

Hungry Ghosts - Mao's Secret Famine by Jasper Becker - The Great Chinese Famine from 1958 to 1962

<https://gradesfixer.com/free-essay-examples/hungry-ghosts-maos-secret-famine-by-jasper-becker-the-great-chinese-famine-from-1958-to-1962/>

The book "Hungry ghosts: Mao's secret famine" written by a British journalist Jasper Becker in 1996 is the first historical book which describes in detail the famine in China that took place between 1958 and 1962. Jasper Becker gathered details of this catastrophe from the people who survived this famine from all around the world, thus it recreated the image of that time period and fills the gaps in the modern history of China.

The "Great Leap Forward" is the duplication of Stalin's collectivization in Soviet Union. China's chairman Mao Zedong, influenced by Soviet Union and who was crazy about Marxism-Leninism ideology, wanted to be the first who build communist society, and believed that with this program they will surpass Britain in 2 years. However, Mao's acolytes feared to tell the truth about the failure of this program, all the information were faked. Even when Mao was told about the mass starvation, he declined to believe. As a result approximately thirty million Chinese peasants starved to death (Becker 1996, xi).

The chapter 5, "False Science, False Promises", is dedicated to the Utopian proclamations of Mao about the bright future, Communist propaganda, falsification of figures, and adoption of Soviet Union ideas. In order to better explain the events that took place in China, Jasper Becker reviews the theories of Russian pseudo-scientists: Trofim Lysenko, Ivan Michurin and Vasily Williams. First, he discusses the failures in Soviet Union which resulted from the ideas of those pseudo-scientists. Then turns into China, here he talks about the adoption of those ideas. It turns out that the failures in Soviet Union did not stop Mao from implementing them. He was too preoccupied with his idea of making a new society, so instead of acting rationally, he thought they could rewrite Nature's Law by implementing ideas of those pseudo-scientists.

The universities in China were based on Soviet style, they followed Soviet methods and textbook, meanwhile western scientists were taken to the prison. The lectures were propagated Michurin's hybrid theories, students crossed different species in order to get bigger and more yield hybrids. Furthermore, Mao constituted a 'Eight-point Lysenkoist', which became a plan for all Chinese peasants. Each point was examined in detail. The first element is called "The Popularization of New Breeds and Seeds". Here the author again discussed the falsified achievements that came out of hybridizing different species, the production of 'extraordinary animals' and 'super big plants'. The most surprising thing was that Mao's supporters believed that they can breed pigeons prematurely. Since all real scientists were arrested, they used ideas without any scientific evidences. They did everything that came to their mind. Thus, it affected not only human being but also animals. By this we can the real picture at that time, they were fanatic that did not want to accept failures.

To conclude, Jasper Becker's work contributed much to the history of not only China, but of the world. The only weakness that can be pointed out is that he basically used eyewitness's narratives, which might not be accurate, so he could strengthen his arguments by using more official documents of that time.