

Political System Reform of China Under the Grand Strategy Theory

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Abstract

How to interpret the political system reform of China is an important issue even for today. Promoting and deepening the political system reform in China is an important part of uploading and improving the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promoting the modernization of the national governance system and capacity. Based on the grand strategy theory, this article attempts to understand and analyze the political system reform of China from three aspects: the objectives of the grand strategy, the relationship between the objectives and means, and the way and art of thinking. We conclude that China’s political system reform should upload the governing and guidance role of the fundamental objectives, the unity of means and objectives, and the unity of “practicality, comprehensiveness, and discretion”.

Key words: Grand strategy; Political system reform; Grand strategy theory

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On August 18, 1980, Deng Xiaoping’s speech on the reform of the Party and state leadership system at the enlarged meeting of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee had marked the beginning of China’s political system reform, which has lasted for more than 30 years. Great achievements have been made during the political system reform, including the institutionalization and legalization of the leadership system of the Party and the state. It also helped eliminate malpractices such as no separation between the Party and the government, and substituting the Party for the government. These achievements need to be approved. Most of the people, including academia, common people, and even foreign media, are not very satisfied with the progress of the political system reform in China. They think there are still many problems, and the reform is too out-of-date. Some scholars even think that little progress has been made in the political system reform in recent years. The difference in their evaluations of the reform is mainly due to the difference in their perspectives and standards, which lead them to focus on only one point at a time.

The new central team with General Secretary Xi Jinping as the leader has unswervingly carried out the anti-corruption activities. The breadth and depth of these activities reflect the importance and urgency of further promoting the political system reform. In order to understand and evaluate the political system reform correctly, to better promote the future reform, and to better upload and improve the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promote the modernization of the national governance system and capacity, this article analyzes China’s political system reform from the perspective of the ‘grand strategy’ theory.

1. ANALYSIS ON APPLICATION OF ‘GRAND STRATEGY THEORY’ IN THE POLITICAL SYSTEM REFORM

What is the grand strategy theory? The key is to

understand the 'grand strategy'. "The grand strategy refers to strategy at the highest level; that is, it is an operation mode or plan of political entities, which consciously develop, mobilize, coordinate, use and guide all their political, military, economic, technological, diplomatic, ideological, cultural and spiritual resources according to the overall concept, and strive to achieve their fundamental goals." (Shi, 2008, p.110) the grand strategy can be summarized into six topics: "grand strategic goal or objectives, the relation between grand strategic objectives and the means, the means and resource, decision-making mechanism and institution, grand strategic thinking, grand strategic artistic and leadership quality." (Shi, 2007, p.16)

The concept and theory of grand strategy are mainly used in war and military. This raises the question whether they are suitable for analyzing China's political system reform. Though politics and military are closely related, they are not the same. However, to some extent, the political system reform of a nation is similar to a large-scale war. The failure of a war can lead to the decline of a nation, and the failure of the political system reform will lead to disaster. For example, the failed reform of the former Soviet Union had led to the disintegration of the union. Despite of many reasons behind the failure of the former Soviet Union, viewing from the perspective of grand strategy, the leaders failed to come up with a reasonable grand strategy for the reform. The leaders' quality and capability of governing the reform was extremely weak, which made their unreasonable grand strategy even worse. This is another important reason that leads to the failure of the former Soviet Union. Thus, it is reasonable to apply the grand strategy theory to analyze the political system reform.

2. FUNDAMENTAL UNDERSTANDING OF CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM REFORM WITH THE GRAND STRATEGY THEORY

Here, we combine the characteristics of political system reform with grand strategy theory and focus on three topics in which we explain and analyze the political system reform: the objectives of the grand strategy, the relation between the objectives and the means, and the grand strategic thinking and its art.

2.1 The Objectives of the Political System Reform With the Grand Strategy Theory

"The objectives is the most important question in the grand strategy." (Shi, 2008, p.110) Politics plays a decisive role in Chinese society; that is, politics determines everything in China. Therefore, the political system reform is extremely important for the society and the nation. It greatly affects every aspect of the society. The political system reform must have a clear goal. More importantly, this goal must always be consistent with the

fundamental objective of the country. The specific goals of a country may change with time, but its fundamental objective should be absolute and permanent.

The political system reform is extremely important and complex, and the complexity grows as the reform deepens. We have always practiced gradual reform as our understanding of the objectives deepens. Comrade Deng Xiaoping said, "There are three objectives of our political system reform: first, to consolidate the socialist system; second, to develop the productive forces of our socialist society; and last, to promote socialist democracy and motivate the enthusiasm of the people." (Deng, 1994, p.178) Through the disposition and mobilization of fully deepening the reform in the Third Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, the Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th CPC Central Committee had proposed the "overall objective of uploading and improving the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and promoting the modernization of the national governance system and capacity."¹

It is obvious that our Party and state are constantly deepening their understanding of the objectives of our political system reform so that these objectives conform more to the fundamental objectives and requirements of the nation. More importantly, we need to keep the fundamental objectives in mind and eliminate all possible interferences during the political system reform, including not "being too obsessed with the process, which obscures the relation between intention and consequences, or indulging in the means that leads to neglect or even corrupt the objectives." (Shi, 2007, p.17)

From the perspective of the grand strategy theory, one of the main reasons that our political system reform has made great progress without detours is because we have a clear understanding and firm belief in the objective of the reform. The leaders of the former Soviet Union, on the other hand, had ignored or forgotten the objective of the political system reform and the fundamental objective of the nation.

2.2 The Relation between the Objective and the Means of Political System Reform With the Grand Strategy Theory

The second topic of particular importance in the grand strategy lies in the relation between the objective and the means, and between the means and the resource. The grand strategy is "a comprehensive action plan based on well-thought relation between the objective and the means". (Shi, 2008, p.112)

The objective of political system reform is clear, but sometimes the means are insufficient to accomplish them.

¹ *The decision of the CPC central committee on several major issues of upholding and improving the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promoting the modernization of the national governance system and capacity* (p.5). Beijing: People's Publishing House.

We have achieved a lot in political system reform in the past; however, we should realize that we were passively carrying out the reform during the majority of the time. Sometimes, we were forced to do it, rather than actively pushing for reform, to adapt to the needs and development of the society. Taking initiative in political system reform is very important and greatly affects the means. Within the scope permitted by the environment, only by actively performing political system reform can we obtain means that are sufficient to achieve the objective. Otherwise, the means will be temporary and not transferrable. This often leads to the lack of a comprehensive and thoughtful planning and consideration of the objective and the means. This lack of planning internal conflicts and tension between the objective and the means, which is undoubtedly un conducive to the smooth progress and development of political system reform. Thus, it is urgent for us to come up with a more thoughtful and comprehensive planning and arrangement for the relation between the two in order to better promote a smooth development of China's political system reform.

2.3 China's Political System Reform Under the Grand Strategy Thinking and Art

The thinking and artistic nature of the grand strategy are the "living soul" of the theory. They mainly focus on the overall situation, flexibility, and practicality of the reform. The grand strategy is an art and artistic creation itself. It relies on talent, practice, experience, courage, and even concept and theory. (Shi, 2008, p.113)

A grand view is the most important part of the grand strategy thinking, together with the sharp and firm sense of "discretion" or "balance". Politics plays a decisive role in China, and thus the reform of the political system is an activity that affects the whole nation. Any negligence, mistake or error will result in failures and disaster to socialist modernization. Therefore, we cannot reform solely for the sake of reform and focus on the pursuit of value in one aspect. Instead, we should integrate the political system reform in the cause of socialist modernization and understand it at the level of China's future and destiny. Our Party and state should have a grand view of the overall situation a sense of "discretion" or balance during the political system reform. At the same time, the strategy of political system reform should be regularly and comprehensively examined, adjusted, and reformed. On one hand, our political system reform strategy is still in an early stage with lots of uncertainties and needs to be revised and improved; on the other hand, the complexity and difficulty of the reform increases as it deepens, and the more changeable and accidental the environment will become. Any events may lead to unpredictable consequences.

Though the political system reform needs the guidance of scientific theory, it is, in essence, a practical activity. In addition to the leaders' insight, creativity, coordination,

execution, implementation and more, this activity needs a high degree of creativity and artistry. Any theory that regards the political system reform as a mechanical, procedural, or operational activity is extremely dangerous. The reform is an extremely complex activity, and it will face many difficulties, interferences, and obstacles during the process. Although the strategic planning is important, the key of political system reform lies in the implementation of the strategy and its challenges. Carl von Clausewitz stressed, "In order to firmly implement the plan to the end, to stick to the plan, and not to be thrown off track by thousands of constraints and interferences, we need a great power of character, together with the clarity of mind and the perseverance of spirit." (Carl von Clausewitz, 1976) Paul Kennedy once said, "It can never be precise or predetermined. What does such a grand strategy, which is essentially a piece of art, rely on? It relies on the continuous and intelligent examination of the objectives and the means of the political entities, and the most respected two intangible things – wisdom and judgement". (Kennedy, 2005)

3. FUNDAMENTAL REQUIREMENTS OF CHINA'S POLITICAL SYSTEM REFORM WITH THE GRAND STRATEGY THEORY

3.1 The Guiding and Governing Role of the Fundamental Object Must be Uphold

In most of people's minds, the fundamental objective has the characteristics of being ultimate and static. This mindset can easily lead to opposite attitudes toward the fundamental objective: one is the characteristic of being ultimate endows it with a color of extreme importance, and the other one is that the static nature often makes people ignore or forget the fundamental objective in practice. This is extremely unfavorable and harmful to the political system reform, and we must avoid such mindset while promoting the reform. The fundamental objective of the political system reform plays a directional role and is a "true" existence that dominates all other aspects of the reform. We must not give it importance while "leaving it on the shelf". When there are different ideas about the objective of political system reform in the academia, especially when foreign media with ulterior motives send out "noises" about our political system reform, we must insist on taking the fundamental objective of the political system reform as a "yardstick" to measure the diversified voices and filter out the "noises". This will help to form a consensus on the fundamental subjective of political system reform in academic and in society, and promote joint force pushing the political system reform forward.

The overall objective of our political system reform has always been consistent: we must insist on the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and promoting

modernization of the national governance system and capacity. We must take this objective as the guidance for all activities during political system reform. Otherwise, the reform will suffer setbacks and even failure.

3.2 The Unity Between the Objective and the Means Must be Uphold

The objective determines the means, and the means reflect the objective. Thus, when the objective is clear, the success of political system reform largely depends on the means. The selections of means for China's political system reform mainly depends on the choice of "breakthrough", which directly reflects the strategic thinking and reform path of political system reformers. This is the key for the success of the reform. The reform is a systematic project of great significance and involves a wide range of aspects. The correct choice of "breakthrough" is important in minimizing the risk of the reform and achieving the phased and overall objectives of political system reform.

There are different views on the choice of breakthrough of political system reform. Since the reform is a systematic and comprehensive project, it is normal for scholars to have different understandings about the choice. This not only reflects the comprehensiveness and complexity of the reform, but also shows the correlation among various fields and aspects of the reform.

It is obvious, based on the existing political system reform in the past, that rather than selecting several "breakthroughs" at the same time, we focused on one at a time. This way helps ensure the orderly progress and reduce the risk of the reform. Moreover, the comprehensive promotion of the reform has been gradually realized due to the correlation among various fields. However, because of the lack of a correct understanding of this method and means of the reform, a considerable number of people have always believed that our political system reform is "patching", which needs to be corrected. We should approve the achievements of our political system reform without bias. There are still deficiencies in our political system, and the reform is still far from the needs of socialist development and the needs of the people. During this time period, it is particularly necessary for the country to promote the deepening of political system reform more actively, with great courage and determination. The achievements from different breakthroughs of the reform have been shown, and we must further promote the reform in order to accomplish new achievements while maintaining the existing ones. However, the deeper the reform is, the greater the resistance and obstacles we may encounter. If these "breakthroughs" can be viewed as the "protective belt" of the traditional political system, the reform is to continuously reform these "protective belts" to eventually change the "inner core" of the traditional political system and truly form a new institutional system that is suitable

for our basic and fundamental political systems. In this way, the "advantages" of our political system, which is that people can enjoy more realistic and higher level of democracy, can be achieved. Once again, the more in-depth the political system reform is, the more consistent the selected means and the choice of breakthrough must be with the objective of political system reform. Otherwise, the reform will suffer from setbacks and failures.

3.3 The Unity of "Practicality, Overall Situation, and Discretion" Must be Uphold

China's political system reform needs guidance from both scientific theory and practical standards. We have no experience to learn from. Everything is brand-new and unfamiliar, and needs to be explore in practice. We cannot copy from theory completely and must use practice as the standard. We must start from practice and seek answers with practice.

China's political system reform is not only a comprehensive and systematic one, but also an activity in the cause of constructing the socialist with Chinese characteristics. The reform must be arranged from a grand viewpoint, as far as comprehensiveness is concerned. We need to focus on all aspects and promote it in an integrated and coordinated manner due to the correlations among the fields. In terms of systematization, the reform of political system must be coordinated and matched with the reform of economic system. A benign relation of mutual promotion should be formed between the two reforms. Missing any one of the two will lead to its failure, which will further lead to setback and failure of the whole society. As Comrade Xi Jinping pointed out, "If the reforms among various fields are mismatched and implicate others, it will be difficult to comprehensively deepening the reform. Even if we reluctantly force it, the effects will not greatly reduce." (Xi, 2014)

The political system reform in China is highly related to the future and destiny of socialism. We are at a critical point of development, when social problems and conflicts, such as the gap between the rich and the poor, social injustice, corruption, and others are most concentrated and acute. If these problems and conflicts cannot be solve defectively, they will directly affect our social and political stability. Stability is always the most important thing in China. It is impossible to do anything without social and political stability. Things that affect the social and political stability are related to the fallback of the political system either directly or indirectly. Our political advantages are the key to China's great achievements, while the issues and fallback of the system are the crux of problems in China. The solutions depend on the continuous promotion and deepening of political system reform. It is particularly important for us to grasp the "propriety" political system reform. The urgency of solving problems and conflicts makes people wish and demand for a faster reform, which could easily lead to radical political system reform. The

comprehensiveness, complexity, and uncertainties of the reform need a stable and steady environment. We need to consider people's demands while keep the pace and degree of political system reform under control. This is the requirement of "propriety" in political system reform. Grasping the "propriety" of political system reform is the highest level "art" in political practice, and it is the inevitable requirement for the success of China's political system reform. Deng Xiaoping said, "China's political system reform concerns thousands of people. To carry it out, first we need to be bold and resolute. Secondly, we need to be cautious, keeping our traditions and straightening out relations in all aspects. The political system reform can affect the society much more than economic system reform." (Literature Research Office of the CPC Central Committee, 2004). The failure of political system reform of the former Soviet Union was mainly due to Mikhail Gorbachev's lack of "art" and "propriety" required for political leadership. Later he talked about the main lesson of political system reform was "to master the propriety", "After repeatedly recalling the series of dramatic events in Soviet Union during the latter half of the 1980s and the early 1990s, we can conclude that almost all of our frustrations, mistakes, and losses are precisely related to our deviation away from reasonable propriety." (Gorbachev, 2002)

CONCLUSION

With the continuous advancement and deepening of political system reform, we will face more difficulties with much complexity. This requires us to comply with the trend of history, respond to the reasonable requirements from the people, and actively perform political system reform. We also need to have a more comprehensive and systematic planning and arrangement for the reform, and examine our political system reform from the perspective of the grand strategy in order to further improve the "grand strategy" of China's political system reform. Since the 18th CPC National Congress, the Party Central Committee

centered on comrade Xi Jinping has always had the great political courage and wisdom, complied with the trend of history, adapted to changes in China's main social conflicts, took charge of the "Four Greatness", comprehensively promoted the overall plan of the "Five in One", and coordinated the strategic implementation of the "Four Aspects". By comprehensively deepening the reform in important fields, they have uphold and improved the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, and constantly promoted the realization of the overall objective of modernization of the national governance system and capacity.

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