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Why Has Marxism, Which Originated in the West, Succeeded in China?

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ABSTRACT

Marxism originated in Western Europe, where capitalism first emerged, but after being disseminated in the East achieved success in China. The reasons lie first of all in the character of Marxism as truth; in the compatibility of Marxism both with the spirit of Chinese tradition and with conditions at specific times; and with the successful sinicization of Marxism, that reflects the inheriting and developing of Marxism by the Chinese communists. The strategy of proletarian revolution that was formulated by Marx and Engels on the basis of historical developments in Western Europe was of great significance for guiding action in Germany at a time when the bourgeois revolution had been only partially successful, as well as in Russia and China, that were yet to experience a bourgeois revolution as such. This was because the strategy accorded well with the national conditions of these countries. The stance, viewpoints and methodology of Marxism are also compatible in many respects with the traditional Chinese spirit; this has made it possible for the Chinese people to understand and accept Marxism, and helps account for the more successful application of Marxism in the concrete national conditions of China. Together, the establishing of the People's Republic of China and the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics fully demonstrate the truth of Marxism and the inevitability of the victory of socialism over capitalism.

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Marxism originated in Western Europe, where capitalism first emerged. In the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, first published in 1848, it was pointed out that “[the fall of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable” (Marx and Engels [1848] 2010, 496). After 170 years, the proletariat of Western Europe is still living in the darkness of capitalism. By contrast, Marxism since its dissemination in the East has achieved success in China, and the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics continues to advance. Behind this contrast lies the fact that Marxism, as a universal truth, is compatible both with the traditional Chinese spirit and with the national conditions of the modern epoch. The success of Marxism in China also reflects the fact that the Chinese communists, as represented by comrade Mao Zedong, inherited and developed Marxism, achieving its successful sinicization.

1. Marxism as Truth

“[The fall of the bourgeoisie] and the victory of the proletariat are equally inevitable,” and this declaration points toward the inevitable replacement of capitalism by socialism. The triumph will not be a victory of Chinese socialism over American capitalism, but of the socialism of all countries over global capitalism. One of the signs of this is that socialism is being openly proposed in the primary campaigning for the US presidential election. In China, meanwhile, socialism is not just a signal, but an existing reality.

The path of socialism in China did not begin in 1949 when the People’s Republic of China was founded. Its beginnings can be traced back to 1927, when the Kuomintang (the Nationalist Party of China, KMT) conducted a massacre of the Chinese communists, who were forced to mount an armed uprising and to establish their revolutionary bases. In these bases, a social system existed that differed both from that in the KMT-controlled areas, and from capitalism. Mao Zedong called this system “the new democracy”—a system with socialist elements, leading towards socialism. Its advantages were soon recognized, and it won support from the people.

During the War of Resistance against Japan, the KMT administration was recognized internationally as the legitimate authority, and received almost all the foreign aid. But for Chen Jiageng,¹ who compared Chongqing under KMT control with Yan’an under the control of the Communist Party of China (CPC), “the hope for China [lay] in Yan’an” (Zhao 2012). This was not only because the CPC leaders were uncorrupted, unlike the leaders of the KMT, but also because the CPC-controlled region had a system that could better unite the people, resist the Japanese invasion in a more resolute manner, and build a better homeland, even though the material conditions there were much worse.

After the victory of the resistance against Japanese invasion, the regions under direct KMT control were much stronger than those under CPC leadership in both economic and military terms, even without taking into account the US economic and military aid to the KMT government. Nevertheless, the KMT was driven from power in the mainland of China within three years of starting the civil war. The fundamental reason was that Marxism is a world truth, and socialism received a hearty welcome and support from the people. Marshal Chen Yi once stated:

The victory of the Huaihai Campaign (the second of the three decisive campaigns in the Chinese People’s War of Liberation) was based on the people’s wheelbarrows, that were used for sending goods and materials to the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) at the front. (Lv 2019)

As a song of the time goes, “people would save their last handful of rice for army provisions, their last piece of cloth for an army uniform, their last quilt for wounded soldiers, and their last son in the family for the battlefield.” It was to the accompaniment of folk songs of this kind that the people pushed their wheelbarrows through the storm of shot and shell to bring support to their army at the battlefield. The Chinese people thus “voted” with their blood and sweat for the status of the CPC as the governing party and for the establishment of the socialist system in China—a choice far more meaningful than the elections, based on paper votes, for the regimes in the West.

During the military struggles of the Chinese revolution, the PLA’s military victories were also the result of learning from Napoleon’s tactics as analyzed by classic Marxist writers, and of enhancing the army’s size and mobility as military tasks of the proletariat

revolution. Although Mao Zedong as the builder of the people's army had not read the relevant Marxist literature, he nonetheless proposed the strategic and tactical principle of "concentrating a superior force to attack the enemy's weakest link, achieving the guaranteed annihilation of a significant portion of the enemy in mobile warfare, and destroying the enemy one by one" (Mao [1945] 1991, 983). The successful application of this principle in military struggles illustrates, from another angle, the correctness of Marxist military ideas. Various battles during the Chinese revolution, including the three campaigns of the War of Liberation (1945–1949) and the crossing of the Chishui River four times to achieve the strategic transfer of the Red Army through the Long March, also testify to the truth of many other ideas raised by classic Marxist writers. For example, Engels points out,

. . . in the case of such masses it is impossible for the strategist and the tactician (who is in command on the battlefield) to be one and the same person, division of labour comes into effect here. Strategic operations, the co-operation of the various corps, have to be directed from the central point of the telegraph lines; tactical operations have to be directed by the individual generals. (Engels [1851] 2010, 555)

Further,

You may be forced to retreat, you may suffer a repulse, but as long as you are able to give the impulse to the enemy instead of receiving it from him, you are still to a degree his superior; and what is more, your soldiers will feel themselves, individually and collectively, superior to his men. (Engels [1854] 2010, 234)

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the CPC and the Chinese people continued to build the socialist system and to promote the socialist cause under the guidance of Marxism. China achieved such rapid economic growth that it completed within a few decades what had taken the West several hundred years. Despite a low level of development in certain technological areas, China by the beginning of the reform and opening-up had come to possess the most complete industrial system and national economy in the world.

From the beginning of the reform and opening-up, China has maintained the dominant status of public ownership of the means of production as the core element of its socialist system. Also adhered to have been the system of distribution according to labor, the leading role of the state-owned economy in market resource allocation, and active adjustment and control of the direction of economic development. Meanwhile, and taking account of the national conditions of an underdeveloped economy at the primary stage of socialism, China has developed its socialist market economy and sought to overcome the deficiencies of the capitalist components in its economy on the basis of Marx's law of value. In this way, it has risen to become the world's second-largest economy. While the 1997 Asian financial crisis and 2008 US financial crisis had serious effects on the world economy, China's outstanding performance during those crises saw it become the principal force driving world economic development.

The founding of the People's Republic of China, together with the development of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, has fully demonstrated the correctness of Marxism and the inevitable victory of socialism over capitalism. Of course, China is not the only socialist country. For decades, Russia and a number of Eastern European nations were also socialist countries, and North Korea, Cuba, Vietnam and Laos are socialist countries with their own characteristics.

Engels at one point observed:

All that is real in the sphere of human history becomes irrational in the course of time, is therefore irrational by its very destination, is encumbered with irrationality from the outset; and everything which is rational in the minds of men is destined to become real, however much it may contradict existing apparent reality. (Engels [1886] 2010, 359)

The US financial crisis of 2008 again showed the irrational reality of world capitalism; meanwhile, scientific socialism as revealed by Marxism will be realized around the world. In Western Europe and the United States, socialism is not far off. If the United States is to become great again, as Trump promises, what it must do is to accelerate its transition to socialism and to become a great socialist country, rather than reinforcing its own monopolistic position in the manner of Trump, and perpetuating a decayed and ossified imperialism.

2. The Compatibility of Marxism with China's Prevailing National Conditions

Marx and Engels were born after bourgeois revolutions had triumphed in a number of Western European countries, in particular, Britain and France. The two men witnessed both reversions to feudalism and subsequent bourgeois revolutions, notably in Germany. Based on their studies of these bourgeois revolutions and their scientific analysis, they mapped out a path towards the victory of proletarian revolution. In March 1850 they declared in the "Address of the Central Authority to the League":

... a new revolution is impending, when the workers' party ... must act in the most organised, most unanimous and most independent fashion possible if it is not again to be exploited and taken in tow by the bourgeoisie. (Marx and Engels [1850a] 2010, 278)

As soon as a workers' party is used and controlled by the bourgeoisie, the victory of the proletariat becomes no more than idle talk. During the First World War, the Western European workers' parties of the Second International came to be used and controlled by the bourgeoisie under the slogan of "defending the homeland." These parties rejected the proposal, from Liebknecht and Lenin, that imperialist war be turned into civil war. As a result, the working classes in Western Europe were drafted into fighting against each other, missing a priceless opportunity to defeat capitalism and take the lead in entering socialism. By contrast, the comparatively backward Russia, led by the Bolsheviks under Lenin's guidance, seized the opportunity to become the world's first socialist country.

Unlike the case with the European countries, China's bourgeois revolution was still far off in the future when Marxism was being born. The fruits of the 1911 bourgeois revolution were stolen by Yuan Shikai, a minister of the feudal dynasty, and the second revolution was launched by Sun Yat-sen, leader of the capitalist class. It was not until after the birth of the CPC, guided by Marxism, that the Northern Expedition of the Chinese bourgeois revolution gained some success. But in cooperating with the KMT as a party of the bourgeois class, the main CPC leaders at the time failed to pay sufficient attention to the guidance of Marx and Engels, who stated:

In order to be able energetically and threateningly to oppose this party, whose treachery to the workers will begin from the first hour of victory, the workers must be armed and organised. The arming of the whole proletariat with rifles, muskets, cannon and ammunition must

be carried out at once, the revival of the old civic militia directed against the workers must be resisted. (Marx and Engels [1850a] 2010, 283)

As a result, the “civilian self-defense force” with Chinese characteristics—that is, gangsters from secret societies—was able to raid the workers’ pickets, who were then disarmed by Chiang Kai-shek, thus setting off the counter-revolutionary coup of April 12 in which large numbers of Chinese communists and workers were killed. The Chinese communists quickly responded. Mao Zedong proposed the slogan of “political power grows out of the barrel of a gun,” and shifted to the path of armed uprising, establishing revolutionary bases, and carrying on armed struggles. This led to the birth of the People’s Republic of China. The country thus entered the age of socialism before advanced nations in Europe and North America.

“It is not enough for thought to strive for realisation, reality must itself strive towards thought,” Marx observed at one point (Marx [1844] 2010, 183). Marx and Engels formulated their strategies for proletarian revolution based on the historical development of Western Europe. They may have come late to this task in respect of Britain and France, where the capitalist system had been established and where bourgeois rule had been consolidated; that is to say, they could not go back in history to guide the revolutions in these countries from the starting point. But for countries like Germany, where the bourgeois revolution had not yet succeeded, or for Russia and China, where it was barely in prospect, such strategies were quite compatible with the national conditions of the times, and could thus provide guidance of great value.

Marx rejected the idea that it was “absolutely necessary . . . to metamorphose” his “historical sketch of the genesis of capitalism in Western Europe into a historico-philosophical theory of general development, imposed by fate on all peoples, whatever the historical circumstances in which they are placed” (Marx [1877] 2010, 200). He insisted that if Russia were to continue along the path it had followed since 1861, it would “miss the finest chance that history has ever offered to a nation, only to undergo all the fatal vicissitudes of the capitalist system” (199). The key reason why proletarian revolutions could succeed in backward countries like Russia and China was because in these countries, the working class and the Marxist-guided political parties that represented them existed even before the bourgeois revolutions took place. While the capitalist class was forced to initiate the bourgeois revolution, and had to arm the proletariat to fight for its success, the proletariat during this process acquired the armed forces and political power it needed in order to contend with the bourgeois class. As soon as external conditions ripened, and the working-class party adopted the proper strategies, it was completely reasonable in these circumstances to expect a victory, even the first victory, for the proletarian revolution in a backward country.

The People’s Republic of China, after it was founded, faced tremendous difficulties in bringing about economic development. In 1954 Mao Zedong said of China’s low productive forces:

What can we make at present? We can make tables and chairs, teacups and teapots, we can grow grain and grind it into flour, and we can make paper. But we can’t make a single motor car, plane, tank or tractor. (Mao 1999a, 329)

But this time another socialist country, the Soviet Union, reached out a helping hand. As Engels stated,

Only when the capitalist economy has been relegated to the history books in its homeland and in the countries where it flourished, only when the backward countries see from this example “how it’s done,” how the productive forces of modern industry are placed in the service of all as social property—only then can they tackle this shortened process of development. (Engels [1894] 2010, 426)

These words of Engels provide an exact fit with the historical conditions in China at that time, and the Soviet Union was the perfect example of a socialist country granting fraternal aid. It was on the Soviet model and with Soviet aid that China quickly gained the capacity to produce automobiles, planes, tanks and tractors, without carrying a huge debt that could not possibly be paid off (Yu 2018, 101-102). On this basis, China was able to achieve its tremendous development following the reform and opening-up. In addition to the accumulation of means of production such as machines, equipment, and factory buildings for industrial production, there was also accumulation in terms of such material productive forces as geological exploration, irrigation systems, railroads, roads, bridges, airports, and ports, as well as scientific and technological advances, and the universal improvement of education, production skills and the average life span of the masses of workers. Without such accumulation in the first three decades of the People’s Republic of China, the policies of the reform and opening-up, which merely made adjustments to the relations of production, could not possibly have achieved this rapid development on their own. If other developing countries are to learn from the success of China’s development path, they should never refer solely to China’s strategies and experience following the reform and opening-up, but should seek to learn from the entire course and experience over nearly a century since the founding of the CPC.

Further, China did not simply duplicate the model of the Soviet Union, but has always concentrated on integrating basic Marxist tenets with the concrete Chinese conditions, so as to make the model more compatible with the national conditions in China at any given time. Marx and Engels had profound insights concerning the importance of developing the productive forces:

This development of productive forces . . . is an absolutely necessary practical premise, without it privation, *want* is merely made general, and with *want* the struggle for necessities would begin again, and all the old filthy business would necessarily be restored. (Marx and Engels [1845-1846] 2010, 49; emphasis in the original)

In that spirit, after the ending of the “Cultural Revolution,” it was decided at the Third Plenary Session of the 11th National Congress of the CPC that the central task would shift from class struggle to the development of the productive forces and the modernization of China’s industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology.

Marx points out:

If it is the necessary labour which determines the value of commodities, instead of all the labour time contained in them, so it is the capital which realises this determination and, at the same time, continually reduces the labour time socially necessary to produce a given commodity. (Marx [1894] 2010, 90)

In this sense, the increase in the social productive forces is aimed at reducing the socially necessary labor time used to create commodities (or products). Given that China is still at the primary stage of socialism, with its productive forces underdeveloped, the historical conditions make it necessary for China to learn from the developed countries of the

West, just as Lenin's proposal to learn from Taylorism allowed the existence of capitalist privatization to a certain extent. In order to develop the productive forces at the primary stage of socialism, China began its reform and opening-up and the development of various types of economic components, which led to the implementation of a socialist market economy.

Of course, Marx also observes:

Capitalist production, therefore, under its aspect of a continuous connected process, of a process of reproduction, produces not only commodities, not only surplus value, but it also produces and reproduces the capitalist relation; on the one side the capitalist, on the other the wage labourer. (Marx [1867] 2010, 577)

While developing the multi-ownership economy, we must prevent the social relationship between capitalists and waged workers that now exists in the public economy from becoming permanent. Failure to do so will ossify the primary stage of socialism, and not only will the higher stage of socialism be out of the question, but the whole society will retreat to capitalism (Yu 2018, 125).

Addressing this contradiction in the development of the socialist market economy, Deng Xiaoping pointed out:

We allow the development of individual economy, of joint ventures with both Chinese and foreign investment and of enterprises wholly owned by foreign businessmen, but socialist public ownership will always remain predominant. The aim of socialism is to make all our people prosperous, not to create polarization. If our policies led to polarization, it would mean that we had failed; if a new bourgeoisie emerged, it would mean that we had strayed from the right path. . . . In short, predominance of public ownership and common prosperity are the two fundamental socialist principles that we must adhere to. (Deng [1985] 1993, 111)

The report of the 19th National Congress of CPC also points out:

If our Party is to unite and lead the people to effectively respond to major challenges, withstand major risks, overcome major obstacles, and address major conflicts, it must undertake a great struggle with many new contemporary features. All thinking and behavior in the vein of pleasure seeking, inaction and sloth, and problem avoidance are unacceptable. (Xi 2017)

As long as we adhere to the principle of scientific socialism in Marxism, and remain adept at what the report of the 19th CPC National Congress calls the "great struggle," China will not fall into the rut that led to the demise of the Soviet Union and its Communist Party, and socialism with Chinese characteristics will achieve success in building a modern socialist country.

3. Compatibility of Marxism with the Traditional Chinese Spirit

President Xi Jinping points out that "the Marxist stance, viewpoints and methods run through Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and thus constitute the essence of the system of scientific thinking of Marxism" (Xi 2010). The Marxist stance, viewpoints and methods are in fact compatible with the traditional Chinese spirit in many respects, so it is comparatively easy for the Chinese people to understand and accept Marxism. This has allowed a better integration of Marxism with Chinese conditions, and has contributed to the success of Marxism in China.

3.1. Compatibility of the Marxist Stance with the Traditional Chinese Spirit

The fundamental stance of Marxism is that “the emancipation of the working class must be achieved by the working class itself.” In a letter to August Bebel, Wilhelm Liebknecht, Wilhelm Bracke and others, Marx and Engels provided a clear warning to the leaders of the German Social Democratic Party: “. . . we cannot co-operate with men who say openly that the workers are too uneducated to emancipate themselves, and must first be emancipated from above by philanthropic members of the upper and lower middle classes” (Marx and Engels [1879] 2010, 408). In similar fashion, Mao Zedong in his talks on reading the Soviet Union’s textbook of political economy also pointed out:

When it discusses the various rights that workers in the Soviet Union enjoy, it does not mention their right of managing the state, army, enterprises and education, which in fact is the greatest and most fundamental right of workers in a socialist system. Without this, the right of workers to employment, rest, education, etc., cannot possibly be guaranteed. (Mao 1999b, 129)

What these two examples show is an insufficient understanding on the part both of the German Social Democratic Party and of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. This is why the German Social Democratic Party failed to lead the German people to socialism, and why socialism in the Soviet Union came to an end when it was still at an incomplete stage. In traditional Chinese culture, however, the goal of the intellectual is to cultivate the moral self, to bring harmony to the family, to govern the state in the right way, and ultimately, to bring peace to the whole world. Outstanding intellectuals in ancient China “always took the prospects of the world as their own responsibility,” and sought to instruct the people in the idea that “the rise and fall of the nation concerned each and everyone.” In line with the traditional Chinese spirit that includes a strong sense of responsibility, the CPC places much stress on the innovative spirit of the mass of the people.

Marx and Engels once stated that during the process of revolution, “Far from opposing so-called excesses, instances of popular revenge against hated individuals or public buildings that are associated only with hateful recollections, such instances must not only be tolerated but the lead in them must be taken” (Marx and Engels [1850a] 2010, 282). Mao Zedong did not have access to these words of Marx and Engels, but he expressed the same idea in his “Report on an Investigation of the Peasant Movement in Hunan”:

The peasants’ revolt disturbed the gentry’s sweet dreams. When the news from the countryside reached the cities, it caused immediate uproar among the gentry. Soon after my arrival in Changsha, I met all sorts of people and picked up a good deal of gossip. From the middle social strata upwards to the Kuomintang right-wingers, there was not a single person who did not sum up the whole business in the phrase, “It’s terrible!” Under the impact of the views of the “It’s terrible!” school then flooding the city, even quite revolutionary-minded people became down-hearted as they pictured the events in the countryside in their mind’s eye; and they were unable to deny the word “terrible.” Even quite progressive people said, “Though terrible, it is inevitable in a revolution.” In short, nobody could altogether deny the word “terrible.” But, as already mentioned, the fact is that the great peasant masses have risen to fulfil their historic mission and that the forces of rural democracy have risen to overthrow the forces of rural feudalism. The patriarchal-feudal class of local tyrants, evil gentry and lawless landlords has formed the basis of autocratic government for thousands of years and is the cornerstone of imperialism, warlordism and corrupt officialdom. To overthrow

these feudal forces is the real objective of the national revolution. In a few months the peasants have accomplished what Dr. Sun Yat-sen wanted, but failed, to accomplish in the forty years he devoted to the national revolution. This is a marvelous feat never before achieved, not just in forty, but in thousands of years. It's fine. It is not "terrible" at all. It is anything but "terrible." "It's terrible!" is obviously a theory for combating the rise of the peasants in the interests of the landlords; it is obviously a theory of the landlord class for preserving the old order of feudalism and obstructing the establishment of the new order of democracy, it is obviously a counterrevolutionary theory. No revolutionary comrade should echo this nonsense. If your revolutionary viewpoint is firmly established and if you have been to the villages and looked around, you will undoubtedly feel thrilled as never before. Countless thousands of the enslaved—the peasants—are striking down the enemies who batted on their flesh. What the peasants are doing is absolutely right, what they are doing is fine! "It's fine!" is the theory of the peasants and of all other revolutionaries. Every revolutionary comrade should know that the national revolution requires a great change in the countryside. The Revolution of 1911 did not bring about this change, hence its failure. This change is now taking place, and it is an important factor for the completion of the revolution. Every revolutionary comrade must support it, or he will be taking the stand of counter-revolution. (Mao [1927] 1991, 15-16)

Indeed, China's reform and opening-up involves conscious action by the Chinese peasants and support for their initiatives from the party and government leaders. As Deng Xiaoping pointed out,

One thing we have learned from our experience in economic reform over the last few years is that the first step is to release the peasants' initiative by delegating to them powers of decision in production. That is what we did in the countryside. We should do the same in the cities, delegating powers to the enterprises and grass-roots units and thereby motivating workers and intellectuals and democratizing management by letting them participate in it. (Deng [1986] 1993, 180)

Xi Jinping further stressed,

We should always keep in mind our fundamental principle, and from the bottom of our hearts, treat the people genuinely as the master. We should look on ourselves as public servants and pupils of the people, so as to put the Party's mass line into practice in a conscious manner. Wisdom and creativity come from the people; we must learn from them with modesty, and find our roots in the rich soil of the people, always absorbing nourishment and strength from the people so as to increase our political wisdom, enhance our governing capacity, and improve our style of leadership. As Mao Zedong said, "Things will work if we take the people as our teacher." This is a profound idea. The people are the driving force for the creation of history; this is the most fundamental principle of historical materialism, that we as communists should never forget. (Xi 2010)

It is precisely because the people's initiative and innovative spirit are brought into full play that the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics is able to advance steadily with each day that passes.

3.2. Compatibility of Marxist Viewpoints with the Traditional Chinese Spirit

In his "Speech at the Ceremony Commemorating the Bicentenary of the Birth of Marx," Xi Jinping stated:

Marx and Engels affirmed, in a high degree, the contribution that Chinese civilization had made to human civilization, and through scientific determination foresaw the emergence

of “Chinese socialism.” In their minds, they even bestowed an elegant name on this ideal new China—the “Republic of China.” (Xi 2018a)

The original text of Marx and Engels that Xi refers to is as follows:

The imperturbable Middle Kingdom was aroused by a social crisis. The taxes no longer came in, the state reached the brink of bankruptcy, the population sank *en masse* into pauperism, erupted in revolts, refused to acknowledge the mandarins of the Emperor or the priests of Fo, mishandled and killed them. The country reached the brink of ruin and is already threatened with a mighty revolution. But worse was to come. Among the rebellious plebs individuals appeared who pointed to the poverty of some and to the wealth of others, and who demanded, and are still demanding a different distribution of property, and even the complete abolition of private property. When Herr Gützlaff came among civilised people and Europeans again after an absence of twenty years, he heard talk of socialism and asked what this might be. When it had been explained to him he cried out in horror: “Shall I then nowhere escape this pernicious doctrine? For some time now many of the mob have been preaching exactly the same thing in China!” Now Chinese socialism may admittedly be the same in relation to European socialism as Chinese philosophy in relation to Hegelian philosophy. Nevertheless, it is a gratifying fact that in eight years the calico bales of the English bourgeoisie have brought the oldest and least perturbable kingdom on earth to the eve of a social upheaval, which, in any event, is bound to have the most significant results for civilisation. When our European reactionaries, on their presently impending flight through Asia, finally come to the Great Wall of China, to the gates leading to the stronghold of arch-reaction and arch-conservatism, who knows if they may not read the following inscription upon them: RÉPUBLIQUE CHINOISE. LIBERTÉ, ÉGALITÉ, FRATERNITÉ. (Marx and Engels 2010, 266-267)

We all know that in the most famous text of Marx and Engels, the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, the best-known idea is that of the abolition of private property (Marx and Engels [1848] 2010, 498). This corresponds to the traditional spirit of the rebellions in Chinese history. Today as in the past, these rebellions have always called for total elimination of private ownership.

In Chinese history, whenever the gap between rich and poor widened, there would appear the voice of what Confucius called the “concern over inequality rather than want.” Despite the class distinctions in ancient Chinese society, the traditional Chinese spirit has a natural tendency towards freedom, equality and universal love, as can be seen in such classless ideas as “the people are more important than the ruler,” and “is anyone born as a king, duke, general or minister?” Many other old literary works or folk sayings express similar ideas, for example, “I would not bow to a superior for the sake of making a living”; “Why should I serve the high and mighty with lowered eyes and on bent knees? Such things can never make my heart rejoice!”; “I don’t have to stay here, I have my own place”; “Extend your respect for the aged in your own family to those of other families; extend your love for the young ones in your own family to those of other families,” etc.

For Marx, one of the differences between East and West lies in the following:

Climate and territorial conditions, especially the vast tracts of desert, extending from the Sahara, through Arabia, Persia, India, and Tartary, to the most elevated Asiatic highlands, constituted artificial irrigation by canals and water-works the basis of Oriental agriculture. As in Egypt and India, inundations are used for fertilizing the soil in Mesopotamia, Persia, &c; advantage is taken of a high level for feeding irrigative canals. This prime necessity of an economical and common use of water, which, in the Occident, drove private enterprise

to voluntary association, as in Flanders and Italy, necessitated, in the Orient where civilization was too low and the territorial extent too vast to call into life voluntary association, the interference of the centralizing power of Government. Hence an economical function devolved upon all Asiatic Governments, the function of providing public works. (Marx [1853] 2010, 127)

Meanwhile in the West,

... in an age and in a country where royal power, aristocracy and bourgeoisie are contending for domination and where, therefore, domination is shared, the doctrine of the separation of powers proves to be the dominant idea and is expressed as an “eternal law.” (Marx and Engels [1845-1846] 2010, 59)

In the West, various political parties and groups contend with each other, to the point where this obstructs solidarity within the working class. For example, in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* it is suggested that “This organisation of the proletarians into a class, and consequently into a political party, is continually being upset again by the competition between the workers themselves” (Marx and Engels [1848] 2010, 493). By contrast, the main themes during the development of the CPC have always been efforts to prevent disintegration, and a concern for unity. Zhang Guotao once tried to split, and had a larger army and more party members under his leadership, but he did not enjoy the highest level of authority within the party. His effort to bring about a split was soon ended. For China, that has always needed large water projects to govern the Yellow River and Yangtze River, the idea has long been established of maintaining a centralized authority to accumulate strength and deal with important matters.

The traditional Chinese spirit stresses the idea of “the whole world as one community” (*tian xia wei gong*). An example of this concept may be seen in the actions of Chen Baochen, who was viceroy of Hunan Province at the end of the Qing Dynasty. Chen was assigned the task of implementing the new reform policies, for which he hired German mining engineers to investigate a gold mine in Huangjindong, Ping Jiang, Hunan Province. When a large amount of gold was found in the area, his colleagues suggested that rich local landlords and businessmen should invest jointly in the mining and share the profit. Chen retorted furiously that mining was a way of making the country rich and strong; how did anyone dare to use it for personal reward? He then reported the developments to the central authority, and made the mine wholly state-owned (Xie 2005). Sun Yat-sen, as the leader of China’s bourgeois revolution, also stressed the importance of “regulating capital.” This traditional spirit makes it easier for the Chinese people to leap over the “Caudine Forks” to accept and practice public ownership as advocated in Marxism.

3.3. Compatibility of Marxist Methodology with the Traditional Chinese Spirit

In Marxism, the fundamental methodology is materialist dialectics, which originated from the materialist transformation of Hegelian idealist dialectics. The application of materialist dialectics in the sphere of historiography leads to the Marxist view of history, specifically,

... the conceptions and ideas of each historical period are most simply to be explained from the economic conditions of life and from the social and political relations of the period, which are in turn determined by these economic conditions. History was for the first time placed on its real basis; the palpable but previously totally overlooked fact that men must first of all eat, drink, have shelter and clothing, therefore must *work*, before they can fight for domination,

pursue politics, religion, philosophy, etc.—this palpable fact at last came into its historical right. (Engels [1877] 2010, 192–193; emphasis in the original)

By the same token, the traditional Chinese spirit stresses the fact that “people only know etiquette after the granary is full, and know honor and grace when there is a sufficient supply of food and clothing.” That is to say, people not only need food, drink, housing and clothing, but must be guaranteed sufficient amounts of them before they can engage in politics, religion, philosophy, etc.

Like Hegelian philosophy, traditional Chinese philosophy is characterized by dialectical thinking. What makes it different is that it also contains a form of materialism not found in Hegelian philosophy, a materialism that stresses “studying things to acquire knowledge” (*zhi zhi zai ge wu, wu ge er hou zhi zhi*)²; it thus has features in common with the materialist dialectics of Marxism. In *Capital*, Marx discusses the method of inquiry that “has to appropriate the material in detail, to analyse its different forms of development, to trace out their inner connexion” (Marx 1887). This is a first-rate exposition of the need to “seek truth from facts” in the traditional Chinese spirit.

One of the important ideas in materialist dialectics is the universality of connection between things, which the traditional Chinese spirit expresses in straightforward fashion as “the harmony between humanity and nature” and “the correspondence between humanity and the universe.” Another example is Chinese medicine. Unlike modern Western medicine, which uses X-rays or NMR to locate the source of pain for treatment, Chinese medicine rejects this idea of treating the head when there is a headache or treating the foot when there is pain there. In Chinese medicine, a headache might be caused by disease in another part of the body, and curing that disease will remove the headache. This is actually a reference to the universality of connection, in the sense that we cannot treat a problem in isolation. Nowadays, Trump attributes the Sino-US trade problem to China’s favorable balance of trade, equated with a loss of money on the part of the United States, which consequently tries to force China to open up further. However, the real cause of the trade problem is not trade itself, but trade-related investment, or what China calls “profit in the US, and a favorable balance in China.” Marx once pointed out that Britain during his time was a country with an excess of imports over exports, just like the United States today. The reason lay in the fact that the “enormous and increasing British capital invested in all parts of the world” could only flow back to Britain “in the form of foreign produce,” that was “to swell the list of British imports” (Marx [1858] 2010, 429). In similar fashion, China’s favorable balance of trade is the result of US profits made in China that return to the United States through China’s favorable trade balance. The truth, therefore, is not that there is a loss of US money, but rather, of China’s money; the problem is not China’s refusal to open its trade to the United States, but rather, the refusal of the United States to open itself up to Chinese investment. If, as Trump requests, China becomes more open to the United States, while the United States prohibits a Chinese company such as Huawei from investing in the United States, the consequence can only be a still more favorable Chinese trade balance.

While Engels specifies the main laws of dialectics as “transformation of quantity and quality—mutual penetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes—development through contradiction or negation of the negation—spiral form of development” (Engels [1873–1882] 2010, 313), the traditional

Chinese concept of *yin* and *yang* and the diagram of *taiji* precisely reflect the “mutual penetration of polar opposites and transformation into each other when carried to extremes.”

For Marx, “the philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point is to *change* it” (Marx [1845] 2010, 5; emphasis in the original). Among the ancient Chinese intellectuals, much emphasis was placed upon the unity of knowledge and practice, which in some sense corresponds to Marx’s proposition. In Western mythology, the fate of a person is predetermined and cannot possibly be changed no matter how hard he or she tries, but in Chinese mythology, a person’s fate can be altered. The attraction of Chinese religions does not lie in the “afterlife,” but rather in “this life.” In contrast to the Western idea of being saved from the last judgment, the traditional Chinese spirit stresses the ideas that “heaven helps those who help themselves,” and that “people help those who help themselves.” This means that the Chinese people never wait passively for the spontaneous progress of history, but are able to actively push history forward under the guidance of Marxism in order to achieve the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

4. The Success of the Sinicization of Marxism

The final important reason for the success of Marxism in China lies in its successful sinicization. These two successes are connected and mutually enhancing.

As Marx and Engels pointed out in the 1872 preface to the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*,

However much that state of things may have altered during the last twenty-five years, the general principles laid down in the Manifesto are, on the whole, as correct today as ever. Here and there, some detail might be improved. The practical application of the principles will depend, as the Manifesto itself states, everywhere and at all times, on the historical conditions for the time being existing, and, for that reason, no special stress is laid on the revolutionary measures proposed at the end of Section II. (Marx and Engels 1969)

The ten suggested measures for the most advanced countries presented at the end of the second chapter of the *Manifesto of the Communist Party* have not all been taken up in the course of China’s revolution and socialist construction. The revolution and construction have been carried out by the Chinese people led by the CPC, which has integrated the basic tenets of Marxism with the country’s concrete social realities. On the basis of China’s historical conditions, the CPC has advanced with the times and achieved the successful sinicization of Marxism. These achievements provide the foundation for the CPC to guide the Chinese revolution and the construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics, thus leading to the success of Marxism in the East.

According to the *Constitution of the Communist Party of China*,³ adopted on October 24, 2017, these achievements of the sinicization of Marxism are: Mao Zedong Thought, created by the Chinese communists with Mao Zedong as their chief representative; Deng Xiaoping Theory, created by the Chinese communists with Deng Xiaoping as their chief representative; the important concept of the “Three Represents,” created by the Chinese communists with Jiang Zemin as their chief representative; the Scientific Outlook on Development that puts the people first and calls for comprehensive, balanced and sustainable development, and that was created by the Chinese communists with Hu Jintao as their chief representative; and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, created by the Chinese communists with Xi Jinping as their chief representative. Of these, the topics of the creation of Mao Zedong Thought, Deng

Xiaoping Theory, and Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era are of particular importance.

4.1. *The Creation of Mao Zedong Thought*

Mao Zedong Thought was created at an extremely difficult time for the Chinese revolution. Its creation not only saved the revolution, but also guided it towards success. Mao Zedong Thought then guided China's socialist construction to achieve its initial success.

The CPC was founded under the guidance and with the help of the Communist International, and began by following the early model of the Russian Communist Party in organizing the workers' movement and carrying out the theoretical and propaganda work of Marxism. Then, under the specific conditions of China and guided by the Communist International, the CPC cooperated with the KMT, the bourgeois party, and completed the bourgeois-democratic revolution under KMT leadership. During this process, however, a lack of awareness of the KMT's betrayal of the revolution caused the great revolution to fail. The CPC tried to continue the revolution through uprisings in major cities, but due to the great disparity in strength, had to retreat to the countryside.

It was under these circumstances that Mao Zedong wrote "Why Is It That Red Political Power Can Exist in China?" In this article, he pointed out that "China is in urgent need of a bourgeois-democratic revolution, and this revolution can be completed only under the leadership of the proletariat" (Mao [1928] 1991, 48). This is what he later called the new democratic revolution, and it marks the beginning of Mao Zedong Thought as the sinicization of Marxism. In the article, he stressed in particular:

The long-term survival inside a country of one or more small areas under Red political power completely encircled by a White regime is a phenomenon that has never occurred anywhere else in the world. There are special reasons for this unusual phenomenon. It can exist and develop only under certain conditions. First, it cannot occur in any imperialist country or in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but can only occur in China which is economically backward, and which is semi-colonial and under indirect imperialist rule. For this unusual phenomenon can occur only in conjunction with another unusual phenomenon, namely, war within the White regime. It is a feature of semi-colonial China that, since the first year of the Republic [1912] the various cliques of old and new warlords have waged incessant wars against one another, supported by imperialism from abroad and by the comprador and landlord classes at home. Such a phenomenon is to be found in none of the imperialist countries nor for that matter in any colony under direct imperialist rule, but only in a country like China which is under indirect imperialist rule. Two things account for its occurrence, namely, a localized agricultural economy (not a unified capitalist economy) and the imperialist policy of marking off spheres of influence in order to divide and exploit. The prolonged splits and wars within the White regime provide a condition for the emergence and persistence of one or more small Red areas under the leadership of the Communist Party amidst the encirclement of the White regime. (Mao [1928] 1991, 48-49)

This in fact represents the sinicization of Lenin's idea concerning the existence of the Soviet Union surrounded by the world's imperialist countries.

Further, Mao Zedong Thought sinicized the practice of seizing power through urban uprisings, as exemplified by the Paris Commune and by the October Revolution in Russia, and turned this model into that of encircling cities with an insurgent countryside. It sinicized the regiment-level party branch through establishing party branches at the company level. Later, party branches were built in each village and each factory workshop, with a party

branch for every 100 people, which tremendously strengthened the connection between the party and the people. This was absolutely necessary for the new democratic revolution and for socialist construction in a country with a backward economy, underdeveloped modern industry, and a small number of industrial workers. Because the mass of the population lacked the sense of organization and discipline that are characteristic of modern industrial workers, the success of the revolution and construction could only be achieved if people were organized through grassroots party branches. To enhance proletarian consciousness—and in particular, the sense of organization and discipline—among all party members and cadres, while at the same time learning from the lessons of the intra-party purges in the Soviet Union and from the use of such measures in the Red bases during the early times of the Chinese revolution, the CPC replaced intra-party purges with internal rectification of incorrect styles of work. It thus created a sinicized path of party building, as can be seen in the large numbers of outstandingly dedicated CPC members who fear no sacrifice for the cause of revolution and socialist construction.

With an eye on the concrete issues of the Chinese revolution, and basing himself on Marxist dialectical materialism and epistemology, Mao Zedong also wrote “On Contradiction” and “On Practice,” which have not only enriched and developed but also successfully sinicized Marxist philosophy.

4.2. The Creation of Deng Xiaoping Theory

While recording great achievements during the 1970s, China’s planned economy also displayed increasing rigidity and suffered from disadvantages. During these years the Sino-US relationship eased, and after the end of the Cultural Revolution official diplomatic relations were established. This was followed by an improvement in the Sino-Soviet relationship, and China’s economic development entered a period of historic opportunity.

The Chinese communists as represented by Deng Xiaoping seized on this opportunity, showing an attitude of realism and a readiness to seek the truth. Within the context of the continuous revolution under the proletarian dictatorship, a shift took place from the political revolution “with class struggle as the key link” to the social revolution “with economic construction at the center.” Efforts were devoted to the “four modernizations” of agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology, so as to build socialism with Chinese characteristics. On this basis Deng Xiaoping Theory, the second great achievement of the sinicization of Marxism, was recorded.

The first point to be clarified in Deng Xiaoping Theory is that China is at the primary stage of socialism. Before the opening of the 13th CPC National Congress, Deng Xiaoping noted:

The Thirteenth National Party Congress will explain what stage China is in: the primary stage of socialism. Socialism itself is the first stage of communism, and here in China we are still in the primary stage of socialism—that is, the underdeveloped stage. In everything we do we must proceed from this reality, and all planning must be consistent with it. (Deng [1987] 1993, 252)

Taking the reality of the primary stage of socialism as their departure point, and following the Marxist principle that “productive forces determine the relations of production, and the relations of production must correspond to the productive forces and drive them forward,” the Chinese communists with Deng Xiaoping as their chief representative took

account of the Chinese reality and implemented a series of economic reforms, proceeding from the “planned economy as the main form supplemented by market adjustment,” to the “planned commodity economy,” and then to the “socialist market economy.” These reforms, along with the opening to the outside world, have provided impetus for the rapid development of the Chinese economy, which over a brief period of a few decades has grown to become the world’s second-largest.

In the course of building socialism with Chinese characteristics, China has introduced foreign capital and opened up to private capital, and consequently has witnessed a rapid growth of non-public economic components. However, what socialism with Chinese characteristics follows is the basic principle of Marxism, rather than of any other “ism.” As Deng Xiaoping pointed out,

Our modernization programme is a socialist programme, not anything else. All our policies for carrying out reform, opening to the outside world and invigorating the domestic economy are designed to develop the socialist economy. . . . In short, predominance of public ownership and common prosperity are the two fundamental socialist principles that we must adhere to. We shall firmly put them into practice. And ultimately we shall move on to communism. (Deng [1985] 1993, 110-111)

4.3. The Creation of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era

As China becomes the world’s second-largest economy, it is displaying the new normal of shifting from a high speed towards a mid-high speed of development. The principal contradiction of Chinese society is shifting from being “between people’s increasing material and cultural needs and backward social production” to being “between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people’s ever-growing need for a better life.” Socialism with Chinese characteristics is entering a new era.

Today, the Chinese communists with Xi Jinping as their chief representative are following closely in the steps of the times. The path they are taking is neither the old one of isolation and rigidity, nor a vicious one beneath a changed banner. Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is created on the basis of building a society that is moderately prosperous in all aspects, of deepening the reform in all aspects, of the rule of law in all aspects, and of strict party discipline in all aspects.

Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era follows the tradition of the Chinese communists of sinicizing Marxism. It integrates the basic tenets of Marxism with the concrete social realities of China in the new era. It stands on the ground of the new era, and answers the questions of the new era. It is the latest fruit of the sinicization of Marxism and is the Marxism of the new era in China.

Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era represents a perfect match between the thought of the new era and social reality. It demonstrates a strong awareness of problems and an orientation towards them, in the sense that it stresses the solving of problems and is dedicated to exploring innovative methods for overcoming them, rather than stressing difficulties and allowing the problems to continue, while merely declaring an intention to find solutions. Precisely because of this, Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era meets the challenges of reality; it is demanded by reality, and achieves positive results in practice.

Within a short period of six years, over 1,600 reform plans were proposed, with many difficult cases solved and many treacherous situations successfully dealt with. The reform of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is now in full force, with breakthroughs in multiple aspects, thus entering the stage of rapid yet steady advance in depth. (Xi 2018b)

The rise of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era is at the same time a guarantee of the continuing success in China of Marxism, that was born in the West.

Notes

1. Chen Jiageng (1874–1961), Singapore rubber and shipping entrepreneur, founder of Amoy University.
2. From the *Book of Rites*, one of the classics of Confucianism.
3. See <http://www.12371.cn/special/zggcdzc/zggcdzcqw/>.

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