The Historical Process and Basic Experience of Upholding and Strengthening the Communist Party of China Leadership Since Reform and Opening up

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Abstract. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the greatest advantage of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, the fundamental guarantee for doing a good job of the Party and the country, and the fundamental point of China's political stability, economic development, national unity and social stability. According to the different age conditions of the Communist Party of China, the historical tasks undertaken, and the exploration and practice of upholding and strengthening the Party's leadership, the process since reform and opening can be divided into three main stages: recovering and optimizing, deepening and perfecting, strengthening and maturing. As a red line running through the historical great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the practice of upholding and strengthening the Party's leadership since reform and opening up has accumulated valuable experience, mainly including: to establish the core of the Party's leadership, to give priority to political construction of the Party, to uphold the principle that the Party commands the overall situation and coordinates the efforts of all quarters, to strengthen the Party's leadership constantly and to have the courage to carry out self-reform and conduct strict self-governance.

Keywords: the Communist Party of China, socialism with Chinese characteristics, reform and opening up

1. Introduction

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China clearly pointed out the significant advantages of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and China’s system for governance. The first is “upholding the centralized and unified leadership of the Party, following the Party’s scientific theories, maintaining political stability and ensuring that the country keeps advancing in the direction of socialism” [1], the plenary session put the decision to uphold and strengthen the Party’s leadership system as the first priority, highlighting the Party’s leadership position in the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and the national governance system. For the implementation of the spirit of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, unwaveringly upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership over all work, upholding and strengthening socialism with Chinese characteristics, advancing the modernization of China’s system and capacity for governance, achieving Two Centenary Goals, and realizing the Chinese Dream of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, studying the historical process of upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership since reform and opening up and summing up its historical experience have great and far-reaching significance.

2. The Historical Process of Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Leadership Since Reform and Opening up

2.1 Recovering and Optimizing: Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Leadership in Emancipating the Mind (1978-1992)

At the beginning of reform and opening up, Chinese Communists mainly represented by Deng Xiaoping summed up the historical experience of Party building and emphasized that upholding the Party’s leadership is the core of upholding the Four Cardinal Principles. At the same time, it is
pointed out that it is necessary to clearly oppose bourgeois liberalization, because its purpose is to deny the Party’s leadership. Without the Party’s leadership, it is impossible to have a correct political line to lead and stabilize and unite the political situation.

2.1.1 Put Forward the Fundamental Policy of “In Order to Uphold the Party’s Leadership, We Must Work Hard to Strengthen the Party’s Leadership”

Deng Xiaoping clearly put forward the basic policy of “in order to uphold the Party’s leadership, we must work hard to strengthen the Party’s leadership.” It is particularly emphasized that the focus and key of this policy is to strengthen the Party’s conduct and strengthen ideological and political work. Since the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the Party conduct has been generally good, but due to historical and practical reasons, there are also unhealthy practices and negative corruption within the Party. If no measures are taken to solve it, reform and opening up will be buried. The bright future of the Party will lead the Party to lose its leadership and to perish. The Party conduct of the ruling Party is a matter of life and death of the Party and the entire Party must persistently correct all kinds of unhealthy practices. At the same time, it is necessary to strengthen the Party’s leadership through ideological and political work, drive the Party’s organizational construction and work style, resolutely oppose and resist the thought of Western trend of bourgeois liberalization, and copy the wrong ideological trend of multi-party rotation.

2.1.2 To Uphold and Strengthen the Party’s Leadership Calls for Maintaining Central Authority

In order to better upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership and effectively respond to various risks and challenges encountered in the historical process of reform and opening up, Chinese Communists mainly represented by Deng Xiaoping clearly stated that “the Party Central Committee must have authority”. The key to maintaining the authority of the Party Central Committee lies in forming and establishing the Party’s core of leadership, and resolutely maintaining its core status and authority. This is the inheritance and development of Marxist Party building Theory and it is a scientific summary of the Party’s historical experience. To maintain the authority of the Party Central Committee, we must be good at grasping the overall situation and taking the overall situation into consideration. It is necessary to properly handle the overall and local relations of national construction, maintain the authority of the Party Central Committee, and strengthen macro-control capabilities. We must ensure that the authority of the Party Central Committee is resolutely maintained on major issues and direction issues. We must proceed from the overall situation when we do things and think about issues.

2.1.3 Reform and Strengthen the Party’s Leadership System and Methods

Chinese Communists mainly represented by Deng Xiaoping clearly put forward the task of reforming the Party’s leadership system and methods on the basis of profoundly summarizing the shortcomings and issues of the Party’s leadership system, emphasizing that the basis of this task is to fully restore the Party’s Leadership and focus on improving the Party’s specific leadership system. The Party adheres to the ideological line of seeking truth from facts, formulates and implements a series of principles and policies in line with China’s reality, such as improving the Party’s democratic centralism and strengthening the Party’s collective leadership; re-establishing the Party’s Disciplinary Inspection Committee to clarify the Party’s discipline; emphasizing the construction of socialist democracy and the legal system and strengthening the Party’s leadership foundation; strengthening ideological and political work for cadres and the masses inside and outside the Party; reforming the establishment of central institutions, and gradually abolishing the lifelong system of leading cadres.
2.2 Deepening and Perfecting: Upholding and Perfecting the Party’s Leadership in Deepening Reform (1992-2012)

The 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China established the goal of reforming the socialist market economy system, marking that reform and opening up has entered a deepening stage, and many new situations and issues have also emerged on the issue of the Party’s leadership. On the basis of scientifically judging from the international situation and profoundly summing up historical experience, the Party has deepened and pushed forward how to uphold and strengthen the Party’s leadership from awareness to practice.

2.2.1 Proposed and Established the Important Thought of the “Three Represents”, Which Provided Scientific Theoretical Guidance for Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Leadership

The Chinese Communists mainly represented by Jiang Zemin closely combined with the reality of reform and development of China, focused on solving the new situations and new issues faced by Party building at the turn of the century, and put forward the Important Thought of the “Three Represents”, which provided scientific theoretical guidance for upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership. These include: we must organize and lead the development of productive forces, and continuously uphold and strengthen Party building in accordance with the requirements of the development of advanced productive forces, strengthen leadership capabilities and levels; we must strengthen leadership in ideological and cultural construction, ideological work and so on. We must innovate leadership concepts, reform leadership methods, and continuously develop advanced socialist culture with Chinese characteristics; we must continuously strengthen our work style, strengthen leadership mechanisms, make scientific decisions, and better respond to the concerns and demands of the Chinese people.

2.2.2 Established “The Two Vanguards” of the Party, and Consolidated and Expanded the Class and Mass Foundations of the Party’s Leadership

The Communist Party of China is the vanguard of the Chinese working class, as well as the vanguard of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation. This is a new scientific generalization of the nature of the Party under the historical conditions of reform and opening up. It is an enrichment and development of the Marxist Party building doctrine. It is of great significance to consolidate and expand the class and mass foundations of the Party’s leadership. The nature of the working class vanguard is related to whether the Party can always become the core of leadership of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics, the success or failure of the Party’s cause, and the future and destiny of the country and the nation. At the same time, the Party’s consciousness to become the vanguard of the Chinese people and the Chinese nation is its essential characteristics and fundamental requirements. It is necessary to strive to safeguard, realize and develop the fundamental interests of the entire Chinese people and the Chinese nation, continuously strengthen the Party’s cohesion and consolidation, and expand the mass base of the Party’s leadership.

2.2.3 Strengthened the Party’s Advanced Nature and Purity, and Consolidated the Party’s Leadership

Since the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Communists mainly represented by Hu Jintao have further deepened their understanding of the laws of governing and construction of the Communist Party, put forward major strategies to strengthen the Party’s advanced nature and purity and taken effective measures to continuously advance. It has played a most important fundamental role in consolidating the Party’s leadership. The first is to carry out continuous theoretical study and education to comprehensively strengthen the theoretical quality and level of the Party’s members. The second is to uphold the practice orientation and guide the majority of the Party’s members and cadres to consciously maintain their advanced nature and purity in practice. The third is to strengthen the system and mechanism of maintaining the Party’s advanced nature and purity, and provide a reliable system guarantee for consolidating the Party’s leadership position.
2.2.4 Upheld the Combination of Administering the Country According to the Rule of Law and the Rule of Virtue to Strengthen the Level of the Party’s Leadership

Governing the country according to law is a profound summary of the practical experience of the Communist Party of China, an inherent requirement for advancing the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and a fundamental guarantee for upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership. The Party has continuously explored and practiced governing the country according to law, and provided the necessary legal support for better upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership. The first is to scientifically define the connotation of governing the country according to law. The second is to give a clear explanation of the essential condition of governing the country according to law, including strengthening the legislative work, focusing on observing the law, and strengthening the concept of the rule of law. The third is to clarify that the goal of governing the country according to law is to build a socialist nation ruled by law. It is pointed out that guided by the idea of the rule of law, comprehensively implement the basic strategy of governing the country according to law, and speeding up the construction of a socialist country governed by law. The fourth is to clarify the idea of governing the country by combining the rule of law with the rule of virtue.

2.2.5 Put Forward the New Requirement of “Strengthening the Party’s Governing Ability and Improving the Party’s Leadership and Governing Level”

In the 21st century, the conditions for the Party’s leadership and governance have undergone profound changes. In order to further uphold and strengthen the Party’s leadership and promote the development of reform and opening up and the socialist modernization cause, the 16th National Congress of the Communist Party of China explicitly proposed “strengthening the construction of the Party’s governing capacity, and improving the Party’s level of leadership and governance.” The 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China further emphasized that the construction of the Party’s governing ability is related to the overall situation of the Party’s construction and the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Improving the Party’s leadership and governing ability must be taken as the core content of the building of leading groups at all levels. This is a major issue with overall significance. It is related to whether the Party can lead the people to continuously create a new situation in the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, to realize the comprehensive construction of the Well-off Society, and to further consolidate the core position of the Party’s leadership under new historical conditions.

2.3 Strengthening and Maturing: Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Overall Leadership in the Great Revolution (2012 to Present)

As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the Chinese Communists mainly represented by Xi Jinping have put more emphasis on upholding and strengthening the Party’s overall leadership, permeating the Party’s leadership in all activities governing the country, and proposing that “the Party is the highest force for political leadership” “the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China, and the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China” and so on. Party building has reached a new level.

2.3.1 Clarified the Important Status and Fundamental Principles of Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Overall Leadership in the New Era

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Party has summed up the developing experience of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics, and has clearly identified that upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership is the fundamental foundation for starting, upholding and developing the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics. It has a bearing on the future of the Party and the country. It is related to the fundamental interests of the Chinese people. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clarified that the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China, the greatest strength of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the
Communist Party of China, and emphasized the fundamental principle of upholding the Party’s leadership over all work. This is a brand-new assertion of upholding and strengthening the important position and fundamental principles of the Party’s leadership, and it shows that the Party has deepened their understanding of the laws governing the Communist Party, the laws governing socialist construction, and the laws governing the development of human society.

2.3.2 Clarified Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Comprehensive Leadership’s Fundamental Requirements and Keys

Establishing a core of leadership is the basic view of Marxist Party building Theory, the Party’s fine historical tradition and unique political advantages, and the urgent need to advance the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the New Era. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed that the fundamental purpose and principle of Party building in the New Era is to uphold and strengthen the Party’s overall leadership, and required all comrades in the Party to firmly establish the “Four Consciousnesses” (the consciousness of the need to maintain political integrity, think in big-picture terms, follow the leadership core, and keep in alignment), resolutely achieve “Two Safeguards” (determinedly holding fast to the centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, firmly safeguarding President Xi Jinping’s central role), and to be highly consistent. The requirements of “Four Consciousnesses” are reflected in all aspects of specific work, and the entire Party must maintain a high degree of consistency with the Party Central Committee in ideological and political actions and implement the Party Central Committee’s decision-making and deployment without fail. When implementing the Party Central Committee’s decision-making and deployment, it must be ideologically firm, politically firm, and resolute in action.

2.3.3. Improved the System and Mechanism of Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Comprehensive Leadership

A series of new requirements on upholding and strengthening the Party’s comprehensive leadership has further promoted the new great project of Party building in an all-round way. The first is to reform and strengthen the Party’s organizational system, fill gaps, establish new rules, and consolidate the organizational foundation for upholding and strengthening the Party’s overall leadership. A series of organizational systems has been formulated and revised to provide a strong institutional guarantee for regulating the Party’s leadership and organizational operations. The second is to reform and strengthen the Party’s cadres and personnel system and strengthen the key forces that uphold and strengthen the Party’s leadership. A scientific and accurate mechanism for selecting and employing personnel has formulated, which can provide strong team support and intellectual support. The third is to strengthen the construction of primary-level organizations, and ensure that the Party’s leadership takes root at the primary-level. Building a mechanism for implementing the primary-level Party organizations to strictly implement the Party’s main responsibility, and implement a system for reviewing and appraising Party building leaders at the primary-level, so that the Party’s principles and policies are implemented at the primary-level.

3. Basic Experience of Upholding and Strengthening the Party’s Leadership Since Reform and Opening up

The basic experience of upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership since reform and opening up is the history of successive generations of struggle of the Chinese Communists for more than 40 years. During this period of history, the Party’s research on new situations and issues has not only accumulated rich experience in upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership, but also formed a wealth of theoretical results.

3.1 To Establish the Core of the Party’s Leadership

The foundation of upholding and strengthening the Party’s leadership lies in establishing the core of the Party’s leadership, which is not only conducive to achieving the Party’s centralized and
unified leadership, better uniting and consolidating forces from all sides, but also improving the Party’s leadership and governing ability, and achieving the national prosperous and lasting. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Communists mainly represented by Xi Jinping have faced the historical mission of the New Era, faced with new challenges and opportunities, grasped the general trend, and grasped the new great project of Party building as the starting point. The great struggle of the Party, the military, and the Chinese people with new historical characteristics has created a new situation in the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

3.2 To Give Priority to Political Construction of the Party

Political attributes are the primary attributes of a political party. Attaching importance to political construction is an inherent requirement for strengthening party building. As a Marxist Party, the Communist Party of China speaks of politics as its most fundamental requirement, which concerns the direction and effect of Party building. This is determined by the nature and purpose of the Party, and it is also a consistent requirement. Since reform and opening up, the Party is united and undivided and has a strong spiritual drive because it is inseparable from the Party's high emphasis on political construction. The Communist Party of China, as the world’s largest political party, leads the direction and level of the world’s proletarian party and world socialist development. Political construction must always be given to priority.

3.3 To Uphold the Principle That the Party Commands the Overall Situation and Coordinates the Efforts of All Quarters

Coordinating and advancing the great cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the New Era and realizing the grand goal of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation require the Party, the military, and the Chinese people to work harder to meet the risks and challenges on the way forward. This undoubtedly requires the Communist Party of China, which has matured in practical struggle, to continuously strengthen its ability to overall planning, policy formulation, and reform and ensure that the Party always takes the overall picture and coordinates the parties in the development of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics. Achieving a unified ideological unity, political unity, and unity of action at a higher level and further improving the Party’s creativity, cohesion, and combat effectiveness can provide the most powerful political guarantee for the healthy development of various undertakings.

3.4 To Strengthen the Party’s Leadership Constantly

Strengthening the Party’s leadership is not to negate the Party’s leadership, but to better upholding the Party’s leadership. The two must never be opposed or separated. To this end, we must deepen the reform of the Party’s and the country’s leadership systems, courageously promote institutional innovation, and take the lead in advancing the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities. We must continuously eliminate the shortcomings of institutions and mechanisms that hinder development, comprehensively deepen reform, and strive to build a complete standard and effective institutional system, optimize the Party’s governing method, strengthen the Party’s leadership level, and provide a more effective institutional guarantee for the new victory of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the New Era.

3.5 To have the Courage to Carry out Self-Reform and Conduct Strict Self-Governance

To uphold and strengthen the Party’s leadership, we must carry forward the spirit of criticism and self-criticism, be brave in self-reform, uphold the truth, correct mistakes, constantly review our own existing issues that weaken the Party’s leadership and endanger the Party’s leadership, and work hard to solve the “Loose and Soft” issue of governing the Party. We must uphold the inward-looking courage to attack the pain points in the Party, deepen the comprehensive and strict governance of the Party with the resilience of failing to achieve our goals, and firmly grasp the requirements of governing the party with the spirit of nailing, and continue to strengthen the Party’s
ability to purify, improve, and reform itself, ensure the Party’s physical health and vitality, and ensure that the Party is always the core of strong leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

4. Summary

From what we have discussed above, we can draw the conclusion that the key to doing things well in China lies in the Party. Upholding the Party’s leadership over all work has always been an important principle of Marxist Party and an important weapon for the Party’s development and expansion to defeat the enemy and win victory. The key to upholding the Party’s leadership over all work lies in determinedly holding fast to the centralized and unified leadership of the Party Central Committee, firmly safeguarding President Xi Jinping’s central role, and resolutely safeguarding the authority of the Party Central Committee. On one hand, we must ensure the Party’s role in commanding the overall situation and coordinates the efforts of all quarters, and give full play to the core role of leadership. On the other hand, we must steadfastly promote the all-round development of strict Party discipline and unswervingly make the Party robust and strong.

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