

# ***A Brief Analysis of the Historical Change Process and Characteristics of Hu Yaobang's Political Character***

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**Abstract:** The development of character profoundly influences an individual's life, and in the realm of politics, it shapes a person's political trajectory, encompassing a series of decisions and choices. Hu Yaobang, as a prominent political figure within the Chinese Communist Party, was influenced by the cultural milieu of Hunan Province during his formative years, the era he lived in, and the people and events around him. Through a series of challenges and experiences, he evolved into a paramount figure within the CCP, with his political character maturing over time. Hu Yaobang's political character is multifaceted, marked by his dedication to public service, unwavering courage, and steadfast beliefs. These traits not only earned him acclaim as an exemplary Communist Party member but also bestowed enduring contributions upon China's reform and opening-up endeavors. This study aims to explore Hu Yaobang's political character, offering insights into China's unique historical development through individual analysis, holding positive implications for furthering China's reform and opening-up and its contemporary populace.

**Keywords:** Hu Yaobang, character, history, traits

## **1. Introduction**

Since China's entry into the era of reform and opening-up in 1978, leading up to the present day, these initiatives have brought significant changes to China and the world. Particularly for China, relying on reform and opening-up, the country's GDP has surged to become the world's second-largest. This achievement owes much to the efforts of China's leadership and its people. Consequently, scholarly interest has remained keen on studying the Chinese leadership, with research on Deng Xiaoping being a focal point. Among the second-generation leaders within the Chinese Communist Party, Hu Yaobang holds immense research significance. His distinctive and charismatic personality continues to attract domestic and international attention. Delving into his political character connects his political work and practical experiences, providing multi-dimensional insights into China's specific developmental trajectories and offering a means to comprehend the significance of understanding China.

## **2. Formation of Hu Yaobang's Political Character**

Comrade Hu Yaobang was a seasoned Communist warrior, a great proletarian revolutionary, and a politician within the second-generation leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. His affable

personality, rigorous approach, open-mindedness, and genuine proletarian revolutionary spirit influenced generations of Chinese and even people worldwide. Among the leaders since the establishment of New China, his political character was undoubtedly unique. The formation of one's political character primarily stems from their political practices. However, studying the formation of a person's political character cannot solely rely on political activities; it also involves various aspects such as family upbringing, regional culture, and educational experiences, among others, all crucially impacting a person's character formation, including their political character.

## **2.1. Formative Period of Political Character**

"If China were Germany, Hunan would be Prussia," was a slogan circulating in the early years of the Republic of China in the Hunan region. Despite reflecting Hunanese pride, indisputably, in such an environment rich in talent and spirit, numerous revolutionaries and leaders emerged. Notably, figures like Huang Xing, Tan Sitong, Cai E, Mao Zedong, Liu Shaoqi, Peng Dehuai, among others, were outstanding representatives of proletarian revolutionaries. In that era, Hunan's rural movements surged vigorously, characterized by robust and resolute spirits, particularly the influential Liuyang rural movement known for its fervor. Such a substantial environment and specific practical experiences shaped Hu Yaobang's initial political character. Especially during his schooling, influenced by teachers and relatives, he delved into progressive books and articles. His encounter with Mao Zedong in 1927 unknowingly ignited his enthusiasm for proletarian revolution. In 1929, Hu Yaobang secretly joined the Communist Youth League and became its leader, formally immersing himself in the torrent of revolution.

Following his participation in the revolution, imbued with the daring and tenacious spirit of the Hunanese, Hu Yaobang quickly gained prominence within the revolutionary ranks. Due to his wit and young age coupled with a slight and slender frame, he swiftly gained the nickname "Little Red Devil" within the Red Army. Before October 1949, Hu Yaobang engaged extensively in the early Communist Youth League organizations, organizational departments, and propaganda departments, accumulating rich experiences in struggle and work. He also participated in the globally acclaimed Long March of 25,000 miles, further cementing his firm Marxist faith.

## **2.2. Maturation Period of Hu Yaobang's Political Character**

Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China, it marked a period of maturity for Hu Yaobang's political character. His focus shifted from revolutionary warfare to revolutionary construction and reform. Before the Cultural Revolution, Hu Yaobang was primarily engaged in party affairs at the local level and in the central Communist Youth League. Due to his adeptness in youth work, Hu Yaobang frequently spearheaded the daily activities of the Central Communist Youth League. His extensive involvement in youth work cultivated Hu Yaobang's fervent, straightforward, and approachable work style.

During the Cultural Revolution, he tirelessly fought against the anti-revolutionary factions led by Jiang Qing and Lin Biao, enduring confinement and criticism as a "black gang member" advocating the "Liudeng Line." Despite a temporary "release" in 1968, attending the Eighth Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the Ninth National Congress, he was later sent to labor at the "May Seventh Cadre School." In 1975, as the First Deputy Leader and Vice President of the Party's Central Group at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, his work received affirmation from Deng Xiaoping. However, by 1976, he was falsely accused of being one of the "four black elements advocating a reversal of verdicts" and a "hardened capitalist roader," facing renewed suppression and persecution. His experiences during the Cultural Revolution constituted the most painful decade of Hu Yaobang's career. His righteous propositions were overlooked, and he

personally suffered. Witnessing colleagues unjustly treated without recourse to justice deeply pained him. He fully realized the importance of democracy and the rule of law, earnestly reflecting on the essence of Marxism and what it meant to be a Communist Party member. While his lengthy youth work provided immense courage to drive reforms, his experiences during the Cultural Revolution bestowed upon him the fearless wisdom for reform.

### 3. Characteristics of Hu Yaobang's Political Character

Hu Yaobang stands as one of the most charismatic and distinctive leadership figures in post-revolution China. Comrade Wen Jiabao, who worked closely with him and later became a prominent national leader, passionately expressed, "I personally experienced Comrade Yaobang's excellent style of close engagement with the masses and concern for their hardships, his noble character of selflessness and transparency, witnessing his selfless dedication to the party's cause and the people's welfare, working tirelessly day and night. His teachings and actions remained etched in my heart, influencing significantly my subsequent work, study, and life." [1] Hu Yaobang not only influenced generations of Communist Party members but also resonated deeply with successive generations of Chinese. Renowned Go player Nie Weiping reverentially remarked, "I deeply admire him with utmost reverence." [2]

So, what distinct political character traits did Hu Yaobang possess that left an indelible impression on both those in power and the masses, lingering in their memory for a long time?

Firstly, his dedication to public service remained unwavering. For a leader, especially one of high authority, maintaining a work style close to the people is commendable. Continuously bearing in mind being a public servant, Hu Yaobang, whether at the Organization Department, the Propaganda Department, or in his role as Party Chairman and General Secretary, never displayed any airs of an official. Constantly caring about people's suffering and wholeheartedly serving the people epitomized Hu Yaobang's sought-after image in the eyes of the masses. According to reports from People's Daily at that time, between January 1979 and July 1985, Hu personally reviewed over 2,000 letters from the people. This meant he had to review an average of one letter per day, resolving numerous practical difficulties. These included challenges faced by companies, rural development, transportation issues, and the resettlement of persecuted individuals during the Cultural Revolution. Hu Yaobang not only showed great concern in responding to these letters but also, during his six-plus years as the Chairman and General Secretary of the Central Committee, frequently visited grassroots levels. Wherever difficulties were most prevalent, Hu Yaobang was often seen. During the Spring Festival of 1983, he spent the holiday with ordinary soldiers and civilians on Hainan Island. Before the Spring Festival in 1984, he visited impoverished areas in Guangxi. In 1985, he went to the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau and, in 1986, to Guizhou. In the 1980s, he left his mark in over 2,000 counties and more than 1,600 of these counties nationwide. Wherever he went, the people greeted him with joy, engaging in casual conversations. He personally assisted the people in resolving difficulties, earning widespread admiration and commemoration from numerous government officials and masses even after stepping down from the highest leadership position and upon his passing. As Comrade Zeng Qinghong stated in a speech during the 90th anniversary commemoration of Hu Yaobang, "His historical achievements and outstanding qualities will forever be remembered in the hearts of the Party and the people." [3]

Secondly, unwavering courage throughout. Wisdom and courage are essential elements for political figures. Among them, courage is particularly rare, especially in complex and highly dangerous political circumstances. This stands as one of the most brilliant characteristics among Hu Yaobang's numerous political traits. Especially notable was the rectification process after assuming the position of Deputy Principal of the Central Party School and the extensive review of wrongful cases after becoming the Minister of the Organization Department. This period marked China's emergence from the shadow of the Cultural Revolution, a time when the nation faced myriad

challenges and required comprehensive restructuring. Upon assuming the role of Deputy Principal of the Central Party School, despite the school being significantly affected during the Cultural Revolution, Hu Yaobang fearlessly initiated comprehensive reforms. He was unafraid to address and rectify individuals and matters associated with the "Gang of Four," while simultaneously emphasizing the Party's cadre policies. Balancing the need to end chaos and chart a legitimate course was an immense challenge. A professor at a university in China, upon hearing about the rectification at the Central Party School, even composed a five-character poem, "The national atmosphere, the 'left' is frightening. Dragons lurk while tender-skinned individuals reside. Frequent campaigns, many innocent souls at academies. Rectifying documents, three hundred and sixty kilograms." [4] This vividly showcased the magnitude of grievances back then and the complexity of rectification efforts at the Party School. During his tenure as the Minister of the Organization Department, Hu Yaobang continued to demonstrate his courageous demeanor. He repeatedly expressed, "If we don't take the plunge, who will?" [5] Carrying the spirit of taking the plunge, he defied common opinions, resolutely moved forward, disregarded personal safety, broke through numerous restraints and limitations, and, with the support of senior comrades like Deng Xiaoping, Ye Jianying, and Chen Yun, actively led initiatives. This included removing the label of "rightist" from all intellectuals, rehabilitating Liu Shaoqi and Zhang Wentian, and rectifying the case of the "Sixty-One Person Group." These endeavors demanded considerable effort from Hu Yaobang, proving his courage. During the rectification process, he once said, "Regardless of when, under what circumstances, and by which organizational level or individuals decisions were made and approved, corrections should be made based on actual facts." [6] His boldness was evident. In an era demanding courage and bold action, Hu Yaobang lived up to the era's expectations, ensuring that the nation and its people discarded their burdens and moved forward boldly.

Thirdly, unwavering faith. Faith in communism is a fundamental element for Communist Party members, and a qualified and outstanding Communist Party member must withstand countless tests with an unwavering commitment. Throughout Hu Yaobang's extensive revolutionary career, he encountered various challenges, including persecution during the Cultural Revolution, being criticized as a "gang member," and suffering setbacks in 1976 as one of the "four black elements." These were significant trials for someone just about to embark on a significant endeavor. His steadfast belief in communism, nurtured since childhood, was inseparable from these experiences. Establishing a correct belief system is vital for unwavering commitment. With a clear and unwavering belief, one can remain constantly vigilant. Whether in the highest leadership position or not, he faced numerous challenges and temptations. The saying goes, "The higher you are, the colder it gets." However, Hu Yaobang dared risks, confronted challenges, endured hardships, maintained a mentality of serving the people, retained a simple citizen's mindset, remained upright, impartial, and selfless. Without a robust belief system within him, achieving all this would have been challenging.

#### 4. Conclusion

Representative of a generation of Chinese Communist Party members shouldering the responsibilities of their times, studying Hu Yaobang during various periods in Chinese history, especially during the reform and opening-up era, enlightens us about the inevitable difficulties in reform. In the face of these challenges, the best approach is to solve them. Constantly overcoming difficulties propels China's continuous progress. The new generation of Chinese Communist Party members, represented by Xi Jinping, boldly rectifies mistakes, combats corruption, faces problems and challenges head-on, expressing a determination for development to the Chinese and the world. We have every reason to believe that generation after generation of Chinese, through continuous efforts, will continue to advance the great cause of reform and opening up and eventually realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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