

# **Marxist-Leninism 2.0:**

## **PANEL: China's Socialist Consultative Democracy**

**Pennsylvania State University**  
**12 February 2018**  
**Lewis Katz Building**  
**Room 236; 9.00 – 11.00 AM**  
**University Park**

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### **Conference Concept Note**

These are quite dynamic times for democracy—as theory, institution, and system. What had once been a term whose contours and applications appeared to converge around global certainties has encountered, in this new era of national and international relations, challenges from a number of quite distinct sources. Those sources now have names—populism, legalism, the so-called deep state, democratic deficit, and internationalism—most useful as proxies for distinctive modalities of democratic stress. Those stresses are augmented by perceived deficits in systemic accountability and representation. Though attention has been paid to the specific challenges within the structures of Western liberal democracies, Marxist Leninist political communities have also encountered similar challenges within their own political systems.

China has also been deeply engaged in this global conversation about the shape and character of contextually legitimate but stable systems that express the core democratic foundation of the state and its government. Chinese leaders have recognized, probably more consciously and directly than their counterparts in the West, that states and political communities worldwide appear to have moved to a new era in which many of the approaches to social, economic, political or cultural organizations require reconsideration—and adjustment to suit the times. Especially from the beginning of the leadership period of Xi Jinping, China, under the guidance of its vanguard CPC and in sometimes vigorous dialogue with its elite institutions, has turned to the development of its social and political forces with the same vigor with which it sought to develop its productive forces from early in the leadership of Deng Xiaoping.

Indeed, Chinese leaders have noted that as China has developed, its own governance systems have been facing new challenges. The techniques and approaches to democratic organization and operation, grounded in the assumptions of 20<sup>th</sup> century techniques, were now required to meet new challenges that followed from the successful development of Chinese productive forces and the deepening of Chinese engagement with the world. The Chinese Communist Party (CPC) itself, in exercising its leadership responsibilities noted the shift from the challenges of development of productive forces to the emergence of a new contradiction at the heart of Chinese governance. The Report of the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC Congress made that clear:

What we now face is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. China has seen the basic needs of over a billion people met, has basically made it possible for people to live decent lives, and will soon bring the building of a moderately prosperous society to a successful completion. The needs to be met for the people to live better lives are increasingly broad. Not only have their material and cultural

needs grown; their demands for democracy, rule of law, fairness and justice, security, and a better environment are increasing. At the same time, China's overall productive forces have significantly improved and in many areas our production capacity leads the world. The more prominent problem is that our development is unbalanced and inadequate. This has become the main constraining factor in meeting the people's increasing needs for a better life.

The impulse to further develop the productive forces of governance in the face of the fundamental challenges of China's new era have acquired an increasingly clear contemporary form since the conclusion of the CPC's 19<sup>th</sup> Congress in 2017. Xi Jinping's Report to the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC Congress outlined a comprehensive approach to socialist democracy deeply embedded within the guiding leadership of the CPC and closely aligned with the people, state institutions, and the mechanisms of consultation now in long development within the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC). Socialist democracy has become an umbrella concept that intermesh a number of important structures that constitute the framework within which democracy with both socialist and Chinese characteristics is defined and implemented. Socialist democracy itself includes significant focus on popular consultation, and on the mediating power of law. It also focuses on the parallel development of democratic structures and practices within the CPC that can then be used as a template for the exercise by the CPC of its leadership obligations. Democracy itself is shaped by an integrated normative structure centered on what are referenced as "core socialist values" from which it is possible both to implement and assess the working of institutions. But socialist democracy also integrates what is referenced as "socialist consultative democracy." The Report to the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC Congress explains:

We will advance extensive, multilevel, and institutionalized development of consultative democracy, and adopt a coordinated approach to promoting consultations carried out by political parties, people's congresses, government departments, CPPCC committees, people's organizations, communities, and social organizations. We will strengthen the institutions of consultative democracy and develop complete procedures and practices to enable the people's broad, continuous, and intensive participation in day-to-day political activities.

Socialist consultative democracy has been developed around the United Front Parties as well as other representative institutional social organs. It serves as a means through which popular engagement can be institutionalized and made effective. Yet it appears to mean much more than that—integrating most aspects of official life within a tight web of consultation, monitoring, and review guided by the CPC.

As in the West, these vigorous action appears to have produced a new approach both to the theory and practice of democratic governance in China to suit the new era of Chinese socialist development, a Marxist-Leninism 2.0 for the new era. This conference brings together leading scholars from Europe, the United States and China, to consider the development of this Chinese Socialist Democracy in the new era. These scholars will consider the theory, form, and consequences of Marxist-Leninism 2.0 as expressed as contemporary Chinese Socialist Democracy. It will take as a starting point Xi Jinping's consideration about the shape and practice of democracy within China:

"In such a vast and populous socialist country, extensive deliberation under the leadership of the CPC on major issues affecting the economy and the people's livelihood embodies the unity of democracy and centralism. Chinese socialist democracy takes two important forms: In one, the people exercise their right to vote in elections; and in the other, people from all sectors of society undertake extensive deliberations before major decisions are made. In China these two forms do not cancel one another out, nor are they contradictory. They are complementary. They constitute

institutional features and strengths of Chinese socialist democracy.” (Quoted from Li Junru, Consultative Democracy, People’s Democracy, [China Today](#) March 1, 2018).

Contributions will seek to theorize this emerging Marxist-Leninism 2.0, and to consider the role of key institutional actors and organs—the CPPCC, the state institutions, and other social and political forces—as well as their relationship to the CPC. Analysis will be undertaken from a Chinese, Western and comparative perspective. The core object of participants will be to seek to extract the fundamental theory and characteristics of the emerging systems, and to point to the likely paths to further development.