



Research Article

Review of Mao-Ze-Dong's Theory on New Democracy

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Abstract

In China, the trajectory of the 'New Democratic Revolution' became evident through the May Fourth Movement of 1919. In the subsequent phase, a democratic revolution was organised under the leadership of workers and peasants. This movement was directed against the feudal system, imperialism, and colonialism. This new phase of the movement also marked the inception of a new cultural revolution. The People's Republic of China was established in 1949. This phase of the revolution concluded under the leadership of the Communist Party of China, driven by an alliance between workers and peasants and the cooperation of the bourgeoisie. The New Democratic Revolution constitutes a transitional phase—an intermediate stage situated between a semi-feudal, semi-colonial social order and a socialist social order. It is a revolution led by the working class, aimed at constructing a new democratic society.

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1. INTRODUCTION

An essay titled *'On New Democracy'* was published in January 1940. The essay first appeared in the inaugural issue of a periodical titled *'Chinese Culture'*. In the history of political philosophy, this essay stands as one of Mao's most significant contributions. Mao's thoughts regarding democracy serve as a complement to his broader concepts of revolution. The commitment to building a "New China" finds its expression in the concept of New Democracy. Mao's essay *'On New Democracy'* articulates his ideas concerning the politics, economics, and culture, specifically the national, scientific, and mass-oriented culture of this New Democracy.

According to Mao, the ultimate objective is the construction of a New China. For a prolonged period, Communists have actively participated in and remained committed to the revolutionary struggle for the sake of political, economic, and cultural transformation. This protracted revolution has culminated in the creation of a new state and social system for the people of China. This new state and society are to be characterised by a *'New Politics, New Economics, and a New Culture'*. The feudal society founded upon an archaic political and economic base must be fundamentally transformed. The colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal society that emerged as a result of foreign capitalist aggression must be transformed. Subsequently, a new society, a new polity, a new economy, and a new culture must be constructed.

The Chinese Revolution will advance through two distinct stages. These two stages are: the democratic revolution and the socialist revolution. The task of the first stage of the revolution is to transform a society characterised by its colonial, semi-colonial, and semi-feudal nature into a democratic society. The task of the second stage of the revolution is to carry the revolution forward and establish a socialist social system.

The Politics of New Democracy

One of Mao's seminal works is the Chinese Revolution and the Chinese Communist Party. This essay was published in 1939. Mao's comprehensive concept regarding the politics of New Democracy is articulated through this work. According to Mao, a New Democratic Republic is a specific type of democratic republic, one that is led by the proletariat. This political system operates under the joint dictatorship of a coalition of anti-imperialist and anti-feudal social strata. In Mao's view, the proletariat, the peasantry, the intelligentsia, and sections of the petty bourgeoisie constitute the primary forces determining China's destiny. From a historical structural perspective, Mao posits that the Chinese Revolution is divided into two distinct phases: democracy and socialism. In his essay titled *'On New Democracy'*, Mao wrote: "The historical characteristic of the Chinese Revolution is that it is divided into two steps, that of democracy and that of socialism." The democratic phase of the revolution constitutes a distinct and novel form of democracy, *'New Democracy'*. This is not democracy in the conventional sense; rather, it is a unique, Chinese-style democracy. Mao

stated: "The first step is not democracy in its general sense, but a new special type of Chinese style, the New Democracy." Mao further observed: "The Chinese Revolution is divided into two historical stages; the first stage is the New Democratic Revolution. This constitutes the new historical characteristic of the Chinese Revolution."

The People's Democratic Dictatorship

In New Democracy, a *'People's Democratic Dictatorship'* is established. A New Democratic revolution is a prerequisite for organising a socialist revolution. This revolution serves as the initial stage for the establishment of a socialist society. Through the revolutions in Europe and the United States, a capitalist democracy characterised by bourgeois dominance and dictatorship was established.

Through the socialist revolution in the former Soviet Union, the dictatorship of the proletariat was established. However, in China's New Democracy, a *'People's Democratic Dictatorship'* was established. Given China's semi-feudal and semi-colonial social structure, this constituted a new type of dictatorship. In his work titled *'New Democracy'*, Mao stated: "This kind of New Democratic republic differs, on the one hand, from the old European-American capitalist republics under bourgeois dictatorship which are the old democratic republics and are now obsolete; and on the other hand, it differs from the Soviet-type socialist republic under the dictatorship of the proletariat which has already developed in the Soviet Union and which will be established in all capitalist countries. Indeed, this will undoubtedly be the predominant form for the state and government structures of all industrially advanced nations. However, for the revolutions in colonial and semi-colonial countries during a specific historical period, this latter type of republic is not suitable. Therefore, during a specific historical period, the revolution in all colonial and semi-colonial countries can adopt only a third type of state form, that is, the New Democratic Republic. This is a state form specific to a particular historical period; thus, it is a transitional form. Nevertheless, it is an indispensable form that cannot be bypassed."

In the context of New Democracy, Mao provided a detailed explanation and analysis of the concept of the *'People's Democratic Dictatorship'*. According to Mao, the "people" in New Democracy consist of the workers, peasants, urban petty bourgeoisie, and the national bourgeoisie. The dictatorship exercised by these groups constitutes the *'People's Dictatorship'* within the framework of New Democracy. The *'People's Democratic Dictatorship'* is, in essence, a synthesis of two elements: democracy for the people, and "repressive measures" (dictatorship) directed against the reactionaries. As Mao wrote: "The combination of these two aspects, democracy for the people and dictatorship over the reactionaries, is the *'People's Democratic Dictatorship'*." Mao stated: "The Chinese proletariat, peasantry, intelligentsia, and other petty-bourgeois elements constitute the fundamental forces that will determine

the destiny of the country. The democratic republic that we seek to establish in China today can only be a democratic republic under the joint dictatorship of all anti-imperialist and anti-feudal people, led by the proletariat. This will be a New Democratic Republic, a republic of the 'Three New Principles of the People,' embodying a genuinely revolutionary Three Great Policies."

Three Types of State Systems

Based on the class character of political power, Mao categorised the state systems of the world into three types. These three types of state systems are: (1) Republics under the dictatorship of the bourgeoisie; (2) Republics under the dictatorship of the proletariat; and (3) Republics under the joint dictatorship of several revolutionary classes. The first type represents the old-style democratic state. The second type of state system corresponds to that of the former Soviet Union. The third type constitutes the transitional state form for revolutions in colonial and semi-colonial countries. Mao observed: "In present-day China, this New Democratic state form takes the shape of an anti-Japanese and anti-imperialist united front of the people. It represents an alliance of several revolutionary classes and, indeed, a united front."

The System of Government

Mao also discussed in detail the system of government within the framework of New Democracy. Mao stated: "The state system is the joint dictatorship of all revolutionary classes, while the system of government is democratic centralism. Such is the politics of New Democracy..." Mao advocated for the establishment of a system of People's Congresses throughout China. These congresses would exist at every level, ranging from the National People's Congress at the apex, down to the congresses at the provincial, district, sub-district, and township levels. At each level, these bodies would elect their respective government organs. An electoral system based on genuine universal and equal suffrage would be instituted. This system is eminently suited to ensuring the proper status of the various revolutionary classes within the state, facilitating the genuine expression of the people's will, guiding revolutionary struggles, and fostering the spirit of New Democracy. This system is the system of democratic centralism.

According to Mao, only a government established based on democratic centralism can fully articulate the views of all revolutionary people, and can act and struggle most effectively against the enemies of the revolution. Mao stated: "The attitude that power must not be the monopoly of a select few must prevail within both the government and the armed forces; without a genuinely democratic system, this objective cannot be attained, and there will be no harmony between the government's administrative mechanisms and the state structure."

The Economy of New Democracy

Mao articulated the necessity of a New Democratic system not only in the political sphere but also in the economic realm.

Much like the political system, the economic system must be New Democratic in nature; specifically, under the New Democratic system, major banks, large-scale industrial enterprises, and commercial establishments are to remain under state ownership. The objective behind this was to ensure that private capital could not dominate the people's livelihood. Consequently, state control was not advocated for capital that did not exert such influence over the people's way of life. Mao stated: "Enterprises of a monopolistic character, or of a scale too large for private management, such as banks, railways, and airlines, shall be operated and administered by the state, so that private capital cannot dominate the people's livelihood; this constitutes the fundamental principle of capital control." Mao further added: "China's economy must proceed along the path of 'capital control' and 'equalisation of land tenure,' and under no circumstances shall it be permitted to fall into the 'monopolistic possession of a few individuals'..."

State-owned enterprises shall constitute the cornerstone of the national economy. The economy of the New Democracy will be guided by the principles of capital control and the equalisation of land tenure. Emphasis will be placed upon socialist elements and characteristics. Mao affirmed: "This constitutes the correct policy for constructing the economic framework of the New Democratic Republic. Under the leadership of the proletariat, the state-owned sector of the New Democratic Republic's economy will possess a socialist character, and this shall serve as the guiding force for the entire national economy. However, this Republic shall not confiscate other forms of capitalist private property, nor shall it impose restrictions on the development of capitalist production that does not 'dominate the people's livelihood' or China's economy currently remains at a highly backward stage."

Cooperative enterprises shall adhere to socialist principles. Within China's economic structure, the monopolistic control of a privileged few shall not be countenanced. In rural areas, feudalistic relations shall be abolished. Land shall be distributed to the actual tillers of the soil. Nevertheless, given the underdeveloped state of China's economy, the policy of completely abolishing all forms of private ownership has not been adopted at this particular stage. Mao stated: "The economic system of the rich peasants in the countryside will be allowed to continue as it is. This constitutes the principle of 'equalisation of land tenure.' The correct slogan for this principle is 'Land to the Tiller.' At this stage, a socialist agricultural system will not generally be established; however, the various forms of cooperative economy developed on the foundation of the 'Land to the Tiller' principle will indeed contain socialist elements."

According to Mao's interpretation, this constitutes the economy of New Democracy. And the politics of New Democracy represent the concentrated expression of this New Democratic economy.

The Culture of New Democracy

In Mao's view, any specific culture is the ideological reflection of the contemporary politics and economy of a specific society. The Cultural Revolution serves as a powerful instrument of mass revolution. Mao stated: "Revolutionary culture is a powerful revolutionary weapon of the people." Naturally, the objectives of a mass revolution encompass not only the political system and the economy but also mass culture. Under New Democracy, cultural movements are conducted in the interest of the people. The New Democratic Revolution entails the adoption of a program for a scientific, national, and mass-oriented culture. Mao stated: "New culture is the ideological reflection of new politics and a new economy. Its function is to serve this new politics and new economy."

The culture of New Democracy is a new, revolutionary culture. It is a life and death struggle. This struggle is conducted in harmony with the social transformation of China. It is a struggle of revolution against counter-revolution. New Democratic culture engages in a struggle against the opposing forces born of the politics, economy, and culture of the past.

This culture has evolved into a culture of a New Democratic character. It constitutes a component of the global proletariat's socialist culture. According to Mao, China's new culture emerged in the aftermath of the May Fourth Movement. This culture stands in opposition to all forms of feudal and superstitious notions. The essence of New Democratic culture lies in opposing imperialist and feudal rule and exploitation, while simultaneously safeguarding China's national sovereignty and distinct national characteristics. This cultural revolution is to be led by the proletariat and carried out by the broad masses of the people. Mao stated: "The culture of New Democracy is the anti-imperialist, anti-feudal culture of the masses and the people, led by the proletariat." Mao further added: "We designate the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal culture of the masses as 'New-Democratic culture'; today, this culture serves as the culture of the Anti-Japanese United Front. This culture can be guided solely by the culture and ideology of the proletariat—that is, the ideology of Communism; it cannot be guided by the culture or ideology of any other class. In short, New-Democratic culture is the anti-imperialist and anti-feudal culture of the masses, led by the proletariat."

National, Scientific, and Mass Culture

Finally, Mao discussed the scientific nature and mass foundation of New-Democratic culture. According to Mao, a New-Democratic Republic is realised only through the synthesis of the politics, economics, and culture of New Democracy. The new culture of the Chinese nation is a national, scientific, and mass-oriented culture. Mao outlined the essential prerequisites for fostering the development of this new national culture and for bolstering national self-confidence. These prerequisites involve critically examining the evolution of past cultures, specifically, discarding their feudal elements while embracing the democratic essence. The Chinese working class

possesses a scientific outlook; furthermore, there exists the potential for an alliance to emerge between the progressive, materialist bourgeoisie and natural scientists. There is absolutely no room here for reactionaries. New Democratic culture seeks the truth within the realm of objective reality itself; hence, this new democratic culture is inherently scientific.

In essence, New Democratic culture represents the culture of the broad masses of the Chinese people. Revolutionary culture serves as a potent revolutionary weapon for revolutionary people. Mao identified several specific roles for New Democratic culture. These include: safeguarding the interests of the working class, the peasantry, and the labouring masses; educating and enlightening the revolutionary masses and cadres; elevating the cultural standards of all these segments of the Chinese population; and maintaining close, intimate ties with the masses. The intrinsic form of Chinese culture is its national form; consequently, China's New-Democratic culture must assume this national character. To achieve this, it is essential to comprehensively and thoroughly integrate the universal truths of Marxist philosophy with the specific practices of the Chinese Revolution. New-Democratic culture is intimately linked with national wealth, national culture, and the socialist ideals of China as a whole. This New-Democratic culture is destined to become a creator of world culture. Acting as a catalyst for mutual exchange and development, New-Democratic culture will contribute to the construction of a global culture. Furthermore, New-Democratic culture will be enriched by the cultures of capitalist nations. However, wholesale Westernisation has neither been accepted nor endorsed. Elements from the cultures of capitalist countries must be adopted only after careful and thorough deliberation. Currently, China has transitioned from a 'New Democracy' into a 'Socialist State.' According to Mao, China's revolutionary history is divided into two distinct phases: the Democratic Phase and the Socialist Phase. The objective of the Socialist Phase was to accelerate the pace of the revolution and to establish a socialist social order. At present, a People's Republic has been established in China. This state is administered under the leadership and with the active cooperation of the country's working people. It stands as a socialist state of the Chinese proletariat.

Criticism: Mao's concepts regarding 'New Democracy' are not immune to controversy or debate. Critics have highlighted various limitations inherent in Mao's New Democratic ideology. A discussion of these points is therefore essential.

1. Mao's assertion that New Democratic culture would evolve under the leadership of the proletariat is a point open to dispute. Fundamentally, the Chinese Revolution was an agrarian revolution; its primary objective was to transfer political power into the hands of the peasantry. In forging the Anti-Japanese United Front, Mao mobilised a broad

coalition comprising peasants, workers, patriots, the bourgeoisie, and the lower-middle class.

2. Critics allege that Mao's conception of democracy was, to a certain extent, clouded by an infatuation with the Communist Party and by an adherence to the ideology of party dictatorship.
3. According to critics, Mao's doctrine of New Democracy lacks originality; the influence of Leninist thought is patently evident in this regard.
4. In Maoist doctrine, the Soviet revolutionary model was adopted or rejected as deemed necessary. This issue has sparked debate among Marxist thinkers.
5. China's subsequent political leaders neither acknowledged nor endorsed Mao's proposals regarding the Cultural Revolution.
6. Political philosophers generally believe that the coexistence of democracy and centralisation is not possible. While a commitment to democracy has been professed, the Communist Party retains a stronger inclination toward centralisation. The Communist Party of China has adopted the principle of "democratic centralism."
7. Proponents of Western liberal democracy allege that Mao opposed bureaucratic systems, and this is indeed true. However, there remains room for debate regarding the extent to which Mao's "cadre system" was truly democratic and impartial.
8. According to critics, Mao, in practice, went to extremes regarding issues related to education, economic planning, and revisionist policies. Consequently, China failed to achieve the desired success in the realms of either democracy or socialism.
9. In the run-up to the revolution, Mao accurately and comprehensively analysed the problems facing the Chinese people; on this point, there is no room for disagreement. However, there remains scope for debate regarding the accuracy of Mao's analysis and assessment of the situation in the post-revolutionary era.
10. Even intellectuals who supported the Soviet model did not endorse Mao's concepts regarding democracy and socialism.
11. Controversies both within and outside the Party arose concerning Mao's ideas on agrarian reform, industrial policy, cooperatives, defence strategy, the rashness of the Cultural Revolution, the "Great Leap Forward" policy, and political purges. As a result, the development of democracy and the realisation of socialism were impeded.

CONCLUSION

Mao was deeply preoccupied with the formulation and implementation of programs for the reconstruction of an independent China. Following the attainment of independence, he was acutely aware of the necessity for innovative programs to foster the growth and expansion of a new socialist order in China. He outlined a new democratic framework specifically tailored to serve as a foundation for the socialism of the future. It was in this context that Mao's concept of "New Democracy" emerged. Mao possessed historical insight, sociological understanding, philosophical depth, and analytical capabilities of an exceptionally high calibre. Drawing upon these strengths, he formulated the political, economic, and cultural blueprint for his "New Democracy." The concepts and ideas of New Democracy are comprehensive, multifaceted, and creative in nature. Mao's New Democracy constitutes a significant contribution to the history of Marxist philosophy. New Democracy stands as one of the most pivotal elements within Mao's political and social thought. Despite its limitations, the importance and significance of New Democracy in the history of Marxist political thought remain beyond dispute.

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