

## SHORT BIOGRAPHY FOR SUSUMU TAKENAGA

### Contact Information

**Address:** Faculty of Economics

Daitobunka University

1-9-1 Takashimadaira, Itabashi Ward

Tokyo 175-8571 Japan

**Telephone:** 81-3-5399-7326 (office)

**Fax:** 81-3-5399-7367

**Email Address:** [takenaga@ic.daito.ac.jp](mailto:takenaga@ic.daito.ac.jp), [takenaga@qa2.so-net.ne.jp](mailto:takenaga@qa2.so-net.ne.jp)

Susumu Takenaga, professor of economics, born in 1949.

He specializes in research on the Marxian economic theory and the history of economic thought. He has obtained the doctor degree in economics from the Paris University in 1984. He has published about 50 articles in different journals and has written or compiled several books and presented them many times on national and international conferences in Japanese, English and French languages.

He has been and is active in various committees organized in academic organizations such as Japan Society of Political Economy, Japan Society for the History of Economic Thought, and organized in October 2005 the annual conference of the JSPE on the campus of Daitobunka University. Member since 1998 of the Japan editorial committee of MEGA.

### Select list of publications since 2000

*A study on the Ricardian Economics –theory of value and theory of money,*  
Ochanomizu-Shobo,

Theory of money of D. Ricardo –currency issue and economic dynamics—,

*Keizaironshu (Economic Journal)*, Daitobunka University, No.76

A characterization of the theory of value of Marx in 1840s, in *System of the Economic Theory of Marx*, edited by Kinzaburo Sato and Fumio Hattori, Yuhikaku

Structure and problems of the circuit theory of money 1-4, *the same Journal*, No.80-83

Theory of Money of David Ricardo: Quantity Theory and Theory of Value, *Lecturas de Economia*, No.59, 2003, Columbia

The Researches of Prof. Teinosuke Otani on Marx's Manuscript of Chapter (Book) 5 of the Volume III of *Capital*, *the same Journal*, No.84

## **A phase in the value controversy in the Soviet Union in 1920s**

**Susumu Takenaga**

My presentation today concerns my translation of the master piece of Isaac Ilich Rubin, *Essays on Marx's theory of value* and my researches related to this translation. Rubin was a member of the Institute of Marx and Engels inaugurated just after the October Revolution under the direction of David Ryazanov, one of the most renowned Russian marxologue. As a researcher of this Institute Rubin published during 1920s many important articles and books on Marx's economic theory, in particular on his theory of value using the first philological materials collected in the Institute with a view to publishing them as volumes of MEGA (Marx Engels Gesamt Ausgabe). He published the first edition of *Essays* in 1923 and the second edition in 1924 and the third in 1928, and the fourth last edition in 1930, when Stalin had already consolidated his dictatorial position as party leader. Ryazanov and members of the Institute of Marx and Engels including Rubin were banned from academic world in 1931, because their research and publishing activities on the first hand materials of Marx and Engels did not always conform with the politics of Stalin who tried to systematize dogmatically the theory and thought of Marx and Engels so as to serve the state and party of Soviet Union.

From 1930s on, the name and the work of Rubin remained in oblivion for a long time not only in Soviet Union but also in other countries. But since the English translation of *Essays* appeared in early 1970s, Rubin's interpretation of Marxian theory of value revived among Marxist economists of the so-called Western countries (America, Europe and also Japan). Rubin's translated book served as a powerful basis for the partisans of the one side of the value controversy during 1970s and 1980s. This English translation was made from the 3rd edition published in Russian in 1928, but the translator and the author of the preface ignored totally the historical context of the

book, and cut off the appendix to this edition Rubin added in order to respond to the critiques made after the publication of the 2nd edition in 1924 against his interpretations of some cardinal points of Marx's theory of value. In this way, this English translation was perceived rather in the context of theoretical debates in 1970-80s in Western countries than in its original Russian context. But, on behalf of its correct interpretation and evaluation, it is obvious that Rubin's book must be read and placed in its own historical context.

Toward the end of 1980s, a copy of the 4th edition of *Essays* was found by chance in Japan in the library of Hitotsubashi University. Until then, the third edition had been believed to be the last edition, because of the year of its publication 1928 was just before the establishment of Stalinian regime, and the publication of further edition had been supposed to be practically impossible. But the unexpected 4th edition of 1930 was really found, which had been brought into Japan by a famous Japanese economist, Ichiro Nakayama, of Hitotsubashi University, before the second world war from Europe. But as for its content, the 4th edition does not differ substantially from the 3rd edition, the English version of which was already in circulation and known.

As I had been personally interested in the theory of value of Marx and published several articles on this subject since the graduate school, I decided to translate this 4th edition of Rubin's book and to add to the Japanese edition the results of my proper work on the value controversy in the Soviet Union during the second half of 1920s. But for this purpose I could make use of a very limited number of first hand materials, because many of the documents concerning this controversy belonged to the list of prohibition and were conserved secretly in various archives during the era of ex-Soviet Union. The translator's presentation I added as appendix had thus to be on a considerably insufficient basis. This appendix had to be improved somehow to get rid of such a drawback. The Japanese translation was published anyway with translator's comments by Hosei University Publishing House in 1994.

Accidentally, the publication of my translation was just after the collapse of ex-Soviet Union and the beginning of its transition to a new regime. Along with this

process, the documents put under the political oppression during the Soviet regime lost every reason to be kept secret, among them were Rubin's works and materials related to the value controversy in 1920s. In recent years the works of more important Russian economists or thinkers such as Bucharin, Kondratiev etc. have been and are being published in their original form.

I asked some libraries and archives in Moscow to make photocopies of the designated documents and send them to Japan, and I really could obtain most part of them which would have been unbelievable before 1990s. Most important among them are some published books of Rubin himself other than *Essays* and various editions of *Essays* itself, and also some books of main adversaries of Rubin in the value controversy such as Kon, Shabus etc. On the basis of these materials, I edited a book supplementary to the translation of *Essays*. These are materials published in translation for the first time in the world after a long period of ban in the ex-Soviet Union. Among these are the chapter 12 *Value and exchangeable value (Content and form of value)*, and chapter 14 *Abstract labor*, of the 2nd edition of *Essays*. These are chapters, on the topics of which the value controversy was most vividly waged after 1924, and which were most extensively rewritten or amplified by Rubin for the publication of the 3rd edition in 1928. If we are to study and evaluate Rubin's interpretation of the theory of value of Marx and the debates around it in the late 1920s, it is indispensable to know exactly the content of these chapters in the 2nd edition, which was the object of the controversy, and to compare them with the content of the corresponding chapters of the 3rd edition, which was so to say the result of the controversy on the side of Rubin because these chapters were rewritten by him under the strong and visible influence of this controversy. This supplementary book also contains articles which I consider most important and which are written by authors from both side of the controversy (Rubin school and anti-Rubin school, put between brackets).

I added at the end of this supplementary book an article of my own I wrote on the basis of the examination of these first hand materials, in which I tried to shed some light on the particular characteristics and problems of Rubin's interpretation of

Marx's theory of value, brought into relief against the background of historical relation of the classical theory and Marx and also of the controversial context of the late 1920s in Soviet Union. My presentation today entitled *A phase in the value controversy in the Soviet Union in 1920s* is based on this article of mine. There are many important points to point out and complicated relations among them to elucidate, but the time given for my presentation, 20 minutes, is too short to explain them sufficiently. So I chose to mention the background of my work rather than to try to enter into details of full controversial stories. For those among you who are interested in the details, I beg to refer to the full text in English presented beforehand to the organizer of this Conference. Nevertheless, for the rest of my time I will pick up very briefly some relevant points in question in order to give you a certain idea of the Rubin controversy.

Rubin's adversaries adopted the physiological interpretation of the abstract labor. According to them, the abstract labor is obtained in abstracting from a really performed labor every concrete form of its expense to reduce it to pure "expense of physiological energy" of human organs. The existence of the abstract labor understood in this way goes along with the human labor, hence this abstract labor has no special connection with the commodity form of the products of human labor.

The abstract labor, as long as it consists of physiological energy, can be quantitatively expressed with a certain number of calories as unit of calorific value, as Kon affirmed. It is just because the value has as its ultimate foundation of existence such a physical quantity as "energy" that it admits quantitative treatment. The physiologists generally adopted such an opinion, which served them as one of efficient arguments for criticizing Rubin's "sociological" interpretation of abstract labor. In fact, when Rubin tried to treat the "quantity of abstract labor" in the 3rd edition in response to this critique, he was to suffer from considerable difficulties.

In response to the critiques Rubin advanced "3 sorts of equal labor" with a view to rigorously conceptualizing the abstract labor. These 3 sorts of equal labor (1. "physiologically equal labor", 2. "socially equalized labor", 3. "abstract labor") was to serve the purpose of delimiting the extension of the abstract labor and at the same

time of distinguishing it clearly from the physiological labor.

According to physiologists, Dashkovskii for example, in whatever form of social organization of labor, the existence of abstract labor is necessary, as long as is necessary a reduction of various forms of labor of society to a common unit capable of rendering them quantitatively comparable to each other, and since such a necessity does not limited to the commodity economy, the existence of abstract labor is trans-historical. But the abstract labor as Rubin understands it can exist only under two conditions: 1. it is socialized by being equalized and 2. this equalization is realized in a reified form (commodity exchange). This abstract labor is certainly a “socially equalized labor” but one particular form of it. Rubin utilizes the distinction of “3 sorts of equal labor” as a conceptual device to clearly advance the specificity of the abstract labor as he understands it, and at the same time he criticizes with this conceptual device the concept of abstract labor of physiologists.

In the 2nd edition Rubin had the tendency to seize each of production and exchange as one particular concrete process taking place once and for all (at least explicitly, they were not situated as one step of the repeated processes in the flux of reproduction), but in the 3rd edition of *Essays* Rubin adopts the overall angle of view of reproduction. It is from this angle of view that he advances now new points of arguments on the problems of relations between production and exchange related to the abstraction of labor and the generation of value. In this context the production is regarded as having behind it a manifold repetition of preceding productions and exchanges and hence naturally as taking place with a view to exchange (selling).

What becomes here the most important problem is whether and how the “quantity of abstract labor” determining the amount of value relates to the quantity of labor in the production (concrete labor) as “physical, technological” process. In Rubin’s theory, the abstract labor is a “commodity form of society” which creates the value. If so, how can the quantity of value or its variation be explained? One of the issues of controversy around the 2nd edition was how to treat the quantity of value. In reading the passages amended in the 3rd edition we see Rubin in considerable difficulties.