homes and children were placed in boarding schools (as toddlers were placed in nurseries). The leaders have taken complete control over the peasants and didn't allow them to have private possessions. They had to surrender all their belongings and this drove some people to madness. They also took away people's individuality and didn't endorse people to dress creatively. Instead, men and women were to dress alike by wearing unisex baggy cotton trousers and jackets. In a town in the Hubei province, Bo Yibo, a member of the Chinese Communist Party, spoke about what took place after the Party Secretary of Paoma town making an announcement on October 1958 in his book, *Retrospective of Several Big Decisions and Incidents*. This announcement stated that November 7th of that year would mark the end of Socialism and Communism would begin the next day, November 8th. After this meeting took place, people had a strong reaction by hitting the streets and began to break into shops. They began taking all the goods, which is basically stealing in broad daylight, and once the shops were emptied out, people started barging into stranger's homes. They took other people's belongings like chicken and vegetables and brought it back home to eat when they ran of supplies on their shelves. With all the chaos of fighting for survival, people stopped caring about which child belonging in which family and just shared among each other. Only wives in each family were safe from being shared with other families because of the uncertainty the Party Secretary of Paoma town felt. He couldn't come to a decision regarding the sharing of wives so he decided to have the higher-level authorities to come up with the decision of the ownership of each person's own wife.¹³ The commune leaders continue to restrict the peasants even more and took more control of different aspects of each individual's rights. Not only did the leaders have power over what the peasants

¹³ Yibo Bo, *Retrospective of Several Big Decisions and Incidents* (Beijing, China: Central Party School, 1993), 754.

have to do while farming, but they also made the final decisions for marriages, funerals, travel and the distribution of food and other goods. They renamed things like shops to “material supply offices”, cash as “certificates of purchase”, and money deposited in banks as “public accumulation funds”.¹⁴ Currency of money had no value during this time. Wealth was defined by the value and amount of work done by each individual. Each peasant was ranked based on their health and strength. Since money had no value, a new system was developed where things provided by the government were given to the peasants in communes for free. The food in communal halls was given out for free. Not only that, but things like clothes and haircuts were free. No one received pocket money for their work with this system, instead of the majority of the basic necessities of life, like food, clothing, housing, childbirth, education, medical treatment, marriages, and funerals, were given to everyone free of charge.

¹⁴ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 108

Analysis of Chairman Mao's Thoughts

Most people throughout China in the government or villages during Chairman Mao's reign would listen to his words whether the things he said was right or wrong. In 1958, Chairman Mao went on multiple tours to the new model communes in Henan to see the progress of his 5-year plan. He would admire the agricultural miracles and the rapid rate of some communes reaching the final stage of Communism.¹⁵ During his tour, the commune leaders would give him reports that were created to flatter him and talk about how wise he was to predict the great success in agriculture. These reports were to make Chairman Mao feel proud and believe that nothing is wrong. Mao would read the reports from commune leaders that there was a mass increase of national grain harvest, like 185 million tonnes to 430 million tonnes. Some even stretched the reports to 500 million tonnes.¹⁶ However, everything Chairman Mao saw at the model communes in his tour was nothing but a 'staged pantomime'. When the communes receive notice that Chairman Mao is visiting, the local officials would prepare a specific field(s) for Chairman Mao to inspect. The locals would be told by the local officials to dig out the wheat from other fields and replanting it all in the field they prepared for Chairman Mao to inspect. Once Chairman Mao arrives, the local officials would place three children on top of the grain. This was to show that the wheat was grown together closely enough for it to support all the children's weight. When Chairman Mao would move on to the next commune of his tour, the commune would take the grain back to where they originally were. The movement of grain to one specific field when Chairman Mao was visiting was used as the same trick in every commune. There would also be electric irrigation pumps used to water the fields. However, little

¹⁵ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 121

¹⁶ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 84

to Chairman Mao's knowledge, it was the same pumps being used. When Chairman Mao was asleep in each commune, the pumps would be taken from the previous commune and installed in the next commune he would be visiting in his tour.¹⁷

Chairman Mao was shown so much "success" with The Great Leap Forward from his tour and reports that he's been receiving from the communes that he refuses to believe that there was a famine occurring. What led to the rejection of the possibility of famine in Mao's mind was his possible narcissism and borderline syndrome, according to Dr. Li Zhisui (Mao's psychologist and doctor for twenty-two years). Dr. Li Zhisui was one of Mao's many personal physicians but the most well known for his written biography on Mao called *The Private Life of Chairman Mao*. The borderline syndrome is defined as a driven need to control others while having a constant steel wall with their own feelings and being in an alert at all times as to who is in charge of whom. This would result in a person to be unable to gain human attachments. Most important of them all, people with the borderline syndrome are always willing to abandon others before anyone else can abandon them. They feel that they are a special human being worth and virtuous but is not properly appreciated by others. Therefore, anyone they are close to can become their enemy any second. They are very sensitive towards criticism and stubborn. They are able to sense immediately if they are being ignored but unaffected by how others judge him. With all of these factors, it would cause Chairman Mao to be surrounded by enemies and leads to feeling victimized by them and joy by aggressively standing for others. Dr. Li's diagnosis for Chairman Mao's case is that he has a "strong degree of secondary narcissism", which leads to the huge desire to be in the center of attention and constant search of flattery and praise. With both

¹⁷ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 122

narcissism and borderline syndrome, it would cause Chairman Mao to be extremely sensitive towards the importance of emotions and impermanence of positive feelings.¹⁸ Dr. Li came to the conclusion based on his observations that his patient was “devoid of human of feeling, incapable of love, friendship, or warmth. Mao frequently accused others of fomenting conspiracies, but he was the greatest manipulator of all”. Chairman Mao would watch the people around him like a hawk and calculate what their next moves were.¹⁹ Dr. Li saw that Chairman Mao had no sense of responsibility or obligation towards others which led him to have a history with abandoning his wives and children.²⁰

¹⁸ Lucian W. Pye, “Rethinking the Man in the Leader,” *The China Journal*, no. 35 (1996): 108. JSTOR (2950278).

¹⁹ Pye, “Rethinking the Man in the Leader,” 109.

²⁰ Pye, “Rethinking the Man in the Leader,” 110.

Mao's Lack of Concern

Many villagers were suffering from the lack of resources to stay alive but Chairman Mao had little care towards this issue. Besides the false reports of “successful grain harvest” from local commune officials, there were also reports from peasants who spoke the truth about their current situation of lack of food (refer to chapter 2). When Chairman Mao received reports about food shortages for multiple months, he refused to believe that it was true. He came to the conclusion that the reports were just lies compiled by the peasants and that the ‘rightists’ were conspiring to demand supplies from the government to hide the grain they already have. Mao told the reports regarding food shortages that the only reason there is a lack of food is that there are peasants who are hoarding their grain and his solution to this problem of hoarding is the creation of the ‘anti-grain concealment’ campaign. The main point of this campaign was to have ‘anti-hiding production’ and prevent people from ‘privately diving-the-grain’. This led the local officials to a dead-end and had no other option but to ignore the starving peasants’ pleas for emergency grain relief. People from starving villages would round up signed petitions to be sent to Chairman Mao but to have its existence erased. An example of this was when Chairman Mao received a letter from the villagers in the Po Hu commune located at the Henan province. They requested an investigation regarding the corrupt behavior of the team leaders that were assigned by the government who were abusing their power to ‘savagely’ beat the peasants. They would beat the peasants for hoarding grain and the people who refused to comply by not beating the peasants were being criticized for displaying a low political consciousness. After reading the letter, Chairman Mao replied by contacting Wu Zhifu, who was the provincial leader. He told him to not to be too rough with the ‘comrades who commit slight mistakes’. Chairman Mao

advised him to lessen the punishment and let them reflect on what they did wrong themselves.²¹ As Chairman Mao continued to receive the truthful reports from villagers, he did not do anything to help them besides giving their provincial leaders a warning. This was because Chairman Mao was determined to bring the Great Leap Forward to higher heights.²² After all the criticisms Chairman Mao received for the neglect of villager's wellbeing, he came to believe that there was a conspiracy forming so he made a 'half-hearted' apology at the Lushan Conference. This was a conference that brought the Politburo together. He talked in his apology that food shortages were just rumors and were no more than wild exaggeration. In his apology, he believes that the lack of vegetables, hairpins, and soap is not the end of the world. He said that he was also on the edge about this problem but just takes sleeping pills before going to bed to feel better. He recommended people to do the same. As he continued to make his speech, he urged others to recognize that any mistakes made are to have shared responsibility with everyone.²³ Chairman Mao would continue to believe that the lack of food is because of the peasants. He claims that they are the ones who stashed all the grain by burying it underground and would guard it to prevent it from being found by others.²⁴

As people in villages like Hebei continue to do exhausting labor, they resulted in having extreme fatigue and more prone to diseases with their immune system becoming worse. The people became frailer as they require medical assistance but are unable to receive it on time and this had a huge impact on their lives.²⁵ As the days went by, Chairman Mao receives a report

²¹ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 86

²² Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Wilfulness," 424.

²³ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 89

²⁴ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 94

²⁵ Thomas P. Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Wilfulness," *The China Quarterly*, no. 186 (2006): 425. JSTOR (20192620).

from the Yunnan provincial Party committee about an outbreak of edema, dysentery, polio, and other diseases. The main cause of edema was severe nutritional deprivation. Meanwhile, in Shandong, it was very common for people to migrate to another village when famine struck their own village. However, at this time, they stopped fleeing due to the disease spread into other villages. Chairman Mao's response for this was telling all provinces to "watch out" for the spring famine. He suggested mixing grain with vegetables and husks for strict frugality and a way to reduce rations during the slack season.²⁶ With all the reports of famine Chairman Mao has been receiving, he was willing to acknowledge that there were flaws in his actions but never stopped believing that there were huge harvests being made from each province so his plan was working. Therefore, during the mid-1959, he sent out an order to all provinces to speed up the delivery of grains to the centre where grain was collected and approved a new higher goal for state grain procurement. This caused even more people to starve and die from the famine.²⁷ As people continued to starve to death, Chairman Mao did not take any other actions to resolve the issue for the entire summer of 1960.²⁸

²⁶ Bernstein, "Mao Zedong and the Famine of 1959-1960: A Study in Wilfulness," 427

²⁷ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 92

²⁸ Becker, *Hungry Ghosts*, 126

Mao's Reaction to the Government Towards the Failure of the Plan

With the end of the Great Leap Forward in 1962, around fifteen to forty million people have starved to death caused by the famine between the years 1959 to 1961. In 1962, China held the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference from January 11th to February 7th. This conference consisted of political leaders and representatives from different districts, counties, and industrial enterprises. The main focus of this conference was to discuss the reformation from the Great Leap Forward and with the political mood at the conference being lifted, policy proposals from 1961 were brought forward and seriously implemented.²⁹ In the Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, Chairman Mao represented the central government and claimed formal responsibility for the failure of the 5-year plan, The Great Leap Forward and mistakes made by leftists. He specifically talked about the steel campaign, the backyard furnaces, and the unreasonable quotas for grain procurement with high planning targets. All these policies were taken responsibility by Mao Zedong as his title as Chairman of the Communist Party of China. However, thousands of local cadres were used as scapegoats for the blame of being part of the failure of the Great Leap Forward and were legally punished.³⁰ After Chairman Mao's speech in the conference, he presented a campaign that focused on fixing the mistakes in the organization of reform with 'theoretical assumptions and practical requirements'. He also proposed a general policy for thrift as achieving more with less cost. He spoke about his plans for the general agricultural and industrial policy for the upcoming five years and thereafter.³¹ By the end of the

²⁹ Roderick MacFarquhar, *The Origins of the Cultural Revolution* (New York: Published for the Royal Institute of International Affairs, the East Asian Institute of Columbia University, and the Research Institute on Communist Affairs of Columbia University by Columbia University Press, 1974), 2.

³⁰ Felix Wemheuer, "Dealing with Responsibility for the Great Leap Famine in the People's Republic of China," *The China Quarterly*, no. 201 (2010): 180.

³¹ Ralf Bonwit, "Communist China's "Leap Forward"." *Pacific Affairs* 31, no. 2 (1958): 164.

Seven Thousand Cadres Conference, the removal from office of several ministers and non-Communist political leaders and a widespread campaign in opposition to Rightists (which temporarily overthrown the original campaign brought up by Chairman Mao during the beginning of his speech) were made. In this campaign, it was to go against Leftist tendencies since Chairman Mao refused to consider another large scale industrialization of agriculture in the upcoming years after what happened to the Great Leap Forward.

Many people with important administrative or teaching positions were ‘exposed’ as “Rightists who had disguised themselves as Communist Party of China (CCP). During the meetings about denunciation, the CCP kept records of distinguished non-Communists that included details of their activities even long before the final phase of the Chinese civil war. In these records, it can be seen that there was alleged statements or a clear tendency of the writer ‘interpreting’ statements by non-Communist intellectuals to reflect on their behavior as early as the 1930s. There was a case where a follower of the late Kao Kang was found guilty for ‘disguising himself as a Leftist’. He advocated for a policy of speeding up the introduction of mechanized State farms and was seen as someone who was trying to cover up Rightist activities. This case was an example where people saw others disguising themselves as loyal members of China while having evil intent towards the community like the folktale of Painted Skin (where a young and beautiful female was discovered to be a non-human creature or monster). In an NPC session that year, it marked the end of the anti-Rightist campaign and the correction towards the new upsurge in production. This meant that changes were being made to the promotion of thrift and productivity to prepare China for a better future.³²

³² Bonwit, “Communist China's "Leap Forward",” 164.

As changes were being made in China for the aftermath of the Great Leap Forward, Li Hsien-nien, Finance Minister of China, proposed to use agricultural taxes to increase the State revenue. He stated that the State revenue would slightly increase but the tax aspect was not the whole picture. In his speech, he stated:

“Different from the case in [the] industry, the funds required by agriculture for production and capital construction should mainly be derived from the accumulation of the agricultural producers' cooperatives themselves... According to preliminary estimates, if all the agricultural producers' cooperatives in the country set apart as reserve funds eight percent of their income from agricultural production and subsidiary occupations from which the production costs have been deducted, the reserve funds that the country's agricultural producers' cooperatives can [utilize] in 1958 will probably total some 3,000 million yuan. In order to meet the needs of further enlarged reproduction, the State has just decided that the ratio of agricultural producers' cooperatives reserve funds may be suitably raised. Moreover[,] the primary decisive factor in agricultural production and construction is the labour power of the broad masses of peasants. There are more than 500 million peasants in our country; they constitute a gigantic source of labour power. An overwhelming majority of capital construction works in agriculture are small or medium-size, the completion of which is in the main guaranteed if there is sufficient labour power. Our peasant labour is relatively adequate, and in the past[,] there was even a surplus of labour power in the slack season. Now we should turn the slack season into a busy one, and carry out agricultural capital construction on a large scale and over a wide field. Here lies our main hope.”

He believes that the economy in China can increase by utilizing the fields with the millions of peasants in the countryside. With so many peasants and vast lands, China has enough manpower to carry out ‘agricultural capital construction’. The Minister of China overall wants to have a better for China. The main focus of this campaign was to have better overhead management of the current inputs, evasion of financial mismanagement and waste, and for agriculture, increase of intensive cultivation and higher yields per acre. An example of this would be reclaiming the wastelands to increase the number of crops that had been removed due to high costs.³³

³³ Bonwit, “Communist China's "Leap Forward",” 165.

Throughout the meetings regarding the anti-Rightist denunciations, Chairman Mao has hinted about the dangers that would come if the process of social transformation continues to be delayed that the bourgeois and old-fashioned peasant ideas might take root. This was a basic “contradiction within the people” based on Chairman Mao’s terms. This would mean that to resolve this issue is doing a mass transfer of Party officials and cadres to the countryside and being brought up in Li's budget speech about "thrift campaign" he stressed about. However, Chairman Mao made sure to point out that none of these dangers has occurred but Communists in China has not given up on this claim about the dangers and with the collaboration of Chairman Mao, they all have "enriched" the theory of Marxism-Leninism. They believe that China's experiences are of special significance for under-developed countries. With the realization and placing limitations in governing the industrialization of China, while inputting principles for making the maximum use of China’s reserved manpower, the Chinese Communist leaders may strengthen the Communist bid for uncommitted Asia irrespective of any promises of industrial aid by the Soviet Union.³⁴

³⁴ Bonwit, “Communist China's "Leap Forward",” 172.

Aftermath of the Great Leap Forward

No matter how well intentioned a plan is, without any real thoughtful planning, will definitely result to disastrous results. With the requirement of having steel furnaces in their backyard all steel were to be melted for steel production, which included the peasants tools to make ends meet. Lack of tools to adequately harvest crops and meet quotas generated distrust within party officials and peasant. Both rural plebeians and party members clashed in opposition causing a bigger sharp fall in food productivity. With these factors, there was a suffocation of supply in food. The food shortages and the resulting starvation also heightened the cause of social unrest. Creating a catalyst for many peasants to rise up against the party. Peasants informed Chairman Mao the situation they were going through since the commune leaders were unable to help them. While those who wrote about the problems were easily dismissed by party leaders and even Chairman Mao himself. It was too late when Chairman Mao accepted to face the fact that there were flaws in the Great Leap Forward that led to millions of deaths in China. People had no food to eat so some had no choice but to resort to cannibalism to survive. After the end of the Great Leap Forward, Chairman Mao had made a public apology for the failure of his 5-year plan of being better than Western civilization with an economic reconstruction. However, not once did Chairman Mao spoke about the peasants as victims of the Great Famine which led fifteen to forty million people to starve or overwork to death.

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