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- Editorial
- The Fracturing of Socialist Thought in Australia
- A Time of Qualitative Change: the importance of China's New Political Party System
- The Leninist Party and the Question of Cadre
- Multipolarity and Chinese Modernisation
- Book review: *Storming the Heavens: Peasant Rebellion in China 1925-1949 Through a Marxist Lens*

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PRACTICE  
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## A Time of Qualitative Change: The Importance of the Model of China's New Political Party System

Roland Boer

### 1. Opening Remarks

The initial “touchstone” of my paper is the fact that 2025 was the year of making the “eight-point regulation” and its spirit the centre of party-building activities. Why a touchstone? The “eight-point regulation” and its “spirit” reveal much about the developments of China’s socialist governance, especially as it relates to international forms of governance.

While I begin with the “eight-point regulation” and its “spirit,” especially since 2025 marks a focus on the regulation and its spirit for Party building after 13 years of a through-going reform of party structures and practices, I am interested in the broader framework. Thus, in the first part I will move from the regulation and its spirit to the dialectic of rule of law and rule of virtue. The second part moves to the question of the statutory processes for country-wide governance, that is, the relationship between the leadership of the CPC and the now rather mature socialist democratic system – or whole-process people’s democracy. Here, the key is that the people own any decision made, from the grassroots level to the country-wide level. The third part pays attention to international implications, initially for the practice of communist and workers’ parties in other countries (my specific example will be Australia), and then for political parties more generally.

### 2. From the Eight-Point Regulation and its Spirit to Rule of Law and Rule of Virtue

The eight-point regulation may be summarised as follows: improving the quality of investigation and research, streamlining meetings and activities, simplifying documents and briefings, regulating travel and visits, minimising security protocols so as to cause minimal disruption, improving news reporting, strictly regulating the publication of documents, and practising diligence and thrift. They were promulgated in December of 2012 and once again became the centre of Party building in 2025.

We should also keep in mind the history of the CPC since its founding in 1921 and the renewed emphasis on the risks of the “four winds,” on the

work-style of Party members and so on since the CPC’s 18th National Congress in 2012. However, allow me a comment here concerning the eighth regulation, which is captured in a four-character phrase, 勤俭节约 *qínjiǎnjiéyuē*, to be diligent and thrifty. Many are the expressions of this deeply-held value in Chinese culture, but I would like to say that it this value is close to my heart. Why? My parents were immigrants from the Netherlands to Australia and this is also a traditional Dutch value to which I hold even today.

In October of 2014 at the full assembly of the Fourth Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central Committee, Xi Jinping first mentioned the “seven malpractices.” In order to seek promotion and great power, some officials, ignoring the party’s political discipline and rules, have engaged in one or more of these malpractices:

- (1) Practising cronyism and sidelining those outside their circle;
- (2) Ganging together to form self-serving factions;
- (3) Making anonymous and false accusations against others and generating rumours;
- (4) Buying support and votes;
- (5) Promising official posts in exchange for personal gain and relying on favouritism for promotion;
- (6) Feigning compliance while obstructing in practice and acting as they please;
- (7) Practising insubordination and making baseless criticisms of Central Committee decisions.

However, I would like to pay attention to what is really a dialectical relation, between the eight-point regulation and its spirit, which leads to the dialectic of boundary and work-style, and ultimately between rule of law and rule of virtue. To begin with the eight-point regulation and its spirit, this embodies the relation between what to avoid and what should be promoted, the temptations to be negated and the values that should be upheld. We may put this in terms of strict enforcement of the regulations and the promotion of a healthy work-style. As it is said, “To cultivate oneself strictly means to enhance one’s

party spirit, strengthen ideals and beliefs, elevate moral standards, pursue noble sentiments.” We may put it in the following terms: the eight-point regulation indicates the boundary between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable; however, within this boundary we also need a positive model, a code of ethics, a work style to which all party members should adhere and seek to develop and promote.



In many respects, this is a philosophical question, or a Marxist dialectical question. We may put this in terms of rule of law and rule of virtue, which is a distinctly Chinese contribution to the Marxist tradition of governance and thus a contribution to Marxist political philosophy. Unlike other types of governance, where rule of law is held to be supreme, the Chinese tradition gives us both rule of law and rule of virtue – albeit thoroughly and qualitatively transformed in light of Marxism.

As we know, developing a rule of law in the context of a socialist system has been a project that dates back more than 100 years to the beginnings of the Soviet Union. In China, the search for and development of a socialist rule of law has been a long road with many twists and turns. However, the unique contribution has been to bring the rule of virtue into a relation with the rule of law. This really is an excellent example of the “second integration,” in which the basic

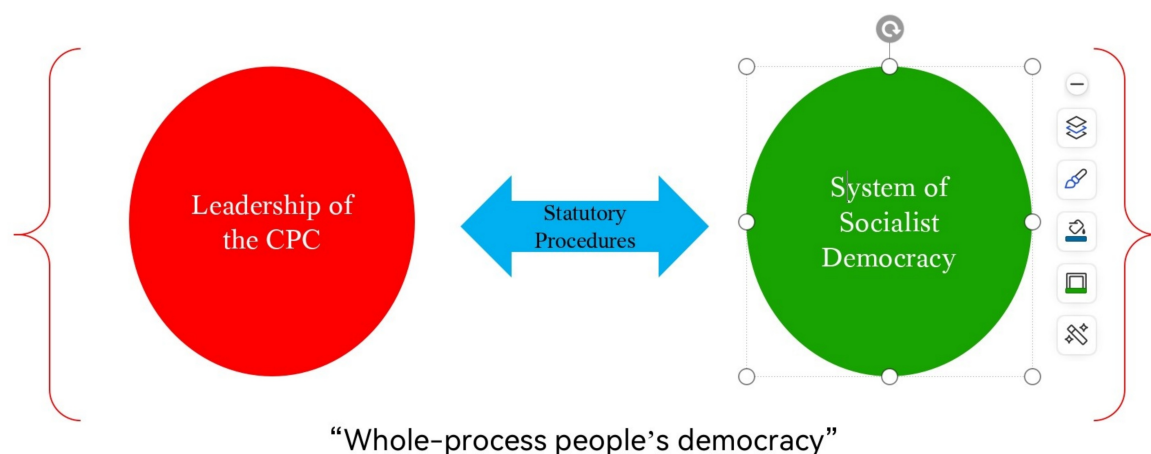
principles of Marxism are integrated with the best of the traditional Chinese culture of governance.

### 3. Implications for Country-Wide Governance and Everyday Life

At this point, we move to consider the relation between inner-party governance and country-side governance. This is more than simply a process of infiltration, in the sense that that the practice of the eight-point regulation and its spirit by grassroots party branches infiltrates into society at large. Instead, I would like to emphasise a more systematic framework. In my earlier research, I have pointed out that a major achievement of the CPC has been to solve at last the problem of how to translate issues of inner-party governance to country-wide governance. More specifically, this concerns the process of transforming democratic centralism from an inner-party policy to the reality of country-wide governance. Understanding how to achieve this transformation has taken more than a century: it is not simply a case of transferring the inner-party practice of democratic centralism to country-wide governance (as was assumed in the Soviet Union). Instead, the process required new insights derived from practice.

Let me put it this way: the core principle is that the leadership of the CPC is enhanced through socialist democracy and socialist democracy is strengthened through the leadership of the CPC. Now for the breakthrough as to how this can be achieved: it is through the statutory processes of the socialist democratic system, or what we know as “whole-process people’s democracy.” In other words, the will of the Party, which has been drawn from careful research and insights from the people, becomes the will of the people through the whole system of statutory processes. These include rule of law and rule of virtue, the dialectical integration of both electoral and consultative democracy in light of China’s experience, as well as the always developing process of integrating the party with the masses. To my mind, this has been a significant achievement in development China’s governance.





But what is the key? The key is that the people need to “own” the deliberations and decisions made. By “owning decisions” I mean that the people may make proposals, be involved in deliberations, discuss and debate them, and then accept as their own the policies and decisions made. This process relates to the eight-point regulation and its spirit, the statutory processes of country-wide democratic centralism, grassroots contact points for developing legislation, the levels of people’s congresses and consultative conferences, the “Party-Masses Service Centres” and so on. From my perspective, this is a much more substantive and higher level of democracy than is found in Western countries.

#### 4. International Influence of the “China Model”

As far as the international implications and influence of the “China model” are concerned, I will emphasise three aspects. The first concerns the international background, the second deals with the implications for all political parties, and the third concerns what various communist parties may learn from the “China model.”

To begin with, more and more analysts agree that the few Western countries of the world are facing a multi-dimensional crisis – a crisis in economic, political, social, cultural, educational, and philosophical fields. I do not have time to go into detail here, especially in terms of the different approaches taken by scholars, but I would like to emphasise the political crisis for Western countries. Their political systems are fraying, breaking up, and in the process of transformation into another form. They have much to learn from China’s experience. Of course, the multi-dimensional crisis of the West is only one aspect

of a period of qualitative change in world history, of changes unseen in a century.

Further, it seems to me that all political parties in various countries should study and learn from the CPC’s eight-point regulation and its spirit. To my mind, the regulation and its spirit are simply common sense: any political party should abide by these regulations and their spirit if they wish to seek legitimacy and approval of the common people. Strict and enforced discipline along with a higher level of values and work style than among ordinary citizens is a must for any political party. I would go as so far as to say that in our time the CPC is setting a new standard for all political parties worldwide, and it is a high standard indeed.

The General Secretary observed in March 2025, during an inspection visit of Guizhou: “The Central Committee has decided to carry out in-depth study and education on the implementation of the Eight-Point Regulation and its spirit throughout the party. This is a key task for party building this year. Party organisations at all levels should carefully organise and implement this decision, and encourage party members and cadres to enhance their resolve and form good habits, so as to unite people’s hearts and minds and inspire them to work hard and with a fine style. We must ensure that party spirit, conduct, and discipline are all addressed simultaneously, and that efforts to improve party conduct, enforce discipline, and fight corruption are closely integrated. Let us carry forward the spirit of the Long March and the spirit of Zunyi, and energetically forge ahead on the new Long March.”

Finally, I would like to say a little more concerning the implications of the China model for communist and workers’ parties worldwide. Here we need to distinguish between parties that lead socialist

countries (Vietnam, Laos, DPRK, and Cuba) and parties that are still in the long process of gaining such leadership. The former group have their own histories and experiences from which to draw, but have also learned from each other. However, the latter group has more to learn from the “China model.”

While there are many communist and workers’ parties throughout the world, some smaller and some larger, I would like to draw from my experience as a member of the Communist Party of Australia (CPA). The CPA was established in 1920, soon after the October Revolution in Russia, and the party has a long and complicated history. Over the last decade or more, the CPA has emerged from a period of survival in the 1990s and early 2000s to a period of party-building and development and is regaining in some respects a role of leadership in some parts of the working class. During this process of party building, the CPA has always adhered to the principle of seeking truth from facts and conducting in-depth research, focusing on enhancing its understanding of China and the Communist Party of China. As a result, it has gained a deeper grasp of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the cinification of Marxism, and Chinese-style modernisation.

To be realistic, the CPA is still a small but growing party, but it seems to me that the CPA may still learn the following from the CPC:

- 1) The dialectical unity of regulation and spirit, or disciplinary boundaries and the higher ethical standards for a Party member. Currently, there is an imbalance in the relation between regulation and spirit; in other words, the spirit or work style of party members still needs to be improved.
- 2) At present, the CPA is gradually recovering its earlier practices of democratic centralism for inner-party governance. However, since Australia

is not yet a socialist country, not much thought has been devoted to considering how democratic centralism may be implemented for country-wide governance through the statutory processes of socialist democracy.

- 3) To go a little further, the CPA has not yet given adequate attention to the question of culture. To be clear: while the CPA has learned well the lesson of the “first integration” and seeks to integrate the basic principles of Marxism with Australia’s concrete realities, it has not yet addressed and understood the need for the “second integration.” I think here especially of how the basic principles of Marxism may be integrated with the best of traditional indigenous culture in Australia.

## 5. Concluding Reflections

In this paper, I have addressed the following: the dialectical unity of regulation and spirit, and of rule of law and rule of virtue; the statutory processes for country-wide practice of democratic centralism; the people owning decisions made; then the implications for worldwide political parties, and especially communist and workers’ parties (with a focus on the CPA).

By way of conclusion, I would like to tell a small story. Some years ago, I was participating in a conference in Yalta, Crimea (now once again part of Russia). The mother of the conference organiser was also participating in the conference; she is both from Russia and a long-time member of the Communist Party of the Russian Federation. At one point my host’s mother made a comment: even today in Russia, the cultural assumption is that a communist party member is honest, forthright, concerned with others and not themselves, and lives a simple and frugal life. These are the some of the moral standards, the ethical values, the work style of a member of the communist party.