The Crisis of Representativeness and Post-Party Politics*

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Abstract

This article analyzes the crisis of representativeness in contemporary China from three perspectives: first, the fracture of representativeness is a general political crisis in the world; second, the crisis of representativeness resulted from the crisis of the socialist system in China, the core of which is the decline of class politics; third, theoretical debates and the mass line in the modern Chinese revolution are not only historical prerequisites for representative politics in China but also contain elements that transcend its representative system. In the context of post-party politics, rethinking this political heritage will contribute to the exploration of the future of politics.

Keywords

fracture of representativeness, post-party politics, people's war, the mass line, supra-representativeness

The Decline of Representation in Global Politics

The decline of representation in contemporary politics is the result of a unique, multilayered political crisis. First of all, its core aspect, a crisis of party politics, is a fracture of representativeness, a discursive failure of established political values in actual political processes and consequently a crisis of legitimacy. Party politics took its modern shape in nineteenth-century Europe. In China, it was the most important political innovation of

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the twentieth century. The party politics of the Xinhai Revolution period, especially between 1911 and 1915, attempted to emulate the multiparty parliamentary system developed in the framework of European constitutional politics. Faced with the challenges of secessionism, monarchical restoration, and the crisis of republicanism, the revolutionaries and many political elites began to shift away from their original political objectives.

The Leading Party as Vanguard

There were three prerequisites for the formation of the uniquely Chinese modern party politics. First, after the establishment of the Republic of China, regional secessionism, military separatism, and partisanship interlocked with one another and led to the formation of a new national politics crucial in early Republican-period political thinking. Second, during World War I, many political parties in the West participated in nationalist war mobilization and supplied a political impetus for the war. Consequently, reflection on traditional modes of party politics peaked among European intellectuals after World War I. The reconstruction of Chinese party politics occurred in this intellectual atmosphere. Lastly, when the Russian Revolution erupted during World War I, some Chinese revolutionaries believed that Bolshevism as a political model could overcome the limits of bourgeois party politics. (Debates and reflections on Bolshevism and its party structure also began in this period, but I do not have enough space to elaborate on this issue.) In other words, the crisis and failure of party politics gave birth to the party system that was the political nucleus of this revolutionary century. In contrast to the parties in crisis, this new model of political parties influenced by the Russian Revolution and the Comintern bore the dual features of a super-political party 超级政党 and a "supra party" 超政党. The term "super-political party" indicates that both competing parties, the Guomindang (GMD) and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), were obliged to adopt some of the elements or forms of party politics and claim themselves to be political parties but neither of them intended to form a competitive party politics within the structure of a parliamentary system. Instead, both aimed to become a hegemonic party or a "leading party." "Supra party" implies that the political representation of both parties was different from the multi- or dual-party structure in a parliamentary system and was much more similar to the Gramscian concept of a "modern prince" that represents the people and the future. In the case of the CCP, the role of the party is as the vanguard of the proletariat. The theory and praxis of "people's war" that was developed in the late 1920s and expanded during the war against the Japanese invasion (1931–1945) and the civil war (1945–1949) generated a new form of party politics. It consolidated military

struggle, land revolution, base-area building, and the construction of a revo-lutionary constitutional state into an unprecedented practice, the core of which was political strategies, namely, military struggle, the mass line, and the united front. With its class politics based on the proletariat, the union of workers and peasants, and the united front for national liberation, the CCP eventually overtook the GMD, which gradually deviated from the peasant movement and mass politics to state politics.

The Detachment of the Political System from Social Forms

In both the multiparty system in the West and the system of multiparty coop-eration under one party rule in China, the representativeness of political par-ties has become increasingly obscure. In the case of China, the representativeness and the politics of the party have mutated drastically as categories such as the proletariat, the union of workers and peasants, and the united front lost their clarity.[1] After the PRC was established, the Communist Party searched for a new path for its own renovation under the conditions of post-people's war. The failure of the Cultural Revolution signified the end of this search, as well as the beginning of the full integration of the party into the framework of the state. In my view, the decline or rupture of representation is the consequence of depoliticization, the most severe symptom of which is the statification of the party: the party has submitted itself increasingly to the logic of the state, depriving itself of its essence, which should be a form of political organization and political movement, as both its function and form of organization have been assimilated to the state apparatus. This process implies the end of the mass line that had engendered the political dynamism of the CCP. Two interrelated forms of the statification of the party can be identified: first, the bureaucratization of the party in the early days before the economic reform, which became one of the pivotal reasons why the Cultural Revolution was launched; second, the marriage of the party and capital in the process of the corporationalization of government during the market reform. For the party, the rupture of representativeness manifests itself most intensely in the incongruity between the party's claim to general representativeness as it transcends previous class categories and its increasing distance from the people, especially those from lower social strata. There are of course policies protective of workers and peasants; however, we can barely find any organic connection between party politics and the politics of workers and peasants.

The detachment of the political system from social forms happens not only in socialist or post-socialist countries, but in European and American parliamentary party systems and in other political systems based on them as well. In China, the relationship between the party and its class base has

become ever more vague, just as among Western political parties, the distinction between the left and the right has blurred. In the contemporary world, the fracture of representativeness has so intensified that it leads to the belief that the type of party politics that flourished in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries has already disappeared, or persists merely in confined areas; it is transforming or has already transformed into a state-party politics, that is, one that serves as a structure of state power. Unlike in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, it is hard to find in contemporary party politics political movements with a clear agenda. The growing scale of the political party and its monopoly of state power are normally interpreted as the expansion of party politics. However, if we investigate whether it is political parties that control the state, or the converse—the logic of the state that controls parties—the latter may be the proper answer. The boundary between party and state is vanishing, the outcome of their assimilation being precisely the dissolution of political representativeness, which in turn renders power relations in the political sphere no longer capable of balancing or reducing the inequality in the socioeconomic sphere, but instead provides institutional support for such inequality. Under the conditions of the fracture of representativeness, the political rhetoric of politicians degrades into a performance aimed at grabbing power, and technocratic bureaucrats are inevitably gaining higher political positions. In the Western multiparty or dual-party structure, the role of political parties is fundamentally voter mobilization pivoting on elections that take place every four or five years. This is more like a state apparatus for the rotation of leaders.

In the twentieth century, the super-political party in China originally possessed an intense politicalness sustained by rigorous organization, a straightforward value orientation, and mass movements carried out through the vigorous interaction between theory and political practice. However, under the contemporary mode of political parties, party organization almost equals administrative organization. The party has become a component of the management apparatus, its function of mobilization and supervision increasingly identical with the state mechanism as its features of a bureaucratic system intensify and its politicalness diminishes. The crisis of representativeness in party politics is a crisis for ruling parties as well as for non-ruling parties. In China nowadays, the representativeness of the democratic parties has become unprecedentedly elusive.

The waning of the representativeness of public institutions that mediate between state and society (parliament in the West, and in China, the National People's Congress and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference) echoes the aforementioned process. In parliamentary democracy, seats in the parliament usually center on political parties. There are

theoretical debates regarding whether parliament functions as part of the state or as an institutionalization that includes certain public spheres. But with the statification of political parties, the connection between parliament and society is gradually being severed. During my visit to India, I noted that grass-roots social movements prospered there. Even the most active types of social movement, however, could not play a parallel role in the area of public policy making because political parties monopolized parliamentary power. In contrast, in terms of theoretical orientation, the social representation system used by the People's Congress of China seems more removed from party politics than party-centered parliamentary politics. In practice, this social representation model needs to be buttressed by politics centered on the so-called mass line, the decline or the transformation of which will undermine the process of selecting people's representatives and the role of the People's Congress in political life of China. The ratio of representatives in the People's Congress—for instance, the percentage of workers and peasants whose numbers in the People's Congress are disproportionate to their contribution to Chinese society—has often been criticized in the past. The homology of a system of representation and social power relations symptomizes the crisis of representative politics and is a consequence of depoliticization.

The second aspect of the decline of representation refers to the fact that typical public spheres, such as the media, also experience a crisis of publicity. The large-scale expansion of the media entails the contraction of the public sphere: freedom of the media industry has replaced the freedom of speech of the citizens; the media not only are unprecedentedly allied with capital, power, and the media's own interests but in some cases even attempt to take over the role of political organizations, the party among them. In Italy, Silvio Berlusconi's media group propagates values that enabled him, a criminal suspect, to be elected prime minister repeatedly. The media, especially massive media groups—regardless of whether they are private or state-owned—cannot be simplistically reckoned as an independent vehicle for citizen and public opinion. They should rather be seen as a network of interests disguised as a public vehicle. The permeation of media influence in political and other public spaces cannot be considered as part of a process of democratization either; it is rather the colonization of these spheres. On the surface, we can say that media are controlled by politics. But in reality, the political sphere is also colonized gradually by media—political figures cajole the public with claptrap and it is not rare that they adopt discourses structured by the logic of the Eastern and the Western media. The Chinese media have been industrialized and corporationalized since the 1990s because of the new political and economic strategies of the party aimed at adapting to marketization and globalization. But with the statification of the political party, the corporatization

of the government, and the partification of the media, the relationship between the media and the party has turned into a contest between two entangled interests that, in their games of strategic conflict or cooperation, resort to pretensions either to democracy and liberty, or to stability, rule of law, and situation awareness. The confrontation between the editorial department of *Southern Weekend* and the Guangdong Provincial Party Committee in the early spring of 2013, for example, was absolutely not a struggle between public opinion and the state but an entanglement that arose as both sides were hijacking public demands, in other words, a confrontation that emerged in the contemporary redistribution of power. The two sides had different interests but their political discourses were nearly identical.

In China today, censorship is a deep-rooted problem. The realm of public speech demands a true reform. But any reform based on the established structure will merely become a struggle for power that disguises itself as a call for a free press. Today, the methods used to suppress public opinion have changed: the media have often served as one of the mechanisms to muzzle public opinion. Such a power struggle evinces the political competition between partified media and the traditional political party that generated it. The former possesses more political energy and features; the latter resembles an entrapped power apparatus deprived of its ideological function, no longer a political organization in the classical sense. Ironically, these two sides are nonetheless parabiotic. They replace and conceal the problems of political debates and freedom of speech with games of strategic conflict and cooperation.

The third aspect of the decline of representation is the crisis of law. Under depoliticization, legal procedures are often manipulated by interest groups. This manipulation is seen not only in general legal procedures, but also permeates the process of legislation. Hence, instead of simply asserting proceduralist opinions, it is an urgent and inevitable matter for the legal reforms of our day to reconsider the relationship between law and politics.

The problems in the three aforementioned areas constitute the essence of today's political transformation.

Hence I raise the following questions: As party politics has degenerated into the politics of a state-party or state-parties, is a post-party politics possible? While modern political parties are still widespread around the world, the post-party politics we are discussing refers not to the politics after political parties disappear but to the fact that the political party has already taken up new features in the context of depoliticization. The political party was established in nineteenth-century Europe on the basis of a political movement. In twentieth-century China, party politics, especially Communist Party politics, was largely reshaped by people's war and its political aftermath. On

the one hand, the term "post-political party" indicates that although parties still act as leading political entities, in reality they have lost the representativeness held by parties in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and have parted from their original logic. At the same time, political forms have stabilized—major political institutions were built upon the principle of representativeness of party politics. Consequently, the fracture of representativeness becomes the main symptom of today's political crisis. On the other hand, the term "post-party politics" indicates the necessity to devise a new form and corresponding practice beyond the framework of party politics. The key issues for post-party politics are how to reconstruct representativeness, to reconstruct it on what level, or even whether we should think differently about representativeness itself. In the political practice of twentieth-century China, elements of post-party politics were active but only as the practice of a super-political party, namely, as people's war, the mass line, and the united front. All these practices of representativeness attempted to move beyond conventional relations of representation. Although it partly evolved from such super-party politics, present-day party politics in China was also generated by the degradation of a super-party into a state-party system. In order to overcome the crisis of representation, we need to reconstruct representativeness and to explore new paths of post-party politics.

Today, representativeness cannot be reconstructed by repeating old slogans or praxis. We have to face the problems of representative politics and the detachment of social structure from the political system. From this perspective, two dimensions of post-party politics need to be tackled: we should reexamine the principles of representative politics in twentieth-century China and should explore the conditions and possibilities of post-party politics.

Rethinking the Principles of Representative Politics of Twentieth-Century China

The problems of representativeness, as well as the related problem of a system of representation, were the core issues of modern political systems. In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, the content of representative politics consisted of categories such as political party and social class, as well as their actual application in the framework of state politics. After monarchy declined, representative politics became connected with problems of democracy. Political principles of representative politics in China differ from those in the West, which pivot on a parliamentary multiparty system and principles of universal suffrage. This difference has been fundamentally misunderstood and neglected. We need to clarify the problems related to the forms of

democracy: Western democracy based on general elections is not the only model of democracy, nor is democracy a mere abstract form. It has to be based on political momentum, without which none of the democratic forms could survive.

The Meaning of "The Working Class as the Leading Class"

To analyze the principles of Chinese representative politics, we could start with the constitution of the PRC. The Chinese constitution is seldom quoted by constitution scholars to discuss the meaning of constitutionalism. Its Article 1 states, "the People's Republic of China is a socialist state under people's democratic dictatorship led by the working class and based on the alliance of workers and peasants." Article 2, "all power in the People's Republic of China belongs to the people." These two articles illustrate the principles of representative politics during the socialist period, which were constituted by many fundamental political categories. But these political categories cannot be reduced to commonsensical terms: they cannot be verified by simple a priori principles or be restored as general empirical facts. They emerged in twentieth-century China in the political praxis of revolution.

For example, what does "the working class as the leading class" mean? In the first half of the twentieth century, the Chinese working class was weak. The Chinese revolution, judged by the composition of its participants, was mainly a peasant revolution. How can the working class become the leading class? In empirical terms, it is also disputable whether the bourgeoisie, as opposed to the working class, could be regarded as a class in itself. For most of the twentieth century, the working class only made up a small fraction of the Chinese population, but it generated class revolution and class politics. Now China has the largest working class in the world, but there is no class politics of a commensurate magnitude.

The concepts of class and class politics are interconnected but need to be treated separately. Modern Chinese class politics certainly had its objective reality and material basis, which can only be grasped from the perspective of a universal connection. Without theoretical analysis, political mobilization could not have existed. Without people's war from the late 1920s to the late 1940s, the practice of class politics with the peasants as its major participants and representing the proletariat would have been impossible; without Third World countries' efforts to industrialize through a socialist approach, the subjectivity of the working class could not have been created. The working class as an objective reality cannot spontaneously spark working-class politics. Without the building of political organizations for the working class or

movements fighting for it and its liberation, there cannot be a working-class politics.

The working class as the leading class is a political statement rather than a positivist conclusion. It was generated in the political and economic analysis of the conditions of China and of other oppressed nations in the context of global capitalist development and emerged only in the people's war and the campaign for the construction of a socialist state. Thus we can say that working-class politics emerged from the theoretical analysis of the internal contradictions and the socialist movements in so-called "backward areas" (rural societies) due to the imbalances of capitalism. It is in this context that "class" is not a general positivist analysis but an analytical category of political economy rooted in the analysis of capitalist production and expansion. As capitalism and imperialism expanded, all the non-Western areas, including China, were woven into the structure of the global capitalist division of labor. Industrial capitalism centered on the West subjugated all the social classes and social domains. Consequently, in every society, struggles against one's own unequal condition and governance all aimed at abolishing class exploitation. Capitalist class exploitation is the final stage of class exploitation. This is why although China in the early twentieth century did not have a large working class, it witnessed the rapid growth of working-class politics within large-scale political and military struggles started by peasants, students, and urban citizens. The genesis and reality of working-class politics cannot be denied by the small number of working-class participants. In other words, class politics refers to movements against the contradictions created by the logic of capitalism and its derivative class inequality. Hence the political concept of class or the concept of leading class cannot be equated with class in the sense of social stratification or occupational division. The essence of leadership is located in the fact that it is the momentum, which has different manifestations in different historical periods, to change this capitalist logic.

Two crucial social realities were the basis for the working class to become the leading class representing the people's general interests. First, China was an agricultural society and 90 percent of its population was constituted by peasants. Hence the representativeness of the working class had to connect with the problems of the peasants and include the peasants in order to construct the political category of "the people." Second, the working class was not only an appurtenance of capitalist production, but also a political identity constructed as the opponent of the capitalist class and reflected the general interests and the future of the people. The existence of the working class as an appurtenance of capitalist production, namely, reified forms of labor, is not equivalent to the existence of class politics. Class politics, manifested as a general impetus liberated from the capitalist logic of production, originated

from the analysis of the capitalist global division of labor, of the dynamic of its internal contradiction, and of its political practice in many areas including those without industrialization. As the characteristics of national oppression under capitalism differed from those in the pre-capitalist period, class politics also represented the interests of the oppressed nations, and the liberation of the working class included national liberation. The concept of "leadership" signified the political momentum for comprehensive social movements: although in different periods it can be represented by particular dominant political forces, this concept is not equal to a political bureaucratic system. The logic of modern political transformation was generated not according to established social structures but through theoretically analyzing capitalist development. This theoretical analysis and its political praxis directly shaped a new political subjectivity. It is for this reason that even when the structure of social classes changes, political momentum that has emerged in response to inequality can still remain vigorous by means of diversified political participation, theoretical debates, and social experiments.

The Depoliticization of the Category of Class

Today, however, the political logic of the twentieth century has weakened. Most intellectuals investigate social stratification and its politics in China from a positivist perspective. Right-wing, and even some left-wing, intellectuals believe that in twentieth-century China, because the working class, compared with the peasant and other social classes, occupied a very limited space in political life and because the capitalist class was immature, the nature of China's modern revolution could not be socialist and the working class could not truly become the leading class. This positivist opinion, to some extent, deconstructs the foundational principles of the Chinese revolution and modern Chinese politics. It prevailed when the flow of historical theoretical analysis, the main element of twentieth-century politics, receded. Intellectuals taking this approach share the view that "class" is a structural and essentialist concept and refuse to recognize its politicalness based on a politico-economic analysis of capitalism.

In the context of depoliticization, the concept of "class" begins to follow a formalistic logic and slips toward a structural concept of "class division." Currently, the connotation of class barely differs from the notion of stratification in contemporary sociology, which pivots around the state and regards social strata as objective structures without any impetus for the political. In contrast, the twentieth-century concept of class is political. Its connection with the state, that is, the concepts of the workers' state or socialist state, was represented formally through the pioneer party and its class alliance. Without

the background of people's war and the campaign for the construction of a socialist state, there would have been no class politics in praxis. Based on the concept of class as a structural stratification, a structural system of representation could accordingly be established in the socialist state. The system of social representation used in political parties and the People's Congress is an example. On the contrary, although in the twentieth century it contained elements of social stratification and its politics consequently included elements such as proportional representation, the concept of class was fundamentally political. It was closely associated with political representativeness or political leadership, of which the so-called "mass line" policy was its actualization. Hence today's social sciences can neither explain the crisis of representativeness nor provide understanding for the origin of twentieth-century representative politics. Under depoliticization, the dilemma caused by the fracture of representativeness cannot be resolved by the nonetheless necessary and positive steps of increasing seats for certain classes, such as workers or peasants, in the political party or in the People's Congress. Reconstructing representativeness and repoliticization are actually two different expressions of the same problem, with the latter referring to the need to reanalyze the internal contradictions and imbalances within contemporary capitalism in order to discover its driving force and change its logic.

The Conditions for Post-Political Party Politics

To return to the topic of class politics formation early in the twentieth century, Chinese class politics at that time already had elements of supra-representative politics since the political parties that played the central role in such politics had features like those of a supra-political party or a super-political party. If we use the classical Chinese political concepts "rites and music" 礼乐 and "institutions" 制度 as a basis for comparison, so-called supra-representativeness can be compared to the logic of "rites and music" and representativeness to the logic of "system." Just as "rites and music" refer to systems that are to be formed and forming, supra-representativeness indicates a political process that allows people to participate and leads to the formation of order 秩序. This process emphasized by supra-representativeness functions also within the framework of a representative system but is not its equivalent.

After World War I, prolonged debates on parliamentary politics broke out among different political schools and even among communists from different countries. A key issue in the debates was the redefinition of the political party. In the struggle between the GMD and the CCP and in the war against the Japanese invasion, armed struggle, the mass line, the united front, as well as party construction in the practice of above three aspects, etc. became political

assets for the CCP. The mass line, summarized as "all for the masses; all relies on the masses; from the masses and to the masses," was the guideline by which this supra- or super-political party politics was consolidated. First applied to the construction of the base areas and later to the governing of the whole country, the mass line was a political praxis that inherited or borrowed from some forms and principles of the Western representational system that originated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, such as the election of representatives and the narrative of representativeness. This was true not only of the CCP but of all the other democratic parties as well. It remains clear that this political praxis contains supra- or post-political party elements that embody the endeavors to establish organic and political connections between the political party and society.

In the political heritage from twentieth-century China, the supra-representativeness of Chinese representative politics bears two essential features: the importance of culture and theory, and the sustaining of the political dynamics of the party through the practice of the mass line.

Theoretical Debates and "Self-Revolution"

A phenomenon recurrent in modern Chinese history was that cultural movements established the foundation for new politics and political parties in turn attempted to discipline cultural movements. The emergence of political representativeness and political subjectivity was closely linked with cultural movements and theoretical struggles, to which historical research was often subordinate. I do not have enough space here to thoroughly discuss these cultural movements and what we could learn from them and will instead focus on one point: I believe political dynamics always come from the interaction between culture and politics. They will be lost if the political party overly interferes or disciplines cultural movements, thereby destroying the interaction between politics and culture. Today, culture has been categorized as an independent sphere as opposed to politics and economy. It is no longer a space for the continuous creation of new political subjectivity. The term "culture industry" encapsulates the position of culture in an economic society. In his *On Contradiction*, Mao Zedong writes that in backward countries, theory normally occupies the primary position. It is impossible to establish a new politics without theoretical development. Founding a theory does not mean drawing up plans behind closed doors. The relation between theory and its praxis determines the results of theoretical struggle: Is it a relation between theory removed from reality and its dogmatic politics, or between theory that comes from and resorts to praxis and its application? To emphasize the importance of praxis is not to deny the importance of debates on ideas,

theories, and lines 路线—but is to oppose dogmatism in order to prevent a separation between the policy orientation of the political party and the demands of society.

The Chinese state system is characterized by the symbiosis of the party and the government, which generates energy as well as crisis. Simply praising or criticizing this union cannot resolve any problems. We should rather try to understand why this system can under certain conditions generate political energy and in some other circumstances weaken the political energy of the party to an unprecedented degree and force it to prostrate itself before the logic of power and capital. In other words, it is not productive to simplistically denounce the union of the political party and the state in general. Instead, we should analyze its various forms and connotations. The formation of the structure of Chinese party politics is closely associated with the Chinese revolutionaries' exploration of the socialist path. State ownership that aimed at resolving the contradiction inherent in capitalist private ownership provided a historical prerequisite for the direct union of the state and capital in the days of reform. That the state was in control of a large amount of capital had the benefit of enabling the state to be free from the manipulation by a single capitalist or an oligarch and to maintain strong regulatory capacity. But in the circumstances of depoliticization, political energy is mainly manifested through state power, especially administrative power rather than political power. With the weakening of political power, state power is also gradually surrendering to the control of interest networks centered around capital. Accordingly, like privately owned capital, state-owned capital is also facing the same problems of corruption, monopoly, and, as a result, inefficiency. Hence the crucial problem is not the privatization of state-owned property but how to free state-owned property in China from interest networks centered on capital. The dissolution of subjective initiative due to the alliance between power and capital is a consequence of depoliticization. Since the positive and the negative elements of the system are entangled with each other, we will inevitably face a political crisis if there is no continuous "self-revolution" to create new political energy.

During the Chinese revolution and the ensuing socialist period, theoretical debates within the party were one of the methods to accumulate political energy and to adjust the direction of development: the elevation of practical problems to the level of theoretical discussions and debates on lines can generate a new political momentum; it is also the best approach to help people understand that the best way to correct mistakes is through debate based on praxis and implementing institutional adjustments accordingly. Even during that time, such debates were not confined to the intra-party sphere but were enriched by the mass line and by the reciprocal relations between theory and

praxis. After the thoroughgoing reform, such theoretical debates ineluctably extended to the social sphere. There are several prerequisites for post-political party politics, namely, citizens' freedom of speech, space for debate in the political sphere, citizen's political participation supported by modern technology, and the reinstallation of laborers to the center of Chinese political life. The healthy development of political debates and citizens' political participation will not be achieved without reforming the political sphere, the essence of which is to set ourselves free from the logic of media capital as it conglomerates and functions in the role of a party in order to create a space of true tolerance and freedom. Only on this premise can positive interaction between social debates and public policy adjustments be accomplished. Today, the forces suppressing citizens' freedom of speech come not only from the traditional political sphere but from media power that has been corporatized and partified as well. Expanding the public sphere and opposing a media monopoly do not contradict each other.

Theoretical debates cannot be treated as abstract discussions removed from political practice; they are rather a recapitulation of practice, also using the outcome of practice and new practice to examine previous theories and practice. The experience of the Chinese revolution is based on praxis, correcting its mistakes through theoretical debates and political struggle and consequently creating premises for new strategies and new practice. In Mao Zedong's *On Practice*, he argues that the Chinese revolution had no preexisting model and that it was always learning and exploring. So too for reform. In the twentieth century, whenever theoretical debates and the struggle over the political line were relatively active, the political realm was also more lively and the innovations in political structure more dynamic. The current practice of "decentralizing power and transferring benefits" 放权让利 has increased the importance of local experiments; theoretical orientations should accordingly be more diverse. The dynamic of reform in China largely derives from different local experiments and their competition and from the constructive dialectical interaction between central and local governments, namely, "initiative from two sources" 两个积极性.

Struggles over the line in the Chinese revolution, through which new political paths were created, are closely associated with theoretical debates. The process of reform has also witnessed such line struggles. Theoretical and political struggles have the ability to correct mistakes during revolutionary politics. To emphasize the rectifying capacity of theoretical and political struggles does not conflict with criticizing the tendency of violence and despotism in the process of struggle. The result of cruel struggle and unmerciful punishment in line struggles has taught us a heavy lesson—the CCP must resolve problems on the basis of democracy and law. Still, we should not

simply regard theoretical debate and line struggle as mere power competition and political repression because of the existence of violence in these struggles. Political repression marks the end of theoretical debate, of line struggle, and of the practice of competition within the party. Today, the oppression against intellectual debates implemented by political and media power also marks the end of politics. A large amount of writings claiming to summarize and reflect on violence in history actually focuses on discrediting necessary theoretical debate and line struggle, leading to the dysfunction of the self-rectifying mechanism of the political party and to the self-enclosure of the political sphere. This type of research is a product of the politics of depoliticization. An urgently relevant question here is: Why were theoretical debates, especially those having reached the level of debate over the political line, more likely to be transformed into violent oppression? The consideration of this issue cannot exclude the process of the statization of political parties through which the necessary boundary between the party and the state disappeared and the political party no longer had a relatively independent theoretical space. In addition, this issue cannot be understood without considering the partification of the media—media power tries to become a sort of political agent for the state or for capital and begins to colonize the public sphere. Criticism and self-criticism used to be key elements of political life in China, but they were eliminated after Deng Xiaoping promoted the dictum of "don't argue" 不争论 in the 1980s. Without debates, struggles, and testings, how can the practice of criticism and self-criticism be carried on? How can political innovation be achieved?

The Mass Line

The close connection between party politics and the power structure is a contemporary condition. Now it is almost impossible to depend on the self-transformation of the political party to formulate a new politics. The level of bureaucratization in state and party structures is unprecedentedly high in the current situation of statized party politics. It is unmanageable to rely on the power of the political party alone to diminish bureaucracy. Hence, the mass line not only serves as a channel for the political party to maintain its political vigor but also needs to acquire a new dimension, that is, political openness, or greatly increasing political participation.

The mass line policy was first put forward by the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China in 1929 in a letter to the Fourth Route Army. However, "all for the masses; all relies on the masses; from the masses and to the masses" is not just a political and military strategy, but a description of an organic revolutionary politics as well. Like "the people" 人民, "the masses"

群众 is also a political category containing a new political subjectivity produced by uniting the political party and the common people 大众, especially peasants. The mass line policy reveals the underlying affinity between the politics of the political party and the politics of public society. This is a unique element in Chinese politics. The party was said to be the political representative of the masses, but in reality it embodied the process of shaping the masses into a political subjectivity, and was a way for the masses to represent themselves in the people's war or the campaign for the construction of their own state. We can hardly find explanations for this element in nineteenth- and twentieth-century party politics of Europe or in its versions in other areas.

People's War

How was the connection between the CCP and mass politics formed? The mass line was proposed in 1929 after the Northern Expedition failed and the CCP shifted from a struggle focused on cities to people's war based in the countryside. People's war, a political category and not war in general, was a process that created a political subject as well as its political structure and form of self-expression. In people's war, relations of representation in traditional politics were fundamentally transformed: the subject—the people 人民群众—was born in war and all forms and qualities of politics, such as the political party and the border region government, were either produced or transformed according to the people's needs. Without people's war, the transition of the CCP would have been unthinkable. In terms of membership composition, social basis, party work methodology, and the interpretation of revolutionary politics, the CCP born in 1921 that was composed of a few intellectuals and had no substantial connection with the working and the peasant classes differed greatly from its counterpart during the period of the Jiangxi Soviet. The failed urban revolts and workers' struggles led by Li Lisan, Wang Ming, and Qu Qiubai after the Great Revolution 大革命 (1924–1927) also differed from people's war, which unfolded through the strategy of encircling the cities from the countryside. The union of the party with the army, the red government, and the masses with peasants as the majority during the people's war, along with its changed relations with other parties and other social strata and their political representatives, reminds us that people's war created not only a political party that differed thoroughly from its predecessors but a class subject that featured the peasants as its main component and differed thoroughly from historical proletarian classes. I call this political party a super-party containing supra-party elements.

When it was founded, the CCP was mainly composed of intellectuals whom the Comintern representative Maring (Henk Sneevliet) regarded as petit bourgeois and whose connection with the working and peasant classes was even looser than the GMD's. In 1925 to 1926, as the GMD adopted a policy of alliance with Russia and with the CCP, the two parties allied to promote the peasant movement, the fruits of which included the Peasant Movement Training Institute at Guangzhou. The GMD made some political innovations: first, it established a party-army instead of relying on the old warlords; second, it cooperated with the CCP to advance the peasant movement and to use the mass line to assist the Northern Expedition—a policy gradually abandoned after 1927. The concept of party-army and the resistance of armed anti-revolution by armed revolution were not inventions by the CCP but by the GMD that was still in its revolutionary stage and influenced by the international communist movement.

People's war was the outcome of the failure of the Great Revolution but its elements first emerged as early as in the Northern Expedition. The armed forces that participated in the Autumn Harvest Uprising and in the Nanchang Uprising joined forces at Jinggangshan and established the Jiangxi Soviet base area—a milestone marking the unfolding of people's war. In the base area, land reform and military struggle served as the basic method to transform party politics into a mass movement. The pivotal issues of the Jinggangshan period hence became land reform and regime construction under the revolutionary war. The union of the political party with the army and of the party with the peasant movement and land reform mediated by the army not only changed the content and major task of the revolution but created a brand-new revolutionary political subject through the quadruple union of the party, the army, the construction of a new regime, and the peasant movement—that is, the political foundation of people's war. Compared with the political party, party politics, and other political phenomena that originated in nineteenth-century Europe and twentieth-century Russia, people's war in the revolution of China was a new and original invention.

Mao Zedong said that the army and the people were the basis of success. His words deserve explication: first, the war depended on mobilization and the masses; second, there must be local armed forces and guerrillas in addition to a strong regular army; third, the categories of the military and of the civilian were established in the land reform and the construction of a new regime. These historical prerequisites brought forth the so-called mass line. The mass line advocated first of all that both the starting point and the ultimate end of party work should benefit the largest number of people.

The Soviet Council System in People's War

In addition, the Soviet Council was the organizer of the lives of the masses. Only when the Soviet had done its utmost to solve the problems facing the masses and to concretely improve their lives could it establish the faith of the masses in the Soviet and mobilize them to join the Red Army, to help fight the war, and to defeat the GMD's encirclements.

How should we understand the Soviet as the organizer of the lives of the masses? On the surface it seemed to emphasize the organizing function of the Soviet, but in praxis, it above all required the CCP members to immerse themselves among the masses and to learn from the masses. Without the organization, the subjectivity of the masses could not come into being. Without the process of becoming one with and learning from the masses, the organization would lose its energy and become a mere structure that dominated the masses. The Soviet was a form through which the masses came into being and the CCP was a political organization through which the proletariat was enabled to express itself. In the vast and unindustrialized countryside, the proletariat acquired the ability of self-expression in movements of the political party. In this sense, it was the political party that created the self-expression of classes and therefore created political classes. But it is important to note that this party was not the one before people's war, but the one reconstructed through land revolution and the making of the Soviet. The former could not create a proletariat with peasants as its major component; only a political party engaged in people's war and base-area building could accomplish this mission.

Since it was the organization form of daily life, the Soviet equaled a political regime. Although a political regime in this sense also needs to learn from experiences of the state in Chinese and world history, it was not a capitalist state in general but a political form that produced classes with self-awareness. Under people's war, the Soviet handled not simply military issues but also the organization of daily life. Issues concerning land, labor, daily necessities, women, schools, etc. all formed major parts of people's war. The mass line was the basic strategy of people's war and changed or reconstructed the significance of the political party. This is one of the unique creations of the twentieth-century Chinese revolution.

The mass line, "from the masses and to the masses," as well as the cultural politics of "for whom" 为了谁 and "how to serve" 怎么为, are all questions about the relationship of the political party with the masses and society. Since the crust of modern politics is the state, political movements cannot operate by themselves, detached from political power. The problem of a representative system actually emerged when the party and the state became affiliated.

That is to say, a political system depends on a certain type of representation for its construction. In the Jiangxi Soviet and the other base areas for the war against the Japanese invasion, there was political regime construction under people's war. The issue of a representative system arose in this process of regime construction but the representative system of this period was closely associated with the praxis of supra-representativeness—"from the people and to the people." After 1949, as people's war ended, the formalization of the state system required the formalization of the representative system as well and consequently the relationship between the party and the masses gradually transformed from one of supra-representation to a representative system that pivots on the state system. The system of representation can function in the form of general elections, local elections, elections within political parties, recommendation, rotation, or election by lot. The merits or disadvantages of these forms are not absolute. Instead, they should be determined by analyzing the concrete circumstances, that is, as long as active politics of the people and for the people exists.

Supra-Representativeness in the Politics of Representativeness

When we are discussing the problems of the system of representation, however, we often neglect the element of supra-representativeness in the politics of representativeness. In fact, the mass line policy contains such an element. The concept of "the masses" in the mass line, a political process, contains the connotation of political subjectivity that is about to germinate and take shape. "The masses" is political energy in formation. Its relationship with the political party also changes in this process—the duality gradually integrates into a relative unity. This relationship is not completely one of representation; in other words, it often transcends the relationship of representation. The two sides mold each other in such a relationship in the struggle to accomplish their purposes so that the mass line becomes the process of creating a new political subjectivity. In this process, the masses become a political category and the political party, part of mass politics; the two define each other and intermingle. Hence, how to respond to a changing era and to the different compositions of the masses in new social conditions becomes a major agenda for political organizations to reconstruct political representativeness. Without this process, political representativeness, regardless of its form of application, will face the danger of becoming empty, as a consequence of which the political system will become detached from public life. The aspect of

supra-representativeness in representative politics is often neglected when discussing the problem of representative systems.

As class politics ebbs, party politics has shifted to post-political party politics. Contemporary China is undergoing a historical process of class reconstruction and of the suppression of class politics, which contrasts sharply with the situation in the twentieth century when class politics was extremely active despite the relatively small size of the working class. What are the political connotations of "the mass line policy" under post-party politics? In the Chinese revolution, especially in the people's war, the mass line can be roughly described as a political process through which a mature and highly disciplined political party, according to its clear political orientation and mission, mobilized the masses and recruited members active among the masses in order to strengthen and reform itself while fully guaranteeing the freedom and legal rights of mass organizations and mass movements and respecting their independence. For instance, after the war against the Japanese invasion broke out, the CCP Central Committee issued on October 16, 1937, the "Policy on Mass Movements." It emphasized the need to "establish organizations that truly belong to the masses, including labor unions, peasants' unions, student unions, merchants' unions, and other organizations for youth, for women and for children, based on the political, economic and cultural needs of the masses" and that "it is necessary to organize as many workers and hired farm hands as possible into labor unions and as many peasants as possible into peasants' unions." These mass organizations practiced "extensive democracy" within themselves and participated in government work as autonomous groups while promoting the economic and political interests and cultural activities of the masses.

The State-Party System and Its Overcoming

In today's state-party system 国党体制, we can use the mass line policy concept but should not and cannot re-create the previous political mode. One of the results of the statification of the political party is that the relationship of the political party, as the end point of a political movement, with the masses gradually transforms into one between the state and society. Nowadays a meticulously organized and highly disciplined political party with a clear agenda, that is, a political party in the twentieth-century sense, no longer exists, and the politics of the masses 大众政治 created by the mass line policy has also vanished: politics has degenerated into the category of management, a politics of depoliticization. The statification of the party signals the end of the era of the mass line. In a context completely different from that of the twentieth century, what does it mean to broach the topic of the mass line

again? Do we talk about the masses in the relationship between the state and the citizens or in the relationship between the political party and classes? The birth of the masses, as a political subject coming into existence, proclaimed the birth of a new political form. Under globalization and marketization, what does the mass line—the outcome of people's war—signify? What political power does the reference to the mass line today intend to create, what political subject to cultivate, and what future does the mass line actually point to?

The mass line is not simply rhetoric, and as a political thesis, it is not as self-evident as the words in this phrase are. Hence to bring up this issue again is not to return to a particular historical period but to pursue a probable and uncertain future. To rely on the masses does not simply mean social supervision or participation but requires a certain form of social organization. When we say there is no class politics in the twentieth-century sense today, it does not mean there are neither active class movements nor citizen politics. Among contemporary social organizations, nongovernmental organizations get more media attention whereas the working class and peasants movements are seldom covered. These two groups engage in political, social, ecological, and cultural issues in different ways. Currently, many social organizations and social movements have political potential, but they might not all lead to more positive politics. Under the conditions of financial capitalism, even social movements are penetrated by the capitalist system. Hence no matter whether we discuss civil society or analyze class politics in the contemporary world, we cannot avoid examining new forms of contemporary capitalism.

Financial capitalism is a global problem. Under financial capitalism, just as the accumulation of capital and its internal contradictions have reached an unprecedented scale, so too the gap between fictitious economy and real economy has become extraordinary. This distorted process of accumulation continues to disrupt social relations. Compared with the Western countries, China has a larger real economy and a larger labor population related with the real economy; the economic regulatory capability of its state is also stronger than in many developed countries. Financial capital, highly mobile and transnational, has escaped from the traditional restrictions of industry, guild, and even the state. What significance do these new developments have for the political dilemma we are discussing in this article? How are the state, political parties, class, and social organizations changing? These are problems remaining to be discussed. What we can be sure about is that we need to redefine and reanalyze a series of fundamental concepts that constitute the modern state system and power structure, including sovereignty, citizen, class, labor, and so on. In the Chinese context, how we understand these issues is directly linked with the issue of political practice.

For example, in the Chinese context, reconstructing representativeness is one of the methods to overcome the crisis of representativeness. The question is what type of representativeness should be adopted. Is it necessary to reemphasize the importance of the working class or the alliance of workers and peasants? Under financial capitalism, Western countries experienced and are still experiencing deindustrialization. Many intellectuals have noted the radical shrinking or even disappearance of the working class as a revolutionary class and have begun to challenge theoretically the idea of class and class politics. The other side of this social process, however, is the industrialization and the formation of a working class on a grand scale in China and in many other non-Western countries. Under globalization, this structure of class formation is not stable. An important phenomenon in contemporary China is the restructuring of class society 重新阶级化. Here it is inevitable to reuse the concept of class. But the expansion and reorganization of the working class and the decline of working-class politics happened almost simultaneously. The newly emerged working-class politics has not been able to reach the depth and scale of the preceding one. We can immediate identify its two features: first, it is detached from party politics; and second, the new working class is unstable due to the mobility of the contemporary system of production. This instability renders the new working class different from its equivalents in the era of socialist industrialization and in the early stage of their formation.

We can roughly identify four types of workers' struggles. First, strikes and attempts at self-organization (unionization) in order to protect workers' own personal rights and interests. The workers' strike at the Guangzhou Honda factory is an example. This is typical working-class politics. Second, attempts to shorten the contract period. Workers refuse to work in a factory or for a company for long. Instead, they will stay in one position for a year or two before taking another job. From a classic perspective of class politics, this tactic will jeopardize the solidarity of workers. But to demand a higher salary from the state and capitalists, it is a most effective action. Third, in addition to traditional forms of organization such as unions, new forms have appeared. The so-called "foreman system" 领工制, which used to be seen as a way of enabling double exploitation, has become a new type of organizational form for workers' struggle. It protects some of the interests of workers through informal contracts. There are also associations for people coming from the same province, town, or village, and for ethnic minorities, all of which have the same function. Lastly, rights protection 维权 movements focused on the protection of legal rights of individuals. In addition to these four types, rural reconstruction 乡村建设 also provides an alternative form of support for the labor movement. Discussions on these issues are myriad but are mainly

conducted within the framework of social stratification, barely exploring the political potential of these forms of organizations or their overlap with and differences from traditional class politics.

If the fracture of representativeness is manifested as the detachment of political forms from social forms, what is the political form that can organically connect with social forms? Class and class politics exist in contemporary China. Reconstructing representativeness is inevitably linked with the need to restructure class society. But as the statification of the political party intensifies, instead of reconstructing a political party of a certain class, post-party politics would probably take the approach of formulating a more independent social politics (including political organizations in a broader sense, such as workers' unions, peasant associations, and other social organizations) and shifting to an active labor politics that focuses on reforming the relations within the production system. In fact, urban/rural conflict and its repercussions, regional imbalances and their reverberations, class relationships and their transformation, as well as the ecological damage caused by contemporary modes of production and consumption, these are all the most intense manifestations of the contradictions in modern capitalism. Therefore, rural reconstruction, environment protection, transformation of the development model, protection of ethnic equality and cultural diversity, and improving the social status of the working class should all become the impetus for a contemporary politics of equality.

Why raise the issue of post-party politics? The answer lies in the understanding that two conflicting proposals for contemporary political reform share the same premise of returning to party politics. For the right wing, the basic political model is the classic multiparty system based on the parliamentary politics framework. For the left wing, it is important to recuperate or reconstruct the political representativeness of the party and consequently to raise a series of questions concerning class and its political forms. Chinese reality reveals that the latter poses the more urgent question. But it is very likely that contemporary political reform will not necessarily return to the political model of the nineteenth or twentieth century but rely on the new political and economic reality. Reconstructing representativeness through the mass line policy, theoretical debates, and organization reconstruction is an inescapable political process but its purpose is very probably not to return to the old political party model. Today, although the political organization called "political party" still exists, its political connotation has changed significantly. In the early twentieth century, this change was undertaken deliberately, and was accomplished by establishing a super-political party to overcome the crisis in multiparty politics. In the late twentieth century, however, this change was more passive as it was completed in the shift from a

partified state to a statified party. Under the new conditions, how social power can engage in political processes on a larger scale and in a more direct fashion becomes a necessary project in the exploration of a new political framework. It is also the precondition for the party to practice the mass line to some extent. Hence the process of rebuilding political representativeness cannot simply rely on traditional party politics; it must include the practice of post-party politics, for which current technological developments also provide more possibilities. So-called post-party politics does not negate the function of political organizations but rather highlights their characteristics of being open, unfinished, and non-bureaucratic. The mass line and mass politics are the source of political vigor and the foundation for resisting right-wing populism.

Post-Political Party Politics

Today social structures are changing drastically. To design their course of development and reconstruction should be everyone's concern. A new political agency needs to be established on the interests of most of the Chinese people, which in the past demonstrated its political implications and social significance through the category of "the people." Since the concept of "the people" is generally shifting toward the meaning of "population," its political connotation has vaporized to such a degree that we can no longer find any political expression for general interests aside from the concept of "citizen." The disdain for the concept of the people manifests the fragmentation of society in ideology. In modern Chinese history, "the people" was a disputed concept constantly appropriated by different political powers. But it was not always empty. In the period when mass politics and the mass line were active, it was a vibrant political category. Its rich connotations were drained as the result of depoliticization, as mass politics and the mass line were replaced by bureaucratic state politics. I bring up the concept of "the people" here again not as if it were in opposition to the more popular concept of citizen. On the contrary, I argue that it is essential to reestablish the political connection between these two categories. The politics of the citizen does not equal to a politics with the individual as the main subject. It should also embrace the politics of the masses and society and thus the politics of the people. In ethnic minority areas, it should include the politics of ethnic equality as well. In the twentieth century, progressive parties that proposed a political role for the proletarian class were not prompted by the interests of the working class or workers' groups alone. They believed the mission of the proletariat had a universal significance that surpassed the limits of their own interests. It would necessarily become the people's politics, namely the politics for every

citizen. In the system of state power, people's politics is manifested as the politics of true equality. The politics of equality is neither the policies of providing relief for the poor nor meeting the national target of eliminating the poor. It includes reflections on the premises and motivations of politics. I have already analyzed the various connotations of the politics of equality in an earlier article (Wang, 2011) and will not repeat myself here.

Current research on social stratification can quickly identify the interests of particular social classes but it fails to identify a general interest. This is a problem that positivist methodology cannot resolve. Whether or not our politics in the future can develop in a positive direction is determined by whether or not the latent power that represents the future can be discovered within social transitions. This latent power is universal, and what is dormant now will become manifest in the future. To discuss a "reconstruction of representativeness" is to unearth the universality of this suppressed potential. This discussion is essentially a battle for the future. For any type of political system, only when it can create universality, namely when it can represent universal interests, will it possess representativeness. Hence the process of reconstructing representativeness is the process of creating universality. I have no interest in the widely celebrated official slogan of "great cultural development and prosperity." My inquiry is more intrigued by the problem of the relationship between culture and politics. Can we still, as happened in the twentieth century, study the transition of social structures, analyze their possible direction, redefine the boundaries of politics, and discover universality that can represent the future in today's development of China and the rest of the world through the domain of culture? This is a question that must be raised. This is also a challenge we must overcome.

The twentieth century was in a sense a prophecy, one that was soon trapped in crisis after its articulation. But it was also a suppressed potential. Reexamining the cultural and political legacy of the twentieth century does not mean simply returning to outdated praxis. Rather, the object must be to discover its untapped power that contains universality and potential for the future. This suppressed potential reminds us that returning to the old politics of the nineteenth century is not our destination. Our attention should be on the establishment of a constitutional politics in the context of post-political party politics based on the historical legacy of the twentieth century.

Author's Note

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Note

1. The "decline of representation," which suggests a detachment between the political system and social forms, is an issue that I have discussed on various occasions. In Wang, 2006, I discuss the question of depoliticized politics, and in Wang, 2011, I explore the different types of equality crisis and its relationship with the crisis of representativeness.

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