

*Original Paper*

# Mao Zedong's Development of Socialist Democratic Politics in the Early Period of New China and Contemporary Revelations

Zhiwei Niu<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Xi'an FanYi University, School of Marxism, Shaanxi, Xi'an, China

Received: September 19, 2023 Accepted: November 06, 2023 Online Published: November 25, 2023

doi:10.22158/assc.v5n4p156

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/assc.v5n4p156>

## **Abstract**

*In the new era, China's institutional system has been continuously improved, and a series of systems under which the people are masters of their own house, which is a sine qua non for the development of socialist democratic politics in China, has also been upheld and perfected. In the early days of the founding of New China, Mao Zedong, the founding leader of the People's Republic of China, made great efforts in the exploration of socialist democratic politics. At the beginning of the new China, the development of democratic politics was plagued with problems, the root of which was the inadequacy of the state system. In response to this situation, Mao Zedong made fruitful explorations of the system of people's congresses, multiparty cooperation and political consultation under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC), the system of regional ethnic autonomy, and the system of grassroots selfgovernance, laying the foundation of China's institutional system. In developing democratic politics with Chinese characteristics in the new era, it is important to learn from the experience and inspiration of Mao's series of explorations, to continuously improve and implement the relevant systems, to grasp the transformation of institutional advantages into governance effectiveness, and to adhere to the fundamental leadership of the Party.*

## **Keywords**

*Mao Zedong, Democracy, The masses, system*

## **1. Introduction**

The Fourth Plenary Session of the Nineteenth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has profoundly explained the "mapping" of our country's system, which is very much characterised by Chinese features, and which is centred on the fact that the people are the fundamental

driving force behind the development of our country and the implementation of its system. At the Plenary Session, one of the fundamental institutional systems that China adheres to and improves is that of the people being the masters of their own house, highlighting the idea of people centred development. In the early days of the founding of the State, when our democratic political system was very imperfect, MAO Zedong made great efforts to promote the building of a system in this regard, which has had far-reaching effects on the present day.

## **2. Difficulties Faced by the Country in the Early Years of the New China**

The Party's centennial birthday, and from 1921 to the founding of New China through the twenty-eight years of bloodshed is still vivid in our minds. The founding of New China really enabled the Chinese nation to realise its independence and complete the great leap of "standing up", but a century of turmoil has left our country riddled with holes and institutional devastation.

Economically, during the Kuomintang's rule, the oppressed Chinese people were subjected to heavy taxes and levies because of the need to maintain huge military expenditures and to pay reparations to foreign powers. Coupled with the negligence of the domestic market under its rule, speculation was rampant. For example, when Beijing and Tianjin were just liberated, there were more than 200 private banks (banks and moneychangers), and the funds invested in production accounted for only 17% of the funds in the front accounts, while the remaining 70% or more went into commercial speculation; the vast majority of the banks and moneychangers had other back accounts in addition to the front accounts (one book, two books, and more than three books), and the funds used in the back accounts accounted for more than 80% of the funds, and the back and front accounts accounted for more than 80% of the funds, and the back and front accounts accounted for more than 80% of the funds. More than 80% of the funds, before and after the account, into the production of only 1–4%, more than 96% for commercial speculation. The chaos in the market caused by this state of affairs led to serious inflation, resulting in a sharp fall in the value of the currency and soaring prices.

Militarily, although the founding of the new China was a great encouragement and the people really stood up, the war of people's liberation was not yet completely over. Millions of Kuomintang (KMT) troops were still dispersed in Guangdong, Guangxi, Sichuan and Guizhou, etc., and in the liberated areas, there were even vicious incidents such as riots between remnants of the KMT and local bullies, whose aim was to stop the new China in its infancy. In these areas, the greatest victims are still the people.

In the international context, many countries favoured the establishment of people's democracies, but most of the countries that received support for the establishment of New China were still struggling for national liberation and independence. Because of the weak national strength of these countries, the support that the new China received from the international community was still very limited, and its influence in the international arena was negligible. The Western imperialist countries, led by the United States, were bound to play an obstructive role in China's rise because of ideological conflicts,

and diplomatic blockades and conflicts against China were inevitable.

### **3. Mao Zedong's Development of Socialist Democracy in the Early Years of the Founding of New China**

#### *3.1 System of Popular Congresses*

Marxism spread rapidly after the October Revolution in Russia. The May Fourth Movement in China also broke out under the influence of its rapid spread, and then the Communist Party of China was founded in 1921, using Marxism as a weapon to arm the whole party from the beginning to the end. It was with this weapon that the Party was able to win the revolution and establish a new China. After 28 years of arduous practice, the CPC has learnt the lesson of recognising the decisive role of the people in historical development, and has always aimed at raising the status of the people as the main body of the nation, and enabling them to take effective control of the power they should have in the new China. Through his study of the Marxist doctrine of the state, Mao Zedong said as early as 1940, "China can now adopt a system of all people's congresses, provincial people's congresses, county people's congresses, district people's congresses up to township people's congresses, and have the government elected by the congresses at all levels." (Mao Zedong election, 1991) This was the initial conception of the system of people's congresses in China. And with the success of the meetings at all levels, the people felt that the CPC had brought them real rights, that the people were no longer an oppressed and enslaved group, and that their enthusiasm for participating in political life had increased significantly, and that they had more confidence in the CPC to lead the people forward.

#### *3.2 The Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation System under the Leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC)*

The question of whether the democratic parties should stay or go has always been the focus of debate among the parties, and there is a wide range of opinions within the Party. On the fundamental premise that the new China must adhere to the leadership of the CPC, many people believed that there was no longer a need for the democratic parties to exist. However, Mao Zedong always believed that the democratic parties could play a supervisory role, which would have a significant impact on the development of the Party and the country. Thus, at the time of the founding of the new China, he stated that "a political consultative conference must be convened which includes the democratic parties... to proclaim the founding of the People's Republic of China and to elect a democratic coalition government to represent the Republic..." (Mao Zedong Election (Volume 4), 1991) This system was also adopted in 1946 as the first democratic party in the People's Republic of China, and was then adopted in 1946 as the first democratic party in the People's Republic of China. [This system was also established with the convening of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference on 28 September 1949, and the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China, promulgated in 1954, included the democratic parties as an important member of the united front of

democracy, thus legally defining this fundamental political system.

### *3.3 Regional Ethnic Autonomy System*

At the time of the victory in the war of resistance against Japan in 1945, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China gave clear instructions on Inner Mongolia, requesting it to establish a local autonomous government composed of its own nationalities. How to unite the various ethnic groups requires a long period of practice and exploration; in 1952, China promulgated the Outline of Regional Ethnic Autonomy of the People's Republic of China, which clearly defined the content of the system. In 1953, during the transition period, Mao Zedong demanded that "...all ethnic groups should be guaranteed equality in all rights, and regional ethnic autonomy should be implemented. .... gradually develop into political, economic, and cultural (which includes steady and necessary social reforms) for all nationalities, and to eliminate the de facto inequalities among the nationalities inherited from history." [In 1984, China promulgated the Law of the People's Republic of China on Regional Ethnic Autonomy, which clearly stipulates the rights and obligations of all ethnic groups in all aspects, and this autonomy law continues to be improved to this day.

### *3.4 Grassroots Mass Self-Governance System*

As early as the founding of the People's Republic of China, the grass-roots mass self-governance system was initially explored, and as one of China's basic political systems, its emergence was in keeping with the times. Because of the differences between urban and rural areas, there are two types of autonomous organisations: urban neighbourhood committees and rural village committees. Since 1950, neighbourhood committees have been established in various places in accordance with local conditions. Due to the lack of corresponding laws and regulations, the size and functions of the neighbourhood committees varied, and some members of the committees used their power to create chaos and use their power for personal gain. 1953 Peng Zhen made it clear that the organisational nature of the neighbourhood committees should be mass self-governance. Mao Zedong and other central leaders agreed with Peng Zhen and unified the names of the organisations. In 1954, the Regulations on the Organisation of Urban Residents' Committees were promulgated, stipulating the nature, role and organisational status of the Neighbourhood Committees. In contrast to the neighbourhood committees, the village committees emerged after the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) when the household contract responsibility system was universally implemented, and were only formally established in 1987 with the adoption of the Organic Law of the Villagers' Committees (for Trial Implementation).

The system of mass self-governance at the grass-roots level was put forward by Mao Zedong and other national leaders in order to stabilise the nascent people's democratic dictatorship of the new China, in the light of Marxist theories and the actual situation of the country's large population, and it has distinctive Chinese characteristics. Why do they have Chinese characteristics? Firstly, the grass-roots mass self-government organisations were established under the leadership of the Party, and adherence to the Party's leadership ensures that the direction of development is correct. Secondly,

grass-roots mass self-governance organisations have always reflected the people's aspirations and represented their interests.

#### **4. Mao Zedong's Contemporary Revelations on the Development of Socialist Democratic Politics**

Mao Zedong fully affirmed the people's wisdom, recognised and relied on the people's power, and found the fundamental driving force for revolution and construction, which also reflected his wise greatness. As the first leader of the new China and the greatest Marxist statesman in the history of the Party, he always insisted that it is the people who can create history. So today in the new era, if we want to make socialism with Chinese characteristics enter a brand new chapter, it is all the more necessary to respect the people's aspirations and safeguard the interests of the masses. Since Xi Jinping came to power, the new leadership has put forward the idea of people-centred development. But because the political environment was so different from today's, it was inevitable that the previous political system could not be copied and adapted. Mao Zedong's contribution to democratic politics was inherited and developed at the recently held Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee.

##### *4.1 Adherence to and Improvement of the System Is a Prerequisite*

With the thirteen significant advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics fully analysed, all activities related to national governance should be consciously carried out in accordance with the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. These distinctive advantages are derived from Marxism and have been deepened through a series of outstanding achievements in the Chineseisation of Marxism since Mao Zedong Thought. The people-centred development ideology upheld by General Secretary Xi Jinping gives more prominence to the status of the people's main body, so that the fundamental rights and interests of the people can be effectively safeguarded before consciously adhering to China's socialist democratic political system. In the current complex and changing domestic and international situation, it is impossible to achieve long-term development by simply adhering to the existing system in China. In the new era, if we want to achieve more long-term development and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, we must continuously improve and develop the existing system and policies to meet the ever-changing international and domestic environments. The Party's thirteen "insisting and improving" principles emphasise insisting on and improving the system of people's sovereignty and developing socialist democratic politics, which is an important manifestation of highlighting the status of the people as the main body of government. The new generation of leaders with Xi Jinping as General Secretary has fully inherited Mao Zedong's correct attitude towards the people, making socialist democratic politics even better, raising the status of the people as the main body of government, and truly relying on the power of the people to drive the country's development.

#### *4.2 Translating Institutional Strengths into Governance Effectiveness Is Key*

In more than seventy years of practice from the founding of the State to the present, China has achieved rapid development in all aspects, which has been called the Chinese miracle. The thirteen significant advantages in the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee are showing a comprehensive grasp of China's socialist system. But just as a student's performance depends fundamentally on his or her own efforts rather than on the teacher, having an advanced system and being able to bring its sophistication into full play is a key factor in determining the development of China's governance capacity. Whether such a Chinese miracle can be continued or even surpassed depends on more comprehensive policy implementation. The improvement of the system and the superiority it embodies is the best manifestation of the lineage of the Chineseisation of Marxism. Whether or not the socialist system can continue to be upheld and implemented is both a reality check for Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era and a more vivid practical model for the subsequent development of socialism. China is a large country with a population of 1.4 billion people. Improving the system is hard to come by, but whether the system can be firmly implemented is the key. It is difficult to put the system into practice after it has been formulated. Therefore, the establishment of grass-roots mass self-governance organisations facilitates the implementation of systems and policies, with the goal of promoting and safeguarding the work of the Party and playing a driving role in the deployment of national work. Grass-roots mass self-governance organisations were originally set up to address livelihood issues, so the work of self-governance organisations inevitably revolves around the most concerned and realistic interests of the masses, and to address the core issues of people's lives. This system highlights the importance that the new socialist China attaches to democracy, which not only enables the state to grasp the interests and demands of the masses in the first instance, so that the formulation of the system can be more in line with the reality of the people; it also enables the people to participate in political life, thus promoting the formulation and implementation of the system, with a wide and far-reaching impact. Party members and cadres, moreover, should make Marxism their life's creed, strive to become a good Marxist scholar as a lifelong pursuit, and constantly improve their talents and abilities. The people's study of the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Central Committee should be strengthened, so that the people will more consciously surround themselves with the Central Committee of the Party and consciously promote the implementation of the system and policies, so that the whole country will work together as one, and the Party and the people will work together as one to ensure the implementation of the system for the country's comprehensive and rapid development.

#### *4.3 Party Leadership Is the Fundamental Guarantee*

Marxism, as the Party's fundamental guide since its founding, is the "panacea" for the Party to maintain its scientific character. There are six requirements for adhering to and improving the Party's leadership system. Among them, not forgetting the original intention and keeping the

mission in mind have been incorporated into the system for the first time. From the maintenance of the authority of the Central Committee of the Party, the comprehensive nature of the Party's leadership, the relationship between the Party and the people, the Party's ability to govern, and the overall strict governance of the Party, the Party's leadership system has been comprehensively explained in six aspects. These six requirements should always be developed and continuously improved. Among the thirteen "insisting on and perfecting", insisting on and perfecting the Party's leadership system is the fundamental leadership system of the country. In the new era, the Party leads everything. In order to strengthen the leadership of the Party, on the one hand, the Party itself should continue to improve and develop, and build itself into a stronger and more powerful political party, the CPC is a political party founded nearly a hundred years ago with a population of 90 million. Why can it develop so rapidly? It is precisely because the Party has the courage to revolutionise itself and never runs away from problems. In the course of a series of socialist practices carried out by uniting and leading the people, the CPC has never been afraid of making mistakes and has been more courageous in self-correction. In the process of comprehensively governing the Party strictly, the Party dares to turn the blade inward, and is more than capable of leading the people to the future and the Chinese nation to rejuvenation. A big country with a population of 1.4 billion, if the CPC is no longer the leading core of the country and the backbone of China, then such a China is bound to be scattered and divided. The practice over the past seventy years since the founding of New China has proved that the CPC has been able to unite and lead the people to overcome any risks and challenges on the way of China's development. Party leadership is the greatest advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and in the report of the 19th National Congress of the CPC, General Secretary Xi Jinping put forward the "four greats" approach to governing the country, and it is the great project of Party construction that plays a decisive role. The Party has always adhered to the principle that "to strike iron, one must be hard", and the lessons learnt over the past hundred years have proved that strict governance of the Party is not only related to the Party's future destiny, but also has a decisive impact on the future of the country and the nation. It is precisely because of this impact that the Party should carry out a self-revolution with greater determination, courage and perseverance. On the other hand, as the status of the people continues to rise, the role they play is becoming more and more important. It is necessary to strengthen the relevant education of the people, to consciously co-operate with the policies of the Party and the State, and to abide by the State's system. Consciously upholding the leadership of the Party Central Committee with General Secretary Xi Jinping at its core, truly realising the flesh and blood connection between the Party and the people, concentrating their efforts to give play to their significant strengths, and constantly striving to realise the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

## Reference

- Communiqué of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China*. (2019). Beijing: People's Publishing House.
- Regional ethnic autonomy: The thinking and action of the CPC in reconstructing the unified multi-ethnic state. (2019). *Journal of the Central Institute of Socialism*, 2019(04), 165-173.
- Selected Works of Mao Zedong* (Vol. I, 1991). Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991.
- Mao Zedong election (Vol. II)*. (1991). Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991.
- Mao Zedong Election (Volume 4)*. (1991). Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1991. Chen, Jianyue.
- Wu, J. (1958). *Problems of China's capitalist economic transformation*. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 1958.