



# SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS AND ITS IMPACT ON THE RISE OF CHINA

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## ABSTRACT

Marxism and socialism are significant political ideologies within the field of political science and international relations that originated in the Western world and subsequently spread throughout the world. China is among the few countries that have adopted socialism as a political ideology. However, Chinese socialism differs from the Western conception of pure socialism. To facilitate understanding in the Western world, China has proposed referring to it as socialism with Chinese characteristics by emphasizing that socialism with Chinese characteristics in the sense of Marxism aims to combine classical socialism with China's modern principles, as well as core socialist values. In this study, we aim to explore and analyse the key factors of socialism as known in the Western world and socialism with Chinese characteristics. Considering the meaning of socialism in the logic of Chinese leadership we tried to examine official rhetoric, policy priorities, and ideological narratives promoted by the Chinese Communist Party. To this end, we seek to explore how socialism with Chinese characteristics is framed as a distinct path to modernization, national revitalization, realization of the Chinese Dream, and global leadership in China.

**Keywords:** Socialism, Marxism, China, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, International Relations Theories.

## ÇİN TİPİ SOSYALİZM VE ÇİN'İN YÜKSELİŞİNDEKİ ETKİSİ

### ÖZ

Marksizm ve sosyalizm Batı dünyasında ortaya çıkan ve daha sonra tüm dünyaya yayılan, siyaset bilimi ve uluslararası ilişkiler alanındaki önemli siyasi ideolojiler arasında yer almaktadır. Çin, sosyalizmi siyasi bir ideoloji olarak benimseyen az sayıdaki ülke arasında yer almaktadır. Ancak Çin'in sosyalizm anlayışı, Batı'nın saf sosyalizm anlayışından farklılık göstermektedir. Çin, Batı dünyasının, Çin'in sosyalizm anlayışını kolayca kavramasını sağlamak için, sosyalizmi, Marksizm özüne bağlı, Çin özelliklerine sahip, reel sosyalizmle Çin'in modern ilkeleri ve temel sosyalist değerleri ile birleştirmeyi amaçladığını vurgulayarak, "Çin tipi sosyalizm" olarak adlandırmayı önemektedir. Bu çalışmada Batı dünyasında bilinen sosyalizm ile "Çin tipi sosyalizm" in temel faktörlerini araştırmayı ve analiz etmeyi amaçlıyoruz. Çin liderlerinin mantığında yatan sosyalizm kavramını göz önünde bulundurarak, Çin Komünist Partisi tarafından teşvik edilen resmi söylemi, politika önceliklerini ve ideolojik anlatıları inceleyerek "Çin tipi sosyalizm" kavramını irdelemeye çalıştık. Biz bu amaçla "Çin tipi sosyalizm" kavramının Çin'de modernleşmeye, ulusal yeniden şahlanmaya, Çin Rüyasını gerçekleştirmeye ve küresel liderliğe giden ayrı bir yol olarak kendisini nasıl bir çerçevede konumlandığını keşfetmeye çalışıyoruz.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Sosyalizm, Marksizm, Çin, Çin Tipi Sosyalizm. Uluslararası İlişkiler Teorileri

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**JEL:**  
P2, P3, O5

**Geliş:** 13 Eylül 2024  
**Received:** September 13, 2024  
**Kabul:** 24 Aralık 2024  
**Accepted:** December 24, 2024  
**Yayın:** 30 Nisan 2025  
**Published:** April 30, 2025

**Atıf / Cited as (APA):**

Yıldırımçakar, E. & İnan, E. (2025),  
Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and  
its Impact on the Rise of China, Erciyes  
Üniversitesi İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi  
Dergisi, 70, 47-54,  
doi: 10.18070/erciyesiibd.1549653

## INTRODUCTION

Socialism is a political ideology and class struggle lies at the basis of the ideology of classical socialism. The organization of the working class based on class struggle, seizing political power and building the foundations of a classless society constitute the basic building blocks of the ideology of classical socialism.

In a socialist system, the means of production (such as factories, land, and resources) are owned and controlled by the state, by worker cooperatives, or by the community instead of by private individuals or corporations as in capitalism. In this context, socialism is considered to be a socio-economic system characterized by collective or government ownership and management of the production and distribution of goods and services. The main objective of socialism is generally based on reducing economic inequality by ensuring that wealth and resources are distributed more equally among the populace.

According to socialist ideology, the provision of public goods and the prevention of exploitation of workers and consumers necessitate the regulation or control of basic services such as health, education, and housing. Significant progress can be made in this regard through the implementation of appropriate policies. Within the range of socialism, various models exist, including democratic socialism, which advocates for a blend of public and private ownership with a focus on social welfare programs. Additionally, centrally planned systems like communism advocate for state ownership of all means of production, aiming to achieve social welfare and a classless society. These different aspects of socialism entail distinct approaches to resource allocation and societal organization.

The main objective of this study is to examine the role of socialism with Chinese characteristics in China's path towards achieving great power status. This study intends to elucidate the fundamental principles of socialism and its implementation with Chinese characteristics. Additionally, we aim to explore the role of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the development and ascent of modern China by addressing questions such as what factors in socialism with Chinese characteristics enabled China to have such an overall rise, what does socialism mean for modern Chinese leadership? Overall, this study tries to contribute valuable insights into the complex dynamics of socialism and its diverse manifestations in different cultural, historical, and geopolitical contexts, especially socialism with Chinese characteristics.

This study has been structured into three main parts. In the first part of this study, we try to demonstrate the key points of socialism ideology in the literature. Then, we proceed with recognizing socialism with Chinese characteristics as debated in international politics. In the last part, we try to analyse the role of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Finally, we conclude the study by assessing the main findings of the study.

## I. DEVELOPMENT OF THE IDEOLOGY OF SOCIALISM

According to Rousseau (2004, 1982), it is possible to trace the hints of transformation in property relations at the origins of civilized societies. In his work "The Origin of Inequality Among Men," Rousseau analyses how the domination between rulers and ruled arose from property relations. According to Marx and Engels (2008), social structures are organized around property relations, and they need the formation of class societies. They argue that the architects of the theory of classical socialism positioned and organized class societies around two separate poles: oppressors and oppressed. In this positioning, the irreconcilable analysis of the ruler-ruled relationship between the few wealthy and the majority poor plays a key role (Rancière, 2007). Performing a similar analysis from a perspective, Poulantzas (2014) expresses that property-centered formations bring about master-servant positioning. This understanding can manifest itself as serf-vassal in feudalism and as patron-worker in the bourgeois system. This political distinction shaped around those who possess the means of production and those who do not has led to the formation of various structures throughout history. Perhaps the most significant and valuable of these formations is the state structure.

Poggi (2014) emphasizes that rulers and the ruled coexist under

different organizational forms within the state structure. Tanilli (1993) addresses these organizational forms and classifies social structures as slave, feudal, bourgeois, and socialist societies. In slave, feudal, and bourgeois societies, there is a class that owns the means of production. The socialist society, however, does not grant ownership of the means of production to a specific class in line with the imagination of a classless society. Lenin examines the extent of domination within communities in terms of production and property relations. According to Lenin, the state apparatus is a product of these relations. The bourgeoisie's ownership of the means of production enables it to establish domination over the broad masses of people. This domination can lead to hegemony (Lenin, 1999: 19).

According to the classical socialism, the broad masses of people are exploited by a small minority class. According to classical socialism, the only way for the working class to achieve political consciousness is for proletariat to establish a coordinated network of relationships with all oppressed classes within society, and as a result, to construct an organizational form under the living conditions and specific characteristics of society (Lenin, 1992). In the context of the ideology of classical socialism, Quataert (2010) describes workers as the "creators of wealth," however, workers are not in a position of influence in decision-making mechanisms despite constituting almost the entire society. He argues that one of the backgrounds for this lack of influence is income inequality among individuals.

Income distributions are carried out and monopolized by the ruling classes. Ruling classes shape the structure of income distribution by feeding off economic systems (Sönmez, 1990). One of these economic systems is socialism. According to Lichtheim (1976), socialism can be understood as a system that can eliminate inequality in income distribution. In this respect, socialism contains sharp differences from liberalism. As expressed by Sennett (2008), liberalism can be understood through the concept of risk. In a liberal system, individuals are not under the wings of a protective state understanding. It is difficult for them to avoid economic risks throughout their lives. In this regard, socialism differs from liberal economies. The background of this differentiation can also be seen in interpretations of the French Revolution.

With the French Revolution, profound transformations emerged in the relationship between rulers and the ruled. By reintroducing the concept of democracy to the political scene, the French Revolution transformed the structure of ruler-ruled relationships. However, despite this, the French Revolution did not centralize the act of governing the broad masses and did not change the structure of ruler-ruled relationships (Wood, 2011). As Lichtheim also noted (1976), with the French Revolution, the broad masses were able to gain the ability to choose their rulers politically and economically, and the concept of generating consent could become central to their lives, but they could not integrate into a structure that could end class relations. However, both the social and economic consequences of the Industrial Revolution and the structure of the French Revolution played a key role in the formation and development of classical socialism (Lenin, 2012). Conditions were becoming increasingly apparent for a specter to haunt Europe. The new world order largely created by the Industrial Revolution and the French Revolution necessitated the birth of the ideology of classical socialism. At this point, the proletariat, the workers who had no choice but to sell their labour power, became the engine of classical socialist ideology. In this sense, the state apparatus, a product of class society, would be destroyed by the proletariat, and a proletariat dictatorship would be built in its place (Fişek, 1970). The background of the mission assigned to the proletariat by this theory lies in the assumption that the proletariat is alienated and disregarded by the ruling classes, both to itself and to society. It is emphasized that this alienation and disregard will instil class consciousness in the proletariat and ultimately create a class that can lay the foundations of a classless society (Henry, 2011). Çulhaoğlu (2017) also develops his theory based on this process, stating that proletariat who have reached class consciousness can turn into an organized force against the bourgeoisie and take the lead in the transformation of the social, political, and economic order.

The ideology of classical socialism views history as a whole. The structure of social relations organized by previous generations has not disappeared and its shadow has appeared in the structure of current

social relations (Marx, 1972). According to classical socialism, the past is the builder of the conditions of the future. Production relations reveal social classes. As a result, in this theory, a reading of history is conducted in terms of oppressors and oppressed based on ownership of the means of production. This transition from the abstract to the concrete in historical readings has enabled political, economic, and social transformations to be examined from these perspectives (Marx & Engels, 2008).

The ideology of classical socialism examines the concept of exploitation from two different perspectives: explicit and implicit. In this context, an analysis of how exploitation relations were concealed and conducted in a covert manner in feudal society is made. In Western society, the noble class sanctified themselves through divine power, serving as a veil for exploitation relations, thus facilitating their access to political power. This led to the emergence of hidden, implicit exploitation relations. According to Marx and Engels (2008), the bourgeoisie did not feel the need to hide their power behind a divine veil and initiated the era of transparent exploitation by making exploitation relations explicit. According to the ideology of classical socialism, the era of explicit exploitation is grounded on the regime of capital accumulation. According to Marx (2011), the bourgeoisie appropriates all the wealth of society, leading to the dispossession of the class without ownership of the means of production. This, in turn, gives rise to the regime of capital accumulation. Along with the regime of capital accumulation, the class that lives by its labor, without owning the means of production, first produces products with their labor and then becomes alienated from them (Marx, 2013). Individuals who become alienated from their community may adopt an isolated way of life. Faced with the concept of exclusion due to not playing an active role in the process of value production, they create a life space disconnected from society (Gül & Kahraman, 2011). As a result, individuals who are almost equivalent to the entire society play a role in constructing a new society. In this society, the roles of individuals constituting the society are clearly defined. According to the unwritten social contract, which is nourished by historical processes, these role distributions are as follows: while the dominant powers owning the means of production form the ruling classes, the broad masses of people without ownership of the means of production are defined as dependent classes responsible for production activities (Boratav, 2014).

Production processes of the working classes can deeply influence individuals' characters. As Marx argued (2013), the working classes will become impoverished in proportion to the goods and services they produce. In feudal society, production was limited to local contexts. Capitalism, based on competitiveness, transcended the local and implemented a production planning far beyond the quantity of products that could be consumed (Tannenbaum, 2017). As expressed by Sennett (2008), it is difficult to expect the characters of the impoverished masses, who work hard and produce extensively, not to deteriorate. The hardworking, productive, and impoverished masses may seek "salvation" in different ways, and individual character erosion can lead to societal decay in a broad sense.

The classical socialist ideology argues that the regime of capital accumulation leads to exploitation and significant damage to social relations. The ideology of classical socialism exposes the presence of production relations at the root of domination relations. As a result, both the broad masses of people and the goods and services they produce fall under the domination of the ruling classes (Marx, 2013). With their sovereignty strengthened, the ruling classes organized the ruler-ruled relations accordingly. The ideological background of this organizational process revolves around private property (Marx, 2013). According to Soyer (2020), masses who have nothing to sell but their labour are forced to live under the domination of the classes owning the means of production in structures organized around private property.

The core principle of socialism has been differently perceived by international actors in parallel with the changes in global affairs and societies. Though some key points of socialism have been advocated by some states and societies. Socialism has majorly transformed parallel to the transformation of states and society in the modern world.

## II. THE EXPANSION OF SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS

The argument presented by scholars suggests a nuanced view of socialist leadership, highlighting differences in the implementation and adaptation of socialist principles in different historical and cultural contexts. Lenin and Mao are viewed as distinct from other socialist leaders due to the successions they achieved in Russia and China, respectively, while proletariat revolts elsewhere have generally failed (Dieterich, 2018).

According to the Concept of proletariat dictatorship Marx and Engels outlined in Communist Manifesto, the dictatorship of the proletariat is a crucial step in the workers' revolution (Zou and An, 2019). However, the Chinese leadership sees classical socialism as a model of its time, not necessarily applicable to modern China. Similar to Stalin's adaptation in the Soviet states, China is adjusting socialism to fit its unique circumstances, recognizing the evolving temporal and social factors and the country's distinctive ideological and sociological characteristics (Wu, 2008). This perspective underscores the importance of considering China's national conditions when implementing socialism, suggesting that the leadership advocates for altering core assumptions of socialism based on the evolving context and unique characteristics of Chinese society.

According to Marxism, the Proletariat will utilize its sovereignty to gradually seize all capital belonging to the bourgeoisie and centralize all means of production under the control of the state, i.e., the proletariat organized as the ruling class, maximizing the overall output in the shortest possible time. The Constitution of the People's Republic of China modified the term "dictatorship of the proletariat" to "people's democratic dictatorship." Consequently, besides the proletariat, who did not possess the means of production, many socialist workers, patriots supporting homeland reunification, and proponents of socialist endeavours also became integral parts of the ruling class (Zou and An, 2019).

In general terms, socialism with Chinese Characteristics refers to China's adaptation of socialist principles to suit its unique historical, cultural, and economic circumstances. It represents the socialist ideology with Chinese realities by emphasizing its economic development, social stability, and national rejuvenation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CCP). Following these objectives, the Chinese leadership has sought to establish a state system based on socialist principles that can coexist with reforms, market-based orientation, intervention in the economy, and strict insistence on maintaining social harmony and political stability. Accordingly, China aimed to adopt pragmatic policies to overcome the challenges of modernization and globalization by lifting the Chinese People out of poverty and enabling China to have political and economic supremacy.

It is quite striking that the socialism with Chinese Characteristics adopted by China was created by taking advantage of traditional socialist ideologies but was adapted to China's specific conditions. The distinction between socialism with Chinese Characteristics and traditional socialism can emerge in various dimensions. This represents a combination of the basic principles of Marxism adapted to suit Chinese society (Wu, 2008). Socialism with Chinese Characteristics must bear China's historical, cultural, and economic characteristics. As a result, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics was designed to adapt to China's political and sociological conditions. This assumption stems from the belief within Chinese leadership that China differs politically and economically from the rest of the world.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics integrates a greater degree of free market elements into the economic domain. China's shift from a planned economy to market-oriented economic reforms initiated in 1978, marking a departure from the conventional conception of socialism. Despite embracing certain traditional socialist principles, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics upholds single-party governance under the auspices of the Communist Party of China (CPC). While aligned with fundamental socialist tenets, this characteristic delineates China's governance model from that of other socialist nations.

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics places significant emphasis on social and cultural transformations. China has actively pursued the



modernization of traditional values and has adapted to evolving social dynamics. As Wu argued, it is crucial to recognize that the term socialism with Chinese Characteristics is a widely employed concept subject to diverse interpretations and assessments. Consequently, individuals and analysts may assign varied meanings to this term and emphasize different facets of it. Socialism with Chinese Characteristics is perceived as the essential pathway for China to achieve industrialization, modernization, social development, and market orientation (Wu, 2008).

The Cultural Revolution and the collectivization efforts in rural areas emerged as manifestations of Mao's ideological worldview. Mao advocated for perpetual societal transformation, believing that constant revolution was necessary. His concept of the continuity of revolution played a critical role in the Cultural Revolution. According to Mao Zedong (Mao, 2000), fundamental social transformation can only be achieved through continuous revolution. Therefore, emphasis was placed on regular reassessment of social and individual interests and the alignment of political actions with real results. Accordingly, the path of Chinese socialism involved nurturing its intellectual cadre and empowering it to continue the revolution indefinitely. The radical transformation of production relations played a major role in this process. The rapid transition from feudalism to capitalism and then to socialism is evidenced by the revolutions it gave birth to. The integration of these radical changes in production relations into daily life was facilitated by the Cultural Revolution.

In the construction of Chinese Socialism, Mao examined the interaction between social justice and economic development through his ideological framework and experiences. He devised unique strategies specific to China to shape the superstructure and instil class consciousness into society. The concept of continuity of revolution introduced the idea that new advances could be made under the prevailing zeitgeist and local conditions. This pragmatic perspective underpins China's contemporary pathway towards socialism.

The Communist Party of China (CCP) was founded in 1921. Since then, China has implemented a variety of strategies aimed at improving the social well-being of its people. Upon the establishment of the People's Republic of China under the leadership of Mao Zedong, the Chinese leadership initially sought to adopt the technological and industrialization model of the Soviet Union. However, Mao later concluded that this model could not be fully transplanted to China. Instead, he opted to selectively apply elements of it to the Chinese system while remaining grounded in the fundamental tenets of Marxism (Dirlik, 1989). The Chinese leadership aimed to distinguish its approach from that of the Soviet Union by portraying China as adhering to Marxism rather than following the socialist model of the Soviet Union. This distinction was part of China's effort to assert its independence and assert its own path towards socialism.

The concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics was initially introduced by Deng Xiaoping during the opening ceremony of the 12th Party Congress at the onset of the reform and opening-up period (Tao, 2017). This notion gained prominence alongside the implementation of the Opening and Reform policies by the Deng Xiaoping administration in 1978. Through these policies, China sought alternative pathways to both maintain its socialist and communist identity and address the challenges of underdevelopment while fostering greater connectivity with other nations.

The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics constitutes a comprehensive framework encompassing Deng Xiaoping Theory, the essential thought of "Three Represents," and the Scientific Outlook on Development. Xi Jinping thought on socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era represents the latest theoretical advancement in the profound development of Marxism in China. This new ideological framework integrates the imperatives of the contemporary era and is grounded in innovative practices of party governance and statecraft. The theoretical framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics inheres, upholds, and advances Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong Thought, exemplifying the Party's distinguished qualities of continual theoretical innovation and creation (Qi, 2023).

Socialism has evolved into socialism with Chinese characteristics under the guiding principles of Marxism. In other words, Marxism

serves as the driving force behind socialism with Chinese characteristics, enabling China to break free from semi-colonialism and achieve modern societal standards (Yang and Liu, 2022). The path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, entails prioritizing economic development based on China's unique national conditions. This path emphasizes adherence to the Four Basic Principles, pursuing reform and opening up, liberating and developing productive forces, and constructing a socialist market economy, socialist democracy, and social development. It also strives to advance socialist culture, foster a harmonious society, and promote ecological civilization, thereby facilitating the comprehensive development of the people and gradually realizing shared prosperity for all. Ultimately, the goal is to construct a prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful modern socialist country (Qi, 2023; Boer, 2021).

According to some Chinese scholars such as Tian (2012), Yang and Liu (2022), China is committed to promoting Marxism by viewing it as indispensable for achieving its contemporary development objectives, prosperity, and high standards of living. The Communist Party of China has consistently prioritized the welfare of the people, believing that a people-centred approach is optimal for China's development. As such, the party has adopted the motto "people first, life first," which guides Chinese communist policymakers in their efforts to realize the rejuvenation of China.

In the 1950s, the Chinese Communist Party embarked on the gradual realization of industrialization within the framework of socialism. The process of industrialization gained momentum with the convening of the 3rd National People's Congress in 1954, which marked the commencement of modernization efforts spanning agriculture, industry, international affairs, and education. However, Deng Xiaoping's leadership propelled China's modernization efforts further by taking into account the challenging circumstances faced by the Chinese people (He and Zhou, 2023). The long-term objectives of China under the concept of socialism, as governed by the CCP, can be understood through the party's aspiration to enhance the social well-being of the Chinese populace by adapting socialism to the specific conditions of China and the contemporary era.

According to some Western scholars, Mao Zedong attempted to model Chinese society and economy after the Soviet Union, implementing programs for industrialization and agricultural collectivization. However, his tenure also saw the initiation of the Cultural Revolution, a period marked by widespread upheaval and the loss of millions of lives between 1966 and 1976 (Stenslie and Galtung, 2023). In contrast, Deng Xiaoping is often portrayed as a pragmatic leader who prioritized economic growth over ideological pursuits and mass mobilization. His famous statement, "Let some become rich first," underscored his focus on economic development, recognizing the importance of prosperity over strict adherence to Marxist principles of economic equality (Stenslie and Galtung, 2023). Deng Xiaoping's diplomatic approach, encapsulated by the metaphor "no matter if the cat is white or black, as long as it catches mice," exemplified China's new international engagement strategy under the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics. This approach prioritized cooperation with neighbouring and other states, irrespective of their political ideologies, whether democratic or despotic (Wen, 2009). The underlying belief was that China needed to attain both economic and political strength to effectively address poverty and ascend to a position of global influence. This diplomatic stance marked a departure from previous ideological considerations and underscored pragmatic engagement based on mutual interests and benefits.

The concept of modernization within the Chinese Communist Party is perceived as a means to empower and advance the people. Accordingly, the party aims to enhance production and expand public assets, with the ultimate goal of serving the needs of the populace. Xi Jinping has emphasized that the level and effectiveness of the party cannot be self-determined but are determined solely by the people (Wang and Chen, 2021). The 19th National Congress notably underscored that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, necessitating the demonstration of a new spirit and accomplishments by the Party. The new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics is characterized by several

key dimensions outlined in the report of the 19th National Congress. These dimensions, also referred to as the “five aspects,” include requirements pertaining to socialism with Chinese characteristics, the nation, the people, ethnic groups, and the world. This new era signifies a period in which the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects is decisively pursued, paving the way for comprehensive efforts to construct a modern socialist country (Tao, 2017).

As stated by Xi Jinping in his book, Chinese people aspire to provide a better life for their children. This aspiration serves as the mission of the Chinese Government, and it is the responsibility of the government to create an environment conducive to realizing this goal. Through diligent efforts, the entire Chinese population, comprising all ethnic groups, will ultimately achieve common prosperity and enjoy a satisfactory standard of living (Xi, 2014). Since the Chinese leadership considers socialism as the sole political ideology capable of accelerating China’s modernization process. They assert that socialism provides the most effective pathway for China to achieve both economic and political development. As emphasized by the Chinese leadership:

*“Only by upholding socialism with Chinese characteristics can we bring together and lead the whole Party, the whole nation and the people of all ethnic groups in realizing a moderately prosperous society by the centenary of the CPC in 2021 and in turning China into a prosperous, democratic, culturally advanced and harmonious modern socialist country by the centenary of the People’s Republic of China in 2049.”* (Xi, 2014).

The Chinese leadership perceives socialism with Chinese characteristics as the most authentic manifestation of socialist ideology that the Chinese people should endorse. However, they also recognize that achieving this vision is not an easy task and will require time and effort. As Deng Xiaoping remarked in 1992, *“It will probably take another thirty years for us to develop a more mature and well-defined system in every field”* (Xi, 2014). For the Communist Party of China, socialism with Chinese characteristics is considered the primary driver of the party’s success, representing the integration of the theory of scientific socialism.

As president Xi stated *“Socialism with Chinese characteristics is socialism and nothing else. The basic principles of scientific socialism must not be abandoned; otherwise, it is not socialism...Both history and reality have shown us that only socialism can save China and only socialism with Chinese characteristics can bring development to China.”* (Xi, 2014).

The Chinese leadership (Xi, 2014) emphasizes that China has prepared itself to confront the risks and challenges that may impede its development process. They assert that the only effective approach to addressing these risks and challenges is by adhering steadfastly to Marxism and socialism.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics has been shaped by the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party since the establishment of the People’s Republic of China. It has evolved in tandem with China’s changing position in global politics. Despite the erosion of some core characteristics of socialism in Chinese characteristics, the Chinese government maintains its commitment to socialist ideals by asserting strict adherence to Marxism. According to the Chinese government, Marxism is perceived as the only path to success for China. The presence of numerous faculties of Marxism in Chinese universities serves as tangible evidence to support this argument.

### III. THE ROLE OF SOCIALISM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTIC IN CHINA’S EMERGENCE AS A GLOBAL POWER

Socialism with Chinese characteristics is a term coined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) to delineate the unique brand of socialism implemented in the People’s Republic of China. Originating from Deng Xiaoping’s late 20th-century economic reforms and opening-up policies, the concept has remained a central tenet of Chinese governance, as underscored by subsequent leaders like Jiang Zemin, who affirmed the importance of continuing reforms and opening up (Yan, 2001). These policies aimed to alleviate poverty and position China as a global power, even potentially as a superpower in the future.

The theoretical framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics stands as a monumental and historic creation of the Chinese Communist Party during the new era of reform and socialist modernization. It signifies the ongoing adaptation of Marxism to the unique context of China. This framework not only inherits but also advances Marxist-Leninist thought and Mao Zedong’s ideology. It serves as the guiding theory for the Party and the people in their pursuit of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation along the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Tian, 2012).

Zou and An contend that the scientific guidance of Marxism played a crucial role in historical revolutions such as the October Revolution in Russia and the New Democratic Revolution in China led by the Communist Party. Marxism’s emphasis on the people as the agents of historical change underscores the importance of continuous struggle and the pursuit of human happiness. The new socialist development thinking aligns with Marxist principles, emphasizing peaceful and mutually beneficial development, harmony, and ecological sustainability. This approach reflects the evolving nature of Marxism and its adaptability to contemporary challenges. Thus, the new socialist development thinking represents a significant progression and innovation within the framework of Marxism (Zou and An, 2019).

Over the past four decades, the Communist Party of China has demonstrated a deep understanding of the realities of China’s development, consistently placing development as the foremost priority in governing and revitalizing the nation. Aligned with the imperatives of social progress and the liberation and enhancement of productive forces, China has instituted and innovated various systems and institutions. These efforts have led to the establishment of a socialist market economy characterized by the coexistence and development of diverse forms of ownership (Xi Guangqing, 2019). In accordance with Marx’s assertion that “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they will,” Chairman Mao and his successor Deng sought to shape the course of their nation’s history, striving to improve the lives of their people within the constraints of prevailing circumstances. However, President Xi Jinping has emerged as an exceptionally influential leader in China, notably amending the country’s laws to potentially extend his leadership indefinitely. (Stenslie and Galtung, 2023). This era is increasingly associated with “Xi Jinping’s Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” (习近平新时代中国特色社会主义思想)(Han, 2023) suggesting that new era socialism with Chinese characteristics is synonymous with socialism under the leadership of Xi Jinping.

In the new era, the Chinese government has introduced various initiatives aimed at advancing several key aspects of national development. These initiatives include the construction of a modernized economic system, the enhancement of the system of people’s democratic governance, the consolidation of cultural self-confidence, and the promotion of socialist culture. Efforts are also underway to improve living standards and social well-being, accelerate the development of an ecological civilization, and persist in the path of building a strong military with Chinese characteristics. Furthermore, comprehensive advancements in national defence and military modernization are being pursued (Tao, 2017). Reflecting on these achievements, President Xi Jinping emphasized China’s continued adherence to Marxism and Mao Zedong Thought:

Chairman Mao said: *“Once China’s destiny is in the hands of the people, China, like the sun rising in the east, will illuminate every corner of the land with a brilliant flame. We Communists are like seeds, and the people are like the soil. Wherever we go, we must unite with the people, take root and blossom among them.”* (Xi, 2014).

In recent years, China’s position as the most populous country, the second-largest economy, and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council has bestowed upon it both the capacity and responsibility to make significant contributions to the world in this new era. Primarily, China is focused on bolstering its own capabilities. The transition of socialism with Chinese characteristics into a new era represents a significant leap forward for the Chinese nation, which has confronted numerous challenges in modern times. It signifies a profound shift from merely achieving prosperity and power to realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation (Tao, 2017).

Another achievement of China under the guidance of socialism with Chinese characteristics is its unwavering commitment to prioritizing the needs of the people and implementing the mass line principle. The Chinese Communist Party is resolute in addressing people's problems promptly and effectively without delay (Xi, 2014). The current Chinese leadership is dedicated to introducing new measures and initiatives aimed at elevating the standards of living for the Chinese people within the framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics and under the leadership of the CCP. During the 16th National Congress of the CCP in 2002, it was emphasized that the next two decades would be of utmost importance for China and the Chinese nation to achieve their desired objectives (Xin, 2022).

With the introduction of reform and opening-up policies in 1978, China embarked on a new economic trajectory by modifying the fundamental economic principles of socialism to align with Chinese characteristics (Westra, 2023). In the process of China's emergence as a major power, Deng Xiaoping played a pioneering role. However, Xi Jinping is widely regarded as holding a central position within both the Central Committee and the entire Party in terms of politics. In fact, Xi Jinping is credited with founding the thought on socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. (Tao, 2017).

President Xi expressed his belief that China would achieve its long-term goals. By the year 2021, which marked the centenary of the Communist Party of China (CPC), he envisioned China becoming a moderately prosperous society. Additionally, by the year 2049, which commemorates the centenary of the People's Republic of China (PRC), President Xi believes that China will transform into a democratic, more powerful, advanced, and harmonious country, ultimately being recognized as a modern socialist nation (Xi, 2014). To realize these objectives, President Xi initiated the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and propagated China's win-win economic cooperation strategy globally. Through these endeavours, China aims to achieve its long-term political, economic, and social objectives.

Under the guidance of the theoretical framework of socialism with Chinese characteristics, China's socialist economic development has achieved remarkable success, resulting in the continuous enhancement of economic strength and comprehensive national power (Tian, 2012). However, it is acknowledged that socialism with Chinese characteristics still has a long way to go to achieve various objectives, including building a prosperous society for all people living in China in all respects. Chinese leadership maintains that socialism with Chinese characteristics is the essential path for China to realize the Chinese Dream. President Xi Jinping has emphasized that the Chinese people are peace-loving and committed to cooperating with the rest of the world for mutual benefits. This cooperation is grounded in principles of peace and forward-looking strategies, with China fully aware of its responsibilities on the global stage (Xi, 2014).

The intricate relationship between shifts in historical epochs and theoretical innovation is underscored, as each new era acts as a catalyst for the emergence of novel ideas that inform practical implementation. A pivotal moment in this continuum is marked by the 18th National Congress, which heralded the advent of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. This ideological framework serves as a guiding beacon for realizing the profound rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Within this new era, fresh objectives have been delineated, offering a comprehensive roadmap for future developmental pursuits. This roadmap unfolds in two distinct stages: the initial phase, spanning from 2020 to 2035, is dedicated to further advancing upon the groundwork of a moderately prosperous society towards the realization of socialist modernization. Subsequently, the second stage, spanning from 2035 to the midpoint of the 21st century, aspires to forge a resilient, prosperous, democratic, culturally enriched, and harmonious socialist modernized nation (Tao, 2017). Notably, under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has deviated from its traditional policy of maintaining a low profile in foreign affairs, signalling a significant departure in its approach to global engagement.

Since the commencement of its reform and opening-up policy, China has actively embraced economic globalization and has taken proactive measures to coordinate and leverage resources and markets domestically and globally. China has demonstrated a commitment to

familiarizing itself with and adeptly navigating the systems, rules, mechanisms, and approaches prevalent in the global capitalist world and international markets to mitigate potential adverse outcomes. This endeavour has entailed the development of a socialist market economy, the advancement of democratic politics, the promotion of law, and the cultivation of advanced culture. Furthermore, China has actively cultivated and implemented socialist primary values to prioritize the establishment of a socialist new open economic system by embracing the principle of win-win cooperation for global peace and development. In this context, China has played a leading role in advocating for collaborative approaches on the international stage. Moreover, China has undertaken comprehensive efforts to strengthen the governance capacity of the Party, thus charting a course toward socialism with Chinese characteristics (Xi Guangqing, 2019).

In 2013, President Xi Jinping revealed the concept of jointly constructing the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road during his visits to Central Asia. This initiative sought to harmonize both domestic and international factors, thereby laying the groundwork for a comprehensive new framework of broad-based openness amid the "new normal" conditions. With the overarching aim of elevating China from a regional power to a global leadership and realizing the "Chinese Dream," President Xi embarked on ambitious projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and Silk Road Fund. Additionally, he reinforced cooperation within organizations like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Under President Xi's leadership, China has actively engaged in G20 summits and spearheaded numerous new international conferences and events. Moreover, China has assumed a significant leadership role in fostering development and cooperation across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia, while simultaneously establishing new multilateral international cooperation in the international arena (Sun, 2019; Xi, 2019; Yıldırımçakar, 2023).

At the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China held in 2017, "Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era" was officially incorporated into the party constitution. Xi Jinping Thought, often summarized as his "Four Comprehensive Strategies" (四个全面战略布局), is anchored in the principles of the Four Comprehensives. These strategic objectives include the pursuit of a moderately prosperous society, the deepening of reform efforts, governance according to the rule of law, and the enhancement of party discipline (Garrick and Bennet, 2018).

As Xi Guangqing has justified, China's steadfast commitment to the policy of opening up and development has yielded remarkable results. Over the past four decades, there has been a staggering 198-fold increase in the total volume of goods imported and exported, alongside a growth of over 147 times in the total volume of service trade import and export. The country has attracted cumulative foreign investment exceeding 2 trillion US dollars and has consistently contributed to over 30% of global economic growth for multiple consecutive years, emerging as a primary stabilizer and driving force for world economic growth. During this period, China has ascended to become the world's second-largest economy, the largest industrial nation, the top merchandise trading nation, and the leading holder of foreign exchange reserves. Notably, among the world's 500 major industrial products, China produces 220 items with the highest global output (Xi Guangqing, 2019). Indeed, China's economic transformation under the banner of socialism has remarkably improved. However, the fact that China is increasingly moving away from the basic principles of true socialism is becoming a separate topic of discussion.

On the other hand, some Chinese scholars argue that the central leadership of the Communist Party of China has consistently combined Marxist dialectical thought with China's specific national conditions and practices to creatively address the country's practical challenges. This approach is characterized by the principles of prioritizing the people's interests, trusting the people in all matters, relying on the people for support, and wholeheartedly serving the people. Such principles serve as the foundational cornerstone not only of Marxism-Leninism but also of significant strategic doctrines such as Mao Zedong Thought, Deng Xiaoping Theory, the important concept of "Three Represents," and



the Scientific Outlook on Development. Upholding the standpoint of the people and steadfastly adhering to it without deviation or wavering is considered crucial for Chinese Communists in maintaining and promoting the Marxist worldview. Marx and Engels emphasized in the “Communist Manifesto” that while previous movements often served the interests of the minority, the proletariat movement is unique in its dedication to the welfare of the majority, representing an independent and inclusive movement (Zou and An, 2019).

Indeed, socialism in China represents a unique blend of socialist principles and market-oriented reforms. While the state maintains a significant role in crucial sectors, there’s a growing acceptance of market forces, private ownership, and foreign investment. Chinese scholars believe that China’s rise will not only drive its own economic progress but also foster global prosperity and development (Yan, 2001). Through active engagement in the global economy, including participation in international trade and investment, China has experienced rapid economic growth and expanded its global influence.

The advancement of economy and the enhancement of living standards are the key priorities for the Chinese Government (Yan, 2001; Xi, 2014). It is important to understand that “socialism with Chinese characteristics” is tailored to China’s unique political and economic environment and may not be directly translatable to other socialist or communist systems. Moreover, interpretations and applications of this concept have evolved in response to changing local and global conditions.

Through the implementation of reform and opening-up policies, China has gradually liberalized several economic sectors to facilitate the growth of the private sector. Unlike the central planning feature of traditional socialism, China’s approach to socialism adopts a more pragmatic stance, prioritizing economic growth and development. Moreover, Socialism with Chinese Characteristics aspires to increase social stability by addressing social problems through reform and innovation. In this context, the Communist Party of China (CCP) strives to address the important needs and challenges of Chinese society, while aiming to maintain the stability and harmony of the party. While China tries to preserve the basic principles of classical Socialism or Marxism, it also aims to modernize and improve itself in every field. In this sense, Socialism with Chinese characteristics differs from traditional socialism and includes several regulations and innovations in various fields such as economy, politics, and culture. As Dieterich (2018) acknowledges, China has differentiated itself from the Western world thanks to socialism with Chinese characteristics.

## CONCLUSION

Socialism with Chinese Characteristics reveals China’s different approach to socialism by adapting socialism to China’s current political, economic, and cultural realities. Socialism with Chinese characteristics in the sense of Marxism aims to combine classical socialism with China’s modern principles, as well as core socialist values. Socialism with Chinese Characteristics focuses on achieving modernization through a diverse version of socialism without breaking away from Marxism or classical socialism. However, it is hard to claim that China’s current socialist ideology and its social system have strong ties with classical socialism. Chinese leadership has considered that Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, with its current ongoing position is China’s only way out of poverty and become a developed country. Unlike traditional socialism, which emphasizes revolutionary ideals, China’s approach to socialism inclines the importance of peaceful development and mutually beneficial cooperation with other nations. China’s political strategy is based on China’s historical and cultural context by prioritizing win-win cooperation and non-interference policies.

Socialism with Chinese characteristics endeavours to play a crucial role in the context of offering a pragmatic and flexible approach that supports economic reforms while preserving core socialist principles. President Xi launched the BRI project and the AIIB bank to become more cooperative internationally. China has become increasingly recognized not only as an economic power but also as a critical political actor and has become more proactive and relatively aggressive in foreign affairs by transforming China from a low to a high profile in the international arena. Under Xi Jinping’s leadership, China endeavours

to overcome the complexities of socialist modernization and maintain its core socialist values. China has an important role in guiding economic development, but there are also opportunities for private entrepreneurship and marketing. This balanced approach allows China to maintain its economic growth momentum and assert its influence on the world stage, positioning it as a major global player and potentially a second superpower in the future. However, it seems that if China’s economic developments face drawbacks that China cannot cope with, socialism with Chinese characteristics will be discussed more negatively in international political affairs.

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