

## **Taking the Pandemic Prevention and Control as an Opportunity to Advance the Modernization of China's System and Capacity for Governance**

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### **Abstract**

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*The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China(CPC) proposed that Chinese must uphold and improve the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and continuously advance the modernization of China's capacity and system for governance. Since the outbreak of the COVID-19, China's pandemic prevention and control has achieved an overwhelming trend under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with President Xi Jinping at its core. Meanwhile, the party's remarkable advantages in leadership, people-centeredness and concentrated efforts to accomplish major tasks in the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics have been fully demonstrated. However, the pandemic prevention and control has revealed the problems that China has in the national emergency management capacity and system, the rule of law system, the local government's governing capacity and the leadership level system. As such, taking the pandemic prevention and control as an opportunity to continuously sum up experience from it to further improve the public security system, promote the socialist rule of law system with Chinese characteristics and strengthen the innovation of theory and practice, so as to unremittingly develop the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and advance the modernization of China's governance system and capacity to a new level.*

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**Key words:** Pandemic prevention and control; The system of socialism with Chinese characteristics; National governance system and capacity; Modernization

Under the strong leadership of the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the core, the prevention and control of COVID-19 in China has achieved important phased results after more than two-month hard work by the people all over the country: the domestic coronavirus spread, with Wuhan being the main battlefield, has been contained in China; the number of confirmed cases in many places of the country has been "zeroed" and zero growth for several consecutive days; the economic and social order is gradually returning to normal; the pandemic focus shifts from "preventing the coronavirus from entering and spreading within the city" to "preventing the coronavirus from re-entering the country to cause a new pandemic". It can be said that China has achieved an overwhelming victory in the fight against the pandemic.

"Upholding and improving the system of socialism with Chinese characteristics and advancing the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance are major issues related to the prosperity and development of the cause of the party and the country, the long-term stability of the country, and the well-being of the people." President Xi Jinping always stressed. The course of fighting against COVID-19 tested and took the advantages of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics while some problems were exposed in China's current system and capacity for governance. Therefore, a comprehensive summary of the pandemic prevention and control experience will be conducive to advancing the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance.

## 1. THE PROBLEMS ABOUT THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA'S SYSTEM AND CAPACITY FOR GOVERNANCE EXPOSED IN THE PANDEMIC PREVENTION AND CONTROL

The COVID-19 pandemic initially broke out in Wuhan in early December, 2019. In order to prevent and control the spread of the pandemic, the China authority announced to take unprecedented comprehensive, rigorous and thorough measures on January 23, 2020, including temporarily closed all public transportation scheduled to depart from Wuhan, etc.; many provinces activated first-level public health emergency response. Up to March 2020, the pandemic was basically under control in China. However, due to the sudden outbreak and seriousness of the pandemic, several problems in the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance were exposed in the early stage, which worth exploring and reflecting in depth.

First of all, the national capacity and system for emergency management needs to be optimized, and the capability for disaster prevention, reduction and relief needs to be improved. The pandemic has exposed many problems in China's capacity and system for emergency management. (1) Incomplete information disclosure mechanism and delayed information disclosure. According to the public information, Zhang Jixian, director of the Department of Respiratory and Intensive Medicine of Hubei Hospital of Traditional Chinese and Western Medicine, first reported the three suspicious cases she received on December 27, 2019. And then National Health Commission (NHC) has initially identified the source of the pandemic on January 8, 2020. In a manner of speaking, relevant departments in Wuhan city and Hubei province have already acquired the data of COVID-19 at an earlier time. But unfortunately, it was not until the high-level expert team of the National Health Commission (NHC) headed by Zhong Nanshan and Li Lanjuan arrived in Wuhan to learn more details about the situation that the veil on the person-to-person transmission of COVID-19 was lifted, missing the best period for pandemic prevention and control. In the early stage of combating the pandemic, the relevant departments were weak in disease surveillance, research and judgment so that the pandemic failed to be effectively prevented and controlled and then entered the subsequent stage of widespread transmission, causing inestimable losses. (2) Insufficient stock of pandemic prevention materials and weak scheduling capabilities. Due to the sudden outbreak of the pandemic, the government and hospitals had a serious shortage of material reserves, and the hospital's capacity for treatment was lagging behind the number of infected people, resulting in cross infection between medical staff and patients. Besides, the management of donated materials by the Wuhan Red Cross and other related departments was chaotic and inefficient, which led to the situation that the backlogged medical materials could not be delivered to the medical department in the first time.

Secondly, the rule of law still has far to go and people's legal consciousness urgently awaits to enhance. The construction of the rule of law is an important engine to promote the country's system and capacity to a new level. There have been lots of legal issues during the pandemic, which mainly manifested in the following aspects: (1) the absence of laws and regulations. The previous *People's Republic of China Wildlife Protection Law* presented problems and deficiencies in the definition of wild animals, the level of protection of wild animals, the taming and breeding of wild animals and their management and utilization; the lack of laws for behaviors such as price gouging and violence against doctors during the pandemic, etc.. (2) the problem in law enforcement and law-abiding of law enforcement personnel, which was prominently manifested in the fact that a small number of prevention and control personnel seized the pandemic prevention to wantonly destroy citizens' private property or even restrict their freedom. (3) the law-abiding problem of the people during the pandemic, which was mainly reflected in the intentional spread of viruses in violation of laws and regulations to endanger public safety, the fabrication of terrorist information related to COVID-19 or the deliberate spread of terrorist information that was known to be fabricated, and the behaviors that seriously disrupted market order such as price gouging and profiteering.

Lastly, it is necessary to further enhance the system for governing ability and the leadership level of local government. The pandemic has also exposed the uneven performance of each area in terms of pandemic prevention and control work in our country, complicated social response and weak pandemic control in some local areas due to inadequate and ineffective measures of local governments. The public media reported that the health systems of Wuhan city and Hubei province had already obtained evidence of human-to-human transmission of the unidentified pneumonia in the early stage of the pandemic. However, the local governments blocked the news and created a happy and peaceful atmosphere instead of taking decisive measures to control the pandemic immediately. It was not until January 23 that the Wuhan municipal government made the decision to close the city. Unfortunately, it was so late that the situation in Wuhan had been extremely severe at that time: the number of patients was increased sharply, the hospital protection funding was insufficient, and the medical staff were infected, etc.. The pandemic situation in Hubei was gradually brought under control until February 13 when the Hubei Provincial Party Committee Secretary, Governor, and Wuhan Municipal Party Committee successively resigned.

## **2. HIGHLIGHTED STRENGTHS OF THE SOCIALIST SYSTEM WITH CHINESE CHARACTERISTICS**

pandemic prevention and control is not only a big test for China's system and capacity for governance, but also a touchstone for testing the modernization level of the national governance system and capacity. Under the leadership of the Party Central Committee with President Xi Jinping at its core, the party organizations, governments and party members at all levels in China fought on the front line of the pandemic and have won a overwhelming victory domestically. By contrast, COVID-19 pandemic is rampant in other countries. The number of infections and deaths is increased sharply within a period of time especially in some developed countries like the United States, Italy and Spain, although who possess better medical systems and supplies, due to untimely and ineffective measures resulted from the differences in political system and culture and so on. Therefore, the superiority of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics has been fully highlighted through fighting against the pandemic, which will provide valuable experiences for further advancing the modernization of China's system and capacity for social governance. China's strengths for its governance demonstrated in the fight against the pandemic are in the following areas:

Upholding the system strength of the centralized and unified leadership of the CPC. "The most essential feature of the socialist society with Chinese characteristics is the leadership of the CPC. The greatest advantage of the socialist system of China is also the leadership of CPC. The party is the highest force for political leadership." as the report of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC pointed out. The party's leadership is the fundamental guarantee for success in all work of the party and the country, and it is the key stand to overcome all difficulties and risks. In this pandemic prevention and control, the Party Central Committee with Xi Jinping at the core, who took the overall situation and coordinated all sectors to concentrate forces to accomplish major tasks, made a series of decision-making deployments through unified command, unified coordination, and unified scheduling, which gave full play to the role of centralized and unified leadership. Under the leadership of the party, party organizations at all levels in the country followed the orders and took the initiative to fight the pandemic. All party members took the lead and volunteered to join hands with the people to fight against the pandemic. It was the leadership of the party that gave the whole nation its backbone and formed centripetal force, which quickly brought the pandemic under control with one heart and one mind.

Pursuing the vision of people-centered and the strength that always puts the people's lives and health in the first place. The affinity to the people is the distinct feature of Marxism. The fundamental difference between the Marxist political party and other political parties is that it always stands with the people and strives for their interest. As general secretary Xi held: "People's longing for a better life is our goal of struggle." The CPC puts the people at the highest position in its heart forever, always serving the people wholeheartedly and striving for the interests and happiness of the people, which is the fundamental starting point for the deployment of pandemic prevention and control in China.

These practical measures to protect the lives and health of the people all show the deep humaneness of the party: from measures of effectively improving the rate of admission and curing and reducing the rate of infection and mortality to humane care for medical staff's physical and mental health and family members; from concentrating all forces to research and develop COVID-19 drugs to ensuring the necessities of the people's lives like rice and vegetables; from the principal leading cadres withstanding test by sticking their posts, commanding on front line and combating pandemic to the primary party organization and the mass of party members playing the role of fighting fortress and exemplary vanguard; from publishing authoritative information timely, providing open and transparent response to public concerns and offering law support for pandemic prevention and control to building stringent lines of defense across society. "Always putting the lives and health of the people first" is the embodiment of the CPC's purpose of serving the people wholeheartedly, the specific practice of the vision of people-centered development and the fundamental requirement for the pandemic prevention and control.

Ensuring a coordinated national response to mobilize the enthusiasm of all sectors and concentrate on major tasks. "The pandemic prevention and control must adhere to a coordinated national response. That is, party committees and governments at all levels must resolutely obey the Party Central Committee's unified command, unified coordination, and unified scheduling, carrying out all orders and observing all prohibitions; all regions and departments must enhance overall situation consciousness and the overall viewpoint, and firmly abide by the command of the Leading Group for COVID-19 Prevention and Control under the CPC Central Committee and the Joint Prevention and Control Mechanism of the State Council." as Xi called for. After the outbreak, 19 provinces and cities provided counterpart support to the cities in Hubei where the pandemic was severe, and organized 346 medical teams with more than 42600 medical personnel to support Hubei; medical supplies, living supplies and emergency security supplies were continuously delivered to Hubei; the Huoshenshan Hospital with a capacity of 1000 beds was built in 10 days and the Leishenshan Hospital accommodating 1500 beds was accomplished within 12 days; etc.. In combating the pandemic, one of the strengths of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics, concentrating its efforts on major affairs, has once again been demonstrated.

### **3. TAKING THE PANDEMIC PREVENTION AND CONTROL AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO FURTHER ADVANCE THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA'S SYSTEM AND CAPACITY FOR GOVERNANCE**

The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19<sup>th</sup> Central Committee pointed out that the socialist system with Chinese characteristics is a scientific system formed by the people led by the party on the basis of long-term revolution, construction and reform. The central manifestation of the socialist system with Chinese characteristics and its executive capability is China's system and capacity for governance. The notable strengths of China's state and governance systems totally can be summarized in 13 aspects, which offer powerful support for political stability, economic development, cultural prosperity, ethnic unity, people's happiness, social tranquility and national unity. But Xi pointed out, "Although our national governance system and capacity are generally good and have unique strengths, which adapt to China's national conditions and development requirements, more efforts need to be made to enhance the national governance capacity due to its deficiencies." As the Chinese saying goes, the last leg of a journey marks the halfway point. Therefore, Chinese should take this prevention and control against COVID-19 as an opportunity to vigorously propel the modernization of the national governance system and capacity to a new level.

Enhance the ability to respond to crises and improve public security system and mechanism. Dialectical materialism of the view that the contradiction, as the source and driving force for the development of everything, is omnipresent and ubiquitous. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed China's deficiencies in responding to major public health emergencies, not only in policy formulation and system setting, but also in specific operational aspects such as public health pandemic prevention system and material supply. The Fourth Plenary Session of the 19<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the CPC figured out that it is necessary to build an emergency management system with unified guidance, both professional and comprehensive ability, quick response and the upper and lower linkage, optimize the development of national emergence management capacity and improve the capability for disaster prevention, mitigation and relief.

Drawing lessons from the pandemic and improving major pandemic prevention and control measures in terms of the system and mechanism are conducive to promoting the national public health emergency management system and enhancing the ability to respond to major public health emergencies, so as to advance the modernization of the national governance system and capacity to a higher level.

Strengthen the development of socialist rule of law and promote the system of socialist rule of law with Chinese characteristics. The rule of law is a basic way the party leads the people in the governance of the country. The rule of law in an all-round way is not only a profound revolution in national governance, but also an essential requirement and important guarantee for the socialism with Chinese characteristics. The development of the rule of law can drive the modernization of China's system and capacity for governance to a new stage. "Recently, pandemic prevention and control is at a critical period, and scientific, orderly and law-based prevention and control is of the utmost importance. The more hard we fight the pandemic, the more we must be in accordance with the law. In order to ensure the smooth progress of the pandemic prevention and control work, we need to coordinate all the work according to the rule of law." General secretary Xi made important remarks stressing the importance of the rule of law in the pandemic prevention and control in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Session of the Rule of Law Commission of CPC Central Committee, which made significant arrangements for propelling pandemic prevention and control based on the law and enhancing Chinese ability to manage the pandemic in accordance with the law, and provided critical guidance for firmly combating the pandemic. Consequently, in response to the problems exposed in this pandemic, Chinese should revise and improve the relevant laws and regulations for pandemic prevention and control and complete the supporting system as soon as possible to build a comprehensive, scientific and standardized, and effective legal system for pandemic prevention and control with comprehensive system. Only by making the rule of law an important guarantee for pandemic prevention and control can the modernization of the national governance system and capacity be promoted to a new level.

Pursue the innovation of theory and practice and constantly develop the socialist system with Chinese characteristics. Keeping up with The Times is the theoretical quality of Marxism. The present world is undergoing unprecedented changes. Facing the complicated situation at home and abroad, only by constantly listening to the voice of The Times and responding to the call of The Times to conscientiously explore and solve major and urgent problems, meanwhile grasping the historical context to help propel theoretical and practical innovations can Chinese continue to consolidate and enhance the society with Chinese characteristics and create a new platform for the great improvement of the national governance system and capacity.

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