

# ON CONDUCTING RURAL SURVEYS

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## One. Conditions Are Understood Gradually and Only With Persistent Effort

Getting to know the world is no easy matter. Marx and Engels rounded off the theory of scientific communism only after life-long effort and repeated investigation and study. Lenin and Stalin also made many investigations.

Carrying out the Chinese revolution also needs investigation and study. First of all we must know China (its past, present and future). It is regrettable that many comrades are often subjectivist and opinionated and attach no importance whatsoever to investigation and study.

We believe in science, not theology. Therefore, instead of giving play to our imagination we look at the grass-roots levels in making investigation. At the same time, we believe that things are in motion, they are changing, progressing. Thus investigation is a long-term job. We need to investigate things today, and our children and grandchildren will have to investigate things in the future. Only in this way is it possible to go on learning new things and acquiring more knowledge.

We must investigate patiently, step by step, and must not be impetuous. It was only after several years of effort that I came to know the countryside.

I remember it was in 1920, when I first read Kautsky's *Class Struggle*, Chen Wangdao's translation of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* and an Englishman's *History of Socialism*, that I came to know that the history of mankind is a history of class struggle and that class struggle is the motive force in social development; only then did I begin to grasp the method of cognizing problems. But in none of these books was there any mention of things specifically Chinese, such as Hunan or Hubei, Chiang Kai-shek or Chen Duxiu. I took from them

only the idea of "class struggle" and began to study practical class struggle in earnest. After taking part in the peasant movement for four months, I came to know something about the various classes, but this knowledge was quite superficial, not at all deep. The Central Committee later asked me to take charge of the peasant movement. I then made up my mind to conduct further investigations, spending a little over a month in the survey of the five counties of Changsha, Xiangtan, Xiangxiang, Hengshan and Liling. There was an upsurge in the peasant movement in these counties and many peasants had joined peasant associations. The Kuomintang attacked us for "going too far" and for engaging in "riffraff activities" and reviled the peasants for "going too far" by lolling on the beds of the daughters of big landlords. In fact, my investigations showed that not all things had gone "too far," as they said they had, but that this state of affairs was natural and necessary, because the peasants had suffered too much. I think it is inevitable for peasants who have been oppressed for thousands of years to go a little "too far" once they rise up, and it wouldn't have mattered much if they had lolled on the beds of the daughters of the landlords even more often.

However, I was still not very clear about class alignment in the countryside. It was only when I had made a survey of Xunwu after we got to the Jinggang Mountains that I became clear on the question of the rich peasants and the landlords. I put forward measures for dealing with the rich peasants, measures that involved not only "taking from those who have more land and giving to those who have less" but also "taking from those who have better and giving to those who have worse," for this was the only way the rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants and farm labourers could all carry on. If the landlords were not given any land and had nothing to live on, and if the rich peasants were only given poor land



Chairman Mao on an inspection tour of Guangzhou's outskirts in 1958.

and were left half-destitute and driven to rebel, the poor peasants and farm labourers would be isolated. Some people ridiculed my approach as a rich-peasant line, yet I'm afraid my measures were the only correct ones at the time. Of course, today we have the Anti-Japanese National United Front and we are reducing rent and interest, not depriving the landlords and rich peasants of their property rights. Otherwise, it would be impossible for us to unite with them in the fight against Japan.

As regards the poor peasants and farm labourers, I became clear only after my survey of Xingguo County, which helped me realize the importance of poor peasant leagues in redistributing land.

So, it took me six to seven years to acquire experience in conducting rural surveys. Now with the experience of other comrades to go by, you can take shortcuts and accomplish such work in a few months instead of six or seven years. The thing for comrades to do today is dig into questions and exert yourselves in a matter-of-fact way. Provided you are not sleepy heads, you can achieve quite a lot even if you work at it only six hours a day. But you do need to keep at it.

## Two. Method

A. The unity of opposites and class struggle are the two points of departure in our work.

When we observe something, the first step can only be to perceive its broad outlines and form a general impression. Take the case of a newcomer to Yanan. At first he has only a general and vague idea of the place. But after he has visited the Anti-Japanese Military and Political College, the Women's College and other schools and government institutions in Yanan, he takes the second step, adopts an analytical approach and makes a careful and systematic study and analysis of the different aspects of Yanan. Then, taking the third step, he employs synthesis to sum up his analyses of these different aspects and gains a picture of Yanan as a whole. He now knows a Yanan which is different from the one he knew on his arrival. He saw Yanan as a whole at the beginning and he is still seeing Yanan as a whole now, but his knowledge of the place is different. He has now gained a scientific knowledge and a concrete understanding of Yanan. The same is true of our observing a village.

This is the method Marx used in writing *Capital*. First, he analysed the various sectors of capitalist society. Then he synthesized them and arrived at the laws of motion of capitalism.

Special attention should be paid to analysis. There should be synthesis as well as analysis, that is to say, there is an element of synthesis in the analysis made in the second step. As the old saying goes, the principle of good writing is to have both an unfolding and a summing-up.

This saying is correct. And it was also correct for Su Dongpo to study history and the Sung Dynasty by using the method of "tackling the enemy from eight sides." As we study Chinese society today, we should likewise use the method of "tackling the enemy from four sides," dividing it into four sectors — political, economic, cultural and military — and drawing conclusions for the Chinese revolution.

If we use the method of "looking at flowers while on horseback," trying to know a bit of everything, we will only be wasting time and will get nowhere.

Therefore, we must grasp this viewpoint, that is, the unity of opposites and class struggle. This is the viewpoint inherent in analysis and synthesis, as I have already said. If you use this approach in analysing conditions in the rural areas, you will come to know the classes there, their main characteristics and their interrelations. One of the questions you have asked me is: What is a rich peasant? In my view, a landlord lives mainly on rent; a rich peasant lives mainly by hiring farm labourers while engaging in some labour himself; a middle peasant generally does not sell his labour power and works his own land; a poor peasant has to sell his labour power, as he cannot make a living from his land; and a farm labourer sells all his labour power and owns no land at all. Of course, these are only the main criteria of the above classes.

Such an analysis of the different classes and strata as well as their general living conditions is the only way to correctly understand the overall situation in the countryside.

We should think hard in analysing objective reality and analysing classes. We should not turn a blind eye to practical problems. We should throw out purveyors of bombast and should think things out for ourselves and integrate theory with practice.

Lenin said in 1905 that a government of workers and peasants should be formed in Russia after the overthrow of the tsarist government, but Trotsky maintained that there should be a government of workers alone. This shows that Trotsky did not really integrate theory with practice. We should try through practice to identify the law of the movement of things and create new theories. For instance, the protracted nature of China's War of Resistance Against Japan constitutes a law of that war. Today, when you go down to rural areas to make investigations, you should adopt this view-

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## Background Information

CHAIRMAN Mao's talk *On Conducting Rural Surveys* printed here was delivered in Yanan on September 13, 1941, to a meeting of a women's life investigation group jointly organized by the Women's Work Committee and the Northwest China Bureau of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China.

In the same year Chairman Mao called on the whole Party to rectify style of work in accordance with the ideological principles of Marxism-Leninism, eliminate the subjectivism, sectarianism and stereotyped Party writing spread by Wang Ming who had held the leading position in the Party, and unfold the movement of Marxist-Leninist education.

In Yanan, Wang Ming had held the posts of President of the Chinese Women's College and secretary of the Women's Work Committee of the Party Central Committee. In order to eliminate the influence of Wang Ming's line in the women's movement, the Party Central Committee decided in 1941 to close the college, reorganize the Women's Work Committee and remove Wang Ming from the two posts mentioned above.

Chairman Mao delivered the talk after these decisions were taken.

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point and method to guide your practice, and, at the same time, constantly enrich your theoretical understanding in the course of practice.

B. Gathering vast amounts of data and grasping the main points. The more data one collects, the better. But it is essential to grasp the main points or characteristics (the principal aspects of contradictions). When Marx was studying capitalism and Lenin imperialism, they collected vast amounts of statistics and data. However, they did not use them all, they only made use of such data as best illustrated the characteristics under consideration.

No investigation, no right to speak. But there are comrades who like to ask: "Out of ten things, I have investigated nine — all but one. Don't I have the right to speak?" I think that if the nine you have investigated are all secondary things and you have omitted the principal one, you still have no right to speak.

In China today the national contradiction is the principal contradiction, while the class contradiction has become secondary. Before the Xian Incident, the contradiction between the Communist Party and the Kuomintang was the principal one. Since the incident, the contradiction between China and Japan has been the principal one. So it is this contradiction that must be our point of departure in understanding and solving any problem today. If we concentrate on minor matters to the neglect of the principal contradiction, seeing the trees but not the forest, we will still have no right to speak.

Therefore, in synthesizing data, we should avoid getting bogged down in narrow empiricism.

### Three. Replies to Questions

Comrades have raised a lot of questions and I can only answer some of them. Others cannot be answered, because if they could, there would be no need for you to go to the countryside. What is more, you yourselves must go to the rural areas and make investigations before you can understand these problems and find different solutions appropriate to different people and circumstances.

How should we hold fact-finding meetings? A fact-finding meeting must not only pose questions but produce answers. It is advisable to have around three to five people at each meeting. During my survey of Xingguo, I learnt that 40 per cent of the land was owned by landlords and 30 per cent by rich peasants and that 10 per cent was ancestral temple land owned in common by landlords and rich peasants, making a total of 80 per cent owned by the landlords and rich peasants, while only 20 per cent was owned by the middle and poor peasants. But the landlords accounted for no more than 1 per cent of the population and the rich peasants for no more than 5 per cent, while the poor and middle peasants accounted for 80 per cent. On the one hand, 6 per cent of the population owned 80 per cent of the land and on the other 80 per cent of the population owned only 20 per cent. The only logical conclusion could be revolution. This strengthened my confidence in the revolution, my conviction that the revolution would win the sympathy and support of more than 80 per cent of the people.

How should we select samples for investigation? There are three kinds, the advanced, the middle and the backward. If on the basis of

this classification you choose to investigate two or three people from each kind, you will be able to learn the conditions of them all.

How should we collect and compile material? You must do it all yourselves in order to gain experience, experience which you use to improve your work in investigating and compiling material later.

How can we make sure that the people we talk to tell the truth? People are different and therefore you must adopt different approaches. But the main thing is to make friends with the masses and not to spy on them, which causes resentment. If a person does not tell the truth, it is because he does not know whether or not your intentions are for his benefit. You must give him time to get to know your thinking in the course of talking and making friends with him, so that he gradually recognizes your true intentions and regards you as a real friend. Only then will you be able to find out the facts. You must blame yourself and not the masses if they do not tell you the truth.

In my investigation of Xingguo, I invited several peasants for a conversation. At first, they were full of misgivings, wondering what on earth I would do to them. So the first day we only had a chat about everyday matters. No smiles crossed their faces and they did not say much. Later, I invited them to dinner and in the evening I gave them large warm quilts to sleep under. This helped them understand my real intentions. Gradually they began to smile and spoke up more. In the end, we were all at ease. Everybody joined in lively discussions, nothing was held back and we got along so well we might have been one family.

It is not necessary to go into the other questions. It will be better for you to go down as soon as possible to make investigations yourselves.

