

## Journey to birthplace of Marxism enhance 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 death, a themed exhibition co-hosted by the state and city administrations opened at the State Museum of the Rhineland-Palatinate and simultaneously at the museum. Meanwhile, the renovation of the former residence of Karl Marx was completed and opened to the public. A 5.5-meter 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 commemorative events, the city administration also designed various souvenirs using Marx's image.

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 hometown

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 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 “Ba-s Culture from Sichuan” and “Ja Culture from Yunnan” opened Aug 3. The grand finale staged 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 of Germany to enhance their understanding about China."

*Marcus Reuter, director of the 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. I

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.” ■