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## DON'T TOSS AND TURN, AND THEN YOU WILL WIN

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*[December 2008 marked the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the adoption of the liberal economic reform policies that have been credited with radically improving China's standard of living and raising China to one of the world's major economic and military powers. In his speech marking the anniversary Hu Jintao said that for the future there would be no more zheteng: a term almost as ambiguous in Chinese as it is in English. The dictionary definition is "toss and turn." It also means bouncing around, doing summersaults, that sort of thing. This essay attempts an explication of the concept and of Hu's use of it. According to this interpretation, the meaning of the term is to imply that henceforth there will be general policy continuity, a focus on carrying out properly those policies that have already been properly adopted, that there will be no more radical changes of direction. The Party by 2009 set great store on social stability (even confusing it with "harmony"; and the promise of no more zheteng could then serve as a reassurance both to cadres and the general public that they can plan their lives with some sort of assurance that there will be no dramatic interruptions from outside.]*

The opposite of "not tossing and turning" (buzheteng, 不折腾) is tossing and turning (zheteng). Zhe, 折—it can mean turn, as in turn a summersault or a loop de loop. Teng, 腾—this means gallop or prance: so zheteng is not merely to turn a summersault but to do a leaping summersault. This might be fine for acrobatics or diving. Sports, however, also imposes its own rules and limits. You can't just jump around however you please. After you jump you will hit the land or the water, and you'll get hurt if you don't do it properly. And if you land among the spectators and harm one of them, things will be even worse.

When there is a lot of tossing and turning in a country or a region, whether in great matters or small the consequences are unfortunate. The crux here is that the things you are tossing and turning, when it comes down to it, are people. People who are tossed around have no sense of peace or stability. In a given year there may be continuous small disturbances or one large one; but once the year has passed there is still the after-effect, and it will take several years before things feel right again. The dad of one of my schoolmates was a professor, and when he heard this he drew a general rule of life: if you have a stroke of luck and let it go by, there is no guarantee that another one will come rushing along. Take care of this year's business this year. Looking back this sounds a little funny, but if you put it in the context of a year of tossing and turning, when there was no sense of personal security, it does not sound strange at all. In 1965 a "work team" of ten thousand persons entered such and such a county, and as the news spread several dozen persons were scared to death (indeed, committed suicide). Every time people had to fill out a personal history or record of their

family background, they would feel a need to visit the toilet or develop a headache. . . . [\[1\]](#)

In the old society, when the people were not the masters of their own household, we had to toss and turn—our goal was to toss down that corrupt political system and create a heaven and earth that would delight the common people. But once New China was established, the people became the masters of the state. At that point, just in terms of reason if we toss and turn, we are tossing and turning ourselves. This is easy to say, but in actuality things are more complicated. One important consideration is that while the people are the masters of the state, the state is managed through structures of political power, and the structures of political power are controlled by persons who hold power and who are styled “public servants.” It is possible, then, that for a certain period of time and for a variety of reasons, “public servants” can turn their backs on their “masters” and carry out their own will and desires-- they can toss and turn. Because the public servants are in charge of both major and minor things, there is also major and minor tossing and turning. A township head, in pursuit of his own political ambitions, can cause the residents of dozens and dozens of villages to toss and turn like nobody’s business, painting the rocks of a mountain all sleek and green. A county head can mobilize the people of many townships to dig ponds and lay pipes to bring water to where there had not been water before. . .

It would be a great good thing if there would be no more tossing and turning in China of the future. It would benefit the state and the people. Guaranteeing long-term political order is a condition for the great task of bringing about the full development of the Chinese nation. From the political side, no tossing and turning means to emphasize politics, emphasize rules, manage things in accord with the laws and constitution. Within the Party it means to manage things according to the Party constitution. The affairs of state should be managed according to the state constitution. On concrete matters it means that things should be managed by the appropriate offices in a manner appropriate to the particular conditions and with those in subordinate positions obeying those in authority over them. Experience also has taught us that if things are managed in a flustered, hurried manner, with each new issue that comes up detracting attention from those matters that are already in the process of being handled, then everything becomes mixed up and confused and we don’t know what to focus on. We fret over everything. Today this is what is important; the day after tomorrow something else takes its place. If things seem to be overly confused and messed up, the relevant offices might decide to try to do everything at once. The work is treated all as one piece; the main leaders grasp hold of it; the results are obvious. . . But as time goes on, the maxim that each should focus on what he is qualified for has been sabotaged. Something else comes up; the leadership is busy with all sorts of things; the appropriate agencies are no longer under pressure. There is the shock of the accumulation of numbers of different things and unceasing flows of orders from “directive departments” and “work offices” wear out those doing the work. As this goes on there is no longer any pattern to the work and things fall into chaos.

The winning way is in “not tossing and turning.” When people my age hear that in the China of the future there should be “no tossing and turning,” we have a deep understanding of what this means and everyone happily runs around spreading the news. No tossing and turning resolves people to persist firmly along the road of reform and opening with Chinese characteristics. These are not empty words. As a result of all sorts of economic development policies people have begun to be rich. It might happen that someone might feel dissatisfied and uneasy in his heart, and say something like this: Beautiful! But who knows what the future holds? My God! If we’re told there will be more tossing and turning, then all that you are talking about will be no more. That’s scary! This shows that China must persist in avoiding more tossing and turning. We must resolve that there be no more tossing and turning, but instead pursue development with one heart and one mind: and only then can China come out a winner!

*Renmin Ribao*, 13 January 2009

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[\[1\]](#) The reference is to the build-up to the Cultural Revolution. Work teams were groups of Party functionaries from outside a certain unit whose assignment was to investigate that unit, correct errors, and perhaps purge those responsible for the errors.