



# Tombstone: The Great Chinese Famine, 1958-1962

*Yang Jisheng*

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## 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—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."

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