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We Are Still in the Historical Era Specified by Marxism

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ABSTRACT

Although our times have changed greatly and profoundly compared with Marx's, we are still in the "era of transition from capitalism to socialism" as indicated by Marxism. This is based on Marxist historical materialism, on the laws of the movement of social basic contradictions—the dialectical unity of productive forces and relations of production, and economic basis and superstructure, and on the actual situation of basic contradictions of capitalism, as well as the development trend of the world socialist movement. The Chinese communists have been creatively grasping the organic unity of the essence and characteristics of the times, following up the development trend of the times, leading the Chinese people into a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and contributing Chinese wisdom and Chinese program for solving the problems of human development. China has been promoting the building of a "community with a shared future for mankind" and has been committed to building a world of lasting peace, common security and prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, and cleanliness and beauty, safeguarding world peace on the basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and promoting the establishment of a world of mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation.

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In his talk "Continuing to Promote the Sinicization, Modernization and Popularization of Marxism" (see Xi 2017c, 65–68), Xi Jinping pointed out,

Despite the great and profound changes taken place in the era we live in compared to that of Marx, we are still in the historical era specified by Marxism from the wide view of 500 years of world socialism. This is the scientific basis for maintaining firm confidence in Marxism and keeping strong faith in the victory of socialism. (Xi 2017c, 66)

This incisive exposition has a profound historical vision, deep understanding of the historical development laws and accurate grasp of the characteristics of the times, which is of great and profound guiding significance for us to scientifically understand the fundamental essence and main characteristics of the historical era in which we live, correctly grasp the laws and trends of the development of human society, and deeply understand where socialism with Chinese characteristics "comes and goes," so that we can better uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era, carry forward

the theoretical character of Marxism of keeping pace with the times, and continue to promote sinicization of Marxism.

1. The Historical Era Specified by Marxism Is “the Era of Transition from Capitalism to Socialism”

Xi Jinping stressed, “We are still in the historical era specified by Marxism” (Xi 2017c, 66). So, what kind of era is the historical era pointed out by Marxism? This is a major issue that needs to be understood first based on the history of Marxist development—on the basic ideas and views on historical eras of Marxist classical writers.

The concept of “times” mentioned by Marxist classical writers is mainly a social and historical category. In the works of Marx, Engels and Lenin, it is used from different perspectives and in different ways. For example, in the works of Marx and Engels (2012), there are such expressions as historical epoch, revolutionary epoch, cultural age, primitive age, prehistoric age, classical times, medieval times, feudal times, and capitalist times; Lenin (2012) used in his writings the expressions of era of patriarchic system, era of bourgeois-democratic parliamentarism, era of the dictatorship of the proletariat, era of the political rule of the proletariat, and era of the imperialist war, etc. Generally speaking, these words—age, era, epoch, times,—are used to refer to the historical periods or stages, of which some are with obvious landmarks and some are with clear relations of production and economic and social forms, distinct class nature and ruling mode.

“The historical era specified by Marxism” (Xi 2017c, 66) is mainly the latter, that is, the social and economic period with clear relations of production and economic and social forms, and distinct class nature and ruling mode. Such a concept of “era” is a “great historical era” (Lenin 2009, 91) that embodies the essence and general trend of social development.

Therefore, how to divide the times is a major basic issue in Marxist times theory. To divide the times is not a simple work of time division, but rather a deep exploration and identification of the fundamental social nature of a large historical period with distinctive characteristics. It is to find out the deep nature of the “historical era” based on the reality of the “natural time,” so that people in the historical era would establish the coordinates of the era, define its nature and characteristics, and grasp its main contradictions and development trends. Since the criteria for dividing the times are different, there are different perceptions of the times. For example, according to science and technology and production tools, it can be divided into the stone age, the bronze age, the iron age, the steam age, the electrical age, and the internet age; based on industrial development, it can be divided into the agricultural age, the industrial age, the post-industrial age or the information age; from the economic point of view, it can be divided into the era of natural economy, the era of commodity economy and the era of product economy; politically, it can be divided into autocratic era and democratic era; from the perspective of civilization, it can be divided into the obscurity age, the barbaric age, and the civilized age, etc. For the above divisions, some adopt single standards, but others use compound standards; some focus on natural attributes, while some pay attention to social characteristics; some are based on a certain social field, while others are divided according to the overall development of the society.

Marxism standards for dividing the times are based on historical materialism. Marx and Engels discovered the laws governing the development of human society through macroscopic social history, and revealed the nature of the times and its main contradictions and basic characteristics through the contradictory movements of productivity and production relations, and economic foundation and superstructure, which they used as the main standard to divide different historical times. This is mainly reflected in a classical argumentation in the “Preface to a Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy” (see Marx and Engels 1995b, 31–35) written by Marx.

At a certain stage of development, the material productive forces of society come into conflict with the existing relations of production or—this merely expresses the same thing in legal terms—with the property relations within the framework of which they have operated hitherto. From forms of development of the productive forces these relations turn into their fetters. Then begins an era of social revolution. The changes in the economic foundation lead sooner or later to the transformation of the whole immense superstructure. (Marx and Engels 1995b, 32–33)

In broad outline, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be designated as epochs marking progress in the economic development of society. (Marx and Engels 1995b, 33)

Here, Marx used historical materialism as the main basis and fundamental standard for dividing the times, and thus divided human social development until then into four stages. With the movement of capitalist mode of production due to its inherent basic contradictions and principal contradictions, “the bourgeois mode of production” will inevitably perish as “the last antagonistic form of the social process of production,” and therefore “the prehistory of human society accordingly closes with this social formation” (Marx and Engels 1995b, 33). Marx’s exposition contains the historical development trend—the transition from capitalist society to communism.

In discussing the differences between different times, Marx also put forward the view point of the unity of productivity development and production relations and social relations, especially the importance of production relations and social relations in distinguishing different times. In “The Poverty of Philosophy” (see Marx and Engels 1995a, 136–195), Marx clearly explained,

Social relations are closely bound up with productive forces. In acquiring new productive forces men change their mode of production; and in changing their mode of production, in changing the way of earning their living, they change all their social relations. The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill, society with the industrial capitalist. (Marx and Engels 1995a, 141–142)

He also pointed out in *Capital*, volume 1 (see Marx and Engels 2001),

The difference between various economic times lies not in what is produced, but in how it is produced and what means of labor is used. The means of labor is not only a measuring instrument of human labor development, but also an indicator of the social relations through which labor is conducted. (Marx and Engels 2001, 210)

It can be seen that the concept of “era” of Marxism is not a single concept of economy, science, technology, and culture, etc, but a category of politics, society, and history.

According to the situation of the imperialist era in which he lived, Lenin elaborated on the issue of times in a comprehensive and in-depth manner. He believed that “eras” are “great historical times,” not individual situations in a country or region, but the overall situation and overall pattern and characteristics of human society. Although “in each of them there are and will always be individual and partial movements, now forward now backward; there are and will always be various deviations from the average type and mean tempo of the movement” (Lenin 2009, 91), yet its general direction, overall characteristics and whole process of movement are basically determined, which is the basis for dividing the times. Correct judgments of an era and its characteristics should be based on the development of the social history and the overall world pattern. The essence of the times is reflected in the overall relationship and deep laws of history and the world, and the characteristics of the times are the inevitable embodiment of this overall connection and general trend.

Based on his in-depth exploration of the times, Lenin put forward the class standard for dividing the times based on Marxist historical materialism, Marxist view of times, and Marxist class analysis methods. He said,

We cannot know how rapidly and how successfully the various historical movements in a given epoch will develop, but we can and do know which class stands at the hub of one epoch or another, determining its main content, the main direction of its development, the main characteristics of the historical situation in that epoch, etc. (Lenin 2009, 91)

Therefore, in a certain era, the advanced class that conforms to the development of the times and promotes the progress of the times is an important force to determine the development situation, characteristics and trends of the times. It can be seen that Lenin’s class standard is actually a concrete representation of the standard of the production mode by Marxism.

Lenin not only profoundly expounded the essence of the times and the standards for dividing the times, but also scientifically analyzed the main contradictions, development trends and the prospects of the victory of the socialist revolution in the capitalist era based on the actual situation of the development of capitalism and the proletarian revolutionary struggle at that time. He used Marxist point of view to scientifically judge the characteristics of the times, and divided capitalism into three historical epochs in “Under a False Flag” (see Lenin 2009, 91–96): The first epoch (1789–1871) is from the Great French Revolution to the Franco-Prussian war, which is a time of the rise and a complete victory of the bourgeoisie; The second epoch (1871–1914) is from the Franco-Prussian war to the outbreak of World War I, which is a period that the bourgeoisie gained full domination and then declined and a new class steadily mustered its forces; The third epoch (1914–?) is the age of imperialism and imperialist upheavals. He clearly pointed out, “we are undoubtedly living at the juncture of two epochs” (Lenin 2009, 91). The new “juncture” has a new social and class content. “From a rising and progressive class the bourgeoisie has turned into a declining, decadent, and reactionary class. It is quite another class that is now on the upgrade on a broad historical scale” (Lenin 2009, 95). In “Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism” (see Lenin 2009, 97–213), Lenin also pointed out the sharpening of the contradictions of monopoly capitalism: “This intensification of contradictions constitutes the most powerful driving force of the transitional period of history, which began from the time of the final victory of world finance capital” (Lenin 2009, 209).

The concept of “transitional period of history” is put forward here. After the victory of the October Revolution in 1917, Lenin took the October Revolution as a watershed and pointed out that the October Revolution opened up

two epochs of world historical significance, namely, the bourgeois epoch and the socialist epoch, and thus started the world alternation between the capitalist parliamentary epoch and the proletarian Soviet epoch. (Lenin 1985, 207–208)

This can be said to be the earliest expression of the “transition from capitalism to socialism” in Marxist literature.

Since then, the definition and characteristics of epochs in the international communist movement have basically followed Lenin’s views and conclusions. Stalin put forward in “The Foundation of Leninism” (see Stalin 1956) that the present era is “the era of imperialism and the proletarian revolution” (52). The *Moscow Declaration* (see People’s Publishing House 1958), adopted at the Conference of the Communist Parties and Workers’ Parties of the 12 socialist countries in 1957, reads: The main content of our time is “the transition from capitalism to socialism opened up by the Russian October Revolution” (2). This statement was widely recognized by the communist parties at that time and has become the best accredited definition and conclusion in line with the historical reality down to the present era.

Xi Jinping pointed out that despite the great and profound changes taken place in the era we live in compared to that of Marx, “We are still in the historical era specified by Marxism” from the wide view of 500 years of world socialism (Xi 2017c, 66). Generally speaking, the “historical era specified by Marxism” is an era of transformation from capitalism to communism, which is based on Marxist historical materialism, the dialectical unity of productive forces and relations of production, economic base and superstructure, and the actual situation of the basic contradictions of capitalism, class relations and the development of class struggle. It is also the “great historical era” put forward by Lenin (Lenin 2009, 91), that is, the “historical era of transition from capitalism to socialism,” which was opened up by the October Revolution. With the vicissitudes of 500 years of world socialism and the changes of 170 years of the international communist movement, great and profound changes have taken place in the world. However, the development of the times and practice has proved that the essence of the times and the development trend of human society have not changed, and we are still in the historical era specified by Marxism.

2. Grasping the Historical Era in Which We Live from the Dialectical Unity of the Essence of the Times and the Characteristics of the Times

The era discussed by Marxism is a concept of “great era.” A historical era can be divided into several “small eras” according to the characteristics and main problems of different development stages. Today, we are still in the “great era” of transition from capitalism to socialism, but there are different themes and major contradictions in different development stages in this great era. Therefore, it is necessary to grasp the contemporary era comprehensively and accurately from the dialectical unity of the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times.

The essence of an era is the fundamental nature of the times, which is embodied in the dominant mode of production, class strength and nature of the social system. To judge the

essence of a historical era, we must explore the contradictions between the material living conditions and the production mode in the era. As Marx said,

Just as one does not judge an individual by what he thinks about himself, so one cannot judge such a period of transformation by its consciousness, but, on the contrary, this consciousness must be explained from the contradictions of material life, from the conflict existing between the social forces of production and the relations of production. (Marx and Engels 1995b, 33)

Engels expressed the same idea in the “Preface to the 1888 English Version of *Manifesto of the Communist Party*” (see Marx and Engels 1995a, 254–259):

That in every historical epoch, the prevailing mode of economic production and exchange, and the social organization necessarily following from it, form the basis upon which is built up, and from which alone can be explained the political and intellectual history of that epoch. (Marx and Engels 1995a, 257)

Marxism discusses “great historical eras” in the sense of the essence and fundamental nature of the times. It is at this most fundamental level, that is, from the sense of social and historical nature, that the macro-historical concepts of “the capitalist era” and “the socialist era” and the scientific conclusion that the essence of the present era is still the transition from capitalism to socialism are drawn.

The characteristics of the times refer to the iconic reality and main features reflecting the essence of the times presented at different political, economic, cultural and social development stages in a great historical era, which are embodied in the themes of the times, main contradictions, main problems, class relations, international relations, world pattern, level of development of different social systems and their interrelations, etc. In the era of capitalism, for example, it has experienced different development stages, including free capitalism, monopoly capitalism, state monopoly capitalism and international financial monopoly capitalism, of which each shows different characteristics. In the historical era of transition from capitalism to socialism, the two social systems coexist and compete with each other for a long time, and different stages of this era have different characteristics and different themes of the times. Lenin, for example, called the late 19th and early 20th centuries “the era of great proletariat revolution” (Lenin 1995, 159). Before the 1970s, the themes of the times were “war and revolution,” while after the 1980s, Deng Xiaoping put forward the themes of the times as “peace and development” (Deng 1993, 104). Thus, it can be said that the essence of our present era has not changed and is still the era of transition from capitalism to socialism as specified by Marxism, but the themes of the times have changed, that is, from war and revolution to peace and development.

A comprehensive and scientific understanding of the times and a profound and accurate grasp of the times is of great practical and methodological significance to uphold the unity of the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times (i.e., the themes of the times). The essence of the times is fundamental and decisive, which determines the overall direction, mode, and degree of presentation of the characteristics of the times. To grasp the characteristics of the times correctly we must base on the essence of the times to explore the features and trends of the times in the grand and long-term historical background of the development of the times. The characteristics of the times are the concrete expressions and presentations of the essence of the times in different historical periods, which are

embodied in the problems of the times, the main contradictions, the historical tasks and the strategies for adapting to the development of the times. Since the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times are closely related and inseparable, only by organically combining and unifying them can we scientifically and correctly understand the times, grasp the development trends and laws of the times, conform to the development of the times, answer the questions of the times, and formulate correct guidelines, principles and strategies. If we only see certain changes and some characteristics of the times and fail to correctly grasp the essence of the times from the long-term historical perspective and the laws of social development, we will lose our way, shake our convictions, and fail to correctly understand and identify the development trend of the times; if we merely understand the essence of the times in a static way, and stick to the creeds rigidly, we will not be able to keep pace with the times, grasp the pulse of the times, conform to the trend of the times, or properly solve the new problems constantly raised by the times. Therefore, it is very important to uphold the combination and unity of the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times, which is essential to correctly understand the times in which we live, and formulate correct guidelines, principles and strategies.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) not only has many correct successful valuable experiences but also has some misconceptions and lessons in understanding the times. Since the reform and opening up, it is precisely the Party's accurate identification of the essence of the times and the timely recognition of the change of the themes of the times that has provided a correct ideological and theoretical basis for the accurate formulation of the guidelines, principles and strategies of reform and opening up. Deng Xiaoping's thoughts on the essence of the times and the theme of the times are a model for using Marxist theory of the times to observe the world trend and solve China's problems. In the 1980s, according to the new changes and new features of the international situation and the world pattern, Deng Xiaoping clearly stated that "peace and development are two major issues in today's world" (Deng 1993, 104), thus forming the ideological category and basic consensus of the "themes of the times" within the party, and providing a correct distinction between the essence of the times and the themes of the times for observing and studying the times. It is precisely because of the organic unity of the two that China on the path of reform and opening-up and socialist modernization not only upholds socialist direction, but also conforms to the development trend of the times.

Deng Xiaoping put forward the "issue of the times" (i.e., the themes of the times) for the first time when he met with a delegation from Japan on March 4, 1985,

For the world's real big issues or global strategic issues now, one is peace, while the other is economy or development. Peace is between the east and the west, while development is between the north and the south. To sum up, the global strategic issues are about the east, the west, the north and the south. (Deng 1993, 105)

The report of the 13th National Congress of the CPC in 1987 proposed that "peace and development are the themes of contemporary world" (Party Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee 1991, 57). In 1992, the report of the 14th National Congress of the CPC put forward that "peace and development are two major themes of the world today" (Party Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee 1996, 35). Since then, the reports of the successive Party congresses have emphasized these themes, which have become the long-term consensus of the whole party. The report of

the 19th National Congress of the CPC emphasizes again these themes of the times: “the world is undergoing a period of great development, great changes and great adjustment, but peace and development are still the themes of the times” (Xi 2017a, 58).

Combining the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times (the themes of the times) is of great practical significance for the successful progress of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the right direction. Upholding the themes of the times of peace and development is very important for China to seize the strategic opportunities and historical opportunities to accelerate development. At the same time, we must see that the essence of the times has not changed, and we are still in the historical era specified by Marxism, that is, the historical era of transition from capitalism to socialism, only in this way can we maintain a firm belief in ideals and confidence in the victory of socialism. While upholding the essence of the times and recognizing the inevitable trend of historical development, we must conform to the development trend of the times, listen to the voices of the times, and solve the new problems of the times. There is no end to the development of the times, and we must keep up with the times and lead the times. As Xi Jinping pointed out, we should “move forward in the logic of historical progress, and develop in the trend of the times” (Xi 2018, 3).

In short, since reform and opening up, we have always upheld the themes of “peace and development,” have focused on construction, have dedicated to development, and have created a peaceful external environment for reform, opening up, and socialist modernization. We have been striving to grasp the strategic opportunities to accelerate China’s development, promote rapid improvement of China’s comprehensive national strength, and improve China’s international status. And on the other hand, we always uphold the essence of the times, maintain strategic strength in the changing international situation, grasp the changing characteristics of the times in the overall historical development, and firmly uphold the “four self-confidences” (i.e., self-confidence in the path, theory, institution, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics) while grasping the laws of social development. For example, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in the Eastern Europe in the 1990s, theories of “socialist failure” and “the end of history” were on the rise. At this critical moment of historical development, Deng Xiaoping firmly pointed out that the general trend of social and historical development is irreversible.

China will never give up socialism. China will definitely follow the socialist path of its choice to the end. No one can hold us down. As long as China doesn’t collapse, one-fifth of the world’s population is upholding socialism. We have full confidence in the future of socialism. (Deng 1993, 320–321)

This is the confidence on the basis of a profound grasp of the essence of the times. At the same time, we always insist that it is a long and complex historical process for socialism to replace capitalism and we always uphold the unity of the Party’s supreme program and basic program, which is the concrete embodiment of upholding the unity of the essence of the times and the characteristics of the times (the themes of the times). As Xi Jinping stated,

Facts have repeatedly told us that the analysis of Marx and Engels on the basic contradictions of capitalism is not out of date, and nor is their view of historical materialism that capitalism is bound to perish and socialism is bound to triumph. This is an irreversible general trend of

social and historical development, but the path is tortuous. (Party Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee 2014, 117)

In the twenty-first century, when the world is undergoing great development, great changes and great adjustment, the Central Committee of the CPC, with comrade Xi Jinping as the leading core, grasps and follows up the development trend of the times, correctly understands the law and trend of the development of the times, and creatively upholds the organic unity of the nature and characteristics of the times. In the era of great changes not taken place in the world for a hundred years and the historical period of a new fierce contest between socialism and capitalism, the Central Committee of the CPC, with comrade Xi Jinping as the leading core, leads the Chinese people into a new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, creates a new situation for the development of scientific socialism, holds high the great banner of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the world, makes socialism with Chinese characteristics the mainstay of socialist development in the twenty-first century, and contributes Chinese wisdom and Chinese program for solving the problems of human development.

3. Understanding the Historical Process and Strength Contrast of the Long-Term Coexistence of and Competition between Socialism and Capitalism in the Development of the Times

Upholding the unity of the essence and the characteristics of the times, and the combination of theory and practice, history and reality, and the domestic and the international, we can conclude that we are still in the historical era specified by Marxism during the early twenty-first century, and the essence of the times has not changed, but it shows new characteristics that different from the past. The era in which we live remains the historical era of transition from capitalism to socialism revealed by Marxism. The themes of the times are still peace and development, but neither peace nor development has been fundamentally fixed, and instead they have many new manifestations and new characteristics. Xi Jinping pointed out, “Peace and development are still the themes of the times. But at the same time, the global governance system has undergone profound changes, and different institutional models and development paths are competing with each other” (Xi 2016, 41). Contemporary capitalism is imperialism at the stage of international financial monopoly, and the inherent contradictions of capitalism are being accumulated on a global scale. In today’s world, peace, development and win-win cooperation are still the trend of the times, and the balance of international power will continue to develop in a direction conducive to world peace and development. However, since mankind still faces many difficulties and challenges, there is still a long way to go to safeguard world peace and promote common development. It is necessary to use world vision and historical vision to observe and study the new changes and new trends of contemporary capitalism, the new situation, the new problems and the new trends of world socialist development in the twenty-first century, and the new situation of the competition and strength comparison between world capitalism and socialism in the world, so as to comprehensively and historically observe and analyze the new characteristics and new trends of the development of the times.

After the capitalist crisis in 2008, the political and economic strength of the developed capitalist countries such as the United States has decreased relatively, and they seem incapable to dominate the world any longer. The myth of the “end of history” of capitalism

formed after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in the Eastern Europe has disillusioned, and the “violent” global development of capitalism has been reversed. The balance of power and relationship between world socialism represented by China and world capitalism represented by the United States and the western European countries have undergone major changes. In this contest, although the overall pattern of “strong capitalism and weak socialism” has not fundamentally changed, capitalism is clearly on the defensive, and the world socialist forces represented by China are obviously on the rise. The crisis marks that both the competition between the two social systems and the development of world history have entered a new historical period with a new trend and a new pattern.

The new pattern of power balance between world capitalism and world socialism at the beginning of the twenty-first century can be summarized as the following: World capitalism has started a large-scale recession in its long cycle of development; although world socialism is still in the low ebb after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, it has been on the rise in the long cycle of its development supported and symbolized by the great achievements of socialism with Chinese characteristics. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, world capitalism and world socialism have been coexisting and contesting each other for nearly a century, and the world capitalism has gone through a process from decline to flourishing to dwindling, while the world socialism has experienced a process from prosperity to decline to rising.

In the past 30 years, the world socialist movement has gone through a process from hitting the lowest point due to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe to seeking revitalization at the beginning of the twenty-first century. At every important historical point, socialism with Chinese characteristics has played a crucial role of historical turning point in the development of world socialism, and has become the backbone, wind vane and base of the world socialist movement. In general, there are three very important historical points: the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, the capitalist crisis, and the twists and turns in globalization.

The first important historical point: In the late 1980s and early 1990s, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the collapse of the Communist Party of Soviet Union, the drastic changes in Eastern Europe, the “socialist failure theory” and “the end of history” were once on the rise, and the “viewpoint of the collapse of China” was constantly heard in the world. However, China withstood the enormous pressure and challenges, and did not collapse in that “domino” disintegration. As Deng Xiaoping said, “As long as China’s socialism does not collapse, socialism will always stand in the world” (Deng 1993, 346). China has safeguarded and saved socialism.

The second important historical point: the crisis of the entire capitalist world triggered by the international financial crisis in the early twenty-first century. The crisis was less than 20 years later after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe. The so-called “socialist crisis” and “the end of history” caused by the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe have become “capitalist crisis” and “the end of capitalism” in a relatively short period of time. At the same time, in this process of development, socialism with Chinese characteristics not only has achieved great achievements and has steadily held high the banner of socialism in the world, but also has promoted the development of socialism into a new era. As Xi Jinping pointed out,

In particular, after the collapse of the Soviet Union and the socialist countries in Eastern Europe, “China bashing” has been constantly heard in the world, and various viewpoints of “the collapse of China” are continuously put forward. However, instead of collapsing, China’s overall national strength has increased daily and the living standard of the Chinese people has been improving continuously. “The scenery is unique here.” (Xi 2014, 109–110)

China has developed and revitalized socialism.

The third important historical point: After 15 years in the twenty-first century, the trend of counter-globalization in major western countries such as the United States and the United Kingdom has become a turning point, showing that the ability of capitalism to control and dominate the whole world has decreased significantly, while China has been holding high the banner of continuing to promote globalization and has been promoting globalization in a fair and reasonable direction. As Xi Jinping pointed out,

20 years ago or even 15 years ago, the main driving force of economic globalization was the United States and other Western countries. But today, we are regarded to be the most important standard-bearer in the world to promote the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, and to actively fight against various forms of protectionism in Western countries. (Xi 2017c, 212)

It can be said that this is a shift from globalization, which has long been dominated by capitalism, to the direction of globalization led by socialism. This is also of great significance to the development of socialism in the world. It is in this crucial historical period that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, which means that scientific socialism has shown out a strong vitality in China in the twenty-first century. Socialism with Chinese characteristics has become the banner of world socialist development in the twenty-first century and the mainstay of the revitalization of world socialism, and it will certainly make greater contributions to the new development of world socialism and scientific socialism.

4. Correctly Recognizing the New Characteristics and New Trends of the Development of the Times, and Contributing Chinese Wisdom and Chinese Program to Solving Human Problems

At present, the world is at a stage of great development, great changes and great adjustment, but peace and development are still the themes of the times. Multi-polarization of the world, economic globalization, social informatization and cultural diversity are developing in depth; reform of the global governance system and the international order is being accelerated; interconnectedness and interdependence of countries are deepening; the general trend of peaceful development is irreversible. At the same time, mankind is facing many common problems and challenges: instability and uncertainty of the world are prominent; the world economy is lack of momentum; regional hot problems are on the rise; traditional security and non-traditional security problems are intertwined.

Economic globalization is undergoing deep adjustment in countercurrent. It is the inevitable trend of historical development, but so far it is mainly dominated by international financial capital, leading to unequal, unfair and unreasonable international economic order. The outbreak of the international financial crisis in 2008 foreshadowed the necessity of structural adjustment of the globalization model and the global economic and financial governance system led by developed countries. Under the background

that world economic recovery remains weary, western countries led by the United States have set off a wave of “anti-globalization,” and trade protectionism, isolationism, and populism are proliferating, and thus world peace and development are facing even more serious challenges. In particular, US President Donald Trump has unilaterally launched trade wars under the banner of “US priority,” which has further aggravated the “anti-globalization” turmoil. As a result, economic globalization has entered a stage of deep adjustment and rebalancing. As the largest developing country in the world and a major socialist country heading for a modernized power, China takes the responsibility of leading the development of economic globalization.

Great changes have taken place in the connotation and extension of political multipolarization. At the beginning of the twenty-first century, the formation of the pattern of international political multipolarization is accelerating. Western countries such as the United States and the European countries are relatively declining, while a large number of emerging market countries and developing countries, represented by the BRICS, are rising in groups; China has made great achievements in reform and opening up, and has become an important force in the international pattern. The profound changes in the world pattern have prompted major powers to accelerate the adjustment of their strategies and mutual relations. In particular, the United States and other Western countries have speeded up their strategic adjustments, striving to maintain their dominant position in the world, which makes the international situation more complicated and volatile. Countries in the world engage in fierce competitive games in many fields, but they all focus on taking advantages of the international mechanisms and rules to compete for the dominance of international rules and international discourse power. Since at present, conflicts and disputes in hot spots, terrorism, nuclear proliferation and nuclear security, cyber security and other traditional and non-traditional security threats are intertwined, it is necessary to strengthen global governance, safeguard world peace and development and common security. As the international power balance has changed deeply, the international pattern and international relations have evolved profoundly.

The new round competition on science and technology revolution and the industrial revolution has been intensifying. Since the beginning of the twenty-first century, a new round of scientific and technological revolution and industrial reform has been springing up. Global scientific and technological innovation has shown many new development trends and characteristics, and major scientific and technological innovation has reshaped the global economic structure. At present, the major developed countries in the world have accelerated their search for new economic growth points through scientific and technological innovation. Whether China can meet the challenges and arrange the layout in advance mainly depends on whether China can make tangible progress in innovation-driven development.

Struggles in the field of ideology and culture are intensified, and competition between different institutional models, development paths and values has become the main content. Exchanges and collisions of different ideologies and cultures are more frequent, and international contests and struggles in the field of ideology are more fierce and complicated. Competition between different institutional models, development paths and values is increasingly prominent. The Chinese development model is strongly endowed with a sense of institutional competition and ideological competition by western countries. Some Western countries adopt cultural hegemonic strategies in international cultural

exchanges, promote their cultural values and ideologies, institutional models, and development paths as a kind of “universal norms,” and carry out ideological infiltration especially to the socialist countries for “color revolution.” Therefore, only by truly safeguarding its ideological and cultural security, carrying forward its core values and exploring institutional model and development path in line with its national conditions can a country achieve great development in the competitions. China must always uphold path self-confidence, theoretical self-confidence, institutional self-confidence, and cultural self-confidence of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and must establish an advanced system with distinct Chinese characteristics, obvious institutional advantages, and strong self-improvement capabilities, so as to provide a Chinese program for mankind to explore better social systems.

Great changes, which are conducive to the revitalization of world socialism and the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, have taken place in the competitions and struggles between the two social systems. After the outbreak of the capitalist crisis, Marxist thoughts and left-wing thoughts and movements in the world have revived and developed. The global financial crisis has triggered waves of strikes and various occupation movements in Europe and the United States, and social contradictions have intensified unprecedentedly. Some socialist thoughts have also been revived. World left-wing organizations and Communist Parties in different countries have also actively held various international conferences and forums to serve as platforms for demonstrating and uniting left-wing forces. After the capitalist crisis at the beginning of the twenty-first century, world socialism has undoubtedly entered a new stage of development, showing new characteristics and trends. On the whole, the stage from the beginning to the middle of the twenty-first century is a time for the world socialism to seek rejuvenation and development. The main features of the stage is the “coexistence of the four periods”: (1) the period of frequent worldwide movements to oppose and change capitalism; (2) the period of the coexistence and development of the nationalization of socialism with distinctive national features and the internationalization of its coordination and cooperation; (3) the rising period when socialism with Chinese characteristics becomes the banner of world socialism and plays a leading and exemplary role; and (4) the period when competitions and games between world capitalism which is in a new recession and world socialism which is in a new rise are intensifying.

Xi Jinping pointed out, when we look at the world, we should not be fascinated by wild flowers, nor should we be obscured by floating clouds. Instead, we should take up the binoculars of the laws of history and watch carefully (People’s Daily 2014, 1). The CPC can become the trend setter of the times only by grasping the laws of the development of human society, socialist construction and party building. Faced with great and profound changes in the world economy, politics, and culture, etc. at the beginning of the twenty-first century, and the question of the times—“what is wrong with the world and where mankind should go,” the CPC puts forward a Chinese program to promote the construction of a “community with a shared future for mankind” (Xi 2017b, 60) on the basis of the new situation and new problems of the times, the profound changes in the relations between China and the world, and the increase of China’s comprehensive national strength and international status. This program which is to solve the problems of the times focuses not only on the long-term development and future destiny of the human society, but also on solving many common problems faced by human society at the contemporary stage. It

not only inherits and carries forward the Marxist philosophy of establishing a society of “free man community,” but also deeply integrates into the pursuit of the ideal society —“One World, One Family” in traditional Chinese culture. It is also a realistic program to promote to solve the imbalance and insufficient development in the world, and the problems of “development deficit,” “peace deficit” and “governance deficit” in the world.

In today’s chaotic and turbulent world, the rising China is committed to building a world of lasting peace, universal security, common prosperity, openness and inclusiveness, cleanliness and beauty, to safeguarding world peace on the basis of seeking common ground while reserving differences, and to promoting the establishment of a world of mutual respect, fairness and justice, and win-win cooperation. This is a new greater contribution of socialism with Chinese characteristics to mankind in the new era. The report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC clearly stated, “The Communist Party of China strives for both the wellbeing of the Chinese people and human progress. To make new and greater contributions for mankind is our Party’s abiding mission” (Xi 2017b, 57–58). Today, “persisting in promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind” (60) has been established as one of China’s basic strategies for upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It has been written into the Constitution of the CPC and the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China, and has also been written into the relevant documents of the United Nations, which has become the broad consensus of most countries and peoples in the world.

Xi Jinping pointed out,

Only by maintaining national identity can we be recognized by the world, and only leading the times can we go to the world. We should base ourselves on the characteristics of the times, promote the modernization of Marxism, use Marxism to better observe, interpret and lead the times, truly understand the problems of the times, and deeply grasp the context and trend of the world history. (Xi 2017c, 66)

We must persist in using Marxism to observe, interpret and lead the times, promote the development of Marxism with fresh and rich contemporary Chinese practices, and absorb all the outstanding achievements of civilization created by mankind with a broad vision. We must also persist in bringing forth new ideas in the course of reform, constantly surpassing ourselves, drawing on all our strengths in the course of opening up, ceaselessly improving ourselves, constantly deepening our understandings of the laws of the CPC’s governance, the socialist construction and the development of human society, and steadily opening up a new realm of contemporary Chinese Marxism and Marxism in the twenty-first century. This is a profound grasp of the essence and characteristics of the times and a correct answer to the questions of the times by the Chinese Communists in the twenty-first century.

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