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Journey to birthplace of Marxism enhances mutual learning across cultures
Interview with Kitamuro Nanen
Fruitful results of poverty relief accomplished on the Yellow Land
An overview of Xiongan New Area

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Journey to birthplace of Marxism enhances mutual learning across cultures

Li Zhe



The opening ceremony

It was the height of summer. The swelling River Moselle and verdant vineyards added to the beauty of the old city of Trier. A delegation from the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries headed by its president, Li Xiaolin, was visiting the German city from May 31 to June 2.

Learning about Marx in Old Treves

Trier, formerly known as Treves, is one of the oldest German cities. Its history can be traced to the first century BC — the Roman Empire. The churches, the Roman palaces, gates,

long bridges and baths that have stood the test of time are still telling the stories of city's varied past.

It is widely known not only for its rich historical and cultural heritage, but also for its identity as the hometown of Karl Marx. Marx was born in 1818 and lived here until he was 17. As this year marks the 200th anniversary of the great philosopher's birth, Trier and the state of Rheinland-Pfalz are holding a series of commemorative activities. On May 4, a commemoration ceremony was held at the Constantine Cathedral in Trier. About 1,000 people from all circles in Germany attended the event.

On May 5, the date of Marx's birth, a themed exhibition co-hosted by the state and city administrations opened at the State Museum of the Rhine Area and simultaneously at the municipal museum. Meanwhile, the renovated former residence of Karl Marx was opened to the public. A 5.5-meter-high bronze statue of Karl Marx created by Chinese sculptor Wu Weishan was unveiled at the site, and it has become a new landmark for Trier.

Besides launching large-scale commemorative events, the local administration also designed many souvenirs using Marx's image. From

shopping malls to street corner stores, customers saw various kinds of souvenirs emblazoned with the portrait of Karl Marx. Many local restaurants introduced new items to their menus like the “proletarian breakfast”, “Marx bread” and “Marx steak”, among others. After being named for Marx’s book *The Capital*, sales of local wine enjoyed rapid growth in a short time. The most sought-after souvenir was the so-called zero-euro coins, which sold for 3 euros each. On the front side was the familiar head portrait of Marx; on the back were the Porta Nigra and other landmarks. The first and second editions of 25,000 coins were sold out within a few days.

Meeting with China in Marx’s homeland

On the afternoon of June 1, a drizzle had just stopped and the exhibition hall located at the site of the Ancient Roman bath became livelier than usual. Witnessed by over 200 guests from China and Germany, CPAFFC President Li Xiaolin, Vice-Governor Wu Zhongqiong of Jiangxi province and Rheinland-Pfalz State Minister of Culture Konrad Wolf jointly put a seal on a scroll of landscape paintings in traditional Chinese style. The red-ink seal was engraved with characters that said “Meeting with China”. The painting was specially created with a portrait of Karl Marx. The sealing ceremony initiated a series of exhibitions — called *Meeting with China* — about Chinese culture in commemoration of the 200th anniversary of Marx’s birth.

For China, the year 2018 is of special significance, for it was not

only the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx’s birth but also marked the 40th anniversary of China’s reform and opening-up drive. The *Meeting with China* exhibition held in Marx’s hometown thus came at just the right moment.

The event was co-hosted by the CPAFFC and seven provincial and municipal administrations, including Jiangxi, Shandong and Qinghai provinces; Baoshan Yunnan province; Shaoxing, Zhejiang province; Chengdu, Sichuan province; and Beijing. It has also received support from the state administration of Rheinland-Pfalz, the municipal administration of Trier and several German organizations dedicated to friendship with China. Since the opening ceremony, a “Chinese wind” has swept across Trier, which had seen a Marx craze since the beginning of the year.

“The event has brought to Trier one-fourth of China,” Mayor Wolfram Leib said with admiration.

The four-month exhibition series comprised seven themed exhibitions, which have all been launched. “The Charm of Jiangxi, the Chinese Flavor”, the opening of the series, brought to German audiences folk paintings from Wan’an; pottery from the Jingdezhen and Jizhou kilns; egg-decorating crafts from Le’an; embroidery from Xinyuan and Chinese opera plays written by Tang Xianzu, a Jiangxi native and playwright from the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368).

Another exhibition opened on July 6, displaying “Confucius culture and Chinese characters”; and a “Beijing-themed Collection of Chinese seal works”, which introduced the

local audience to the traditional values of the Chinese people and the image of contemporary China. It helped them understand both inheritance and innovation in Chinese culture.

Exhibitions themed “Baoshan Culture from Sichuan” and “Jacking Culture from Yunnan” opened on Aug 3. The grand finale staged on Sept 1 included two exhibitions themed “Luxun’s Literature” and “Sanjiangyuan, Source of the Three Rivers”, which showed what China has achieved in reform and ecosystem protection.

The seven exhibitions adopted various forms of presentation, including pictures, videos, articles, traditional handicrafts and stage performances demonstrating the harmony between traditional culture and modern civilization, environmentally friendly cities and beautiful countryside, and between human society and the nature.

The series of activities told German people stories of how the Chinese people had endeavored to realize their dream of building a beautiful homeland and living a happy life.

CPAFFC President Li said in her opening speech: “I hope that the exhibitions can help our German friends feel the charm of Chinese culture and the pulse of China’s development, witness the great changes of social construction, deepen understanding about China, so as to breathe new life into the exchanges between the two countries and enhance mutual learning between the two civilizations.”

Tracing the origins of Marxism

On June 1, President Li visited

Karl Marx's former residence and the municipal museum where the exhibition of *The Life Course of Karl Marx* was held. The detailed exhibition reproduced Marx's life in Trier, Paris and London. Many of the exhibits — including his birth certificate, original doctoral degree certificate, manuscript and Braille edition of *The Communist Manifesto* — were presented to the public for the first time. Among them was a sketch of young Marx by his college friend Heinrich Rosbach, the earliest existing portrait of him.

After the visit, President Li enthused: "The visit impressed us very much. It is really a roots-seeking journey. Karl Marx devoted his whole life to the liberation of all mankind in hope of helping the poor out of poverty and suffering. This is exactly the root and soul of Chinese Communists. President Xi Jinping once said: 'The people's yearning for a happy life is the goal we strive to attain, and this has been derived from Marx's ideal and original intention.' The Communist Party of China has been making efforts to localize Marxism on the basis of China's concrete conditions, and has used it as the guiding principles in China's practices. China's 40 years of reform and opening-up is the best tribute to the 200th anniversary of Marx's birth."

During the visit to Germany, one of Marx's famous remarks was frequently mentioned — "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." During the past 200 years, the world has been profoundly changed by the theories of the No 1 thinker in a thousand years. ■

Exhibition in Trier receives warm reaction

Jiangxi Friendship Association

On June 1, an exhibition—The Charm of Jiangxi, the Flavor of China—celebrating the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth opened in Trier, Germany. The exhibition was a hit with local audiences and won praise from Chinese and German people in all circles.

The exhibition of selected folk paintings from Wan'an, a county of Jiangxi province, showed the changes and new look of rural areas, agriculture and farmers in China. The paintings recorded the growth of agricultural production, the improvement of farmers' livelihoods and the protection of the ecosystem in China's rural areas as represented by Jiangxi under the leadership of the Communist Party of China. The exhibition embodied a sense of attainment and happiness the people had developed in the nation's endeavor for the building of a moderately prosperous society in all aspects.

Guests present at the scene gave their thumbs-up.

"The year 2018 marks the 200th

anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up. The series of exhibitions themed 'Meeting with China' come at the right time. The audience can learn about the life and theories of Marx as well as the features of various Chinese localities and their economic and social development. It is undoubtedly a good opportunity for the people of Trier and even the whole world to enhance their understanding about China."

**Marcus Reuter, director
General Administration of Cultural Heritage
Protection and Research
Rheinland-Pfalz**

"Holding this exhibition in Marx's hometown is not only a commemoration of the great thinker who has profoundly influenced China and the world at large, but also a chance for people from Germany and worldwide to understand the real China in all aspects and what China has achieved in the past 40 years of reform and opening-up."

window for the German people to get to know China and understand China.”

Li Xiaolin, president of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries

“Currently, China and Germany are important partners, with their relations undergoing rapid and sustained development at a high level. The increasingly widening and deepening exchanges between the two peoples have contributed — and will continue to contribute — to the furthering of bilateral relations. The rich content of the Jiangxi culture exhibition will, I believe, arouse great interest from the German audience.”

Wang Shunqing, China's consul-general in Frankfurt

“Jiangxi is a beautiful place and well known for its pottery crafts. We have been expecting artists from Jiangxi to demonstrate their artistry for a long time. The year 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, and Trier has witnessed rapid growth in the number of visitors. They can not only visit Marx's former residence and trace his footprints, but can also feel the charm of Chinese culture, especially the local culture of Jiangxi province.”

Dr Konrad Wolf, Rheinland-Pfalz state minister of culture

“It is the first time to see such a large-scale display in Germany of Chinese culture with such great diversity packed into one exhibition. Culture, like music, has no national boundaries. Its charm can be enjoyed by audiences from different backgrounds around the world. I would

like to express our sincere thanks to the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries and to the provincial government of Jiangxi for their great efforts in making it happen.”

Kurt Karst, President of Germany-China Friendship Association

Media from home and abroad covered the event with enthusiasm. The hosts held news conferences in Beijing and Trier on April 13 and April 20, which attracted public attention at home and abroad. The launch of *Meeting with China* on June 1 was widely reported by domestic and overseas media. People's Daily and its website, Xinhua Daily Telegraph and Xinhua.net, Economic Daily, Chinanews.cn, the Global Network, Sina.com, and PhoenixNet all reported the activities. Domestic media outlets in Jiangxi province, including Jiangxi Radio and Television Station and other newspapers, TV channels and news websites followed the event all the way, with reports also published via Weibo, WeChat and mobile apps. By 6 pm on June 8, new-media reports on the event had been viewed more than 6 million times.

People from all walks of life gave abundant praise. As of June 8, the exhibition had attracted more than 4,000 German visitors. At the booth exhibiting embroidery, Benedette Andres of the Rheinland-Pfalz General Administration of Cultural Heritage Protection and Research tried needlework on a piece of linen under the tutelage of Zhang Xiaohong, an officially acknowledged “inheritor” of

national intangible cultural heritage.

She said with emotion: “The story of Zhang Xiaohong sharing her decades of experience with her daughter reminds me of my mother teaching me to do needlework when I was a child. Though Germany and China are thousands of miles apart, the similarity in culture and art is amazing.”

Barbara Zwiebelberg, 78, was attracted by the brightly colored folk paintings of Wan'an farmers. She said: “I never expected Chinese paintings to be so bold and bright and full of life and energy, much more than black-and-white ink paintings as I had long thought they were. Despite their rich artistic heritage, Chinese artists have maintained modesty in communication with the rest of the world. The exhibition's theme is appropriate. It has given us who have never been to China a chance to get to know it and conduct face-to-face exchanges with Chinese artists.”

Liang Pengcheng, an artist from Wan'an skilled in a style known as “farmer painting”, gave his explanation. He attributed the genre's origin to folk painters in late ancient times. The new genre, he said, follows the pulse of the times and uses the plain language of color to express the artist's inner feelings and reflect the lives of the common people in modern China.

“Such an approach to artistic creation,” Liang said, “allows it to represent China's folk culture and let the outside know about China and listen to our voice. The exhibition gave us farmer painters a chance to exchange with foreign artists. It will inspire us to produce more and better works.” ■

Special event: 'Tracing Marx's Thoughts'

Xu Yanqing and Liu Lang

The year 2018 marks the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth, the 170th anniversary of the publishing of the Communist Manifesto and the 40th anniversary of China's reform and opening-up drive. It also marks the beginning of a new era after the 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China.

Human society has changed profoundly during the last two centuries. Nevertheless, Marx still enjoys respect from all over the world, and his theories still shine with the brilliance of truth. In a bid to figure out the underlying reason why the Chinese people chose to follow Marxism and have upheld it ever since, we set out on a journey of investigation and of thinking.

From April 23 to 29, the Research Center for People-to-People Diplomacy of the CPAFFC joined hands with the Yan'an Municipal Committee of the CPC and the People's Government of Yan'an to hold a special event entitled Tracing Marx's Thoughts — Commemorating Marx's 200th Birthday. During the series of activities, a delegation of Chinese scholars followed the footprints of Marx to his hometown in Trier, Germany; helped finalize the signing of a memorandum between Yan'an and Trier to establish a friendship-city relationship; reviewed the CPC's original mission statement at the



CPAFFC Vice-President Xie Yuan addressed the forum.

birthplace of *The Communist Manifesto*; exchanged ideas with British scholars and entrepreneurs on Marxism's significance to the current world at the British Museum, where Marx wrote his masterpiece, *The Capital*; and held profound discussions with local officials, scholars, young students and entrepreneurs from Germany, Belgium and Britain along the journey. Through the activities, they gained intuitive recognition of Marx's lofty spirit and brilliant ideas.

First stop: Trier, Germany — hometown of Karl Marx

The black majestic Roman gate stands. River Moselle meanders by. Trier, one of the oldest cities in Germany, was the center of rule in the northern Alps during the Roman

Empire era. Two-hundred years ago, a great thinker, Karl Marx, was here.

In the conference room of the city hall, at noon on April 24, 2018, Dr Li Xinyu, director general of the Research Center for People-to-People Diplomacy of the CPAFFC and members of the Yan'an delegation met with Mayor Wolfram Leibert. The head of the delegation briefed German hosts on the historical relationship between Yan'an and Trier, the cooperation in the cultural and tourism industries and his understanding of the two cities' geographic characteristics and the possibilities of carrying out future people-to-people exchanges. On both sides, the two sides fully expressed their opinions and had a sincere conversation until they reached an agreement.

enhancing future exchanges by efforts from both sides. Mayor Wolfram Leib then took a pen from a pocket and, together with Li, signed the Yan'an-Trier memorandum establishing the friendship-city relationship.

Yan'an has been the spiritual home of all Chinese Communists, for the northwestern city witnessed a historic leap forward in the CPC's development from its founding with insufficient theoretical preparation to its maturity when the Party became fully experienced in integrating Marxism with China's reality. Yan'an was thus acknowledged as a holy land for Marxism, where it finally completed its localization in the mammoth Asian nation. The similar historical roles of Yan'an and Trier inspired the Research Center for People-to-People Diplomacy to promote a friendship-city relationship between the two places. Mayor Wolfram Leib told the Chinese guests that an exhibition on Karl Marx's biography and masterpieces was planned to relive his academic and political career. Visitors would come to better understand how the 19th century, which featured industrialization, urbanization and turbulent social changes, influenced the great philosopher and economist, and how his creative thoughts influenced later generations.

Second stop: Brussels, Belgium
— birthplace of *The Communist Manifesto*

Xi Jinping, general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, praises *The Communist Manifesto* as "a classic work of scientific insight into the law of the development of human society

brimming with struggle spirit, critical spirit and revolutionary spirit, which upholds the position of the people and seeks the interests of the people and the liberation of all mankind". On April 25, the delegation arrived at the birthplace of *The Communist Manifesto* — Brussels, Belgium, where Marx and Friedrich Engels conceived and completed the great masterpiece, which affected the whole world. Since its elaboration 170 years ago, Marxism has spread worldwide. No other thoughts or theories have ever produced such a broad and profound impact on mankind as Marxism has done in history. From 1845 to 1848, Marx lived a life of displacement as a political refugee in Brussels. Volunteers from the Young Marxists, an organization active in Europe, told the delegation that despite having to move nine times in three years, Marx worked with all his passion to complete three of his masterpieces, undaunted by the tough living circumstances. The three were *The Poverty of Philosophy*, *Wage Labour and Capital* and *The Communist Manifesto*, which was jointly written with Engels in the Swan Restaurant in 1848 and which has changed the course of human history.

Third stop: Manchester, Britain —
pioneer of the Industrial Revolution

Manchester is the birthplace of the cotton textile industry as well as the first industrialized city in the world. Two centuries ago, the cotton textile industry first appeared in Manchester to raise the curtain for the Industrial Revolution. In 1842, Friedrich Engels went to the Victoria Mill — owned by his father, Friedrich Engels Sr, and

Peter Ermen — as an intern, where he got to know the life of workers. On his way to Britain, young Engels stopped at the editorial office of *Rheinische Zeitung* and met Marx for the first time. A long friendship began.

Fourth stop: London — where *The Capital* was written and published

From August 1849 onward, Karl Marx lived in London until he died 34 years later on March 14, 1883. Leading a hand-to-mouth existence, Marx devoted all his time to academic studies. After he obtained a reader's card to enter the reading room of the British Museum in June 1850, he went there almost every day, from dawn to dusk, reading and studying — and finally coming up with the first volume of the masterpiece *The Capital*.

His diligence and profound knowledge made him a prolific theorist. The first Chinese edition of *The Complete Works of Karl Marx and Frederick Engels* has 50 volumes, the second more than 60 volumes (whose publication is expected to be completed by 2020) and the international edition of more than 160 volumes. What an admirable wealth of intellect!

Fifth stop: Highgate Cemetery,
London — where Marx sleeps
eternally underground

The quiet and solemn Highgate Cemetery took us back to the Britain of the 19th century. The gravestone with Marx's bust on top was not hard to find. His body was initially buried at a corner of Hyde Park but was moved to the present location in 1954 when a group of British communists raised funds to build the new tomb.

After decades of displaced life, Karl Marx finally got to lie alongside his relatives and sleep his long sleep in peace. Standing before his grave, what we felt was not sadness but strength — a strength that encouraged us to press ahead on our way toward our goal. We drew strength from the epitaph on the great man's gravestone: "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it." Ah, this is the power of practical philosophy. Two-hundred years have passed but China, and the world at large, has never forgotten him.

Sixth stop: Yan'an, China — Venue of the forum marking the 200th anniversary of Karl Marx's birth

On May 14, Vice-President Xie Yuan of the Chinese People's Association for Friendship with Foreign Countries, attended the forum Tracing Marx's Thoughts — Commemorating Marx's 200th Birthday in Yan'an. The forum is of great significance in summarizing the journey of tracing Marx's thoughts in Europe and to promote the localization, modernization and popularization of Marxism in China.

The forum comprised three sub-forums — Marxism and Human Development, Reform and Opening-Up and the Localization of Marxism and Marxism and Youth's Mission. Addressing the forum, Xie spoke highly of the memorandum between Yan'an and Trier for establishing a friendship-city relation. He urged Yan'an to invite the mayor of Trier for a visit "as soon as possible" and promote practical cooperation between the two cities,

especially strengthening exchanges and interactions among the youth.

Meanwhile, doctoral postgraduates from China, Germany, Kazakhstan, Vietnam, Laos and Nepal participated in the youth forum to share their understanding of Marxism and the youth's mission.

Kumar, a Nepalese student from Beijing Normal University majoring in philosophy and China, said at the forum:

"It is believed that the Chinese civilization has a history of over 5,000 years, with profound culture. As an international student, I sometimes feel confused and don't know how to comprehend Chinese culture. In other words, what is China's culture or the new China culture?"

"What is the spirit of new China or China spirit? At the forum, Vice President of the Yan'an Municipal Party School Liu Weiping quoted President Xi Jinping: 'We need to stick to the Marxist culture of seeking the truth from the facts. This is a scientific culture.' Professor Liu's words enlightened me, helping me understand that Marxism is a conviction that demands perseverance, especially when one is faced with hardship.

"Marxism is the seed of the idea of serving the people when you believe that people's interests are above all else. Because the CPC has persisted in the belief that the Party should take the people's interests as the top priority in its development, communism has become widespread."

From April to May, from Trier to Brussels, to the British Museum, to Highgate Cemetery and back to Yan'an, we followed the footprints of

Karl Marx. Though a single month is a very short period in one's lifetime, this one-month journey created a sparkling and unforgettable memory.

Director General Li Xinyu of the CPAFFC's Research Center for People-to-People Diplomacy wrote in her work diary: "Why did the Chinese people choose to follow Marxism in the past and now come up with the need to localize Marxism in China? With that question in mind I set out on a journey to trace the great man's thoughts. I harvested a great deal along the way.

"Finally, when I stood in front of Karl Marx's grave, I found the answer to all the questions mentioned above: 'The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways. The point, however, is to change it.' Isn't that the source of Marxism's localization in China? Just as President Xi Jinping has said, 'Empty talk will lead the country astray, while hard work rejuvenates the nation.' Only when integrating theories with practice can we bring about real changes. Karl Marx's statement that the philosophers' point is to change the world happened to strike chord with the Chinese culture that emphasizes the importance of practice."

The world has never stopped studying and arguing about Marxism as a thought and a theory. Understanding has evolved from "Marx was right" to "Marx might be right", and then to "Marx, you were definitely right!"

It is noticeable that whenever the mankind is at loss about its progress or when the world gets confused as where to go, Marxism is there to guide mankind in the right direction in its persistent pursuit of the ideal society. ■