

Public ownership and socialist forms of labor

Zhaozi Rong
Anhui University, Hefei, China

2

Received 22 September 2025
Accepted 22 September 2025

Abstract

Purpose – Given the inevitability of both market economy and distribution according to work, a socialist market economy becomes inevitable. Consequently, socialist public ownership exhibits a series of significant differences from public ownership in the advanced stage of communism, and correspondingly, labor relations within the public ownership economy manifest in distinctive historical forms.

Design/methodology/approach – The socialist form of labor can be conceptualized as equal labor – an egalitarian relationship measured by labor, where labor equality is built upon the foundation of unequal labor capacities. Equal labor reflects both the historical progressiveness and the historical limitations of socialist labor; the combination of these dual characteristics constitutes the historical nature of socialist labor in a complete sense.

Findings – Due to the inherent contradictions within equal labor, its realization requires a special institutional arrangement called the “Public Property Agency System”. The Communist Party of China (CPC) serves as the “active agent” of public property rights. The leadership of the CPC, as an institutional arrangement, is embedded within the foundation of equal labor.

Originality/value – This article analyzes the deficiencies in relevant discussions found in political economy textbooks (socialist sections) over an extended period; reviews related academic research discussions and demonstrates the rationality and significance of equal labor through comparative analysis of different theoretical perspectives.

Keywords Historical features of public ownership, Socialist forms of labor, Equal labor, Agent of public property rights, The staged nature of the development of equal labor

Paper type Translated paper

Public ownership of the means of production is a crucial concept in socialist political economy, arguably one of its most important theoretical categories. The predominance of public ownership alongside the common development of diverse forms of ownership constitutes an essential component of the basic socialist economic system, determining the nature of the socialist market economy system. Mao Zedong noted that “the overall structure of the Soviet textbook begins with the transformation of ownership systems, first addressing the transformation of capitalist ownership into socialist state ownership, and individual economic ownership into collective ownership. Such an approach is acceptable in principle” (Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 1993, p. 324). “If we were to write a socialist political economy, we could also start from ownership systems,” beginning with the transformation of ownership of the means of production, “and then proceed to address the contradictions between the two forms of socialist public ownership, as well as the trends in the development of these contradictions and methods for their resolution” (Mao, 1999, pp. 137–138). Indeed, most textbooks on socialist political economy published in China have, in various forms, adopted an analytical framework that begins with public ownership as its starting point. Typically, one to two chapters are devoted to discussing the history of ownership transformation, followed by one or multiple chapters examining “socialist public ownership of the means of production.” These sections address the status of public ownership (as the foundation of socialist production relations) and its functions



China Political Economy
Vol. 8 No. 1, 2025
pp. 2–18
Emerald Publishing Limited
2516–1652
DOI 10.1108/CPE-06-2025-048

© Zhaozi Rong. Originally published in Simplified Chinese in *Teaching and Research* in 2025: Rong, Z. (2025), “The Historical Nature of Public Ownership and the Socialist Forms of Labor”, *Teaching and Research*, Vol. 2025 No. 6, pp. 68–80. <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.0257-2826.2025.06.007>

This is a translation of an article originally posted here <https://doi.org/10.3969/j.issn.0257-2826.2025.06.007>

(such as the perceived advantages of public ownership), as well as the extension of socialist public ownership (namely, state ownership and collective ownership). However, they seldom explore the conceptual connotation of public ownership, nor do they sufficiently discuss the historical characteristics and internal contradictions of socialist public ownership. As a result, the concept of ownership presented to readers is reduced largely to legal relations governing the possession of objects; socialist public ownership appears merely as the public possession of the means of production. The distinctions between socialist public ownership and communist public ownership are rarely examined, while the specific forms of socialist labor shaped by socialist public ownership have been nearly neglected in theoretical discourse. When reading the *Political Economy Textbook (Volume II)* of the Soviet Union, [Mao Zedong \(1999, p. 137\)](#) pointed out: “Failing to base its explanations on an analysis of contradictions represents a key characteristic—and the greatest shortcoming—of this book. As a science, it ought to proceed from the analysis of contradictions; otherwise, it cannot be considered a true science.” This critique applies to the sections of this book dealing with socialist public ownership. Also, it extends to the majority of subsequent socialist political economy textbooks influenced by the Soviet model. If the development of socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics is to advance meaningfully based on previous achievements, this logical flaw must be addressed.

1. The historical nature of socialist public ownership

The century-long history of socialist practice clearly demonstrates that socialist public ownership, both in its substance and form, exhibits distinct characteristics that differ markedly from the public ownership envisaged by Marx for the advanced stage of communism ([Rong, 2024](#)). Assuming the basic soundness of Marx and Engels’ projections regarding public ownership in a future society, the qualitative differences between existing socialist public ownership and future communist public ownership include at least the following aspects:

First, socialist public ownership is organized and led by the state apparatus under the proletarian dictatorship, in which the state even acts directly as the subject of ownership of the means of production. Therefore, socialist public ownership does not yet constitute an “association of free individuals.” Socialist laborers are not yet “all-round human beings” freed from the constraints of the old division of labor, nor are they “whole persons” who treat labor as their foremost life need. They are thus unable to form a true “association of free individuals,” especially not on a society-wide and massive scale. The realization of “the workers becoming masters of their own affairs” under socialist public ownership is advanced through the state apparatus led by the Party, whereby the state represents all people in exercising ownership over the means of production. The Marxist party’s mission to “change the world” first aims to establish a socialist system with public ownership as its foundation – a goal consistent with the fundamental and long-term interests of the broadest masses of people. The Communist Party of China (CPC) adheres to a people-centered philosophy of governance, managing publicly owned means of production on behalf of the people, continuously deepening reforms of state-owned enterprises, and improving their corporate governance. The Party promoted agricultural cooperativization and the socialist transformation of urban handicrafts, supporting and guiding working people in their ongoing exploration of effective forms of collective ownership in practice. Thus, socialist public ownership is established under the leadership of a Marxist party, embodying what Lukács termed the unity of working-class consciousness and the direction of history ([Lukács, 1999](#)). The socialist state, under Party leadership, constitutes the subject of ownership in the system of state ownership. The emergence and development of state ownership did not rely on spontaneous forces from below, nor was it a product of market mechanisms.

Second, socialist public ownership does not yet constitute social ownership that encompasses all means of production. It exists in two fundamental forms: state ownership and collective ownership. Under state ownership, the state represents all citizens in

collectively possessing the means of production, which are primarily concentrated in urban industries and commerce. However, this represents only a portion of society's total means of production. Even under a highly centralized planned economy, the state-owned sector did not cover all urban industrial and commercial activities, let alone the vast majority of agricultural means of production. Collective ownership generally refers to rural collectives but also includes some urban industrial and commercial collectives. It constitutes a localized, regional, small-scale and highly fragmented form of public ownership, which remains far removed from the future vision of society-wide public ownership of the means of production. If social ownership is strictly defined as a form of public ownership in which all members of society collectively possess all social means of production, then it must be unequivocally stated that socialist public ownership, in its current form, is not social ownership.

Third, socialist public property rights possess the exclusivity necessary for market transactions. Socialist public ownership exists and develops within a market environment, enabling – and indeed requiring – deep integration with a market economy characterized by diverse forms of property rights. As it coexists with other forms of ownership, public ownership must define its own property boundaries to engage in market transactions, maintaining exclusive rights against other entities beyond these boundaries. This form of exclusivity inherent in public property rights may be termed “external exclusivity.” Soviet Communists were among the first to recognize the necessity of commodity exchange in socialist practice. Lenin introduced the “New Economic Policy,” which emphasized commodity exchange between state-owned industry and individual farmers. Stalin later argued that commodity exchange persists among associated socialist producers – the state, collective farms and cooperatives (Stalin, 1952, p. 13). In doing so, he identified the rationale for a commodity economy from the internal structure of public ownership, thereby advancing Marx's theory of commodity economy (Bai and Fu, 1989). Mao Zedong acknowledged Stalin's theoretical contribution but also noted its incompleteness, emphasizing that while the coexistence of two types of ownership is a primary condition for commodity production, the ultimate fate of commodity production is closely tied to the level of societal productive forces (Association of National History of the People's Republic of China, 1998, p. 58). With the gradual development of China's socialist market economy, comprehensive commodity exchange between the public sector and other forms of ownership has expanded significantly. Since socialist public ownership does not cover all means of production, it necessarily exhibits exclusivity in its ownership rights, much like other forms of ownership. This relationship does not require “mutual recognition as private owners,” yet it indeed entails “treating one another as outsiders” due to clearly defined property boundaries and divergent interests (Marx, 2009a, p. 107). Therefore, socialist public ownership can be embedded within a market economy, participating in the social division of labor through commodity exchange among independent producers.

Fourth, socialist public ownership possesses dual determinacy. There is a deeper reason for its compatibility with a market economy, which lies in the fact that the socialist public ownership of the means of production is inviolably linked to the individual ownership of labor power, and we refer to this mode of distribution of production conditions as the dual determinacy of socialist public ownership. Marx argued that the mode of combining the material conditions of production (means of production) with the personal conditions (labor power) determines a society's mode of production, which in turn depends on how these two types of production factors are owned. The distribution of production factors evolves historically – not only in terms of public versus private ownership of the means of production (as seen in slave, feudal and capitalist systems), but also in the ownership of labor power: from the slave owner's complete possession of the person, to the feudal lord's dependent possession of the serf, to the capitalist system where laborers freely dispose of their own labor power as individual owners. Under socialism, an exclusive ownership relationship exists between public owners of the means of production and individual owners of labor power. This relation of right and will remains a form of “bourgeois right”. Since this exclusive relationship operates

within the public sector, we term it the “internal exclusivity” of public property rights (Rong, 1996; Zhang, 2016). The dual determinacy of ownership – covering both material and human factors of production within the public economy – not only underpins the distribution of the means of consumption according to work but enables publicly owned enterprises to allocate factors of production (especially labor) via market mechanisms. It is also a key reason why state-owned enterprise (SOE) reform could ultimately adopt the form of state capital. Only in the higher stage of communism, when productive forces exhibit fundamentally new characteristics, does labor cease to be merely a means of livelihood and become “the prime necessity of life.” Only then can society inscribe on its banners: “From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (Marx, 2009b, p. 436). At this stage, systematic contradictions between individual and collective interests disappear, the exclusivity between public and individual possession vanishes and “bourgeois right” is transcended. The ownership system of communist society embodies not only the unity of public and individual ownership of the means of production, but also the unity of public and individual ownership of labor power. This is the meaning of Marx’s concept of “re-establishing individual property based on the common ownership of the means of production” (Marx, 2009c, p. 874). A century ago, Lenin sharply observed in *The State and Revolution*: “From the bourgeois standpoint, it is easy to declare such a social system ‘pure utopia.’” Then he emphasized, “the great socialists, in foreseeing its arrival, assumed as its prerequisite neither the present productivity of labor nor the present ordinary person” (Lenin, 1995a, p. 198). Socialism is an independent social formation distinct from the higher stage of communism. Throughout this formation, public ownership of the means of production remains combined with individual ownership of labor power. Both the development of productive forces and the well-rounded human development require a long period before the socialist mode of production can gradually evolve into the communist mode.

Ultimately, the reason socialist public ownership and the market economy can coexist lies in their shared foundation in the productive forces: “Public ownership of the means of production and the commodity economy both rest on the foundation of large-scale socialized production” (Fang, 1991). The fundamental nature of these productive forces is characterized by a continuously deepening social division of labor driven by occupational specialization, with labor remaining predominantly embedded in direct production processes dominated by machine systems; prolonged working hours persist, and the amount of labor input in direct production remains proportional to the output of wealth. Therefore, labor time (as embodied in commodities) remains the fundamental measure of wealth, and social labor can only be effectively organized through a market economy. The current qualitative leap in productive forces, marked by informatization, intelligentization and greening, signals an impending fundamental transformation of human productive forces. However, in the short term, this shift is unlikely to alter the basic characteristics of contemporary productive forces described above. Therefore, throughout all stages of the total production process (production, exchange, distribution and consumption), socialism with Chinese characteristics continues to operate on the same principle as the commodity economy – the exchange of equal amounts of labor. Thus, the compatibility between public ownership and the market economy is not only possible but also necessary for a considerable period to come.

2. The process of exploring socialist forms of labor

Marxist political economy holds that ownership of the means of production is not merely a relationship of property rights or willful control; it is primarily a social relationship within the production process and a relationship between people engaged in labor. To grasp the essential characteristics of socialist public ownership of the means of production, it is necessary to thoroughly analyze the features of relations among workers within a public-ownership economy, clearly define the specific characteristics that distinguish socialist labor from all other social forms of labor and understand the socialist form of labor.

2.1 Deficiencies in the formulations of textbooks of political economy

Practical socialists initially lacked a full understanding of this issue or at least failed to adequately emphasize this dimension of socialist labor relations in their theoretical syntheses of practice. The Soviet textbook of political economy (on socialism), published in the 1950s, defined the social relations among producers within socialist enterprises (public ownership enterprises) as “relations of comradely cooperation and socialist mutual aid” ([Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R., 1959](#), p. 442). This formulation was widely adopted in political economy textbooks in China before the reform and opening-up era. The primary deficiency of this formulation is that it fails to address the inherent contradictions specific to socialist public ownership. It emphasized only that “bourgeois right” had been abolished in relation to the means of production and that relationships of mutual assistance and cooperation exist among workers based on their shared fundamental interests. However, it failed to acknowledge that the other part of “bourgeois right” persists in the distribution of products and the allocation of labor among members of society. Consequently, contradictions of interest still exist between individual workers and the collective, contradictions which can only be mediated through “equal rights predicated on inequality.” The modifier “comradely” is particularly semantically vague – If it intends to emphasize selfless dedication underpinned by common ideals and a blurring of individual interests, then one must ask: within socialist economic relations, does the “bourgeois right” that makes one “as hard and exacting as Shylock, unwilling to work half an hour more than others, or to receive a penny less” ([Lenin, 1995a](#), p. 198) still exist? Is there still a necessity for accounting and auditing the labor process, and for the principle of equivalent exchange in market transactions? This theoretical formulation, focusing solely on the “fundamental unity of interests” in the production relations of public ownership, is clearly one-sided. The need for theoretical legitimization may have influenced theories that exclusively highlight the positive attributes of socialist labor during the initial establishment of a new social system. However, such an approach undoubtedly hinders a profound understanding of the historical nature of this new socio-economic system and the ongoing development and improvement of socialist production relations through reform.

The *Political Economy Textbook (On Socialism)*, edited by Yao Nai and others (hereinafter referred to as the “Yao’s edition”), made valuable strides in deepening theoretical understanding. It asserted: “In accordance with public ownership of the means of production, the interrelationships among people in production must inevitably be comradely relations of equality, mutual assistance, and cooperation” ([Yao et al., 1961](#), p. 69). This formulation added the term “equality” to the original Soviet textbook’s phrasing and provided a profound interpretation of its meaning: “Under the socialist system, the interrelationships among people in production—whether between leaders and the led, managers and direct producers, intellectual and manual workers, workers and farmers, or among workers or farmers themselves—are all comradely relations of equality, mutual assistance, and cooperation. Among laborers, although individuals differ in ability, cultural level, and assigned roles, they are all masters of the state and enterprises; no one has the right to claim a privileged position in social production. Here, there are no exploiters or exploited, no ‘superior’ or ‘inferior’ people. Anyone who steadfastly follows the socialist path and diligently contributes their utmost to society is a beneficial member of society and deserves respect” ([Yao et al., 1961](#), pp. 72–73). The author focuses the analysis of the socialist public ownership economy on the equal rights of workers as “masters of the state and enterprises”, while acknowledging differences in individual capabilities and roles. Then the Yao’s edition delves into “correctly handling interpersonal relations in enterprises,” offering a detailed analysis of China’s “democratic centralism in enterprise management” and the system of “two participations, one reform, and three combinations” in China’s SOEs ([Yao et al., 1961](#), pp. 76–85). Behind these descriptions, the concept of equal labor relations in the public ownership economy clearly emerges [1].

Subsequently, including well into the era of reform and opening-up, textbooks on political economy in China did not continue to explore this theoretical trajectory. Most persisted in using the formulation from the Soviet textbook – “relations of comradely cooperation and

mutual assistance” – entirely overlooking the critical importance of the term “equality” in this context. A few exceptions, such as the second edition of the Southern edition of *Political Economy on Socialism*, adopted the phrase “relations of equal mutual assistance and cooperation among socialist laborers” when discussing socialist labor ([Writing Group of Sixteen Southern Universities for Political Economy Textbook, 1982](#), p. 99). However, even these texts failed to analyze the tension between individual differences in capacity and position and the entitlement to equal rights, as Yao’s edition had done. From the 1990s onward, most textbooks on socialist political economy have exhibited a declining interest in this issue. In abandoning the idealized, even somewhat “utopian,” notion of “comradely relations of mutual assistance and cooperation,” they also ceased to specifically examine interpersonal relations in the public ownership system or abstract theoretical concepts such as the “socialist forms of labor.”

2.2 The theoretical approach of “political economy of labor”

Academic discourse on this subject continued during this period. In the early 1980s, Wu Jixue, Zhu Ling and others introduced “autonomous labor” as an economic category to conceptualize the socialist form of labor ([Wu and Zhu, 1982](#); [Wu, 1983](#)). As [Wu \(1983\)](#) argued, “Marx took ‘capital’ as the core object of his study in capitalist political economy . . . Socialist political economy, in contrast, should examine ‘autonomous labor’ as the mode and form of social wealth production, unveil the economic relations embedded within it, and thereby ultimately disclose the laws governing socialist economic movement”. In 1987, Wu Jixue published his monograph, *Essentials of Autonomous Labor*, systematically outlining a framework for constructing a system of socialist political economy around autonomous labor. He contended that the “political economy of labor” reflects the essential nature of socialist economic relations and embodies the fundamental opposition between socialist and capitalist political economy ([Wu, 1987](#), p. 11). [Wu \(1987](#), p. 167). He further elaborated: “Because laborers have gained autonomous rights over their own labor power and means of production, enabling them to exercise the right to labor directly combined with the means of production, united laborers can formulate scientifically sound plans based on economic laws prior to the social production process. They then consciously allocate the total social labor according to these plans. During the production process, workers themselves are the autonomous masters of the process, managing both social production and their own affairs. After production, workers are the autonomous owners of all products of their labor.” Consequently, wage labor is transformed into autonomous labor, and the latter represents the socialist form of labor and serves as the dominant economic category within the socialist economic system ([Wu, 1987](#), p. 168).

Subsequently, this concept was further expanded to “autonomous associated labor”. Scholars working in this vein sought to more fully articulate, through this concept, the fundamental characteristics of the socialist form of labor. They argued that autonomous labor possesses a dual character of both individuality and sociality, with associated labor representing the “concrete form in which this unity is realized”. [Wu \(1985\)](#) and [Cheng \(1985\)](#) contended: “The planned commodity economy is founded upon two tiers of autonomous labor and two tiers of associated labor. The autonomous labor of individual workers and that of labor collectives, together with their autonomous interests, determine the commodity-economy attributes inherent to the socialist economy. Meanwhile, collective associated labor and societal associated labor, along with their laws of motion, endow this commodity economy with its planned nature”. This framework was proposed as a theoretical foundation for China’s economic system reform. Since the 2000s, Li Bingyan has continued to publish on the category of autonomous associated labor, maintaining that it constitutes the “socialist form of labor” and is the “essential category of the socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics” ([Li, 2003, 2004, 2007, 2021](#)).

The rationality of this theoretical approach lies in its extension of Marx’s concept of the “political economy of labor” in a direction that is sound. [Marx \(2012](#), p. 8) employed the

concept of the “political economy of labor” in the Inaugural Address of the International Working Men’s Association in 1864, thereby defining proletarian political economy from its conceptual standpoint and value orientation. Scholars such as Wu Jixue extended the application of this concept to socialist political economy, augmenting its original meaning with content about economic reality and highlighting elements that reflect the dominant character of actual socialist economic relations: Socialism is a society in which the workers are the masters; the workers become the owners of the means of production; socialism has initiated the historical process of transitioning from a situation where things dominate people to one where people dominate things; and labor itself has become the subject of the economic process, effecting a “reversal of the subject.” Consequently, the “political economy of labor” supplants the “political economy of capital”; the categories of labor and the social forms of labor supplant the category of capital, truly becoming the dominating subject category in political economy. Although the duality of concrete and abstract labor persists under the socialist market economy, and the objectification and reification of labor remain, the principal contradiction between people and things has shifted. This provides substantial grounding for employing labor as the core subject category of socialist political economy. Compared to propositions from other scholars who advocate for retaining the concept of the “commodity” or “capital” as the subject category or “starting category” for socialist political economy, defining socialist political economy as the “political economy of labor” demonstrates greater rationality [2].

2.3 Deriving concepts from the historical characteristics of socialist public ownership

It is widely understood, however, that socialist political economy cannot merely employ “labor in general” as its core category. This is because labor is a transhistorical and abstract category common to all human societies; it cannot define or explain the characteristics that distinguish one specific social formation from another. Therefore, the central challenge for this theoretical approach is to develop concepts that capture the specific social form of socialist labor, thereby defining its historical nature. Explorations such as “autonomous labor,” “associated labor,” and earlier, Yugoslavia’s model of “self-managed associated labor,” all represent valuable efforts in this direction. The primary limitation of these concepts, however, is that they focus exclusively on the historical progressiveness of socialist labor while failing to adequately address its concurrent historical limitations. Much like the Soviet textbooks that one-sidedly emphasized the positive “relations of comradely cooperation and mutual assistance” under socialism, these concepts reflect only one aspect of economic reality – they present a one-sided perspective rather than a dialectical perspective that encompasses both positive and negative aspects. Due to a failure to grasp the inherent contradictions within the socialist public ownership economy, they cannot adequately explain the unfolding and development of the economic system through the movement of contradictions.

The concepts of “autonomy” and “association” discussed here are likely derived from Marx and Engels’ *The German Ideology*, specifically their notions of “self-activity” and “freely associated individuals” in the context of future socialism (Marx and Engels, 1960, pp. 76, 81). As stated, “This self-activity consists of the appropriation of the total productive forces and the concomitant development of the totality of capacities” (Wu, 1987, p. 175). However, it is evident that in *The German Ideology*, Marx did not differentiate between the two stages of the future society. The concepts of “self-activity” and “associated labor” he employed here pertained to the fundamental characteristics of the ideal future society *in toto*, without consideration for the necessarily protracted transitional phase in the grand historical transformation from capitalism to communism. Consequently, these concepts cannot adequately characterize the historical specifics that distinguish the socialist economic system from the advanced stage of communism. The “self-activity” termed by Marx denotes not only what stands in opposition to wage labor but also what is distinguished from labor as a mere “means of livelihood”. It refers to the labor of the future society capable of fully

developing “free individuality” [3]. It is thus directly equivalent to the “appropriation of the totality of productive forces” (social ownership) and the “development of the totality of capacities” (all-round development of the individual). The term “free association” clearly refers to the “association of free individuals” in a future society. These concepts primarily reflect the fundamental opposition between the communist and capitalist systems, without addressing the distinction between the primary and advanced stages of communism.

Some scholars, such as Wu Jixue, were indeed aware of the differences between the socialist economy and the future society. From the outset, they emphasized two salient characteristics of autonomous labor: “Autonomous labor is a planned and organized, self-directed labor; simultaneously, autonomous labor is also an individual means of livelihood.” (Wu and Zhu, 1982) [4] This latter characteristic – its nature as a means of livelihood – is clearly absent from, and cannot be incorporated into, the meaning of Marx’s concept of “self-activity.” In their concept of “autonomous associated labor,” they attempted to imbue the term “autonomous” with richer connotations: on one hand, the individuality of autonomous labor, referring to the personal freedom of the worker and their autonomous control over their own labor power (individual ownership of labor power); on the other hand, the sociality of autonomous labor, referring to the autonomous control over the production process by the associated laborers (public ownership of the means of production). However, this interpretation clearly diverges from the original meaning of Marx’s concept of “self-activity.” Furthermore, the concept of autonomy itself fails to elucidate how these two potentially contradictory “autonomies” are unified within socialist labor. In their search for characteristic concepts reflecting the “socialist form of labor,” their focus remained on Marx’s early works. They did not sufficiently engage with Marx’s subsequent theoretical advancement (the distinction between the two stages of communism), nor with Lenin’s profound analysis of this issue on the eve of the October Revolution. Consequently, they regrettably overlooked the concept of “labor equality,” missing the crucial theoretical link: how the two “autonomies” of the laborers are combined through the “exchange of equal amounts of labor” to constitute “equal labor”. This theoretical “strategy” of seeking distant solutions while neglecting the obvious hinders the analysis of the socialist form of labor, inevitably leading to one-sidedness in the relevant theoretical categories.

3. Equal labor is the substantive content of socialist public ownership

Following the line of thought of “political economy of labor,” Rong published “On the inherent contradictions of public property rights” in *Economic Research Journal* in 1996, where he first proposed that “the essential definition of public property rights is an economic relation that realizes labor equality under the laborers’ common ownership of the means of production”. He further introduced the “dual identity of workers” under the dual-definition of public ownership, as well as the dual exclusivity of public property rights – both externally and internally (Rong, 1996). His book *On Labor Equality: A Study of Improving the Basic Socialist Economic System* (Rong et al., 2013) comprehensively examined the relationship between labor equality and the basic socialist economic system, where public ownership plays a dominant role alongside the coexistence of diverse forms of ownership. Thereafter, the author further refined this framework to establish the category of “equal labor,” explicitly advocating for the construction of a theoretical system of socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics centered on equal labor (Rong, 2017, 2018). The *Intermediate Course in Socialist Political Economy with Chinese Characteristics*, edited by Rong, directly introduced the concept of equal labor into socialist political economy textbooks, explicitly advocating for “equal labor as the principal or core category” to construct a theoretical framework for socialist political economy (Rong, 2025). It represents an initial yet extensive exploration and attempt along this theoretical trajectory.

Equal labor constitutes the historical form of labor under socialism. From the perspective of the product, the social form of labor constitutes the social mode of production. The specific

mode of production of a given society is determined by its characteristic mode of distributing the means of production. “The distribution of the means of production expresses the nature of the mode of production itself” (Marx, 2009b, p. 436). The predominant mode of distributing the conditions of production under socialism is the combination of public ownership of the means of production and individual ownership of labor power, which constitutes the socialist mode of production, namely, the socialist form of labor. In this context, the combination of these two factors of production, regardless of whether market mechanisms are employed [5], cannot be the sale and purchase of labor power and the wage-labor relationship under capitalist private ownership. Instead, it can only be a relationship of equal labor among workers who collectively own the means of production and engage in cooperative labor. On one hand, socialist public ownership abolishes the private appropriation of the means of production, thereby eliminating internal class antagonisms and relations of exploitation; the expropriators have been expropriated. The relations of production within the public ownership economy are purely relations among the workers themselves, encompassing relations between the collective of workers and individuals, as well as among individuals. On the other hand, labor relations within the socialist public ownership economy are equal relations measured by labor, where equal rights are premised on inherent inequality. Here, “bourgeois right” still operates in part. This is not merely a kind of relation of right and will; equal labor must be understood as an objective, concrete economic relation. It permeates the entire process of production, circulation, distribution and consumption in the socialist economy, constituting a real economic relation. The relations of right and will emerge from this underlying economic reality.

Equal labor is the substantive content of socialist public ownership. It refers to the economic relations characterized by equality in decision-making, management, division of labor, distribution and opportunities for development among workers, based on their common ownership of the means of production. First, socialist public ownership signifies the equality of all workers before the means of production, thus fostering relations of equal decision-making and management in utilizing the means of production and in organizing and coordinating cooperative labor. Second, the dual determinacy of the distribution of conditions of production (namely, public ownership of the means of production and individual ownership of labor power) endows workers with a dual identity. As distinct subjects in the appropriation of the conditions of production, there exist differences in rights and interests between the collective of workers and individual workers. This results in equality in the division of labor and distribution that is premised on the inequality of labor capacities – an equal relationship founded on unequal premises. Therefore, equal labor is an inherent implication of public ownership of the means of production. It is a means of coordinating the internal contradictions of socialist public ownership, a prerequisite for the integration of public ownership with the market economy, and the feature distinguishing socialist public ownership from both capitalist private ownership and the public ownership of the advanced stage of communism. Socialist public ownership and equal labor are “two sides of the same coin”. Moreover, it is the relations of equal labor underlying the form of public ownership that constitute the substantive content reflecting the substantive content of socialist relations of production.

The economic relations in the first phase of communism concerns labor equality and distributional equality among all labors and were first articulated by Marx in the *Critique of the Gotha Program*, where Marx (2009b, p. 434) wrote: “What we have to deal with here is a communist society, not as it has developed on its own foundations, but, on the contrary, just as it emerges from capitalist society; which is thus in every respect, economically, morally, and intellectually, still stamped with the birthmarks of the old society from whose womb it emerges. Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual amount of labor.” “Here, obviously, the same principle prevails as that which regulates the exchange of commodities, insofar as it is an exchange of equivalents. Content and form have changed, because under the altered circumstances, no one can contribute anything

except his labor, and because, on the other hand, nothing can pass into the ownership of individuals except individual means of consumption.” “Hence, equal right here remains in principle—a bourgeois right”. Marx herein analyzed the contradiction inherent in this distribution system: although capitalist private ownership has been abolished, establishing relations of equality among workers without class exploitation, “this equal right is still encumbered by a bourgeois limitation. The rights of the producers are proportional to the work they supply; equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard—labor”. This constitutes the fundamental meaning of labor equality. “This equal right is an unequal right for unequal labor. It recognizes no class distinctions, because everyone is only a worker like everyone else; but it tacitly recognizes unequal individual endowment, and thus productive capacity, as natural privileges” (Marx, 2009b, p. 435).

Lenin, in his work *The State and Revolution*, extensively cited this section of Marx’s *Critique of the Gotha Program* and provided an explicit interpretation: “In the first phase of communist society (usually called socialism), ‘bourgeois right’ is not abolished in its entirety, but only partially, only to the extent of the economic transformation achieved so far, namely, only in relation to the means of production”. The public ownership of the means of production is realized under the socialism; to this extent, “bourgeois right” ceases to exist. “However, it continues to exist in another respect: it persists as the regulator (determiner) in the distribution of products and the allocation of labor among members of society. The socialist principle, ‘He who does not work, neither shall he eat,’ has been realized; the other socialist principle, ‘An equal quantity of products for an equal quantity of labor,’ has also been realized. But this is not yet communism, and it does not yet abolish ‘bourgeois right,’ which grants unequal individuals unequal quantities of products in return for unequal (effectively unequal) amounts of labor.” “This is inevitable in the first phase of communism because if we are to avoid lapsing into utopianism, we cannot assume that people will immediately learn to work for society without any legal norms whatsoever after overthrowing capitalism. Moreover, the abolition of capitalism does not immediately create the economic prerequisites for such a change.” “Yet, there exists no norm other than that of ‘bourgeois right.’ Therefore, to this extent, a state remains necessary—one that, while safeguarding the public ownership of the means of production, also protects equality in labor and equality in the distribution of products” (Lenin, 1995a, p. 196). In this work, Lenin repeatedly employed concepts such as “equality of labor and equality in the distribution of products,” “equality of labor and wages” (Lenin, 1995a, p. 201) and “equal labor, equal pay” (Lenin, 1995a, p. 202), manifesting his exceptional understanding of and concern for the relations of “labor equality” in the first phase of communist society. Over the past century and more, socialist practice has fully demonstrated that the theoretical foresight of Marx and Lenin is completely correct.

4. Preliminary analysis of the internal contradictions of equal labor

4.1 Two challenges of equal labor in the direct production process

The dual determinacy of socialist public ownership determines the socialist form of labor and also the inevitable difficulties in realizing equal labor. Marx and later Lenin, proceeding from the historically transitional nature of the socialist system, foresaw the inherent contradictions in its labor relations. Marx explicitly pointed out in *Critique of the Gotha Program* that due to differences in individual labor capacities, combined with variations in family consumption burdens, the equal right to distribution according to work would in reality evolve into de facto inequality between individuals and between families – resulting in “one person actually receiving more than another, and thus being richer than another” (Marx, 2009b, p. 435) [6]. Therefore, socialism with Chinese characteristics holds that the state plays an important role in achieving common prosperity for all people; it should narrow income gaps and ensure equal opportunities for workers to develop their capabilities by strengthening the regulation of national income distribution and redistribution. Practice also clearly shows that contradictions do not exist merely in the processes of distribution and consumption; instead, the

contradictions of equal labor first manifest in socialism's direct production process, presenting challenges in the realization of equal labor within production, which can be observed from at least two aspects.

First is the challenge of production decision-making under equal labor. Specifically, it concerns how to ensure that collective decision-making in a public ownership economy reflects the overall and long-term interests of all laborers. Since laborers collectively own the means of production, they must make decisions together through collaborative labor. However, due to workers' dual identity – as both public owners of the means of production and individual owners of their labor power – there is uncertainty regarding which identity they adopt when participating in equal decision-making. If the majority engage in decision-making from the standpoint of individual owners of labor power, prioritizing personal interests in the process, collective decision-making becomes an arena for bargaining among individuals, and common interests cannot be safeguarded through such collective decision-making. Moreover, the principle of majority rule does not necessarily reflect the interests of the majority, particularly their long-term interests. This aligns with what Rousseau termed the contradiction between the will of all (*la volonté de tous*) and the general will (*la volonté générale*). Voting-based democracy alone cannot guarantee the development direction of the public ownership economy. Collective decision-making under equal labor requires a political culture that prioritizes collective interests, which is a distinct ideology. Only when the majority of participants in collective decision-making accept this culture – placing social equity and collective interests first, and individual interests are subordinated to collective interests – can the quality and efficiency of collective decision-making be enhanced, and the common and long-term interests of workers be protected. Such a collectivist social consciousness is essential to enable workers to participate in decision-making as public owners. Under equal labor, how can such a decision-making atmosphere be fostered?

Second is the paradox between equality in division of labor and equality in management. Equal labor recognizes differences in individual capabilities and follows the principle of division of labor according to ability in labor organizations, which conforms both to equality based on work as the measure and to the law of optimal allocation of labor resources, and aligns with the overall interests of workers under current conditions. However, this principle of equality based on the division of labor according to ability extends to the decision-making and management processes of the public ownership economy, leading to a division between managerial labor and manual labor, which grants some workers greater rights in the production process – thereby creating a contradiction with equality in decision-making and management. This is the so-called paradox between equality in division of labor and equality in management. Since labor remains merely a means of livelihood for most people, there will always be those who slack off or free ride in collective labor, and collective labor without measurement and supervision cannot achieve high efficiency. Regarding the issue of team production, New Institutional Economics contends that the most efficient institutional arrangement is to vest both the monitoring rights and the right of residual claim on team production in the same individual (Alchian and Demsetz, 1994, pp. 59–87). Such an arrangement fundamentally constitutes the core of classical capitalist private ownership. Adopting this solution would inevitably lead to the degeneration of public ownership into private ownership. This theory, while emphasizing the initiative of supervisors, fails to consider the impact of workers' motivation and willingness on production enthusiasm, rendering it an incomplete theory. Under conditions of public ownership, how might the contradiction between equality and efficiency be resolved?

4.2 The agency system of public property rights under public ownership

The solution adopted in public ownership is to select an individual from the laborers to exercise supervisory functions and this supervisor must, in turn, be supervised by all laborers. This constitutes a system of mutual supervision where one person supervises everyone, and

everyone supervises that one person. We regard this as the agency system of public property rights under public ownership or simply the public property agency system. Typically, in a standard agency system, the principal actively selects an agent, and both parties enter into a principal-agent contract, establishing what can be referred to as a “passive agency relationship”. Specifically, when a public ownership organization selects an individual to act as its agent – tasking them with managing the public economy, being accountable to all members of the public ownership organization, subject to collective supervision and reporting on managerial activities – this constitutes the public property agency system. The agent is a member of the workers. They operate under the supervision of all workers and, within the framework of equal labor, hold an equal position with other workers. As Liu Shaoqi once remarked to the national model worker, Shi Chuanxiang: “You serve the people as a sanitation worker, and I serve the people as chairman” ([People’s Weekly, 2015](#)). However, the role of the public property agent possesses unique characteristics. As a professional manager representing the collective owners of public property, the agent holds the authority to administer public assets and direct collective labor. Due to this specialized position, the agent stands in opposition to other members of the collective. Consequently, conflicts may arise between the individual interests of the agent and the collective interests, necessitating oversight by all principals. This establishes a system of mutual supervision: while the agent supervises all workers, all workers collectively exercise bottom-up supervision over the agent. In small labor organizations, this two-way supervision mechanism can be implemented relatively stringently. We characterize this form of equal labor as “autonomous equal labor”: all workers possess autonomy, collectively deciding on the agent for daily management that serves their common interests, and conducting relatively effective oversight of the agent’s work. Although autonomous equal labor already entails a differentiation in the rights of managerial workers versus the whole workers, the relationship between the two remains in balance in most situations.

The cost of democratic decision-making is relatively high in large-scale public ownership organizations. The actual economic process evolves according to the logic of “cost saving”: the general meeting system gradually transforms into a representative meeting system and eventually a multi-level representative meeting system. Through the multi-level representative meetings, workers exercise bottom-up democracy. As the scale of public ownership expands, the number of representative meeting levels increases; at the same time, the agent’s authority and responsibilities grow and the distance between the agent and the broader body of principals gradually widens. When most principals rarely have opportunities for direct engagement with the agent and are unable to exercise effective oversight over them, the multi-level representative meeting system gradually evolves into “bureaucratic form of equal labor”. While mutual supervision still exists, bottom-up oversight has weakened, and top-down management authority has grown disproportionately prominent. The inherent contradiction of equal labor led to the rights of a minority superseding those of the majority, and the tension between the form of the public property agency system and the essence of equal labor became increasingly apparent. This tension was, in fact, already evident in the convergence of bureaucracy and equal labor.

The public property agency system is an inevitable institutional arrangement arising from the internal contradictions of socialist public ownership. Lenin, during early socialist practice, keenly identified this problem, focusing on the risk of bureaucratization within the Soviet state apparatus. In his dictated article, “How we should reorganize the workers’ and peasants’ inspection,” he proposed merging the workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection with the Party’s Central Control Commission. This reorganization aimed to increase the representation of workers and peasants within the Central Control Commission while reducing the staff size of the Workers’ and Peasants’ Inspection, thereby strengthening the connection between the state apparatus and the worker-peasant masses ([Lenin, 1995b](#), p. 779). Socialism with Chinese characteristics has made tremendous efforts in practice. Mao Zedong advocated democratic centralism in enterprise management and summed up the experience into “two participations,

one reform, and three-in-one unity,” which means managers participating in labor and workers participating in management, reforming unreasonable rules and regulations, and combinations of workers, managers and technicians. This framework established the “Angang Constitution” for managing state-owned enterprises. In the new era, the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core has strengthened top-down supervision of cadres at all levels, intensified anti-corruption efforts, and established the National Supervisory Commission system. Concurrently, within the governance framework of state-owned enterprises, it emphasizes integrating CPC leadership with rule-of-law-based corporate governance, fully leveraging the role of trade unions under the Party’s guidance, and enhancing democratic management in enterprises. The foundation of democratic centralism in political economy ultimately lies in the contradictions inherent in equal labor and the consequent necessity of the public property agency system.

4.3 The leadership of the party is an inherent and essential requirement for realizing equal labor

The fundamental reason why the public property agency system with Chinese characteristics can overcome the difficulties in realizing equal labor lies in its incorporation of a unique structural feature into the institutional arrangement of socialist public ownership: the leadership of the CPC. Realizing equal labor requires addressing two core challenges: on one hand, resolving the collective decision-making dilemma arising from the dual character of laborers, which necessitates fostering a collectivist decision-making culture to safeguard the overall and long-term interests of the working class; on the other hand, overcoming the contradiction between equality in the division of labor and equality in management, which requires the correct selection of public property agents, ensuring their loyalty and diligence while enhancing the management efficiency of the public ownership economy. These two institutional needs converge upon and point to a higher-level theoretical proposition: the leadership of the CPC is the most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

The CPC adheres to Marxism adapted to the Chinese context and the needs of our era as its guiding ideology. Based on the tenets of historical materialism, this theoretical framework reveals the direction of human historical development, positing that the demise of capitalism and the ultimate realization of communism are both historically inevitable. The CPC integrates the fundamental principles of Marxism with China’s realities and its fine traditional culture, creatively developing Marxism with Chinese characteristics according to contemporary needs. The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics aligns the direction of historical development with the long-term and fundamental interests of the broadest majority of the people, achieving a unity between historical trajectory and class consciousness. In the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the CPC has consistently maintained the closest ties with the people. It persistently engages in the theoretical “instillation” of the Party’s ideology among the masses and continuously enhances the overall quality of the socialist labor force, thereby fostering an increasingly solid popular foundation for a collectivist social culture. Adhering to a fundamental, people-centered stance, the CPC has remained true to its original aspiration and mission, serving the people wholeheartedly. The CPC is a modern political party with strict discipline. Upholding strict Party self-governance in the course of building socialism, the Party gathers under its banner many outstanding Chinese people willing to serve the people and consistently assigns its outstanding Party members to leadership positions at all levels in the public ownership economy. The CPC’s leadership in public ownership enterprises significantly enhances the alignment between the individual “choice preferences” of public property agents and the overall interests of the workers. This reduces the agency costs in the public ownership system while improving the efficiency of equal labor.

From the perspective of the socialist economy as a whole, the CPC acts as the “proactive agent” for the overall and long-term interests of all Chinese people. Guided by the scientific theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it identifies and represents the fundamental

interests of the broadest masses – interests that align with the historical direction – and proactively assumes its responsibilities. This entails holding and managing public means of production on behalf of the people and overseeing the operation of the state-owned economy. This principal–agent relationship within public ownership does not, in practice, rely entirely on bottom-up supervision of the agent by all principals (the people); therefore, it can be termed “proactive agency”. The CPC’s proactive agency serves to resolve the challenges inherent in realizing equal labor, thereby ensuring the stable functioning of socialist public ownership and sustaining the development of socialist productive forces. Thus, it can be said that the Party’s leadership is embedded within the institutional fabric of equal labor. Without the leadership of the CPC, socialist public ownership would not exist; the dominant position of public ownership would not be safeguarded; and the public ownership economy would not be able to consistently adhere to the socialist direction of equal labor, nor would it be able to grow stronger, improve in quality and expand in scale under the socialist market economy system.

About the author

Rong Zhaozi is Professor of Anhui University and the executive dean of the Institute for Advanced Study of Economic and Social Development, Anhui University.

Notes

1. In his conversations on the Soviet textbook of Political Economy, Mao Zedong, commenting on its discussion of the interaction between socialist relations of production and the productive forces, stated: “Here, only the interaction between socialist production relations and productive forces is discussed, but not the contradictions between them. The relations among people in the labor process also constitute a form of production relations. In this context, there is much work to be done – for instance, the management personnels presenting themselves as ordinary laborers, treating others with equality, improving rules and regulations, the management staff participating in labor, workers engaging in management and combining the management staff, workers and technical personnel into a three-in-one combination” (Mao, 1998, p. 319). The perspective of the Yao’s edition is clearly informed by Mao’s comment.
2. To achieve a comprehensive understanding of Marx’s concept of the “political economy of labor,” it must be considered together with his other propositions, such as the “abolition of the division of labor” and the “abolition of labor” itself (Marx and Engels, 1960, pp. 84, 78). The author contends that what Marx termed the “abolition of the division of labor” refers to the abolition of the traditional division of labor characterized by rigid occupational specialization. Likewise, the “abolition of labor” signifies the supersession of the specific form of labor that persists in contemporary society – labor which serves “merely as a means of livelihood.” This form of labor, an enduring feature of market economies, represents – in Adam Smith’s words – a “sacrifice of tranquility” and a “curse from God” (Marx, 1960, p. 112). It stands in direct opposition to the needs of human life and is, consequently, among those phenomena destined to be abolished in a future society.
3. To emphasize this distinction, Marx proposed the idea of “abolition of labor” (Marx and Engels, 1960, p. 78).
4. Also see Wu (1987): “Autonomous labor is simultaneously a form of subsistence labor. In a socialist society, determined by the specific characteristics of ownership forms over the means of production and labor power, means of consumption are distributed according to work. Labor becomes the means – and the sole means – for each individual to obtain their means of consumption. This subsistence labor carries a certain degree of compulsion, as those who do not work shall not eat, and those who work more shall receive more.”
5. The combination of these two elements under socialist conditions cannot be broadly characterized as a “direct combination.” In certain contexts, such as in rural collective economies with a predetermined membership, the relationship between collectively owned land and all households within the community is established *a priori*. This can be termed a direct combination of the two production conditions. However, in other settings, such as within the sector of socialist economy under ownership by the whole people, the status of enterprise employees is not predetermined, nor is their scope fixed. The selection of individuals who become “employees of SOEs” relies on market mechanisms or other indirect means of determination. Theoretically, this cannot be described as a “direct combination.”

6. Socialist states must adopt robust measures to resolve the contradictions of equal labor in the distribution field. To do this, they should promote equal opportunities for workers to develop their capacity for work throughout society and advance the realization of common prosperity for all people.

References

- Alchian, A.A. and Demsetz, H. (1994), "Production, information costs, and economic organization", in Coadse, R., Alchain, A. and North, D. *et al.* (Eds), *Property Rights and Institutional Changes*, Chinese ed., translated by Liu, S.Y. *et al.*, Shanghai Sanlian Shudian [SDX Joint Publishing Company], Shanghai, pp. 59-87.
- Association of National History of the People's Republic of China (Ed.) (1998), *Maozedong du Shehuizhuyi Zhengzhi Jingjixue Pizhu he Tanhua [Mao Zedong's Comments and Conversations on Socialist Political Economy]*, Association of National History of the People's Republic of China, Beijing.
- Bai, Y.X. and Fu, Z.P. (1989), "Gongyouzhi yu Shangpin Jingji Jianrong de Lilun Yu Shijian—Jianping Gongyouzhi Yu Shangpin Jingji Paichilun [The theory and practice of compatibility between public ownership and the commodity economy with a review of the theory of their mutual exclusivity]", *Dangdai Caijing [Contemporary Finance and Economics]*, Vol. 10 No. 12, pp. 11-14.
- Cheng, B.D. (1985), "Lun Zizhu Lianhe Laodong—Woguo Jingji Tixi Gaige Lilun Yiju Chutan [On autonomous associated labor: a preliminary exploration of theoretical foundations for China's economic system reform]", *Shehui Kexue Zhanxian [Social Science Front]*, Vol. 8 No. 4, pp. 31-38.
- Economics Institute of the Academy of Sciences of the U.S.S.R. (1959), *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Jiaocai [Textbook of Political Economy] (Chinese Translation Version)*, Renmin Chubanshe [People's Publishing House], Beijing.
- Fang, G.W. (1991), "Lun Shehuizhuyi Gongyouzhi yu Shangpin Jingji de Jiehe [On the Integration of Socialist Public Ownership and the Commodity Economy]", *Zhongguo Shehui Kexue [Social Sciences in China]*, Vol. 12 No. 3, pp. 37-48.
- Lenin, V.I. (1995a), "State and revolution", Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Lenin Xuanji [Selected Works of Vladimir Lenin]*, Vol. 3, Renmin Chubanshe [People's Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 109-221.
- Lenin, V.I. (1995b), "How we should reorganize the workers' and peasants' inspection", Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Lenin Xuanji [Selected Works of Vladimir Lenin]*, Vol. 4, Renmin Chubanshe [People's Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 779-783.
- Li, B.Y. (2003), "Ren de Quanmian Fazhan yu 'Zizhu Lianhe Laodong' Fanchou [The All-round development of man and the category of the 'autonomous associated labor']", *Zhonggong Zhongyang Dangxiao Xuebao [Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CPC]*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 57-62.
- Li, B.Y. (2004), "Zizhu Lianhe Laodong Jingji Zhidu yu Guoqi Gaige Moshi Chuangxin [the economy system of autonomous associated labor and the innovation of SOE reform]", *Xuexi Luntan [Tribune of Study]*, Vol. 20 No. 10, pp. 17-21.
- Li, B.Y. (2007), "Lun Shehuizhuyi Lilun Jingjixue de Fanchou Tixi Chuangxin [Discussing about the Category System Innovation of the Socialism Theories Economics]", *Jingji Yanjiu Daokan [Economic Research Guide]*, Vol. 3 No. 4, pp. 1-7.
- Li, B.Y. (2021), "Lüelun Zhongguo Tese Shehuizhuyi Zhengzhi Jingjixue Fanchou Tixi de Chuangxin [On the innovation of the category system of socialist political economy with Chinese characteristics]", *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Yanjiu [Chinese Journal of Political Economics]*, Vol. 2 No. 1, pp. 64-71.
- Lukács, G. (1999), *History and Class Consciousness: Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, Chinese edition translated by Du, Z.Z., Ren, L., and Yan, H.Y, Shangwu Yinshuguan [The Commercial Press], Beijing.
- Mao, Z.D. (1998), *Du Sulian Zhengzhi Jingjixue Jiaokeshu Tanhua Jilugao [Notes on the Soviet Textbook of Political Economy]*, Association of National History of the People's Republic of China, Beijing.

- Mao, Z.D. (1999), “Du Sulian Zhengzhi Jingjixue Jiaokeshu de Tanhua [Discussion on the political economy textbook of the Soviet Union]”, in Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee (Ed.), in *Maozedong Wenji [Works of Mao Zedong]*, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, Vol. 8.
- Marx, K. (1960), “The process of circulation of capital”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Makesi Engesi Quanji [Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Vol. 46, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 5-262.
- Marx, K. (2009a), “Exchange”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Makesi Engesi Wenji [Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Vol. 5, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 103-113.
- Marx, K. (2009b), “Critique of the Gotha Program”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Makesi Engesi Wenji [Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Vol. 3, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 419-450.
- Marx, K. (2009c), “Primitive accumulation”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), in *Makesi Engesi Wenji [Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, Vol. 5, pp. 820-875.
- Marx, K. (2012), “Inaugural address of the International working Men’s association”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Makesi Engesi Xuanji [Selected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Vol. 3, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 1-11.
- Marx, K. and Engels, F. (1960), “The German ideology”, Central Compilation and Translation Bureau of the Communist Party of China (Ed. and trans.), *Makesi Engesi Quanji [Collected Works of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels]*, Vol. 3, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, pp. 11-640.
- Party Documents Research Office of the CPC Central Committee (Ed.) (1993), “1960 Nian [year 1960]”, in *Maozedong Nianpu [Mao Zedong Chronicle]*, Renmin Chubanshe [People’s Publishing House], Beijing, Vol. 4, pp. 298-514.
- People’s Weekly (2015), “Tamen Youzhe Xiangtong de Mingzi—— ‘Laomao’ [They share the same name — ‘Model Workers’]”, available at: http://paper.people.com.cn/rmzk/html/2015-08/10/content_1617523.htm (accessed 10 August 2015).
- Rong, Z.Z. (1996), “Lun Gongyou Chanquan Neizai Maodun [On the inherent contradictions of public property rights]”, *Jingji Yanjiu [Economic Research Journal]*, Vol. 31 No. 9, pp. 16-23.
- Rong, Z.Z., et al. (2013), *Laodong Pingdeng Lun——Wanshan Shehuizhuyi Jiben Jingji Zhidu Yanjiu [On Labor Equality: A Study of Improving the Basic Socialist Economic System]*, Shehui Kexue Wenxian Chubanshe [Social Sciences Academic Press], Beijing.
- Rong, Z.Z. (2017), “Zhongguo Tese Shehuizhuyi Zhengzhi Jingjixue Gangyao——yi Pingdeng Laodong jiqi Shengchanli wei Zhuxian [An outline of the political economy with Chinese characteristics: under the guideline of equal right of employment and productive forces]”, *Zhongguo Pudong Ganbu Xueyuan Xuebao [Journal Of China Executive Leadership Academy Pudong]*, Vol. 11 No. 4, pp. 16-45, 73.
- Rong, Z.Z. (2018), “Gongyou Ziben yu Pingdeng Laodong——Zhongguo Tese Shehuizhuyi Zhengzhi Jingjixue Zhuxian [The public capital and the equal labor: the main thread of political economy of socialism with Chinese characteristics]”, *Shanghai Jingji Yanjiu [Shanghai Journal of Economics]*, Vol. 35 No. 12, pp. 5-15.
- Rong, Z.Z. (2024), “Shehuizhuyi Gongyouzhi ji Guojia Suoyouzhi de jige Lilun Wenti [Several theoretical problems of socialist public ownership and state ownership]”, *Makesizhuyi Yanjiu [Studies on Marxism]*, Vol. 42 No. 9, pp. 91-105.
- Rong, Z.Z. (Ed.) (2025), *Zhongguo Tese Shehuizhuyi Zhengzhi Jingjixue Zhongji Jiaocheng [Intermediate Course on Political Economy of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics]*, Zhongguo Caizheng Jingji Chubanshe [Chinese Financial & Economic, Publishing House], Beijing.

- Stalin, J.V. (1952), *Economic Problems of Socialism in the U.S.S.R*, Chinese Translation Version, Renmin Chubanshe [People's Publishing House], Beijing.
- Writing Group of Sixteen Southern Universities for Political Economy Textbook (Ed.) (1982), *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Jiaocai (Shehuizhuyi Bufen) [Political Economy on Socialism]*, Sichuan Renmin Chubanshe [Sichuan People's Publishing House], Chengdu.
- Wu, J.X. (1983), "Zibenglun yu Laodong de Zhengzhi Jingjixue [*Das Kapital* and the political economy of labor]", *Zhongzhou Xuekan [Academic Journal of Zhongzhou]*, Vol. 5 No. 3, pp. 126-127.
- Wu, J.X. (1985), "Lun Lianhe Laodong——Zizhu Laodong de Gerenxing he Shehuixing xiangtongyi de Juti Xingshi [On associated labor: The specific form of the unity of the individual and social nature of autonomous labor]", *Zhongzhou Xuekan [Academic Journal of Zhongzhou]*, Vol. 7 No. 3, pp. 24-29.
- Wu, J.X. (1987), *Zizhu Laodong Lunyao [The Essentials of Autonomous Labor]*, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe [Shanghai People's Publishing House], Shanghai.
- Wu, J.X. and Zhu, L. (1982), "Zizhu Laodong he Laodong de Zhengzhi Jingjixue Shidian [The starting point of political economy of autonomous labor and labor]", *Henan Shida Xuebao (Shehui Kexue Ban) [Journal of Henan Normal University (Social Sciences)]*, Vol. 23 No. 1, pp. 59-64, 54.
- Yao, N., Yong, W.Y., Jiang, X.M. and Su, S.Z. *et al.* (Eds) (1961), *Zhengzhi Jingjixue Jiaocai (Shehuizhuyi Bufen) [Textbook of Political Economy (On Socialism)]*, Shanghai Renmin Chubanshe [Shanghai People's Publishing House], Shanghai.
- Zhang, Y. (2016), "Lun Gongyouzhi yu Shichang Jingji de Youji Jiehe [On the organic combination of public ownership and market economy]", *Jingji Yanjiu [Economic Research Journal]*, Vol. 41 No. 6, pp. 4-16.

Corresponding author

Zhaozi Rong can be contacted at: rongzhzi@sina.com