

The Mirror Image of Western Marxist Critical Theory and Its Implications

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In *Considerations on Western Marxism*, the celebrated British left-wing thinker Perry Anderson observes that, although Western Marxism inherited the tradition of Marx's critique of political economy, from the 1920s onward it gradually ceased to confront, at the theoretical level, the major economic and political questions of its time; as a result, Western Marxism as a whole turned toward the study and critique of the cultural ideology of capitalism. Anderson thus clearly identifies the critical turn in Western Marxist theory. Viewed against the trajectory of Marxist theoretical development, Western Marxism's critical turn—a departure from Marx's tradition of the critique of political economy—did, to be sure, have as its original impulse the exploration of an alternative path for advancing theory; yet its principal aim was to refute the views of the leading theorists of the Second International and of the Stalinist model, and thereby to turn toward the study of human beings as historical subjects and of their everyday cultural life. Such a critique of thought and culture naturally possesses certain merits: after all, against the present-day backdrop of both cultural and economic globalization, it holds significant heuristic value for our critique of the various forms of cultural hegemonism and of the economism that advocates the absolute freedom of the market. Nevertheless, Western Marxism's theory of social critique displays a distinctly "armchair" character. As Anderson puts it, "Method as impotence, art as consolation, pessimism as quiescence: it is not difficult to find all of these in the writings of Western Marxism" (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 118). This certainly indicates that this particular theoretical temperament of Western Marxism resulted from its severe estrangement from the masses; but the more important theoretical lesson is this: the abstract critique of social culture and ideology must return to the premise of the critique of political economy, for only in this way can it be integrated into the mass practice involved in the production and reproduction of social material life, and thereby acquire a fully grounded confidence. This point merits particular examination, since contemporary China now lies squarely within the terrain of Marx's critique of political economy.

I. The Critical Turn of Western Marxism

Over the course of nearly a century of development, Western Marxism has given rise to a profusion of schools, each with its own relatively distinct theoretical concerns; consequently, although Western Marxism constitutes a vast body, its theoretical content is comparatively complex and loosely knit. Yet as a social current of considerable influence in Western society, Western Marxism is not without a relatively clear central theoretical thread. From Lukács's analysis of the reified consciousness of society and Gramsci's exposition of the theory of cultural hegemony, through the Frankfurt School's critique of the cultural ideology of capitalism, to post-Marxism's deconstruction and critique of contemporary consumer culture (there is scholarly debate as to whether post-Marxism belongs within Western Marxism. In the author's view, the two are geographically continuous and chronologically successive, so post-Marxism cannot be simply excluded from the scope of Western Marxism), and so forth—these together constitute the central theoretical thread of Western Marxism. As Anderson observes, this logical thread “from first to last was concerned principally with problems of culture and ideology” (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 100), turning its gaze toward an ideological analysis and cultural critique “far removed from the economic base,” and striving—from the standpoint of the active effects of social consciousness and cultural psychology on social being—to discover a theoretical path by which “totality” might triumph over capitalism and by which the emancipation of humanity as a “totality” might be realized.

In summing up the logical turn of Western Marxism, Anderson observes that “Western Marxism, taken as a whole, appears to have paradoxically inverted the trajectory of Marx's own development. Marx, the founder of historical materialism, moved successively from philosophy to politics and then economics, as the central terrain of his thought; whereas the successors of this tradition that emerged after 1920 increasingly turned away from economics and politics toward philosophy—abandoning direct engagement with the very questions that had preoccupied the mature Marx” (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 68); “the whole Western Marxist tradition's compass swung ever more toward contemporary bourgeois culture” (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 72). In Anderson's view, however, Western Marxism changed course because it confronted a “painful reality,” and its historical causes cannot be reduced simply to the shortcomings of revolutionary mass practice in the West.

In their anguished reflection on the theoretical causes of the failure of the European revolutions, the forerunners of Western Marxism held that the fundamental cause of that failure lay in the absence of an awakened proletarian “consciousness,” in the absence of a “mass spirit”—a situation directly connected to the one-sided economic determinism propagated by the leading theorists of the Second International. Gramsci pointed out that such economic determinism was, in essence, a form of historical mysticism, since it makes one feel governed by some mysterious force. Describing this

feeling, he wrote: “though he does nothing, something is nonetheless always happening, so that the idea arises that there exists a phantom-like entity independent of the single individual” (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, trans. Bao Xu, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1983, p. 231). Gramsci offered a dialectical analysis: this economic determinism does indeed possess a certain positive significance, for in telling us that history is governed by such determinacy and necessity, and that victory must surely be ours, it also, in a sense, strengthens people’s conviction of inevitable triumph; yet it is undoubtedly also a narcotic, an inexplicably intoxicating religious “aroma,” which in the end can only dissolve the will to resist. Hence Gramsci held that the conscious agency of human subjects assumes still greater importance within socio-historical development, and he opposed economic determinism. Korsch and Lukács likewise opposed economic determinism. In *Marxism and Philosophy*, Korsch argued that the scientific socialist movement had been reduced by the Second International’s economic determinism to a form of purely scientific theoretical contemplation, bearing no direct relation whatsoever to the revolutionary practice of class struggle. Lukács, in *History and Class Consciousness*, argued further that the leading theorists of the Second International, by ignoring Marx’s historical dialectic, had thereby reduced Marxism one-sidedly to such a “purely scientific” theory, which in essence indoctrinated “the proletariat into submission to the various ‘laws’ of bourgeois society, or into an attitude of complacent fatalism” (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Zhang Xiping, Chongqing: Chongqing Publishing House, 1989, p. 228).

Setting out from a critique of the one-sided economic determinism of the later Second International, the early forerunners of Western Marxism turned instead to the view that a path of emancipation different from that of traditional Marxism should be sought within the cultural-ideological structure of society. Moreover, the historical context had also changed: with the pervasive reification of the developed industrial societies of the West, reified consciousness came to obstruct the self-consciousness of the proletariat. They therefore advanced a theory of ideological revolution that emphasized the active agency of the human subject’s consciousness, striving to foreground the emancipatory power of culture. Gramsci’s theory of cultural hegemony and Lukács’s doctrine of reification are their representative theoretical formulations. Thus early Western Marxism “set out from the traditional terrain of economics and politics, turned from advocacy of violent revolution toward ideological revolution, and turned from the study of class ideology toward the study of cultural ideology” (Jiang Hua, “The Cultural Dimension of the Transformation of Western Marxist Ideological Theory,” *Northern Forum*, no. 1, 2008).

Early Western Marxism’s turn toward the study of cultural ideology exerted a profound influence on later Western Marxists. Subsequently, the Frankfurt School conducted a multifaceted movement of cultural critique, largely centered on cultural psychology and instinctual structures as manifested in everyday life. They held that the form of domination in capitalist society was no longer the traditional political-economic domination but rather a cultural-psychological one, accomplished imperceptibly through various cultural forms. In this way, the Frankfurt School in effect set aside the standpoint of the critique of political economy and turned entirely to cultural critique. In Horkheimer’s view, capitalist ideology had become a cultural factor in the

pervasive alienation of developed industrial society; he argued that the Frankfurt School's critique of ideology should center on cultural critique and treat it as its revolutionary task. In the intellectual history of the Frankfurt School, Adorno, Fromm, Marcuse, and Habermas—who followed in Horkheimer's wake and came after him—are all representative figures emphasizing a multi-perspectival cultural critique. By the end of the 1960s, and especially after the events of May 1968 in France, the historical context had again changed greatly, as the developed capitalist countries of the West gradually entered the so-called "consumer society." Accordingly, while deconstructing the "consumer society," post-Marxism also carried on the critical dimension of earlier Western Marxism—namely, cultural-ideological critique. The French thinker Baudrillard is its representative figure. Although in his early works Baudrillard advanced the slogan of a "critique of the political economy of the sign," he did not deliberately seek to return to Marx's standpoint of the critique of political economy; rather, he advocated a cultural-ideological critique grounded in a deconstruction of consumer society in terms of difference. This is so for two reasons. First, the consumption Baudrillard emphasizes is not a link in the circulation of the social economy but rather an ideological universality—"this universality permeates all cultural and material commodities. It becomes the universality of consumption" (Baudrillard, *For a Critique of the Political Economy of the Sign*, trans. Xia Ying, Nanjing: Nanjing University Press, 2009, p. 37). For him, consumption is in essence a construction of cultural codes that tends to regulate and control consumers, becoming "one element in the strategy of power" in the ideological control of capitalist society. Second, Baudrillard did not depart from the governing theoretical thread of later Western mass-culture theory: that is, in the course of further deconstructing the monistic essentialism of economic determinism, he directed attention to the internal differences and contradictions of mass culture that the Frankfurt School had failed to see, treated the differentiated character of mass culture as an object of ideological analysis and critique, and thereby introduced an inquiry into the construction of subject identity.

It must be said that Anderson's judgment is persuasive—namely, that Western Marxism's theoretical path stands in precise opposition to Marx's own. After Marx had inaugurated the theoretical tradition of the critique of political economy, Western Marxism gradually and as a whole turned toward the theoretical study of cultural-ideological critique. This inevitably gave Western Marxist critical theory a mirror-image character qualitatively different from that of Marx's critical theory.

II. The Mirror-Image Character of Western Marxist Critical Theory

Early Western Marxism opposed the Second International's economic determinism with its religious "aroma" and demanded the restoration of "the human will," until this will should become in reality the motive force of economic fact, "able to open a way for itself everywhere and in any form, as the human will decides" (Selected Writings of Gramsci, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1992, p. 10). It thus expressed an intellectual disposition in which "the human will" determines reality—undoubtedly a last flicker of the Young Hegelians. Even when extended into a critique of all cultural

ideologies that suppress and efface “the human will,” it could amount only to “speculation reproduced in the form of caricature.” Marx had long ago given an incisive portrait of such a speculative figure in *The Holy Family*: “We regard this speculation as the most complete expression of the Christian-Germanic principle, which makes its last attempt by transforming ‘Criticism’ itself into some kind of transcendent power” (*Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 1, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009, p. 253).

It must be granted that Western Marxism did indeed identify a fundamental theoretical defect of the Second International. For its leading theorists, socio-historical development resembled the objective unfolding of the laws of biological evolution, and human history was merely a part of natural history. Thus, within a socio-historical process endowed with objective necessity, human beings were passive and could only stand aside as onlookers; the historical process of human society was an objective, spontaneous material process moving independently of human beings, all of it determined by the “natural” law whereby social being determines social consciousness and the economic base determines the superstructure. On this view, then, capitalism was bound to perish of its own accord, and the revolutionary movement of the proletariat was bound to occur spontaneously once certain social and material conditions obtained; all that remained to be done was to await the ripening of those conditions. This was in essence a betrayal of the principle of the proletariat’s revolutionary agency, and such a mechanistic standpoint was bound to lead to the failure of proletarian revolutionary practice.

What is puzzling, however, is that Western Marxism’s theoretical refutation of the Second International, and its consequent turn toward the study and critique of cultural ideology, did not consist in returning to the theoretical works of Marx’s mature period in search of “nourishment,” but rather in departing from Marx’s theoretical standpoint of a twofold critique of political and economic questions. The reasons are manifold; one of them is perhaps directly connected to their questioning and misunderstanding of Engels’s thought. In his later years Engels too had noted the erroneous tendencies of the Second International, and he took particular pains, in various letters, to expound Marx’s historical materialism dialectically. In Engels’s view, when helping to establish the new scientific worldview Marx had deliberately given prominence to the decisive, foundational role of economic life in order to criticize the then-dominant idealist conception of history; but Marx’s materialist conception of history was by no means economic determinism, for he did not regard the economic factor as the sole operative social force. As Engels said, “If somebody twists this into saying that the economic factor is the only determining one, he transforms that proposition into a meaningless, abstract, absurd phrase” (*Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, vol. 10, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2009, p. 591). Indeed, in Engels’s view, what economic determinism lacks is precisely the standpoint of the dialectics of practice; it is incapable of viewing and analyzing socio-historical development dialectically.

Lukács later acknowledged that he had misunderstood Engels’s thought; yet in his earlier work *History and Class Consciousness* he had emphasized the methodological principle of totality within historical dialectics, which shows that he had, to a certain

degree, likewise detected the mechanistic view by which economic determinism one-sidedly treats the object as determining the subject, and social being as determining social consciousness. It must be said that the original theoretical impulse of Western Marxism was to correct the Second International's failure to adopt a historical-dialectical standpoint in revolutionary practice. Thereafter, they emphasized the reciprocal influence of culture and social ideology on social being, and concentrated on the study and critique of culture and social ideology. But in thereby distancing themselves from the economic base and setting aside the study of the social relations of material life, they not only overcorrected but also forsook the root for the branches. For even where they expounded a dialectical methodology of totality, they departed from the domain of social practice in which the relations of material life are examined—still less did they go deep among the masses to lead an actual social revolutionary movement. Over time, the armchair study and critique of cultural ideology, detached from the revolutionary masses, became their inevitable theoretical profile. Thus David McLellan, commenting on Western Marxism in his book *Ideology*, summed up: "It is a general characteristic of Western Marxism to have paid more attention to ideology, and to have treated it more as a problem for theoretical discussion than as a matter of actual political activity" (David McLellan, *Ideology*, 2nd ed., trans. Kong Zhaozheng and Jiang Longxiang, Changchun: Jilin People's Publishing House, 2005, p. 38).

Although Marx reaffirmed in his Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy* that "the anatomy of civil society (the sum total of the relations of material life) is to be sought in political economy" (Collected Works of Marx and Engels, vol. 2, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2009, p. 591), Western Marxism turned a deaf ear. After Marx, through his anatomy of civil society, had inaugurated the new-materialist theoretical tradition of the critique of political economy, Gramsci smuggled the concept of "civil society" into the category of cultural ideology and transformed it accordingly, thereby quite naturally redirecting the critique of political economy toward the study and critique of "cultural hegemony." Gramsci's theoretical legacy has been far-reaching. Among the structuralist Marxists (Althusser, for instance), Gramsci's theory of cultural hegemony was taken up; but here cultural hegemony was more often defined as the ideology of the ruling class, so that it was not only stripped of its revolutionary character but also came unconsciously to constitute human subjects, depriving them of the rational will consciously to grasp the world. This conceptual dismantling and theoretical maneuvering echoed Gramsci's own style, yet the two obviously diverged widely in their definitions of the conceptual content and theoretical function of "cultural hegemony." Worse still, in post-Marxism, cultural hegemony as a theoretical point of origin was pluralistically deconstructed, so as to argue for the eternal, mutually compatible coexistence of a plurality of cultural ideologies (including bourgeois cultural ideology)—thereby turning entirely into the opposite of Western Marxism's original theoretical aim. (In their article "The New Theory of Hegemony and the Deconstructive Logic of Post-Marxism" [Philosophical Researches, no. 2, 2007], Fu Wenzhong and Kong Ming'an analyze in detail post-Marxism's deconstruction of Gramsci's theory of "cultural hegemony." The article holds that, through deconstructing Gramsci's theory of "cultural hegemony," post-Marxism in essence argues for the eternal coexistence of a plurality of cultural ideologies, including bour-

geois cultural ideology.) In this way, the illusory outcome—"flowers in a mirror, the moon in water"—of the theoretical path opened up by Western Marxism, Gramsci foremost among its representatives, becomes plainly visible.

The "armchair" character of Western Marxist theory, once divorced from revolutionary practice and the masses, left it in a "rootless," drifting condition. It was therefore never able to escape the infiltration and entanglement of every fashionable bourgeois doctrine, so that at one moment it was joined to this "-ism" and at another to that. The history of Western Marxist theory has produced Hegelian Marxism, Frankfurt School Marxism, positivist Marxism, existentialist Marxism, analytical Marxism, structuralist Marxism, ecological Marxism, and many other schools besides. The reason they are collectively termed Western Marxism is that most of them actively inscribed the words "Marxism" upon their own banners; yet holding aloft the banner of "Marxism," some of these schools nonetheless frequently became vehicles and testing grounds for importing bourgeois doctrines and extending their influence. It is thus not difficult to understand why Baudrillard, after continually borrowing Marx's concepts and terminology in his early theory to propagate his own influence, in *The Mirror of Production* and subsequent works abandoned Marxism altogether. Anderson holds that, for all its profusion of schools, Western Marxism, "however dissimilar they may be in other respects, these systems have one basic hallmark in common: a shared, latent pessimism" (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1981, p. 112). This shared, underlying pessimism is undoubtedly the overall theoretical temperament of Western Marxism's "armchair" orientation.

III. Implications: Returning to Marx's Critique of Political Economy

After Marx had inaugurated the theoretical tradition of the critique of political economy, Western Marxism gradually turned toward cultural-ideological critique. Thus Western Marxism ultimately formed a theoretical mirror-image cocooned within the "study," together with a theoretical temperament of pessimism. This is something worthy of reflection by Marxist scholars.

From one perspective, an adverse socio-historical environment was the objective factor behind Western Marxism's eventual "post-critical" theoretical form—a "critique after political economy." In the history of Western Marxism's development, three great historical factors compelled it to take up the critical weapons directed against ideological oppression while at the same time forcing it back into the "study": bureaucratic repression by the Communist International in response to criticism; persecution by European Nazism and fascism; and the unipolar dominance of Western imperialist ideology after the upheavals in Eastern Europe. Especially in the first twenty years of Western Marxism's development, European fascism was the "chief culprit" in severing Western Marxism from the mass practice of the Western proletariat. Gramsci, isolated from the world in a fascist prison in Italy, and Korsch and Lukács, each in exile abroad, mark the point at which the historical period in which Western Marxism could

move freely among the worker and peasant masses had ceased to exist. Thereafter the “university” became their refuge and place of exile; the distance between them and the worker and peasant masses grew ever greater, and they could speak only in their own religious-aphoristic or cipher-like language.

The problem, however, is that classical Marxists, in similar historical circumstances, possessed an extraordinary revolutionary boldness. Marx in his mature period consistently upheld the critique of political economy; though besieged by the united forces of all European reaction, he never compromised, continuing as ever to attend to and support the revolutionary movement of European workers, and thereby acquired the lofty stature of a “citizen of the world.” Lenin, though exiled and expelled by Tsarist Russia, consistently upheld revolutionary critique grounded in reality, kept in close touch with the revolutionary practice of the masses, and became the indispensable spiritual mentor who led the Russian October Revolution to victory. This striking contrast shows that Western Marxism’s “post-critical” turn, and its theoretical standpoint itself, are problematic and ought to be criticized. First, the neglect of and attacks on Engels’s thought directly weakened the influence of classical Marxism, driving Western Marxism to seek, within the Western philosophical systems represented by Hegel, the theoretical resources for refuting economic determinism and criticizing the cultural ideology of capitalism—which was the direct cause of its eventual turn to a one-sided cultural-ideological critique. In this way, Western Marxism’s choice of a “post-critical” orientation amounted in essence to undermining its own defenses: not only was it unable thoroughly to refute economic determinism, but on the contrary it was continually infiltrated and displaced by bourgeois ideological doctrines, which used it and then cast it aside. This illusory outcome of theoretical development—“flowers in a mirror, the moon in water”—inevitably led to the shattering of Western Marxism’s “utopian” illusions and, in the end, to pessimism. This also shows how “feeble and impotent” Western Marxism’s “post-critical” theory was. Second, in departing from Marx’s theoretical tradition of the critique of political economy, Western Marxism in essence abandoned the basic principle of the practical critique of reality, which was bound to lead to estrangement from the masses. For Adorno, for instance—a representative figure of the Frankfurt School—theory is a special form of practice, while the concept of practice itself is to be elucidated by theory. Adorno wrote: “Theory is a form of practice, and practice is itself a preeminently theoretical concept” (quoted in Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, p. 94). Such an extreme theoreticism, “by proclaiming from the outset the verbal identity of theory and practice, effectively suppressed the substantive question of the unity of theory and practice as the vital link between Marxism and the revolutionary struggle of the masses; this theoreticism may be regarded as the general watchword of Western Marxism in the period after the Second World War” (Perry Anderson, *Considerations on Western Marxism*, trans. Gao Xian, Wen Guanzhong, and Wei Zhangling, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981, p. 94). It is thus evident that distance from the masses and estrangement from real mass practice are bound to be another expression of Western Marxism’s “post-critical” character.

Even if one follows the methodological principle of Western Marxism's dialectic of totality, cultural-ideological critique is only a critique that comes after Marx's critique of political economy—a subordinate rather than the sole critique, a critique that takes Marx's critique of political economy as its ground and premise. Only such a critique of totality can genuinely realize the dialectical unity of subject and object, of social being and social consciousness, of economic base and superstructure. If the first generation of Western Marxists had not yet abandoned the principle of a critique of totality premised on Marx's critique of political economy, the later schools of Western Marxism—the Frankfurt School in particular—entirely set aside or discarded the principle of a critique so premised, for “totality” was continually deconstructed and dissolved by them as a concept of “identity,” until in the end only the one-sided dimension of cultural-ideological critique remained. Thus Western Marxism could neither thoroughly refute economic determinism, since it had swung to the opposite extreme, nor accomplish the critique of the cultural ideology of capitalism, since it had lost the practical foundation of critique.

Clearly, then, the return to Marx's critique of political economy is a normative implication derived from reflection. Returning to Marx's critique of political economy is a necessary condition for upholding the principle of critique grounded in reality. Only on that basis can theory become increasingly sound and self-assured, because it possesses a real foundation in mass practice. After all, a correct theory—as Lenin pointed out—“can be formed only in close connection with the practice of a truly mass and truly revolutionary movement” (Lenin: Thematic Collection on the Proletarian Party, vol. 4, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2009, p. 246). To return to Marx's critique of political economy is thus to require that theoretical critique return to genuine mass practice, and that, in the process of theoretically anatomizing the concrete social relations of material life, it truly align itself with the interests of the broad masses.

It must be said that the standpoint of returning to Marx's critique of political economy is not in conflict with acknowledging that Western Marxism's cultural-ideological critique has a measure of validity and significance. Only in this way can we say that Western Marxism carries a certain heuristic value in such respects as advancing Marxism's critique of bourgeois thought and culture, and its emphasis on the importance of the proletariat's revolutionary consciousness. For example, in today's era of economic globalization, Western Marxism's firm refutation and critique of economic determinism instructs us that not only was the Second International's “vulgar theory of the productive forces” bound to fail, but that the economic liberalism advocating the absolute freedom of the market is likewise bound to lead to financial crisis; therefore, in the practical process of socialist economic construction, the critique of GDP worship under reform and opening up and of the various blind waves of marketization must of course include a dimension of cultural-ideological critique, but must ultimately be grounded in the theoretical standpoint of Marx's critique of political economy. This is required both for safeguarding the overall harmonious development of society and the nation and for safeguarding the fundamental interests of the people. Further, in the present age of ever-increasing cultural globalization, Western Marxism's critique of cultural hegemonism instructs us that raising China's competitiveness in the global contest over cultural discursive power, resisting Western cultural

hegemony, and strengthening the construction of socialist ideology are challenges that China must currently confront. Therefore, the critique of Western cultural hegemonism must combine the direct focus of cultural-ideological critique with the theoretical standpoint of a critique of political economy directed at bourgeois civil society. This is necessary both for exposing the true face of the Western capitalist oligarchs who manipulate the global cultural industry in pursuit of economic exploitation and political-ideological control, and for meeting the practical need of the broad Third World countries, China included, to accelerate the modernization of a cultural industry with a mass foundation.

In sum, Western Marxism originally sought to prompt Marxism to attend to the suppression of human beings by capitalist alienation, striving to articulate this concern in Marxist terms; yet in the end it formed a “shared” theoretical temperament of pessimism. If this was because it abandoned a concrete critique of political economy and became fixated on the path of turning toward cultural-ideological critique, then to return to, and consciously uphold, the theoretical tradition of Marx’s critique of political economy is the inevitable path by which today’s Chinese Marxist scholars and the ruling party should value the social function and critical role of socialist ideology, and thereby advance from conscious commitment to Marxist theory and culture to confidence in that theory and culture—and thus, too, the necessary premise for attaining confidence in our path and in our system. For Marx’s critique of political economy upholds the new-materialist principle of critique grounded in material reality, anatomizing the sum total of the concrete relations of material life; it is bound up both with concern for the concrete interests of the masses in everyday life and, in the course of effectively advancing sustainable socioeconomic development, with adherence to the dialectical principle of totality. Thus Deng Xiaoping pointed out that the criterion for judging the success or failure of China’s economic development is chiefly whether it is conducive to raising the living standards of the masses. Jiang Zemin pointed out that China’s Marxist ruling party represents the fundamental interests of the masses. The report to the Eighteenth Party Congress emphasized that we must, more consciously, “take putting people first as the core stance in thoroughly implementing the Scientific Outlook on Development, and always take realizing, safeguarding, and developing well the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as the starting point and the ultimate aim of all the work of the Party and the state” (Hu Jintao, “Firmly March Along the Path of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics and Strive to Complete the Building of a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects,” in *Study Companion to the Report of the Eighteenth Party Congress*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2012, p. 9). Xi Jinping pointed out further that “the mass line is the lifeline and fundamental working method of our Party, and an important heirloom by which our Party forever preserves its youthful vitality and its fighting capacity” (Xi Jinping, *Speech at the Symposium Commemorating the 120th Anniversary of the Birth of Comrade Mao Zedong*, Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 2013, p. 17), and that “the Chinese Dream is, in the final analysis, the dream of the people; it must be realized by relying closely on the people, and it must continually bring benefit to the people” (*Selected Excerpts from Xi Jinping’s Discourses on Realizing the Chinese Dream of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation*, Beijing: Central Party Literature Press, 2013, p. 14). Undoubtedly, this is an important manifestation of how China’s contem-

porary Marxist ruling party, in the course of successively and consciously developing Marxist theory, upholds the standpoint of Marx's critique of political economy, safeguards the fundamental interests of the masses, and thereby generates an optimistic theoretical temperament and practical spirit that carries forward Marxist culture. In the course of firmly advancing the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics, such a theoretical temperament and practical spirit constitute the real foundation on which China's Marxist ruling party achieves full confidence in its path, its theory, and its system—and, naturally, a wellspring of strength for enhancing the well-being of the Chinese people and for realizing the dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

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