DEMOCRATIZATION OF THE NATIONAL PEOPLE’S CONGRESS AS THE FOCAL POINT FOR THE CONTINUED ADVANCEMENT OF CHINA’S DEMOCRATIC DEVELOPMENT*

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1. It Is Imperative That China Continue to Advance Democratic Development

Since the inception of the Reform and Opening-Up Policy (改革开放), China has made considerable progress toward democratization on multiple levels— theoretical, institutional, operational, and so forth. While these developments are valuable and encouraging, they are also preliminary and elementary. China’s continued promotion of democratic development is necessitated by changing domestic and global conditions, rather than the personal agenda of any one individual.

For quite some time, in discussing democracy, people in China have emphasized “domestic conditions,” primarily focusing on those factors that have restricted the development of democracy (e.g., economic and cultural backwardness, the effects of autocratic traditions, etc.). In the author’s opinion, these considerations are critical. We can clearly appreciate that if China’s democratic development is to be successful, it must be gradual and steady, taking into account domestic conditions and avoiding the pitfalls of sudden or rushed change, which will ultimately slow long-term progress. However, this is not to say that China’s democratic development should be delayed or postponed. Rather, certain domestic conditions, particularly those that continue to evolve, necessitate China’s continued advancement toward democracy. Our call for “the development of a democracy consistent with national conditions” requires that we consider both those factors that impede democratic development and those that necessitate democratic

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1 Launched by Deng Xiaoping in 1978, the Reform and Opening-Up Policy initiated China’s transition from a centrally planned economy to a market-based system.
advancement. Moreover, in determining the appropriate route for China’s democratic development, we must take into account global conditions, which become increasingly relevant as China continues to open to the world. Here, let us examine in detail several aspects of the current domestic and international climate that compel China’s continued democratic development.

First, China has already taken great strides toward becoming a market economy. For more than two decades, China has undergone considerable reforms, resulting in the gradual transition from a centrally planned economy toward a market economy. With this has come the transformation of the state-owned, centrally planned economy into a system in which public ownership remains prominent while allowing for the simultaneous development of various economic sectors. The steady expansion of the private sector and the accompanying growth of free market competition have resulted in the division and clarification of social interests, which have led these interests to be increasingly stratified and complex. This, in turn, has given rise to the gradual awakening of various social entities (individuals as well as groups, the wealthy as well as the disadvantaged) to their own interests and, consequently, to greater demands being placed on the political system as these entities strive to influence public policy. This constitutes the early stages of what is known as “political involvement.”

During the initial stage of reform, the principal conflict within Chinese society was that which existed between “people’s growing material and cultural demands and the lagging rate of social production.”

Hence, the policy of “building the two civilizations” (“material civilization” and “spiritual civilization”) was aimed at alleviating this fundamental contradiction through a program of domestic development. Today, as China continues to develop into a free market economy, there is a growing demand among the Chinese populace that a third “need” be met: the need for political participation. This is an extremely positive development. The need for political participation calls for the establishment of “political civilization”! The need for political participation provides real impetus for democratic development! According to the writer’s observations, the governing party and its administrators

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2 Zhongguo gongchandang zhongyangweiyuanhui guanyu dangde ruogan lishi wenti de jueyi [Resolution of the Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party on Certain Questions in the History of the Party since the Founding of the People’s Republic of China] (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1982), 875.