

far
east

Reporter

FROM STATE-OWNERSHIP
TO
PRIVATE—OWNERSHIP
The Privatization
of
China's Economy

by Maud Russell

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FROM STATE-OWNERSHIP TO PRIVATE—OWNERSHIP

The Privatization of China's Economy

Far East Reporter Introduction

China's economy continues to move more and more rapidly from socialism, dismantling the very core institution of a socialist economy: the public ownership of the means of production. This basic tenet of socialism is being steadily eroded by a nation-wide emergence of private business and industry.

The economic Reform -- "restructuring the economy" -- initiated after 1978, began opening the door to private ownership by giving peasants long-term rights to land use, rights that were virtually ownership rights. It is now becoming clear that from the very start of the Reform, the socialist economy was officially destined to give way to a non-socialist economy.

The significance and scope of privatization is widely affirmed. Ten years after the Reform began, the noted economist, Tong Talin, Secretary-General of the Chinese Society For Research on Restructuring the Economic System, stated: "The private sector which was previously excluded from the socialist economy, was playing an increasingly active role in the country's economic life. Private ownership is one of the most significant results of China's economic reform." (China Daily 9.19.88) The press proclaims the change from public ownership to private ownership: "Thriving Private Business Praised" headlines a China Daily item: "Private enterprise now flourishes across China as an important economic sector which merits the protection of the Constitution." (11.24.88) "Private ownership Becomes A Major Factor In Economic Life" headlines a December 26th 1988 item in China Daily: "China's national economy was formerly dominated by public ownership. But today the country's newly emerging concept of private ownership has become a major factor in China's economic life. This indicates that it is China's long-term principle to develop a private economy."

By October 1987 the Chinese leadership openly stated that it is not the level of public ownership but the level of productivity that is the criterion for the Chinese economy, thus substituting a capitalist criterion for what had been, since 1949, China's socialist criterion.

OFFICIAL AND LEGAL BASES FOR PRIVATIZATION

The first private enterprise emerged with the beginning of the economic Reform; it initiated a heated debate as to whether this sector was capitalist or socialist. Zhao Ziyang, the general-secretary of the Communist Party, solved this by reporting that the sole criterion was productivity, not ownership. In April of the next year (1988) an amendment to the Constitution gave legal status to private enterprise.

"The first private enterprise in China emerged in the 1980s with the beginning of economic and political reforms. A heated debate persisted on whether that sector was capitalist or socialist in nature until October 1987 when the Chinese Communist Party held its 13th Congress. Zhao Ziyang, the general-secretary of the Party, said in his report to the Congress that the sole criterion for the economy is not its level of public ownership but the level of its productivity. To promote productivity, Zhao said, the State should encourage the non-public sector of the economy, that is, the private economy, to expand. At the 7th National People's Congress in April of this year an amendment on the private economy was added to the Constitution. According to the amendment, the private economy is a necessary supplement to the country's public-owned economy. For the first time, private enterprises in China were accorded legal status." China Daily

11.24.88

REGULATIONS

SAFEGUARDING THE LEGAL STATUS OF PRIVATE BUSINESSES

Before 1978 the then existing private businesses were nationalized. After 1978 private businesses started to emerge as "collectives". In those beginning days owners labelled their businesses as "cooperatives" in order not to be condemned as anti-socialist; these owners were cautious, not sure of the consistency of the government's policy. The authorities, recognizing this as a problem, issued regulations aimed at safeguarding the legal status of private businesses.

"China is drafting the first set of regulations governing privately-owned businesses as a move to promote the development of the private sector of the economy, Xinhua reported on 11 March. The regulations, designed to safeguard the legal status of private businesses and protect their interests, will come into effect soon, Ren Zhonglin, head of the State Commission For Industry and Commerce, was quoted as saying."

Ta Kung Pao
3.17.88

"Rules For Private Firms. The State Council, China's highest administrative body, published the country's first regulations on June 28 (1988). The regulations took effect on July first, aimed at promoting the private economy in accordance with the State policy of developing a diversified economic system, with the publicly-owned sector maintaining a dominant position. The regulations define a private enterprise as an individually-owned business with eight or more employees. The new rules and corresponding income tax regulations are seen as a sign of the government's commitment to encourage private enterprise in the wake of a constitutional amendment passed in April by the National People's Congress confirming their legitimacy."

Beijing Review
7.18-24.88

The issue of hiring-permission licenses began in Beijing in April. "Under the regulations, self-employed business people can now hire as many workers as they like. But they must first obtain a hiring-permission license from the Municipal Labour Bureau."

China Daily
11.8.88

CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

Privately-owned businesses and enterprises offer alluring characteristics to non-socialist-minded profit-seeking entrepreneurs.

The owner becomes a boss. He owns the means of production. He can hire workers. Moderate exploitation is allowed. His main concern is making profits; "getting rich is glorious"-- no longer is it the "serve the people" commitment of earlier days.

"The Characteristics of Private Enterprise. The principal features of private enterprise are as follows: private enterprises belong solely to their investors. The relation between private enterprises and their employees is a hired relationship. It is the investor who is the master or boss, and the workers are only wage labourers. The surplus value they create is turned over to the private investor. The main difference between the privately-owned and the publicly-owned sector is who owns the means of production."

Beijing Review
8.22-28.88

"Characteristics of Private Enterprise. High efficiency, a steady work rhythm and a full load have become major features of labour productivity in private enterprises. Better returns: the private sector lays more emphasis on economic returns from investment and uses it as the yardstick for enterprise production and management. Moderate exploitation: the relation between employers and employees in private enterprises is based on a hire system. Employers use surplus labour value created by their employees for developing production and their own consumption. The private sector lays stress on the laws of value and market demand. It is concerned mainly with making profits."

Beijing Review
10.3-9.88

Individuals, including intellectuals, working in the State-owned section of the economy, are enticed by the financial betterment offered by the private sector.

Deng Xiao-ping's "get rich" slogan and the government's approval and promotion of the private sector is freeing many from any question about loyalty to socialism; they are leaving the guaranteed iron-bowl wages of the State sector and openly entering the profit-seeking business world.

China Daily tells of two such individuals and their profit-seeking aspirations

"Early this year the young man in fashionable denims was simply Youth League secretary at Shanghai University. Now he is the manager of the privately-operated Tongdo Scientific and Technological Consultative Bureau. 'I wanted to fully tap my potential and it couldn't be done as a secretary,' explained Sun Aiguo. Sun says that he believes that private business gives young people a greater impetus to succeed, because competition in this newly emerging sector is stronger than in State-run enterprises. Sun is typical of the new breed of Chinese intellectuals who see private business as the best means of realizing their aspirations and utilizing their talents. According to economic experts, their number is growing every day.

"Zhang Chen is another example. He was one of China's first graduate economists, with a degree from the Beijing Institute of Commerce. His theoretical papers on the country's economic reform have won praise from serious financial thinkers. But he was tired of merely studying the economy on paper. 'I want a private experimental plot on which to practice my economic ideas and the only way to get it was to set up my own business. So he left his teaching job at a workers university and opened his factory in July 1986. This 33-year-old owner of the Wei'erda Beverage Factory, the largest registered private company in Shanghai, says he tends his factory like a plot of experimental farm land. Like many of China's current crop of bright young businessmen, beverage-businessman Zhang is a realistic risk-taker."

China Daily
11.22.88

THE GROWING FIELD OF PRIVATE ENTERPRISE

Having been given the greenlight of the Reform, the October 1987 statement about the changing criterion, the Constitutional amendment, the Regulations and the official spelling-out of the characteristics of private business, individuals, groups, governments (municipal and provincial) and investing entrepreneurs rapidly proceeded to enter the field of private business.

Some of these private business people are farmers who became rich under the Reform's Responsibility System. Some, uneasy about their wealth, feel impelled to start a socially-approved service business such as an old-folks home, an airplane service for spraying insecticides, a hotel, a forestry-development business. Some are peasants turned into surplus laborers who become urban hawkers, setting up stalls on city streets. Some are poor students who, like the peasants, set up stalls. Some peasants with more imaginative business skills, form a group and invest in a large-scale business such as chicken-raising.

"Previously private owners consisted of small peddlars and farmers. In recent years more than 900,000 unemployed youths, mostly senior middle school graduates in cities and towns, have become private businessmen. State employees, lured by the more flexible and freer individual economy, have given up their jobs in State and collectively-run enterprises to become private businessmen. More recently polytechnic and university students and senior technicians have given up their iron-bowl guaranteed wages in government organizations to start their own businesses. The rise of individual ownership has greatly promoted the development of China's service industry."

China Daily 2.12.88

"Liang Guoguang, 39-year-old peasant, in 1985 spent 130,000 yuan (US\$35,135) to build an old folks home, the first of its kind, in the Beijing suburbs, with money he had earned, first as a welder and then in the transportation business. Now he is building a refinery to process used oil; and he is setting up a foundation to run the old folks home in case he gets into difficulties."

Ta Kung Pao 11.17.88

"Zhejiang Province, which has 40,000 private enterprises with eight employees or more, has helped farmer Lifu Jing to set up the country's first private airplane service. He uses a biplane to spray pesticides over wheat fields and forests. Farmer Xu Jingfa has set up the country's first private forestry development company in Yenhxu County in Jiangxi Province." China Daily 11.22.88

"Individuals, mostly farmers who became rich in recent years, now operate 39 homes for elderly people without children in China's rural areas." CD 2.2.89

"Zhang Baoling, a 50-year-old manager of the Yiqin Hotel in Beijing, was granted a license for her business on December 1. The hotel, one of the first eight private enterprises in Beijing, now employs eleven workers. It has a registered capital of 750,000 yuan. The hotel's workers are paid 100 to 300 yuan a month, the same as in State-run hotels."

China Daily
12.19.88

"Three peasants who invested 16 million yuan to build a chicken farm are now the proud owners of the largest private chicken-raising operation in China. The trio are now considering exporting their poultry products on the international market."

Ta Kung Pao
11.10.88

PUBLIC SERVICE AGENCIES
GIVING WAY TO PRIVATE BUSINESS

Medicine. In pre-1978 China medical service was a part of China's socialist set-up. But by 1985 people-run hospitals and private clinics had begun proliferating. Today many of these are now serviced by trained medical personnel and by retired medical professionals. The government has regulations that help promote the spread of private medical service. Even moonlighting by government-employed doctors is permitted.

"Private Clinics Spread in Beijing. Various private clinics and people-run hospitals are seen everywhere on the streets and lanes of Beijing. Private clinics and hospitals began in 1985. At first most of the doctors engaged in dentistry, bone-setting and massage as well as as other kinds of therapies. Now the private clinics and hospitals have almost as many departments as the State-run hospitals have. The growth of private clinics and hospitals, on the one hand, resulted from State policies and its tax-free stimulation; on the other hand a great number of medical personnel began to retire from the State-run hospitals, so private medical institutions tried to recruit them. An official from the Beijing Public Health Bureau said that Beijing had 1,731 registered private doctors and 131 people-run hospitals."

Beijing Review
11.21-27.88

"The Ministry of Public Health has decided to let private doctors own their own pharmacies and open joint clinics or hospitals. As incentive measures, the practitioners will be permitted to charge their patients higher prices for consultancy and prescriptions. The number of licensed private practitioners has increased from 80,000 in 1984, 116,000 in 1985, 126,700 in 1986 to 130,000 in 1987."

China Daily

1.8.89

"Wang, a doctor with the Harbin Red Cross Children's Hospital, makes a salary of 90 yuan a month, but he can double that by moonlighting two hours a night for eight nights in a month. According to regulations adopted recently, he is entitled to work extra hours for extra pay. The government made the move following complaints from doctors that they were not being treated as well as others. The catch phrase among doctors goes: 'The person who performs surgery on the head earns less than the person who cuts hair from the head.'"

Ta Kung Pao

1.12.89

Book Publishing. The State-owned Bookstore is being challenged by a privately-owned publishing service that has formed a nation-wide network.

"Private Publishing Booms In China. The privately-owned publishing and distributing service has formed a network nation-wide. The Xinhua Bookstore, with a staff of 180,000 and thousands of branches all over the country, the only State-owned distribution body known as 'the main channel' of books, has been challenged by individual publishers and distributors in the past five years. The private sector of China's Book Service, known as the 'second channel,' has more than 40,000 employees and a national distribution network of more than 30,000 book stores and vendors. Private publishers can get works into the hands of readers much quicker than State-owned publishing houses. Publishing authorities are encouraging the private sector to become more active. Ta Kung Pao 1.12.89

Public Utilities. The Ministry of Construction announced that public utilities, including power, heat, coal and water as well as busses which have been operated as government monopolies, will be opened to individuals to be run as businesses.

"Monopoly On Utilities In Cities Set To Break Up. Public utilities in cities in China will be opened to individuals to run as businesses for the first time since the Republic was founded in 1949, Minister of Construction, Lin Hanxiang said yesterday. Until now all public utilities, including power, gas, coal, water and busses have been operated as government monopolies. However the development of urban utilities will now be based on the principle that investor and operator should both benefit, Lin told an ongoing national construction conference in Beijing. He said the State aims to have utilities financed mostly by users as the country turns to a commodity economy from a planned one."

China Daily
12.17.88

PRIVATE ENTERPRISES AS MAINSTAYS OF LOCAL ECONOMY

"Private enterprises which were long suppressed are now encouraged by government policy and are flourishing" so states China Daily of November 9th 1988. In city after city across China private businesses are becoming the mainstays of the local economy.

"In Shisi, a newly emerging city in coastal Fujiang Province, private business constitutes the mainstay of the local economy. The city, with a population of 25,000, now has a dozen private enterprises each with a total annual output value of over ten million yuan.

"The city of Wenzhou, in Zhejiang Province, now has more than 20,000 private enterprises. They make up the principal part of the city's economy and have increased local tax revenues to the State to 600 million yuan in 1987 compared with 80 million yuan in 1976.

"Shanghai has more than 70,000 private enterprises, or nearly one third of the nation's total.

"Private enterprises in the city of Ningbo alone can provide products for export worth more than 10 million yuan.

"Private enterprises in Fuzhou, Xiamen and Lianyungang have won their local government's support and organized chambers of commerce. Private entrepreneurs have been assured that the current rectification of the economic order will not restrict the development of the private economy."

China Daily

11.9.88

"The city government of the city of Wuhan, the capital of central China's Hupei Province, has designated an experimental zone for the development of private economy. The official said the zone is being set up to give full play to the market mechanism and change the ownership systems in the production and sales of small commodities. The government will make experiments in carrying out the principle of 'the State regulates the market while the market guides enterprises.'"

China Daily

6.13.88

"Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning Province, has seen private enterprises increase from 100 to 2,103 during the past five months. More than 95% of these newly-set up private enterprises are located in the city's suburbs and are run by individuals, families and groups. This burst of private enterprise is a result of the country's ongoing rural economic reform. Thanks to the reform a large surplus of labour force has surfaced."

China Daily

6.4.88

The city of Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, has gone even farther in firming up privatization: by injecting foreign capitalist entrepreneurs into the locally-owned enterprises. Foreigners can buy the property rights of local industries; they can also join in the management of the factories after buying the property rights. Also they will receive preferential treatment.

"The municipal government of Chengdu, capital of China's Sichuan Province, has decided to transfer, either partially or totally, the industrial property rights of 26 State-owned enterprises to foreigners. A city official said that foreigners will

be allowed to negotiate directly with the enterprises without having to go through government departments. A Chengdu official in charge of economic reform said that the 26 enterprises are advanced in technology, equipment and management and are sound financially. 'They are major money-makers for the city,' he said. 'After buying the rights, foreign investors will be entitled to join in the management of the factories and the city government will provide preferential treatment with regard to the supply of water, electricity, gas and raw materials, as well as loans,' the official said." Ta Kung Pao

9.22.88

FOREIGN CAPITALIST ADVICE
AND
PARTICIPATION IN THE PROCESS OF PRIVATIZATION

Since 1978 China has increasingly sought, received and used the advice of foreign capitalist economists, professors, teachers, technical and financial experts, lawyers, government leaders and the World Bank. In addition China has invited foreign capitalist entrepreneurs to participate in China's economy in joint ventures and in wholly-foreign-owned investments in China.

Since all these foreign advisors and investors come from a private-economy system it is unavoidable that major elements of private business have been injected into China's economic system. The Chinese leaders' continued and increasing pressure for this economic relationship with capitalists indicates that this seemingly subsequent injection of privatization is no mere happenstance. Rather, the implanting of capitalist techniques and principles is a long-planned policy, a policy leading away from China's socialist economy toward a private economy.

In September 1988 a conference arranged by Chinese and Americans was held in Beijing. More than forty experts met to explore "the prospects of economic reform." A major participant was the noted American economist, Milton Friedman. He stressed the need to "proceed with privatization as rapidly as possible, to give the enterprises to the people, sell State-owned ones that are losing money to private owners."

"A conference aimed at exploring the problems as well as the prospects of economic reform in China was held in September, sponsored by Fudan University and the Washington Cato Institute. More than forty experts, mostly economic scholars, addressed the conference.

The Cato Institute gathered Milton Friedman (Nobel Laureate), William Niskanen, a former member of the President's Council of Economic Advisors, Peter Bernholz, a member of the Council of Advisors of the German Ministry of Economists, and David Lampton, President of the National Committee on US-China Relations. Friedman enlarged on the theme 'market' -- 'it marks a general trend sweeping the world, a trend toward transferring government-owned enterprises to private hands.' Friedman suggested that the way to expedite the transition of surplus agricultural labour to industry is to proceed with privatization as rapidly as possible."

Beijing Review

10.24-30.88

"A journalist asked Friedman to recommend a solution to the problem of controlling the money supply without causing an overall increase in unemployment. 'There is definitely only one possible solution,' he said, 'Give the enterprises to the people. Try to sell the State-owned ones that are losing money to private owners.'"

Beijing Review

10.10-16.88

More and more areas of Chinese territory are being opened to foreign investment and preferential treatment is now available in any part of China; authority to grant such treatment is now shared with local governments; State-owned enterprises are being turned into joint enterprises; this is called 'upgrading' them and the "upgrading" includes allowing foreigners to manage or play a dominant role in the joint ventures.

So, with the participation of foreigners from capitalist countries, privatization spreads across China

"Many of the preferential treatments that were granted to foreign investors only in the special economic zones are now applied to all foreign investors in any part of China. Liaoning, Jiangsu and Zhejiang provinces see a great increase in their open areas. Liaoning used to have only one open city, Dalian, but now the province has 27 open counties and cities. Many ensuing specific policies have also been formulated. The new policies give local governments the right to authorize the setting up of Sino-foreign equity and constructed joint ventures and wholly foreign-owned enterprises."

China Daily
9.30.88

"Wholly Foreign Owned Enterprises Grow By 700%. China approved 5,890 foreign-funded enterprises last year, of which the number of wholly foreign owned enterprises grew by 700% as compared with the previous year, according to a spokesman for the Ministry of Foreign Economic Relations and Trade (MOFERT). Liu Yimin, Director of the Foreign Investment Department of the Ministry said the Chinese Government will continue to encourage Sino-foreign economic cooperation."

Ta Kung Pao
1.26.89

THE ECONOMIC LAWS OF CAPITALIST HONG KONG TO BE APPLIED IN MAINLAND CHINA

In October 1988 it was announced that the economic laws and regulations of Hong Kong would be systematically introduced in the special economic zone of Shenzhen, an area the government had already decided to list as an independent entity.

This announcement was followed by Deng Xiaoping's proposal that "several Hong Kongs should be created on the mainland."

That the economic laws and regulations of the notoriously capitalistic Hong Kong would now be applied to a section of China's economy further demonstrates the current Chinese leaders' non-socialist "prospects of economic reform."

"Shenzhen To Introduce Hong Kong Economic Laws. China will systematically introduce the economic laws and regulations of Hong Kong to Shenzhen, located in Guangdong Province and the country's first special economic zone. An official from the State Commission For Restructuring The Economy revealed this at a meeting held recently in Shenyang in Liaoning Province. The official made the remark when he talked of the Central Government's decision on listing Shenzhen as an independent entity in the State Plan. Before this the nine cities of Shenyang, Dalian, Chungking, Wuhan, Harbin, Guangzhou, Xi'an, Ningpo and Qingdao were assigned as independent entities in the State Plan which means that these cities will all enjoy provincial-level rights, especially in their economic activities. The official said China's existing urban economic laws and regulations had proved inadequate for the demands of the current urban reform and open policy."

Ta Kung Pao
10.27.88

SOCIALIST OWNERSHIP ATTACKED BY CHINESE ECONOMISTS

In early January 1989 a revealing article appeared in the Chinese press. It was a lengthy questioning of the validity of the socialist principle of State ownership.

This astounding article was written by three Chinese economists, all highly placed Chinese Communist Party members, and by them presented to the general secretary of the Party, Zhao Ziyang, for discussion by high officials.

These three influential economists see the economic Reform begun after 1978 as a way to end socialist controls of industry. They present the problems involved in the Reform effort and the views and arguments of the various proponents and opponents of suggested ways to end these socialist controls.

The control element discussed was the most expeditious method, the one that would best meet with the least public opposition.

Their proposal for ending State ownership of industry received extensive coverage in various official Chinese publications, indicating that the proposal is completely in line with the government's ten-year economic Reform Plan to move away from socialism and institute full-scale capitalism.

This drastic proposal for ending State ownership confirms Far East Reporter's foregoing chronicle of the steady destructuring of the socialist principle of ownership.

A few quotations from lengthy excerpts from the three economists' article as they appeared in China Daily early in January will suffice to show the article's orientation.

"Now Chinese reform has come to a critical point....

"A genuinely market-oriented reform requires the State to cede its power and responsibilities on almost all economic fields to economic bodies....

"In the period 1978 to 1984 enterprises began to develop their own interests, replacing the State monopoly of enterprises' financial affairs....

"In 1982 few people foresaw the tremendous impact that the market-oriented reform would have on the foundations of socialist ownership....

"Property rights are the key to the restructuring of the economy....."

"Withering Away Of State Enterprise"

What the three Chinese economists are recommending is well on the way. Far Eastern Economic Review observes: "China's State-run industrial section is shrinking, largely spontaneously; State control of enterprises is being relinquished in favor of more diversified forms of ownership. Last year China had 7.3 million industrial enterprises. Some 98,000 were State-owned, 1.83 million were collectives, 5.58 million were in private hands; the remaining enterprises were mainly foreign-joint ventures." (9.8.88)

FAR EAST REPORTER CONCLUSION

The post-1978 Reform of the structure of China's economy is reaching a decisive stage, with privatization well on the road to replacing the socialist principle of public ownership.

The leaders of the Communist Party give lip service to the socialist principle with their constant affirming that "public ownership takes the dominant role." However, this stance is vitiated by their actual policies and practice.

On the one hand, socialist ownership is being dismembered into various economic sectors -- the privately-owned sector, household-operated-businesses, Sino-foreign joint enterprises, Sino-foreign contracted joint enterprises and wholly-owned foreign enterprises on Chinese soil.

On the other hand, the radical, qualitative change in China's economy is glossed over as a change "from one level of ownership" to "The level of productivity." Actually, the change-over is not from one level of ownership to another within the socialist system, but is from one kind of social system to another, that is, from socialism to capitalism. Nor does "the level of productivity refer to a new criterion within the socialist system. Actually, the productivity referred to is that of capitalism, compared to that of socialism.

Equally, the Communist Party is enmeshed in this turnaround and is openly becoming the party pressing for capitalism. The deputy-secretary of the Anhui provincial Communist Party, Meng Fukiang, said it categorically: "Our policy toward the private economy is to encourage and support its growth." Yet millions joined the Communist Party because they believed in communism; that for the time being their views are scarcely reported does not mean their views have changed.

Thus privatization approaches the final stage in the post-1978 economic "reform" process -- a process which has altered the direction of China's economy: a moving from socialism and an advancing into the world capitalist order.

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