

The Institutional Foundation and Practical Significance of the Four-Sphere Confidence

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Abstract: The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is closely linked to the “Four Confidences”, and this connection is reflected in several key institutional areas. A system guided by Marxism provides a clear direction for the “Four Confidences”. The system of centralized and unified leadership by the Party Central Committee serves as the fundamental political guarantee for upholding the “Four Confidences”, while the system of people’s congresses also provides important political and institutional support. On the new journey of the new era, we must rely on the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics to further strengthen the “Four Confidences”. To achieve this goal, we must unwaveringly uphold and improve these three systems in the process of national governance. Only in this way can the “Four Confidences” be consolidated and play a more significant role in practical work.

Keywords: Four-sphere Confidence; institutional foundation; fundamental system

1. The Logical Connection between the Chinese Socialist System and the Four-Sphere Confidence

On 1 July 2016, General Secretary Xi Jinping spoke at the ceremony marking the 95th anniversary of the founding of the Communist Party of China. In his speech, he included cultural confidence in the confidence system of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In this way, the Four-sphere Confidence gradually took shape as a complete system with rich meanings. It also showed the confident spirit and strong determination of Chinese Communists in the new era. More importantly, it provided strong spiritual support for the great struggles with new historical characteristics in the new era. Therefore, the Four-sphere Confidence has important theoretical value as well as practical significance.

On this basis, Xi Jinping pointed out: “In today’s world, if we talk about which political party, which country, or which nation can have confidence, the Communist Party of China, the People’s Republic of China, and the Chinese nation have the most reason to be confident” [1].

Where, then, does the Four-sphere Confidence of Chinese Communists in the new era come from? We believe that its sources are diverse. They include material, ideological, and spiritual foundations. However, we should also recognize a more important point.

At a deeper level, this confidence stems from the solid foundation provided by the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

As is well known, the system plays a vital role in a nation’s prosperity, development, and stability. This is a fundamental issue that affects many areas of national development and has far-reaching implications. If a

political party hopes to govern the country effectively, maintain long-term rule, and uphold social stability, it must be grounded in the country's actual national conditions.

At the same time, it should draw upon the valuable ideas and experiences in historical and contemporary state governance from both China and other countries around the world. On this basis, it is necessary to establish a system of institutions that aligns with the nation's historical traditions, cultural background, and level of economic and social development. Only in this way can the strengths of the system be fully harnessed and governance effectiveness enhanced.

Over the past century, our Party has consistently attached great importance to national governance. This includes the period of revolutionary warfare, when the Party carried out governance work in certain regions, as well as the period following the founding of the People's Republic of China, when the Party assumed full responsibility for governing the entire mainland. Throughout this process, our Party has strived to build a system of institutions suited to China's national conditions.

After years of difficult exploration, our Party gradually developed an institutional system through the practice of national governance. This system is "composed of a series of fundamental, basic and important systems that are closely connected, mutually supportive, and work together". It has laid a solid foundation for strengthening confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It has also provided strong support for maintaining this confidence.

One important feature of this institutional system is that it regards the Party's leadership over all areas of work as the fundamental leadership system of our country. This gives the development of the Party and the state a strong leadership core. It also helps point out the right direction for China's development. Our Party has led the people to avoid both the "old path" and the "wrong path". Instead, we have continued to move forward on the "broad road" and the "right path" toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Despite many difficulties, we have made steady progress. China has achieved two "great miracles" that are rarely seen in the world: "long-term rapid economic development" and "long-term social prosperity and stability". These achievements have given us strong confidence in our path.

Another important point is that this institutional system regards upholding the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological field as a fundamental system. This gives the development of the Party and the state the guidance of scientific theory. It also provides strong ideological support for realizing the great dream of national rejuvenation. Marxism and the theoretical achievements of adapting Marxism to the Chinese context have had a deep influence on the values of our Party. They have also strengthened the spiritual outlook of our Party. More importantly, they provide the Party and the people with the "microscope" and "telescope" needed to understand and change the world.

In this way, the grand cause of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation can move forward in accordance with objective laws of development, providing us with firm theoretical confidence.

In addition, this institutional system is complete, standardized, and works well in practice. It has kept improving through the practice of national governance. It offers strong support for the Party and the state to lead people in solving various problems and challenges in the future. This system also plays a key role in preventing and reducing major risks. Its effects are especially clear in fighting major crises like floods, SARS, earthquakes, and the COVID-19 pandemic. In these events, the institutional strengths of the system have been fully shown. Its governance capacity has also become more obvious. All these facts have made our confidence in this institutional system much stronger.

Finally, this institutional system regards the development and prosperity of advanced socialist culture as an important part of the work of the Party and the state.

It provides institutional support for the development of socialist culture. At the same time, it has promoted the development and prosperity of socialist culture on a wider scale. It has also encouraged the creative transformation and innovative development of China's fine traditional culture. As a result, the spiritual life of the Chinese people has become richer. New achievements have also been made in the development of Chinese culture. These developments have given us strong confidence in our culture.

2. How the Fundamental System of Chinese Socialism Strengthens the Four-sphere Confidence

The fundamental system of Chinese socialism provides an important institutional foundation for the Four-sphere Confidence. At the same time, there are clear connections among these systems.

2.1. The System Upholding the Guiding Position of Marxism in the Ideological Field Provides Direction for the Four-sphere Confidence

Upholding Marxism as the fundamental system guiding the ideological sphere has clarified the distinct direction of socialism with Chinese characteristics and provided clear value guidance for the “Four Confidences”. In this regard, the fundamental system in the ideological sphere plays a vital role in strengthening the “Four Confidences” [2].

Currently, this issue has become increasingly prominent. Some Western countries are attempting to influence China through ideological means, using the internet, social media, and online public opinion to spread ideas such as the “China threat theory” and the “China oppression theory”, in an attempt to exert pressure on China by controlling the narrative online. At the same time, doubts about the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics continue to emerge both domestically and internationally; some even describe China as practicing “state capitalism”. These views directly challenge China’s socialist system and deny the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

To confront these issues, we must increase our cultural faith in socialism with Chinese characteristics while further cementing the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere. This is crucial for maintaining the correct direction of the “Four Confidences” and solidifying their foundation.

Second, establishing Marxism as the fundamental ideological guiding theory makes the direction of the Party and the state’s progress clearer and strengthens our confidence in the “Four Confidences”.

Ideology belongs to the superstructure; it influences the overall development of society and is closely linked to many areas of national development. By upholding the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere, we can fully harness its powerful ability to unite the people and lead them forward. In this way, Marxism can provide guidance for all areas of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and its influence will extend to all other aspects of society, thereby ensuring that Marxism consistently plays a guiding role throughout socialist society.

It is precisely because of this core system that the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics has always remained on the right path. It provides fundamental institutional guidance for us to adhere to the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, develop its theory, and improve its institutional framework. Therefore, throughout the entire development process, these advances have been able to follow the principles of scientific socialism.

We uphold the fundamental system of ensuring that Marxism plays a leading role in the ideological sphere, as this system lays an important foundation for strengthening our “Four Confidences”.

Third, this fundamental system has established Marxism as the guiding ideology in the ideological sphere, charting a practical course for the Party and the people, and clarifying the practical goals of the “Four Confidences”.

Both historical and contemporary facts have proven that Marxism supports national rejuvenation. Its effectiveness stems from the solid truths and moral influence it embodies. This theory serves as a reliable guide for our Party. Looking back over the past century, Marxism has helped the Communist Party of China lead the Chinese people through various stages of historical development, playing a pivotal role in saving, developing, and building a prosperous and powerful China.

Because the Communist Party of China combined Marxism with China’s real conditions during the New Democratic Revolution, it led people to search for a revolutionary path that fit China. So this accomplishment became a key turning point in Chinese history. It brought about the founding of the People’s Republic of China. The country moved from the New Democratic Revolution to the Socialist Revolution, and this shift represented a deep historical transformation.

Following the convening of the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Central Committee, the Communist Party of China, in keeping with the trends of the times, continued to integrate Marxism with China’s actual

conditions. During this period, the major policy of “Reform and Opening Up” was proposed. This decision had a profound impact on the long-term future of the Party and the nation. By drawing lessons from both successes and failures and comprehensively assessing domestic and international circumstances, China achieved a tremendous transformation and has continued to advance toward the goal of prosperity and strength.

They have examined current developments and long-term strategies from a broader perspective, consistently upholding the banner of Marxism and forging ahead. Their leadership has helped the Party and the country achieve major historic accomplishments.

Against this backdrop, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Party explicitly adopted an important decision to “uphold the fundamental system of upholding the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere”. This decision embodies firm political conviction, a long-term historical perspective, and a clear understanding of strategic issues, and is of great significance.

In our view, this is a fundamental system for realizing the great dream in the new era. It also reflects an important feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics. As the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee pointed out, this system “is an important prerequisite and fundamental guarantee for promoting the continuous improvement and maturity of other fundamental systems in practice”.

2.2. The System of the Party’s Centralized and Unified Leadership Provides the Fundamental Political Guarantee for the Four-sphere Confidence

Only by upholding the Party’s leadership can we consolidate the “Four Confidences”. The Report of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China clearly states: “The most essential characteristic of socialism with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the Communist Party of China”. The system of centralized and unified Party leadership provides an important institutional guarantee for strengthening the “Four Consciousnesses”.

First, upholding this fundamental system of centralized and unified Party leadership safeguards the political direction of the Party and the state, and charts the correct course for strengthening the “Four Consciousnesses”.

The system of the Party’s centralized and unified leadership comprises two core aspects. The first is that a political party must have a core and maintain unified leadership throughout the entire Party. For the Communist Party of China, the core requirement for upholding centralized and unified leadership lies in resolutely implementing the “Two Upholds” [3].

The second meaning is that, as the ruling party and the political core of the country, the Communist Party of China needs to play a leading role in the overall development of the country. At present, China needs to uphold the CPC’s leadership in coordinating the overall situation and all sectors. The Party should provide unified leadership over different areas of national development.

Upholding the Party’s centralized and unified leadership is also in line with the general laws of human social life. At the same time, it follows the development laws of political organizations such as political parties in modern society. Institutional confidence is both a spiritual and political foundation for a country’s development and stability. It affects the cohesion and competitiveness of a country and, in the long run, its future.

In the process of leading China’s modernization, the Communist Party of China has always made institutional choices based on the actual needs of national development. The Party also keeps refining and expanding this set of institutions. During this process, the practical effects of these institutions demonstrate their rational nature. Along with the continuous development of the institutional system, public confidence in these institutions grows step by step.

As a Marxist political party, the Communist Party of China regards upholding the Party’s authority and exercising centralized and unified leadership as fundamental principles, and will adhere to these principles over the long term.

Furthermore, maintaining the fundamental system of the Party’s centralized and unified leadership ensures the political direction of the Party and the state, and provides clear value guidance for the “Four Confidences”.

As a guiding ideology, Marxism has united the Party and the people and provided the driving force for their continued progress. Historical materialism states: “The people are the creators of society’s material and spiritual

wealth, and they are also the decisive force behind social transformation”. The Communist Party of China comes from the people, serves the people, and has grown stronger through the people’s support. Therefore, serving the people is one of the most fundamental and enduring characteristics of the Communist Party of China.

The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics is, by its very nature, established for the people. When we trace its roots, our confidence in the path, theory, system, and culture of socialism with Chinese characteristics stems from the trust of the people themselves. This embodies a distinct people-centered value orientation.

The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics shows its people-centered nature in multiple respects. It recognises the people’s principal status, defends their democratic rights, protects their core interests, and raises their sense of happiness. These traits explain why this system has won public acknowledgement and backing. They also form a key internal foundation to lift people’s confidence in the system.

The Communist Party of China takes the mass line as a vital political rule and working method. Its work follows the guideline of “doing everything for the people and relying on the people, coming from the people and going to the people, and turning the Party’s correct ideas into the conscious actions of the people”. This practice has further evolved into the fundamental goal of “serving the people”.

Taken as a whole, the mass line builds solid popular support for the Party’s leadership. From this perspective, it delivers an important institutional advantage for consolidating the Four-sphere Confidence.

2.3. The System of People’s Congresses Provides the Fundamental Political Institutional Guarantee for the Four-sphere Confidence

Because democratic centralism is upheld as an organizational principle, decision-making efficiency can be improved. This practice also helps the political activities of the Party and the state run in an orderly manner under legal rules. In this sense, it offers a democratic guarantee to strengthen the Four-sphere Confidence.

Democratic centralism serves as the organizational principle of the Communist Party of China. It demands strong consistency between the organizational framework and operational systems. As a democratic model, democratic centralism is scientific, rational and effective. It unites collective leadership with leadership authority. More importantly, this system has grown through practical experience and passed historical tests.

Democratic centralism acts as the fundamental organizational rule, organizational framework and leadership system for the Party and the country. It also represents one of the Party’s most prominent institutional strengths. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Chinese Communists with Xi Jinping as their principal representative have entered a new phase of “full and rigorous self-governance of the Party”. Within this context, they have kept enhancing the development of democratic centralism inside the Party.

At the same time, the development of democratic centralism delivers an important institutional advantage for consolidating the Four-sphere Confidence in the new era. When we examine the new historical conditions, deeper recognition of the institutional strengths of democratic centralism enables us to further reinforce confidence in the system.

The system of people’s congresses, functioning as the fundamental political system, effectively safeguards the people’s status as masters of the country. It also builds broad public support for strengthening the Four-sphere Confidence.

Created when the Party combined basic Marxist theories with China’s real conditions, the system of people’s congresses stands as a major institutional achievement. It reflects the choice made by Chinese society throughout its historical development. It also represents an important outcome of long-term efforts by the Party and people of all ethnic groups. In our work to strengthen the Four-sphere Confidence, the system of people’s congresses lays down a fundamental institutional foundation.

This fundamental political arrangement integrates the Party’s leadership, the people’s status as masters of the country, and law-based governance. It occupies a core position within China’s complete set of political systems. China’s Constitution defines the important status of people’s congresses. Deputies at all levels of people’s congresses accept supervision from voters. Yet as a whole body, people’s congresses are not subject to supervision by nearly any other political institutions or bodies.

Under such conditions, the Party’s leadership becomes a vital force to supervise and regulate the work of

people's congresses. Meanwhile, the system of people's congresses supplies institutional safeguards for people's democracy. The Party's leadership offers its political guarantee. People's democracy, in turn, underpins the legitimacy of both the Party's leadership and the people's congress system. In this integrated way, the Party's leadership, the people's role as masters of the country, and law-based governance are unified within the system of people's congresses.

Applied within the people's congress system, the principle of democratic centralism embodies a balanced understanding of the relationship between the whole state power and its separate components. It puts the principle of "the unity of deliberation and execution" into practice inside state institutions. This rule maintains and strengthens the important position of people's congresses in China's political life. It also allows fuller implementation of the principle that "all power belongs to the people".

Only on this foundation can the Party's underlying theories, basic guidelines, and fundamental principles be fully carried out. These ideas can then reach the public and become part of social practice. In this sense, the system of people's congresses builds broad public support for strengthening the Four-sphere Confidence.

3. The Practical Approach to Strengthening the Four-sphere Confidence through the System of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics

The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics lays a firm institutional base to consolidate the Four-sphere Confidence. It also reveals the tight link between this system and the Four-sphere Confidence.

As we look toward the future, we must continue to maintain and refine several key systems. These include the fundamental leadership system under the Party covering all fields of work, the fundamental system that keeps Marxism in the guiding position within the ideological field, and the system of people's congresses. Such work can help the prominent strengths of the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics show more fully in national governance practice. It will in turn offer more robust support to strengthen the Four-sphere Confidence.

3.1. Upholding and Improving the Fundamental System of the Party's Leadership

Sticking to and improving the Party's fundamental leadership system is a complex and systematic task. It involves multiple areas and requires close cooperation among various departments. To get this work done, we need to focus on the core matters while pushing forward tasks in different fields. At the same time, all industries and sectors must work together and coordinate their actions.

One key task is to continuously strengthen the Party's self-governance, fully and strictly implementing it. We should lead great social reforms through the Party's self-renewal. As the famous saying goes, 'To forge steel, you must be strong yourself'. The Party has to strengthen itself first. Only by further advancing the new 'great undertaking' of Party building and creating a stronger Party can the Chinese Communist Party achieve the fundamental shift from being 'big' to being 'strong'. This progress will give the Party greater confidence and ability to face various risks and challenges, and help consolidate its ruling position.

Therefore, on the road ahead, the Chinese Communist Party must continuously improve itself. In taking on the historic mission of carrying out great struggles, advancing great causes, and realizing great ideals, the Party needs to enhance its leadership and long-term governing capabilities. Only by doing so can it continue to be the strong leadership core of the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Another important task is to place greater emphasis on political development within the overall framework of Party building. We should make the resolute implementation of the "Two Upholds" the primary task of political development and continue to advance this work. At the same time, we need to establish and improve the accountability system related to Party leadership. These measures can comprehensively enhance Party members' political awareness, political judgment, and political execution.

For those who fail to properly implement Party leadership or merely go through the motions, clear investigation and accountability mechanisms should be enforced. The Party should also reflect on relevant issues and draw lessons from them. Any weaknesses in the systems and mechanisms supporting Party leadership must be promptly revised and adjusted [4].

Attention should also be paid to leading officials, the "key minority", so that their "leading-geese effect"

can be fully mobilized to uphold the Party's leadership. Leading cadres need to develop their political experience, ideological awareness, practical competence and professional skills. Through the important practice of serving the people, they should continuously improve the Party's ability to guide public opinion, exercise political leadership, organize the masses, and expand social influence [5].

In the end, the fundamental leadership system that upholds the Party's leadership over all work must be put into real practice. It cannot remain merely at the level of principles or policies. Instead, it needs to be reflected in the daily work of Party organizations and leading officials [6].

3.2. Upholding and Improving the Fundamental System that Upholds the Guiding Position of Marxism in the Ideological Field

Upholding the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere is a historical inevitability in China's development since modern times and an inevitable choice based on this historical evolution. To truly uphold and improve this fundamental system, we must persevere and work steadily over the long term; we cannot expect immediate results.

First, we should further promote the popularization of Marxism. The Party's theoretical innovations must be close to the people and deeply rooted among the masses. Only when people truly understand and accept these theories can they become powerful ideological weapons for understanding and transforming the world, and only then can they play their due role in practice.

Marxism is the fundamental guiding ideology for the development of the Party and the state; it must be deeply rooted in the minds of the people to guide their thoughts and actions. Only in this way can the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere be truly consolidated [2].

To this end, we need to build a team that is politically strong, theoretically sound, skilled in communication, and wholeheartedly dedicated to serving the people. This team should go deep into grassroots communities, maintain close ties with the masses, and publicize the Party's theoretical innovations in a way that is easy to understand, ensuring that these ideas are widely disseminated across all levels of society.

Second, we must strengthen ideological analysis and theoretical guidance, resolutely resist erroneous trends with a strong spirit of struggle, and unwaveringly wage a long-term struggle in the ideological sphere.

In recent years, Western ideologies such as historical nihilism, cultural nihilism, democratic socialism, "constitutional democracy", "universal values", "freedom of the press", and "human rights above all" have continued to spread [7]. At the same time, claims that Marxism is "outdated", "useless", or "no longer effective" have been constantly emerging. These views pose a serious challenge to the guiding role of Marxism in the ideological sphere.

Therefore, to uphold and improve the fundamental system that ensures Marxism's guiding role in the ideological sphere, we must clearly respond to these tendencies, accurately identify them, and vigorously refute them. At the same time, we should foster a healthier environment for public discourse and the development of ideas.

Third, we should focus on developing a new generation of people who have confidence, respect moral values, are willing to contribute, take their responsibilities seriously, and continue to pursue progress. In primary schools, secondary schools, and universities, we should take ideological and political education courses seriously and run them well.

Young students are the future of the Party and the country, as well as the hope of the Chinese nation. They are also an important target of the Western hostile forces' attempts at peaceful evolution. For this reason, we need to remain highly alert to these challenges.

Teachers of ideological and political education should follow the "Six Requirements" and the principle of the "Eight Unities" [5]. They should educate and influence students through firm ideals and beliefs, strong moral character, solid academic knowledge, and genuine care for others. The school conducts ideological and political education at every stage of learning, guiding students to grasp the truth and practical power of Marxism and deepening their understanding of and commitment to this theory.

3.3. Upholding and Improving the System of People's Congresses

Historical activities are the activities of the people. As these activities develop, the people's participation will continue to expand. Marx pointed out that the people and driving force of historical progress. Without the people's participation, historical development would lose its source of strength [8].

The Communist Party of China has always maintained close ties with the people. From the revolutionary era to the stage of socialist construction, the Party has relied on the people, served the people, and represented the fundamental interests of the broadest sections of the people. Every step forward taken by the Communist Party of China requires the long-term support of the people [9]. To achieve this goal, the Party must always represent the interests of the people, keep pace with the times, and uphold and improve the system of people's congresses—China's fundamental political system.

We should safeguard people's democracy through institutional and legal means. Citizens may manage state affairs in accordance with the law and enjoy the democratic rights and freedoms guaranteed by the Constitution and the law. This approach can rally the strength of people of all ethnic groups.

We should further strengthen the ties between deputies to the People's Congress and the people. Deputies must adhere to the working principle of "coming from the masses and returning to the masses". The Constitution clearly stipulates: "The National People's Congress and local people's congresses at all levels are elected through democratic elections; they are accountable to the people and subject to their supervision". This provision requires People's Congress deputies to maintain close ties with the people.

Such ties not only safeguard the people's fundamental right to elect and entrust representatives but also constitute an inherent requirement of the democratic centralist system. Deputies at all levels should strengthen their sense of responsibility, service orientation, and spirit of dedication, and earnestly carry out investigative research. Most importantly, they should actively "broaden channels for expressing and communicating public opinion through research, inspections, visits, direct contact with constituents, deputy reception days, and themed practical activities" [10].

We must further consolidate and improve the working mechanisms of the People's Congresses, thoroughly explore effective pathways to achieve the organic unity of "the Party's leadership, the people's role as masters of the country, and governance according to law", and effectively translate this principle into practice.

At the same time, a multi-level coordination mechanism should be established that encompasses "ideological guidance, value-driven impetus, organizational leadership, and legal safeguards". These mechanisms will enable the more systematic collection of public opinion, ensuring that the Party's policies fully and effectively reflect the voices, aspirations, and interests of the people.

We should also pay close attention to what people specifically mean when they talk about the "need for a better life". In this new era, we must focus on addressing the issues of "unbalanced and inadequate development", which will help tackle the challenges people face in their daily lives and provide stronger support for realizing their aspirations for a better life.

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