

Feature: World's top Marxism expert has a crush on China's socialist model  
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BEIJING, May 6 (Xinhua) – Wearing a white T-shirt printed with the head of Karl Marx, Australian professor Roland Boer is easy to spot in a crowd. His students say this is his typical and favorite look.

Boer, professor at the School of Humanities and Social Science of Newcastle University in Australia, was awarded the prestigious Isaac and Tamara Deutscher Prize, the highest in Marxism academia.

He met with Xinhua reporters here in Beijing recently, ahead of the 200th anniversary of the birth of Karl Marx, one of the most important thinkers in modern history.

Although he speaks little Chinese, Boer was able to freely speak such phrases in Chinese as "sinicization of Marxism," "reform and opening up," "socialist market economy," "poverty reduction," "harmony with diversity," and the like.

Born in 1961 as the son of a Presbyterian minister, Boer is not an "average scholar," whose academic path "took an unorthodox turn during a course in political and liberation theology" while studying for a bachelor's degree in the 1980s. He found interest in using Marxist analysis for economic and social phenomena and he did the same during his master's degree. "Marx has always been part of my work ever since, for more than 30 years."

Boer believes that the greatest thinkers are "actually on the margins or outside the mainstream."

"He (Marx) grew up in a Jewish family. His parents became Christian in cultural sense. He didn't go on to a university position. He didn't get a regular job, had to leave Germany, had to leave France ... he was really on the margins of the usual sort of thing," said Boer. "That's where real new discoveries take place."

The particular social context at that time "provided an impetus for someone like Marx to make the breakthroughs" to examine "the functioning of capitalism and the way it works." In his opinion, Marx and his collaborator Friedrich Engels were able to truly see the appalling state of the working class, the profound social disruption and other massive changes in England after industrialization, which "was an inspiration for both of them."

In view of that the West has witnessed a renewed interest in socialist ideas and Marxist ideas after the 2008 global financial crisis, Boer said, citing Marx's 151-year-old masterpiece *Das Kapital* as an example. In a sense Marx was describing a capitalism that was still to come. "He saw what was coming as it were and it's even more relevant now than it was then."

Boer pointed out that in volume 3 of *Das Kapital*, Marx did have a description of the financialization of the market "where money just produces money," something he says occurs today.

"This is the economic model that the United States has been following for a while. The richest people don't make anything. They don't build infrastructure but just get their money producing money," said Boer.

"The fact that people since 2008 especially have been returning to examine Marxism analysis indicates how relevant it is for current issues," he added.

That's one of the reasons Boer found it fascinating to study Marxism and socialism, particularly in China. "The Capitalism system is geared to make the rich richer so the have-nots still have-nots."

Socialism means "the lives of everybody should be improved not just a select group," said Boer, adding that socialism's superiority is its emphasis on justice and equality for all.

"I think that's the wisdom of China's reform and opening-up to realize the importance of that," he said, referencing China's anti-poverty campaign.

Statistics show that China has lifted 700 million people out of poverty through 40 years of reform and opening-up, which is widely described as the greatest human rights achievement of modern times. Boer noticed that more and more countries are interested in China's model "focusing on long term planning and stability."

"Even in Europe like Greece or Hungary or Serbia, countries that have been sort of marginalized in Europe have increasing engagement with an alternative model that China is offering," he said.

Having a crush on China, Boer currently spends about six months in the country every year, teaching at Renmin University and directing a research project called "Socialism in Power" in collaboration with a number of key Chinese institutions and universities.

He told Xinhua that he had never imagined in the past that he would be so engaged in China. "There was no plan in a sense to it but I found myself drawn into it."

Traveling around China, Boer has been committed to trying to understand what Marxism is all about and what China is doing with its socialist construction. In order to read the Marxist literature available here, Boer started to learn his 10th language – Chinese, in his 50s.

Boer said what interests him most is China's creation of a socialist market economy and socialist democracy, and its sinicization of Marxism. Boer says each country develops its own approach to universal questions.

To examine how China is working on the basic right to economic well-being in rural areas, Boer led a team to create a massive open online course by filming in Ruijin, Jiangxi Province, in Fujian Province, and others. He was pleased to find an ethos in these places, which are "with the peasants first of all focused on making sure that they have enough food, that they have safe housing, that they have warm clothes, that life is secure and then they'll become communists."

In regard to the development of Marxism in China, Boer compared it to a tree taking root in a different soil and growing in its own way. "It is Marxism but I see Marxism as a living tradition."

According to Boer, he's been closely following the development of Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era. He said that he actually studied Chairman Xi's works before the first volume of Xi's book on the governance of China. "Xi is taking another step in light of Chinese conditions, history, culture and recent developments and the longer past."

In fact, Boer is one of many Australians who are fascinated by China. He told Xinhua that there is a generational shift in Australia, with more interest in China developing among younger people.

Boer laughs at a suggestion that he is among the younger generation. "Elderly" more like it, he says.