

Still a Century of the Chinese Model? Exploring Dimensions of Democratic Centralism

Guangbin Yang¹

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Abstract In spite of a decade-long history of studying the Chinese Model, most research failed to capture and generalize its essence in an accurate, concise and compelling way. In this paper, I contend Democratic Centralism, the core mechanism in China's system of government, could very well summarize and represent the fundamental elements of Chinese Model, although the current status of Democratic Centralism in social science theories is far from being closer to its significance in practice. Firstly, as the parallel theory of Liberal Democracy, I found that Democratic Centralism is not only a well-organized political order, but also a system with multiple aspects worth rediscovering in meta-theory, such as the system of government summing all power relations in the presentation of Democratic Centralism, the dynamic structural balanced characteristics between democracy and centralism, democracy in political attributes, the collective good in cultural mechanism, people-oriented doctrines in political thoughts and the democratic form in operating mechanisms. Secondly, I argue that in practice Democratic Centralism, as the system of government, represents not only China's organizational principle for the national authorities and the central–local government relation provided in the constitution but is also a factual organizational principle for the political and economic relation and the national social relation following the reform and opening up. What is more important is that Democratic Centralism, as a power structure, also constitutes a general principle for the decision-making process to fulfill the consistency between the form and the process, manifesting an advantage not possessed by other modern systems of government. Therefore, it is the right time for us to rediscover and bring back Democratic Centralism and to better understand the Chinese Model.

Keywords Chinese model · Democratic Centralism · System of government

✉ Guangbin Yang
yanggw@ruc.edu.cn

¹ Department of Political Science, Renmin University of China, Beijing, China

1 Introduction

The system of government of Democratic Centralism was the focus of Western political science in communist research during the Cold War period. The concept almost disappeared from western political science together with the collapse of the Soviet Union. A quarter of a century passed after that; however, the necessity to “rediscover Democratic Centralism” now is the same as to recover “Corporatism” ideology after its loss for 30 years since World War II given that the “Chinese model” now becomes the focus of world public opinion. In fact, as a political core issue, Democratic Centralism has always been a hot topic in both theory and practice in China. But the reason why China’s core issues are not given enough attention is because of the colonization of the problematic consciousness of China’s social science.

A lot of people talk about what exactly the “Chinese model” is today. In my opinion, a model named after a nation is certainly a political system that may well organize that country. Secondly, as a model, it must have historical continuity in terms of ideology and system, as well as unique characteristics due to its exclusivity and use. These two points decide that the Chinese model is actually a political model in China while the core of a political model is firstly about the party’s organizing principle, which is common sense. Such an organizing principle must be applicable to the state’s organizing principle. In this sense, Democratic Centralism is the sole factor to organically connect the party with the state. Since its birth nearly a century ago, Democratic Centralism remains the sole political system or the system of government that is on par with representative democracy.

Research on the system of government is roughly divided into two categories in the international social science community, namely the liberal democratic representative system and the non-democratic system of government (i.e., authoritarianism). In western political science, the former is “the end of history”, while the latter is bound to fail and will immediately be converted or transited to “the end of history”. Comparative political research reveals that the prosperity of developed countries is not due to the application of representative democracy. It is the combined action of many other factors. As for developing countries, basically many of them that were colonized or semi-colonized have adopted representative democracy, including the large countries comparable with China like India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, the Philippines, Nigeria, Mexico, and Brazil. But what is the result? The anti-reality hypothesis also raises the question would we have a better result than that of other giant developing countries if China chose representative democracy, i.e., if the party struggled for democracy?

China has had significant comparative advantages thanks to the application of different systems, but western political science categorizes it as “a bad system of government” included in the list of authoritarianism, which is bound to “the end of history.” Hence, it is a must to shake off the religious ideological discourse system of western social science so as to prove the advantages in the Chinese system of government and restore its doctrinal identity. We also found that the Chinese model heatedly debated should firstly be Democratic Centralism as a system of

government, while this system has not only the modern democratic properties in theory, but also the characteristics of endogenous changes based on Chinese history and culture. Moreover, it overcomes the structural pathology that the giant developing countries are poorly organized due to the general shortage of the national capacity. More importantly, life politics reveals to us that Democratic Centralism as a system of government is also the core of the political process, i.e., the first principle of the decision-making process, thereby constituting the most unique institutional system in the world, i.e., the consistency between political form and political process. For this reason, Chinese politics and even overall social science are essential to conduct an in-depth study of such a fundamental political system with regards to confidence in the way forward and that in the system.

2 Why is Democratic Centralism the Best Representation of the “Chinese model”?

The Chinese people began the discussion of the “Chinese model” as early as a decade ago. As for the Chinese model, there are two decisively different attitudes or values, i.e., negation and affirmation. There are several different views with regard to negation. The first is the adoption of liberal values to negate the Chinese model. In this view, Francis Fukuyama’s “end of history” theory is upheld, in which there is only one model in the world, namely liberal democracy or representative democracy. Other models are all in transition to liberal democracy or will sooner or later be converted into liberal democracy. However, even Fukuyama who created the theory of “the end of history” admitted that the current Chinese model was the only alternative challenger to liberal democracy. The second view is that some economists or reformists worry that China will be satisfied with the status quo instead of proceeding to reform if the Chinese model is affirmed. In a sense, it is not the negation of the Chinese political model or the Chinese model. Instead this is a questioning of China’s developmental model. This means that China cannot stay on the established developmental model, her developmental model needs upgrading. The concern for the Chinese model has its rationality and value. The third is the question to the governance mode, which deems there is no so-called Chinese model. “A thing that can be called a ‘model’ should at least meet the following standards: (1) A model should be institutionally stable; (2) Different from others, a model has particularity or difference; (3) Once established, it can be imitated (diffusivity in the academic term); (4) A model should be recognized by both the creator and others. Based on China’s present situations, these standards are currently not certain, which constitutes a key challenge to summing up the model (Zhang 2014)”. This is a typical case that a question is viewed from the perspective of governance. But such views miss the unique, stable, and diffusible political factors that have been recognized behind Chinese governance. No country is able to determine its unique model from the point of view of governance as a governance pattern is the result from the mutual learning of civilization. For example, some governance models, resulting from the mutual interaction and communication between capitalism and socialism, can be available for mutual learning. Some of these models include the mixed-economy and welfare

states. Compared with the political model, the governance model is technology focused, but not underlying. When we talk about the Chinese model, we are discussing the problem from the perspective of fundamental systems.

Unfortunately, most of those who recognize the Chinese model explore the Chinese model from the perspective of the significance in the governance model and development model. This is the first perspective of the affirmation. The “Beijing Consensus” is undoubtedly the most famous of the affirmation while Dr. Zhang Weiwei, who makes every effort to promote the Chinese model, also summarizes the eight elements of the Chinese model based on the significance of the development model (Zhang 2014). Professor Wang Shaoguang, who also affirms the Chinese model, explores it based on the significance of governance. He proposed the famous theory of “the western system of government and the Chinese political philosophy”, i.e., while westerners are discussing the system of government, Chinese are working on the general plan of policies. In this sense, Professor Wang Shaoguang discusses the Chinese model from the perspective of the significance of governance rather than the fundamental system, i.e., the system of government.

The second perspective is of cultural significance. Professor Pan Wei’s “Subject, People and State” Chinese model theory is more like an all-encompassing civilization model. Daniel Bell’s Chinese model theory in *Beyond Liberal Democracy* is actually created based on cultural significance; namely, he believes that Confucian meritocracy is superior to liberal democratic electoral politics.

The third perspective is from the Chinese model theory in the sense of the political system. In the eyes of Professor Zheng Yongnian, the Chinese model is an internal pluralism relative to Western external pluralism, i.e., the openness of the Communist Party of China (Zheng 2014). In my opinion, searching for answers from the Communist Party of China is closer to the bottom of the problem. Nevertheless, “internal pluralism” is just a political phenomenon instead of the Chinese model.

In comparison, the “complex of multiple contradictions” summed up by Ding Xueliang of politics, society and economy makes the Chinese model seem more realistic: the power structure of Leninism, the market economy under the administration of the government, and the social control system (Ding 2011). Undoubtedly, these are critical aspects in China’s political development. However, just as Zhang Weiwei does, Ding only lists phenomena. What is worse, there is a problem with Professor Ding Xueliang’s view of history. He antedated the “prehistoric period” of the Chinese model to be the 1980s, splitting the three decades before and after the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The history of the revolutionary period is not available either.

Since it is a pattern, it should be only a simple but penetrating term, such as western “representative democracy” or “liberal democracy.” What is more important is that the model as a terminal is definitely not the change in the development policies over a few years or more than 10 years, but some kind of fundamental political system which has a long history. In this sense, the Chinese model is only “democratic centralism” which is frequently heard and neglected. As stated above, a state model has to be centered by a political system which can effectively and properly organize a country. We should know that in the face of a “strong society” as a legacy of history, the leading task of China together with

many other developing countries is how to effectively organize a state. They need a strong state rather than a weak one. After the late Qing Dynasty, China became bogged down in semi-colonialism and division among warlords, and a mess in the words of Dr. Sun Yat-sen. How to organize China was top priority. Dr. Sun Yat-sen and Chiang Kai-shek's attempts to lead the army and create a state based on a party failed. Militarism tinted with warlordism was the destiny of their attempts to place the army under the leadership of a party. The Communist Party of China effectively organized China at last. Democratic Centralism, its organizing principle, played a crucial role. As a victor, the Communist Party of China lost no time in changing Democratic Centralism into the organizing principle of a nation.

In the historical dimension, it is not only the portrayal of the revolutionary history of the Chinese Communist Party, but also the fundamental political system consistently upheld over the 30 years both before and after the Reform. As a system of government, Democratic Centralism does not end with the creation of a government by and accountable to the people's congress. It is reflected in multiple dimensions like the party–government relation, the state–society relation, the central–local relation, and the politics–economy relation. The term of Democratic Centralism can summarize all dimensions of politics, economy and society. Is it not the best summary of the Chinese model?

3 Principle of Democratic Centralism

As an organizing principle of the party and state, Democratic Centralism will undoubtedly undergo many researches. Therefore, in this paper, there is no need to produce a list of extant research results domestically herein anymore. This paper attempts to rebuild the political principle of Democratic Centralism.

The political attribute of Democratic Centralism—democracy. It is generally viewed that Democratic Centralism originated from Russia. Democratic Centralism is the abbreviation of “democratic centralized system.” In Russia, “Democratic Centralism” is a compound word “Демократический централизм”. It may be translated into “a democratic centralized system” or “a democratic centralized power”. It was done this way in the 1920s and 1930s in China (Wang 2002).

It is far from being enough to just linger on “a democratic centralism”, which fails to truthfully reflect the inherent, far-reaching value and logic of a political system. Democratic Centralism is not a simple “democratic centralized power”, but “a centralized system of democracy”, i.e., “a centralization power of democracy.” In fact, the master of Democratic Centralism Mao Zedong just explored it based on the significance of “democracy”. “Democracy” is used to refer to democratic ideology in the passage of *the Struggle in the Chingyang Mountains*. “The very soldiers who had no courage in the White army yesterday are very brave in the Red Army today; such is the effect of democracy”. “In China the army needs democracy as much as the people do. Democracy in our army is an important weapon for

undermining the feudal mercenary army (Mao 1991a)". "Democracy" was a buzzword at that time.

The restoration of "democratic centralism" to "a centralized system of democracy" is not a game of words, but an issue relating to the ontological nature of the political system, i.e., the political nature and political value of the political system. As "liberal democracy" which is a political system is the ontology of liberalism, "democratic centralism" which is definitely a system of government is the ontology of democracy. Liberal democracy prefers freedom, i.e., the property right of the minority. In contrast, Democratic Centralism prefers democracy, i.e., the equal rights of the public.

From an objective point of view, it is easier to promote centralism in China as it has a long tradition of authoritarianism. But it is difficult to form the various systems of democracy and establish a restraint mechanism. Hence, many countries suffer from poor democracy arising from excessive centralization. Modern China experienced division and disunity over more than a century. Authoritative centralism was undoubtedly a necessity. However, given that excessive centralization almost fully depleted social freedom and social creativity and political catastrophes were caused by the deficiencies of inner party democracy, it was critical to place democracy in the institutional matrix. Therefore, it is greatly necessary for the normalization of Democratic Centralism to establish the democratic political attribute of democratic centralism and bring the change in awareness therefrom.

Democratic centralism as a "paradox" Many people understand Democratic Centralism as two systems: democracy and centralism. Are the two words contrary? It is typical of western social science to treat Democratic Centralism from the perspective of binary opposition, while Chinese people prefer the unity of "opposite things", i.e., Lao Tzu's "Movement of the Tao by Contraries Proceeds" striving for the mutual conversion between things. For views and questions about the contradiction between democracy and centralism, Mao Zedong said in Yan'an, "There is no impassable gulf between democracy and centralism, both of which are essential for China (Mao 1991b)". For the Chinese people, the accommodation between democracy and centralism is a normal thinking and working method.

In comparison, if democracy and centralism are semantically contradictory, "liberal democracy", i.e., the contradiction and tension between freedom and democracy, will be more evident (Sartori 1993). This is already common sense.

Although democracy and centralism are interoperable, they are two structural variables, involving the question of how to achieve structural balance. Democratic Centralism needs dynamic balance, so does liberal democracy. Sartori demonstrates that the balance principle of liberal democracy is equally applicable to Democratic Centralism. He said, "If the western-type systems are the products of liberalism *plus* democracy, it follows that they incessantly pose a problem of internal rebalancing between their component parts... In history, we always end up with different equilibrium solutions, that is, with equilibria consisting of different mixes and proportions of their ingredients. Yet, if a social-political system is to hang together, it must obtain at each point in time some equilibrium-type rebalancing. If all the

actors in a given system generate disequilibrium, that is, if no countervailing behavior occurs, then that system simply breaks apart (Sartori 1993)”.

Indeed, the imbalance between liberalism and democracy led to many national problems, such as the failure of governance caused by intense party struggles. The imbalanced Democratic Centralism eventually resulted in the collapse of the Soviet Union. Therefore, in theory, increase of democracy or that of centralism shall be balanced while in practice, the achievement of such balance is wisdom.

Cultural mechanism of democratic centralism—“collective good” Any effective political system must be supported by a compatible cultural system. Politics enables culture to maintain vitality, while the latter prevents the former from falling. We have seen that completely different culture systems in the world all adopt identical types of political systems, such as representative democracy or liberal democracy, while the result is quite different. The key mechanism therein is the conflict between the political system and culture. As a result, a “civilized clash” is unavoidable in spite of all the democratic countries.

China’s political system can only be built on the basis of its own culture. This system is the Confucian ideology that collective good is superior to individual rights, which is called communitarianism in the West. Coincidentally, the property of “Democratic Centralism” is democracy. Democracy is a product of public rights, namely, a product of social equality. This means that Democratic Centralism is a pursuit of “collective good” rather than the presentation of individual rights of liberalism. It is a classic statement of “collective good” that “An individual obeys the organization and the minority obeys the majority.”

Of course, while Democratic Centralism is based on the equal rights of the public, individual liberty and the vitality and creativity resulting from individual liberty are not necessary to be excluded. In fact, with regard to democracy, most of the time Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping talked about a vivid and vigorous political situation elicited by personal vitality, social vitality and local vitality. For believers in liberalism, these statements might fail to be the presentation of democracy. It can be said that the understanding above rigidly sticks to the textbook definition of liberalism and forgets historical and cultural traditions. Even Tocqueville wrote *Democracy in America* from the perspective of the significance of social autonomy. *The ideological basis of democratic centralism—the people-oriented doctrines* Unlike general forms of governance or technical system forms, an effective political system, especially a fundamental system of government, not only should grow in the soil of a particular culture, but also needs to have a value system. In particular, it needs a value system at the level of “theory” to be its support or basis. Otherwise, it is only a globally commensurable form of governance or a form of system. In comparison, the cultural foundation “liberal democracy” is the supremacy of individual rights; namely, power is higher than kindness. Hence, its value system is liberalism. In comparison, the cultural mechanism of Democratic Centralism is “collective good”. The value system is populism which has been a part of Marxism in China.

The concept of Democratic Centralism came from Lenin. How could it take root in China and become a vibrant political system in just a century? It has not only the foregoing profound cultural foundation, but also an ideological basis for governing

the state, which is consistent with the ideology of people-oriented doctrines that has a long history in China. The ideology that the people are the foundation of the state in the pre-Qin period, the ideology that people are more important than the ruler in the Han Dynasty, the ideologies that the world cannot be ruled by “one person” and that “the world is the host while the king is the guest” in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, Dr. Sun Yat-sen’s republic’s ideology that “the world belongs to all”, and Mao Zedong’s republic’s ideology of “serving the people” in particular are just political statements in different forms with regard to the ideology of people-oriented doctrines.

It is also worth noting that all the ideologies of people-oriented doctrines in the past just stayed at the ideological level or worked as a guiding ideology for officials at all levels to follow, but failed to achieve a system or intermediation for the ideology. The difference is that, as a system of government, Democratic Centralism is not only the political system of people-oriented doctrines, but also has the intermediary centralization of Democratic Centralism, which is the well-known mass line. In this regard, Mao Zedong had many classic expositions, such as the mass line ideology of “from the masses, to the masses.” He also treated the mass line as one of the most valuable experiences to the success of the Communist Party of China. With regard to the relationship between Democratic Centralism and the mass line, Mao Zedong said as follows,

Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people’s ideas differ, and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established... If there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly. If there is no democracy and if ideas are not coming from the masses, it is impossible to establish a good line, good general and specific policies and methods. Our leading organs merely play the role of a processing plant in the establishment of a good line and good general and specific policies and methods (Mao 1986a).

If the mass line is linked with Democratic Centralism, it will be easier to understand people-oriented doctrines as the ideological foundation of Democratic Centralism. In all, the mass line stresses the importance of the people. This has also been the Confucian “people-orientation” ideology since ancient times.

In this sense, the logical relationship among the mass line, Democratic Centralism and the people-oriented doctrines is very clear. The mass line is the intermediary mechanism to achieve Democratic Centralism while Democratic Centralism is the political system to achieve republicanism, i.e., the system of government. China’s republic system is surely based on the ideology of “people-oriented doctrines”. The reverse is also true. It is precisely because of the republic system that “the world belongs to all” under the ideological guidance of ideology of “people-oriented” doctrines, better Democratic Centralism came into being. The healthy practice of Democratic Centralism is also impossible without the mass line and other forms of democracy practicing in the political system.

Micro mechanism for achieving Democratic Centralism Democratic Centralism as a system of government is a macro structure. However, the vitality of a political system with a macro structure undoubtedly cannot be enriched and replenished

without a micro mechanism. Otherwise, a political system with a good name will come to nothing. In other words, a set of ideal intermediary mechanisms is necessary for realizing an ideal. The intermediary mechanism herein mainly refers to democracy, i.e., how to create more diverse and effective forms of democracy to improve Democratic Centralism.

1. *The mass line as a special form of democracy* The aforementioned mass line under the ideology of people-oriented doctrines is undoubtedly an intermediary mechanism. For those who are engrossed with the liberal and democratic discourse system, it is hard for them to understand why the mass line is associated with democracy. They even reject the principle of mass line mentally. As everyone knows, the masters of the liberal democracy theory Sartori and Inglehart both treat responsiveness as the foundation of democracy. They believe that democracy is “invalid” if it fails to respond to the needs of the people. As for the significance of responsiveness, either electoral democracy or participatory democracy is not necessarily more valid than the responsiveness effect generated by the mass line. Common sense also tells us that election democracy can be manipulated by powerful interest groups, and that the subjects of participatory democracy are unequal in terms of ability and strength. Therefore, the interest channels and effects expressed by these democratic forms are unequal. It is in this sense that the top-down mass line can make up for the inherent deficiencies of other forms of democracy and convert the will of the people into policy agendas. It can be said that all other forms of democracy can be imitated or even transplanted, but only the mass line with people-oriented doctrines as the basis of culture and ideology is hard to be imitated and transplanted.
2. *Other forms of democracy* In the practice of democracy in China, there have been villager elections, inter-party electoral democracy, deliberative democracy in the form of Wenling’s democratic consultation, online participation in democracy, and decentralization as a democratic form. In these forms of democracy, deliberative democracy is not only the democratic stage of Democratic Centralism, but also an essential political form of the centralized stage. For instance, the voting system and consultation system for major issues and major personnel arrangements are both an important part of the centralized stage. It is in this sense that Democratic Centralism is democratic in terms of political nature.

4 Democratic Centralism as a System of Government

For China’s state building, it is the common sense that the Party is the organizer of the state. The chronological order and organizing path are party building, army building, revolution and establishment of state system. Such a unique state building path decides that it is a must to seek a political theory that can interpret both the state and the Party. In other words, only a political theory effectively uniting the

Party and the state is effective. Democratic Centralism is exactly such a political theory. It evolved from the Party's organizing principle (or party system) into the organizing principle of state power (i.e., system of government). Meanwhile, it is the ontological organizing principle of the Party and the state. We have often argued that there is an inherent organizational and logical relationship between "the Party and the state" and a bridge linking together the Party and the state, that is, Democratic Centralism. Without Democratic Centralism, it is difficult to understand the Party and state leadership system, or comprehend the Party's method for managing state affairs, i.e., the "party-state".

As a system of government, the ideology of Democratic Centralism originated from Lenin. In the article *On New Democracy* written in 1940, Mao Zedong clearly pointed out that the system of government in New China would be the people's congress system adopting Democratic Centralism (Mao 1991c). In the article *On Coalition Government* written in 1945, Mao Zedong also said that the political organization in New China should be the people's congress system and that the organizing principle of the people's congress should be Democratic Centralism (Mao 1991d).

Mao Zedong's theory of founding the nation in the Yan'an Period directly became the guideline for the constitution of New China and even a part of the constitution. The first article in the general principles of the 1954 constitution provides the state system of New China. The second article is the system of government. "Article 1: The People's Republic of China is a people's democratic state led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants. Article 2: All powers of the People's Republic of China belong to the people. The Organs through which the people exercise power are the National People's Congress and the local people's congresses. The National People's Congress, the local people's congresses and other organs of state practice Democratic Centralism".

Democratic Centralism in the 1954 constitution of the People's Republic of China refers specifically to the organizational form of state organs; namely, state organs are created by the National People's Congress and are responsible for the National People's Congress. With regard to the 1982 Constitution of the People's Republic of China, Democratic Centralism includes not only state organs, namely, the organizational form of horizontal power structure, but also national structural form, namely, the organizational form of central–local relation. It is stated in Article 3 of the 1982 Constitution of PRC that "The state organs of the People's Republic of China shall follow the principle of Democratic Centralism. The National People's Congress and the local people's congresses at various levels are constituted through democratic elections. They are responsible to the people and subject to their supervision. All administrative, judicial and procuratorial organs of the state are created by the people's congresses to which they are responsible and by which they are supervised. The division of functions and powers between the central and local state organs is guided by the principle of giving full scope to the initiative and enthusiasm of the local authorities under the unified leadership of the central authorities".

It can be seen that Chinese people's understanding of the system of government is continuously progressing, i.e., the system of government involves not only the

horizontal organizational form of state power but also the longitudinal central–local relation. In fact, this is exactly in line with the significance of the theory on system of government. All in all, the system of government is the right to rule and the relations of power resultant from the right to rule. To put it simply, the system of government is the sum of power relations. Accordingly, the connotations of systems of government in different ages vary. In the city–state period, because of the typical political society, there was not the so-called scale of state in the modern sense and the resulted central–local relation. The system of government mainly refers to the right to rule. With the formation of nation states, the new concept of system of government came into being, such as the unitary system and the federal system, the presidential system and the parliamentary system.

The results of Chinese political science research show that, in the market economy period, power relations do not include state organs and central–local relation in the political category in a narrow sense. Economic power, i.e., power of capital, has already been a power that can control political power and cannot be ignored in fact. Therefore, the study of the theories on the system of government since the market economy period is inseparable from the dimension of politics–economy relation. Capital power is important. Social power is also important because an important feature of modern politics is the popularity of politics. In this sense, the dimension of politics–society relation or state–society relation cannot be ignored by theories on modern systems of government (Zeng 2013). In other words, today’s theories on system of government no longer purely explore state organs as a political concept. There are two other major variables, namely economy and society. The system of government is the sum of political, economic and social relationships (Lindblom 1992).

In this way, in addition to the organizational form of state organs and central–local relation stated in the constitution of China, the connotation of the factual system of government should also include politics–society relation or state–society relation. We found that both the system of government in the traditional sense, i.e., the organizational form of state organs and central–local relation, and the politics–society relation or state–society relation deriving after the reform and opening up, reflect the principle of Democratic Centralism, visibly or invisibly, in China.

1. *The organizing principle of state organs* In accordance with the constitution, China adopts the principles of Democratic Centralism that state organs are created by the National People’s Congress and are responsible for it. The people’s congress system is the centralized embodiment of Democratic Centralism.

First, with regard to the democracy, the people’s congress system is often said to be the supreme authority, that is, a symbol of popular sovereignty. In fact, the people’s congress system not only reflects the principle of popular sovereignty in democratic theory, but also realizes an intermediary mechanism of popular sovereignty, namely, representative democracy and consultative democracy. Since these have been studied in depth, it is no longer necessary to further expound (Yang and Yin 2008).

Second, with regard to the centralism of the people's congress system, the realization of the popular sovereignty principles requires both procedural forms of democracy and institutional arrangements for unity of various democratic procedures. Otherwise we will see that many countries in transition are trapped in party struggles under representative democracy. In China, this system integrating democratic procedures is fully embodied in the Party Constitution and is expressly stated in the Constitution. Specifically, it is embodied in the principles of the Party's leadership. The full statement of China's fundamental political system should be "the people's congress system under the leadership of the Party".

Western party politics originated from the parliamentary politics after the bourgeois revolution. Therefore, the political parties were formed in parliament activities. Moreover, as there are party groups in the parliament, political parties are only political organizations in the nature of interest groups. Completely different from western political parties, the Communist Party of China created a state and cleared the "mess". Its roadmap for founding a state was "party building, army building, revolution and foundation of a state (state organs)". Hence the Party's leadership over the people's congress is a historical endogenous logic and a factual existence. Constitutionalism based on western history cannot be "applied to" China's history and reality. However, many countries, including many large ones ignored their history and turned to constitutionalism featured by conflicts between parties. What is the result then? Therefore, in theory, the advantages of the fundamental system under the Party's leadership deserve more in-depth study and understanding.

2. *The organizing principle of central–local relation* According to the third article of the constitution, the central–local relation is placed under the unified leadership of the central authorities, i.e., the unitary system in the traditional sense. After 30 years of reform and opening up, China's central–local relation has undergone structural changes. China's reform started from decentralization; namely, central authorities granted power to local authorities to arouse their enthusiasm and initiative. The state granted power to society to form its self-management and social autonomy. The government granted power to the market to create a market economy and fully arouse enthusiasm and initiative of individuals. It can be said that the reform and opening was a process of democracy, as well as the formation of democracy in the course of democratization. Without democracy, there is neither energy nor the current economic success. This is a political awareness.

How can the new central–local relation subject to structural changes achieve the principle of Democratic Centralism? If the pre-reform central–local relation was a typical unitary system, the post-reform central–local relation is to some extent dissociative in politics and economy; that is, a unitary political system and binary economic federalism have been created (Yang 2007). The so-called unitary political system means that the central authorities' leadership over local authorities in terms of personnel is ensured under the principle of Democratic Centralism where the Party manages the cadres. Specifically, the cadres above the level of deputy

provincial governor are directly managed by the Organization Department of the CPC Central Committee. The personnel right further guarantees the central authorities' political leadership over local authorities. With regard to political relations, China is a chess game in which all the activities are coordinated.

As for economic relations, the pattern of power sharing and shared governance (academically called fiscal federalism) has been created. China's system of tax distribution and localization of power are both classic cases of economic federalism. The power sharing and shared governance that local authorities enjoy are in fact a kind of decentralized democracy.

The structural change in the central–local relation means that local authorities are no longer purely an agent under the unitary system. Local governments, especially the municipal and county governments, have become a subject of interest. The enthusiasm and vigor arising from the competition between local subjects of interest are just “democracy” in the words of Chinese leaders of different administrations. For example, Deng Xiaoping said, “Arousal of enthusiasm is the biggest democracy”. “Devolving authority to the localities and the people, which in the countryside means the peasants, is the height of democracy. This is an important component of the socialist democracy we talk about (Deng 1993)”. In the book *Democracy in America*, Tocqueville explored popular sovereignty from the perspective of significance of decentralization and social autonomy. Therefore, the reform and opening up which achieved decentralization and public freedom are a process to fulfill democratic rights.

The democracy and political centralism of local governance have promoted formation of new Democratic Centralism in the central–local relation.

3. *The principle for factual composition of politics–economy relation* A nation's style of state–economy relation reflects both its governance model and the nation's real internal interest relationships, i.e., the relationship between groups and that between classes. It is typical that economy decides politics in liberal capitalist America. In the eastern countries and regions adopting a market economy, such as Korea, Japan, Singapore and Taiwan, the relationship between politics and economy is more complex. “A developing country/region” is a summary of these eastern countries and regions.

China is not only different from the United States, but also from Korea and other countries. Economic power is very important, but political power is the most important. Politics, especially political systems, has a decisive role. The premise decides that China is a politically oriented developmental state because of its politics–economy relation.

With regard to the politics–economy relation, China as a “developmental state” is more typical than other systems of government in the East Asia. But China as a developmental state is also one of China's experiences under the principle of “Democratic Centralism”. First of all, in terms of its constituent elements: (1) The political system enabling administrative systems to effectively implement economic planning and economic intervention specifically refers to the related economic authority of the State Council under the leadership of the Leading Group for

Financial and Economic Affairs, the Central Rural Work Leading Group, and other party authorities. (2) Though there are some problems with China's state organs, the national capacity embodied by the entire administrative team on the basis of individual ability of civil servicemen is indisputable. (3) The macroeconomic control authority specializing in the planning of national economy is the State Development and Reform Commission. In particular, most of the departments of the State Council are economic management authorities.

Second, in terms of the economic operation mechanism, China's "developmental state" has the most prominent features. The 10-year plans, 5-year plans, and annual central economic work conferences are all effective mechanisms for comprehensive national development that are worthy of attention. The 5-year plan seems to be the heritage of traditional socialism, but that does not mean that it shall not be cherished. Even the developed capitalist powers like France had mechanisms like the 5-year plans after World War II. If a 5-year plan is a medium-term blueprint for development, a 10-year plan is a comprehensive long-term national development plan. These mechanisms ensure the continuity of the country's development. But planning-based continuous development is unimaginable for the system of the United States and is what American elites envy but cannot acquire.

If the "developmental state" reflects more of the centralism in the politics–economy relation, one of the results of the "developmental state" in the past few decades was the creation of the socialist market economy system. As a result of a market economy system, corporate freedom is inevitable. In fact, the contribution of China's private sector to national economic growth has reached 70 %, and more than 70 % of employment opportunities are provided by this sector. Due to the great proportion and importance, private companies will surely exert influence on and play a role in China's political and economic processes. First, in the economically developed southeast coastal areas, the proportion of private business owners among local representatives of the people's congress is growing, and therefore local people's congresses and governments elected by local people's congresses cannot ignore the interests of these owners. Second, private business owners have the ability to influence national macroeconomic policies, such as the legislation and policies on equal opportunities and status between non-public enterprises that they promote and state-owned enterprises. In other words, the process of China's policy-making has been diversified. Diversification is an important feature of democracy or an integral part of democracy.

In summary, Democratic Centralism is the principle for factual composition of China's politics–economy relation. Thanks to such a system, it is impossible for China's politics–economy relation to become an American-style structure where capital decides the political power. China can only adopt a structure where political power leads economy and capital power. However, no structure satisfies everyone. For example, the structure of the United States is in favor of capital groups but dissatisfies the public while China's structure is conducive to the low classes but dissatisfies the capital power. This is probably the fundamental difference between the Chinese system and the American system.

4. *The principle for factual composition of state–society relation* Before the reform and opening up, China's state–society relation was characterized by linear dependence; namely, the individuals were dependent on the organizations. The organizations were dependent on the governments while governments were dependent on the state. In this way, a line links with all individuals, organizations, governments, and the state. Neither the individuals nor the society had autonomy. Even family life was not free. Only state power was ubiquitous. With the formation of market economy, not only capital power different from the state and society emerged, but also society became evidently more important. For instance, the term “social governance” which was not seen in the past can best interpret this. It is now juxtaposed with state governance, government governance, economic governance and other terms. The importance of “society” is thus presented.

China boasts a tradition of social autonomy since ancient times. For instance, imperial power was not implemented in the counties in ancient times, that is, family autonomy was implemented at the county level and lower. Other cases were handled by guild organizations in the late Ming and early Qing Dynasties, under autonomy of the Chamber of Commerce and especially the financial trade associations in Shanghai in the period of the Republic of China. Thus, it is not necessary to associate social autonomy with the invented concept of “civil society”. Due to such inherent tradition, China's emerging social organizations mushroomed after the reform and opening up. Currently there are over one million social organizations registered at the civil affairs authority, while most have not yet been registered. According to the decision of reform at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee, except political, legal, ethnic, and religion organizations, the establishment of all social organizations should be registered. The system on approval by the competent authorities developed by the Ministry of Civil Affairs in 1992 has been abolished.

While the autonomy and self-management of social organizations are encouraged, the state imposes different restrictions on social organizations, such as the foregoing four types of organizations. Meanwhile, in the course of transformation, the original government authorities established based on industries and sectors were changed into national industry associations, such as the China Iron and Steel Association. Some rights of government authorities have been transferred to government-affiliated industry organizations, such as the CET-4 and CET-6 organizing agencies and many other professional examination organizations. In the past 20 years, the establishment of an industry organization with “China” in its title or a national industry organization should be reported to the State Council for approval.

On the one hand, there is freedom in social governance. On the other hand, the state has strict control and constrictions. In western political science theories, the state–society relation is “state corporatism”; namely, effectively controlled state-dominated industry organizations may actively participate in the political process and the decision-making process. In China's political terms, this is a typical

principle of Democratic Centralism. The autonomous management of social organizations is democratic, but the state's control and limitations are centralized.

The above four structural dimensions, namely, the horizontal administrative system, the vertical central–local relation, the horizontal politics–economy relation, and the vertical state–society system, all represent the principle of Democratic Centralism. It can also be said that China as a gigantic country is organized and is efficiently operating based on the principle of Democratic Centralism. Democratic Centralism not only is reflected on political systems and institutional systems, but also is a major principle of leading the political process.

5 Democratic Centralism as a Decision-Making Process

Compared with the principle of Democratic Centralism of political systems and organizational systems, the principle of Democratic Centralism in the political process is easier to understand, and the Chinese people are more familiar with it. The classic exposition of the principle of Democratic Centralism in the decision-making process is the “from the masses, to the masses” mass line and “centralism on the basis of democracy and democracy under the guidance of centralism”. The complete exposition of the principle of Democratic Centralism in the decision-making process comes from Mao Zedong's speech on how to implement Democratic Centralism,

Without democracy there cannot be any correct centralism because people's ideas differ, and if their understanding of things lacks unity then centralism cannot be established. What is centralism? First of all it is a centralization of correct ideas... If there is no democracy we cannot possibly summarize experience correctly.

Our centralism is established on democratic foundations... Within the Party committees, Democratic Centralism should be the sole mode of operation... Otherwise you have one-man tyranny. Such First Secretaries should be called tyrants and not ‘squad leaders’ of Democratic Centralism (Mao and Zedong 1986b).

The above statement is the most classic representation of the decision-making process of Democratic Centralism. A democratic mass line is in need for obtaining correct and comprehensive information before decision-making. The party committee in charge of collection of “opinions” and decision-making also needs democracy. The way that only the secretary's words count is unacceptable.

The decision-making principle of Democratic Centralism achieves a systematic development in the new century. According to the provisions of the State Council, public participation, expert consultation, risk assessment, validity review, and collective discussion have been mandatory procedures for major decisions. Decision-making democracy or administrative democracy has been a major

progress and breakthrough of China's democratic politics recognized in educational circles.

Not only does the decision-making involving the stakeholders reflect Democratic Centralism as administrative democracy, but also the major reform plans affecting the country's future are also a product of Democratic Centralism. Legislation has been "open-minded". Many drafts of laws and regulations directly related to the vital interests of the mass are released to elicit public opinions, achieving good results. The decision on comprehensive deepening of the reform at the Third Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee and the decision on promotion of law-based governance at the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th Central Committee were both typical products of the decision-making principles of Democratic Centralism.

As a decision-making process, Democratic Centralism can convert the modern national governance system into modern national governance capacity, or Democratic Centralism is the intermediary mechanism for communication between the national governance system and governance capacity. In contrast, many developing countries only have a modern governance system but lack governance capacity. The key is the lack of an implementation mechanism in the political process. Without an intermediary mechanism, a grand and ideal institutional structure can only be put aside and remains useless.

In China, such an intermediary mechanism is Democratic Centralism frequently mentioned by us. Democratic Centralism can create a powerful joint force in managing state affairs and effectively prevent the emergence of mutual constraints and serious internal friction. It also ensures effective governance of the state and truly prevents the emergence of rudderless and messy conditions. In a gigantic country like China, if there are no individual freedoms, social autonomy, market economy, and other original forms of democracy, there will be no social vitality. Without social vitality, there will have been no great achievements since the reform and opening up. Similarly, in an unprecedentedly complex country like China, if there is no decision-making authority, today's achievements will be unimaginable. Many large developing countries have democracy but lack decision-making authority, and therefore their development is hard and slow. Even developed countries like the United States are difficult to promote the public policies and infrastructure projects that the state urgently needs due to the "veto-type system" in the decision-making process. For example, universal health care is difficult to implement; the high-speed rail plan was almost aborted. All these result from the big power of the "veto coalition" in the legislation and decision-making processes.

The comparative advantage of Democratic Centralism in the political process is obvious, while the sustainability of advantages requires more "democracy" in the decision-making process so that more people may be involved in the decision-making and their interests can be better protected. The responsiveness of this system will be stronger, more flexible and more dynamic.

6 Conclusion: Establishing the Status of Democratic Centralism as a Theory on System of Government

Since its entry into the Constitution of the Communist Party of China, the principle of Democratic Centralism has a history of nearly 100 years. The process of its version upgrade follows as, the initial party-army organizing principle (version 1.0), the organizing principle of the regime of New China (version 2.0), and the organizing principle based on the regime organizing principle after the reform and opening up (version 3.0).

There is no other kind of political model like the principle of Democratic Centralism, serving not only the organizing principle of power structure, but also its operating principle. It also fully embodies the unity of organizational form and organizational process. The organizational form of liberal democracy as another major system of government in the world is largely limited to electoral democracy, but the dominant right of capital is masked in the political process. As a system of government, liberal democracy has two faces. If we say that its organizational form is democratic, the politics demonstrated in its organizational process and decision-making process is oligarchy and unbalanced pluralism, i.e., decision-making controlled by dominant interest groups. There have been a large number of studies. A system of government with consistency between form and process is clearly more legitimate and justified than a system of government without. Because of its theoretical advantages, it has strong advantages over performance of governance, which is the result of the comparison between China and the developing countries adopting representative democracy.

As a system having been implemented for a century and still presenting strong vitality, Democratic Centralism is surely based on its inherent culture and political ideologies. The system evolved endogenously and was formed in the revolutionary practice. The cultural tradition containing thousands of years of collective kindness is its foundation. It is also evidently characterized by the ideology of people-oriented doctrines. This endogenous system is naturally more applicable and vital.

The vitality of Democratic Centralism is not only because of its features as an endogenous system, but also its identity of a mixed system of government consistent with political logic. A system of government is encompassing definitely relationships in many aspects and needs to fully unify various relationships. A good system of government must be a mixed system. In contrast, liberal democracy is in essence a mixed system too, but it is interpreted as the theory of dualism with competitive election as a standard. With competitive election, the system of government is democratic while the system of government is non-democratic in case of no competitive election. As a result, the factual mixed system of government becomes a formal one-dimensional theory. The one-dimensional theory that fully depends on competitive election will inevitably bring disasters to other countries.

Democratic Centralism of the Chinese model, which is a justified and legitimate system with a long history objectively reflecting the internal logic of politics, evolving endogenously, and demonstrating the resulted superiority over governance, is qualified to take an essential position in the system of political science theories as

well as that of social science theories. In other words, in China and the United States, the academic research is extremely unserious if the system of government is explored only from the perspective of liberal democracy while Democratic Centralism is ignored. If so, the context of the theory is incomplete, and the significance of its study of comparative politics or study of China will be greatly reduced. The study will even be labeled as useless.

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Yang Guangbin is Professor of Political Science, Renmin University of China, and his research covers the political theory, comparative politics, and contemporary politics of China.