

Strengthening Leninism: The Key to Adhering to and Developing Marxism

Interview with Wang Weiguang



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1. Marxism-Leninism is a scientific and closely-integrated theoretical system and has always been the guiding ideology of our Party

Interviewer: Hello, Professor Wang! This year marks the 150th anniversary of the birth of the great leader of the proletariat, Vladimir Lenin. The journal *Studies in Marxism* has already published a number of articles in memory of Lenin, and what do you think is the best way to commemorate Lenin further?

Wang Weiguang: I believe that the best way to commemorate Lenin is to adhere to and develop Leninism.

Interviewer: This is quite a large issue. Let us discuss it in detail and combine with China's actual situation.

Wang Weiguang: It was under the influence of the October Socialist Revolution in Russia and under the education of Leninism that the Chinese Communists accepted and mastered Marxism, summarized the revolutionary experience in Russia, and applied Marxism in light of China's specific conditions. This is true of the success of China's new-democratic revolution and socialist revolution, and it is also true of the success of China's socialist construction and reform and opening-up.

Comrade Mao Zedong, on behalf of the Communist Party of China, declared resolutely: "The theoretical basis guiding our thought is Marxism-Leninism" (Pang et al. 2013, 283). The Chinese Communists have taken Marxism as their banner and theoret-

ical guide, always combining Marxism and Leninism as a complete ideological system and the sharpest ideological weapon to guide China's practice. All the theories and practices of the Communist Party of China show that Marxism and Leninism are inseparable, and Marxism-Leninism is a complete, systematic and scientific theoretical system. It is precisely because of the guidance of Marxism-Leninism that the Communist Party of China has been able to lead the Chinese people to many great victories in the century-long historical process of China's revolution, construction, and reform. To adhere to and develop Marxism, we must adhere to and develop Leninism, and we must always regard Marxism-Leninism as our Party's unshakable guiding ideology. This is the fundamental experience of our Party.

Interviewer: The success of China's revolution, construction and reform has fully proved that adhering to Marxism-Leninism and constantly enriching and innovating it based on new practices are fundamental principles that our Party must uphold without wavering. Some people may ask, what consequences would arise if we did not adhere to Marxism-Leninism?

Wang Weiguang: There would be serious consequences. For example, the fundamental reason for the failure of socialism in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe was the deviation from and abandonment of Marxism, a significant manifestation of which was the deviation from and abandonment of Leninism. There were two main ways in which the enemies and betrayers of Marxism deviated from and abandoned Marxism-Leninism. The first was to make a great effort to defame Lenin and to repudiate the October Socialist Revolution in Russia under Lenin's leadership. They labeled Lenin as a "conspirator" and a "German spy", dismantled his statues, proposed relocating his tomb, and maliciously disparaged and slandered him, while characterizing the October Revolution as an "extreme terrorist" revolution and a "most tragic event". They censured Lenin for supposedly choosing an erroneous path for Russia's development, and completely rejected the correct course of the October Socialist Revolution under his leadership while fomenting a trend of defamation and denial of Lenin and Leninism. The second was to create division and antagonism between Leninism and Marxism, disavowing Leninism by asserting that it had diverged from Marxism or was distinct from it altogether. Influenced by external trends of defaming and repudiating Lenin and Leninism, there was also been an internal trend of unjustly criticizing Lenin or disregarding Leninism, in which some only mentioned Marxism without acknowledging or critiquing Leninism, cutting down the Marxist-Leninist banner and the theoretical basis of our Party. The purpose of this trend of defaming Lenin and denying Leninism was to achieve the goal of denying Marxism, and then to deny Mao Zedong Thought, which inherited and developed Leninism and the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The ulterior motive was to abolish the guiding position of Marxism, deny the leadership of the Communist Party of China and subvert the socialist system.

Interviewer: Undoubtedly, Leninism can be viewed as a natural progression of Marxism, and the commitment to upholding Marxism inherently entails adherence to Leninism. Could you please provide an in-depth elucidation of its profound implications?

Wang Weiguang: Marxism-Leninism constitutes an inseparable unity. Neglecting Leninism and failing to acknowledge Marxism-Leninism results in the forfeiture of the ideological tool of Leninism, thereby erasing the correct guiding ideology and theoret-

ical foundation of the Party and ultimately leading to a fundamental alteration of the Marxist essence of the Party. In response to the erroneous trend of repudiating Leninism and opposing Marxism-Leninism, General Secretary Xi Jinping has firmly upheld the great banner of Marxism-Leninism and has emphatically underscored the imperative of adhering to and advancing Marxism-Leninism. He made it very clear: “We should not abandon Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought; otherwise, we would be deprived of our foundation.” (2014, 8). He emphasized, “Marxism-Leninism has lit the beacon for the Chinese people to move forward” (Xi Jinping, 2013, 4). In the report to the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, General Secretary Xi Jinping (2020, 21) reiterated, “The Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era builds on and further enriches Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Theory of Three Represents, and the Scientific Outlook on Development.” Marxism-Leninism serves as the ideological root and soul of the Communist Party of China. The loss of this ideological root and soul would result in a crisis of identity and direction for the Party, and it would up on an entirely divergent trajectory. This historical lesson is starkly illustrated by the tumultuous events surrounding the collapse of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe.

Historical facts once again prove that Stalin’s observation at the sixteenth congress of the CPSU (b) in June of 1930 correct: “During the past period we have achieved a number of decisive successes on all the fronts of socialist construction. We achieved these successes because we were able to hold aloft the great banner of Lenin. If we want to be victorious we must continue to hold aloft the banner of Lenin and keep it pure and unstained” (Stalin 1954, vol. 12, 384–85).

2. Lenin is an outstanding leader of the proletariat and has made significant contributions to the global communist movement and the advancement of human society

Interviewer: As General Secretary Xi Jinping (2013, 11) has emphasized, “The evaluation of historical figures should be contextualized within the specific era and social conditions in which they lived, necessitating a comprehensive understanding of historical circumstances and processes, as well as a scientific grasp of historical laws. It is essential not to overlook the interplay between historical inevitability and contingency.” In this light, how should we evaluate Lenin based on the historical conditions of the era and society in which he lived?

Wang Weiguang: Lenin, a distinguished leader of the proletariat, astutely discerned the spirit of the times and provided solutions to the challenges of the new era. He initiated practical revolutionary activities that were in line with the needs of the time, and he was a trailblazer in establishing the new trajectory of social progress and development during his era. Lenin’s contribution to the October Socialist Revolution in Russia and the construction of socialism in the Soviet Union stands as a historic achievement, greatly advancing the global emancipation of the working class and the progress of human history. Lenin not only successfully led the October Socialist Revolution in Russia to establish the world’s first socialist country and defend and consolidate the Soviet socialist government, but also achieved remarkable success in leading the construction of socialism. The October Socialist Revolution led by Lenin and the socialist cause he

created broke through the weak links of imperialism's global rule and created a new socialist social form. A new pattern of coexistence and competition between capitalist and socialist societies emerged in the world, marking a new epoch for humanity's transition from capitalism to socialism.

Interviewer: In practical terms, what are Lenin's main contributions?

Wang Weiguang: In summary, there are five aspects of Lenin's main contributions. First, he led the October Socialist Revolution and established the first socialist country. Second, he adhered to the guiding ideology of Marxism and founded the first proletarian revolutionary Party. Third, he upheld the absolute leadership of the Party over the army and created the first people's army. Fourth, he relied on proletarian dictatorship to consolidate the people's socialist government of the Soviet Union. Fifth, he implemented the New Economic Policy and led the practical exploration of socialist construction.

Interviewer: Let us examine these aspects in more detail. Would you elaborate on how Lenin led the October Socialist Revolution and established the first socialist country?

Wang Weiguang: The outbreak of World War I intensified the contradictions between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat, and also brought about profound crises in the production and livelihood of the masses of the world. Russia, being economically and culturally relatively underdeveloped, faced significant challenges in terms of labor force. The urgent demand for revolution among Russian proletarians and laborers was met with high levels of revolutionary fervor. The existing sharp social contradictions in Russia were aggravated by World War I. According to Lenin, "But for the war, Russia could have gone on living for years and decades without a revolution against the capitalists." (2011, 360) In March 1917, the February Revolution broke out in Russia, in which the autocratic rule of the Tsar was overthrown and the Russian Bourgeois Revolution was victorious. After the victory of the February Revolution, two regimes, the Soviet Government and the Provisional Government of the Bourgeoisie, existed side-by-side in Russia. As Lenin argued, "This remarkable feature, unparalleled in history in such a form, has led to the interlocking of two dictatorships: the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie (for the government of Lvov and Co. is a dictatorship, i.e., a power based not on the law, not on the previously expressed will of the people, but on seizure by force, accomplished by a definite class, namely, the bourgeoisie) and the dictatorship of the proletariat and the peasantry (the Soviet of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies)." (2011, 60-61) The Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionary Party held majority control within the Soviets but voluntarily ceded power to the bourgeois Provisional Government, "limiting its own role to that of an observer, a supervisor of the convocation of the Constituent Assembly" (2011, 60). The bourgeois Provisional Government carried out reactionary policies, "trying its hardest everywhere and in every way to keep out and weaken the Soviets, to reduce them to nought" (2011, 61), and tried to quell domestic revolutionary movements and establish bourgeois dominance.

Under such circumstances, Lenin advocated a shift from a bourgeois-democratic revolution to a socialist revolution, and a relentless endeavor was undertaken to consolidate the Bolsheviks around this ideological line. At that time, some within the Party advocated the continuation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution and opposed the shift to socialist revolution, and others supported the Provisional Government and provided supervision for it. Lenin strenuously criticized these erroneous views within

the Party, advocating the possibility, reality and necessity of the transformation of the bourgeois-democratic revolution into a socialist revolution, exposed the hypocrisy of the Provisional Government and denounced the treachery of the Mensheviks and Socialist-Revolutionaries, so as to enlist the support of the masses, push for the unification of the Party's understanding and endeavor to achieve the goal that "all power should be vested in the Soviets". In his *On the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution of April 1917*, Lenin clearly stated: "The specific feature of the present situation in Russia is that the country is passing from the first stage of the revolution—which, owing to the insufficient class-consciousness and organization of the proletariat, placed power in the hands of the bourgeoisie—to its second stage, which must place power in the hands of the proletariat and the poorest sections of the peasants." (2011, 22) He articulated: "Only the power of the Soviets can be stable, obviously based on a majority of the people. Only Soviet power could be stable and not be overthrown even in the stormiest moments of the stormiest revolution. Only this power could assure a continuous and broad development of the revolution, a peaceful struggle of parties within the Soviets. Until this power is created, there will inevitably be indecision, instability, vacillation, endless 'crises of power', a constant farce of ministerial leapfrog, and outbreaks on the Right and on the Left." (2011, 371)

Lenin repeatedly stressed that only the Soviet power could truly represent the interests of the people and address their concerns. The proletariat took power through armed force, and deployed the work of the uprising in accordance with the strategy of armed struggle. Between July and October 1917, Lenin wrote two letters to the Central Committee of the Party, *The Bolsheviks Must Assume Power* and *Marxism and Insurrection*, formulating a series of guidelines for socialist revolution according to the development of the situation. In November 1917, the Bolsheviks launched the Petrograd Armed Uprising and occupied the Winter Palace, the headquarters of the Provisional Government. Through the All-Russian Congress of Soviets of Workers' and Soldiers' Deputies, a People's Committee was elected and Lenin was elected as the chair of the committee. Under the leadership of Lenin, the Bolsheviks achieved a triumphant success in the October Socialist Revolution, establishing the first Soviet power representing the proletariat and laboring masses, thereby founding the world's first socialist state and providing a triumphant model for emancipating the global proletariat and its laboring masses. Comrade Mao Zedong lavished high praise upon the global significance of the October Revolution: "the first imperialist world war and the first victorious socialist revolution, the October Revolution, have changed the whole course of world history and ushered in a new era" (Mao 1965b, 364). From then on, he emphasized, the "second kind, namely, the proletarian-socialist world revolution, thereupon began." (1965, vol. 2, 346) Further, "The October Revolution has opened up wide possibilities for the emancipation of the peoples of the world and opened up the realistic paths towards it; it has created a new front of revolutions against world imperialism, extending from the proletarians of the West, through the Russian revolution, to the oppressed peoples of the East" (Mao 1965, vol. 4, 284). Comrade Mao Zedong wholeheartedly acknowledged the profound impact of Lenin's successful October Revolution on our country: "Always isolated in the past, China's revolutionary struggle no longer feels isolated since the victory of the October Revolution. We enjoy the support of the Communist Parties and the working class of the

world” (1965, vol. 4, 286). He also pointed out: “Then, and only then, did the Chinese enter an entirely new era in their thinking and their life. They found Marxism-Leninism, the universally applicable truth, and the face of China began to change” (1974, vol. 25, 413). The practice of proletarian revolution led by Lenin provided a practical example for the world socialist revolution and the democratic liberation movement of the colonized and semi-colonized peoples.

Interviewer: I would like to hear your thoughts on how Lenin contributed to upholding the guiding ideology of Marxism and establishing a revolutionary party for the proletariat.

Wang Weiguang: Marx and Engels stressed that the proletariat must establish a proletarian party different from the bourgeoisie, petty-bourgeoisie democrats and other socialist factions in order to fulfill its historical mission of overthrowing capitalism and achieving communism. Engels emphasized in his 1889 correspondence with Gerson Trier: “If the proletariat is to be strong enough to win on the crucial day, it is essential—and Marx and I have been advocating this ever since 1847—for it to constitute a party in its own right, distinct from and opposed to all the rest, one that is conscious of itself as a class party. (2010, 423) In the late 19th century and early 20th century, as global capitalism transitioned from free competition to monopoly, class contradictions intensified. This period saw a continuous bursting forth of workers’ revolutionary movements, an upsurge in the vigor of the proletarian struggle, and so there was an urgent need for the leadership of a proletarian political party. The advanced members of the Russian proletariat, represented by Lenin, courageously took on this historical mission. In the practice of leading the struggle of the Russian proletarian revolution, Lenin used the Marxist principles of party building to establish Bolsheviks, the united proletarian party of Russia, so as to maintain and consolidate the leading position of the proletarian party in the Russian revolution and actively solve and explore a series of major problems of party building. This profoundly influenced the construction and development of proletarian parties in countries around the world.

The initial phase of the Russian workers’ movement saw reliance on tactics such as terrorist activities and economistic measures for the sake of revolutionary actions, but they often resulted in a failure to achieve their objectives and experienced repeated setbacks. These failures made Lenin realize that the Russian proletariat must be guided by an advanced ideology, specifically Marxism, to establish its own proletarian party. Lenin always insisted on the ideological foundation of party building and on making Marxism the fundamental guiding principle of the party. He advocated that party members should align their ideological stance with Marxism, emphasizing that the adherence to ideological education and the embrace of Marxist theory as a guiding principle should constitute the fundamental distinction between Marxist parties and worker movements influenced by other trends of social thought. In his 1902 work *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin argued for the necessity of establishing a unified proletarian political party, explicitly stating that Marxism serves as the guiding ideology of the party, and laying an ideological foundation for the construction of a proletarian party. Lenin opposed allowing just anyone into this party. Under his leadership, Lenin established the Bolsheviks as a proletarian party guided by Marxism and representing Russia’s working class. Bolshevism was the expression of the Marxism to which Lenin adhered. While Lenin led the Bolsheviks

to adhere strictly to Marxist principles, he confronted various opportunist trends with resolute determination and thus won widespread recognition from the masses and constantly expanded Bolshevik membership. Under the leadership of the Bolsheviks, the Russian proletariat won the October Revolution and established Soviet power, and came to play a leading role in the process of socialist construction in the Soviet Union. The experience of founding the Bolshevik Party has profoundly influenced the establishment of other global proletarian political parties in the world, especially the establishment of the Communist Party of China. This influence has promoted the development of the proletarian revolutionary cause and significantly advanced the emancipation process of the proletariat. According to Comrade Mao Zedong, “The Communist Party of China is a party built and developed on the model of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. With the birth of the Communist Party of China, the face of the Chinese revolution took on an altogether new aspect” (1965, vol. 4, 284).

Interviewer: Lenin insisted on the absolute leadership of the party over the army, forging the first people’s army and safeguarding the achievements of the revolution. Please elaborate on this aspect.

Wang Weiguang: Comrade Mao Zedong once said, “According to the theory of Marxism-Leninism, the first institution of the state is the army. In the absence of an army, there is no power” (1996, 326). In light of the disintegration of imperialism and the acute war situation at home, Lenin held that the former bourgeois military force was inadequate, and advocated for “create new armies” (2011, 108-109) that would be “composed entirely of the proletariat and the semi-proletarian peasant class close to the proletariat” (1985, 410). Lenin established the first Workers’ and Peasants’ Red Army under the dictatorship of the proletariat, and this was the world’s first military that could truly represent the interests of the people. Lenin consistently upheld the Party’s leadership role in the Red Army, emphasizing the significance of Party branch work in military construction. This embodied the fundamental principle that the Party should, in the context of constructing a proletarian army, maintain control over the armed forces. As early as 1916, he stated: “Social-Democratic work among the troops must be extended and intensified, both before and after the call-up. Social-Democratic groups must be formed in all military units. The historical inevitability and legitimacy, from the standpoint of socialism, of using arms in the only legitimate war, namely, the proletarian war against the bourgeoisie to liberate humanity from wage-slavery, must be explained.” (2011, 144) Lenin stressed the importance of ideological construction within the army, and that each unit needed a party branch and a political commissar to ensure that the guidelines were followed. *The Program of the Communist Party of Russia (Bolsheviks)*, which he presided over, stipulated: “In addition to the military chiefs, there must be political commissars who should be reliable and selfless Communist Party members, and Communist Party branches must be set up in every unit to foster internal ideological cohesion and conscious discipline.” (1985, 410) Lenin affirmed that propaganda efforts by party branches and cadres played an extremely crucial role during wartime. In summarizing their impact on warfare, he noted: “And despite the treachery of some military specialists, we have defeated Kolchak and Yudenich, and are winning on all fronts. The reason for this is the existence of communist cells in the Red Army; they conduct propaganda and agitation carrying a tremendous impact, and thanks to them the small number of old officers find themselves in

such an environment, under such tremendous pressure from the Communists, that the majority of them are unable to break out of the communist organization and propaganda with which we have surrounded them.” (2012, 147)

Lenin insisted that the people’s army should fight for the interests of the masses and promoted strict discipline to ensure the military’s service to the people. He believed that the Red Army of the Soviet Union differed from traditional armies, considering it a revolutionary armed force fighting for proletarian liberation. During its formation, he specified the nature of the Red Army, indicating that “the Red Army is a tool of the dictatorship of the proletariat, and it is necessarily of a distinct class character.” (1985, 410) The mission of the Red Army is to “safeguard the gains of the revolution and our people’s power, the Soviets of Soldiers’ Workers’ and Peasants’ Deputies, the whole of this new and truly democratic system, against the attacks of all the enemies of the people, who are bending all efforts to destroy the revolution.” (2011, 420). It was precisely because the Red Army understood that safeguarding the interests of the people was its mission that it could fight voluntarily for the interests of the Russian proletarian revolution and the Soviet government. Lenin attached great importance to the role of military discipline, emphasizing that strict discipline was the foundation for the consolidation and expansion of the Red Army. Discipline is the key to winning wars and the basis for fighting against those who threaten the interests of the people. In 1920, great significance was attached to establishing military discipline while summarizing the experience of the war at home and abroad: “we were pressed on all sides by imperialist armies and when the working folk of Russia still did not understand the tasks that confronted us. Guerrilla methods prevailed then, each tried to grab a weapon for himself without consideration for the cause as a whole, and disorder and robbery prevailed in the localities. In the course of these two years we have created a united and disciplined army.” (2012, 395)

Interviewer: How did Lenin rely on proletarian dictatorship to consolidate the people’s power of the socialist Soviets?

Wang Weiguang: After the victory of the October Revolution, the Soviet government was subjected to blockades and armed interventions by more than a dozen imperialist countries, while the Soviet government had not yet established its own army. Confronted with this critical scenario, Lenin discerned exceptionally acute contradictions among imperialist countries and recognized an opportunity to exploit their fierce competition for the survival of the Soviet government. For instance, when faced with the formidable offensive from the German army, Lenin advocated signing the Brest-Litovsk Treaty with Germany. In the face of the counter-revolutionary war waged by the imperialist coalition that was mobilizing domestic reactionaries, he led the Red Army of Workers and Peasants to fight against counter-revolutionary forces through a revolutionary war so as to safeguard socialism. He led the Bolsheviks to implement the war communism policy from 1918 to 1921 so as to win the war and protect the newly established socialist regime. The main components of communist policy during wartime included: the nationalization of industries and expropriation of property, ranging from large enterprises to small and medium-sized ones; the central control of food supply and the prohibition of private food sales, which included the establishment of a surplus grain collection system in which the state purchased peasants’ excess grain at low prices to ensure adequate food for military personnel and civilians; market restrictions and limitations on private trade;

implementation of an egalitarian distribution system; enforcement of compulsory labor and militarization, as well as adherence to the principle that those who did not work would not eat. War Communism maximized the resource concentration of manpower, material assets and financial resources, which provided the essential material support for winning the war while safeguarding the fruits of the October Revolution and protecting Soviet regime. He spearheaded the defense of the socialist Soviet government with the Bolsheviks, the Red Army and the masses.

Interviewer: Lenin implemented the New Economic Policy according to the actual conditions at the time and played a leading role in the practical exploration of socialist construction. I would appreciate it if you could share more details on this topic.

Wang Weiguang: The victory of the October Revolution made Russia the first socialist country in the world. The transition to a socialist society and the construction of socialism emerged as the foremost challenge confronting the Soviet government. This was an urgent practical dilemma that Marxism was compelled to address at that time. With the emergence of many new situations and problems in the practice of socialism in Russia, Lenin did not rely solely on theoretical knowledge from books to understand socialism. Instead, he emphasized practical experience as essential for comprehending and carrying out socialist construction. As Lenin argued, “the whole thing now is practical work; that the historical moment has arrived when theory is being transformed into practice, vitalized by practice, corrected by practice, tested by practice” (2011, 413). He also expressed his belief, “The times have passed, and in Russia, I am sure, have passed beyond recall, when we used to argue about the socialist programme on the basis of book knowledge. Today socialism can be discussed only on the basis of experience. (2011, 514). In essence, he began to lead the socialist construction of Russia from the actual national conditions of economic and cultural underdevelopment.

The policy of war communism was essential for winning the civil war and defending Soviet power, but it needed to be adjusted upon the conclusion of the war. Lenin reflected on the war communism policy and stated that “It was the war and the ruin that forced us into War Communism. It was not, and could not be, a policy that corresponded to the economic tasks of the proletariat. It was a makeshift.” (2012, 343). Lenin contended that “We expected—or perhaps it would be truer to say that we presumed without having given it adequate consideration—to be able to organize the state production and the state distribution of products on communist lines in a small-peasant country directly as ordered by the proletarian state. Experience has proved that we were wrong. It appears that a number of transitional stages were necessary—state capitalism and socialism—in order to prepare—to prepare by many years of effort—for the transition to communism. Not directly relying on enthusiasm, but aided by the enthusiasm engendered by the great revolution, and on the basis of personal interest, personal incentive and business principles, we must first set to work in this small-peasant country to build solid gangways to socialism by way of state capitalism.” (2012, 58). It was because of problems with the policy of wartime communism that the continuation of this policy by the Soviet government after its victory of the war aroused to a certain extent discontent among the masses. Recognizing that maintaining this policy would result in loss of the support of the masses, Lenin made an appropriate adjustment from war communism to the New Economic Policy, which was aligned with productivity levels at that time.

Lenin considered the development of productive forces and the improvement of productivity to be important tasks and development targets of socialist construction, emphasizing the significance of the material foundation for socialist development. He pointed out: "Following its seizure of political power, the principal and fundamental interest of the proletariat lies in securing an enormous increase in the productive forces of society and in the output of manufactured goods." (2012, 188-189) He was fully aware that the socialist system was superior to the capitalist system, but the level of productivity was still far behind that of developed capitalist countries. For this reason, he proposed that socialism must strive towards achieving higher productivity than capitalism. "In the last analysis, productivity of labour is the most important, the principal thing for the victory of the new social system. Capitalism created a productivity of labour unknown under serfdom. Capitalism can be utterly vanquished, and will be utterly vanquished by socialism creating a new and much higher productivity of labour." (2011, 427)

Based on this assessment, Lenin held that modern large-scale industry meant the development of electrification, and proposed the famous slogan "Communism is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country" (2012, 419). He stated: "we shall see to it that the economic basis is transformed from a small-peasant basis into a large-scale industrial basis. Only when the country has been electrified, and industry, agriculture and transport have been placed on the technical basis of modern large-scale industry, only then shall we be fully victorious". (2012, 516) To accelerate the level of Soviet productivity, Lenin advocated that socialist countries that are economically and culturally backward should fully utilize the best achievements of capitalism to build socialism. He vividly depicted socialism as "Soviet power + Prussian railway order + American technology and Trust organization + American national education and so on ++ = the sum = socialism" (1985, 520), while asserting that "The possibility of building socialism depends exactly upon our success in combining the Soviet power and the Soviet organization of administration with the up-to-date achievements of capitalism." (2011, 259)

In order to improve the construction of socialism, Lenin proposed the New Economic Policy and carried out comprehensive reforms, including economic, political and cultural reforms, which were aimed at meeting the productivity requirements at that time and strengthening connections with the masses so as to provide them with better services. On the one hand, Lenin advocated the reform of Soviet state organs. Despite being socialist in nature, these organs were established upon the dismantled old state apparatus and retained some of its shortcomings. On the other hand, Lenin placed significant emphasis on cultural reform by prioritizing the improvement of education and elevating the cultural and ethical standards of society. In order to develop education, he proposed reallocating funds from other sectors to education "being done by us to adjust our state budget to satisfy, as a first measure, the requirements of elementary public education." (2012, 463) This included increasing teachers' salaries and improving their status, which were the inevitable requirements for the development of the proletarian culture. Under the correct leadership of Lenin, the Soviet government led the people in the rapid recovery and development of the domestic economy and launched large-scale socialist construction.

3. Lenin is a great Marxist who has advanced Marxism to the new stage of Leninism

Interviewer: Stalin spoke highly of Lenin's greatness: "Lenin's greatness consists precisely in the fact that ... he was able to grasp the essence of Marxism and use it as a starting point for developing further the teachings of Marx and Engels" (Stalin 1954, vol. 8, 263–264). What are the outstanding theoretical contributions that Lenin made to the development of Marxism? Please provide a summary.

Wang Weiguang: Lenin accurately assessed and comprehended the essence and characteristics of the time to apply and develop Marxism creatively. He advanced Marxism to the stage of Leninism by integrating Russia's national conditions with the practical dimensions of the proletarian revolution and socialist construction. Leninism not only represents a significant enrichment and expansion of Marxism under new historical conditions, but also lays an essential foundation for its ongoing development and adaptation to changing conditions and practices, thereby playing a pivotal role in advancing Marxist theory from the past to the present. Leninism has made Marxism-Leninism the guiding principle for Chinese Communists and for the world, providing a scientific worldview and methodological guide for the solution of actual problems in socialist countries. The outstanding theoretical contributions that Lenin made in the development of Marxism mainly include the following. The first is the theory of the essential characteristics of the era, in terms of imperialism and proletarian revolution. The second is the theory of the state, proletarian dictatorship and the new type of proletarian democracy. The third is the theory of the new type of proletarian political party. The fourth is the theory of the New Economic Policy and socialist construction. The fifth concerns the innovation and development of the philosophy of Marxism.

Interviewer: To begin with, let us talk about Lenin's theoretical contributions to the essential characteristics of the era, in terms of imperialism and the proletarian revolution.

Wang Weiguang: During the late 19th and early 20th centuries, capitalism transitioned from the stage of free competition to monopoly capitalism, which is also referred to as imperialism. The pursuit of a scientific understanding of the essence, characteristics and developmental laws of the era, an accurate knowledge of the changes brought about by capitalism, a systematic grasp of the essence of imperialism and its developmental laws, as well as a comprehensive understanding of the profound impact of imperialist development on the proletarian revolution, emerged as a major epochal challenge for society at that time and presented an actual problem that Russian society at the time had to address.

Using Marxist positions, viewpoints and methods, Lenin had a keen insight into the fact that global capitalism had entered the stage of monopoly capitalism, i.e., the stage of imperialism. He revealed the basic characteristics of imperialism such as monopolies, parasitism or decadence, and decaying capitalism. He also pointed out that monopoly capitalism was the highest stage of capitalist development and discovered the uneven development of the economies and societies of imperialist countries. It was acknowledged that the contradictions had been intensified between imperialist countries, between socialism and capitalism, between capitalist countries and colonized peoples, as well as between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat. As a relatively underdeveloped country in

economic and cultural terms at that time, Russia, with an increasing number of all types of contradictions and a more serious level of contradictions, was the weak link in imperialist rule. As a result, Lenin stressed the major impact of imperialism on the proletariat, especially on the Russian proletariat, and stated that the Russian proletariat was capable of taking the lead in carrying out socialist revolution and achieving success. Lenin's scientific assessments of the essence, characteristics, and development laws of the era, as well as his assessments of the historical stages of imperialism and bourgeois revolutions, provided a theoretical foundation and practical guide not only for the October Socialist Revolution in Russia, but also for proletarian revolutions worldwide and the international communist movement, including the Chinese revolution.

Lenin applied Marxist positions, viewpoints and methods to study the emergence, development, and essential characteristics of imperialism, accurately predicting the trend of its development. His work *Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism* was dedicated to elucidating the Marxist theory of imperialism. According to Lenin, "We have to begin with as precise and full a definition of imperialism as possible. Imperialism is a specific historical stage of capitalism. Its specific character is threefold: imperialism is (1) monopoly capitalism; (2) parasitic, or decaying capitalism; (3) moribund capitalism. The supplanting of free competition by monopoly is the fundamental economic feature, the quintessence of imperialism. (2011, 105) His profound definition reveals the economic foundation and essence of imperialism, offering a clear delineation of its historical position while dissecting the acute and irreconcilable contradictions inherent in monopoly capitalism, i.e., imperialism. Lenin approached imperialism from its economic foundation: "Economically, the main thing in this process is the displacement of capitalist free competition by capitalist monopoly." (2011, 265) He clarified that monopoly was the essential characteristic of imperialism and imperialism was the monopolistic stage of capitalism. This monopolistic stage of capitalism is an inevitable product of the concentration of production at a certain stage, representing a qualitative change in capitalist relations of production. Starting from the economic foundation of capitalism, he summarized in a scientific way the five characteristics of imperialism and argued that the economic foundation and essence of monopoly capitalism determined the nature of imperialist plunder, aggression and the struggle for world hegemony, which would inevitably sharpen the contradictions of imperialism both domestically and internationally, and also determined its evolution towards higher social forms. In other words, "in its economic essence imperialism is monopoly capitalism. This in itself determines its place in history, for monopoly that grows out of the soil of free competition, and precisely out of free competition, is the transition from the capitalist system to a higher socioeconomic order." (2011, 298) Lenin unequivocally asserted, "Imperialism is the eve of the social revolution of the proletariat." (2011, 194), predicting the advent of such a revolution and indicating that imperialism will inevitably be replaced by a more advanced form of society, i.e., socialism.

Interviewer: How does imperialism transition to socialism through a proletarian revolution? In other words, how can the socialist revolution prevail over imperialist rule?

Wang Weiguang: Marx and Engels, based on the state of laissez-faire capitalism at the time, believed that socialist revolutions would break out simultaneously in several advanced capitalist countries and achieve victory. The proletarian revolution "will there-

fore be no merely national one; it will be a revolution taking place simultaneously in all civilized countries, that is, at least in England, America, France and Germany. In each of these countries it will develop more quickly or more slowly according to whether the country has a more developed industry, more wealth, and a more considerable mass of productive forces.” (2010, 352) Lenin discovered the laws of the uneven economic and political development of monopoly capitalism as well as the inherent vulnerabilities in the imperialist system. At that time, Russia was a weak link in the chain of imperialist domination and the fulcrum of various internal and external contradictions. The domestic and international conditions of Russia at that time provided the proletariat with an opportunity to break through the imperialist front and achieve victory in the proletarian revolution. Lenin, as a leader of the proletariat, put forward the theory that socialism could first achieve victory in one or several countries, which fundamentally addressed the theoretical and practical issues of revolutionary struggle for the proletariat in the imperialist stage. In his work *The Military Programme of the Proletarian Revolution*, Lenin explained: “The development of capitalism proceeds extremely unevenly in different countries. It cannot be otherwise under commodity production. From this it follows irrefutably that socialism cannot achieve victory simultaneously in all countries. It will achieve victory first in one or several countries, while the others will for some time remain bourgeois or prebourgeois.” (2011, 79) As for the question as to how to judge whether a country constitutes a weak link in imperialism, Lenin held that there should be at least four conditions, including a certain level of large-scale industry and modern proletariat, a governing class unable to maintain its previous rule due to a relatively weak foundation and ruling capacity, a high degree of revolutionary fervor among the proletariat and laboring masses who are unwilling to continue living as before, and leadership and guidance from a politically mature Marxist political party. Russia was at the time positioned as a weak link within the imperialist system and capable of undergoing a socialist revolution.

Lenin proposed the theory that the national liberation movement in colonized countries was an integral part of the global proletarian revolution. With the division of the world at the hands of imperialism, he recognized that imperialism had enabled the expansion of the national question into the colonized areas. So he developed the theory of national liberation movements in colonized territories. He observed that new characteristics had emerged in the national question during the imperialist stage, marking “a peculiar epoch of world colonial policy” (2011, 254). In other words, all colonial nations were subjected to exploitation and oppression by imperialist countries, and the world was divided into oppressor nations and oppressed nations. In *Preliminary Draft Theses on the National and the Colonial Questions*, Lenin stated: “the whole world, as we now see, is divided into a large number of oppressed nations and an insignificant number of oppressor nations, the latter possessing colossal wealth and powerful armed forces.” (2012, 240) This indicates that the issue of liberating oppressed nations had become not just a regional issue, but a global one. Drawing from Marxist theories on nationality and taking into account the characteristics of the imperialist era, Lenin insisted: “we must link the revolutionary struggle for socialism with a revolutionary programme on the national question.” (2011, 408) He elaborated on the strategies of the proletarian struggle in colonial countries, pointed out the prospects for and the process for realizing nation-

al liberation movements in these countries and put forward the theory that colonial countries could transition directly from capitalism to socialism without going through the capitalist path. “Not only should we create independent contingents of fighters and party organizations in the colonies and the backward countries, not only at once launch propaganda for the organization of peasants’ Soviets and strive to adapt them to the pre-capitalist conditions, but the Communist International should advance the proposition, with the appropriate theoretical grounding, that with the aid of the proletariat of the advanced countries, backward countries can go over to the Soviet system and, through certain stages of development, to communism, without having to pass through the capitalist stage.” (2012, 244) Lenin’s ideologies have guided proletarians in leading national liberation movements within colonies while making significant contributions toward Marxism on the issue of national liberation.

Interviewer: The theories of the state, the proletarian dictatorship and the new proletarian democracy were also enriched and developed by Lenin. What are the specific aspects?

Wang Weiguang: Lenin enriched and developed the Marxist theory of the state, while also adhering to and developing the theory of proletarian dictatorship. In his efforts to assist the Russian proletariat in seizing power and establishing a socialist state, he undertook a thorough study of the Marxist theory of the state, culminating in the writing of *The State and Revolution*. He remained faithful to Marxist views on the origins, essence, functions and principal components of the state. He also emphasized the viewpoint that it is necessary to dismantle the old state apparatus and establish a new proletarian state apparatus after the proletariat seizes power from the bourgeoisie. Furthermore, he advocated for the implementation of proletarian political rule, as well as the concepts of proletarian dictatorship and a new form of proletarian democracy. According to Lenin, proletarian dictatorship is the inevitable outcome of the proletariat’s struggle against the bourgeoisie and also an essential component of scientific socialism, inheriting and developing Marx and Engels’s theory on proletarian dictatorship.

As early as the February Revolution of 1917, Lenin proposed that the proletariat should seize political power independently. By leading the October Revolution, the proletariat should overthrow the bourgeois regime and establish proletarian political power. After the October Revolution, Lenin analyzed the economic and political structure of Soviet Russia and expounded on the inevitability of establishing proletarian dictatorship. He argued that “The essence of Marx’s theory of the state has been mastered only by those who realize that the dictatorship of a single class is necessary not only for every class society in general, not only for the proletariat which has overthrown the bourgeoisie, but also for the entire historical period which separates capitalism from ‘classless society’, from communism.” (2011, 418)

Interviewer: How is the dictatorship of the proletariat implemented?

Wang Weiguang: During the process of the Russian proletarian revolution under Lenin’s leadership, he identified the Soviet as the specific and optimal form of proletarian dictatorship in Russia, asserting that “The Soviets are the Russian form of the proletarian dictatorship.” (2011, 257) Indeed, it is true that the path towards socialism varies for different nations and countries. Each country should take into consideration its own national conditions and characteristics in determining the specific forms of revolution

and governance. It is essential to avoid blindly copying the Russian model without considering the unique circumstances of each nation.

Lenin discussed extensively the substance and tasks of proletarian dictatorship, emphasizing that Marxism viewed the violence in proletarian dictatorship not as an end in itself, but rather as a more democratic and new type of dictatorship, which exercises dictatorship over the bourgeoisie while ensuring democracy for the proletariat and the masses. Precisely due to this reason, the task of proletarian dictatorship was to transform the old relations of production, which oppressed the proletariat and the masses, and establish a new type of socialist relations of production. According to Lenin, “the dictatorship of the proletariat is not only the use of force against the exploiters, and not even mainly the use of force. The economic foundation of this use of revolutionary force, the guarantee of its effectiveness and success is the fact that the proletariat represents and creates a higher type of social organization of labour compared with capitalism. This is what is important.” (2011, 419) For this reason, “Its chief feature is the organization and discipline of the advanced contingent of the working people, of their vanguard; of their sole leader, the proletariat.” (2011, 388)

Lenin repeatedly stressed that the proletariat and its vanguard, the Communist Party, were the leading forces in the proletarian dictatorship. Lenin pointed out that only the Communist Party could realize this dictatorship, and that the Party was the most significant leading force of proletarian dictatorship, and that this is determined by the quality of the Communist Party: “that only the political party of the working class, i.e., the Communist Party, is capable of uniting, training and organizing a vanguard of the proletariat and of the whole mass of the working people that alone will be capable of withstanding the inevitable petty-bourgeois vacillations of this mass and the inevitable traditions and relapses of narrow craft unionism or craft prejudices among the proletariat, and of guiding all the united activities of the whole of the proletariat, i.e., of leading it politically, and through it, the whole mass of the working people. Without this the dictatorship of the proletariat is impossible. (2012, 246) ” Lenin elaborated in detail on the essence, forms, content, tasks and leadership of proletarian dictatorship, thereby making a significant advance in the Marxist theory of proletarian dictatorship.

For the first time, Lenin established the people’s army in both theory and practice. He affirmed the leadership of the Communist Party over the people’s army, making it a powerful tool for safeguarding the interests of workers and peasants, resisting bourgeois oppression and consolidating proletarian power, thereby developing and perfecting Marxist views on military construction and state theory.

In the process of establishing proletarian dictatorship, Lenin explored a new form of democracy for the proletariat that was more democratic than bourgeois democracy and put forward the theory of a new type of socialist democracy. The new form of proletarian democracy that should be adopted after the proletariat seized power became an important problem that Lenin faced. He emphasized, “To develop democracy to the utmost, to find the forms for this development, to test them by practice, and so forth—all this is one of the component tasks of the struggle for the social revolution.” (2011, 457) Delving into the establishment of a comprehensive and new form of socialist democracy was always of paramount concern for Lenin’s investigations. He led the Party to transition from the initial implementation of people’s self-government and direct democracy after

the success of the October Revolution to an indirect democracy system where the Party governs on behalf of the people, and he led the Party in its ongoing quest for realizing new democracy. In this exploration, he believed that the political system of the new type of Soviet democracy was conducive to centralizing national power for unified action and discipline. Nevertheless, this form of democracy limited the democratic rights of the masses to a certain extent and nourished bureaucracy. Consequently, in order to transform the state institutions, expand the proletariat's supervisory power and gradually promote a political democracy that truly embodies people's democracy and socialist new democracy, he led the Bolshevik Party to reform the highly centralized political system by implementing measures such as "workers' democracy" within the party, establishing an internal supervisory system, separating party and government functions and streamlining institutions. Lenin's thoughts on the new proletarian democracy are the inheritance and development of Marxist theories on the construction of socialism's democratic politics, thereby constituting an important component of the theory of the construction of socialist democracy.

Interviewer: Lenin achieved a series of significant theoretical advances concerning the theory of the new proletarian party. What are his principal achievements?

Wang Weiguang: Lenin's profound considerations on party building, through taking into account both domestic and international situations, led him to develop a series of theoretical achievements regarding the establishment of a new proletarian party. Through practical experiences, Lenin sought to explore, enrich and expand upon the Marxist theory of party building, thereby shaping the Leninist theory of party building. Lenin presented a comprehensive theory on this question in works such as *The Urgent Tasks of Our Movement*, *Where to Begin* and *What Is to Be Done?* In these writings, he integrated the construction of the proletarian party with the actual process of socialist development, while systematically elaborating on the ideological foundation, sources of strength and organizational principles of the proletarian party.

Lenin held that the ideological construction in the proletarian party should be given top priority. Guided by Marxism, the party should uphold communist ideals and beliefs, always serving as the vanguard Marxist party of the proletariat. It should consistently act as the leading force in the proletarian revolution and the socialist state. In the initial stages of the establishment of the Russian Communist Party, Lenin explicitly stated that adherence to Marxism was crucial for the survival and success of both the proletarian party and the revolutionary cause of the proletariat. He viewed adherence to the guidance of Marxism as a necessary requirement for ensuring scientific and advanced nature of Marxism, as well as the essential approach for addressing the actual developmental challenges in Russian society. In *What Is to Be Done?*, Lenin explicitly stated, "We take our stand entirely on the Marxist theoretical position: Marxism was the first to transform socialism from a utopia into a science, to lay a firm foundation for this science, and to indicate the path that must be followed in further developing and elaborating it in all its parts." (2008, 210) He emphasized, "the role of vanguard fighter can be fulfilled only by a party that is guided by the most advanced theory." (2009, 370) He advocated for the combination of Marxism with the specific conditions of each country, emphasizing that "an independent elaboration of Marx's theory is especially essential for Russian socialists; for this theory provides only general guiding principles, which, in particular,

are applied in England differently than in France, in France differently than in Germany, and in Germany differently than in Russia.” (2008, 212)

Lenin emphasized the crucial importance of the leadership role of the proletarian party in the process of revolution and construction, clarified that the proletarian party was the leading force of Soviet power and demonstrated in a pioneering way that the Communist Party should firmly hold the leadership, both in the revolutionary period and in the process of socialist construction. He pointed out, “it is only the advanced section of the working class, its vanguard, that is capable of leading the country.” (2012, 186)

Lenin made it clear that a proletarian party must be adept at maintaining and strengthening close ties with the masses in order to become a strong and invincible force. After the establishment of the Party, the support of the people was pivotal for the success of the Russian Revolution and socialist construction. He pointed out that the advancement of the proletarian party lay in its close contact with the masses and its representation of the fundamental interests of the masses: “A vanguard performs its task as vanguard only when it is able to avoid being isolated from the mass of the people it leads and is able really to lead the whole mass forward” (2012, 227). Further: “The mass of the working people are with us. That is where our strength lies. That is the source of the invincibility of world communism. More new workers from among the masses for the ranks of the Party to take an independent part in building the new life—that is our method of combating all difficulties, that is our path to victory.” (2012, 65) Lenin was fully aware of the danger of the Party’s detachment from the masses: “One of the greatest and most serious dangers that confront the numerically small Communist Party which, as the vanguard of the working class, is guiding a vast country in the process of transition to socialism (for the time being without the direct support of the more advanced countries), is isolation from the masses,” (2012, 192). Stalin (1954, vol. 6, 326) clearly expounded on Lenin’s ideology of the party’s close connection with the masses: “In this connection we must bear in mind Lenin’s immortal words to the effect that our Party’s strength lies in maintaining living contact with the millions of non-Party people, that the more effective this contact is, the more durable will be our successes.”

Lenin clearly identified the fundamental organizational principle of the proletarian party as democratic centralism, emphasizing the necessity to develop it into a disciplined, organized and authoritative new type of party. General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized, “According to Lenin, a party should have a tight organization with unified will and action. Only a party established on the principle of centralism can be a ‘truly iron-like organization’” (Xi Jinping, 2019). As General Secretary Xi Jinping has indicated, Lenin emphasized the importance of party organization as a guarantee for the accomplishment of the historical task of the proletarian party: “In its struggle for power the proletariat has no other weapon but organization.” The proletariat “inevitably will, become an invincible force only through its ideological unification on the principles of Marxism being reinforced by the material unity of organization, which welds millions of toilers into an army of the working class.” (2009, 412) What are the fundamental organizational principles of the proletarian party? He adopted democratic centralism as the organizational principle of the Bolsheviks and presided over the inclusion of democratic centralism in the party’s statutes at the Fourth Congress of the Russian Social-Democratic Labor Party in 1906. When drafting *The Teams of Admission into the Communist International*, he extended

the principle of democratic centralism to the Comintern as well, stipulating that “Parties belonging to the Communist International must be organized on the principle of democratic centralism.” (2012, 210) During the revolutionary period, Lenin placed more emphasis on centralization. However, with the end of the war, he stressed the expansion and strengthening of inner-party democracy to give full play to the creativity of the proletarian political party and promote the vitality and dynamism of socialist construction. He advocated that the party should attract the advanced elements from society to join party organizations, while at the same time the party should be governed with strict discipline. According to Lenin, party members should play an exemplary and leading role in all respects, and strict party management should be enforced through measures such as setting a probationary period for new party members, following rigorous admission procedures and strengthening the education of party members. After being admitted to the party, members were under the supervision of party discipline and the country’s laws. Even more, Lenin demanded more severe punishments for Communist Party members who committed crimes than for common people in the Soviet Union.

Interviewer: Did Lenin also make major theoretical contributions to Marxism and scientific socialism in terms of the theoretical aspects of the New Economic Policy and socialist construction?

Wang Weiguang: Yes, Lenin’s proposal of the New Economic Policy and theory of socialist construction based on the actual conditions of socialist development in Russia was an important theoretical contribution to Marxism and to scientific socialism. The New Economic Policy is a policy adjustment made by Lenin based on the international situation faced by the Soviet regime and the social realities at that time, representing a policy of economic reform necessitated by the needs of post-war economic development. The NEP was the product of combining Lenin’s theories of socialist construction with practical realities. It was also the theory and practice of the transition from the seizure of power in the October Revolution to socialism. Lenin noted: “We began to develop the new economy in an entirely new way, brushing aside everything old. Had we not begun to develop it we would have been utterly defeated in the very first months, in the very first years.” (2012, 269). Further, “and that at a moment when we have set out on our practical path, when we must not approach socialism as if it were an icon painted in festive colors” (2012, 442) Peasants have the advantage and constitute the vast majority of the small-scale agricultural economy. It is precisely under such objective conditions that “the essence of this policy is the alliance of the proletariat and the peasantry, the union of the vanguard of the proletariat with the broad mass of the peasants” (2012, 171), “We are learning how to continue erecting the socialist edifice in a small-peasant country without committing such mistakes.” (2012, 58). The New Economic Policy was introduced in 1921, which included replacing the surplus grain collection system with a grain tax system, allowing farmers to have the right to dispose of their surplus grain after paying taxes, halting industrial nationalization while permitting private enterprise operations, vigorously developing commerce and making full use of market and commodity monetary relations to facilitate the circulation of agricultural and industrial goods, as well as strengthening economic cooperation and exchanges with capitalist countries by means of leasing arrangements. The implementation of the NEP assisted with rapid recovery and development of the domestic economy.

In a relatively backward country like Russia, how could socialism be constructed? This was a major issue for the communist movement in Russia. Socialism, as envisioned by the classic Marxist writers, was built through proletarian revolutions in highly developed capitalist countries, while Russia was a relatively backward country. During the implementation of the New Economic Policy, Lenin not only recognized the positive aspects of the policy but also astutely observed its negative implications. He realized that the New Economy Policy contained elements that were inconsistent with socialism. He considered the policy as a temporary and necessary “retreat”, recognizing the political risks underlying it, which reflected the unity of Lenin’s firm Marxist principles and flexibility. According to Lenin, “It was called a New Economic Policy because it turned things back. We are now retreating, going back, as it were; but we are doing so in order, after first retreating, to take a running start and make a bigger leap forward.” (2012, 437). “Every step in this New Economic Policy entails a series of dangers.” (2012, 99), noted Lenin. “The restoration of capitalism, the development of the bourgeoisie, the development of bourgeois relations in the sphere of trade, etc.—this constitutes the danger that is peculiar to our present period of economic development, to our present gradual approach to the solution of problems that are far more difficult than previous problems have been. There must not be the slightest misunderstanding about this.” (2012, 99-100) The purpose of the New Economic Policy was to develop social productivity and improve the living conditions of the working class with some capitalist economic measures, so as to consolidate their position but not to undermine socialism with capitalism. The New Economic Policy was necessary, but it was not entirely of a socialist nature. Lenin warned against regarding it as the ultimate direction for socialism lest it lead instead to capitalism. In sum, the New Economic Policy reflects the high degree of unity between Lenin’s adherence to socialist ideals and to reality, as well as the principles of Marxism and the flexibility of strategy, which provides valuable insights for economically disadvantaged countries seeking progress towards socialism.

Interviewer: Yes, Lenin undertook some explorations and put forward some concepts on socialist construction. Could you please specify what they are?

Wang Weiguang: Drawing from the lessons of the New Economic Policy, Lenin formulated his vision for constructing socialism. On the one hand, he made a comprehensive analysis and assessment of the reasons for the October Revolution, thereby acquiring a new comprehension of socialism. He asked whether it was in accordance with Marxism for Russia, as an economically and culturally underdeveloped country, to undergo the process of a socialist revolution. Sukhanov, a member of the Mensheviks, wrote a seven-volume *Notes on the Revolution (Zapiski o revoliutsii)* from 1918 to 1921, in which he described the history from the February Revolution to the October Revolution in the form of memoirs, proposing the erroneous view that Russia was not ready for a socialist revolution and socialist construction. According to Sukharnov, “The development of the productive forces of Russia has not attained the level that makes socialism possible.” For Lenin this was an “incontrovertible proposition.” At the same time, Lenin also argued that the focus of the debate with Sukhanov is not whether Russia’s productive forces have reached the level for implementing socialism, but rather that it should not be used as an excuse to deny Russia’s socialist revolution or socialist construction. According to Lenin, “If a definite level of culture is required for the building of socialism (although nobody

can say just what that definite ‘level of culture’ is, for it differs in every West-European country), why cannot we begin by first achieving the prerequisites for that definite level of culture in a revolutionary way, and then, with the aid of the workers’ and peasants’ government and the Soviet system, proceed to overtake the other nations?” (2012, 478-479) This argument reflects his insistence “that certain periods of development may display peculiarities in either the form or the sequence of this development.” (2012, 477)

On the other hand, in combination with the practical experience of socialism, a new and more scientific concept for socialist construction was proposed. In agriculture, Lenin held that the nature of cooperatives depended on which class held political power and controlled the means of production, and thus proposed transforming agriculture through agricultural cooperatives based on socialist principles. In terms of industry, he pointed out that the development and construction of the socialist economic foundation can be achieved through industrialization and electrification. In terms of politics, he advocated strengthening the construction of state power and the ruling party, making the party a genuine vanguard of the working class. In the realm of culture, he emphasized the importance of cultural construction and cultural revolution: “This cultural revolution would now suffice to make our country a completely socialist country” (2012, 475). Lenin’s conception of constructing socialism reflects his deepened understanding of socialism and his efforts to consider the question of “what kind of socialism and how to construct it?” from the perspective of Russia’s underdeveloped economic and cultural conditions, all the while adhering to the combination of the basic principles of Marxism with the concrete reality of socialist construction.

Interviewer: Lenin has also made significant contributions to the innovation and development of Marxist philosophy. Would you be able to summarize these achievements?

Wang Weiguang: The reason why Lenin was able to become a great leader of the working class, successfully establish the first socialist country and lead its socialist construction lies in the fact that he always adhered to Marxist positions, viewpoints and methods to recognize and solve practical problems, innovate and develop Marxist philosophy, and open up a new realm of Marxist philosophy. Lenin’s philosophy is the inheritance and development of Marxist philosophy in the context of proletarian revolution and imperialism.

Lenin emphasized the guiding role of Marxist philosophy: “Marx’s philosophy is a consummate philosophical materialism which has provided mankind, and especially the working class, with powerful instruments of knowledge.” (2011, 25). According to Lenin, “Marx’s philosophical materialism alone has shown the proletariat the way out of the spiritual slavery in which all oppressed classes have hitherto languished.” (2011, 28). Combining the practice of socialist revolution and construction, Lenin adhered to and innovated dialectical materialism and historical materialism. His work *What the ‘Friends of the People’ Are and How They Fight the Social-Democrats* from 1894 criticized the historical idealism of the populists and upheld and enriched historical materialism. His work *What Is to Be Done?* from 1902 systematically criticized the opportunistic economism of the time, while defending and developing historical materialism. In 1908, he wrote *Materialism and Empirio-Criticism*, in which he both criticized philosophical revisionists like Bogdanov and corrected the absurd and reactionary approach to dialectical materialism by Machism. From 1914 to 1917, in order to master the ideological

weapons for analyzing imperialism and imperialist wars as well as to criticize revisionism and social chauvinism, he wrote *Philosophical Notebooks*, *Imperialism: The Highest Stage of Capitalism*, and *State and Revolution*, in which he delved into the study and exposition of dialectical materialism and historical materialism, enriching and developing Marxist philosophy, especially Marxist dialectics. From 1917 to 1924, he wrote a series of important works to consolidate the dictatorship of the proletariat and explore socialist construction, creatively applying dialectical materialism and historical materialism so as to explore the laws of socialist construction as well as significantly enrich and develop Marxist philosophy.

Interviewer: Lenin enriched and developed the basic principles of Marxist philosophy. On which specific areas did he focus?

Wang Weiguang: In summary, Lenin enriched and developed the principles of dialectical materialism and historical materialism. As far as enriching and developing the basic principles of dialectical materialism are concerned, Lenin summarized the principles of the two basic philosophical lines: “Are we to proceed from things to sensation and thought? Or are we to proceed from thought and sensation to things? The first line, i.e., the materialist line, is adopted by Engels.” (2010, 42). Lenin distinguished matter from its concrete forms and proposed a scientific definition of matter from a philosophical perspective, revealing its objective reality: “Matter is a philosophical category denoting the objective reality which is given to man by his sensations, and which is copied, photographed and reflected by our sensations, while existing independently of them.” (2010, 130). He expounded on the principle of the inseparability of matter and motion and upheld the fundamental principle of the primacy of matter in Marxist materialism. He carried out a comprehensive study of the two fundamental opposing views on development and explicitly put forward that the law of the unity of opposites is the core of dialectics. He stressed the objective reality and ability to know the objects of cognition, elucidated the dialectics of cognition, differentiated between materialism and idealism in epistemology and upheld the materialist reflection theory, pointing out that the root of idealist epistemology lies in “Rectilinearity and one-sidedness, woodenness and petrification, subjectivism and subjective blindness—voilà the epistemological roots of idealism.” (2008, 361). He emphasized the importance of the practical viewpoint in epistemology, pointing out that “The standpoint of life, of practice, should be first and fundamental in the theory of knowledge.” (2010, 142), thus taking practice as the criterion for testing truth and advocating the unity of theory and practice. He opposed splitting materialism and dialectics, arguing that dialectics is Marxist epistemology. Lenin insisted on the objectivity of truth, elucidating the dialectical relationship between absolute truth and relative truth, recognizing that absolute truth and relative truth can be mutually transformed under specific conditions. “Human thought then by its nature is capable of giving, and does give, absolute truth, which is compounded of a sum-total of relative truths. Each step in the development of science adds new grains to the sum of absolute truth, but the limits of the truth of each scientific proposition are relative, now expanding, now shrinking with the growth of knowledge”. (2010, 135) He emphasized the dialectical relationship between the certainty and uncertainty of the criterion for truth, stating that “This criterion too is sufficiently ‘indefinite’ not to allow human knowledge to become ‘absolute’, but at the same time it is sufficiently definite to wage a

ruthless fight on all varieties of idealism and agnosticism.” (2010, 142-143). According to Lenin, truth is a process, and the analysis of concrete situations was the core of Marxism.

Concerning the enrichment and development of the basic principles of historical materialism, Lenin argued for the objective laws of social development and expounded the basic category of the “social formations of the economy”, stating that the development of these formations is based on productivity and asserting that the laws of social development are like natural laws and are not subject to the will of individuals. He proposed: “only the reduction of social relations to production relations and of the latter to the level of the productive forces, provided a firm basis for the conception that the development of formations of society is a process of natural history.” (2008, 140-141) Lenin discussed the dialectical relationship between the inevitability of historical development and the role of individuals in history, elucidated the dialectical relationship between the masses, classes, political parties and leaders, and expounded on the thought that it was the masses who made history. Based on the nature of Russian society, he pointed out: “the Russian economic system constitutes a bourgeois society, from which there can be only one way out, the one that necessarily follows from the very nature of the bourgeois system, namely, the class struggle of the proletariat against the bourgeoisie” (2008, 160), This was the only way to transform Russian society. Lenin elaborated on the active role of the superstructure in social development and emphasized: “without a revolutionary theory there can be no revolutionary movement” (2008, 343). He proposed that the urgent task of Russian Marxists was to organize the proletariat for conscious class struggle and explained the relationship between economic and political struggles so as to provide guidance for the proletarian class struggle. He discussed the dialectical relationship between economy and politics, proposing that politics was based on the economy while the fundamental interests of the proletariat could be realized only by elevating economic struggles to political struggles and carrying out political revolution. He advocated combining political and economic struggles and stated: “Every economic struggle necessarily becomes a political struggle, and Social-Democracy must indissolubly combine the one with the other into a single class struggle of the proletariat. The first and chief aim of such a struggle must be the conquest of political rights, the conquest of political liberty.” (2008, 213). Lenin revealed the unity of the relationship between the truth and scientificity of Marxist philosophy, proposing the principle of party spirit in philosophy and emphasizing that a proletarian party spirit is a necessary condition for genuine scientific endeavour. In his view, only by adhering to the principle of the party spirit can one master Marxist philosophy. Lenin also highlighted the existence of class and class struggle during the transition from capitalism to socialism, revealing the essence of the proletarian dictatorship, and made the famous assertion that communism entails the eradication of classes.

4. Leninism constitutes an integral part of Marxism and holds significant practical relevance for guiding the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics

Interviewer: On the occasion of the 150th anniversary of Lenin's birth, it is imperative to study Leninism accurately by understanding its developmental trajectory and fundamental principles. It is essential to learn how Lenin applied Marxist positions, viewpoints, and methods to guide the struggle of the Russian proletariat and the practice of socialist construction. This enables us to guide the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics and continuously develop and innovate contemporary Marxism and 21st-century Chinese Marxism. Hence, I would appreciate a brief discussion on how we should study Leninism in this new era.

Wang Weiguang: Leninism indeed represents an enrichment and development of Marxism. It has served as a theoretical foundation for the ideology of Mao Zedong Thought and the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Denying and deviating from Leninism will ultimately lead to the negation of Marxism and the rejection of the "Four Cardinal Principles." In the practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, it is crucial to strengthen the study of Marxism, which includes the necessity of enhancing the study of Leninism. In summary, there are three main aspects. First, as Lenin did, emphasis should be placed on theory. Secondly, following Lenin's example, practice should be prioritized. Thirdly, as Lenin did, great significance should be attached to party building.

Interviewer: First, how to understand the emphasis on theory, in light of Lenin's emphasis?

Wang Weiguang: Lenin always attached great importance to learning, especially to theory: "we must at all costs set out, first, to learn, secondly, to learn, and thirdly, to learn, and then see to it that learning shall not remain a dead letter, or a fashionable catch-phrase (and we should admit in all frankness that this happens very often with us), that learning shall really become part of our very being, that it shall actually and fully become a constituent element of our social life." He continued, these are "demands that are fit and proper for a country which has set out to develop into a socialist country" (2012, 488-489). A good knowledge of Marxism-Leninism is an essential prerequisite for comprehending the contemporary world and addressing the challenges of our times. It is also indispensable for effectively advancing socialism with Chinese characteristics and for upholding and developing Marxism-Leninism in the new era. General Secretary Xi Jinping (2014, 405) has pointed out: "Only by learning and understanding Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the Important Thought of the 'Three Represents' and the Scientific Outlook on Development, and in particular by comprehending the Marxist stands, viewpoints, and methods that permeate them, can we attain clear minds and profound understanding. It is only then that we can accurately comprehend the laws of ruling the Communist Party, socialist construction and human social development. Only at this point can we steadfastly adhere to our ideals and beliefs in complex situations while persistently following scientific guiding ideology and leading people on the right path towards continuous advancement of socialism with Chinese characteristics." (2014, 404-405)

Interviewer: Second, following Lenin's example how should we prioritize practice?

Wang Weiguang: Lenin's greatness is exemplified by his integration of Marxist theory with practical application, addressing theoretical challenges and real-world problems encountered during revolution and construction, putting forward suitable theories, lines, principles and policies based on the specific national conditions and historical background of Russia, as well as leading Russia to socialism through bold practice and adept implementation. As practice evolves, theory must also adapt to address new challenges arising from practice. We should learn from Lenin, who not only dared to practice, but also adjusted and promoted theoretical innovation and practical innovation in a timely manner when the existing theories, lines, guidelines and policies did not meet the needs of social development. It is necessary to improve the ability to use Marxism to respond to and solve practical problems faced by socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and address the challenges of Chinese socialist development. At the same time, we should draw from the successful experience of Chinese socialist development so as to guide practical innovation with theoretical innovation, as well as test theoretical innovation through practical innovation.

Interviewer: Finally, following Lenin to what specific aspects of party building should we attach great significance?

Wang Weiguang: The classic writers of Marxism-Leninism place great importance on party building, emphasizing the strengthening of party leadership and fully leveraging the vanguard role of the proletariat. Lenin closely integrated the theory of proletarian party building with practice and put forth the theory of building a proletarian political party. For the Communist Party of China, which has more than 96 million members and more than 4.6 million grassroots party organizations, General Secretary Xi Jinping has emphasized: "In the new era, our Party must promote the social revolution it leads, and build itself into a vibrant Marxist ruling party that is always at the forefront of the times, enjoys the wholehearted support of the people, has the courage to reform itself, and is able to withstand all tests." Further, "This is not only an objective requirement for our Party to lead the people in advancing this social revolution, but also an innate need of our Party, which is a Marxist party, to strengthen and develop itself" (2020, 93). The Communist Party of China, as a Marxist party, must strengthen its own construction and fully exert its leading role in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It should firmly adhere to Marxist ideals and beliefs, genuinely start from and base its work on the interests of the people, win the support of the people, and genuinely serve as the historical and core leader of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

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