

Why has China Achieved Success by Taking the Socialist Road?

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China Intercontinental Press, 2016. Pp. 246. ISBN 978-7-5085-3327-8

First published in Chinese as 中国走社会主义道路为什么成功 in this book Dai Mucai uses the concept of ‘Chinese characteristics’ to explain the rationale behind China’s success. While central to the title, the concept remains significant in all eighteen chapters. The first six chapters employ the word ‘road’ in headings to designate the process of formation of Chinese modern history. Mucai maintains that ‘we should note that the Chinese nation’s unremitting pursuit for modernisation and rejuvenation over more than 170 years since the Opium Wars was part of the ever-advancing history’ (p. 9). For that reason, he introduces a concept which serves as the backdrop to understanding the Chinese path to its current status — ‘the Chinese Road’. After the Opium Wars, Mucai maintains that China was gradually reduced to a semi-colonial, semi-feudal society: since the Opium Wars, China suffered incessant invasions from Western powers and was reduced to the status of being a semi-feudal, semi-colonial society.

The first six chapters establish the platform for the book. Mucai presents not only what the Chinese way is, but also the direction in which it is heading. He combines the concept of Chinese characteristics with the emerging Chinese Road which is based on the integrity of the history of modern China (p. 11), the major part of which derives from the foundation and continuing supervision provided by the Chinese Communist Party where ‘the Chinese road is being broadened continuously’ (p. 19). Central to the foundation of this party is only not its organisational or structural role, but the vision of its leaders who have led China to stability and prosperity. Chapter four ‘The Chinese Road is Consistent in Social Nature’, is fundamental in reviewing this topic. Mucai poses the question, which echoes the book title, ‘why has China taken the Socialist road but not any other road since the beginning of last century?’ (p. 31).

Adopting an historical perspective, Mucai then divides Chinese modern development into three phases: the outbreak of the Opium Wars and the invasion of China by western powers which transformed Chinese Society; the eruption of the revolution of 1911, which brought about the end of the Qing Dynasty 'marking the end of more than 2,000 years of feudal despotic rule in China' (p. 31). The third phase is the founding of New China in 1949, culminating, under Mao Zedong, in the establishment of the socialist political system and ending the semi-colonial, semi-feudal society (pp. 31-32).

Chapter five is significant for an understanding of the modes China adopted in laying out the Chinese road. Mucai sets out two points: first, concerning the westernisation of China, and the second what he terms the Soviet-Model. Mucai labels westernisation as a process of learning from the West, i.e., reaching an advanced status like the West, which involves embracing advanced science and technology, system and culture (43). It may be surprising that some in China held the view that 'we must admit that we are inferior to the others in one hundred aspects, not only in material ways and mechanics and in our political system, but also in morals, in knowledge, in literature, in music, in arts and in health' (p. 45). Furthermore, Mucai writes that during the 1970s and 1980s when China carried out her reform and opening-up, proposals of total westernisation and repudiation of traditional culture were again brought forth. Some held the view that traditional Chinese culture which the people had borne for several thousand years, had been a 'crucifix' and did not have the slightest merit (pp. 44-47).

The Soviet-Model or the Russian-style revolution had a significant influence upon the development of the Chinese revolutionary road (p. 50). Chapter seven poses the question why Marxist thought became the mainstream in China's ideological and cultural domains. When China was searching for survival, independence and liberation, the Russian-style revolution offered a 'makeshift' template for advanced Chinese intellectuals (p. 50). Generations of Chinese intellectuals had an impact on the advance of Marxism in China. Li Dazhao and Chen Duxiu were the earliest Marxists pioneers. Mao Zedong and Cai Hesen and other key left-wing members of the May Fourth Movement constituted its major part. Mucai brings out the balance between the impact of the intellectual movement in China and the subsequent political and

cultural events. July 1927, the birth of the CPC organised according to the model of the Russian Communist Party, marked a new era in China. On 1st of October 1949 The People's Republic of China was founded. The most urgent need facing it was to acknowledge the situation within and outside China and to address the realities of China's situation in order to create a permanent path of success. Mao Zedong held that China's revolution must principally assume the long-term armed struggle (p. 88). Mucai maintains that according to a Marxist theory of the state, the army is a major component of state power. The armed struggles in China were revolutionary wars under the leadership of the proletariat, with the peasantry as the main body of the armed forces and the main forces of China's revolution (p. 89).

China was being equipped with both intellectual guidance and the people's military power. This was achieved by the CPC making clear its revolutionary road with Chinese characteristics by setting up armed regional regimes of workers and peasants and besieging the cities from the countryside until national power was finally seized (p. 89). To achieve holistic balance, Mucai observes that Mao Zedong knew that China's economy was underdeveloped, and China needed international aid, which came from the socialist camp headed by the Soviet Union because the principle task of the CPC was economic reconstruction. Pointedly, the key policy orientation of the Peoples' Republic of China during the early years was that even while receiving foreign aid the Chinese did not compromise their sovereignty and at the same time did not antagonise capitalist countries. Mucai points out while borrowing from others China was still thinking independently (p. 115); it was essential for China to maintain its own identity.

Chapter eleven narrates the shift in China's road ahead from copying the Soviet Model to exploring China's own road of Socialist Development. The following chapter explains industrialisation as the priority on China's own road. The modern China of today can be traced back to September 1954, (on September, 15, the Constitution of the People's Republic of China was enacted) when the CPC Central Committee for the first time put forward the objectives of 'four modernisations': industry, agriculture, transportation, and national defences (p. 132). In the early pages, Mucai repeatedly confirms the notion of China being semi-colonial and semi-feudal. At the advanced stage of his book, the phrase is employed to highlight the advantages

of adapting the socialist economic system which by the end of 1956 had reached its basic stage of completion. The devastating effect of ‘The Great Leap Forward’ is explained in chapter thirteen.

Chapter fourteen presents statistical information that enhances the book’s value. When the new China was founded, there were no more than fifty thousand scientists and technicians throughout the country. By 1966, there were already 1,600 institutions of scientific research with 4,345 million scientists and technicians (p. 154). Mucai confirms the reform period between the founding of the new republic and the opening-up in 1978 is marked by significant contrasting negatives and positives. Chapter fifteen is dedicated to Deng Xiaoping’s economic and political contribution to China. Its central argument is that Deng wisely advocated adhering to the ‘Four Cardinal Principles’: including Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong’s Thought (p. 163), moving towards a basic tenet of Deng Xiaoping: ‘we must restore our Party’s ideological line — seek truth from facts... proceed from realities in doing everything and build socialism according to China’s realities’ (p. 194).

Chapters seventeen and eighteen are dedicated to the objectives and soul of the ‘Chinese Road’. It is argued that ‘Chinese-style modernisation’ means adhering to the CPC and developing the socialist market economy and modern democratic politics (p. 206). Prosperity is the objective of socialist economic modernisation; democracy is the objective of political modernisation; advanced culture is the objective of cultural modernisation; and harmony is the objective of socialist social modernisation. The conclusion emphasises that the Chinese road has had a different identity to the Soviet, European, American and many other models (p. 242). This Chinese model has been created by the Chinese people under the leadership of the CPC. In sum the scope and precision of this book makes it suitable reading for both academic and non-academic purposes. Readers with a particular interest in the way China has progressed, or those who seek to assess the formation of current Chinese standing in the world, will find lucid explanations and answers in this book.

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