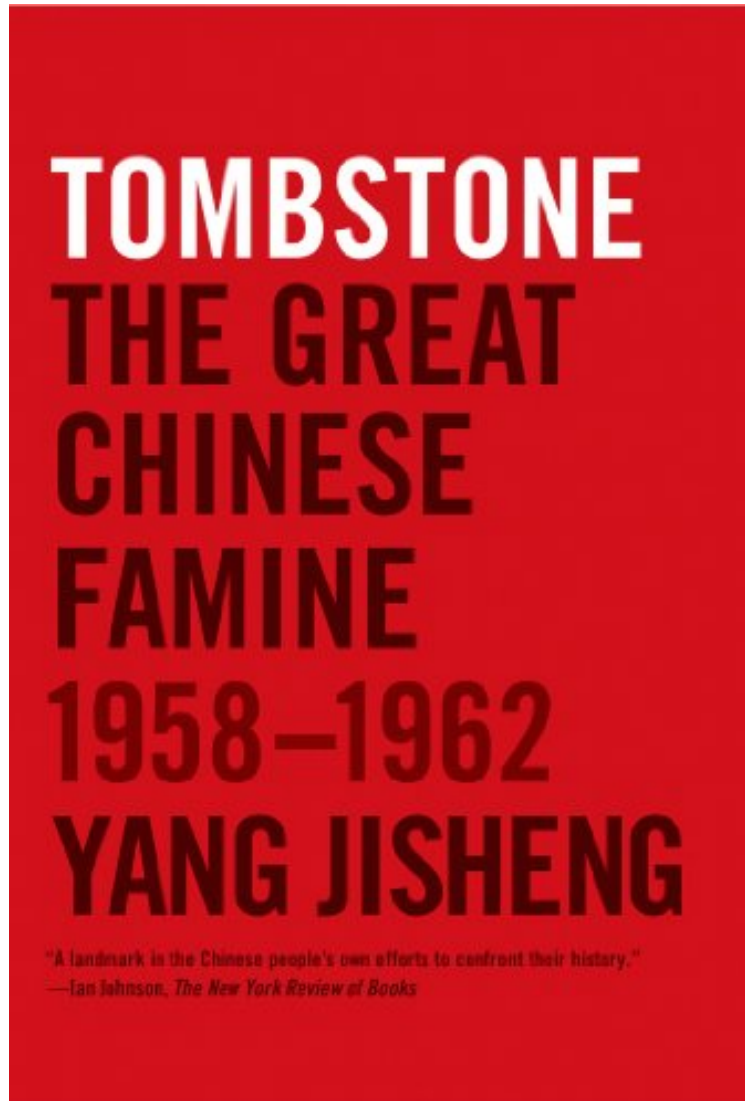


(Mobile book) Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962

## Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962

*Yang Jisheng*

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**Yang Jisheng : Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962** before purchasing it in order to gage whether or not it would be worth my time, and all praised Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962:

181 of 187 people found the following review helpful. Sophisticated and well-documented analysis of China's post 1949 history By David Paulson Recently I read a short review of this work in the New York times, and then to my surprise saw this 629 page book on the Chinese Famine of 1958-61 in my local bookstore. I thought, who would buy it? I did graduate study in Chinese History, speak Chinese, and lived in China in 1982. Now I am not in the China field. The topic is interesting to me, so I bought it and read it over the weekend. I was very pleasantly surprised. It's

true that the writer's intention was to document the effects of the Great Leap Forward objectively, but I was also pleased that he was not afraid to draw conclusions and penetrate to the heart of the issue: Every major communist regime, the Soviet Union, the PRC, Cambodia, Vietnam, North Korea etc. caused mass starvation in the initial period when their zeal was high and they sought to get an iron grip on the population by controlling the food supply. The problem with these regimes is systemic; the suffering was not the result of "natural disasters" or "isolated abuses." Totalitarian systems have big problems pulling off mid-course corrections. They are not responsive to feedback until they go beyond the brink. In those systems everyone is a slave to their superiors and often they are also tyrants to those below them in the pecking order. The only way to prevent this from happening again is to educate the populace (stop calling them peasants) and gradually transition to openness and democracy. Other things that the writer brought out that I think people should realize:- Despite the depiction of the Communist movement as a "peasant movement," the regime caused great suffering among the farmers, killing more people than the Japanese invaders (1937-1945).- The local cadres rode hard over the rural population to please their superiors, and then when the policy changed, got the blame for the problems. How ironic!- The regime took great pains to hide the problems it created, and many Western scholars or politicians (the earlier Edward Friedman? Nixon? Kissinger?) and journalists were fooled. However, some brave analysts did pick up on this early on. The first book on this specific topic was written by Jasper Becker, a journalist who I have never met but respect very much. It's not true that no one knew about this until China opened up after 1989 -- some people just want to believe fairy tales and close their eyes to unpleasant facts. I recommend this book, with the caveat that the non-specialist reader should not get too bogged down in the details. Sometimes the writer proves his point in one chapter, and then repeats the point in more chapters that are just the same story set in different locations. For specialists the details will be interesting but the general reader may want to skim over some parts, and focus on the analysis which I think is outstanding. 2 of 2 people found the following review helpful. A true story about the horrors of Mao's reign of terror By Jerry CPP Facts and figures, facts and figures, facts and figures. No real personal human interest stories, which seems strange since it chronicles the needless and early deaths of more than 35 million Chinese people due to Mao's evil policies. It shows what can happen when average people blindly follow an evil man, and how even good ideas can be corrupted by simple people put in charge of their peers with no training and no accountability. My wife is a survivor of that time, being born in China in 1958. This book does help me understand why she is always hungry, grows a huge garden, is always preparing food, and gets frantic if a meal is an hour late; food is the most important thing in her life. None of us, not even the poorest of the poor, in the U.S. can comprehend what tens of millions of Chinese suffered in the late 1950's and 1960's. I wish the author would have used the help of a professional writer to make an easier read, but it is none the less an important historical book. 4 of 4 people found the following review helpful. Extraordinary, Accurate, Heart Wrenching By Kindle Customer As a Russian History major moving to China I thought I would research Chinese history for a project to occupy my time. As I ploughed through VOLUMES of materials I began learning things I had not heard of before, and drawing some very different conclusions than the Chinese history readily available. I was frustrated wondering WHY so much mis-information has been so wide spread? Then I read Tombstone. This book not only confirmed my personal conclusions, but helped me in my frustration because it shines a spotlight on the shadowy pile of rubbish that has been passing as historically accurate accounting. Every high school should teach this book. Truth far beyond clarifying this portion of historic tragedy is embedded in the writing.

The much-anticipated definitive account of China's Great Famine An estimated thirty-six million Chinese men, women, and children starved to death during China's Great Leap Forward in the late 1950s and early '60s. One of the greatest tragedies of the twentieth century, the famine is poorly understood, and in China is still euphemistically referred to as "the three years of natural disaster." As a journalist with privileged access to official and unofficial sources, Yang Jisheng spent twenty years piecing together the events that led to mass nationwide starvation, including the death of his own father. Finding no natural causes, Yang attributes responsibility for the deaths to China's totalitarian system and the refusal of officials at every level to value human life over ideology and self-interest. Tombstone is a testament to inhumanity and occasional heroism that pits collective memory against the historical amnesia imposed by those in power. Stunning in scale and arresting in its detailed account of the staggering human cost of this tragedy, Tombstone is written both as a memorial to the lives lost and an enduring tombstone in memory of the dead and in hopeful anticipation of the final demise of the totalitarian system. Ian Johnson, writing in The New York Review of Books, called the Chinese edition of Tombstone "groundbreaking . . . One of the most important books to come out of China in recent years."

From Bookforum Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962 is methodical and factual, and it amounts to a devastatingly clear account of Mao and his era. In the me of building Communist utopia overnight, farmworkers were diverted to labor on industry and infrastructure; agricultural work was collectivized and thrown into disorder; high-ranking bureaucrats imposed useless and destructive pseudoscientific farming methods on the countryside. Local officials, vying to demonstrate the greatest commitment to progress, reported fraudulent crop yields, and the

government requisitioned its due share of the non-existent bumper crops. Even with such shocking stories driving the narrative, the true horror of Tombstone is that its not sensational. It is, rather, a meticulous accumulation of evidence and fact. Tom Scocca The best English-language account . . . [Tombstone] combines thorough statistical analysis with detailed archival research and heart-rending oral histories. Matthew C. Klein, Bloomberg Without a doubt the definitive account--for now and probably for a long time . . . One of the most important books--not just China books--of our time. Arthur Waldron, The New Criterion A vital testimony of a largely buried era. Clarissa Sebag-Montefiore, The Independent Yang's discreet and well-judged pursuit of his project over more than a decade is a quietly heroic achievement. Roger Garside, China Rights Forum Tombstone easily supersedes all previous chronicles of the famine, and is one of the best insider accounts of the Party's inner workings during this period, offering an unrivalled picture of socioeconomic engineering within a rigid ideological framework . . . meticulously researched. Pankaj Mishra, The New Yorker Eye-opening . . . boldly unsparing. Jonathan Mirsky, The New York Times Book Beautifully written and fluidly translated, Tombstone deserves to reach as many readers as possible. Samuel Moyn, The Nation [An] epic account . . . Tombstone is a landmark in the Chinese people's own efforts to confront their history. Ian Johnson, The New York of Books The toll is astounding, and this book is important for many reasons--difficult to stomach, but important all the same. Kirkus Mao's Great Famine of the late 1950s continues to boggle the mind. No one book or even set of books could encompass the tens of millions of lives needlessly and intentionally destroyed or explain the paranoid megalomania of China's leaders at the time. As with the Holocaust, every serious new account both renews our witness of the murdered dead and extends our understanding. Zhou Xun here selects, translates, and annotates 121 internal reports from local officials to their bosses. They form a frank, grisly, and specific portrait of hysteria defeating common sense. Zhou's University of Hong Kong colleague, Frank Dikter, extricated some of these documents from newly opened (and now again closed) archives in local headquarters across China for his Mao's Great Famine: The History of China's Most Devastating Catastrophe 1958-1962, but Zhou's book stands on its own. A useful introduction, headnotes to each chapter, a chronology, and explanatory notes frame the documents. VERDICT Accessible and appealing to assiduous readers with knowledge of Mao's China; especially useful to specialists. Charles W. Hayford, Evanston, IL A book of great importance. Jung Chang, author of Wild Swans and co-author of Mao: The Unknown Story A truly necessary book. Anne Applebaum, author of Gulag: A History In 1989 hundreds, perhaps thousands, of Chinese died in the June Fourth massacre in Beijing, and within hours hundreds of millions of people around the world had seen images of it on their television screens. In the late 1950s, also in Communist China, roughly the inverse happened: thirty million or more died while the world, then and now, has hardly noticed. If the cause of the Great Famine had been a natural disaster, this double standard might be more understandable. But the causes, as Yang Jisheng shows in meticulous detail, were political. How can the world not look now? Perry Link, Chancellorial Chair for Innovative Teaching, Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages, University of California, Riverside Hard-hitting. . . It's a harrowing read, illuminating a historic watershed that's still too little known in the West. Publishers' Weekly Groundbreaking The most authoritative account of the Great Famine One of the most important books to come out of China in recent years. Ian Johnson, The New York of Books The most stellar example of retrospective writing on the Mao period from any Chinese pen or computer. Perry Link, Chancellorial Chair for Innovative Teaching, Comparative Literature and Foreign Languages, University of California, Riverside The first proper history of China's Great Famine. Anne Applebaum, The Washington Post A monumental work comparable to Solzhenitsyn's Nobel Prize-winning work The Gulag Archipelago. Xu Youyu, Chinese Academy of Social Science About the Author Yang Jisheng was born in 1940, joined the Communist Party in 1964, and worked for the Xinhua News Agency from January 1968 until his retirement in 2001. He is now a deputy editor at Yanhuang Chunqiu (Chronicles of History), an official journal that regularly skirts censorship with articles on controversial political topics. A leading liberal voice, he published the Chinese version of Tombstone in Hong Kong in May 2008. Eight editions have been issued since then. Yang Jisheng lives in Beijing with his wife and two children. Translator Bio: Stacy Mosher learned Chinese in Hong Kong, where she lived for nearly 18 years. A long-time journalist, Mosher currently works as an editor and translator in Brooklyn. Guo Jian is Professor of English at the University of Wisconsin-Whitewater. Originally trained in Chinese language and literature, Guo was on the Chinese faculty of Beijing Normal University until he came to the United States to study for his PhD in English in the mid-1980's.