

# REFLECTIONS ON CHINA'S ROAD TO DEVELOPMENT

Nine Essays by Hu Sheng, 1983-1996



The Commercial Press

# Reflections on China's Road to Development

Nine Essays by Hu Sheng,

1983 – 1996

*by*

Hu Sheng (胡绳)

English Translation by Liu Ruixiang, Paul White et al.

Revised by Suzan Dewar



The Commercial Press  
Beijing

**图书在版编目(CIP)数据**

关于中国发展道路的思考:胡绳的九篇论文:1983~1996:  
英文/胡绳著. —北京:商务印书馆, 1997. 3  
ISBN 7-100-02447-1

I. 关… II. 胡… III. 社会主义建设模式-研究-中国-文集-  
英文 N.D61-53

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字(97)第 03146 号

GUANYÚ ZHONGGUÓ FÁZHǎN DÀOLÙ DE SIKǎO:  
HÚSHÉNG DE JIǔPIĀN LÙNWÉN

**关于中国发展道路的思考**

**胡绳的九篇论文**

(1983—1996)

胡 绳 著

---

商 务 印 书 馆 出 版

(北京王府井大街 36 号 邮政编码 100710)

新华书店总店北京发行所发行

一 二 〇 一 印 刷 厂 印 刷

ISBN 7-100-02447-1/K · 527

---

1997 年 4 月第 1 版

开本 850×1168 1/32

1997 年 4 月北京第 1 次印刷

字数 184 千

印数 1500 册

印张 6 3/4 插页 1

定价:18.00 元

## THE AUTHOR

Hu Sheng was born in January 1918 in Suzhou of Jiangsu Province. He attended middle school in Suzhou and Shanghai and after graduation enrolled in the Peking University in 1934. Starting from the latter half of 1935, he tutored himself while writing in Shanghai and took part in the cultural activities led by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). He joined the CCP in Wuhan in January 1938. From the end of the 1930s to the 1940s he was chief editor and editor of a number of newspapers and journals. He also worked in several local CCP leading organs in the cultural field. After the founding of the People's Republic of China, he was secretary-general of the Propaganda Department, deputy director of the Political Research Department, and deputy chief editor of the *Red Flag* (红旗) journal, all of the Central Committee of the CCP.

Hu Sheng was persecuted during the "cultural revolution," dismissed from his posts and deprived of work. He later became deputy director of the Party Literature Research Center and director of the Party History Research Center, both of the Central Committee of the CCP. In 1985, he was appointed President of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. He was a member of the Standing Committee of the Fourth and Fifth National People's Congresses (1975-83); a member of the Twelfth Central Committee of the CCP (1982-87); and since 1988 has been a vice chairman of the National

Committee of the Chinese People's Consultative Conference.

Hu Sheng was a member of the presidium of the Society of Chinese History and was, for a long time, presidents of the Society of Chinese Communist Party History and the Sun Yat-sen Society.

Hu Sheng devoted himself at an early age, to studying Marxism and to researching and writing on philosophy, history and cultural thought. During China's Anti-Japanese War and Liberation War years, as well as after the founding of the People's Republic of China, he published many essays, theses and articles in various newspapers and journals. He also published books on philosophy and history. A number of essays he published during the new era of socialist modernization which began with the convocation of the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the CCP (1978) and which practices reform and opening to the outside world, caught the attention of various circles and were highly valued. His writings are widely influential socially and among school graduates. They are highly appraised by theoreticians and are also of influence abroad. In October of 1990, he was made a member of ACADÉMIE EUROPÉENNE DES SCIENCES, DES ARTS ET DES LETTRES (EUROPEAN ACADEMY OF ARTS, SCIENCES AND HUMANITIES).

His major works are: *Imperialism and Chinese Politics* (1948), *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement* (two volumes, 1981), and *The Seventy Years of the Chinese Communist Party* (chief editor, 1991). The two-volume *Collected Works of Hu Sheng* includes major essays he wrote from 1935 through 1948 and from 1979 through 1995. *Imperialism and Chinese Politics*

was published in the former Soviet Union, the former German Democratic Republic, Uruguay and Japan in the respective languages of these countries. Its English and Korean language editions were published in Beijing. Over three million copies of *From the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement* were published in China. Its English edition was published in Beijing. His major essays, theses and representative works now appear in *The Complete Works of Hu Sheng* of approximately three million words scheduled to be published in 1997.

# CONTENTS

- 1 Marxism and the Reality of China (1983)
  - 26 Capitalism Is Impractical in China (1987)
  - 56 Several Problems Related to Modern China and  
the World (1990)
  - 66 China's Reform and Opening to the Outside  
World (1991)
  - 89 Two Major Undertakings by Mao Zedong During  
His Lifetime (1993)
  - 114 Appendix: Notes on "Two Major Undertakings by  
Mao Zedong During His Lifetime"
  - 128 What Is Socialism and How Is It to Be Con-  
structed? (1994)
  - 165 Marxism Is a Developing Theory (1994)
  - 182 Several Problems Related to the Study of China's  
Modern History—Preface to the Second Edition  
of *From the Opium War to the May Fourth  
Movement* (1996)
  - 193 China's Role in the 21st Century (1996)
-

## Marxism and the Reality of China

Over six decades ago, Marxism spread to China and rapidly integrated itself with the workers' movement and other revolutionary movements. Armed with Marxism, the Communist Party of China displayed, even in its infancy, a vitality unprecedented in China's ideological and political arenas.

At the time the Chinese bourgeois revolutionary movement for a bourgeois republic was at an impasse, with slim chances for success, Marxism and the Russian October Revolution broadened horizons for the Chinese people. They, especially the advanced elements among them, gradually came to the conclusion that the future of the Chinese nation, like that of oppressed people throughout the world, lay in socialism and communism.

The earliest Marxists in China believed that the country's problems could be solved simply by copying socialist revolution methods adopted by the Western proletariat. But before long, they came to see from their own experience that this would get them nowhere.

In the giant Asian country of China, then already reduced to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal state, the target of the revolution was not the ordinary bourgeoisie, but imperialism, feudalism, and the comprador-bureaucrat bourgeoisie who ganged up with them. More-



over, the country's political and economic development was uneven and its capitalism underdeveloped. While the ranks of the proletariat were not large, the peasantry had inexhaustible strength that could be called in to action.

Apart from the urban petty bourgeoisie which could be its ally, the proletariat could also find allies in other classes and social strata, particularly in the struggle against imperialism. Under these social and historical conditions, China had to take a unique road in developing the revolutionary movement until it entered the stage of socialism.

The Marxists in China once had to oppose such a point of view, i. e., there had been no class or class struggle in China since ancient times, and modern social development in China could not be interpreted from the viewpoint of class struggle. The reality in China was so "special" that Marxist historical materialism, the theory of class struggle and socialism, were completely impractical in China. Chinese Marxists, investigating into China's history and reality, proved that none of these theories were tenable.

However, China's history has its own characteristics which should be examined when one studies Chinese history through Marxist viewpoint and method.

To cast off the yoke of semi-colonialism and semi-feudalism, Marxists in China should use experiences of their own, truly understand reality of China, and apply independently the universal truth of Marxism so as to find a revolutionary road suited to China's reality.

The reality of a country is always subject to change. Revolution means to transform an old world into a new one. However, it is impossible to achieve such a

transformation if people merely imagined a proposal for a new world without foundation. The transformation should be conducted in keeping with the objective laws of development and starting from the actual situation of the old world.

This is the distinction between Marxist scientific socialism and Utopian socialism. Of course, it is the same for the reality of a country. Only when people proceeded from the reality of their country could backwardness be transformed.

Generally speaking, Marxists in every country should consider the realities of their own country in applying the common principle. This is particularly important for China.

The history of Marxism's development in China is one of combining the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practice of the Chinese revolution. Only when the combination was correctly handled did Marxism take root in China, direct the Chinese revolutionary cause and refute thoroughly those who thought Marxism did not fit the reality of China. If not combined with the actuality of China, Marxism would only lead to erroneous principles for the Chinese revolution.

In 1930, Mao Zedong warned against "book worship" (本本主义), the first time our Party conscientiously and firmly opposed dogmatic tendencies in regard to Marxism. "Book worship" means to lose contact with China's reality, thoughtlessly impose some Marxist conclusions and copy certain foreign patterns or formulas. In essence, it is dogmatism. Mao Zedong said, "The victory of the Chinese revolutionary struggle will rely on Chinese comrades who are familiar with China's situa-

tion." [1]

Marxist theory is neither dogmatic nor unchangeable; it is a guide to action. This is the viewpoint emphasized time and again by Karl Marx and Frederick Engels. The young Marx once said, "The correct theory must be made clear and developed within the concrete conditions and on the basis of the existing state of things." [2] Mao Zedong's admonition to oppose book worship conformed to the basic spirit of Marxism.

Because China was a semi-colonial, semi-feudal country, its revolution had to proceed in two steps: first achieving victory in the democratic revolution and then starting the socialist revolution.

China's special conditions determined among other things that the proletariat should, and could, win leadership over the democratic revolution; that the proletariat-led democratic revolution should take armed struggle as the major form supplemented with other forms of struggle; that the proletariat must establish rural revolutionary base areas, develop the peasant revolutionary war under its leadership and encircle the cities from the rural areas, and that the proletariat could form a united front with the bourgeoisie under certain conditions.

The Chinese Communists went through countless difficulties (including setbacks and failures) before completely mastering the law governing the development of the Chinese revolution. In the early 1930s, "Left" adventurism (左倾冒险主义) landed the Chinese revolution in a predicament by failing to understand the characteris-

---

[1] Mao Zedong, *Works on Rural Surveys* (in Chinese), Beijing, Renmin Press, 1982, p. 7.

[2] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, New York, International Publishers, 1976, Vol. I, p. 392.

tics of China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, the specific status of various social classes in China and particularly the fact that China's bourgeoisie consisted of national bourgeoisie and comprador bourgeoisie, and the characteristics of a revolutionary war led by the proletariat with peasants as its mainstay. They did not apply Marxism to China's specific situation in guiding the Chinese revolution, but copied "formulas" from books.

Although some of the formulas may have been of universal significance, they became utterly useless when separated from concrete practice. And some of these "formulas" were derived from foreign experiences and did not fit in with China's conditions.

In the 1930s the Chinese Communists represented by Mao Zedong swept away these errors of "Left" dogmatism both in theory and practice. Mao Zedong said,

*Our dogmatists are lazy-bones. They refuse to undertake any painstaking study of concrete things; they regard general truths as emerging out of the void and turn them into purely abstract unfathomable formulas.*

*The dogmatists... do not understand that conditions differ in different kinds of revolution and so do not understand that different methods should be used to resolve different contradictions; on the contrary, they invariably adopt what they imagine to be an unalterable formula and arbitrarily apply it everywhere, which only causes setbacks to the revolution or makes a sorry mess of what was originally*

*well done.* [1]

The victory of the new democratic revolution in 1949 fully proves that the revolutionary road taken by the Chinese people led by the Chinese Communist Party is correct. This road is in keeping with the reality of China and is a Marxist road with Chinese characteristics.

The fact that China realized its transition from new democracy to socialism in a short time after the victory in 1949 is another eloquent proof of the great strength created by integrating Marxist universal truth with China's concrete practice. Although China's semi-colonial and semi-feudal society ended with the victory in 1949, steps in socialist transformation from private ownership of means of production fully considered the features surviving the semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Therefore, the socialist transformation as a whole was conducted smoothly.

Then, after the basic completion of socialist transformation from private ownership of means of production, namely the basic establishment of the socialist system, did the road of social development in China still retain characteristics of its own? In addition to other elements, did its characteristics still reflect the reality that China was once a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society? These questions are of vital importance to the success or failure of socialism in China.

Marx and Engels scientifically proved that capitalist society would certainly collapse and would be replaced

---

[1] Mao Zedong, *Selected Works*, Beijing, Foreign Languages Press, 1975, Vol. I, pp. 321-322.

by socialist society because of the contradictions it could not solve on its own. The historical mission of the proletariat is to win ruling power through revolution and to replace capitalist private ownership by socialist public ownership so as to accomplish elimination of all classes and create a non-class society.

Marx and Engels once estimated that proletarian revolution would succeed in advanced capitalist countries and would succeed in several countries at the same time. They briefly described measures the proletariat would adopt after they took power in "the most advanced countries," holding that "these measures will of course be different in different countries." [1]

However, both Marx and Engels had cautious attitudes towards the specific future structures and development progression of society. They only made a few comments on principles.

For instance, Engels remarked in 1890 on a discussion in a German publication of product distribution in the future society:

*Strangely enough it has not struck anyone that, after all, the method of distribution essentially depends on how much there is to distribute, and that this must surely change with the progress of production and social organization, so that the method of distribution may also change presumably. But to everyone who took part in the discussion, "socialist society" appeared not as something undergoing continuous change and progress but as a stable affair*

---

[1] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, 1976, Vol. IV, p. 505.

*fixed once for all, which must, therefore, have a method of distribution fixed once for all. All one can reasonably do, however, is 1) to try and discover the method of distribution to be used at the beginning, and 2) to try and find the general tendency along which the further development will proceed.* [1]

No doubt, Karl Marx talked in 1875 in detail about the principle of distribution in socialist society in his article, *Critique of the Gotha Programme*. However, his argument was not beyond the scope of what Engels called "reasonable debate." Further, his discussion was directed at phrases by Ferdinand Lassalle: "fair distribution of labour earnings" and "the proceeds of labor belong undiminished with equal right to all members of society."

In refuting these empty words, Marx pointed out that in a socialist society, distribution of the means of consumption must be tied to the principle of exchange of equal amounts of labor, namely, "a given amount of labor in one form is exchanged for an equal amount of labor in another form."

Hence, *equal right* here is still — in principle — a bourgeois right. This equal right is an unequal right for different laborers.

But "these defects are inevitable in the first phase of communist society". What we may learn from these statements is that consideration of problems cannot simply proceed from an abstract concept of equality and fair-

---

[1] Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works*, two volumes, Vol. II, pp. 441—442

ness. In fact, it is impossible for Karl Marx to explain in detail methods of distribution in a future society, just as we could not work out a plan directly from Marx's expositions and ignore our social historical conditions as we entered the period of socialist society. Marx was certainly not calling on us to set about abolishing the "defects" immediately.

What Marx stressed was that one could not proceed from the abstract principle of "fairness". If someone thought that existence of unfairness required restrictions in order to achieve fairness, the thinking is not Marxist but a return to the view of Lassalle.

In a word, Marx and Engels in their lifetime could only conceive the basic principles of a socialist society and the general directions it would possibly take.

It is the same for distribution and other questions. Concrete laws governing the development of socialist society in different countries remain to be practiced and studied by later generations.

After the October Revolution, the Bolsheviks led by Lenin once attempted "to introduce the socialist principles of production and distribution by direct assault, i. e. , in the shortest, quickest and most direct way". [1] But they failed. Therefore, they had to change their minds and adopt methods conforming to the historical characteristics of the Russian society.

Lenin once thought that all nations would enter the socialist society. However, their ways were not entirely the same and each had characteristics of its own. He considered that possibilities existed for colonial and

---

[1] V. I. Lenin, *Collected Works*, Moscow, Progress Publishers, Vol. 33, p. 93



backward countries to avoid development of the capitalist stage and transit directly to the socialist society by going through a certain revolution.

He held that differences among various nations and countries would remain for a long, long period of time even after the realization of the dictatorship of the proletariat all over the world. So, each should apply

*the fundamental principles of communism (Soviet power and the dictatorship of the proletariat), correctly modify these principles in certain particulars, correctly adapt and apply them to national and national-state distinctions.* [1]

These declarations by Lenin merit attention. All nations and countries will certainly become socialist societies. However, the "Great Harmony of the World" (世界大同) is in the distant future. These countries will not only arrive at socialism by various means but will also develop it differently according to their own conditions.

There still exists the problem of integrating the universal truth of Marxism with concrete practices of different countries during socialist construction. China, which has gone through a special road from semi-colonial and semi-feudal society to socialist society, should pay special attention to this problem.

Human history shows a socialist society does not come out of a void. It is established on the basis of civilizations created by humanity through several thousand years, particularly the civilization created by capitalism, which is much more advanced than any previous ones.

---

[1] *Ibid.*, Vol. 31.