

Grasping the Xi Jinping's People-Centered Development Philosophy

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Abstract: Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the Central Committee of the CPC with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core has grasped the general trend of the times and the overall international and domestic situations. President Xi, as the core of the CPC Central Committee, has delivered many important speeches on a broad range of issues, offering his thoughts, views and judgments on reform, development and stability, domestic and foreign affairs, national defense, Party-building, national governance and military. Those speeches embody Xi's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era.

1. Introduction

In Xi's Thought, the people-centered development philosophy is the starting point, the foothold and the essence. Researching his people-centered development philosophy is of vital theoretical and practical significance for advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics at a new starting point and realizing the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

2. The Scientific Connotation of People-Centered Development Philosophy

"Serving the people wholeheartedly" is the fundamental purpose of our party. As a Marxist party, since its establishment the CPC has made people's interests and happiness as its ultimate mission. Since the 18th National CPC Congress, the Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core has inherited the Marxist view of the people and adopted the innovative theories of previous generations of CPC central leadership. Gradually it has shaped a people-centered development philosophy in its endeavors to promote socialism with Chinese characteristics, a philosophy that enriches the connotation of CPC's mass line ideas and answers the nitty-gritty questions about the status, the main body, the stance, the aspiration, the livelihood and the well-being of the people.

People-centered development philosophy is a set of rigorous and scientific ideological and theoretical systems. It includes some core elements like views on people's stance, people's position, people's goals, people's interests and people's initiatives, all of which are intertwined and overlapped in developing the theory and practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Stance is of utmost importance, as it separates proletarian parties from any other political parties. A true proletarian party always stands up for the people.

The CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping stressed the people's stand being the fundamental political stance of the CPC, the purpose of serving the people despite the transformation of government functions and the adoption of the mass line in all aspects of the nation's governance.¹ ²His pet phrases such as "people-centered"³, "for the people", "people's stance", "public opinion", "the people", "people's sense of gain", "seeing on the same page with the people"⁴ have clearly shown the CPC's people stance. Checking President Xi's busy calendar, we

¹ Xi Jinping, Second Plenary Session of the Second Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee[R]. 2013.2

² Xi Jinping, Selected Speeches and Statements: Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission, Party Construction Reading Press, Central Literature Publishing House, 2019(01):223-235

³ Xi Jinping, Report to the 18th CPC National Congress[R]. 2017.10

⁴ Xi Jinping, Speech on the National Conference on Propaganda and Ideology[Z].2013.8

are impressed by his commitment to people, with whom he spent most time. The president lives up to the motto “I will put aside my own well-being for the good of my people.”⁵

The goals of a ruling party usually reflect the nature of a party. In this case, the goals of the CPC are aligned with the goals of the Chinese people. On the first day he took office, Xi said: “The people’s yearning for a better life should be our goal.”⁶ In 2014, in an interview with Russian TV in Sochi, he said, “My ruling philosophy, if summarized in a sentence, is to serve the people and shoulder my responsibilities”.⁷ According to the report of the 19th National CPC Congress, the original aspiration and mission of the CPC are to seek happiness for the people and realize the national rejuvenation. In the final analysis, everything the CPC fights for is for the Chinese people.

The CPC General Secretary Xi Jinping always put people first, in an irreplaceable place, above anything else. He has emphasized that “people’s interests override all and anyone who exercises power must serve the people and be responsible to the people”.⁸ In the fight against the COVID-19 epidemic, the CPC Central Committee has put people’s life and health first. Regardless of the cost, the Chinese government paid all the medical bills for patients of all age brackets to ensure that no one left untreated, which shows the people-centered approach. Xi himself also stressed the need to narrow the income gap and promote social fairness and justice to achieve the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects on schedule. “When defining a moderately prosperous society, the key is to observe the condition of farmers.”⁹ “We shall leave no field, no one and no region behind. We shall let the 1.3 billion Chinese people share the fruits of a moderately prosperous society in all aspects.”

Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at the core has focused on improving people’s livelihood, implementing inclusive, basic and safety valve projects for targeted poverty alleviation. The number of people living in poverty has decreased by more than 10 million annually in recent years. By the end of 2020, we have eradicated absolute poverty in rural areas, a great feat in the history of global poverty alleviation.

As socialism with Chinese characteristics in a new era advances, the people-centered development philosophy is materialized in all the practices of the Chinese governance. The concept has already transcended national boundaries and ideological differences: People from all over the world are embracing it. Mankind is facing major changes and common challenges unseen in a century. The landscape of international relations is undergoing profound adjustment, and the world is facing increasing instability and uncertainty. With a broad global vision, President Xi Jinping proposed to build a community with a shared future for mankind. The proposal, which was mentioned in some UN documents, has received wide praises from the international community, and become a historically important thought. The people-centered development philosophy has pointed out a path of human civilization. It is a major input from CPC that reflect the common values of humanity, which is expected to boost progress of mankind.

In short, the people-centered development philosophy is the mainstay of the socialist thinking with Chinese characteristics in the new era. Only CPC members of this era grasp this core and use it as the “entry” to understand Xi Jinping’s Thoughts on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era can they truly understand the entire theoretical system at both macro-level and micro level, can they master the methodology and the essence. So that they can understand the reason and the result, and consciously strengthen the “four consciousnesses” and the “four self-confidence” and the “two safeguards”, intellectually empowered to understand and change the world.

3. Theoretical Origins of the People-Centered Development Philosophy

⁵ Xin Jinping, Xi Jinping: The Governance of China, Foreign Languages Press, 2020.6(01):144

⁶ Xi Jinping, Selected Speeches and Statements: Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission, Party Construction Reading Press, Central Literature Publishing House[M]. 2019(01):56-58

⁷ Xi Jinping, Selected Speeches and Statements: Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission, Party Construction Reading Press, Central Literature Publishing House[M]. 2019(01):84

⁸ Xi Jinping, Selected Speeches and Statements: Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission, Party Construction Reading Press[M]. 2019(01):17

⁹ Xi Jinping, Selected Speeches and Statements: Staying True to Our Original Aspiration and Founding Mission, Party Construction Reading Press, Central Literature Publishing House[M]. 2019(01):194

No scientific theory arises out of thin air; all theories develop from previous cultural heritage and theoretical legacies. First, the people-centered theory has absorbed elements from the traditional culture of the Chinese nation. With a splendid civilization and a history that stretches over 5,000 years and, China has put “people-oriented” ideas at the heart of the ancient political philosophies.

In the traditional Chinese culture, the people's view is often interpreted as the simple “people-centered philosophy”¹⁰ and Confucianism became a mainstream school. During the Shang and Zhou dynasties, the people were seen as the foundation of a country, and the rulers believed that only when the people led a good life, could the country thrive. Confucius proposed benevolent governance and love for the people. Mencius' came up with the theory that who gained the common aspiration of the people could rule the world, and thus the people should be more precious than the ruler. During the Han and Tang dynasties, Jia Yi clearly stated people should be seen as the basis of government, and Emperor Taizong is known for his famous metaphor for the people and the government as water and boat (Like water can float or sink a boat, people can establish or topple a government). In the Ming and Qing dynasties, Zhang Juzheng put knowing the people and keeping them safe as a key responsibility of the government, and the Qianlong Emperor expressed a people-oriented philosophy of ruling. As late as the period of the Republic of China, Sun Yat-sun developed the Three Principles of the People. Although schools of thought have different political propositions, they all touch on the same theme: love people and reign with benevolence. For instance, Confucianism advocates benevolence and love, Taoism compassion, Mohism universal love and Buddhism Maitrī.

All of these ideas emphasize the importance of the people, their interests, their well-being, and the methods to ensure their benefits. No doubt, such simple ideas inspired great political progress in history; however, they were blind to class struggles, clouded by a narrow vision, plagued by utilitarianism. They should come under close scrutiny.

General Secretary Xi Jinping, nourished by traditional Chinese culture, his revolutionary family traditions and teachings and burnished by his seven years as a sent-down youth in Liangjiahe, Shaanxi Province, has gained a deeper and more rational understanding of the bond between a country and its people. He maintained a scientific attitude of applying the traditional people-oriented philosophy to the present conditions with creativity, thus forming the people-centered development philosophy. From his example, we can see that the essence of traditional Chinese culture serves as the humanistic background of the philosophy and offers a very important cultural perspective.

Second, Xi' philosophy stems from the inheritance and innovation of Marxist theory. Changes in mankind's living conditions overrides any other changes on this planet. Marxism is the science that guides the liberation of the proletariat or even the entire human race in the world. It is the doctrine that seeks happiness for the vast majority of people. It is the sole mission of Marxist doctrine to enable the proletariat to realize the three major emancipations of economy, politics and spirit, and to become the master of the three, namely, the master of nature, the master of society and the master of oneself. For all the doctrines of Marxist theory, its logical starting point is always man. It revolves around “man” to develop and its final destination is also man. Its ultimate goal is to achieve “the free and comprehensive development of each and every person”, the establishment of “the free association of man”, and eventually communism. From this perspective, Marxism presents a doctrine of man, a doctrine of the fate of the masses. Thus, the CPC takes Marxist doctrine as its fundamental guiding ideology, serving the people its fundamental purpose and regarding the people the decisive force in promoting social development. This is how the CPC has formed its view of the people.

Based on CPC's view of the people, Xi has incorporated new ideas, theories and assertions to form the people-centered development philosophy. The word “people” is frequently seen among the texts of *Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era*, which highlights his love and care for them and shows his concerns of the people, kindness towards the

¹⁰ Song of Five Children, Book of History[Z].

people, and respect for the people. For example, in the report of the 18th CPC National Congress¹¹, the word “people” appears 145 times, and in the report of the CPC National Congress, more than 200 times. Anyone who reads the speech transcripts will see how people are adequately represented and understand that the commander-in-chief has the best interest of people at his heart and embodies the “people-first” ideas. The report of the 19th CPC National Congress emphasizes that the original aspiration and the mission of the Party is to seek happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation for the Chinese nation. In short, the people-centered development philosophy is built on the Marxist materialistic view of history and the Communist Party's view of the people.

4. The People-Centered Development Philosophy is a Summary of the Practice of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the New Era.

All scientific theories derive from practice, and they often play a guiding role in practice in return. The people-centered development philosophy is not deduced from books and theories, but from the vivid practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The CPC Central Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has always responded to the need of the people, made their demand top priority and their aspirations as the first goal and policy guidance. Throughout the master plan of balanced economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological progress and the implementation of the Four-Pronged Comprehensive Strategy, it has sublimated and enriched the people-centered development philosophy.

For instance, in terms of national economy, the CPC Central Committee maintains that the fruits of development should be shared by the people, so that the outcome of reform and development can benefit all people in a fair manner. It has committed to improving people's livelihood and empowering people with a greater sense of fulfillment and happiness. In terms of political participation, General Secretary Xi Jinping takes the stance of the people, with a proud proclamation of “offending a handful of people to protect the interest of all the 1.3 billion population of China”¹². He battled against corruption, taking out “tigers” (high-ranking corrupted officials), swat “flies” (low-ranking corrupted officials), and hunt down “foxes” (cunning corrupted officials) and punishing wrongdoings. Meanwhile, he has launched campaigns to address formalism, bureaucratism, hedonism, and extravagance. He will continue to strengthen socialist democracy, improve mechanisms to ensure that the people run the country, and explore the most extensive, feasible and effective democracy. He will strive to ensure broader access to democracy and people's political and spiritual liberation.

In the practice of ecological progress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has formed a green-oriented concept of ecological development, which encompasses green development ideas, assessment of officials' work on ecological conservation, green production methods, eco-friendly lifestyle etc. In short, it can be summarized as the “six principles” and “five systems” of ecological development. Environmental policies such as “clear waters and green mountains are as valuable as gold and silver mountains”¹³ and “beautiful China” are thoroughly implemented to ensure access to clean water, air and food, the bread-and-butter questions for people's wellbeing. Elevating ecological conservation to the CPC agenda, which has never been seen in history, has instilled new vitality into the CPC's people-first ruling philosophy.

In this new context, we should grasp the people-centered development philosophy, the fundamental stances and methods of the CPC in the new era, and adhere to the mass line and the historical materialism that people are the true heroes. We should let people be the master and wholeheartedly serving the people. The Chinese government for the people, by the people and of the people, will prevail. As long as we closely unite around the CPC Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping as the core and implement the people-centered development philosophy, from a new starting point we will be able to succeed in the practice of socialism with Chinese

¹¹ Xi Jinping, Report to the 18th CPC National Congress[R]. 2017.10

¹² Xi Jinping, 30 Lectures on Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era[M]. Learning Press, 2018.5(1):323

¹³ Publicity Department of the CPC Central Committee, Study Outline of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, Learning Press, People's Publishing House [M]. 2019.6(01):169

characteristics in the new era, and realize the Chinese dream of the great rejuvenation of the nation.

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