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On the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

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Abstract

Purpose – In human history, poverty for most and prosperity for few is the norm. Thus, no theory or practice of common prosperity has been developed. Marxism first formulated the theory of common prosperity, and the classical Marxist authors conducted theoretical exploration on the issue of common prosperity, forming a series of scientific conclusions.

Design/methodology/approach – The century-long practical history of the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the great practice of leading the Chinese people in getting rid of poverty, letting some people and regions get rich first and ultimately achieving the goal of common prosperity.

Findings – Common prosperity is the great practice of the CPC that leads all Chinese people in building a modern socialist country in an all-round way in the new era.

Originality/value – The path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics will certainly arise in the process of the great practice of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. Based on the anti-poverty theory and the “spirit of poverty alleviation” from the battle against poverty with Chinese characteristics, the theory of common prosperity and its spirit with Chinese characteristics will certainly be formed. The above conclusions constitute the basic principles of the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics.

Keywords The Sixth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of CPC, Common prosperity, Objective basis, Realization path, Theoretical spirit

Paper type Research paper

1. Raise of the question

Opinion of the CPC Central Committee and the State Council on Supporting Zhejiang in Building a Demonstration Zone for Achieving Common Prosperity Through High-Quality Development, hereinafter referred to as “the Opinion”, issued by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (the CPC Central Committee) and the State Council in 2021, states that “The fifth plenary session of the 19th CPC central committee made a major strategic plan for solidly propelling common prosperity.” On October 29, 2020, the CPC Central Committee proposed that one of “the long-range objectives for China to achieve socialist modernization by 2035 basically” is “a better life for the people, with more notable and substantial progress in the well-rounded human development and achieving common prosperity for everyone”. According to *Resolution of the CPC Central Committee on the Major Achievements and Historical Experience of the Party over the Past Century* (The CPC Central Committee, 2021), the “Ten Clarifications” of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era emphasizes that “It makes clear that the overarching goal of upholding and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics is to realize socialist modernization and national rejuvenation, and, based on finishing the building of a moderately prosperous



society in an all-round way, a two-step approach should be taken to build China into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, strong, democratic, culturally advanced, harmonious, and beautiful by the middle of the century, and to promote national rejuvenation through a Chinese path to modernization.” From this, it can be seen that common prosperity has been the ruling program and action guide for national governance under the leadership of the CPC. Given this, what is the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics like under this program and guide? This paper tries to answer the question.

2. Common prosperity: history, theory and reality

Any path depends on the established objective practice, which tends to be the continuation of historical practice and implementation under the guidance of corresponding theories, thus forming the historical, theoretical and practical elements of the path. The same is true for the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, this paper’s elaboration of the path should first clarify its historical, theoretical and realistic elements.

2.1 Historical element: common prosperity is human’s aspiration for and pursuit of a better future

Prosperity is the opposite of poverty and deprivation (the two words can be used interchangeably). General Secretary Xi (2021b) profoundly pointed out that “Poverty is a chronic affliction of human society.” Throughout human history, we have to admit that although common poverty is rare, poverty for the majority and prosperity for the few is common throughout the dynasties. Common prosperity, or even poverty for the few and prosperity for the majority, has never existed. Since common prosperity has never appeared in human history, naturally, there has never been a corresponding path. This is the basic historical fact about prosperity in the history of humankind.

Since common prosperity has never appeared in human history, the realization of common prosperity was only people’s rosy aspiration for and persistent pursuit of the future of society in history. For example, with the beautiful imagination and aspiration for common prosperity, the political demands of peasants in uprisings in different eras of Chinese history have coincidentally embodied the germ of the idea of common prosperity. In the Northern Song dynasty, Wang Xiaobo and Li Shun put forward the slogan of “equal status, equal wealth,” presenting dissatisfaction with the then condition of inequality of social status and wealth and the demand for improvement. In the late Ming dynasty, Li Zicheng put forward the idea of “equalizing the land and exempting the tax,” which referred to the differences in land ownership and the issue of taxation. The peasants’ uprising of the Taiping Heavenly Kingdom at the end of the Qing Dynasty involved not only the issue of land ownership but also the pursuit of a better society of common prosperity, proposing that lands, food, clothes and money should be shared to ensure the even distribution everywhere and access of everyone to food and clothing. Although all these peasants’ revolts proposed “common” featuring egalitarianism, these proposals were not implemented during the uprisings and failed to work when the revolts failed. They could not bring equality and equity to the people, let alone “common prosperity.” Instead, it may lead to “common poverty” along with the failures of these revolts. However, the ideological element of “common” (especially common prosperity) has been deeply rooted in the Chinese nation and has become the traditional gene, ideological source, and practical reference for current theories and practice regarding common prosperity.

2.2 Theoretical element: the theory of common prosperity is pioneered by Marxism

Since it is a historical norm that common prosperity has never been realized, the theory of common prosperity was never formed in history until Marx and Engels pioneered the

scientific theory of common prosperity. Thus, this scientific theory is an integral part of Marxist theory. Marx, Engels and Deng Xiaoping respectively distilled the basic principles and fundamental approaches of the Marxist theory of common prosperity from the practice of their times.

Marx gained profound insight into the fundamental laws of capitalism – “Producing surplus value or profits is the absolute law of this mode of production (Marx, 1972, p. 679).” This reveals that the fundamental law of capitalist production is the production of surplus value, forming the Marxist theory of surplus value. Driven by this law, the capitalist economy always ends up in the issue of polarization, which is manifested in two specific ways: On the one hand, the bourgeoisie accumulates increasing capital, and on the other hand, the proletariat becomes increasingly poor. Given this unique phenomenon in capitalism, Engels (2012, p. 329) pointed out that “On the one hand, immeasurable wealth and a superfluidity of products with which the buyers cannot cope. On the other hand, the great mass of society proletarianized, transformed into wage-laborers, and thereby disabled from appropriating to themselves that superfluidity of products. The splitting up of society into a small class, immoderately rich, and a large class of wage-laborers devoid of all property, brings it about that this society smothers in its own superfluidity, while the great majority of its members are scarcely, or not at all, protected from extreme want.” According to Engels’ elaboration, it is not difficult to understand that polarization is an inevitable phenomenon, an inevitable end of capitalist private ownership, which means that poverty is an inevitable product of private ownership, especially capitalist private ownership. Driven by the law of surplus value, the contradictory movement of the capitalist mode of production objectively and inevitably brings about poverty for the majority (forming the proletariat) and prosperity for the few (forming the bourgeoisie), and the evolution of capitalist private ownership inevitably leads to the infinite accumulation of capital, which in turn inevitably leads to the infinite accumulation of relative and absolute poverty for the working class. This phenomenon of polarization is “alienation”, which is profoundly explained in Marx’s theory of alienation. “As long as there is private property, there will be ‘alienation’, there will be a gap between rich and poor in the production, possession, distribution, and consumption of wealth, and poverty will remain (Zhang, 2007)”. “The worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and size (Marx, 2012, p. 51).” This means that the polarization shows an increasing trend.

In that case, how to eliminate the gap between the rich and the poor? And how to slow down or even stifle the tendency of increased polarization? In this regard, Marx and Engels have given the most fundamental solution: the proletariat overthrows the bourgeois state power, establishes socialist state power under the leadership of a proletarian party, eliminates bourgeois private ownership under socialist state power and establishes socialist public ownership, under which people can ultimately eliminate poverty and realize common prosperity through collaboration and hard work. Guided by the above concept, Marx and Engels envisioned that the fundamental purpose of the future communist society would be “production for the wealth of all”, where the wealth of all is the common prosperity discussed herein. According to the above statement of Marx and Engels, the fundamental law of modern social development is still that only by eliminating capitalist private ownership and establishing communist public ownership can the people finally achieve common prosperity.

Based on the practice of socialist construction since the founding of New China, Deng Xiaoping revealed that the root cause of poverty in socialist countries is the low level of productive forces. He profoundly pointed out that “At the beginning of building socialism, the level of productive forces in backward countries is inferior to that of the developed capitalist countries, and it is impossible to eliminate poverty. Thus, socialism must vigorously develop productive forces, gradually eradicate poverty, and constantly raise the people’s living standards (Deng, 1993a, p. 10).” According to Deng’s statement, poverty and the possibility of

polarization still exist in socialist countries at the initial stage of their establishment. However, poverty in socialist countries is caused by the low level of productive forces rather than the socialist system. Therefore, it is possible to get rid of poverty and move towards prosperity by vigorously developing productive forces under the socialist system.

The above statements of Marx, Engels and Deng Xiaoping respectively revealed the objective root causes of poverty from production relations and productive forces and further proposed solutions and approaches to getting rid of poverty and moving towards prosperity, forming the Marxist theories of anti-poverty and common prosperity.

2.3 Realistic element

The practice of common prosperity and the corresponding path and theories will be continuously enriched and improved during the building of a modern socialist country in the new era in an all-round way and the process of rural revitalization therein.

Undoubtedly, the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics for common prosperity in the new era and the choice and formation of this path embody the basic elements of traditional Chinese culture and the core principles of Marxism. However, they are nurtured, formed and developed in the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which is, looking ahead, the great practice of building a modern socialist country in the new era.

In the great practice of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics is bound to be formed. As General Secretary Xi (2020b) pointed out, “China has achieved what developed countries have taken centuries to achieve in several decades, and our country’s economic development has been dramatic. Its achievements have been world-renowned, harboring great momentum, vitality, and potential for theory creation.” The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics includes both the anti-poverty theory (Li, 2021) and the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. As an integral part of the theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, these theories are derived from the great practice of corresponding aspects of socialism with Chinese characteristics and the path formed therein, reflecting that the issues of each era drive the theoretical innovation of each era. General Secretary Xi (2020a) made a profound exposition on it: “The issues of the times are the driving force of theoretical innovation. Marx, Engels, Lenin, etc., all advanced theoretical innovation by thinking about and answering the issues of their times.”

In terms of the generation and formation of the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics in the new era, it is necessary to have a deep, comprehensive grasp of the new problems and phenomena that emerge in the great practice of building a modern socialist country and promoting rural revitalization. Based on comprehensively grasping these two aspects, build a keen understanding of the practical process and realistic elements of moving toward common prosperity. Since this is the case, sound answers must be given to the following two questions.

The first question is how to gain profound insight into the objective process and great practice of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics in the new era. To this end, it is essential to master a science-based approach to in-depth insight. General Secretary Xi (2020a) has already made a profound elaboration on this: “First, take China’s realities into consideration, following the principle of ‘from Chinese practice, to Chinese practice’. Write papers based on the reality of our country. Make theoretical and policy innovations conform to China’s reality and have Chinese characteristics. Constantly develop socialist political economy and sociology with Chinese characteristics. Second, conduct in-depth research by investigating the real situation and making practical proposals that fully reflect actual situations to make the theoretical and policy innovation sensible and well-grounded. Third, grasp the law, adhere to the Marxist position, viewpoints, and methods, see the essence through the phenomenon and explore the long-term trend from short-term fluctuations to

make innovations in theories and policies advanced and scientific. Fourth, establish an international perspective, explore the common issues facing humanity based on interactions between China and the world, and contribute Chinese wisdom and Chinese solutions to building a community with a shared future for mankind.”

The second question is how to innovate the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics in the new era. For this purpose, it is necessary to understand the national and world conditions in a systematic, comprehensive and complete manner. As for reasonably understanding the national and global conditions, General Secretary Xi (2020a) made a profound elaboration in the same document: “At present, the world economy and our economy are facing many new major issues that require scientific theoretical answers. We should base on our national conditions and development practice, study the new situations and problems facing the world economy and our economy, reveal new features and laws, refine and summarize laws from our economic development practice, and upgrade the practical experience into systematic economic doctrine. We should develop a new realm of contemporary Chinese Marxist political economy, and contribute Chinese wisdom to the innovative development of the Marxist political economy.” and “The practice of reform and opening up and socialist modernization in the new era is the ‘gold mine’ for theoretical and policy research, and there is great potential for theoreticians in the economic and social fields in China.” Xi (2020a) further pointed out that “We should take a long-term view, grasp the general trend, ask for public advice, pool wisdom, study new situations and make new plans.”

In short, by making solid progress in these aspects, the basic principles and theoretical system of the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics can be formed gradually based on realities.

3. The great practice of the CPC in leading the Chinese people from getting rid of poverty to moving toward common prosperity

Entering a new era, China is engaged in the great practice of building China into a modern socialist country in an all-round way under the guidance of the Marxist theories of anti-poverty and common prosperity. In the process of this great practice, as far as the rural areas and agriculture in the new era are concerned, a great practice of rural revitalization is ongoing in an all-round way, all of which is aimed at achieving the ambitious goal of moving toward common prosperity. This means that the solid promotion of common prosperity begins to transit from ideal to practice. In the history of mankind, common prosperity has always been people’s beautiful imagination and wonderful vision of the future, but it has not been put into practice. Against this background of history and reality, the practice of common prosperity will be the realization of common prosperity for the first time in human history during China’s building of a modern socialist country and promoting rural revitalization in an all-round way under the leadership of the CPC. And this reality is objectively predicated on China’s completion of the great task of eradicating poverty and building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way because the fundamental prerequisite of prosperity is the elimination of poverty. General Secretary Xi (2021b) pointed out in his *Speech at the grand gathering to mark China’s accomplishments in poverty alleviation and honor model poverty fighters* that “Poverty eradication has been an ideal of mankind since ancient times and is the basic right of all peoples to pursue a happy life.” It is thus clear that only by eliminating poverty can people move toward prosperity. Therefore, China’s successfully eradicating poverty and building a moderately prosperous society is the objective basis for advancing common prosperity and enables people to understand the historical and contemporary value of the CPC’s great practice of solidly advancing common prosperity in the new era in a broader historical space and time.

Prosperity can be either common or partial. For all human beings, partial prosperity is always accompanied by partial poverty. In human history, “partial prosperity + partial poverty” is a universal phenomenon, and there may be few exceptions. Such exceptions may be common poverty when the wealth of the entire society is reduced to zero because of the decimation of social productivity by factors such as war, plague and climatic disasters. However, there has never been common prosperity as an exception because the fundamental prerequisite for prosperity is a high level of productivity development, which has not occurred at any time in human history. The phenomenon of “partial prosperity + partial poverty” can be subdivided into two phenomena: One may be “prosperity for the few + poverty for the majority,” which is common in human history as low social productivity can only satisfy a few people’s need of prosperity. The other may be “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few,” a phenomenon that has hardly ever occurred in human history, which is also caused by low social productivity. In short, throughout human history, the objective reality has always been the former, not the latter. Besides, the richer the minority, the poorer the majority will be, which is polarization. Polarization often leads to a shift from order to disorder in society, ultimately leading to social breakdown and common poverty. It is thus clear that only by preventing polarization can common poverty be avoided and social stability be maintained. Therefore, this is the bottom-line task of any government in any era when governing a country; otherwise, the government will collapse, and society will be in turmoil. On this basis, only by vigorously promoting social productivity, slowing down the trend of “prosperity for the few + poverty for the majority” and advancing the trend of “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few” can the ambitious goal and great prospect of common prosperity be realized. In short, it is from eradicating poverty to prosperity, and then from “prosperity for the few + poverty for the majority” to “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few”, and finally to the glorious culmination of common prosperity that is the general path of common prosperity.

Nevertheless, as each country faces its different background and conditions, the specific path for each country to achieve common prosperity has both commonalities as well as specificities and differences. In terms of the great practice of the CPC in leading China’s revolution, construction and reform for the past one hundred years, as of the end of 2020, China has achieved the elimination of absolute poverty through the completion of the great task of poverty eradication, and at the same time, has built a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. On this basis, China has embarked on a new journey of building a modern socialist country and promoting rural revitalization on all fronts in 2021, which is also a new journey for the CPC in leading the whole nation moving toward common prosperity (starting in 2021). Reviewing the CPC’s great practice in the past 100 years, the CPC has pioneered the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics, which is from poverty eradication to prosperity, and then from “prosperity for the few + poverty for the majority” to “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few”, and further moving toward common prosperity. Summing up the experiences and lessons learned, the details of this path with Chinese characteristics are as follows:

3.1 Complete eradication of absolute poverty is a great project ensuring basic needs in common prosperity

Poverty and prosperity are two aspects of the same historical process. They are in opposition to each other and consecutive. Only when poverty is eliminated can the people move towards prosperity, and only when some people or regions get rich first can they help others get rich too and achieve common prosperity finally. China had been haunted by poverty for thousands of years, but this long-lasting plague finally ended by the end of 2020. At the grand gathering to mark China’s accomplishments in poverty alleviation and honor model poverty

fighters, General Secretary Xi (2021b) solemnly declared that “China has scored a complete victory in its fight against poverty,” indicating that China has ended the spell of poverty that haunted the Chinese nation for several thousand years. And this complete victory means that China has “completed the arduous task of eradicating absolute poverty (Xi, 2021b),” enabling the Chinese nation to start a great journey from poverty to prosperity. Also, it represents that China has “generated another earthly miracle that will go down in history (Xi, 2021b),” since throughout the history of the world for thousands of years and the development reality of the world today, no other era or country has secured a complete victory of poverty elimination, highlighting China’s miraculous achievements in poverty elimination.

From the general historical logic and theoretical logic, the end of poverty should be the starting point toward prosperity. Therefore, General Secretary Xi (2021b) pointed out that China’s great achievements in poverty eradication are the crystallization of the century-long efforts of the CPC. The results of the CPC’s century-long poverty alleviation practice have made it possible that, on the one hand, the complete victory in the battle against poverty has laid the material foundation for China’s march toward common prosperity in the new era of building a modern socialist country and promoting rural revitalization; on the other hand, in this course, China has developed scientific ideas, sound systems, competent teams and persistent spirits in the Party’s leadership, state power and the socialist system, reform and opening up, and national governance, laying a solid foundation for thoughts, system, teams and spirits in the march toward common prosperity in the new era. The above material and spiritual foundations formed in the poverty eradication process make China’s eradication of poverty and establishment of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way by the end of 2020 become a great project ensuring basic needs in China’s move toward common prosperity starting in 2021. As pointed out in the Opinion (The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021): “Since the reform and opening up, by allowing some people and regions to get rich first and then bring prosperity for all later, social productive forces have been greatly liberated and developed, and people’s living standards have been continuously improved. Since the CPC’s 18th National Congress, the Central Party Committee, with Comrade Xi Jinping at its core, has been staying true to its original intention, bearing the mission in mind, and uniting and leading the entire Party and people of all ethnic groups in China to make unremitting efforts to achieve common prosperity. Historic achievements have been made in building a prosperous society in an all-round way. In particular, the complete victory in poverty eradication has solved the problem of absolute poverty that has plagued the Chinese nation for thousands of years, setting a solid foundation for advancing common prosperity in the new stage of development.” There is no doubt that the “solid foundation” herein refers to both the material and spiritual foundation formed in the battle against poverty.

3.2 The path out of poverty and the path toward common prosperity are consecutive

It is known that only by getting rid of poverty can people move towards prosperity, and only when some people and regions get rich first can common prosperity for all be achieved finally. Therefore, the process from poverty to prosperity and then to common prosperity must go through the following consecutive stages: If the logical starting point is common poverty, then, only by vigorously developing productive forces based on social stability can the poverty for some people be gradually eliminated and the prosperity for some people be gradually realized, further eliminating common poverty; based on the elimination of common poverty, further development of productivity makes more the rich and fewer the poor regarding “prosperity for the few + poverty for the majority,” which is gradually changed to “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few,” and based on “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few,” further development of productivity makes more the rich

and fewer the poor in the phenomenon of “prosperity for the majority + poverty for the few.” As the trend continues to develop, common prosperity will be achieved in the end.

In short, from the historical, realistic and theoretical logic, the above theoretical deduction is the basic law and trend of human society from poverty to prosperity and then to common prosperity and is the general path from eliminating poverty to reaching common prosperity. It must be observed by all countries and regions, including China. However, a path is composed of general and specific paths. Therefore, the path of poverty reduction with Chinese characteristics is the prerequisite for and foundation of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics.

Based on following the general path from poverty eradication to common prosperity, Deng Xiaoping elaborated this path with Chinese characteristics in the following four aspects: First, it is essential to find a socialist path that can promote rapid economic and social development, whose primary task is to eradicate poverty. [Deng \(1993b, p. 255\)](#) pointed out, “To get rid of poverty, we must find a relatively fast development path. Poverty is not socialism, and socialism does not mean sluggish development.” Second, he emphasized the significance of the order of priority on the path to common prosperity. Allow some people and regions to get rich first and let them lead the others in getting rich later. In other words, “some people and regions get rich first + others get rich later = common prosperity for all.” [Deng \(1993c, p. 155\)](#) profoundly elaborated on it: “Our policy is to let some people and regions get rich first to help the backward regions, which is an obligation for the advanced regions. We adhere to the socialist path, and our fundamental goal is to achieve common prosperity. However, even development is impossible.” Third, in China, capitalism would only bring about polarization and thus would not enable China to realize its ambitious goal and the great prospect of common prosperity. In this regard, [Deng \(1993d, e\)](#) said, “The capitalist path can make a few percent of the Chinese people rich but will definitely not help the rest ninety percent achieve prosperity. (p. 64)” and “Capitalism will allow a few people in certain areas to get rich faster, leading to the rise of the bourgeoisie and producing a group of millionaires. But at most, the number of these people will not reach one percent of the population, while many people will remain poor. (p. 208)” Fourth, in the process of adapting Marxism to the Chinese context, Deng first elaborated on the essence of socialism and clearly pointed out that the essence is not anything else but common prosperity. [Deng \(1993f\)](#) analyzed this issue from the perspective of the underlying laws of socialist development: “The essence of socialism is to liberate and develop productive forces, eliminate exploitation and polarization, and ultimately achieve common prosperity.”

Based on the path of anti-poverty with Chinese characteristics from getting rid of poverty to common prosperity elaborated by Deng Xiaoping, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward a systematic, comprehensive and complete concept of precise poverty alleviation, leading the Chinese people in the practice of anti-poverty with Chinese characteristics and finishing the path of anti-poverty with Chinese characteristics by the end of 2020 ([Li, 2020](#)). At the grand gathering to mark China’s accomplishments in poverty alleviation and honor model poverty fighters, [Xi \(2021b\)](#) pointed out that “For more than 30 years since reform and opening up, the Chinese people have explored actively and struggled tenaciously to walk the path of poverty alleviation with Chinese characteristics.” Standing at the “turning point” of China’s transition from 2020 to 2021, it is reasonable to say that the extension of China’s path of poverty reduction is the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. That is to say, “the Chinese path = the path of poverty reduction with Chinese characteristics + the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics.” As General Secretary [Xi \(2021a\)](#) profoundly pointed out, “Eliminating poverty, improving people’s livelihood, and achieving common prosperity are the essential requirements of socialism.” Also, according to the Opinion ([the CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021](#)), “Common prosperity is the essential requirement of socialism and is the common expectation of the people.”

Furthermore, since China has embarked on a new journey of building a modern socialist country in 2021 and implemented a comprehensive strategy of promoting rural revitalization in response to the problems faced by China's rural areas and agriculture during the journey in the new era, the process of promoting the practice of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics is synchronized with the new march of building a socialist modern country and promoting rural revitalization in an all-round way, which are essentially three aspects of one object and can be promoted synchronously and develop coordinately. The comprehensive building of a modern socialist country and the promotion of rural revitalization are the specific processes of advancing common prosperity, while common prosperity is the goal and beautiful vision of the former two aspects.

3.3 Building a modern socialist country in the new era and promoting rural revitalization in rural areas and agriculture comprehensively is the process of China's realization of common prosperity in the new era solidly

On the basis of the great achievements in poverty eradication and the completion of the comprehensive building of a moderately prosperous society in 2020, China started the great practice of moving toward common prosperity in 2021. The great practice of common prosperity is an ongoing objective process integrated into the new journey of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way and the great practice of promoting rural revitalization in China's rural areas and agriculture in the new era. If the great achievements in poverty eradication and the building of a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way are regarded as laying the material and spiritual foundation for moving toward common prosperity, then the new journey of building a modern socialist country and the great practice of promoting rural revitalization in the new era in an all-round way are the great processes of the CPC leading the Chinese people toward common prosperity in a solid manner. The combination of these three great processes is precisely the great practice of building socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. As the Opinion ([The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021](#)) pointed out, "With China's new journey of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way, it is necessary to put the promotion of common prosperity in a more critical position and make more efforts toward this goal, to let people truly feel that common prosperity is visible, tangible and real."

In the great process and practice of moving toward common prosperity solidly, the realization of common prosperity is the process of relieving the main contradiction of society until it is completely solved. China's principal social contradiction in the new era is the conflict between people's pursuit of a better life and the unbalanced and insufficient development, which is a scientific statement in the Political Report of the 19th National People's Congress in 2017. However, this contradiction remains prominent in the new era currently. As pointed out in the Opinion ([The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021](#)): "At present, the problem of unbalanced and inadequate development is still prominent in China, with relatively large disparities in terms of regional development and income in urban and rural areas, and the basis and conditions for common prosperity vary from region to region." Therefore, promoting the progressive fulfillment of common prosperity can alleviate the major social contradiction in the new era gradually.

Solidly advancing the great process and practice of common prosperity means enabling all Chinese people to live a better life. As pointed out in the Opinion ([The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021](#)), "Common prosperity has distinctive characteristics of the times and Chinese characteristics, which means that all people can generally live in prosperity and self-confidence and enjoy a livable and pleasant environment, harmonious society, and universal access to public services, fulfilling well-rounded development of the people and comprehensive progress of the society and sharing the fruits of reform and

development and a better life through hard work and mutual help.” To enable all Chinese people to live a better life is the vivid embodiment of the CPC’s adherence to and practical implementation of the “people-centered” philosophy of governance.

However, since common prosperity has never been realized in human history, there is no successful, mature experience to draw on. And one of the successful experiences of the CPC in state governance is to experiment first before popularizing. Therefore, advancing the great process and practice of common prosperity requires building demonstration zones for achieving common prosperity. As the Opinion ([The CPC Central Committee and the State Council, 2021](#)) pointed out, “Advancing common prosperity for all is a long-term and arduous task. Thus, we need to select certain areas to carry out pilot schemes and do demonstrations.” Then, what is the pilot scheme? What is to be demonstrated? In the author’s view, it is to take the lead in exploring the basic connotation and principles of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. The essence of this exploration is creating the theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. To this end, at the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs held on August 17, General Secretary Xi Jinping made a systematic and comprehensive discussion of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. The following is a systematic interpretation of it.

4. Theoretical overview of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

Theory and practice are dialectically united. The theory of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics will inevitably be born from the great practice of common prosperity. This theory is an important part of Xi Jinping’s economic thought. At the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs held on August 17, 2021, General Secretary Xi Jinping elaborated on the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics from four aspects, namely, the essence of socialism, as well as the characteristics, the ideology and the path of development regarding Chinese-style modernization, forming a theoretical overview of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics, which is the core principle of China’s path of common prosperity. Xi ([China National Radio \[CNR\], 2021](#)) pointed out that “Bringing prosperity to all is an essential requirement of socialism, as well as an important feature of Chinese-style modernization. We must adhere to the people-centered philosophy of development and bring about common prosperity through high-quality development.” Guided by this speech, this meeting further provided a systematic, comprehensive and complete theoretical overview of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics, including specific connotations, basic principles, historical practice and the specific path.

4.1 Specific connotations of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

What exactly is the specific connotation of China’s path of common prosperity? This is the primary question when it comes to discussing common prosperity. Only when the primary question is clarified can the scope and substance of the discussion be defined. At the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, Xi ([CNR, 2021](#)) emphasized that “The common prosperity we are working to achieve is for everyone and covers enrichment of people’s lives in both the material and non-material sense. It is not prosperity for a minority, nor is it rigid egalitarianism.” That is to say, the “common” regarding common prosperity has three connotations: First, the prosperity is “for everyone,” rather than “for the few”; second, it covers enrichment of people’s lives in both the material and non-material sense, which eliminates the inherent perception and prejudice that enrichment is limited to material lives, ignoring spiritual lives; third, it is clear that “common

prosperity is not equal to rigid egalitarianism,” that is, “common” is not equal to “uniformity” and “egalitarianism.” This critical distinction clarifies people’s inherent mindset. The above three aspects of the connotations clarify the basic principles, historical practice and basic means regarding the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics.

4.2 The basic principles of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

Any path must comply with corresponding principles. The difference in principles observed and the degree of compliance with principles often determine the correctness and implementation efficiency of the path. The same is true for the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. So, what are the basic principles that must be adhered to on this path? At the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs, Xi (CNR, 2021) pointed out that “We should adhere to the people-centered philosophy of development, promote common prosperity through high-quality development, and properly balance the relationship between equity and efficiency. We should establish basic institutional arrangements enabling coordination and complementarity between the primary, secondary, and tertiary distribution. We should intensify our efforts to regulate distribution through taxation, social insurance, and transfer payments while also working to make these efforts more precise. This will help us expand the relative size of the middle-income group, raise incomes among low-income earners, properly adjust excessive incomes, and prohibit illicit income, creating an olive-shaped distribution structure that is larger in the middle and smaller at each end. By doing so, we will be able to promote social fairness and justice and people’s well-rounded development and make solid strides toward the goal of common prosperity for all.” This clarifies the fundamental principle, general principle and specific principle of following the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. Among them, the general and fundamental principle is to “promote social fairness and justice and people’s well-rounded development and make solid strides toward the goal of common prosperity for all (CNR, 2021).” In order to implement this principle effectively, it is necessary to formulate more detailed specific principles to ensure that the general and fundamental principles are put into practice.

To this end, three specific principles were formulated at the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs regarding philosophy, path and distribution, that is: (1) Principle of philosophy (CNR, 2021): “Adhere to the people-centered development philosophy,” which reflects the fundamental purpose of the CPC. (2) Principle of the path (CNR, 2021): “Promote common prosperity through high-quality development, and properly balance the relationship between equity and efficiency.” This principle embodies the characteristics of the path of common prosperity chosen by the CPC. (3) Principle of distribution (CNR, 2021): “We should establish basic institutional arrangements enabling coordination and complementarity between the primary, secondary, and tertiary distribution. We should intensify our efforts to regulate distribution through taxation, social insurance, and transfer payments while also working to make these efforts more precise. This will help us expand the relative size of the middle-income group, raise incomes among low-income earners, properly adjust excessive incomes, and prohibit illicit income, creating an olive-shaped distribution structure that is larger in the middle and smaller at each end.” This principle reflects the means of adjustment of the path of common prosperity chosen by the CPC. In general, these three principles are dialectically unified. The principle of philosophy is the starting point, the principle of the path is the means to implement the principle of philosophy, and the principle of distribution concerns how to distribute the fruits of social production under the guidance of the principle of philosophy. These three principles are coherent and successive, forming a continuous action plan that ensures the realization of the fundamental and general principle. Thus, it seems that principles of taking the path of

common prosperity with Chinese characteristics are clear, which are gradually formulated and accumulated, thanks to the practice and theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics since reform and opening up. Nowadays, these fundamental, general and specific principles still need to be and can be implemented in the new era of comprehensively building a socialist modern country and promoting rural revitalization.

4.3 The historical logic of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

The path and principles of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics were not imagined out of thin air but gradually developed in the century-long practice of the CPC in leading the fight against poverty and building a modern socialist country in the new era (Lyu and Li, 2021). Therefore, like other paths with Chinese characteristics, the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics is distinctly practical and scientific. It can be seen that the CPC has led and is leading the Chinese people through three phases, namely, getting rid of poverty, from poverty to prosperity, and finally to common prosperity, forming the historical logic of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics. Regarding poverty elimination, the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs (CNR, 2021) pointed out, “After the launch of reform and opening up in 1978, through a thorough review of both positive and negative historical experiences, our Party came to realize that poverty is not socialism, and thus began breaking down the constraints of outdated systems. This allowed some areas and some people to become better-off first, driving the liberation and development of productive forces.” That is to say, since reform and opening up, the CPC has been keenly aware of the following basic principles of adapting Marxism to the Chinese context: The fundamental purpose of reform and opening up is to consolidate socialism, which requires getting rid of poverty. And poverty elimination requires “breaking down the constraints of outdated systems”, which means abandoning rigid egalitarianism, and “allowing some areas and some people to become better-off first” with appropriate differences. Practice has proved that “allowing some people and areas to get rich first” fully mobilizes the enthusiasm of all parties and stimulates potential productive forces, thereby “driving the liberation and development of productive forces”. And with “the liberation and development of productive forces”, more material and spiritual wealth can be created to eliminate poverty and consolidate socialism. These invaluable intellectual assets have enabled the CPC to lead the Chinese people in getting rid of poverty to common prosperity since the onset of reform and opening up, perfecting socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Based on the material and spiritual wealth accumulated in the fight against poverty since reform and opening up, precise poverty alleviation and building a moderately prosperous society in the new era provide a more solid material and spiritual foundation for China to move from prosperity to common prosperity. Therefore, the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs (CNR, 2021) pointed out that “Since the 18th CPC National Congress held in 2012, the Central Committee has given greater weight to gradually achieving the goal of prosperity for all. To this end, our Party has adopted effective measures to improve people’s wellbeing, win the battles to eradicate extreme poverty and build a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way. These efforts have created conditions conducive to bringing about prosperity for all.”

It is precisely because of the completion of the great task of poverty eradication and the comprehensive construction of a moderately prosperous society by the end of 2020 that the CPC is able to lead the Chinese people in starting a new journey of building a modern socialist country and implementing the great strategy of rural revitalization in an all-round way in 2021, which together constitute the great practice of the CPC leading the Chinese people towards common prosperity, with the ultimate goal of advancing China along the path of

common prosperity. Therefore, the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs (CNR, 2021) pointed out that “We are now marching toward the Second Centenary Goal of building China into a great modern socialist country. In response to the evolution of the principal challenge facing Chinese society and people’s growing needs for a better life, we must make achieving common prosperity the focus of the Party’s efforts to seek happiness for all Chinese people, which will, in turn, solidify the foundations of the Party’s long-term governance.” This shows that common prosperity is both an objective process and a goal to strive for.

4.4 The basic route of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics

Any path is composed of elements, including process and phases, policy and property rights protection, spirit and public opinion, and special provisions. The tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs summarized the basic route of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics with 13 tenets. The author categorized the 13 tenets according to the general elements of paths, forming the specific contents of the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics outlined in this meeting.

Common prosperity cannot be achieved overnight but in phases and step by step. To this end, the meeting (CNR, 2021) made it clear that “common prosperity should be advanced common prosperity in phases”. This indicates that to achieve common prosperity we cannot be too hasty but should advance in phases and achieve common prosperity when the task in each phase is completed.

During the phased advancement of common prosperity, it is important to heed the degree of transition in terms of common prosperity in both chronological and spatial order.

Regarding chronological order, the tenth meeting of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs (CNR, 2021) pointed out that “We should pursue incremental progress and must have a full picture of the long-term, complex, and onerous nature of this goal. We must also encourage all areas to explore effective paths tailored to their own conditions. We will draw together experience and then gradually apply it in other areas.” Rather than a current state, common prosperity is an ambitious ideal and goal to be approached gradually and finally realized in the journey of building a modern socialist country in an all-round way. Therefore, the road to common prosperity with Chinese characteristics is a long, difficult, torturous process in chronological order.

Regarding spatial order, the tenth meeting of the Central Finance and Economics Commission (CNR, 2021) pointed out that “We will work to make our development more balanced, coordinated, and inclusive. We will accelerate efforts to improve the socialist market economy, make regional development more balanced, and boost coordination in development between different industries. Moreover, we will support the development of small and medium-sized enterprises.” Common prosperity is coordinated, balanced and integrated development, rather than even development among regions. Therefore, the path of common prosperity with Chinese characteristics is a competitive process while achieving coordinated, balanced and integrated growth in spatial order.

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