Research on the Evolution of CCP’s “Two-front Arrangement” in Mao’s Era: In Point of Historical Institutionalism

Abstract

In the political regime of CCP, democratic centralism is the formal system of an organized form. “Two-front arrangement” is informal system, which is used to renovate three defects of democratic centralism, including the effects of informal system, power centralization, and the crisis of political successor. This article is used three concepts of “historical institutionalism”, which are path dependence, critical juncture, and punctured equilibrium, to explain the transition of “two-front arrangement” in CCP.

First, in the path dependence, “two-front arrangement” is a method used by CCP to repair the deficiency of democratic centralism. Second, the path of “two-front arrangement” was gone through two critical junctures of transition, one is the CCP twelve party congress in 1982, and two is the CCP sixteenth party congress in 2002. At last, the results of these critical junctures produced new punctured equilibrium. The work of “two-front arrangement” changed to patron-client type after the CCP twelve party congress and evolved to functional type after the CCP sixteenth party congress. The change of “two-front arrangement” is gradually evolving to some kinds of institutionalization. From the random type in Mao’s era, the patron-client type in Deng’s era, to the functional type in Jiang’s era, we can find that the “two-front arrangement” has remarkable function to repair three defects of democratic centralism as time went by. So we can take it as the formation of institutionalization.

We analyze the “two-front arrangement” during Mao Zedong’s era. “First-front” leaders are those who participated in the policy-making process directly while leaders on the “second-front” are referred to those who only indirectly involved in the process. The article argues that the best way to identify leaders in their affiliation in the “two-fronts” division of work is to have a detailed breakdown on personnel in the highest decision-making bodies, the Politburo and the Central Secretariat.

We divide Chinese leadership during Mao’s era into four categories according to official document and reputation and status of the leaders. The article further delineates the operation of the “two-front arrangement” according to the division of work between the party and the state, charisma of the leaders and formal institutions. At the end, we try to assess the impact of the “two-fronts” model on Chinese politics.

Keywords: critical juncture; democratic centralism; historical institutionalism; path dependence; punctured equilibrium; two-front arrangement