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Chinese Comparisons of Socialism : A New Agenda for Research and New Perceptions of Convergence in Socialist Reforms

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Communist ideology has not kept pace with socialist reality. Socialism, as it is actually practiced, has become increasingly diverse. After World War II when "socialism in one country" expanded to socialism for one-third of humanity, a monolithic ideology confronted the reality of varied national traditions and diverse stages of modernization, including a more advanced and complex Soviet economy. Over the past four decades the confrontation has continued: ideology has grudgingly yielded ground to a changing world. Once the monocentric socialist camp was divided by the Yugoslav-Soviet and Sino-Soviet disputes, in place of a single model of socialism multiple models arose. Socialism in practice has raced ahead of ideological explanations in Moscow, Beijing and other communist capitals.

Communist leaderships have been reluctant to theorize about the diversification of socialism. Stalin and Mao dismissed different approaches as revisionism (i. e., heresy); their pronouncements concentrated on demonstrating that their way alone was correct. Although Mao made some comparisons between China and the Soviet Union, he stifled attempts to base such assessments on accurate and detailed information. Brezhnev's leadership recognized some differences based on national circumstances, but refused to consider how one society could learn from another or to explore how variations in the socialist system arise. Even in the substantial Soviet literature on China, there was only indirect and fragmentary commentary on how Chinese circumstances led to differences in socialism.¹ It was easier to imply that deviations were occurring, with only negative consequences, thereby rejecting any recognition of legitimate differences in socialism. Comparative studies of socialism were not permitted in the major communist-led countries, and in writings that passed through the censorship of their close allies. Only in 1978 did this prohibition begin to fall in China.

Comparative socialism now stands out as one of the principal subjects within a broad program of reasserting communist ideology on a more scholarly and applied footing. At the end of the 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s China's leadership under Deng Xiaoping faced a "crisis of belief." Much of past ideology had been discredited by the failure and reversal of the Cultural Revolution. In these circumstances, theorists and social scientists in general were encouraged to reassert the relevance of ideology, contributing to public support and optimism for communist party leadership and also to the adoption of reforms that would propel the country forward. The new interest in ideology led away from the dogmatic use of quotations to the detailed summing up of past experiences in the socialist world.

The two most fundamental concepts of communist ideology in the twentieth century

are socialism and capitalism. Each is defined by communist leaders in ways that sharply distinguish it from the other, yet without losing sight of the contrasting meaning of the other. When new interpretations are introduced to suggest that capitalism can be reformed to realize, however incompletely, some of the positive goals of socialism or that socialism should be modified, in the short run, to retain certain efficient features of capitalism, there is resistance within the leading circles of communism. Advocates of reform may be accused of favoring convergence. Nevertheless, the durability and continued vitality of capitalism and the declining economic growth coupled with the serious social problems of socialism have necessitated adjustments in theory in ways that were previously discredited as revisionism. The line between socialism and capitalism continues to shift, in recent years leading to increasing overlap between the two. At the same time, leaders insist that some line be drawn. No direct advocacy of convergence is tolerated. As a result, comparisons among socialist countries are more acceptable than comparisons across the socialist-capitalist divide. According to available sources, the reconceptualization of socialism in China has rushed ahead of the debate over capitalism.² Rather than neglecting ideology, China's leaders have shown a keen interest in bolstering it through writings about the real world of socialism.

That the accent is placed on the positive can be seen in the choice of countries for comparison. Largely excluded are the worst excesses of China's own past and the entire history of development of the socialist countries with which relations are chilly: Afghanistan, African countries, Albania, Cuba, Kampuchea, Mongolia, and Vietnam. North Korea is also omitted. The Soviet Union, past and present, occupies the central place in the comparisons. Eastern European countries also figure importantly. Despite calls to bring China into these comparative writings, it has largely been excluded from the first stage of scholarship. Paradoxically it is Soviet history that bears the major burden in justifying an optimistic assessment of socialism in world history.

In 1984–1986 the comparative study of socialist countries has burst forth as one of the principal interests of China's Marxist theorists and its specialists on Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union. With recent signs that a similar field may be beginning in Soviet academic circles,³ the prospects are suddenly greatly improved both for gaining inside views on how socialism varies around the world and, perhaps more importantly, for understanding the direction of socialist development inside the country in which the comparisons are being made. Chinese writings on comparative socialism shed new light on Chinese reforms in the 1980s and on the meaning of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." They also have implications for future relations among socialist countries and between socialist and capitalist countries.

Until the 1980s, despite some largely unrealized hopes to develop a field of comparative communism in the West,⁴ there was scarcely any substantial scholarship in this area. The comparative study of socialism — apart from some Western economics courses with a technical focus and politics courses with a narrowly governmental focus — failed to develop. Today Chinese scholarship stands out in this undeveloped field not so much for its accomplishments as for its new dynamism and emergent tendencies. It may lead in the growth of international scholarship in this field.

To obtain a clear picture of the state of research on comparative socialism in China, it

will be helpful to look separately at four aspects of scholarship: the history of the emergence of this field, the current agenda for research, the typologies of socialism that have been proposed, and the significance of the new field. Because the author has not had access to the most recent internal circulation (*neibu*) journals, the source base is most extensive through the first months of 1985 and for the following year relies heavily on newspaper articles and a small number of journals.

I. History of the Emergence of Comparative Studies of Socialism

The first requirement for comparative research is the recognition that there is something to learn from the diverse experiences of other countries. Although Chinese had studied the Soviet experience intently during the 1950s, this was done in the spirit of learning what socialism is, not as part of any strategy for comparative research. Later when China and Albania were treated as the only socialist countries left, Chinese leaders sought to expose what is not socialism rather than to compare what is. Only in 1978 did Chinese leaders recognize that an impasse had been reached in their own country's development and that efforts should be made to learn from the experiences of other countries. The gathering of information about socialist countries, including the Soviet Union, notably increased as early as 1977.⁵ By the spring of 1978 the first conference was already convening to draw lessons from this information.

At first, comparisons were indirect and concentrated on economic organizations in Yugoslavia and Romania.⁶ The May 1978 conference on the Yugoslavian economy first had to establish that the Yugoslavian system was indeed socialist rather than revisionist, opening the way for attention to the self-management system and other factors that could account for rapid economic development. Positive commentaries on the Romanian management system and system of distribution in the summer of 1978 were soon followed by general observations on the reform of management in Eastern Europe. Above all, the decision in Beijing in the final months of 1978 to give priority to reforms of China's economic system established the need to scrutinize the approaches taken by other socialist countries. In the theoretical meetings at this time, Chinese participants report, scholars first proposed that there are multiple models of socialism.

In 1979 the network of countries chosen for comparison widened. All Eastern European communist-led countries, except Albania which had abruptly fallen from favor, were now the subject of articles. By late 1979 Hungary was emerging as the favored model. When China's reforms entered a stage of consolidation and both Yugoslavia and Romania encountered deepening economic troubles, it became popular to treat Hungary as the successful middle road within the movement for socialist reform. As leaders were grappling with thorny problems such as how to evaluate Mao's role in history and how to cope with the democracy movement, they issued guidelines that steered publications about socialism toward the middle ground. Writings on Soviet reforms of the economic management system increased rapidly after the revisionist label was removed from that country in the second half of 1979.⁷

By the spring of 1981 the goal of comparing the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries was clearly announced in Chinese publications. In the inaugural issue of the important *neibu* (internal circulation) journal, *Problems of the Soviet Union and Eastern*

Europe, Liu Keming, then the director of the Institute of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, specifically asserted this comparative objective.⁸ The first detailed comparative book on the Soviet Union and all seven Eastern European countries was published in 1982. It systematically examines agricultural reforms over the previous three decades and proposes a typology of three types of management systems represented by Yugoslavia, Hungary, and the Soviet Union. (The last is generally grouped together with the five remaining countries).⁹

It was not until the second half of 1982 that the basic framework for research on the Soviet Union was in place. The experiences of fact-finding delegations, including economists, reported over several years first for Yugoslavia and Romania and then for other Eastern European countries, were finally repeated for the Soviet Union. An important visit occurred from February to April 1982, when three Chinese economists traveled through the Soviet Union.¹⁰ Following their report and the upbeat mood of preparations for bilateral negotiations, the tone in writings on the Soviet economy became more positive. In September the newly established Chinese Association for Soviet and East European Studies (Zhongguo Sulian dongou xuehui) met. (The existence of the association was not revealed publicly until 1985.) Along with study of the Soviet political system and Soviet foreign policy, it established as the two principal subjects for study the reform of the Soviet economic system and the reforms of Eastern European economic systems.¹¹ Andropov's succession to the top leadership position in Moscow and his ideological reforms, one of which concerned the Soviet Union's need to learn from the experiences of Eastern European socialist countries, contributed to further positive reassessments of the Soviet Union. To be sure, criticisms of many aspects of the Soviet Union continued, but the foundation was now secure for far-reaching and, on the whole, sympathetic comparisons of actual conditions in the eight socialist countries covered by the new association.

Various writings in 1983 and 1984 explain the need for comparative studies. They point to the diversity of models for the transition to socialism and for socialism itself and conclude that this proves one cannot take as dogma the views set down in books by early Marxists or treat socialist society as an unchanging thing.¹² It is necessary, authors inform their readers, to study and compare the experiences of other socialist countries. With such information, each country can take into account its own specific characteristics and chart its own path to socialism. Monolithic socialism is dead. Blind copying of another country's model is a serious error. Comparative research, guided by sympathetic understanding and not by the one-sided and slanderous approaches found in the West, is needed to reveal the actual reasons for past mistakes and inadequate reforms. As Zhou Xincheng and Li Jun explain, Chinese scholars who apply the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism in their comparative work will identify the means for reasserting the superiority of socialism.¹³

Reform figures seized the opportunity to propose an agenda for reexamining the most sensitive issues in the history of communist parties in power. As Su Shaozhi stated in March 1983 at the conference to commemorate the one-hundredth anniversary of Marx's death, such a reexamination is needed to develop Marxism creatively and thus meet China's main theoretical need of building socialism with Chinese characteristics. He

argues that it is necessary to determine what is general to any socialist system and what corresponds to the specific conditions of Russian history and cannot be applied everywhere.¹⁴

Newspaper articles and reports in journals on conferences draw attention to the upsurge of activity in comparative socialism, following the interruption of the campaign against spiritual pollution, from the second half of 1984. In September 1984 a Beijing conference called by the editorial board of the journal *Internal Reference on World Economies and Politics* identified as the highest priority the need to strengthen comparative studies of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe and China.¹⁵ In November 1985 and February 1986 the newspaper *Guangming ribao* printed articles with an agenda for comparative studies and a differentiation of types of socialism.¹⁶ In a draft circulated in the spring of 1986 a Chinese economist doing research in the United States proposed a more elaborate typology of models of socialist economic management. Although writing in English, she had already published a version of her typology in a Shanghai journal in 1985 and was planning to publish more on this subject in Chinese.¹⁷

The principal impetus for a new field of comparative socialism came in preparations for the October 1984 Communist Party plenum and at the plenum itself. Best known as the "urban reform" plenum, this gathering also produced a shift in the field of ideology. It questioned the dogmatic elements of Marxism-Leninism and approved of efforts to reevaluate the history of socialism. The upsurge in ideological reassessments in the final months of the year reflects the party leadership's new goals.

By 1985 reformers had started on ambitious plans to produce a multivolume series comparing socialist societies, while more orthodox figures were also writing of the need to compare socialist economic systems. The two sides seem to emphasize different objectives in their plans. Su Shaozhi's focus is to find out what should be abandoned, in other words to expose past mistakes to prevent their repetition. He considers the influence of the Soviet model in China to be too strong in the 1980s, and seeks to diminish it by more fully revealing its shortcomings. This leads to an agenda involving the broadest possible range of comparisons, even including: 1) foreign relations such as the expulsion of Yugoslavia in 1948, the debate between China and the Soviet Union, and the clash of Albania and foreign communist countries; and 2) political phenomena such as the criticism of Stalin at the Twentieth Congress, China's Cultural Revolution, the "Prague Spring," and Poland's disturbances and military management.¹⁸ The orthodox interest in comparisons seems to have an opposite objective and a narrower design. New studies appear to be seen as a means to reassert a rather narrowly defined range of choices that signify socialism, including to draw China closer to the Soviet model. Orthodox plans concentrate on comparisons of the economic management system.¹⁹

II. The Agenda for Comparative Research

Deng Xiaoping's emphasis on "building socialism with Chinese characteristics," which was chosen as the title of the collection of his writings from 1982 to 1984,²⁰ has guided the new interest in comparative studies of socialism. To distinguish between "socialism" and "Chinese characteristics," study is necessary. According to Su Shaozhi, the first requirement is "to study socialism by tracing back to its origin and distinguishing socialism

from the specific model which was held up as an immutable formula in the past decades.” He adds that it is necessary to find out: “what are the fundamental aspects that must necessarily be observed by all nations and countries in building socialism?...what are the aspects that were expounded in classical Marxist writings under the influence of specific historical and regional conditions? What, in Lenin’s momentous development of scientific socialism, are the principles which are universally applicable? And what are the particular conditions which, being applicable only to the specific socio-historical conditions in Russia, should not be mechanically copied everywhere? Which of Stalin’s and Mao Zedong’s expositions on socialism are really a development of Marxism-Leninism? And which must necessarily be discarded? Moreover, we should study the expositions on socialism made, in the various stages of the development of Marxism, by many prominent figures worthy of being called leaders and thinkers, and see which really represent deep insight and which were only of transitory significance? If we fail to study socialism by getting to its very root, we will find it very difficult to grasp its essence and refrain from regarding this or that model appearing in the practice of socialism as one of its universal principles.”²¹

Su Shaozhi’s 1983 agenda for the comparative study of socialism seeks answers to four groups of questions. The first group arises out of the changes in socialism from theory to reality. These are changes in the communist party, the relationship between the party and society, and problems of class struggle, socialist democracy, democratic centralism, and nationality relations in the country. Su asks how can the special difficulties in the succession of younger people to the party’s leadership be overcome? The second group arises out of socialism changing from reality in a single country to reality in more than one country. What changes should there be in the earlier model and what are the results of experiments and reforms to make changes? For example, what is the impact on social stability, democratization, and economic effectiveness? Su also includes questions about the relations among communist parties and how they appraise each other’s ideologies.

The third group of questions focuses on socialist construction in underdeveloped countries, where many complex factors are visible that were not foreseen by the classical theses of Marxism. What are the effects of the absence of capitalism and of a democratic tradition? What are the experiences “in eradicating the corrosive influence of the pre-capitalist social relations, psychology and ideology over the new society?” Fourth, Su identifies questions concerning the basic theories of Marxism, which have emerged following publication of Marx’s early manuscripts. Among these are questions about the relationship between Marxism and humanism, science and ideology in Marxism, and contradictions alleged by Western scholars (including misrepresentations) between Marx and Engels or Lenin. Su argues that Chinese must accept the challenge of answering many questions through “conscientious studies” and “well-founded and logical interpretation.”²²

On October 21, 1985, Su Shaozhi simultaneously published substantial articles in two of China’s leading newspapers, *People’s Daily* and *Guangming ribao*.²³ In one article, he begins by noting Deng Xiaoping’s call at the recent plenary session of the Chinese Communist Party for all cadres young and old to study Marxist theory and concludes with

a reference to Chen Yun's speech pointing to cadres and their children using their power for private gain. In order to clear away obstacles such as this to reform, Su calls for theory that is not dogmatic, opportunistic, or merely words inconsistent with actions. In the *Guangming ribao* article Su writes in detail about the analysis that is needed.

Prior to doing so, however, he restates what in 1985 had become the guiding position: that in all socialist countries the modes of production (*shengchan fangshi*) and the social system (*zhidu*) are the same (*gongtong de*). In other words, the basic system is the same, while the structure differs. Countries reform the economic mechanism even though they do not tamper with the fundamental structure of socialism. The common marks in all socialist countries are: "the elimination of the exploiting system, the public ownership of the means of production, distribution according to work, the planned development of the national economy, the political power under which the working class and the labouring people enjoy ample democracy, and the highly developed productivity and spiritual civilization."²⁴ Although these commonalities exist and there is a universal system, there is no universal model.

Su's 1985 agenda for comparing socialist countries includes five historical elements: 1) the distinct economic organizations formed over a long period; 2) the customs of life and networks of social relations connected to the particular character of a nationality; 3) the tradition of political administration; 4) the background of cultural concepts; and 5) the path and type of revolution. The economic and social systems have various aspects which interact with these historical factors. Five of these are also mentioned: 1) the understanding of scientific socialist theory by the communist parties of various countries; 2) the strategy for economic and social development; 3) the political system and the process of policy making; 4) social concepts and the way of life; and 5) the international environment and foreign policy.

Finding these lists of themes unwieldy or too abstract for comparative research, Su proposes another set of categories to be used as direct and clear standards for classification. First is the system of ownership of the means of production, where differences in types of public and types of private ownership are found. Second is the distribution of consumer goods, where countries differ in their effort to find an equilibrium and avoid the contradictions between economic efficiency and social equality. Third is the distribution of the means of production, where the old model relied too much on central planning and was followed by reforms that expand the role of market allocations. Fourth is the transmission of information, which may be mainly vertical or mainly horizontal, solely through administrative channels or inclusive of mutually independent media and legal channels. Fifth is the policy making structure, which in Russia's War Communism approached the extreme of complete centralization and, in general, faces the danger of bureaucratism or, if too dispersed, anarchism. Sixth is the structure of social organizations, which can be diversified or relatively monolithic and can advance or thwart the all-around free development of the individual and social progress. Seventh is the structure of political authority, which at first was highly centralized, but increasingly gave rise to shortcomings which prevented socialism from showing its superiority to capitalism in establishing a higher degree of democracy. Finally, Su notes the structure of consciousness. Here Su repeatedly contrasts

freedom (of speech, of publishing, of scientific and artistic creativity) to control and surveillance by administrative organs. These eight standards can be used to compare socialist countries, Su proposes.

In contrast to Su's detailed agenda for comparative studies, on which he specifically includes many of the most sensitive developments in the history of socialist countries,²⁵ Zhao Mingui four months later in the same newspaper worries about the difference in today's world between scientific socialism and non-scientific socialism.²⁶ He insists that the goal of carrying out comparative research is first of all to make clear the boundary between scientific socialism and non-scientific socialism, and in this way to maintain Marxist scientific socialism. In his view a new discipline has begun to develop in China over the past few years and in order to develop it further it is necessary to clarify such questions as its contents, the objects of study, and how to classify the various socialisms in the world today, Zhao distinguishes three types: 1) scientific socialism which uses Marxism as the guiding thought under the leadership of a Marxist party or a communist movement; 2) socialism of national democracies in the Third World; and 3) various socialist factions which are guided by historical idealism (*lishi weixinzhuyi*).

Zhao's concerns seem to flow from debates on what constitutes scientific socialism. The 1984 conference of the Chinese Marxist Research Association (*Zhongguo Makesi yanjiuhui*) had met in Nanchang late in November immediately preceding the widely publicized announcement that rigid adherence to Marxism is "naive and stupid."²⁷ A year later, in a more conservative mood and following the plenary session of the Central Committee at which ideological education was trumpeted as a necessary response to corruption by cadres, a more restrictive approach to Marxism seemed to be in vogue. Even so, Su Shaozhi and others were proceeding with plans for a broad comparative agenda.

Is the Chinese agenda complete? The answer, from the point of view of Western and Japanese writings, has to be no. At the very least, some topics are being approached so indirectly or defensively that their place on the agenda is difficult to discern. Is there a persistent totalitarian tendency in Leninism? Are Stalinist purges, China's Cultural Revolution, and Kampuchean genocide all a predictable outcome of an ideology that fans hatred in the name of class struggle? Is democratic centralism under the communist party a serious barrier to the grassroots participation and local autonomy deemed necessary for the success of long-term reform? These and other questions are not being asked in a forthright manner, and it remains unclear that the answers to them will be based on a genuine empirical approach to comparisons rather than on deductions from pronouncements by party leaders. Nonetheless, we should give credit to the boldness of the reform agenda for the sensitive issues that are addressed and for its potential to make comparative studies of socialism an empirical field of study.

III. Typologies of Socialism

The discussion of models in the 1980s has been guided by the argument that all socialist countries have the same economic system and it continues for the entire stage of socialism. Socialist countries all have the same basic traits. Discussion of differences must focus on a lower level of generalization. The typologies already proposed

concentrate on differences in the economic management system. Over the past several years these typologies have grown in complexity while continuing to group China's recent reforms with those of other countries. They serve the goal of placing China in the mainstream of the socialist world.

The basic typology and starting point for discussions of variations has been a tripartite distinction according to the criterion of the degree of centralization of economic management. On one end of the spectrum is Yugoslavia with its socialist self-management system. It has been decentralized since the beginning of the 1950s. At the other end is the Soviet Union (sometimes it is unclear whether this is a past state from which Soviet reforms have already begun to lead away) and some Eastern European countries, which are excessively centralized. In the middle are China from 1979, Hungary after 1968, and some other Eastern European countries, at least to a partial degree. From 1979–1980, to a growing extent, and, without doubt, from 1981 this classification has guided comparisons of the socialist world.²⁸

It was always apparent that this was an incomplete typology for the history of socialism. Chinese sources made it consistently clear that all three types reflected reform currents away from a fourth model: the traditional model or the highly centralized, planned economy. This traditional model, never referred to as Stalinism, is the common starting point for all socialist countries. It figures heavily in many studies and must be included in all Chinese typologies of socialism.

There is less clarity concerning the relationship of the programs that preceded centralized planning in the Soviet Union and models of socialism. Intensive discussions during the early 1980s focused on War Communism and the New Economic Policy (NEP), with even some concern raised for alternative strategies to the course adopted by Stalin in the First Five-Year Plan and Collectivization.²⁹ (Bukharin's approach [and its relationship to the NEP] received some mention although he has not been rehabilitated and the discussion of him has been largely quieted.³⁰) Were there separate models of socialism distinguishable in these experiences? The basic typology did not answer this question. It is possible that reformers sought to obtain public recognition of an NEP model, but this goal was not realized.

Other ambiguities arose from the sweeping inclusiveness of the concept of the traditional model. Chinese could not be satisfied with the simple lumping together of Mao's program for socialism with Stalin's program and the immediate post-war approaches in Eastern Europe. Most publications implied that China retained the traditional model until 1979, while in some places they may have associated the strategy of the Cultural Revolution with War Communism. Because the Soviet traditional model and War Communism were implicit in many efforts to distinguish types of socialism, one might conclude that from 1981 there was a five-model typology.

Furthermore, there were tensions between two concepts of the socialist middle ground. On the one hand, many publications stress what all reforming socialist countries have in common.³¹ Above all, this means deemphasizing the differences between the Soviet Union and Hungary or grouping other Eastern European countries with Hungary. On the other hand, there have been efforts to isolate the Soviet Union or Yugoslavia from the middle group, underlining how much further decentralizing reforms

must proceed in the former or how negative are the anarchic consequences of insufficient state control in the latter. As perceptions of the Soviet Union were improving and Yugoslavia was receiving less attention, without being dropped altogether, the tendency increased to accept a broad middle ground.

Jiang Chunze's typology of socialist economic models resolves some of these ambiguities in a manner consistent with the emerging majority in 1984–1986 and at the expense of some earlier reform goals. First, it expands the range of models, distinguishing between two pre-models and five models. The premodels are each broadened to include non-Soviet examples. In the category of War Communism Jiang places China's red base areas from 1927 to 1949 and Yugoslavia's wartime base areas as well as the Soviet Union from 1918 to 1921. Grouping these periods as examples of a pre-model diminishes their relevance to contemporary concerns. This appears to be a further step to limit the appeal to China's revolutionary heritage that had been popular among older party leaders during Mao's lifetime. At the same time, it may be of more significance that the Soviet New Economic Policy of 1924–1928, which is equated with China's development from 1949 to 1953, is relegated to the category of a pre-model. Efforts from 1979 into the early 1980s to treat the NEP as a precedent and possible model for Chinese reforms had not won approval. As Jiang declares, any model of a socialist economy can exclude pre-models because they are "temporary measures adopted because of situational needs."³²

Among Jiang's five "models of real socialist experience" are Model I, the Soviet Union from the 1930s to 1950s and all of the socialist countries before reforms, and Model II, the Yugoslavian self-management system. Jiang describes the first model as the prototype or the fundamental model from which all others are derived. Reforms address the drawbacks left by this model. She explains that there were objective reasons for the formation of this model and positive consequences from it — for rapid industrialization, wartime victory, and post-war economic recovery. It had problems, however, and needed to be reformed.

Jiang notes that the Yugoslavian model was in the lead in launching reform but also seems to cast doubt on it, referring to it as "the model of the earliest modification" and as a system based on "so-called socialist ownership of the means of production," and treating it as the only model with only a single example. Then, she adds, in the mid-1960s stronger measures weakened macroeconomic management and this system "moved into a new phase of so-called free joint labor of the producers." The state became overcautious and did not dare to take action, and units at the bottom developed a tendency toward blindness and spontaneity.

Jiang groups the first two models together, claiming that they are both based on a desire "to realize the final objective of communism" and at the same time are, on many basic points, at the opposite extremes. She adds that the Yugoslavian model arose in historical conditions that included military, economic, political and ideological pressures and it "carried a very strong but questionable theoretical background." She balances these remarks with brief mention that this model can cut down on bureaucratism and make the microeconomy active and concludes that experience is still being gathered that will lead to efforts to solve various new contradictions.³³

This clear rejection of a decentralized model of socialism reflects a narrowing of the reform end of the preferential middle ground on the socialist continuum. Along with the restrictive interpretation of the NEP and the reduced attention to Bukharin, this evaluation of the Yugoslavian model suggests that following the zenith of economic reform momentum in the final months of 1984, the ideological case for widening reform has been weakened. In Jiang's formulation, Yugoslavia fares little better than the traditional model; it has lost its potency as a guide for Chinese reforms.

Jiang's sharpest attacks are reserved for Model III, the extremely left approach that emphasizes class struggle and idealism. The only cases of it identified are the Leap Forward and the Cultural Revolution, both occurring in China. Briefly she refers to this model as unsuccessful, leading to a deteriorated situation. The two experiences with it were painful and taught a lesson that she asserts, "need not be repeated here."³⁴

Models IV and V are clearly preferred over the others. The former is described as a modified centrally planned economy with reforms aimed at reorganizing institutions. Jiang holds up the German Democratic Republic since the 1970s as successful in making substantial improvements in many areas. She concludes that "since production in the German Democratic Republic has reached a high degree of concentration, it is believed that under socialism it is not imperative to allow for competition because competition is not the only means to enhance economic interests." Less positively, she finds the Soviet Union since the mid-1960s (also in this category) to have been ineffective in improving the target series and reorganizing institutions. She is not pessimistic, however, about the prospects for reform on the basis of this model, noting that Andropov intended to make further reforms but died before he succeeded and Gorbachev's instructions for "thorough reform" if carried out, may lead to a change from Model IV to Model V.³⁵ Jiang ends on an uncertain note, but apart from the suggestion that the Soviet Union, in contrast to East Germany has been ineffective in applying this model and that bold proposals might shift it to the presumably more desirable Model V, there is no sign of criticism of Model IV.

Model V is the preferred approach to socialism. Jiang describes this as an exploratory reform model, the goal of which is to respect objective economic laws. This planned commodity model "attempts organically to link together central planning and market functions." It is propelled by "theoretical breakthroughs." As applied in China, the model stands out for its ability to "bring about a thriving, energetic socialist society." It is also becoming the path of the majority. Hungary after 1969, China since 1979, and other Eastern European countries drawing on their own national characteristics are grouped as examples of this model. While Jiang is careful to recognize that reform is complicated and to refer to this model as exploratory, there is no doubt that she favors it. She sees it as having at least four advantages: 1) the philosophical principle that "practice is the sole criterion of truth," which opens the way to reform; 2) the simultaneous reform of the political system, which she calls the fifth modernization and the premise and guarantee of economic modernization; 3) the open door to the outside, bringing about a sixth modernization in the area of ideology; and 4) the breaking away from rigid concepts.³⁶ Elements of the reform agenda are retained in this characterization.

Comparing the earlier tripartite typology to Jiang's conceptualization of models, we find in the latter a stronger assertion of the advantages of one model for socialism in a reform era. Although still humble about the difficult road ahead, the Chinese position has become more assertive about what China's own recent development has demonstrated. Following the tendency of the past several years, this approach also is supportive of the Soviet reform program. It treats the existing model in the Soviet Union as one that can lead either to effective reforms within the scope of the model itself or as capable of evolving into model V already found in China, in Hungary, and, to a significant extent, in Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland. The reader gets the impression that Andropov and now Gorbachev are on the right track and even that the line between Models IV and V is rather fuzzy. It apparently has been crossed by Eastern European countries from the 1960s and could be crossed by the Soviet Union as well. With Yugoslavia receiving greater criticism, several Eastern European countries being reclassified into the same model as China, and the Soviet Union having the prospect of shifting to that model, reform socialism seems to be converging on a single model.

In some of the earlier formulations of the tripartite scheme, the vast area of the Soviet Union, its past record of successes, and its advanced industrial economy were mentioned as explanations for the possible applicability of a more centralized model than one that is required in China.³⁷ In Jiang's formulation too East German centralization is justified by its advanced economy. Nevertheless, given Jiang's doubts about Yugoslavia, we discern a narrowing of the successful current options for reform-oriented socialism from three to two, and, at the same time, the implication that the Soviet Union may shift to the model which China advocates raises the possibility that only a single model may in the not very distant future prevail in the socialist world. The logical result from China's accelerating effort in the 1980s to place itself in the mainstream of a reform movement that is engulfing the socialist world and to justify its own reform course in terms of the long-term direction of Soviet development and the immediate thrust of recent Soviet reform currents is to collapse the differences among models.

IV. Significance of Chinese Comparisons of Socialism

Looking back over the history of Chinese communism, we find the following approaches to comparative socialism. In the 1950s, it was assumed that there is only one socialist model — the Soviet model of the Stalin era had universal applicability. In the 1960s and most of the 1970s, it was also assumed that there is only one true model, but that the danger lurked of revisionism and countries could abandon the model. For a time in 1978–1979, leaders feared that some interpretations of communist ideology were suggesting that more than one type of socialism exists. If Leninism were judged to be only a Soviet variant in origin, then the vista for Chinese reforms would be much wider. While accepting the Soviet Union as socialist, China would be free to depart sharply from its experience. It could chart a new path to socialism. Perhaps, in the guise of recognizing a common humanism across the socialist and capitalist worlds or of discovering the humanistic inclinations of early Marx, China could reorient its search for reforms as much to the capitalist world as to the socialist. It soon became clear that China's leaders would not tolerate this range of debate.

In 1979–1981 the line was established that there is only one socialist system even though it is manifested in different models. This rather loose and tolerant formulation did not at first seem to show preference for either Yugoslavia or the contemporary Soviet Union, but in the next few years the Soviet Union emerged on top, second only to the Chinese-Hungarian model. In turn, the focus has shifted from three models to two and the two models are now seen as having the potential to converge into one model of socialist reform. Socialism would still be seen to differ according to national characteristics, but these differences would be treated as more minor and would reflect a greater demand for uniformity in discussing reform than expected in the previous approach.

Along with the tendency to find convergence within the socialist world, there also exists a reform agenda to explain how socialism has failed to realize its potential in the past. Its concern is not limited to the economic management system, but would highlight the political system and foreign policy troubles that have afflicted the system. The reform approach would delve deeply into the social consequences of socialist policies and the impact of a country's pre-socialist heritage. The two approaches are, in part, complementary, yet they also are in contrast to each other and are likely to have different implications for international scholarship, for China's internal development, and for foreign relations.

Positive impressions of Soviet reforms are expressed by some Chinese reformers who continue to see the need to struggle against advocates of orthodoxy at home. What they seem to say is that "Look, even Moscow is taking steps toward reform. Further reform in a socialist system is unavoidable." They place less stress on how much more reform has occurred in China than on how much China has in common with the problems of other socialist countries.

The view that socialist countries are converging in their economic reforms tends to narrow the contributions to international scholarship by separating the economy from other aspects of socialism. It stresses China's commonalities with the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe, making them the frame of reference for further reforms in China. Moreover, it has indirect, but not inconsequential, consequences for improved relations between Beijing and Moscow. To the extent that Chinese depict Gorbachev as a committed reformer in tune with China's own domestic policies, this creates a favorable environment for improved relations.

Different implications might follow from a full-scale inquiry into the history of socialism's excesses. Chinese scholarship could quickly establish itself as the leader in the communist world in analyzing the true nature of socialism in all of its manifestations. Such research would likely lead to a sustained program of reform, particularly of the political system, in order to prevent similar mistakes in the future. At the same time, a more critical attitude to Soviet history and to continuing characteristics of the Soviet and Eastern European systems would create a barrier to improved relations.

In 1986 the emerging field of comparative socialism in China has not yet clearly established the direction in which it will develop. On the one hand, the reform agenda for delving deeply into the history of socialism has recently been more fully articulated and, on the other hand, typologies of economic management systems have shifted toward a view of convergence among socialist countries. Further development of this field should help

clarify the ambiguities that abound about the future of Chinese socialism.

Under Gorbachev's vigorous leadership, Soviet reforms are more closely approaching Chinese impressions of socialist commonalities. Whereas the Chinese had for several years been almost alone in pointing to Sino-Soviet reform similarities, world opinion and Soviet opinion was at last shifting in the direction of the Chinese position. Soviet leaders were now stressing how much the two countries had in common as a factor that should help them bridge foreign policy differences. In the absence of Soviet concessions on China's "three obstacles" to better relations, leaders in Beijing were now concerned with distancing themselves somewhat from Moscow. The optimistic mood of emphasizing that both countries are socialist with much in common, in evidence at the welcome given to Arkhipov in December 1984 by Chen Yun and Peng Zhen and not many months later picked up by Gorbachev and his aides, had become a source of concern to Beijing. Chinese reformers, such as Zhao Ziyang, who even in December 1984 had stressed that Chinese and Soviet views of reform differ, were able in 1986 to convince their colleagues that more pressure had to be placed on Moscow for concessions and more reassurance had to be given to Washington, Tokyo, and other trading partners. An article on June 19, 1986 showed China's distress with Soviet efforts to forge a special relationship, i. e., to link similarities in the social system with China to so-called "principles of socialist internationalism." The article concludes, "We must not transplant such theories. On the contrary, we should denounce them."³⁸ Clearly under current circumstances Beijing is not prepared to translate views of converging socialist reforms into a major shift in foreign policy.

Notes

- 1 Gilbert Rozman, *A Mirror for Socialism: Soviet Criticisms of China* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985).
- 2 Li Qiang, "Yao zhuyi dui dangdai zibenzhuyi", *Guangming ribao*, August 14, 1985, p. 3.
- 3 In the political report to the Twenty-Seventh Party Congress, Gorbachev asserts that socialism was built in countries "that were very different from one another" and "each of them advanced to the new formation by its own path." See the *Current Digest of the Soviet Press*, 38, No. 8 (March 26, 1986), 6. For a Chinese review of Soviet thinking on the theory of socialist society, see Su Shaozhi and Cai Shengning, eds., *Shehuizhuyi zai dangdai shijie shang* (Beijing: Guangming ribao chubanshe, 1985), pp. 16-75.
- 4 An upsurge of Western writings in the late 1960s and first half of the 1970s resulted in introductory appeals with little cumulative effect. See Frederic J. Fleron, Jr., *Communist Studies and the Social Sciences* (Chicago: Rand McNally & Co., 1969); Chalmers Johnson, ed., *Change in Communist Systems* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1970); and Leonard J. Cohen and Jane P. Shapiro, eds., *Communist Systems in Comparative Perspective* (Garden City, New York: Anchor Books, 1974). Also see the journal, *Studies in Comparative Communism*, which has kept alive the goals for this field.
- 5 Gilbert Rozman, *The Chinese Debate About Soviet Socialism, 1978-1985* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987), p. 35.
- 6 Nina P. Halpern, "Learning From Abroad: Chinese Views of the East European Experience, January 1977-June 1981," *Modern China*, 11, No. 1 (January 1985), 83-85.
- 7 Gilbert Rozman, "China's Soviet Watchers in the 1980s: A New Era in Scholarship,"

- World Politics*, 37, No. 4 (July 1985), 446–447.
- 8 Liu Keming, “Fakanci,” *Sulian dongou wenti*, No. 1, 1981, pp. 1–2.
- 9 Ding Zeji et al, *Sulian he dongou guojia nongye jingji tizhi de gaige* (Beijing : Nongye chubanshe, 1982), p. 247.
- 10 Liu Guoguang, Liu Suinian, and Zheng Li, *Sulian jingji guanli tizhi kaocha ziliao* (Beijing: Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan, 1984).
- 11 “Zhongguo Sulian dongou xuehui chengli dahui ji shoujie nianhui zaihu zhaokai,” *Sulian dongou wenti*, No. 1, 1983, p. 78.
- 12 Yong Wenyuan and Luo Zong, “Chuangjian you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi jingji moshi,” *Shehuikexue*, No. 3, 1983, pp. 10–25.
- 13 Zhou Xincheng and Li Jun, “Shiying woguo jiakuai chengshi tizhi gaige de xuyao, jinyibu kaizhan Sulian dongou guojia jingji tizhi gaige de yanjiu gongzuo,” *Shijieshi yanjiu dongtai*, No. 11, 1985, p. 41.
- 14 Su Shaozhi, “Prospects for Socialism as Viewed from China’s Experience and Lessons,” *Selected Writings on Studies of Marxism* (Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences), No. 2, 1985, pp. 8–9.
- 15 Shu Yan, “Ba dui Sulian dongou wenti de yanjiu xiangqian tuijinyibu : zaijing bufen Sulian dongou wenti zhuanjia, xuezhe zuotanhui zongshu,” *Shijie jingji yu zhengzhi neican*, No. 11, 1984, p. 1.
- 16 Su Shaozhi, “Shilun shehuizhuyi tizhi fenlei biao zhun,” *Guangming ribao*, October 21, 1985, p. 3 ; Zhao Mingyi, “Shilun dangdai shehuizhuyi wenti hanyi, duixiang ji qi fenlei,” *Guangming ribao*, February 24, 1986.
- 17 Jiang Chunze, “The Development of Socialist Economic Models in the Real World,” (unpublished manuscript, 1986) ; Jiang Chunze, “Guanyu shehuizhuyi jingji tizhi de fenlei yu bijiao,” *Shijie jingji wenhua*, No. 5, 1985, pp. 56–62.
- 18 Su Shaozhi, “Lizu dangdai, ba Makesizhuyi tuixiang qianjin,” *Makesizhuyi yanjiu* (congkan), No. 1, 1983, p. 23.
- 19 For an example of a narrow interpretation of reform focused on the economy, see Yu Guangyuan, “Reform During Socialist Construction in Terms of World and Chinese History,” *Social Sciences in China*, No. 3, 1985, pp. 25–31. For a very positive overview of economic reforms in six Eastern European countries, see Wang Chongjie and Ding Yongning, “Gaige zhi feng chuibian dongou,” *Renmin ribao*, November 13, 1985, p. 2.
- 20 Deng Xiaoping, *Jianshe you Zhongguo tese de shehuizhuyi* (Beijing : Renminchubanshe, 1984).
- 21 Su Shaozhi, “Develop Marxism Under Contemporary Conditions : In Commemoration of the Centenary of the Death of Karl Marx,” *Selected Writings on Studies in Marxism*, No. 2, 1983 (Beijing : Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought), pp. 33–34.
- 22 Ibid., pp. 24–27.
- 23 Su Shaozhi, “Yi xin de yaoqiu xuexi Makesizhuyi lilun,” *Renmin ribao*, October 21, 1985, p. 5 ; Su Shaozhi, “Shilun shehuizhuyi tizhi fenlei biao zhun,” *Guangming ribao*, October 21, 1985, p. 3.
- 24 Su Shaozhi, “Prospect for Socialism as Viewed from China’s Experience and Lessons,” *Selected Writings on Studies of Marxism*, No. 2, 1985 (Beijing : Institute of Marxism-Leninism-Mao Zedong Thought), pp. 9–10.
- 25 Su Shaozhi, “Develop Marxism Under Contemporary Conditions,” : pp. 21–23.
- 26 Zhao Mingyi, “Shilun dangdai shehuizhuyi wenti hanyi, duixiang ji qi fenlei.”

- 27 “Zhongguo Makesizhuyi yanjiuhui zai Nanchang juxing xueshu taolunhui he nianhui,” *Makesizhuji yanjiu*, No. 1, 1985, pp. 308–309.
- 28 Ding Zeji et al, *Sulian he dongou guojia nongye jingji tizhi de gaige*; Zhang Dexin, ed., *Dongou jingji gaige langchao* (Beijing: shishi chubanshe, 1985), pp. 186–195.
- 29 Sun Chengmu, “Sulian jinxiandaishi,” *Zhongguo lishixue nianjian 1982* (Beijing: Renminchubanshe, 1982), pp. 225–228; Chen Zhihua, “Sulian xiandaishi yanjiu de xin jumian ye yi xingcheng,” *Shijie lishi*, No 5, 1984, pp. 5–7.
- 30 Zhongguo shehuikexueyuan MaLiezhuyi Mao Zedong sixiang yanjiusuo, ed., *Lun Buhelin sixiang* (Guiyang: Guizhou renminchubanshe, 1982), pp. i–iii.
- 31 Jiang Chunze, “The Development of Socialist Economic Models in the Real World,” p.12.
- 32 Ibid., pp. 21–26.
- 33 Ibid., p. 27.
- 34 Ibid., pp. 27–28.
- 35 Ibid., pp. 28–36.
- 36 Ding Zeji, et al., *Sulian he dongou guojia nongye jingji tizhi de gaige*.
- 37 Chinese criticisms, both oral and written, of Soviet economic policies take the modest starting point that successful Chinese methods may not be appropriate for Soviet conditions. The Soviet Union is more developed economically and agriculture is more mechanized. These circumstances support a greater role for centralized planning, I was told in several interviews during the winter of 1984–85.
- 38 Shao Tianren, “International Law Undergoing Change,” *China Daily*, June 19, 1986, p. 4.