



Road to Well-off Society Series
Chief Editor Wu Li

Road to Well-off Society **POLITICAL PROGRESS**

Chen Jian

Beijing Times Chinese Press

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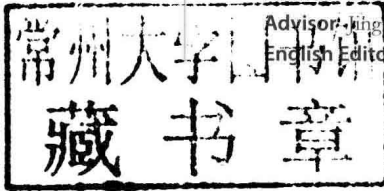
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General Preface

The so-called “comparatively well-off society” is China’s reform goal proposed by the great leader Deng Xiaoping in the 1980s through borrowing the “comparatively well-off” concept (“the government is honest and enlightened and people live a well-off life,” and “the ordinary people have some assets and are self-sufficient”) in the Chinese traditional culture. The “road to a comparatively well-off society” discussed and introduced by the series of books refers to this noble cause from the beginning of reform and opening up that began in late 1978 when China’s per-capita income was less than US\$200 (all calculations based on the exchange rate prevailing at the time) to 2012, when China’s percapita income exceeded US\$6,100.

I

That the Chinese Government put forward the concept and goal of “building a comparatively well-off society” in the early 1980s was no accident, but based on profound historical reasons and practical needs. After 1840, China, with a long history and splendid agricultural civilization, suffered from invasion of industrial civilization and Western capitalist powers, and thus was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Constantly undermined by aggression, oppression and exploitation of the imperialist powers, and sank into

a destitute condition. In the ensuing 100 years, the Chinese people, through an arduous, life-and-death struggle over several generations, finally gained victory and founded the People's Republic of China in 1949.

After the founding of the PRC, the primary task was to reap the fruits of revolutionary victory through construction. They had to accomplish industrialization as soon as possible to change the country's poor and backward economic situation. Only in this way could China achieve true independence and the great rejuvenation of the nation. In order to achieve the goal of catching up with and surpassing the developed capitalist countries, China chose the road of socialist industrialization, believing this was the economic system that could best guarantee an economic development speed higher than the Western developed countries. Thus began the 50-year struggle to achieve the "four modernizations", covering industry, agriculture, science and technology, and national defense, by the end of the 20th century. However, the planned economy was not up to the task. Though it helped guarantee the "high accumulation" and social stability under the condition of very low per-capita income and realized the goal of establishing an independent industrial system and ensuring national security, it resulted in a rigid system from the outset. Thus, it was not suitable for China's extremely unbalanced economic development and not conducive to mobilizing various positive factors and, in particular, not beneficial to bringing into play the advantage of rich human resources.

Before China implemented the policy of reform and opening up in late 1978, the problem of poverty, with the per-capita income of less than US\$200, had not been solved. This was clearly inconsistent with the fundamental goal of socialism and also made it impossible to realize the goal set in the 1950s - to achieve the "four modernizations" and catch up with and surpass the world developed countries by the end of the 20th century. Moreover, continuing to

follow this target would inevitably lead to settling for quick results divorced from economic reality. The mistakes in changes of economic system, guidelines and policies as well as the ups and downs in the economic development pattern in the early years were mainly due to this “eagerness for quick results”. The economic and social development targets were so high they became divorced from national conditions. Therefore, when the Communist Party of China (CPC) implemented the basic line of “taking economic construction as the central task” after 1978, it was very important to correctly assess China's actual development level and conditions and formulate correct development goals. In this context, Deng Xiaoping, chief architect of China's policy of reform and opening up, put forward the concept of “building a comparatively well-off society”.

II

After the concept and goal of “building a comparatively well-off society” was proposed in the early 1980s, its connotation also kept up with the times and was constantly developed, enriched and improved with economic and social development and the deepening understanding of the CPC and government. In 1981, Deng Xiaoping proposed: “We certainly cannot reach the level of Japan, Europe, the United States and even some of the comparatively more developed countries in the Third World by the end of the 20th century. By then, we can only achieve a comparatively well-off society and we assume that the per-capita national income shall, on the base of the US\$250 in 1980, double in a decade and quadruple in two decades, i.e. the per-capita gross national product should reach US\$1,000; [however] if it could hit US\$800, the Chinese people would

live a comparatively well-off life.”¹ This assumption was accepted by the 12th CPC National Congress in 1982.

When the goal of “building a comparatively well-off society” was basically achieved at the end of the 20th century, the 16th CPC National Congress held in 2002, recognizing national conditions and the gap with developed countries, declared: “The life of Chinese people has generally achieved the comparatively well-off level, but per-capita GDP is still relatively low and there is a fairly large gap compared with that of developed countries and even a comparatively large gap when compared with that of some relatively affluent developing countries. With a vast territory, China’s development is very uneven. There is a very great development gap between the less developed regions, in particular poverty-stricken areas in Central and the Western China, and the developed areas in the eastern coastal region. A gap also exists between the big cities and mountainous and rural areas in the eastern coastal provinces. The well-off life we are leading is still at a low level; it is not all-inclusive and is very uneven.”² Thus, the 16th CPC National Congress defined the first two decades in the 21st century as a period of “building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way”, and required: “We need to concentrate on building a well-off society of a higher standard in an all-round way to the benefit of well over one billion people in this period. We will further develop the economy, improve democracy, advance science and education, enrich culture, foster social harmony and upgrade the texture of life for the people.” To achieve this goal, the CPC put forward the “people-oriented” scientific outlook on development and a number of major moves

1 *Chronicle of Deng Xiaoping's Thoughts (1975-1977)*, published by the Central Literature Publishing House in 1998, pp.187-188.

2 *Selected Works of Jiang Zemin* (Vol. III), published by the People's Publishing House in 2006, p.416.

for promoting healthy economic development and building a harmonious society.

Based on the great achievements made in the first decade of the 21st century, in 2012, the 18th CPC National Congress also created new requirements of “completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by 2020”. The goals were: (1) The economy should maintain sustained and sound development. China should double its 2010 GDP and per-capita income for both urban and rural residents by 2020. (2) People's democracy should be expanded. A law-based government should be basically functioning. (3) The country's cultural soft power should be improved significantly. A system of public cultural services should be basically in place, and the cultural sector should become a pillar of the economy. (4) The living standards of the people should be raised in an all-round way. Equal access to basic public services should be generally achieved. Educational modernization should be basically realized. (5) Major progress should be made in building a resource-conserving and environmentally friendly society. The ecosystem should become more stable, and the living environment should improve markedly. To this end, the 18th CPC National Congress put forward specific plans and requirements on the overall construction in the economic, political, cultural, social and ecological aspects. This is the reason why there are six volumes in this series respectively on economic development, political progress, cultural development, social progress and ecological improvement, as well as a general introduction to the program.

III

In the 30-odd years from the beginning of reform and opening up when the goal of “building a comparatively well-off society” was put forward, to 2012, when the 18th CPC National Congress created the target of “completing

the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects”, China has gradually achieved its development vision. That a country with a population of 1.3 billion realized a 30-fold per-capita income increase in some 30 years is an unprecedented great change in the development history of human society. The secret of the success, we think, lies in that China has implemented the theories, the way and systems of “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. In other words, China has fully utilized the invisible hand of the market and the visible hand of government, not only bringing into play the basic role of market mechanism in allocation of resources so that the vigor of labor, technology, management and capital, and so on, has been released, but also exerting the function of the CPC and the government in leading social development and offsetting any “market failure” so that the relationships between reform, stability and development have been handled properly.

Due to the large population, small amount of per-capita resources and vulnerable environment, China still faces many difficulties and challenges to fulfill the grand objective of completing the building of an all-round, moderately prosperous society by 2020, even though per-capita income has reached the middle-income level of over US\$6,000. For example, China must deal with the relationship between government and the market properly, change governmental economic functions, resolve the restriction of resources and environment on development, realize resource-conserving and environmentally friendly sustainable development and solve the problem of unbalanced development between the urban and rural areas and between regions and the overlarge gap in the incomes of residents, so as to achieve social harmony and common prosperity. For this purpose, the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee adopted the Decision of the CPC Central Committee on Several Important Issues of Comprehensively Deepening Reform, putting

forward new ideas, strategies and initiatives in six aspects, i.e. economy, politics, culture, society, ecology and self-building of the CPC. This has provided new momentum and vigor for the building of a well-off society in all aspects and created inexhaustible reform dividends and broad space for development.

In short, the Chinese people's spirit of seeking truth from facts, advancing with the times, working hard and being good at learning and willing to cooperate with others and their courage and wisdom for constantly deepening reform will surely make them realize the dream of completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all aspects by 2020.

Wu Li

November 2013

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