

MENU

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**Letter****Mao inflicted horror on the Chinese people**

From Daniel J Aronoff. Sir, James Putzel (Letters, July 11) contends that the household responsibility system, which was indisputably the catalyst for China's growth take-off in the 1980s, created incentives that enabled farmers to exploit "the rural infrastructure created during the communal period"

JULY 12, 2016 7:01 PM

Sir, James Putzel ([Letters \(http://next.ft.com/content/bf02a742-42cf-11e6-9b66-0712b3873ae1\)](http://next.ft.com/content/bf02a742-42cf-11e6-9b66-0712b3873ae1), July 11) contends that the household responsibility system, which was indisputably the catalyst for China's growth take-off in the 1980s, created incentives that enabled farmers to exploit "the rural infrastructure created during the communal period". This implies that the bizarre and inhumane policies of the preceding period of Maoist rule — which caused tens of millions to die of starvation — actually promoted progress. It is an utterly baseless claim.

Under Mao's rule, farmers were forced to convert their fields to raise crops that would, according to central planners, increase yields and promote regional agricultural self-sufficiency. In fact, the conversions decimated crop yields and fields had to be repurposed later on. During the Great Leap Forward (when between 30m and 40m died of starvation) farmers were forced to melt their steel tools to make steel girders (which were of no value). This further reduced the agricultural capital stock. The dams and irrigation systems built under Mao were of such poor quality that, even when they served a useful purpose, which was rare, they quickly depreciated and had to be rebuilt. Finally, investment in the inadequate transportation infrastructure connecting rural areas to urban markets, which often resulted in a surfeit of food in some regions while others starved, was not made until recent decades.

I must say I find it scandalous that a professor at the prestigious London School of Economics should promote a view that confers a modicum of respectability on the horror that Mao inflicted on the Chinese people.

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