

The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics: Its Internal Logic and Unique Advantages

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Abstract: The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is a great innovation made by the Chinese people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC) over the past 70 years, since the founding of the People's Republic of China, and particularly during the past 40 years of reform and opening up. It is also a fundamental institutional support and guarantee for China to achieve the Two Centenary Goals^① and realize the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. The formation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics indicates profound theoretical, historical and practical logic and demonstrates the unique institutional advantage China enjoys. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is an organic unity of the CPC spirit and its affinity to the people, demonstrating its unique institutional advantage by ensuring the position of the people as masters of the country and making development people-centered. It is an organic unity of reform and conventionalization, demonstrating its unique institutional advantage through self-revolution, establishment and optimization step by step. It is also an organic unity of tradition and modernity, demonstrating its unique institutional advantage by inheriting Chinese civilization while embracing world civilization.

Keywords: the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, internal logic, unique advantages

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① The Two Centenary Goals were put forth by the CPC at its 18th National Congress for building socialism with Chinese characteristics. The two goals are to complete the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects by the centenary of the CPC (founded in 1921) and to build China into a modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, and harmonious by the centenary of the PRC (founded in 1949).

Institutional problems generally refer to problems that are basic, universal, stubborn and lasting during the advancement of social reform and development. System is the basic structure that facilitates the operation of a country. System essentially underpins social development and mainly embodies “the order” and “rules”. 70 years ago in September 1949, the First Plenary Session of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) was convened in Beijing (current Beijing). At the First Plenary Session, Mao Zedong proclaimed the establishment of the People’s Republic of China and the new system of people’s democratic dictatorship, which marked that “the Chinese people have stood up.” “Ours (our nation) will no longer be a nation subject to insult and humiliation” (Mao, 1998, pp. 343-344). “Thus begins a new era in the history of China” (Mao, 1998, p. 348). The First Session of the First National People’s Congress was successfully held some 65 years ago (in September 1954). It established the system of people’s congresses, the fundamental political system of the People’s Republic of China. “This is a great innovation by the Chinese people in the history of world political systems, an in-depth conclusion drawn from the bitter past of Chinese politics, a historical result of the radical transformation and surging development of Chinese society over the past 100 years. It is also an inevitable choice for the Chinese people to stand on our own and master our own destiny” (Xi, 2016a, p. 53). The 70-year history of the People’s Republic of China is essentially the history about the establishment, consolidation, reform and development of the socialist system. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which was shaped and has been under constant improvement during the practice of reform and opening up in the new era, inherits the CPC’s valuable experience in continuous exploration of the socialist system while gathering the CPC’s political wisdom in deepening institutional reform and promoting institutional innovation over the past 40 years of reform and opening up. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics profoundly manifests the dialectical unity of the theoretical logic of institutional improvements in scientific socialism and the historical and practical logic of institutional improvements in China’s social reforms.

The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics: An Organic Unity of the CPC Spirit and Its Affinity to the People, Demonstrating Unique Institutional Advantages by Ensuring the Position of the People as Masters of the Country and Making Development People-centered

The original aspiration and the mission of Chinese Communists is to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. The original aspiration embodies the CPC’s nature, tenet, ideal, belief, grand goal and its 100-year course of struggle. The campaign on the theme of “staying true to our founding mission” is a strong driving force that has enabled the CPC to lead the Chinese people in struggling and fighting, overthrowing the reactionary rule, eliminating the system of exploitation and eventually achieving national independence and liberation. The campaign is also a strong driving force that has enabled the CPC to lead the Chinese people in promoting self-reliance and hard work, founding a new socialist China, establishing the basic system of socialism, realizing

a great social change and ensuring the position of the people as masters of the country. Furthermore, the campaign is a strong driving force that has enabled the CPC to lead the Chinese people in consciously carrying out a great social revolution and a profound self-revolution and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics through reform and opening up in pursuit of common prosperity, comprehensive strength enhancement and national rejuvenation. History clearly shows that the Chinese Communists have always stayed true to their original aspiration and mission and untiringly struggled for it. Their persistence has been the most important factor and most fundamental guarantee for all social reforms in modern China. “The leadership of the CPC constitutes the most essential attribute of Chinese socialism, and the greatest strength of this system. The foundation and lifeblood of the CPC and the country, and the interests and wellbeing of all the Chinese people boil down to upholding and improving the leadership of the CPC” (Xi, 2016b, p. 22). Upholding the unity of the leadership of the CPC and the position of the people as masters of the country is the generative and developmental logic of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and also the biggest advantage of this system.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is an organic unity of the party spirit and its affinity to the people, as this system has been shaped by the CPC by attaching importance to the people’s actual needs and initiatives and continually drawing on the experience of the people in great creation and practice. Consequently, this system has a deep base and an institutional advantage in mobilizing and uniting the people.

The CPC is an advanced political party emerging from the Chinese people’s relentless struggles for liberation. It is also an advanced political party that comes from the people, has its roots among the people, and maintains a close bond with the people. Firmly believing in the people and relying on the people is in line with the essential attribute of the CPC and is also where the CPC leadership lies. The CPC’s fundamental principle and tenet is to always be obligated to do everything in the interests of the people and rely on their strength and carry out the principle of “from the people, to the people”. By relying on the people, the CPC won victory in the New Democratic Revolution (1919-1949). By relying on the people, the CPC for the first time ever in China established a socialist system to eliminate exploitation and bring liberation and happiness to the people. In the early days when the basic system of socialism was initially established, Mao Zedong emphasized that the CPC should rely on the people as the main force and mobilize all positive factors to serve the cause of socialism. Mao considered such an emphasis to be a basic policy of socialist construction. “In the past we followed this policy of mobilizing all positive factors in order to put an end to the rule of imperialism, feudalism and bureaucrat-capitalism and to win victory for the people’s democratic revolution. We are now following the same policy in order to carry on the socialist revolution and build a socialist country” (Mao, 1999a, pp. 23-24). The CPC managed to count on the people, fully arouse the enthusiasm of workers, farmers and a large number of intellectuals and unite with all forces that could be united. In this way, the basic system of socialism was established, consolidated and developed. The formation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in the new era of reform and

opening up has further highlighted the internal logic, which clearly manifests the strong leadership of the CPC and the main force of the people.

The reform and opening up in the new era is essentially a great awakening of the CPC based on its in-depth review of socialist history and is also a great revolution in China's socialist system. This "great awakening" or "great revolution" is primarily characterized by proceeding from the Chinese reality, establishing the fundamental principle of socialist construction based on the people's actual needs, and learning from the people's practical experience to inject more vigor into the socialist system. In the early years of reform and opening up, Deng Xiaoping used to reiterate, "(Our experience in the 20 years from 1958 to 1978 teaches us that) poverty is not socialism, and that socialism means eliminating poverty. Unless you are developing the productive forces and raising people's living standards, you cannot say that you are building socialism" (Deng, 1993, p. 116). "The principles of socialism are: first, development of production and second, common prosperity. We permit some people and some regions to become prosperous first, for the purpose of achieving common prosperity faster" (Deng, 1993, p. 172). The CPC took the emancipation and development of productive forces as its basic task, and the realization of common prosperity as its fundamental objective during the preliminary practice of reform and opening up. It was during this process that the socialist economic and distribution systems with Chinese characteristics, with public ownership playing a leading role and all forms of ownership growing side by side, gradually took shape and exhibited a strong advantage in emancipating the productive forces and creating more material wealth for society. Based on the early-stage practice of reform and opening up in China, Deng Xiaoping pointedly concluded during his inspection tour of southern China in 1992 that "the essence of socialism is liberation and development of the productive forces, elimination of exploitation and polarization, and the ultimate achievement of prosperity for all" (Deng, 1993, p. 373). This scientific conclusion was made based on the people's actual needs for socialism and experiences. It is therefore of great significance to the innovation and development of scientific socialism.

Regarding the origin of the vigor and vitality of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, the practice of reform and opening up explicitly demonstrated that the vigor lies in the people's initiative of socialism and that the vitality comes from the people's independent practice of socialism. This is the unique internal generative logic supporting the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Deng Xiaoping once shared his profound interpretation of such an institutional logic. According to Deng, many successful ideas and innovations in the socialist system with Chinese characteristics during the process of reform and opening up were "conceived by other leaders or by the masses. All I did was sum up those ideas in the form of principles and policies" (Deng, 1993, p. 272). "It was the peasants who invented the household contract responsibility system with remuneration linked to output. Many of the good ideas in rural reform came from people at the grass roots. We processed them and raised them to the level of guidelines for the whole country" (Deng, 1993, p. 382). "Many ideas that emerged in the process of reform and opening up came from people's real practice. The report (to the 14th CPC National Congress) should attribute the progress

and achievements to the collective leadership of the CPC Central Committee, rather than myself alone. Such new ideas by no means came from the mind of one single individual. Instead, they were the collective wisdom of the Chinese people. I only summarized them and further advocated” (Deng, 1995, pp. 30-31). These meaningful and incisive discussion have revealed that the people’s profound understanding of socialism, along with their initiative, are the very sources and strong driving forces of the self-revolution of the socialist system. Also, it deeply reveals that there has been an organic unity of the CPC’s strong leadership and the people’s great creations during the formation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese Communists, represented by Deng Xiaoping, gave high respect and strong support to the Chinese people for their great practice and initiative. It was their endorsement that effectively advanced the self-revolution of the socialist system, gradually shaped the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and gave rise to a “unprecedented miracle” in the history of socialism.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is an organic unity of the CPC spirit and its affinity to the people. Particularly highlighted by its essential characteristic of ensuring the position of the people as masters of the country and its value orientation of making development people-centered, this organic unity features extensive popularity and institutional advantages which are for the people and to the benefit of the people.

What distinguishes an old state system (constitution) and a new one is the people’s position therein. As Karl Marx put it, “In monarchy we have the people of the constitution, in democracy the constitution of the people.” “Democracy starts with man and makes the state objectified man.” “It is not the constitution that creates the people but the people which creates the constitution” (Marx, 1992, p. 281). The socialist system is essentially characterized by maintaining the people’s principal position in the country and advancing state building and governance in accordance with the people’s fundamental interests and wishes. On the eve of the nationwide victory of the New Democratic Revolution, Mao Zedong made it clear during the preparation for the founding of a socialist China that “we are a socialist state under the people’s democratic dictatorship, which means the names of governments at all levels should begin with the ‘people’s’ (such as the People’s Court and the People’s Liberation Army) to differentiate the socialist China from the Chiang Kai-shek regime” (Mao, 1998, p. 136). “To sum up our experience and concentrate it into one point, it (our state power) is the people’s democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the working class (through the Communist Party) and based upon the alliance of workers and peasants” (Mao, 1999b, p. 1480). “The people’s state protects the people. Only when the people have such a state can they educate and remould themselves by democratic methods on a country-wide scale, with everyone taking part” (Mao, 1999b, p. 1476). After the founding of the People’s Republic of China, the CPC ensured the position of the people as masters of the country and relied on the people as the main force to keep consolidating and developing the socialist system. In this way, the CPC effectively advanced socialist construction and laid the institutional groundwork for the later initiation of reform and opening up and the development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is primarily characterized by ensuring the position of the people as masters of the country under the strong leadership of the CPC. As was pointed out by Xi Jinping in his report to the 19th CPC National Congress, “Party (the CPC) leadership is the fundamental guarantee for ensuring that the people run the country and governance in China is law-based; that the people run the country is an essential feature of socialist democracy; and law-based governance is the basic way for the Party to lead the people in governing the country. These three elements are integral components of socialist democracy” (Xi, 2017a, p. 36). The 70-year institutional development of the People’s Republic of China since its founding in 1949 (particularly its over 40-year institutional reform since the initiation of reform and opening up in 1978) has proved that ensuring the unity of the leadership of the CPC, the position of the people as masters of the country and law-based governance is at the root of the socialist system’s continuous consolidation and optimization and, more importantly, the very logic for improving and invigorating the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. This system is an organic unity of the leadership of the CPC and the position of the people as masters of the country. Such an organic unity is underlined by two aspects. First, the people are the masters of the country and all the power of the country belongs to the people. The position and role of the people as masters of the country has been realized and consolidated by upholding and improving the system of people’s congresses, the system of CPC-led multiparty cooperation and political consultation, the system of regional ethnic autonomy and the system of community-level self-governance under the unified leadership of the CPC. It is precisely during the continuous improvement and development of the basic political systems that the leadership of the CPC and the will of the people are organically united. Second, the CPC has always held the glary banner of the people’s democracy to ensure and realise the position of the people as masters of the country, which becomes the basis of the establishment and consolidation of the socialist system. It has enabled the reform and improvement of the socialist system by fulfilling three basic tasks; reflecting the will of the people, ensuring the people’s rights and interests and stimulating their creative vitality. It is precisely through the goal and value orientation of “ensuring the position of the people as masters of the country by institutional means” that the strong leadership of the CPC and the position of the people as masters of the country are organically united.

Being people-centered at all levels during the whole process of institution building is at the core of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. At the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee proposed the vision of making development people-centered to empower the socialist system with Chinese characteristics with a distinct people-oriented position and a core people-centered approach. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee made “the promotion of social fairness and justice and the improvement of well-being both the starting point and ultimate goal” of continuing the reform comprehensively, modernizing the national governance system and improving and developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee made it clear that “the people are the main force and the source of law regulations” and emphasized that “the promotion of law rules must be for the

people and by the people, benefit and protect the people, and take the people's rights and interests as the starting point and ultimate goal." The Fifth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee introduced the vision of "innovative, coordinated, green, and open development that is for everyone," and prioritized the principle of "adhering to the people's principal position in the country during the completion of the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects." The Sixth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee further emphasized that "the CPC must follow the fundamental tenet of serving the people wholeheartedly and maintaining its close ties with the people so as to reinforce and regulate the intra-party political activities" and to lay a solid political foundation for its "people-centered philosophy of development." Based on the historical experience in the development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, the 19th CPC National Congress, under the guidance of Xi Jinping's Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, set forth 14 points for the basic policy. The second point is "committing to a people-centered approach" and the fifth point is "seeing that the people run the country." This series of political views and principles increasingly highlight a commitment to a people-centered approach, which is a core value of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and enrich this core value with more definite and profound connotations for the new era.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is a fundamental institutional guarantee for upholding and developing the people's democracy. According to Karl Marx, there is no such thing as "pure democracy" or "abstract democracy". The democracy is neither a "luxury" that is monopolized or controlled by a privileged few, nor a "cheap item" which can be afforded and owned by everyone. Democracy is invariably associated with a certain political system and serves for certain purposes of interests. Democracy exhibits a distinct class nature and intention for interests. Many countries' systems with different natures seem to advocate democracy, but their understandings and practices of democracy were not necessarily the same, or even entirely contrary. Confucianism, a traditional philosophy of China, advocated that "the people come first, the state will be stable." Accordingly, most social systems in the history of feudal China claimed themselves to be people-based. Yet the word "people" here referred only to a small group of elites (i.e. the so-called *junzi*) with the right to participate in political activities and voice their opinions, and the word did not cover the masses (i.e. the so-called *xiaoren*, literally, "little person" in traditional Chinese culture). This is known as "those who work with their brains rule and those who work with their brawn are ruled." Modern western thinkers advocate "people first, rights based". Most of the modern capitalist countries also claim their systems to be democratic. Admittedly, historic progress has been made in mankind's pursuit of democracy but it must be pointed out that their democratic systems are closely related to capital, which means this so-called democracy is highly restricted. Hardly shared and exercised by the general public in any real sense, such a democracy is nothing more than a tool for ruling and a competitive tactic. Having critically inherited a variety of democratic values and systems, major Marxist philosophers revealed the essence of the values of a socialist democracy. For example, according to Vladimir Lenin, democracy, as a system and form of the state, "signifies the formal recognition of

equality of citizens, the equal right of all to determine the structure of, and to administer, the state” (Lenin, 2012, p. 201). Democracy means rule and governance by the people, namely, granting an equal right to all people to participate in state governance. This is the essence of Marxist democracy and also the core of the political system of socialist democracy. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which is committed to a people-centered approach, demonstrates and promotes the democratic values of Marxism during the process of self-development and improvement. First, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics commits to a people-centered approach and makes the promotion of social fairness and justice and the improvement of well-being both the starting point and ultimate goal. Second, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics adheres to the people’s principal position in the country and focuses on respecting the position of the people as masters of the country, inspiring the people’s subjective awareness, and arousing the initiative of the overwhelming majority of the people. Third, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is always for the people, with a commitment to realizing, maintaining and increasing the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. In short, during the continuous development and improvement of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, the CPC successfully help the majority of the people recognize, support and participate in this system by always adhering to and highlighting the people-centered philosophy. This successful practice has significantly boosted the CPC’s confidence in this system.

The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics: An Organic Unity of Reform and Establishment, Demonstrating Unique Institutional Advantages Through Step-by-step Self-revolution, Establishment and Optimization

A socialist system cannot be accomplished in one stroke. Instead, the system requires continuous improvement through self-adjustments and reforms. One defining feature of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is reform and opening up. The most essential task of today’s reforms and opening up in China is normalizing and optimizing the system step by step while comprehensively deepening reform and opening up. This fundamental task is expected to become the most outstanding advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.

Reform and opening up is an attribute unique to the socialist system and is also a basic approach to the continuous improvement of this system. Frederick Engels, a founder of scientific socialism, clearly stated, “To my mind, the so-called ‘socialist society’ is not anything immutable. Like all other social formations, it should be conceived in a state of constant flux and change” (Engels, 2009, p. 588). In the early years of the People’s Republic of China, Mao Zedong conducted in-depth research into the objectivity of contradictions in socialist society and the inevitability of corresponding reform. Based on this Mao argued, “In socialist society the basic contradictions are still those between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base. However, they are fundamentally different in character and have different

features from the contradictions between the relations of production and the productive forces and between the superstructure and the economic base in the old societies” (Mao, 1999a, p. 214). The basic contradictions of any exploitative society inevitably lead to the replacement of its system. The basic contradictions of a socialist society necessarily lead to socialist reform, which includes self-adjustment and improvement. Given the breadth and depth of its institutional adjustments, such a reform can be regarded as a revolution, which, however, is different from institutional replacement. Back then, socialist reform was unprecedented, which meant there was no experience to draw on. As a result, almost all socialist countries worldwide successively paid dearly for the reform of their rigid systems in the 1960s and 1970s. Having probed into the historical experience of the former Soviet Union and the countries in Eastern Europe, and the lessons of China in the Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), the CPC convened the Third Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee in 1978, which marked China’s beginning of reform and opening up, an unprecedented great revolution in the history of socialism. So far, the policy of reform and opening up has lasted over 40 years in China, achieving impressive results. In particular, the policy has initiated and developed socialism with Chinese characteristics, creating a strong driving force and the institutional guarantee for China’s socialist modernization. Also, the policy has exerted a far-reaching impact on the socialist system with Chinese characteristics by endowing it with the very virtue and vitality that is adaptive to the Chinese context, meets the needs of the people and conforms to the trends of the times, thus paving the way for giving full play to the superiority of the socialist system. History shows that “the vigor of socialism with Chinese characteristics derives from reform and opening up.” “Only by carrying out reform and opening up can we develop China, develop socialism, and develop Marxism. Having been born out of the reform and opening up drive, socialism with Chinese characteristics is certain to thrive along with the continuation of China’s reform and opening up policies” (Xi, 2014a, p. 1).

In terms of institutional innovation, reform and opening up in contemporary China has adhered to the Four Cardinal Principles^①, taken into account the realities of contemporary China, conformed to the trends of the times to explore effective forms of the socialist system, and striven to realize institutional establishment step by step. The organic unity of reform and establishment is in line with the internal logic of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.

The profound ideas of institutional reform in Deng Xiaoping Theory highlight the internal logic of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, i.e., the organic unity of reform and establishment in three dimensions.

First, reform is the only way for China to emancipate and develop its productive forces in a socialist context. “Revolution means the emancipation of the productive forces, and so does reform.” “In the past, we only stressed expansion of the productive forces under socialism, without mentioning the need to liberate them through reform. That conception was incomplete. Both the liberation and the

① The Four Cardinal Principles refer to the principles of adhering to the socialist path, the people’s democratic dictatorship, the leadership of the CPC, and Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought. The Four Cardinal Principles are the foundation of the state, and the political cornerstone for the survival and development of the Party and the state.

expansion of the productive forces are essential” (Deng, 1993, p. 370). “Just like our past revolutions, the reform is designed to clear away the obstacles to the development of the productive forces and to lift China out of poverty and backwardness” (Deng, 1993, p. 134). Consequently, in order to develop productive forces, China must launch a profound reform in its economic system and structure as it is the “only way” to develop the productive force in a socialist context (Deng, 1993, p. 138).

Second, the reform is a primary means of adhering to and improving the socialist path. “The reform has stimulated the development of the productive forces and has resulted in a series of profound changes in economic life, social life, people’s work style and their mentality. This reform is the self-improvement of the socialist system, and in certain areas and to a certain extent it is also a revolutionary change. It is a major undertaking that shows we have begun to find a way of building socialism with Chinese characteristics” (Deng, 1993, p. 142). One key target of reform is to eliminate bureaucracy in certain systems and institutions. “Our bureaucracy, which is a result of small-scale production, is utterly incompatible with large-scale production.” To achieve socialist modernization, “it is essential to overcome the evils of bureaucracy.” “Our present economic management is marked by overstaffing, organizational overlapping, complicated procedures and extremely low efficiency,” which have resulted from certain institutional disadvantages, not any individual malpractices. “The fault lies in the fact that we haven’t made reforms in time. Our modernization program and socialist cause will be doomed if we do not make them now” (Deng, 1994, p. 150).

Third, the reform is a strong driving force to make the socialist system conform to the trends of the times and catch up with major players. “In today’s world things are moving with unprecedented rapidity, especially in science and technology. There is an old saying in China, ‘Progress is made every day’, and that is the way things are today. We must keep abreast of the times; that is the purpose of our reform” (Deng, 1993, p. 242). “The present world is open” (Deng, 1993, p. 64). “It (China) cannot develop in isolation from the rest of the world” (Deng, 1993, p. 78). “The experience of the past thirty or so years has demonstrated that a closed-door policy would hinder construction and inhibit development.” China should insist on combining reform with opening up. “To do this, we have to invigorate the domestic economy and open to the outside world” (Deng, 1993, p. 65). “In short, if we want socialism to achieve superiority over capitalism, we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures and to learn from other countries, including the developed capitalist countries, all advanced methods of operation and techniques of management that reflect the laws governing modern socialized production” (Deng, 1993, p. 373).

It was precisely in the above three dimensions of institutional reform that Deng Xiaoping endued the reform in contemporary China with revolutionary significance. According to Deng, the reform is not just an amendment of the minor details of the socialist system, but a “revolutionary change” (Deng, 1993, p. 134); “reform is China’s second revolution” (Deng, 1993, p. 113); “the future of China hinges on our adhering to those policies (of reform and opening up)” (Deng, 1993, p. 368). Stressing the reform’s protracted nature, Deng said, “The purpose of the reform is to lay a solid foundation for sustained development over the next decade and throughout the first half of the next century. Without

the reform, there could be no sustained development. So, we should think not in terms of just three to five years, but in terms of the last 20 years of this century and the first 50 of the next. We must persist in the reform” (Deng, 1993, p. 131).

Based on a strategic reflection of the profound and arduous long-term institutional reform, Deng Xiaoping proposed a “well-defined system” during his inspection tour of southern China in 1992 when China’s reform was faced with a major test. He said, “It will probably take another thirty years for us to develop a more mature and well-defined system in every field. The principles and policies to be applied under each system will also be more firmly established” (Deng, 1993, p. 370). This forward-looking and incisive assertion revealed the law and the internal logic of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. From Deng’s talks given in his inspection tour of southern China in 1992 to the convening of the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, China underwent, step by step, a two-decade process of institutional reform and establishment. Ever since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee has dutifully shouldered the responsibility of establishing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics while continuing reform and opening up. The Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee in November 2013 adopted the Decision of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Some Major Issues Concerning Comprehensively Deepening the Reform, which marked the beginning of an even more critical decade-long journey of well establishing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. According to the decision adopted at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, “By 2020, decisive results will have been achieved (by China) in the reform of important areas and crucial segments... Institutions and systems that are structurally complete, scientifically standardized and effective in operation are to be formed, to ensure that institutions in all areas become more mature and complete” (2013, p. 7). Adhering to the “basic policy that underpins our endeavors to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics”, Xi Jinping further specified how to comprehensively continue the reform and advance the institutional establishment at the 19th CPC National Congress. Xi said, “We must uphold and improve the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and continue to modernize China’s system and capacity for governance. We must have the determination to get rid of all outdated thinking and ideas and all institutional ailments, and to break through the blockades of vested interests. We should draw on the achievements of other civilizations, develop a set of institutions that are well conceived, fully built, procedure based, and efficiently functioning, and do full justice to the strengths of China’s socialist system” (Xi, 2017a, p. 21). China’s institutional reform and establishment has embarked on a new journey while socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. The CPC is leading the people in advancing “great social revolution”, which is also the CPC’s “great self-revolution” that “must go on” (Xi, 2018a, p. 1).

Regarding the basic law and internal logic of the organic unity of reform and establishment of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, Xi Jinping summarized his profound understanding as “two half-journeys”. In the spring of 2014, Xi Jinping delivered an important speech at a provincial-level officials’ seminar on studying and implementing the decisions of the Third Plenary Session of

the 18th CPC Central Committee on continuing reform. Xi incisively argued, “In terms of building a more mature and better established system, China has completed half of socialist reform, fulfilling the major historical goal of developing the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and continuing its reform. Thus, a solid foundation has been laid. Today, in the second half of our socialist reform, we are tasked with an important historic mission, that is to make our socialist system with Chinese characteristics more mature and better established, and provide a set of more complete, more stable and more effective systems for the development of the Party and the nation, the well-being of the people, social harmony and stability, and the enduring prosperity and stability of the country. This is a grand project. It entails carrying out all-round and systematic reform and integrating reform in various fields to promote the overall modernization of our national governance system and capacity” (Xi, 2014a, p. 27). The clear promotion of realizing institutional modernization, while advancing the modernization of national governance is in line with the CPC’s historical evolution, featuring the pioneering spirit of our times. This promotion was also a starting point for the 10-year “post-institutional establishment” reform task put forward by Deng Xiaoping and it created a new reform context for “institutional optimization”. The introduction of the “second half of socialist reform” is significant in the sense that this definition highlights the pressing tasks of the modernization of national governance and the modernization of the socialist system during the historical process of modernizing Chinese industry, agriculture, technology and national defense after the establishment of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Thus, the definition of “second half of socialist reform” is key to China’s comprehensive continuation of reform and is crucial for China to give full play to the unique advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in its historical process of modernization.

The historical process of world modernization proves that people with petty shrewdness attend to trivial matters; those with enough wits attend to management of people; those with greater wisdom attend to governance of institutions. “The system is fundamental, comprehensive and long-term for shaping national governance” (Xi, 2014a, p. 28). The system is the basic framework that ensures a state’s operation, the fundamental support for its social development, and the primary embodiment of corresponding “rules” and “procedures”. In the new era, socialism with Chinese characteristics places new requirements on institutional reform and establishment. The socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which contains the corresponding political system, economic system, cultural system, social system, eco-system, political party system, as well as a variety of specific systems, institutions and mechanisms, is now faced with the historical task of comprehensive modernization. Social modernization is essentially related to institutional modernization. Relying on the establishment of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, China has comprehensively continued its institutional reform and innovation, striving to modernize its national governance system and capacity. In essence, China is staging a major institutional revolution to realize institutional modernization. China’s first 30 years of reform in the new era focused on solving major practical problems such as the adjustment of relations of production and social relations, the emancipation and development of the productive

forces, the release and increase of social vitality, the elimination of poverty and the realization of common prosperity. During such a historical process of reform, how to raise the level of institutional modernization is increasingly highlighted as a primary task of reform. Both Deng Xiaoping's view of "institutional establishment" and Xi Jinping's "two half-journeys" manifest the internal logic of China's core value orientation of institutional modernization during its reform process. Xi Jinping profoundly argued, "Now, our reform is at a new, important crossroad. The advancement of our reform today is no less complex, no less sensitive, and no less tough than that of three decades ago" (Xi, 2015, p. 64). "We are now in a state very much like sailing to the midstream of a river or climbing halfway up a mountain, as the goings get tough, we must press ahead and there's no turning back. Our reform and opening up has gone through numerous difficulties, but there is a long, difficult adventure for all Chinese Communists and the people of all ethnic groups. This is a more glorious mission, tougher tasks, more serious challenges and more lofty duties" (Xi, 2018b, p. 42). Xi analyzed the pressing concerns and said, "Our system has not been more mature and more stable, and some aspects have even become major inhibited factors for the development and the stability." Thus, "we must adapt to the general process of national modernization" and strive to complete the historical task of institutional modernization to "institutionalize, standardize and routinize affairs concerning the CPC, the country and the society and keep improving our capacity of effectively applying the socialist system with Chinese characteristics to national governance" (Xi, 2014a, pp. 28-29). Such incisive expositions have identified China's reform direction and task as institutional optimization and establishment during the modernization of the national governance system and the improvement of governance capacity. It is beyond any doubt that institutional optimization and establishment has become the most pressing task when the socialist system with Chinese characteristics further demonstrates its institutional advantages during the organic unity of reform and establishment.

Since the 19th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee has staged another "great revolution" which mainly involves institutional reform and establishment. The Third Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee initiated a reform of the CPC and government bodies. This institutional reform is "a major move in continuing the reform comprehensively and a concentrated action to modernize the national governance system and improve the governance capacity." "It is also a systematic and integrative restructuring of the bodies and corresponding management mechanisms of the CPC and the government" (Xi, 2019, p. 1). Over the past one year or so, further top-down reform has been in full swing, making significant progress against a challenging backdrop. The top-down reform has made significant theoretical, practical and institutional achievements in the "reconstructive improvement" of the leadership system of the CPC, the governance system of the government, the organizational system of armed forces and the work system of popular organizations. The top-down reform has also made a crucial step forward in organically uniting the institutional reform and the establishment of the leadership and organizational systems of the CPC and the government. Moreover, it has provided a strong organizational guarantee for China to improve and develop its socialist system with Chinese characteristics, modernize its national governance system

and improve its governance capacity. Xi Jinping said, “The completion of institutional restructuring and functional adjustment can only treat the ‘symptoms’, not the ‘root cause’. To truly tackle the ‘root cause’, more efforts are required” (Xi, 2019, p. 1). The modernization of the national governance system, or rather institutional modernization, is a major reform strategy formulated by the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee. The full implementation of this reform strategy is a key step and also a compulsory task towards the full establishment of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. To this end, China must “ride the momentum, go to all lengths, and continue to fight an uphill battle and crack tough nuts” in a bid to make major breakthroughs in the institutional reform and innovation of critical areas and key steps (Xi, 2019, p. 1).

The Socialist System with Chinese Characteristics: An Organic Unity of Tradition and Modernity, Demonstrating Its Unique Institutional Advantages by Inheriting the Chinese Civilization While Embracing World Civilizations

According to Frederick Engels, “The central link in civilized society is the state” (Engels, 1995, p. 176). Engels’ assertion incisively indicates the state system’s nature, status and function in the course of human civilization. First, any state system features “inheritance of civilization”, is under the deep influence of political and cultural traditions and is a summary of the existing social civilization system. “We make our history ourselves, but, in the first place, under very definite assumptions and conditions. Among these the economic ones are ultimately decisive. But the political ones, etc., and indeed even the traditions which haunt human minds also play a part, although not the decisive one” (Engels, 1995, p. 696). Second, state system features strong “prescription of civilization” functions such as “sequence” and “regulation”, and is a summary of existing social civilization order. “It (the state) is a product of society at a particular stage of development; it is the admission that this society has involved itself in insoluble self-contradiction and is cleft into irreconcilable antagonisms which it is powerless to exorcise. But in order that these antagonisms, classes with conflicting economic interests, shall not consume themselves and society in fruitless struggle, a power, apparently standing above society, has become necessary to moderate the conflict and keep it within the bounds of ‘order’; and this power, arisen out of society, but placing itself above it and increasingly alienating itself from it, is the state” (Engels, 1995, p. 170). Third, any state system features distinct “adaptivity of civilization” and makes self-adjustments and improvements while accommodating the requirements of social civilization. A state system is directly determined by whether it can satisfy the people’s needs and safeguard their interests. “Does a people have the right to give itself a new constitution? The answer must be an unqualified ‘yes!’ because the constitution becomes a practical illusion the moment it ceases to be a true expression of the people’s will” (Marx, 1995, p. 316). The above three points are arguably universal laws manifested in the history of social and state systems. Such universal laws are also of profound enlightening significance to the improvement and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. How to balance the traditional political culture and the modern

political one and maintain the organic unity of the tradition and modernity of institutional innovation has become a major question for China to answer through much deliberation and scientific assessment on its way to the improvement and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

China should bring the institutional strength of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics into full play through creative transformation and innovative development of the fine traditional Chinese political culture.

China should organically unite socialism with Chinese characteristics and the fine traditional Chinese culture and attach more importance to the upholding and development of socialism with Chinese characteristics through creative transformation and innovative development of the traditional culture in order to lay a solid cultural basis for boosting confidence in the path, theories, institutions and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This is an important part of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era and is also the epistemology and methodology that must be followed in order to uphold and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics in China, a land with profound cultural deposits and far-reaching influence.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics has been gradually developed over the past 70 years since the founding of the People's Republic of China, particularly over the past 40 years of reform and opening up. Yet, born in China, a country with a long history, socialism with Chinese characteristics also bears profound historical and cultural traditions and has a historical generative logic of its own. In this regard, Xi Jinping has made multiple comments. He said, "Over thousands of years, the Chinese nation has been on a different civilization development trajectory. The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics is not by accident but is rooted in the historical and cultural traditions of China." "The uniqueness of China's cultural tradition, history and circumstances determines that China needs to follow a development path that suits its own reality. In fact, we have found such a path and achieved success along this path" (Xi, 2014b, p. 2). Xi stressed, "Socialism with Chinese characteristics is the unity of the theory of scientific socialism and social development theories of Chinese history. Socialism has taken root in China. It reflects the wishes of the people and meets the development needs of the country and the times" (Xi, 2014c, p. 21).

The Chinese system, i.e., the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, which is an important part of socialism with Chinese characteristics, also contains many positive factors of traditional Chinese culture, particularly traditional Chinese political culture. China's time-honored traditional political civilization and institutional civilization are combined to form an indispensable cultural basis for the establishment and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and an essential cultural support for the Chinese people to enhance their institutional confidence.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics contains factors of traditional political culture and the genes of traditional political civilization. Such factors and genes are highlighted in the following five aspects.

The Political Idea of Humanity Supremacy

Chinese civilization is people-centered, while Western civilization is God-centered. This is a defining distinction between the two civilizations. Chinese civilization attaches great importance to the harmony of interpersonal relationships, while Western civilization is more concerned with relationships between man and God. The origin of the term “*renwen*” (humanity) can be traced back to the early development period of traditional Chinese political culture. As recorded in the *Book of Changes*, “This (a blend of delicacy and force) is the adornment of heaven. Control by civilization is the adornment of humanity. Observe the adornment of heaven to see the changes of the times; observe the adornment of humanity to transform and complete the world.” The contrast between “humanity” and “heaven” in ancient Chinese political culture highlights the then Chinese people’s emphasis on humanity. Respect for man is at the core of humanism. Traditional Chinese political culture holds that “Heaven and Earth is the parent of all creatures, and of all creatures, man is the most highly endowed.” Although there are religions and theologies in China, they have never enjoyed supremacy as they have in Europe. Traditional Chinese political culture worships ancestors and places emphasis on corresponding sacrificial rites. This is in nature the worship of humanity which mainly involves offering sacrifices to those ancestors who made outstanding contributions to the survival and development of later generations. Being people-centered and oriented is the essential characteristic of Chinese political civilization.

The Political Ideal of Self-cultivation, Family Regulation, State Governance and Bringing Peace to All under Heaven

The traditional Chinese political ideal of “self-cultivation, family regulation, state governance and bringing peace to all under heaven” is the highest realm pursued by men of insight throughout Chinese history. This political ideal is primarily about attention to the cultivation of political ethics and the improvement of political personality. Confucius once said, “If I can hear the ‘Dao’ (the Way) in the morning, I can die content in the evening.” He advocated, “Die to achieve virtue—die for a just cause.” Mencius also advocated “die for a just cause” and pursued a perfect political life in which “neither riches nor honors can corrupt him; neither poverty nor humbleness can make him swerve from principle; neither threats nor forces can subdue him.” From a perspective of traditional Chinese political culture, man with perfect morality and wisdom becomes sage. “Everyone can be such a sage as Yao or Shun.” No one is a born sage. Only through painstaking self-cultivation can one expect to approach the state of a sage. Mencius summarized, “When heaven is about to confer a great responsibility on any man, it will exercise his mind with suffering, subject his sinews and bones to hard work, expose his body to hunger, put him to poverty, and place obstacles in the paths of his deeds so as to stimulate his mind, harden his nature, and improve wherever he is incompetent.” Confucius once said, “When you see a good person, think of becoming like her/him. When you see someone not so good, reflect on your own weak points.” Such Confucian maxims were gradually developed into

Neo-Confucianism in the Song (960 AD-1279 AD) and Ming (1368 AD-1644 AD) dynasties. With *Tianli* (“heavenly principles”) at the core, Neo-Confucianism then became the dominant moral view and world outlook in China. According to philosopher Zhang Zhai, Chinese intellectuals should strive “to ordain conscience for Heaven and Earth, to secure life and fortune for the people, to continue the lost teachings of past sages, and to establish peace for all future generations.” Such a pursuit is arguably the highest realm of “moral composition and self-cultivation” advocated by traditional Chinese political culture.

The Political Vision of Family-State Unity

Traditional Chinese political culture regards family and state as an organic whole. State is a bigger form of family, while family is a smaller form of state. Thus, family protection and state defense are well integrated. It has been the Chinese people’s common wish to live a well-off life in a prosperous country at peace. To safeguard national interests, the Chinese people are willing to devote themselves to their country’s cause. Being patriotic, they would sacrifice individual (family) benefits for national interests when necessary, and never lay aside their concern for the country even when in a humble position. Such a strong sense of national identity originates from the Chinese people’s advocacy of collective interests. Throughout its long history, the Chinese nation has developed a distinctive national character which places collective interests over individual interests and collective development over individual development. The word “collective” here may refer to a family, a nation and even a state. Individuals are “small self”, while groups are “greater self”. The highest realm of a group is the public. As the old Chinese saying goes, “When the great way prevails, the world is equally shared by all.” This vision is a unique contribution of the traditional Chinese political culture to world political civilization.

The Political Pursuit of Harmony and Moderation

Based on the simple dialects of Yin-Yang alteration, ancient Chinese philosophers developed the concepts of “*zhonghe zhijing*” (state of harmony and moderation) and “*zhongyong zhidao*” (the doctrine of the mean) and adopted them as the basic norm of state governance, as well as relationships between people, between man and society, and between man and nature. The Chinese word “*zhong*” (in *zhongyong* and *zhonghe*) originally means “middle”, “center”, and “being impartial and avoiding leaning to either side.” The Chinese word “*he*” (in *zhonghe*) originally refers to “harmonious and gentle voice,” which is deemed the highest realm of beauty. “The Mean (*zhong*) is the great root of all-under-heaven. Harmony (*he*) is the penetration of the way through all-under-heaven. When the Mean and Harmony are actualized, Heaven and Earth are in their proper positions, and the myriad things are nourished.” Some ancient Chinese scholars even argued that “all-under-heaven yearn for *zhonghe* (harmony and moderation).” In traditional Chinese political culture, “state of harmony and moderation” is reflected in many aspects. Harmony and moderation is a yardstick of governance. Xun Kuang once said, “When it comes to handling governmental affairs, impartiality

should be the criterion, while harmony and moderation should be the yardstick.” Only by moderate and harmonious means can a balanced and peaceful world be expected to come true. Harmony and moderation is a desired quality. The so-called *junzi* (gentleman) in Chinese context refers to a man of moderate views and upright character. Harmony and moderation is also an aesthetic pursuit, as reflected by the traditional Chinese aesthetic principle of being “joyous but not indecent, mournful but not distressing.” Moreover, moderation is a norm for dealing with various relationships. As the old Chinese saying goes, “In practicing the rules of propriety, harmony is to be prized.”

The Political Mindset of Unity

One special achievement made by the Chinese political civilization in understanding the world lies in the fact that it regards “Heaven, Earth and Man” as an organic whole, based on which a series of unique world views and methodologies have been developed. The Chinese political mindset of unity is epitomized by the following argument in the *Book of Changes*: “*Yin* and *yang* were to establish the way of Heaven. Softness and stiffness were to establish the way of Earth. Benevolence and righteousness were to establish the way of Man.” Ancient Chinese sayings such as “seeing big things through small things” and “a straw shows which way the wind blows” demonstrate the profound political wisdom of ancient Chinese thinkers and philosophers in national governance and social management.

The above five aspects are sufficient enough to prove that the extensive and profound traditional Chinese political culture has exerted an imperceptible cultural influence on the formation of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and that this political culture is also the cultural origin of the political and institutional civilization of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese Communists follow the principle of “creative transformation and innovative development”, taking the initiative to absorb positive factors and beneficial components of traditional Chinese political culture, based on the realities of China. It also conforms the trends of the times and makes steady progress in institutional reforms and innovations. Thanks to this, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, with more institutional vigor and deeper cultural traditions, has managed to stand the tests of various challenges and risks and become a mainstay of socialist China in the new era.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics features both profound Chinese cultural traditions and far-reaching cultural modernity. Open and inclusive to civilizations worldwide, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics conforms to the trends of the times and actively draws on the experience and achievements of other political and institutional civilizations to enable self-development and enhancement. Such a cultural strength helps explain why China has had a growing institutional confidence since its initiation of reform and opening up. Also, the cultural strength forms an important driving force for the Chinese people to create a better life and the Chinese nation to realize great rejuvenation in the context of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics.

In today’s world, a variety of development paths and social systems are competing with each other, complementing each other, forming a major developmental trend characterized by pluralistic

coexistence and common progress through political multi-polarization, economic globalization, cultural diversification and social informatization. Meanwhile, a diversity of ideological trends and actions against multi-polarization and globalization also pose serious challenges and potential threats to the general trend of global development. The world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. In such an unprecedentedly changing context, the Chinese way of development increasingly exhibits its strong competitiveness and extensive cohesion, and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics more and more showcases its unique institutional advantages and its far-reaching impact on the general trend of global development. The Chinese way of development and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, full of vigor and vitality, are now leading the trends of the times. Such performance should be primarily attributed to general secretary Xi Jinping's leadership, who has shaped a broad and profound new concept of civilization by conforming to the trends of the times, constantly forging ahead and advancing with the times to broaden the vision of the Chinese way of development in a modern civilized context while raising the socialist system's level of modern civilization. The Chinese way of development and the socialist system with Chinese characteristics form important parts of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and serve as sharp ideological weapons for Chinese people to tackle the challenges of various uncertainties and severe risks and to subsequently boost the confidence in socialist way and socialist system.

Human civilization, which includes political civilization and institutional civilization, is the jointly created result of mankind and is the crystallization of human work and wisdom. However, there have been various prejudices and confusions on how to view and approach world civilization (political and institutional civilization in particular). Some Western scholars trumpet the so-called "clash of civilizations" and the "superiority of Western civilization" and pursue "hegemony of Western civilization". They hold that the primary axis of conflict in the future will be along cultural lines in global politics, that the Oriental civilization has lost its due vitality, and that the world has reached the "end of history". In China some scholars and intellectuals stick to the conventional thinking of the "class of civilization" and the "irreconcilability of civilizations", regarding ideology and social systems as the only criteria for the assessment of a civilization, and considering socialist civilizations to be the only "true and authentic" civilization and Western (capitalist) civilizations to be "decadent and out-of-date". Xi Jinping's new outlook on civilization is of great realistic significance and profound value because it reveals the "colorful, equal and inclusive" law of human civilization's evolution and grasps the main development trend of world civilization. Moreover, Xi also advocated, "We should ensure that when it comes to different civilizations, exchange will replace estrangement, mutual learning will replace clashes, and coexistence will replace a sense of superiority. This will boost mutual understanding, mutual respect and mutual trust among different countries" (Xi, 2017b, p. 1). In this way, China can actively promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind.

The socialist system with Chinese characteristics is a great innovation independently created by the Chinese people based on the realities of China, and is also the crystallization of the outstanding

achievements of political and institutional civilizations in modern times. Xi Jinping once said, “Democracy and human rights are the common pursuit of mankind. We must respect the right of individual countries to independently choose their own development path. The Chinese people’s pursuit of the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is in essence a process of promoting social fairness and justice and continuously improving human rights” (Xi, 2017c, p. 19). The political and institutional achievements (such as democracy, rule of law, equity, justice, human rights, security, regulation and order) which are shared by all civilizations worldwide have been fully absorbed and highlighted in the formation and development of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. China is now further promoting its Belt and Road cooperation in the international community and advancing its building of a community with a shared future for mankind. During this historical process, the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, featuring magnanimousness and inclusiveness, is sure to further consolidate and grow and bring its unique institutional superiority into full play in a bid to make even more institutional contributions to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and the achievement of shared growth through collaboration.

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