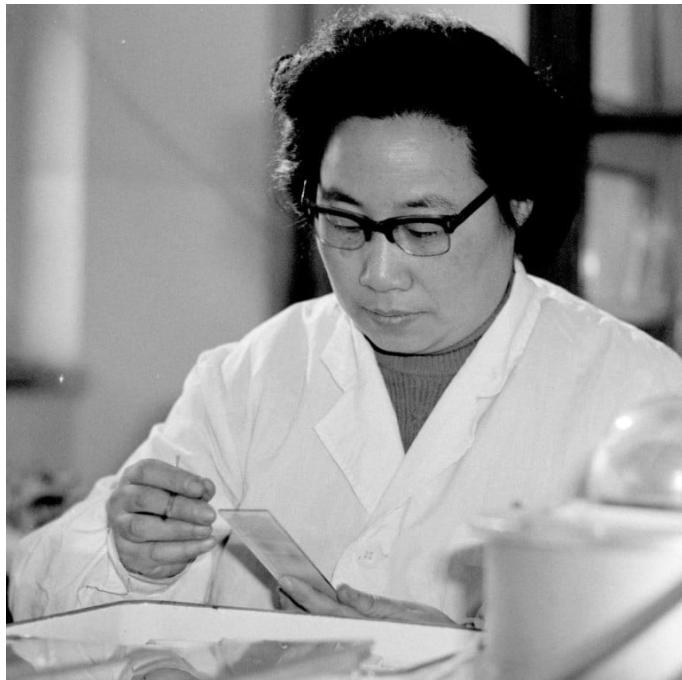


Tu Youyou, Ho Chi Minh, Mao Zedong and the struggle against malaria

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Beginning in 1969, Chinese scientist Tu Youyou led more than 500 researchers to

develop a malaria treatment. The project began to assist Vietnam, but it has gone on to save millions of lives all over the world, especially in the Global South.

Caused by a parasite which is spread by infected mosquitoes, malaria has killed billions during thousands of years of human history. Just in the last century, an estimated [150 to 300 million](#) people died from the disease.

While smallpox, cholera, polio and the plague have been beaten back, malaria and tuberculosis continue to kill hundreds of thousands of people annually. In 2023, an estimated [597,000 people](#) died from malaria. Ninety-five percent were Africans.

This disease also endangered Vietnam's liberation struggle against the U.S. capitalist empire. In addition to the napalm and Agent Orange dropped by U.S. planes, Vietnamese people were also dying from malaria.

Mosquitoes were infecting Vietnamese soldiers marching down what the corporate media called the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Older remedies like chloroquine were not as effective as they once were.

The Vietnamese communist leader Ho Chi Minh asked the People's Republic of China for help. Ho's comrade, Mao Zedong, responded by setting up Project 523 to find a new and better cure.

It was named for its starting date of May 23, 1967. Its leader was the woman medical researcher Tu Youyou.

Project 523 included more than 500 researchers, including Yu Yagang and Zhong Yurong. (Science, Sept. 29, 2011) Tu and her colleagues searched through thousands of old recipes from Chinese traditional medicine.

A plant called sweet wormwood, mentioned in a 1,600-year-old Chinese medical text, became the focus of attention. Tu Youyou helped develop an extraction method that led to the discovery of the anti-malaria drug Artemisinin in 1972.

Socialist solidarity vs. capitalist greed

Artemisinin and a later medication also developed in China, called dihydroartemisinin, have saved millions of lives around the world. Tu Youyou was finally awarded a Nobel Prize in 2015.

The struggle against malaria continues. It's outrageous that over half a million Africans die from it every year.

Project 523 followed other massive public health efforts in socialist China, including the struggle against schistosomiasis, which was carried by snails. An army of volunteers waded into waterways to destroy the snails, as recounted in "Away with all pests," by Dr. Joshua S. Horn.

The number of [schistosomiasis cases](#) in China fell from 11.6 million in the 1950s to 38,000 in 2017.

Compare that with capitalist Big Pharma's record against COVID-19 in Africa. While by the fall of 2021, 6.4 billion vaccine doses had been administered worldwide, only 2.5% of them had been given [in Africa](#).

Back in 2001, the U.S. Agency for International Development head, [Andrew Natsios](#), declared it was useless to provide treatment for HIV/AIDS in Africa. He claimed that the medications — which had to be taken at certain intervals — were worthless because Africans allegedly "don't know what Western time is."

This year is the 50th anniversary of Vietnam's victory against the U.S. empire. On April 30, 1975, a Vietnamese tank smashed through the gates of Wall Street's

former embassy in what was to become Ho Chi Minh City. Poor and working people rejoiced everywhere.

Helping Vietnam was the solidarity given by the other socialist countries, including the then-existing Soviet Union, China, Cuba, and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea. Part of that solidarity was the work of Tu Youyou and her fellow scientists in finding new cures for malaria.

The Pentagon killed millions of Vietnamese, Laotians and Cambodians, yet the U.S. war machine was defeated. Despite the genocide in Gaza, Palestine will also win.

