

The Evolution of "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics": Its Elliptical Structure of Socialist Principles and China's Realities*

Yeonsik Choi

Since the early 20th century, China has sought an avenue for the Sinification of Marxism. China has attempted to integrate the socialist principles with China's concrete realities under the condition of new historical contexts. "Socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a product of those efforts. The fundamental nature of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" though, is at the center of controversy because its conceptual definition is unclear and incoherent. Indeed, socialism with Chinese characteristics has unceasingly evolved along with changes in historical settings, showing diverse patterns of practice. Accordingly, this paper sees "socialism with Chinese characteristics" as a work in progress that is still evolving along with the interaction between the socialist principles (ideology) and Chinese characteristics (reality). Ideally the ultimate goal of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is to achieve national salvation by making China strong and rich. However, this desire for a strong China has been revealed in a range of volatile actions and reactions swinging between socialist principles and China's realities.

This paper sheds light on the development of Chinese socialism by examining three historical periods: the integration of Marxism and China's realities in the Mao era; the road of reform and socialist modernization in the post-Mao era; and the new road to socialist spiritual civilization in the 1990s. The journey for a new Chinese civilization started with complete denial about its traditional culture. However, what we are seeing today is China's deliberate paying attention to the traditional culture. Nonetheless, socialism with Chinese characteristics that highlights the positive influence of cultural factors is still equivocal as to whether China will maintain its current pattern of development.

Key words: strong China, enlightenment, emancipation, spiritual civilization, socialism with Chinese characteristics.

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Since the early 20th century, China has sought an avenue for the "Sinification of Marxism" or, literally, "making Marxism Chinese" (*makesizhuyi de zhongguohua*).¹ China's scholars of Chinese Marxism have conventionally described this formulation as the integration of the universal principles of Marxism with China's concrete realities under the condition of historical contexts. The Chinese Communist Party's official articulation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a product of these efforts.

However, the fundamental nature of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is in itself controversial because its conceptual definition is unclear and incoherent. With regard to this conceptual incoherency in Chinese socialism, Stuart Schram had earlier depicted the "Sinification of Marxism" as a complex and ambiguous concept, which is apparent in the conflicting interpretations related with the essential nature of "Sinification." Moreover, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" has been unceasingly evolving along with changes in historical settings, showing diverse patterns of practice.

Accordingly, it is still ambiguous and arguable that "socialism with Chinese characteristics" corresponds to a certain historical phase representing a specific mode of production and relations of production, although the formulation has obtained the status of orthodox ideology since it was presented to the Twelfth Congress of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) in 1982 by Deng Xiaoping. Previous prevailing interpretations of Chinese socialism can be classified into two aspects; economic interpretation of the more salient trend between the two interpretations, however, can be traced directly to the CCP Central Committee's announcement of a shift in the Party's line to Four Modernizations in December 1978. Thus, the substantial restructuring of Chinese politics since 1978 has also been focused on removing political practices regarded as disruptive to economic development.

However, it is not only as recent as this that China's socialists came to think of economic growth as their national goal. Indeed, China's socialists have continually conceived of both socialism and capitalism as two alternative strategies for economic development since socialism emerged as an issue in Chinese politics for the first time in 1905.³ In this regard, Arif Dirlik suggests the term "postsocialism" as an alternative to capitalist and socialist methods of development,⁴ which is the Chinese way to escape from economic backwardness.

Arif Dirlik suggests postsocialism as an alternative to socialism because he believes that the idea can become a defining feature of "socialism with Chinese

^{1.} Arif Dirlik, Marxism in the Chinese Revolution (Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield, 2005), p. 78.

^{2.} Stuart R. Schram, *The Political Thought of Mao Tse-Tung* (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1974), p. 112.

^{3.} Arif Dirlik, *op. cit.*, pp. 17–41.

^{4.} Arif Dirlik, "Postsocialism? Reflection on 'Socialism with Chinese Characteristics'," in Arif Dirlik and Maurice Meisner, eds., *Marxism and the Chinese Experience: Issues in Contemporary Chinese Socialism* (New York: M.E. Sharpe, 1989), p. 375.

characteristics" with all its contradictions, but without falling into the teleological utopianism immanent in the word "socialism." His understanding of contradictions, however, mainly lies in the contradiction between socialism and capitalism. Therefore, he does not pay careful attention to the China-specific elements that are to be combined with socialist principles. Indeed, "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is an ideology that has been evolving along with the contradictory combination of "Chinese contexts" and "general values of socialism."

Li Zehou describes the integration of socialism and Chinese characteristics as a dual variation in which China seeks to achieve "enlightenment" (*qimeng*) and "national salvation" (*jiuwang*) simultaneously.⁶ According to Li, the desire for national salvation often prompted enlightenment movements in China. For example, in the early 20th century, a single-minded commitment to national salvation motivated the precursors of the May Fourth Enlightenment Movement among Chinese intellectuals who desired to make China stronger in order to survive foreign aggression. In this regard, Chow Tse-tsung argues that "the most important purpose of the movement was to maintain the existence and independence of the nation" and "the basic spirit of the movement was to jettison tradition and create a new, modern civilization to save China."

As Vera Schwarcz points out, however, Chinese intellectuals believed there could be no external imperatives of national salvation (*jiuguo*) without internal prerequisites of enlightenment (*qimeng*).⁸ Furthermore, the desire for national salvation frequently developed into irrational activism and blocked the emergence of rational movements of enlightenment in China. Nonetheless, it should be emphasized that the commitment to national salvation was one of the most important criteria on which Chinese intellectuals evaluated diverse imported Western ideologies, such as liberalism and social Darwinism.⁹ For this reason, Western philosophies and their universal values were modified substantially to accommodate the Chinese-specific desire for national salvation.

Ideally the ultimate goal of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is to constantly achieve national salvation by making China strong and wealthy. But this desire for a strong China has been revealed in a range of volatile actions and reactions swinging between socialist principles and China's realities. Consequently, the slogan of national salvation has continually been utilized as a tool to

^{5.} Ibid., p. 377.

^{6.} Li Zehou, *Zhongguo xiandai sixiangshi lun* [Essays on Contemporary Chinese Intellectual History] (Hefei: Anhui wenyi chubanshe, 1999), pp. 823–866.

^{7.} Chow Tse-tsung, *The May Fourth Movement: Intellectual Revolution in Modern China* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1960), p. 359.

^{8.} Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of the May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1986), pp. 1–11.

^{9.} Yan Fu, for example, who had first introduced the works of Herbert Spencer, Adam Smith, John Stuart Mill, and Montesquieu to China, had been seeking the sources of wealth and power of the West above individual liberty and autonomy. For details, see Benjamin Schwartz, *In Search of Wealth and Power: Yen Fu and the West* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964).

rescue the regime from crisis and justify political legitimacy, whether that be from the Mao Tse-tung and Deng Xiaoping era to the Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao era. In this paper, I argue that "socialism with Chinese characteristics" can be understood as the structure of an ellipse with two foci: socialist principles and China's realities. Accordingly, this paper sees "socialism with Chinese characteristics" as a work in progress that is still pendulously moving along an elliptical orbit consisting of variable combinations between socialist principles and Chinese realities.

This paper sheds light on the evolution of Chinese socialism by examining three historical periods: the integration of Marxism and China's realities in the Mao era; the road to reform and socialist modernization in the post-Mao era; and the new road to socialist spiritual civilization in the 1990s. The journey for a new Chinese civilization started with complete denial of its traditional culture as a main factor incurring China's total backwardness. However, what we are seeing today is China's return to traditional culture in order to rejuvenate spiritually polluted socialist civilization. In this sense, culture has been understood as a catalyst facilitating the rapid change of reality positively or negatively. Nonetheless, "socialism with Chinese characteristics", whilst highlighting the positive influence of cultural factors, is still equivocal as to whether China will maintain its current pattern of development. As a result, it is difficult to predict where Chinese socialism is heading and what it ultimately intends to achieve.

A Synthesis between Marxist Universality and Chinese Reality: Mao's Formula

The reason the earliest Chinese Marxists began to study Marxism and accepted it at once, in spite of their immature understanding of socialism, was that there was an impending need to overcome obstacles derived from both Western capitalism and the Chinese tradition. They found in the Marxist canon the possibility to meet their needs. To them, the Marxist idea looked clear, simple, and effective in pursuing national salvation. In addition, the reality of the success of the 1917 Russian Revolution brought them new inspiration and experience. As Li Dazhao mentioned, the victory of the Bolsheviks and Bolshevism seemed to demonstrate that the oppressive world order run by Western imperialism would be soon terminated and that, accordingly, the whole world should follow Marxism's revolutionary course. ¹⁰

What then were the Chinese characteristics included in Chinese Marxism? When Li Dazhao introduced Marxism into China in the early 1900s, he interpreted it in terms of nationalist populism and moralism because, for him, Marxism was not a dogma but a guide to action for national salvation. Since then, populism and

^{10.} Li Dazhao, *Shouchang wenji* [Collected Works of Li Dazhao] (Shanghai: Shanghai shudian, no date), pp. 217–222.

^{11.} Li Zehou, op. cit., pp. 977-982.

moralism have been the most salient Chinese characteristics that can be observed in socialist movements in China. First, populism as a Chinese characteristic may be traced to Li Dazhao's claim to "go to the people, go to the rural periphery" which itself was inspired by the Russian Narodnik Movement of the 1870s. China's populism was similar to the Russian movement because both aimed to end all forms of capitalist exploitation and, by doing so, create a true people's democracy.¹² Particularly, Mao Tse-tung recognized the revolutionary potential of Chinese Marxism in rural areas. As China was essentially an agricultural society, Mao believed that the foundation of the Chinese Communist revolution should be the peasantry rather than the proletarian-led urban masses. 13 Second, Chinese Marxism included a lot of ethical and moralist characteristics from the onset. Li Dazhao underlined moral revolution as well as social revolution based on humanism and socialism, respectively.14 Liu Shaoqi called for the engagement in allencompassing self-cultivation in the course of the revolutionary struggle. ¹⁵ During the Yan'an Rectification Movement, Mao Tse-tung also elaborated on the reformation of morality, especially among intellectuals. 16 The tone of these remarks corresponded both implicitly and explicitly with the moralism of Confucianism.

The populist and moralist characteristics commonly found among Chinese Marxists came not from theoretical spheres drawn out on paper but rather from their own concrete experiences. Essentially, Mao attempted to integrate Marxist theory with

^{12.} As Maurice Meisner pointed out, despite the significant differences between Li Dazhao and Russian populist thought, the populist strain in Li's thought was "the most faithful expression of the spirit of early Russian Populism to be found in modern Chinese intellectual history." For a comprehensive treatment of Li Dazhao and especially of his populist strain, see Maurice Meisner, *Li Ta-Chao and the Origins of Chinese Marxism* (New York: Atheneum, 1979), pp. 71–89.

^{13.} The year 1927 was a turning point in Mao's revolutionary warfare. When the uprisings in such cities as Shanghai, Nanchang, Changsha, and Guangzhou all failed in 1927, Mao Tse-tung criticized those who still regarded cities as primarily important. At that time, Mao shifted his focus from cities to rural areas, emphasizing the peasantry as a revolutionary force. Mao Tse-tung, *Mao Tse-tung xuanji* [Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1991), pp. 12–44.

14. Li Dazhao, *op. cit.*, p. 111.

^{15.} The ultimate goal of Liu's self-cultivation was to encourage proletarian ideology and revolutionary struggles. However, Liu Shaoqi obtained the concept of self-cultivation from Confucian ethos. In his essay, "Lun gongchandangyuan de xiuyang" [On Self-Cultivation of the Communist], Liu Shaoqi cited two ancient Confucian writings: The Analects of Confucius, in which Zengzi said, "I daily examine myself on three points" (The Analects of Confucius 1:4); and The Book of Odes, which said "like bone cut, like horn polished, like jade carved, like stone ground" (The Book of Odes 1:5(55)). Thus, the self-cultivation that Liu Shaoqi stressed showed a strong Confucian morality. Liu Shaoqi, Liu Shaoqi xuanji [Selected Works of Liu Shaoqi], Vol. 1 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1981), p. 109.

^{16.} During the Yan'an Rectification Movement, Mao Tse-tung wrote "Gaizao women de xuexi" [Reform our Study], "Zhengdun dang de zuofeng" [Rectify the Party's Style of Work], and "Fandui dangbagu" [Oppose Stereotyped Party Writing]. In these writings, rectification meant correcting the style of study by opposing subjectivism; correcting the style in Party relations by combating sectarianism; and correcting the style of writing by opposing Party stereotypes. Mao Tse-tung, op. cit., pp. 795–803, 811–829, 830–846.

the reality that China was actually experiencing. He was always against studying Marxism in isolation from the realities of Chinese society. He opposed blind "book worship" (*benben zhuyi*) and instead suggested undertaking an extensive investigation to establish a socialist model that fit unique Chinese realities.¹⁷ According to him, integrating the universal principles of Marxism–Leninism with the concrete practices occurring within the Chinese revolution was the criterion by which the truth of the all-encompassing world should be understood.¹⁸

Mao's attempt to integrate the universal principles of Marxism with Chinese realities was an epoch-making development compared to the iconoclasm of the New Culture Movement that did not take Chinese realities into account. 19 The New Culture Movement had only attempted to implement Western enlightenment while denying all the traditions and the realities of Chinese society. As a result, the Movement became unrealistic and impractical. In contrast, Mao Tse-tung stressed in 1938 that Chinese people should treasure their illustrious past from Confucius to Sun Yat-sen and carry over this valuable legacy into the Modern Age. He also emphasized that Marxism could be put into practice only when it was integrated with the specific characteristics of China and thereby acquired a definite national form. ²⁰ By highlighting that Chinese culture should have its own national form, he wanted to fortify his theory that integrated Marxism with Chinese realities.²¹ Although Confucian philosophy itself has its own universal values, he intentionally underscored the China-specific historical experiences of Confucianism that were to be integrated into the universal principles of Marxism. For this purpose, he brought back the tradition of "seeking truth from facts" that had been reinterpreted differently for the last 20 centuries since it first appeared in "Biography of King Xian of Hejian" (Hejian Xian Wang Zhuan), History of the Former Han Dynasty (Hanshu, vol. 53, The Thirteen Sons of Emperor Jingdi). According to Mao's definition, "facts" were all the things that exist objectively, and "truth" meant the internal relationships between facts or the laws governing the facts. He also defined "to seek" as "to study."22 By his interpretation of "seeking truth from facts" Mao sought to study and consequently discover the internal relationships of Chinese society, relying not on subjective imagination, not on momentary enthusiasm, not on lifeless books, but on facts that exist objectively. Thus, his reinterpretation of Marxism, which was based on the Chinese reality, paved the way for a new paradigm of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

^{17.} Ibid., pp. 109-118.

^{18.} *Ibid.*, pp. 282–298.

^{19.} In this regard, Arif Dirlik argues that Mao did not just read Marxism in accordance with the Chinese historical experience, as is commonly recognized, but insistently read the Chinese historical experience into Marxism, in the process "re-creating" Marxism. Arif Dirlik, *Marxism in the Chinese Revolution*, p. 75.

^{20.} Mao Tse-tung, op. cit., p. 534.

^{21.} Ibid., p. 707.

^{22.} Ibid., p. 801.

However, the new paradigm had an elliptical structure consisting of two heterogeneous centers – Marxism and Chinese traditions. As these two elements were inherently in conflict in some ways, they could hardly sustain a certain fixed shape (or relationship) within the structure. That is, if Marxism were to be given more weight, Chinese traditions would grow smaller. Similarly, if Chinese traditions were to be emphasized, the Marxist approach would have lost some of its power. Hence, the evolution of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" was predicted as likely to have been an inconsistent and reality-dependent pattern. In addition, "practice" as the criterion of truth is a reality-dependent concept, so the tradition of "seeking truth from practice" has underscored Chinese characteristics rather than socialist universality. This, in turn, meant that China might have chosen a policy that was incompatible with socialist principles in order to adapt itself to the ever-changing circumstances of the world. Flexibility and adaptability were the logical bases on which Mao Tse-tung's mass campaigns and Deng Xiaoping's open-door policies could be launched.

How then can practice as a criterion of truth be tested and justified if it is not defined as fixed? There is no doubt that the subjective judgment of Chairman Mao was the criterion used to evaluate all types of political activities in China. For 3 decades after the People's Republic of China (PRC) was established in 1949, Mao Tse-tung Thought played the role of official ideology in directing policy-making for the People's Republic. Particularly during the Cultural Revolution, the Chinese people adored Mao Tse-tung almost as a living god, shouting "three loyalties" and "four boundlessnesses." Marxism was introduced into China with the desire for national salvation, but it degenerated over the years and became a political dogma for the personal cult of Mao Tse-tung.

Consequently, Mao's attempt to integrate the Marxist doctrine with Chinese traditions ended up as a personal dictatorship and power monopoly. Mao Tse-tung Thought, once purported to epitomize the ideal model of Chinese Marxism, turned into a lifeless and fossilized dogma that lost its elasticity and adaptability in its failure to "seek truth from facts." The negative impact of Mao Tse-tung Thought on China was the most detrimental during the 10-year turmoil of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976). The Cultural Revolution, an era of inhumane chaos, left the Chinese economy in tatters and destroyed any remnants of traditional values by calling upon the Red Guards to smash the Four Olds: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. The most conspicuous example of denying Chinese traditional values during the Cultural Revolution was the Anti-Confucian Campaign that began from the end of 1973 and continued until the death of Mao Tse-tung in September 1976. During that period, Confucianism, including Confucius, Mencius, Tung Chung-shu, and Wang Yang-ming, was entirely rejected in

^{23. &}quot;Three loyalties" indicates loyalty to Chairman Mao, loyalty to Mao Tse-tung Thought, loyalty to Chairman Mao's revolutionary line. "Four boundlessnesses" refers to boundless loyalty, love, veneration, and faith in Chairman Mao. Li Zehou, *op. cit.*, p. 1020.

defense of the Cultural Revolution and Confucianism's defending of the slavery system was subject to criticism.²⁴ As Maurice Meisner appropriately delineates, "At the outset the leaders of the Cultural Revolution attacked the Four Olds, especially the lingering influences of superstitions inherited from old China's feudal tradition, only to replace them with the superstitious worship of Mao Tse-tung and the primitive rituals performed around the Chairman's cult."²⁵ Turmoil and violence engulfed China with this campaign against the Four Olds and, as a result, all forms of traditional values were almost eradicated.²⁶ Whether Mao was trying to implant Marxism in the Chinese context or vice versa, his Revolution turned out to be an ideological manipulation that generated a historic catastrophe.

A Synthesis between Market Economy and Four Cardinal Principles: Deng's Formula

Ironically, the Cultural Revolution gave those who came after Mao a chance to review the historical experience of Chinese socialism as a whole. In 1976 when Mao Tse-tung died, a strong backlash ensued against the cult of personality. Deng Xiaoping and his anti-Left colleagues began to draw a master plan for rebuilding a new Chinese-characteristic socialism, thus blaming Mao Tse-tung for his arbitrary decisions and the leftist errors of the Cultural Revolution. For his purpose, Deng Xiaoping employed a dual strategy utilizing Mao's historical role as embodying both the Chinese Lenin and Stalin – the leader of revolution and the tyrant of empire – combined.²⁷ On the one hand, Deng Xiaoping pointed out the numerous errors for which Mao Tse-tung was responsible. By doing so, Deng was able to justify his purging of radical Leftists. On the other hand, he also gave credit to Mao's revolutionary career because Deng Xiaoping still needed the shadow of Mao Tse-tung Thought – the symbol of Chinese socialism – to hold socialist legitimacy.

In putting his strategy into practice, Deng Xiaoping first successfully ousted the "Whateverist" faction that consisted largely of those who had benefited from the Cultural Revolution. Hua Guofeng, the head of the "Whateverist" faction, and his

^{24.} For the interpretations of the ideological intentions of the Anti-Confucian Campaign, see Merle Goldman, "China's Anti-Confucian Campaign, 1973–74," *The China Quarterly*, 63 (1975); A. James Gregor and Maria Hsia Chang, "Anti-Confucianism: Mao's Last Campaign," *Asian Survey*, 19-11 (1979).

^{25.} Maurice Meisner, Mao's China and After: A History of the People's Republic (New York: Free Press, 1999), pp. 293–294.

^{26.} About 4,000 articles that criticized Confucian culture were published during the Cultural Revolution. In addition, more than 1,400 books concerning anti-Confucianism were published in the period 1973–1976. Song Zhingfu, Zhao Jihui, and Pei Dayang, *Ruxue zai xiandai zhonguo* [Confucianism in Contemporary China] (Zhengzhou: Zhongzhou guji chubanshe, 1991), p. 345.

^{27.} For the question of Mao and the reinterpretation of Mao Tse-tung Thought, see Maurice Meisner, *op. cit.*, pp. 439–444.

associates, had rather rashly pledged in a highly publicized declaration to support whatever decisions were made by Chairman Mao. Deng Xiaoping accused them of vulgarizing Mao Tse-tung Thought. Next, Deng purged the ultra-leftist Gang of Four who drove China into bloody chaos by distorting Mao Tse-tung Thought.²⁸ Consequently, Deng Xiaoping assessed Mao's career as 30 percent mistaken and 70 percent meritorious, so that he could preserve Mao Tse-tung Thought as one of his political strategies, while denying the personality cult that idolized Mao.

According to Deng Xiaoping, emancipating the mind and seeking truth from facts were the living soul of Marxism as well as the fundamental ideological weapons for placing China in an invincible position. In his view, "practice" was to be regarded as the sole criterion for testing truth.²⁹ Of course, Mao Tse-tung also called for "practice." However, Deng's emphasis on practice was different from Mao's because the former aimed to open a new era of development. Particularly, Deng Xiaoping paid attention to the actual changes in the Chinese economy. In the late 1970s, he believed that China should alter its direction through the "Four Modernizations" - of industry, agriculture, national defense, and science and technology. He also argued that a dogmatized ideology could not dominate truth unless it was practical enough to effectively cope with the changes in reality.³⁰ If practice was the sole criterion for testing truth, why not test Mao Tse-tung Thought in the pursuit of truth? Certainly, Mao Tse-tung Thought could not be the exception. By testing Mao's doctrine against practice, Deng Xiaoping hoped to overcome the old legacy of Mao Tse-tung Thought as well as the impoverished conditions in the wake of the Cultural Revolution, thus shifting the focus of national salvation from political struggles to economic development.³¹

Deng Xiaoping's reform program that terminated political struggles and began to concentrate on socialist modernization was established at the Third Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee in December 1978. The Third Plenum is considered as a major turning point in modern Chinese political history because it was here that Leftist mistakes were corrected and China began pursuing new policies, such as thought emancipation, systemic reform, and opening up to the rest of the world.³²

However, Deng's reform policy faced new political challenges from both sides of the left–right ideological continuum.³³ On the one hand, Xu Wenli, the editor of

^{28.} Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1994), pp. 38–39, 42–47.

^{29.} *Ibid.*, pp. 126–128.

^{30.} *Ibid.*, pp. 111–112.

^{31.} *Ibid.*, pp. 140–153.

^{32.} Chinese Communist Party, *Zhonggong zhongyang wenjian xuanbian* [Selected Documents of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party] (Beijing: Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao chubanshe, 1994), pp. 82–96.

^{33.} For a chronicle of the pro-democracy movement during the period between 1978 and 1989, see Merle Goldman, *Sowing the Seeds of Democracy in China: Political Reform in the Deng Xiaoping Era* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1994).

the magazine *April Fifth Forum* (*Siwu Luntan*), criticized Deng's policies from the vantage point of orthodox Marxism. On the other hand, Wei Jingsheng, the editor of the journal *Explorations* (*Tansuo*) and best-known Chinese pro-democracy activist, called for democratization, criticizing the socialist tone Deng Xiaoping and his colleagues retained. Deng allowed the Chinese people and party members to raise diverse, even radical, voices from below to facilitate his reform policy. When he met Ryosaku Sasaki, the Chairman of the Japan Socialist Party, on 26 November 1978, Deng said, "Our constitution guarantees the Chinese people the right to write big-character posters, express their ideas, or demand democracy." In reality, his posture on "thought emancipation" was meant to encourage reformists and strengthen his own political power, not to promote freedom of speech. In response, Wei Jingsheng, in his essay entitled "Do We Want a Democracy or a New Dictatorship?" in March 1979, condemned Deng Xiaoping's bid to consolidate power. In his writings, Wei argued that democracy should be China's Fifth Modernization as a precondition for the other four aspects of modernization.³⁴

Then, as early as the spring of 1979, the official crackdown against the demand for democratization began when Deng Xiaoping sensed a rising threat to the rule of the CCP. At first, Deng had found the pro-democracy groups useful because they attacked his political enemies. However, once he had consolidated his power, the movement felt more like a threat, and he began to suppress the pro-democracy activists who threatened his power-base. On 29 March 1979, Wei Jingsheng was arrested for his outspoken criticism of Deng's "new dictatorship." Shortly after the arrest, Deng Xiaoping presented the Four Cardinal Principles at the Conference on Theoretical Work. In the Principles, he emphasized that China must adhere to the principle of upholding the socialist path, the principle of upholding the people's democratic dictatorship, the principle of upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and the principle of upholding Marxist-Leninist-Mao Tsetung thought.³⁵ For those who opposed the one-party totalitarian rule of the CCP, upholding the Four Cardinal Principles looked like regressing to an outdated ideology that was fundamentally incompatible with economic reform and the open-door policy. Deng Xiaoping needed an ideological device to constrain the forces that attempted to undermine the socialist rule, because political stability was indispensable for economic development. He was convinced that it was possible to pursue socialism through a market economy, something that no country had ever experienced.³⁶ Hence, the Four Cardinal Principles were the key policy to strive for the socialist market economy.

By the end of 1970s, Deng Xiaoping virtually completed his blueprint for China's modernization, a blueprint that was embodied in adhering to the "one center" (the central task of economic construction) and "two basic points" (adher-

^{34.} Andrew J. Nathan, Chinese Democracy (Berkely: University of California Press, 1986), p. 33.

^{35.} Deng Xiaoping, op. cit., pp. 158-184.

^{36.} Ibid., pp. 231-236.

ence to the four cardinal principles and implementation of reform and the opendoor policy). However, in order to consolidate his power and accelerate the reform policy, Deng Xiaoping needed to knock out Chairman Hua Guofeng whose authority was rooted in an alleged scrawl that Mao Tse-tung wrote to choose Hua as his successor.³⁷ As Mao's anointed successor and the head of the "Whateverist" faction, Hua Guofeng still flaunted the slogan that whatever Chairman Mao approved should be unhesitatingly implemented.³⁸ Accordingly, Deng had to remove Hua from his power bases by ensuring the demystification of Mao Tse-tung Thought. To set out his plan, Deng Xiaoping intervened more than 16 times in drafting documents for the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee held between March 1980 and June 1981,³⁹ and, as will be explained below, eventually succeeded in ousting Hua from the chairmanship by highlighting both Mao's and Hua's errors. 40 The Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee was marked as a major historical milestone that reassessed Mao Tse-tung Thought without damaging the legitimacy of Chinese socialism on the one hand and shifted the focal point of national salvation from political struggles to economic development on the

From the late 1970s onwards, the new Chinese leadership started to bring order out of chaos and return to the rectitude of the past (*boluan fanzheng*), because they believed that the correct interpretation of Mao Tse-tung Thought was the way towards the future development of China. The Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee was a conference to reaffirm this point in its official report entitled "Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China." The report emphasized that Chinese socialism should be based on Mao Tse-tung Thought integrating the universal truth of Marxism–Leninism with the concrete practices of the Chinese revolution. In the Four Cardinal Principles, Deng Xiaoping elucidated that Mao Tse-tung, along with Marx and Lenin, was a true successor of the socialist tradition

^{37.} Mao Tse-tung is assumed to have written a memo on 30 April 1976 to Hua Guofeng and said, "With you in charge, I'm at ease" (*Ni banshi wo fangxin*). See Tang Yingwu, *Jueze: 1978 nian yilai zhongguo gaige de licheng* [Making Choices: The Historical Process of China's Reform since 1978] (Beijing: Jingji ribao chubanshe, 1998), p. 19.

^{38.} For the overall economic situation and policies in Hua's era, see Sun Jian, *Zhongguo jingji tongshi* [The Comprehensive History of Chinese Economy], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Zhongguo renmin daxue chubanshe, 1999), pp. 1837–1850.

^{39.} For the whole process of revision of the official report ("Resolution on Certain Questions in the History of Our Party since the Founding of the People's Republic of China") presented at the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, see Xiong Zhiyong, ed., *Zaisheng zhongguo* [Revitalizing China], Vol. 2 (Beijing: Zhonggong dangshi chubanshe, 1998), pp. 609–720.

^{40.} Deng Xiaoping, op. cit., pp. 309–310.

^{41.} At the Sixth Plenum of the Eleventh Central Committee, Hua Guofeng was dismissed as Party Chairman and Chairman of the Central Military Commission of the CCP and demoted to Junior Vice Chairman, which is the lowest position in the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau (*Renmin Ribao*, 30 June 1981).

^{42.} Chinese Communist Party, op. cit., p. 167.

and therefore Deng would follow Mao Tse-tung's policy line to integrate the universal truth of Marxism with the concrete practices of the Chinese revolution. In this regard, the spirit of seeking truth from facts was still important in Deng Xiaoping's era.

However, there was a critical difference between Mao and Deng. In constructing a new model for national salvation, Mao Tse-tung made use of Marxism as an alternative to capitalist enlightenment and integrated it with the Chinese reality. By contrast, Deng Xiaoping attempted to implant a capitalist market economy in the socialist tradition that had been already established as China's ideological principle. Mao's Chinese socialism was a combination of the Marxist doctrine and Chinese traditions, while Deng's Chinese socialism aimed to integrate two different Western civilizations – socialist spiritual civilization and capitalist material civilization – into one ideology. Accordingly, the indigenous Chinese cultural tradition was perceived as an important part of Chinese socialism in Mao Tse-tung Thought. On the contrary, Deng Xiaoping considered cultural tradition as a mere feudal remnant that should be eradicated along with the personality cult.

The Road to Socialist Spiritual Civilization: From Authoritarian Coordination to Innovation of Civilization

Deng Xiaoping and his fellows put forth the view that China was in the primary stage of socialism. Its level of productivity greatly lagged behind that of industrialized capitalist nations. 43 Therefore, China had to go through an extremely long primary stage so that it could achieve industrialization. How then can China achieve a remarkable modernization? Because China was a low productive socialist state, it needed to implant capitalist factors into its socialist economy. 44 The integration of socialism and market economy was the basis of socialism with new Chinese characteristics, at least while China remained in the primary stage in terms of productivity. The Chinese reality and characteristics in the Mao period signified the revolutionary situation of China, while the Chinese reality in the post-Mao era was the idea that the demand for a market mechanism would promote productivity. That is, the revolutionary environment was no longer the Chinese reality in Deng's era. The portrait of Chinese reality had changed from old-fashioned political struggles to a capitalist market economy. In accordance with this change, the universal principles of Marxism had to be integrated with the market mechanism and, consequently, a new form of socialism appeared in China. The CCP argued that China's socialist market economy was an economic mechanism that took planned economy as primary and market economy as secondary.⁴⁵ However,

^{43.} Ibid., p. 209.

^{44.} Ibid., pp. 360-361.

^{45.} Ibid., p. 205.

while maintaining its socialist cover, China was actually heading toward capitalism, as indicated by the permeation of the market mechanism and private ownership.

The drastic change in the Chinese reality also influenced Chinese intellectuals, especially neo-Marxists, in terms of their ideological identity. The emancipation of thought triggered by the Four Modernizations brought about changes in perception among some intellectuals like Zhou Yang, Wang Ruoshui, and Wang Yuanhua, who had a strong tradition of humanitarian Marxism. Hais group of intellectuals began to pay attention to the problem of socialist alienation. Their criticism of the socialist tradition opened a new door for the New Enlightenment Movement in China. Of course, at the outset, their criticism was primarily focused on the old-fashioned socialist tradition dogmatized by Mao Tse-tung. Hence, in the beginning, the New Enlightenment Movement did not have tensions and overt conflicts with the new Chinese leadership. But as Wang Hui observes, after the antispiritual pollution campaign of the early 1980s aimed at these humanitarian Marxists, the New Enlightenment Movement gradually took the form of an intellectual movement that pursued Western capitalist modernity subsumed under the tradition/modernity dichotomy.

Their dichotomous approach of China versus the West (or tradition vs modernity) aimed to overturn both old and new traditions of China. The old tradition, namely "great tradition" (*da chuantong*), meant traditional culture based on Confucianism. The new tradition, namely "little tradition" (*xiao chuantong*), indicated the socialist tradition established under the flag of anti-feudalism. As can be seen in a number of magazines that were published to reflect Chinese intellectuals' admiration for Western civilization as well as their criticism of old and new Chinese traditions, New Enlightenment intellectuals in the 1980s pursued Western capitalist modernity and considered Chinese socialism as a feudal tradition that

^{46.} Among them, Wang Ruoshui stressed the democratic and humanitarian strains in the Marxist tradition in his treatise "On the Marxist Philosophy on Man." Maurice Meisner, *op. cit.*, p. 486.

^{47.} Wang Hui, a New Leftist leader in the 1990s, criticized the Thought Emancipation Movement and the New Enlightenment Movement in the 1980s. However, as liberalists like Xu Jilin understood the New Enlightenment Movement in the context of the Thought Emancipation Movement, he also understood these two movements as from the same school. Xu Jilin, "Qimeng de mingyun: ershi nian laide zhongguo sixiangjie" [The Fate of an Enlightenment: Twenty Years in the Chinese Intellectual Sphere], *Ershiyi shiji* [Twenty-First Century], 50 (1998); Wang Hui, "Dangdai zhongguo de sixiang zhuangkuang yu xiandaixing wenti" [The Circumstances of Contemporary Chinese Thought and the Problem of Modernity], in Xu Jilin, ed., *Ershi shiji zhongguo sixiangshi lun* [On the History of Chinese Philosophy in Twentieth Century], Vol. 1 (Shanghai: Dongfang chuban zhongxin, 2000), pp. 615–649.

^{48.} According to Wang Hui, most intellectuals in the 1980s were appointed as researchers or university professors. They later became high-ranking officials in the 1990s. See Wang Hui, *op. cit.*, p. 625; Wang Hui and Theodore Huters, eds., *China's New Order: Society, Politics and Economy in Transition* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), p. 156.
49. *Ibid.*, pp. 155–157.

should be discarded.⁵⁰ In fact, Chinese intellectuals in those days had lost their belief in socialism due to the sense of despair that came from the wide gap between China and the West.⁵¹ In this situation, their reflection on cultural traditions, namely "cultural fever" (*wenhua re*), brought about a desire for Western modernity, namely "Western learning fever" (*xixue re*), decreasing confidence in the value and effectiveness of socialism.

Deng Xiaoping interpreted the skeptical attitude of intellectuals who had strong admiration for Western modernity in the 1980s as a serious challenge of bourgeois liberalization against the socialist rule.⁵² Although Deng himself criticized the dogmatized version of Mao Tse-tung Thought and pursued reform policies, he did not totally deny all the socialist traditions. Socialist tradition was one of the imperative parts of "socialism with Chinese characteristics" and Deng Xiaoping could not be tolerant of those who raised a fundamental question about socialism per se. Rather, he emphasized repeatedly the soundness of socialism in order to cope with the decline of belief in socialism resulting from the productivity-first principle. However, the CCP's attempt to offer a proper socialist alternative to materialist hedonism and spiritual liberalism was unlikely to have attracted people's attention. Deng Xiaoping thought the problem was the unconstrained demand for democracy, namely bourgeois liberalization that did not require exercising dictatorship over saboteurs.⁵³ He therefore attempted to shatter the threat imposed on socialist development by emphasizing "socialist spiritual civilization."⁵⁴

Calling for a fight against the decadent bourgeois ideology that created "spiritual pollution," Deng Xiaoping stressed socialist civilization at the Sixth Plenum of the Twelfth Central Committee held in September 1986.⁵⁵ As a result, the Committee chose the "Resolution on the Guiding Principles for the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction." The Resolution seemed to support "letting a hundred flowers

^{50.} For example, *Striving towards the Future* (*Zouxiang Weilai*), *Culture: China and the World* (*Wenhua: Zhongguo yu shijie*), *New Enlightenment* (*Xin qimeng*), *Thinker* (*Sixiangjia*), etc. See Suisheng Zhao, "Chinese Intellectuals' Quest for National Greatness and Nationalistic Writing in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly*, 152 (1997), p. 727.

^{51.} Cui Jian, one of the most popular Chinese singers in the 1980s, used to sing "Nothing to My Name" (*Yi wusuoyou*) covering his eyes with a piece of red cloth. It symbolized the despair that Chinese young intellectuals felt at that time.

^{52.} Deng Xiaoping, *Deng Xiaoping wenxuan* [Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping], Vol. 3 (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1993), pp. 36–48, 123–125, 194–197. When President Ronald Reagan visited China in April 1984 and delivered a speech on American liberal values, entire communities of Chinese intellectuals came under the impact of Western liberalization. For details on the situation of bourgeois liberalization in 1980s China, see Immanuel C. Y. Hsü, *China without Mao: The Search for a New Order*, 2nd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), pp. 211–219.

^{53.} Deng Xiaoping, op. cit., p.154.

^{54.} The term "socialist spiritual civilization" was first coined by Ye Jianying in a speech on 29 September 1979 and enshrined in law as a duty of the state in Article 4 of the revised PRC Constitution when it was implemented on 4 December 1982. Christopher R. Hughes, *Chinese Nationalism in the Global Era* (London: Routledge, 2006), p. 22.

^{55.} Deng Xiaoping, op. cit., p. 196.

bloom and a hundred schools of thought contend" (*baihua qifang baijia zheng-ming*).⁵⁶ However, in reality, its focus was to popularize the idea of spiritual civilization so as to facilitate the anti-spiritual pollution campaign. The Resolution aimed to single out socialist collectivism in spite of China's inegalitarian strategy of "getting rich early" (*xianfulun*).⁵⁷ In this sense, the socialist spiritual civilization was an effort to standardize civic virtues in order to uphold the rule of the CCP. This developed into neo-authoritarianism in the late 1980s, so that China had to go through a period of economic modernization under authoritarian state control before democracy would be established.⁵⁸

One failure of the socialist spiritual civilization, was that it failed in controlling "spiritual pollution." The Chinese democracy movement between 1986 and 1989 showed that a socialist spiritual civilization conducted by authoritarian means was not the most effective method to cope with escalating demands for liberalization.⁵⁹ Furthermore, since 1992 when Deng went on a southern tour of China and stated that leftist errors were much more dangerous than rightist ones, 60 the crisis of faith in socialism has become worse. 61 In the midst of an ideological vacuum resulting from the suppression of liberalization and decreasing effectiveness of socialism, nationalism emerged as a new ideology to replace the old ones. Particularly, anti-Western nationalist sentiment was relatively pervasive enough to arouse sympathy among Chinese intellectuals who were fragmented into several blocs in the 1990s. 62 Reflecting this nationalist sentiment, the "Resolution on Certain Important Ouestions for the Reinforcement of the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction" was chosen at the Sixth Plenum of the Fourteenth Central Committee in October 1996. The Resolution included more cultural factors than previous ones, although it basically followed the principles of the 1986 resolution. 63 Thus, in the

^{56.} Chinese Communist Party, op. cit., pp. 341-343.

^{57.} *Ibid.*, pp. 335–336.

^{58.} For the neo-authoritarianism in Deng's era, see Mark P. Petracca and Mong Xiong, "The Concept of Chinese Neo-Authoritarianism: An Exploration and Democratic Critique," *Asian Survey*, 30-11 (1990); Gong Ting and Chen Feng, "Neo-Authoritarian Theory in Mainland China," *Issues & Studies*, 27-1 (1991); Barry Sautman, "Sirens of the Strongman: Neo-Authoritarianism in Recent Chinese Political Theory," *The China Quarterly*, 129 (1992).

^{59.} For the debate among the Chinese leadership over the Tiananmen Square massacre of June 1989, see Andrew J. Nathan and Perry Link, eds., *The Tiananmen Papers* (New York: Public Affairs, 2001).

^{60.} Deng Xiaoping, op. cit, p. 375.

^{61.} The so-called three faith crises indicate the crisis of faith in socialism (*xinxin weiji*), the crisis of faith in Marxism (*xinyang weiji*), and the crisis of faith in the Party (*xinren weiji*).

^{62.} Even those who accused the CCP of the 1989 Tiananmen Square massacre tended to support the nationalist movement in the 1990s. For this, see Merle Goldman, "Politically-Engaged Intellectuals in the 1990s," *The China Quarterly*, 159 (1999), pp. 700–711.

^{63.} Chinese Communist Party, *Zhonggong zhongyang guanyu jiaqiang shehui zhuyi jingshen wenming jianshe ruogan zhongyao wenti jueyi* [CCP Central Committee's Resolution on Certain Important Questions for the Reinforcement of the Socialist Spiritual Civilization Construction] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1996), pp. 8–9.

1990s, the cultural traditions that had been condemned during the 1980s were re-examined as a new alternative for China's development.

Furthermore, the rise of China in the 1990s made it possible to pay new attention to Confucian values as cultural sources of her rapid economic and political growth, although Asian value debates lost their relevance with the 1997 Asian financial crisis. ⁶⁴ Of course, there were no fundamental changes in Confucian values after the Asian financial crisis. The focal points of Confucian values were the primacy of group over individual and emphasis on harmony and order as they were before. But Chinese party officials of the Jiang Zemin administration began to take heed of Confucian values in order to control spiritual pollutions that were brought about by individual liberalism. Among various efforts they had made to adopt Confucianism as a dominant ideology of China, they enacted the "Outline of Implementation of National Morality" in 2001, which combines Confucian values and socialist collectivism. ⁶⁵ These efforts to utilize Confucianism as a source of socialist patriotism had been further strengthened in the Hu Jintao era.

On 4 March 2006, at the Tenth National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), Chinese President Hu Jintao presented the so-called "socialist concept of honor and disgrace" and advocated for the creation of an advanced socialist culture in China. 66 Noticeable among other values in Hu's concept of honor and disgrace is patriotism.⁶⁷ In a list of do's and don'ts, Hu Jintao emphasized "do love and do not harm the motherland," defining the former action as honor and the latter as disgrace. On 14 March of the same year, Chinese Prime Minister Wen Jiabao echoed Hu's sentiment in the press conference at the conclusion of the Fourth Session of the Tenth National People's Congress (NPC) by citing an aphorism that appeared in *The New History of the Tang Dynasty* (Xintangshu): "To think about where danger looms will ensure our security; to think about why chaos occurs will ensure our peace; and to think about why a country falls will ensure our survival." In that press conference he also said, "We need to consistently and unswervingly press ahead with reform and opening up...[and] to continue to adhere to the road of building 'socialism with Chinese characteristics.' Although there will be difficulties in the road ahead, we cannot stop. Back-pedaling is not a way out."68 According to Lam, however, if Hu and Wen

^{64.} For a brief overview on Asian values debates, see Donald K. Emmerson, "Singapore and the 'Asian Values' Debates," *Journal of Democracy*, 6-4 (October 1995), pp. 95–105.

^{65.} Young Nam Cho and Jong Ho Jeong, "China's Soft Power: Discussions, Resources, and Prospects," *Asian Survey*, 48-3 (May/June 2008), p. 471.

^{66.} Renmin Ribao (7 March 2006).

^{67.} Even though patriotism as official nationalism is popular among government officials, it is also important to keep in mind that the government is very cautious in dealing with popular nationalism because uncontrolled popular nationalism will threaten China's political stability. For the official discourse on patriotism and its contradiction with popular nationalism, see Yongnian Zheng, *Discovering Chinese Nationalism in China: Modernization, Identity, and International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 87–110.

^{68.} Renmin Ribao (15 March 2006).

were only after an adulterated type of "authoritarian Confucianism" they could not ensure that their call for Confucianism would win the support of the Chinese populace. ⁶⁹ Confucianism for them, like in the case of Jiang Zemin, ⁷⁰ only meant the ideological weapon to prevent party cells from succumbing to bourgeois liberalization.

In their addresses, both Hu and Wen underscored the completion of "socialism with Chinese characteristics," especially based on the value of patriotism, which they believe would be the only way China would be able to break off the chains of decades of underdevelopment and make the dream of a strong China (qiangguomeng) come true. On the surface, their claims sound compelling if "socialism" and "Chinese characteristics" are corresponding and compatible. However, China's historical experiences prove that "socialism with Chinese characteristics" is a mixture of two conflicting and contradictory trajectories: Chinese characteristics and socialism. "Chinese characteristics" presumes some cultural traditions unique to China. By contrast, "socialism" embraces universal and invariable values and principles. Thus, "socialism with Chinese characteristics," including the two heterogeneous components, often brings about a confusion concerning China's identity. Today, China is still seeking to dialectically integrate a capitalist market economy with the Chinese cultural tradition (including both the great tradition and little tradition) in order to create a new socialist model with Chinese characteristics. However, it is open to question whether China will be able to achieve the innovation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics."

Conclusion

Since the mid-19th century, China has unceasingly attempted to establish a new tradition while denying its old cultural traditions. In this process, Confucianism, which had been a governing principle of the state over the centuries, was considered an old custom that hindered the development of China and that accordingly, should be eliminated. Indeed, almost all forms of Confucian traditions and values were condemned and denounced during the New Culture Movement. In time, however, the New Culture Movement was replaced by Marxist ideology. Thus, a Western ideology that had denied Chinese traditions was in turn denied by another Western ideology.

It is of course the desire for national salvation that has driven this series of ideological experiments in China. The first attempt to learn about Western civilization was based on the desire to overcome the stigma and shame of China's defeat in the Opium War. When young Chinese intellectuals were disappointed by the

^{69.} Willy Wo-Lap Lam, *Chinese Politics in the Hu Jintao Era: New Leaders, New Challenges* (New York: M. E. Sharpe, 2006), p. 281.

^{70.} Willy Wo-Lap Lam, The Era of Jiang Zemin (Singapore: Prentice Hall, 1999), p. 279.

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imperialist nature of Western civilization, they looked for an alternative to save China and finally found hope in another Western ideology – Marxism.

Unfortunately, however, China failed repeatedly in its attempts to implant those Western ideologies because reform processes were often driven by an impetuous desire. The Westernization fever during the New Culture Movement was frustrated by Western imperialism. Marxism as an alternative to Western learning also ended up as a dogmatic socialism. Likewise, ideological experiments that did not consider China's cultural traditions were unlikely to be a true means of national salvation even though those efforts appeared to be effective for a while. In fact, tolerance of religious and cultural differences was one of the characteristics of Chinese culture, and the characteristic of tolerance was the driving force that facilitated China's accommodation of Western ideologies. If Chinese traditional factors were not involved, the Western ideologies would hardly have been imported into China.

Taking a detour to Western learning and Marxism for the last century, China began to deliberately pay attention to its cultural traditions again. Its ideological journey to "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics" has not been painless so far and may not remain so, precisely because it is hard to dialectically integrate Confucian cultural traditions with socialist political ideology. Particularly, the current Chinese socialist market economy has brought about not only remarkable economic growth but also numerous social problems. Among other problems, China has suffered from the confusion of ideological identity. Is China a socialist society or a capitalist society? To address this question, the Chinese leadership has been concentrating on the innovation of "socialism with Chinese characteristics." However, the future of "socialist spiritual civilization" is still behind the curtain.

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