



## **The Anti-Trump: Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era**

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*Motivated by a series of questions asked in an interview during the IX World Socialism Forum - an annual event now organized in autumn in Beijing by the World Socialism Research Center at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) and other political and cultural organizations in the PRC - I propose the following reflections on the thinking of Xi Jinping about the entry of Chinese socialism into a new era.*

The thinking of the General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party has a strategic value not only for China - and this in itself, given the size of the Chinese territory, population and economy, impacts on the rest of the world - but also for the Communist parties and workers, for the anti-imperialist movements of struggle and against neo-colonialism, for all the authentic democratic and progressive forces of the world.

“New era” implies that we leave behind an “old era”, that we enter a new phase in the history of China and of the world: not only of China, but of the whole humanity. And this not only because the history of China cannot but influence the destinies of the world, but also because, as Xi writes, the destinies of China and the world are interconnected: “We in China believe that China will do well only when the world does well, and vice versa” [1].

The era we enter is new for both China and the world.

### **1. The new era for China**

What is new and changes for China?

Forty years after the start of the policy of reform and opening up the face of China has profoundly changed. The PRC has made an extraordinary leap forward in the development of productive forces. From an economic and social point of view it has been the greatest transformation that the history of mankind has ever known, which took place in extremely short times from the point of view of history, which measures the great transformations in terms of centuries and not years or decades. A transformation that has involved one billion and 300 million people, which has brought the vast majority of the Chinese population out of poverty and has led hundreds and hundreds of millions of farmers to urbanize quickly. Seen through the eyes of the historian, it was an extraordinary achievement, which we may not yet be fully aware of. Like all major transformations, it does not only embrace economic data and an extraordinary uninterrupted GDP growth of around 10% on average per year. The great Chinese transformation embraces all fields: social, cultural, political, collective mentality...

We can observe another extraordinary characteristic of this great transformation: the compactness, the wisdom, the ability to correct errors, of the Chinese “ruling class”, that is, the Chinese Communist Party. When I say this, I do not ignore the moments of tension and even acute struggle that have manifested within the Chinese leadership group on the lines to be followed; this is part of history and life, which develops through contradictions. But the Chinese ruling group has had the wisdom and the ability to positively overcome contradictions, to maintain the unity of the party firmly, to broaden the membership base, to extend its influence in society. And it has done so by keeping the roots of its history and its foundations firmly in place, combining them with the most advanced and progressive characteristics of the rich and articulated Chinese national culture: it was the sinization of Marxism.

The CPC studied the experience of Soviet socialism very carefully and drew lessons from the dissolution of the USSR and popular democracies in Central and Eastern Europe and the Balkans between 1989 and 1991. (Among the many studies, I would like to mention the international conference promoted by the CASS in 2011, the proceedings of which were published by Li Shenming [2]). Among the various and complex causes that led to the 1989-91 disaster, a decisive role is played by the political, ideological and organizational failure of the CPSU, which should have played the leading role in the process of socialist transition.

Xi's Thought devotes particular care and attention to the Communist Party, from every point of view: it reminds every member of the party, and in particular the leaders, that party rules and discipline must be strictly observed [3], that in a Communist Party there must be no room for corruption, that it must be fought with extreme vigour [4]; it calls for daily work for an ever closer link between the Communist Party and the masses [5]. In addition, Xi reconfirms the fundamentality of Marxism: “We should never forget our origins and we must remain committed to our mission. Chinese communism has its origins in a belief in Marxism, communism and Chinese socialism, and loyalty to the Party and the people” [6]. Xi Jinping works for the study and development of Marxism, giving a boost to the schools of Marxism that are spreading among institutes and universities throughout China.

The extraordinary economic, social and political advance of China in recent decades has

allowed it to reach a certain stage in the development of productive forces. The path of this extraordinary advance has been marked - as always happens in every complex historical process - by contradictions: between social classes, between city and country, between coastal and inland areas, between more and less advanced regions. In Xi Jinping's report to the 19th CCP Congress (October 2017) they were condensed into the formula of "unbalanced and inadequate development". The quality and effectiveness of development is not as it should be, environmental protection is inadequate, there are still large disparities in income distribution, in the development of urban and rural areas and between the different regions of the big country; the level of welfare is still inadequate. The CPC, which was formed on the study and concrete analysis of contradictions (I remember the well-known writings of Mao *On Contradiction*, 1937, *On the correct handling of contradictions among the people*, 1957), in the 19th congress grasped the character of contradictions and the change in the main contradiction:

*The main problem is that our development is unbalanced and inadequate. This has become the most serious limiting factor in meeting the growing needs of the people for a better life. We must recognize that the evolution of the main contradiction afflicting Chinese society represents a historical change that affects the entire scenario and places many new demands on the work of the Party and the country. Based on continuous efforts to support development, we must devote great energy to addressing the imbalances and inadequacies of development and push hard to improve the quality and effects of development. With this, we will be in a better position to meet the ever-increasing economic, political, cultural, social and ecological needs of our people and to promote comprehensive human development and all-round social progress.*

The new era for China is therefore the overcoming of unbalanced and inadequate development and the transition to harmonious development, respectful of man and the environment, environmentally friendly, which puts qualitative rather than quantitative growth first. The modern construction of socialism with Chinese characteristics is divided into three phases: by 2020 it aims to complete the creation of a society with a level of widespread well-being; from 2020 to 2035 it aims to create the foundations of socialist modernization, while from 2035 to the middle of the century it aims to transform China into a modern socialist country based on harmony, beauty and democratic civilization.

In his report to the XIX Congress Xi listed 14 points:

1. party leadership on all aspects of society;
2. politics must be people-centered;
3. deepen the reform as a whole;
4. a new concept of development (innovation, coordination, green economy, openness and sharing);
5. the people are the sovereign of the country;

6. adhere to the rule of law, govern the country as a whole according to the law;
7. develop a system of socialist values and trust in our own culture;
8. to support and improve the livelihoods of the people;
9. harmonious coexistence of man and nature (ecological civilization);
10. national security;
11. full leadership of the Party over the army;
12. “one country, two systems”: promoting reunification with Taiwan;
13. to fight for an international community with a shared future for all of humanity (this has been included in the new CPC statute);
14. govern the party fully and rigorously.

## 2. The new era for the world

The new era is not just about China, it's about the whole world. Which era is coming to an end and which one is it to start? What is the character of the new era?

About 30 years ago, after 1989-91 which brought the end of the USSR and the popular democracies in Europe, imperialist globalization, led by the USA, which presented itself as the absolute winners of the Cold War, gained momentum in the world.

That globalization, implemented through heated wars, has shaken important regions of the planet, the area of the MENA countries (Middle East and North Africa); it has led to the absorption into NATO and the EU, under the control of Western capital, of the former socialist countries of Eastern and Balkan Europe and some former Soviet republics; it has shaken the economies of the African countries.

But the advance of imperialist globalization has stopped before the resistance of Russia, which since 1999 has fired El'cin and has been governed under Putin's leadership; nor has it managed to cope with the growing contradictions within the capitalist system. The crisis that began in the USA in 2007-2008 (financial bubble following an indiscriminate expansion of credit - subprime mortgages - to cope an insufficient demand) has been passed on to the economies of the EU, whose internal system inspired by German “ordoliberalism” has allowed some stronger countries - Germany in primis - to pass the crisis on to the most fragile countries, the so-called PIIGS, forced to adopt policies of austerity, of reduction or cancellation of welfare, of lowering wages. This has aggravated the crisis in these countries, with a fall in domestic demand and GDP in a recessive spiral. This in turn has led to a vertical fall in support for the political parties that governed during the crisis, with an exponential growth of populist and “sovraniist” movements, which proclaim the break-up of the EU as the only possible solution.

Liberal globalization has also affected the economic structure of the United States, which has become increasingly financialized, focusing on the issue of dollars, whose world weight as a reserve currency and denomination of international prices of raw materials, starting from oil, is supported by military force (the U.S. alone spend almost as much in arms as the rest of the world put together). Despite the enormous military force, however, the USA has had to deal with the resistance of the occupied countries, which the USA and its most loyal allies, the United Kingdom, have not been able to normalize. So they have replaced the goal of normalizing and pacifying these countries under the direct or indirect control of the United States with the “strategy of chaos”. (adopted by Obama and Hillary Clinton), which no longer aimed to normalize, but to make ungovernable a crucial area of the world in order to prevent other countries from benefiting from it. It is a desperate strategy, which has affected the consensus within the US establishment. Trump’s electoral victory was the answer to the American internal malaise [7]. Trump is now attempting another path, including trade war to regain US leadership (“America first”).

Both Trump’s rise to the US presidency and the advance of populist forces in Europe and beyond are a response to the crisis of hegemony of the ruling classes of the West, who had focused everything on imperialist globalization and on the unipolarity of the US and its NATO armed wing. This response is not progressive, but regressive: with respect to an increasingly interconnected world and the possible construction of a community of shared destiny for humanity, Trump and the populist-sovereignists propose a protectionist closure in their inner courtyard, the absolute priority of their state in opposition to the others (Donald Trump: “America first”; Matteo Salvini: “ the Italians first”). Faced with the crisis of liberal democracies, a return to populist demagoguery is proposed, which characterized the fascism in the 1920s and 1930s of the 20th century. Also in the 20th century, with the First World War, a first cycle of globalization was closed, of what Marx defined as the tendency inherent in bourgeois development to the realization of a world market. To the first globalization of the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century there were two answers: a progressive, socialist and internationalist one, represented by the USSR; a reactionary one, represented by Fascism and Nazism. A century later, we find ourselves - with all the appropriate differences - in a similar situation: on the one hand, the crisis of imperialist globalization, of its false internationalism, which in the name of human rights has bombed Serbia and Iraq, Afghanistan and Libya, and has promoted colorful revolutions from Georgia to Ukraine, also trying to attack Hong Kong; on the other hand, the reactionary responses of the protectionist closure, of the reaffirmation of unipolarism that sets no limits to the absolute exercise of sovereignty, with the consequent disallowance of the existence of a world community (Trump denies the international treaties on climate and environment, recognizes no other right than that of its superstate). Both these positions - imperialist globalization and populist sovereignty - are reactionary and wrong for the peoples and the development of the planet.

### **3. China and the world in the new era**

Faced with the structural crisis - economic, political and cultural - of imperialist globalization we have seen in recent decades the extraordinary growth of China - and other countries in which it won the revolution led by communist parties, such as Vietnam.

The reform and opening initiated by Deng Xiaoping in 1978 meant China's opening to the world market; but this opening was not indiscriminate, it was instead directed and controlled by the CPC, which had its own clear strategic project for the development of the productive forces. While the US-led globalization was characterized by imperialism, and therefore was, as the economist Chossudovski wrote, the "globalization of poverty" [8], the opening of China to the global market can be defined as an "anti-imperialist globalization", in the sense that China has adopted strategies and methods that, opening regions and sectors of its economy to world capital, has directed it to the internal development of the country.

In the three decades since 1978, up to the threshold of the 18th CPC Congress (2012), China has tried to maintain a low profile at the international level, has carefully avoided becoming a protagonist, while weaving - the Shanghai Forum, the BRICS - an important network of ties with other countries. This was a wise choice, which allowed China to focus on internal development issues, and to provide an economic basis for a further leap forward. The development of the Chinese productive forces was the main concern and to it - as in the times of the united anti-Japanese front - everything had to be subordinated. But just as, after the defeat of the Japanese, the CCP resumed its strategic objectives of the Chinese Revolution, once it reached an adequate level of development, China is preparing for a new phase that requires the development of a new policy.

This is where the Chinese program of a non-imperialist "new globalization" intervenes, as opposed to the failed globalization of the United States. The founding idea of this "new globalization" is innervated and articulated in a great initiative, the Belt and Road Initiative, the new Silk Road. It is a concrete development initiative for China and the world, and at the same time a cultural proposal, closely linked to China's new internationalism, to the struggle to build a community of shared destiny for all humanity.

Today China is the only country in the world that proposes to the whole world, to the whole of humanity, an extraordinary human development project that can become hegemonic, a key idea accepted and shared by the peoples of the world.

We are at a crossroads. The old road - which despite the smoke of novelty is also that of the "America first" of Trump - is closed, is bankrupt. Both imperialist globalization and sovranistic and exclusionary protectionism are disastrous: they are two specular reactionary forms.

Xi proposes a "new globalization". It is not only an economic but also a cultural project of concrete universalism in the recognition of diversity and in the proposal to fight for the construction of a community of shared destiny for humanity. It is the strategic vision of the future of the entire world as an increasingly interconnected world, which requires a new type of globalization, completely different from that led by the United States and Western countries, which has been underway since 1991. Relations between countries around the world must be based on win-win reciprocity. In this sense, Xi Jinping's thinking is the opposite of Trump's thinking of "America first": Xi thinks of the community of common destiny of humanity, not just the destiny of his nation. Xi's thinking is universalistic, not particularistic. This universalism is not, however, an abstract universalism, but a concrete universalism, which considers the concrete economic and social conditions, the contradictions between social classes and states.

In his speech to the UN for the 70th anniversary, Xi Jinping said on September 28, 2015:

*We should increase inter-civilization exchanges to promote harmony, inclusiveness, and respect for differences. The world is more colourful as a result of its cultural diversity. Diversity breeds exchanges, exchanges create integration, and integration makes progress possible.*

*In their interactions, civilizations must accept their differences. Only through mutual respect, mutual learning, and harmonious coexistence can the world maintain its diversity and thrive. Each social model represents the unique vision and contribution of its people, and no model is superior to others. Different civilizations should engage in dialogue and exchanges instead of trying to exclude or replace each other. The history of humanity is a process of exchanges, interactions, and integration among different civilizations. We should respect all civilizations and treat each other as equals. We should draw inspiration from each other to boost the creative development of human civilization [9].*

For China, Xi's thinking is an innovation and at the same time is in continuity with the thinking of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and other leaders and theorists of socialism with Chinese characters. Continuity is in a vision of China as a developing country that needs a relatively long period to develop the productive forces and must concentrate on this enormous goal: here China has achieved many successes in a few decades, and it is now the second most important economy in the world, and it is developing more and more. But the change that Xi has brought about is no less important, because, considering the level of development of the Chinese productive forces, Xi indicates that China has entered a new phase, which needs a new globalization. The Belt and Road Initiative is not only a concrete proposal for the countries of Asia, Europe and Africa; it is also a metaphor for the idea of projecting China into the world. It's the idea of the new globalization that Xi has exposed in many speeches against the protectionist policy of the Trump administration.

In short, we can say that today in the world there are two opposing conceptions about the future, and consequently two opposing policies: the new globalization proposed by China and an exclusivist nationalism, which is a real regression for humanity.

Xi's internationalist conception is not the erasure of China's national interests and of socialism with Chinese characteristics; on the contrary, it is the recognition that these interests can be better developed in an interconnected world. It is the dialectic of universal and particular, national and international.

In the "new era" we meet the new phase of China's development, aimed at overcoming its current main contradiction, as indicated by the 19th CPC Congress, and the proposal to the peoples of the world, to the workers' movement and to all authentically democratic and progressive forces of a progressive exit onwards (and not reactionary and regressive) to the crisis of imperialist globalization.

It is the duty of the Communist parties and workers of the world, of the genuinely democratic and progressive forces, to take up the strategic challenge that Xi's thought proposes.

## NOTES

[1] Xi Jinping, *The governance of China*, vol. II, Foreign Languages Press, Beijing 2017, p. 597.

[2] See *Nad etim razmyšljaet istorija. Zametki k 20-tiletiju s momenta razvala SSSR* [This is what history is about. Notes for the 20th anniversary of the collapse of the USSR], Social Sciences Academy Press, Beijing, 2013.

[3] Xi Jinping, *The governance of China*, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 164-170.

[4] Xi Jinping, *The governance of China*, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 176-184, and several other writings and speeches.

[5] Xi Jinping, *The governance of China*, vol. II, op. cit., pp. 456-478.

[6] Xi Jinping, *The governance of China*, vol. II, op. cit., p. 355.

[7] I would like to refer to my “Changes in the global framework. Trump, EU, Italy”, in MarxVentuno n. 1-2/2018, also available at <https://www.marx21books.com/mutamenti-nel-quadro-mondiale-la-politica-internazionale-di-donald-trump-la-ue-litalia/>

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[http://www.marx21.it/documenti/catone\\_mutamentinelquadromondiale.pdf](http://www.marx21.it/documenti/catone_mutamentinelquadromondiale.pdf)

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[8] *The Globalization of Poverty and The New World Order*, Global Research, 2003.

[9] See “A New Partnership of Mutual Benefit and a Community of Shared Future”, in *The governance of China*, vol. II, p. 573.