

High public support attests to success of CPC's self-reform: Australian scholar

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The week-long 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) concluded on October 22, 2022, at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. Photo: Li Hao/GT

Editor's Note:

China had an epic decade since 2012. Particularly in the last five years, which are truly momentous, extraordinary, the country has successfully dealt with major challenges including turbulent developments in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and the COVID-19 epidemic. The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC) has laid out plans for the strategic missions and major measures in the next five years, getting the efforts to build a modern socialist country in all respects off to a good start.

Roland Boer (Boer), a Marxist scholar from Australia, told Global Times reporter (GT) Liu Zixuan that "by combining long-term planning with significant flexibility, the CPC has emerged as one of the - actually, I should say the - most successful political party in the world."

GT: You have deep ties with China, having taught at Renmin University of China and Dalian University of Technology. What developments and achievements in China over the past 10 years have impressed you the most?

Boer: Yes, my connections with China go back to 2007, when I first began to visit for shorter periods - lectures, conferences, and so on. By 2013 I was working at Renmin University of China, and in 2019 moved to Dalian University of Technology.

Apart from the more obvious achievements, such as achieving a well-off society, the overcoming of absolute poverty and so on, I would like to emphasize following achievements:

The first concerns a growing cultural confidence. In the earlier years of the 2010s, there was a significant debate concerning the growing economic strength of China and its global political importance, but there was a lag in the influence of Chinese cultural approaches. With a history of 5000 years, the question was: how can China's own cultural experience contribute to the world, without copying other models? Since that time, I have noticed that Chinese scholars and many others have become engaged internationally in so many ways. They are fearlessly prepared to go wherever there is a need, to explain calmly and rationally what China can contribute to the world.

The second feature I have noticed is the extraordinary ability to manage rapid growth in economic, political, and social terms in a stable manner. As a philosopher, I view this process in terms of contradiction analysis. In other parts of the world where they have experienced rapid development, it has been deeply disruptive and full of conflict. But not so in China, where the development has by and large been achieved in a stable and harmonious manner. Where contradictions have threatened to become a problem, careful management has ensured that the problem was resolved.

The third one is a very personal experience. It is what I call the greening of China. In the early months of 2019, I hiked the length and breadth of Beijing. Every second day, I would hike 15-20 kilometres, from the plains of the east to the mountains in the west, from one corner of the city to the other. What did I find? To my amazement, I found one green belt after another, one park that had been restored after another.

The waters had been cleaned up so that water-life returned; the planting of so many trees and shrubs was amazing. Alongside strict observance of environmental laws, these efforts required long-term implementation. On my hikes, I was experiencing the greening of Beijing. And in my many travels to the regions of China, I have also noticed the greening of China as whole, so much so that China now leads the world in "green growth."

Finally, I have been struck by the consolidation and maturing of socialist rule of law and democracy.

GT: In your latest publication, *Socialism with Chinese Characteristics: A Guide for Foreigners*, you mention that China's socialist democratic system is already quite mature and superior to any other democratic system. How do you understand the whole process of people's democracy?

Boer: To begin with, a key feature is the combination of electoral and consultative democracy. In contrast to Western political systems, which focus almost exclusively on elections (after which voters are forgotten by political parties), China has developed a comprehensive system in which both elections and consultation take place. These are institutionalised in the many levels of people's congresses and people's political consultative conferences, but the combination can be seen in so many other ways. A major reason is the long history and experience of the "mass line" that goes back a long, long way in the experience of the CPC.

Second, there is a genuine involvement of common people in the development of legislation. Here I think of the more recently established three-level system for developing legislation to be decided at the National People's Congress. This system has national, provincial, and city levels, with a focus on

grassroots contact points. At this very local level, we find hearings, panels, feasibility studies, and more, to nurture proposals from the ground up as well gain feedback for legislative drafts. This is a concrete embodiment of whole-process people's democracy, from initial proposal to implementation, as well as overseeing the results.

Third, since the 18th National Congress of the CPC in 2012, there has been a most significant development of socialist rule of law and the legal system. Of course, this development has a longer history, but I am struck by the major developments since 2012. To be clear, a socialist rule of law arises from a socialist system and supports that system. It is qualitatively different from the Western idea of rule of law. It is this socialist rule of law that supports the many practices of electoral and consultative democracy, and it is the crucial mediation between leadership of CPC and the people as masters of the country.

Finally, I would like to make a point that Westerners struggle to understand, but if they really want to know how China's political system works, they have to understand it. This is a philosophical and dialectical point: the leadership of the CPC is enhanced through democratic practice, and socialist democracy is strengthened through CPC leadership.

GT: You also wrote in your book that socialism with Chinese characteristics is one of the most important global realities today. However, the concept and its practice remain largely misunderstood outside China. This is also the original intention of why you wrote the book, hoping that more Westerners would understand China. In your opinion, what misunderstandings does the West have about China and why do they have? How to resolve these misunderstandings?

Boer: I would like to sum up the problem in terms of the problem of using Western categories in an attempt to understand China. The problem is that this effort is always doomed to fail. Let me give an example: when I was undertaking research for my book, I began working through Western material. I soon found that most of it was useless since it used Western approaches. So, I turned to Chinese language sources, and more than 90 percent of the references in the book are to Chinese scholarly sources.

Philosophically, we may speak of a "false universal." By this I mean that in the West, - actually a small number of countries that make up only 14 percent of the world's population - they tend to forget the historical development and concrete conditions of the methods that they have developed. As a result, they assume that Western methods and categories are universal and that they can be applied everywhere in the world. This is false universal, since Western methods cannot be applied in such a manner.

How to resolve this problem? I think developing countries in many parts of the world have a better understanding, since they share as a deep level China's experiences of semi-colonialism, humiliation, and deep poverty. In regard to the few Western countries of the world, this will simply take longer. There is a need to continue the process of translating scholarly works, to explain again and again how China's system works, and work together with many other countries to promote a genuinely multi-polar world. I often say to my many friends and colleagues in China that you are not alone; you have many friends in the world, and the key is to work together with these friends to develop a new, just, and more democratic system of international relations.

GT: The five years since the 19th National Congress of the CPC have been extraordinary and unprecedented. What do these five years mean for the CPC?

Boer: The last five years have indeed been extraordinary. I am 61 years old, with four adult children and five grandchildren. I never thought I would see such events in my lifetime. The world is now changing fast, and changing for the better. I am generally optimistic about the way the world is developing. At the same time, these changes come with heightened contradictions, crises, conflicts, and so on. But this is part of the process.

I was in Beijing when 19th CPC National Congress took place. In the last five years, all governments and political parties throughout the world have faced and continued to face huge challenges and problems, and few have done well. In this context, the achievements of the CPC have been even more remarkable: facing the challenge of COVID-19; the stabilisation and further development of Hong Kong Special Administrative Region; peace, stability, and harmony in Xinjiang with notable economic and social development; rolling out the world's most comprehensive social security system, well-off society, overcoming absolute poverty, the list could go on. By combining long-term planning with significant flexibility, the CPC has emerged as one of the - actually, I should say the - most successful political party in the world.

GT: The deployment of strategic tasks and significant projects over the following five years are the main topics of discussion at the CPC's 20th National Congress. In the upcoming five years, there will be uncertainties and difficulties for all countries. What advantages does transcending the election cycle give the CPC in governing?

Boer: I would like to put my answer in more philosophical terms. The crucial difference is between antagonistic and non-antagonistic contradictions. The Western political system is based on antagonistic contradictions: class conflict has led to the capitalist form of the state, and political parties are engaged in constant conflict with one another. The election cycle in Western countries is an effort to manage these contradictions, but what we find is that when an opposition party comes to power, they spend much of their time undoing the policies of the previous government. Now that this system is in an obvious state of decline and fragmentation, there is simply no long-term planning. For example, you can see this with the energy and economic crisis in Europe today.

By contrast, a socialist system operates with non-antagonistic contradictions. Of course, there are many contradictions on the path of socialist construction, and these need to be managed. But the basis is that the contradictions are not antagonistic, are not struggling with each other for dominance. This reality is very clear in the combination of electoral and consultative democracy in China, with the eight other political parties, minority groups, mass organisations, and so on, working together for a common goal. Thus, it is possible to develop long-term plans based on careful assessment of the situation and what is needed.

GT: What lessons can developing countries learn from Chinese model?

Boer: Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, developing countries have been subjected to a type of neocolonialism by the old Western powers (think of the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, among others). This has not benefited them in the least. These developing countries have become even poorer, as fading Western powers have sought to extract valuable raw materials from these countries without providing any economic benefits. By contrast, since the launch of Belt and Road Initiative in 2013, more and more are studying the China model. This study is not for the sake of copying the China

model; instead, it is to learn how to develop an approach that is suited to their concrete conditions, to their history, culture, and economic situation.

GT: Compared with Western political parties, self-reform is a major feature of the CPC. How do you understand the CPC's self-reform compared to the Western political ecology?

Boer: The key here is legitimacy. In terms of the Western political ecology, the huge problems that have become apparent today have a longer history. More than 30 years ago, Western countries thought they had triumphed, that their system was the perfect one that all should adopt - think of the proclamations of the "end of history" at the time. But there was a problem: when they assumed they were triumphant, these Western countries and their political systems and their political parties ceased to reform and renew themselves. They stagnated, fragmented, and are now facing major crises. Trust in governance and public institutions is now at an all-time low. For example, in Australia, only about 50 percent of people trust the government, public institutions, and the news media. The trust is even lower in the US and UK.

By contrast, the CPC constantly undergoes rigorous self-renewal. In my new book, *Socialism in Power: On the History and Theory of Socialist Governance*, the final chapter concerns the thorough renewal of the CPC since the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012. The renewal has taken place in terms of structures, grass-roots party branch building, the quality of party branch secretaries, and knowledge of Marxist theory. The main points that emerge from this process include:

1. Criticism and self-criticism
2. Democratic supervision by local people.
3. Clean and transparent governance.
4. "Taking the people as centre," or a "people-centred" approach.
5. And the reality that self-reform and self-renewal is a constant process.

What is the result of this process? In international surveys, China is one of the top countries in the world for trust in governance and public institutions, as well as confidence in the direction the country is going. The figures are in the high 80 percent and more usually in the 90 percent range. This is a huge testament to the success of self-renewal and the legitimacy of the CPC.