

## From Mao Zedong to the 18th National Congress of CPC: The Developing Logic of the “Mass Line”

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**Supported by** the Social Science Fund in Chongqing (No.2012BS01). This paper is the stage achievement of the doctoral project “A Study on the National Identity of the Youth in the Context of Globalization”; And is the stage achievement of the project “A Research on the Building of National Identity of Ethnic-minority College Students in the Context of Globalization”, supported by the Fundamental Research Funds for Central Universities in 2014 in Southwest University (No. SWU1409193).

Received 5 January 2014; accepted 12 April 2014  
Published online 24 May 2014

### Abstract

From Mao Zedong to the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC, “Mass line” is the main line running through all the theories and practices of the Communist Party of China. The 90 years of the history of CPC is a history when there is a gradual enhancement of the understanding of the “Mass line”, and is a history in which the CPC has unswervingly adhered to the “Mass Line”, centered round the vast masses, and promote the mass work in advance with the times. On the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong and of the implementation of educational activities about the “Mass line” throughout the whole Party, this paper attempts to make an analysis of the development of CPC’s “Mass line”. The writer is firmly convinced that it is of immense historical value and time significance.

**Key words:** Mao Zedong; The 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC; “Mass line”

Cui, J. (2014). From Mao Zedong to the 18th National Congress of CPC: The Developing Logic of the “Mass Line”. *Higher Education of Social Science*, 6(3), 65-70. Available from: URL: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/hess/article/view/4784>  
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/4784>

### INTRODUCTION

“Mass line” is an original creation from the combination of the fundamental tenets of Marxism and the reality of China, is the organic unity of the masses’ stand, ideas and work, and is the lifeblood of the Communist Party of China as well as its immortality and prosperity. From Mao Zedong to the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC, “Mass Line” has undergone ups and downs, but it always follows a specific track, leaving clear imprints. On the occasion of the 120th anniversary of the birth of Mao Zedong and of the implementation of educational activities about the “Mass line” throughout the whole Party, this paper attempts to make an analysis of the development of CPC’s “Mass line”. The writer firmly believes that it will be of immense historical value and time significance.

### 1. THE DEEPENING UNDERSTANDING OF THE “MASS LINE”

“Mass line” is a great innovation on the leadership theory and methods made by CPC members represented by Mao Zedong; with the progress of the history of Chinese revolution, construction and reform, the Party has continuously enhanced the understanding of the “Mass Line”, and has tried to enrich, develop and improve it.

Besides, gradually formed in the revolutionary practices, “Mass Line” is a conclusion of the revolutionary experience. In the paper “Issues Concerning Methods of Leadership” made in 1943, Mao Zedong gave a complete specification of the “Mass Line” concept with a standard language for the first time, and he tried to raise it to the height of the Marxism epistemology. “In all the practical work of our Party, all our correct leadership must come from the masses and go to the masses, that is to say, we should converge the opinions of the masses (scattered and unsystematic views) together (making them into unified and systematic views through researches). Then we should

go to the masses to propagate and explain these views so as to make them become those of the masses, and let the masses to stick to and apply the views into practice; then the masses should test these views in their practices. The correct views will later be collected by the central leadership and then be given to the masses to withstand test. Things will go on like this. In this sense, the views from the masses will become more and more correct, vivid, and prosperous. All these could be called Marxism epistemology (*The selected works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 3, 1991, p.89).” Mao’s statement combines Marxism epistemology with the reality of China, profoundly reveals the dialectical relations between the Party and the great masses, and clarifies a fundamental way to achieving the Party’s leadership. Therefore, “Mass Line” is a great creation not only for the history of Marxism, but for the guiding ideology of the Communist Party of China, which marks that “Mass Line” has a mature theoretical form as well as a complete scientific mode. On October 23, 1961, Deng Xiaoping made a further elucidation of the scientific connotation of the “Mass Line” in the paper “Promoting In-depth and Meticulous Work”. “The correct line and policy of CPC should come from the masses, reflect the requirements of the masses, correspond to the reality of the masses, and should be realistic, accepted by the masses, as well as can mobilize the masses, and can in turn lead the masses. This is called “Mass Line” (*The selected works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1994, p.288). This statement once again stresses that scientific decision-making and correct leadership must come from the masses, must be tested and mended in the practices of the masses. In addition, faced with the new circumstances of the Party after the Reform and Opening up, and based on the experience gained from the Socialist Construction and Reform, the third-generation leaders of CPC represented by Jiang Zemin concluded the time connotation of the “Mass Line” as follows: “respect the creation of the masses, listen to the voices from the masses, reflect the will of the masses, and converge the wisdom and strengths of the masses to develop our undertakings (*The selected works of Jiang Zemin*, 2006, p.262).” All the above-mentioned statements serve as good reasons for us to believe that the Communist Party of China has continued to enhance its understanding on the “Mass Line”. Apart from these, HU Jintao also led the whole Party to promote the great project of Party building and focused on the following vital points: “largely relying on and properly caring for the laboring masses is the fundamental purpose of our Party to serve the people wholeheartedly and is the most important and essential reflection of our Party’s implementation of the “Mass Line” (Hu, 2010, p.10). Moreover, Hu also believed that in order to adhere to the “Mass Line”, come from the masses and go to the masses we should “put people’s aspirations and demands as the fundamental basis for the Party’s decision-making , so

that the decision will reflect both the actual interests of the masses as well as represents their long-term interests, will not only reflect the common aspiration of the majority of the people but also take into consideration the special requirements of some people (*The selected important documents since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 2008, p.874). This has highlighted the dominant position of the masses, greatly enriched and developed the “Mass Line” theory of the Communist Party of China. What is more, the report made in the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC put forward eight fundamental requirements for winning new victories of socialism with Chinese characteristics, among which the first priority was to adhere to the “dominant position of the great masses”. To this end, we should “always have the safety and well-being of the masses at heart, timely and accurately get to know what the masses is concerned about, and carry out mass work painstakingly and thoroughly. Besides, we should correctly handle the relationships between the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of people, between the common interests of the people at the present stage and the special interests of different groups, earnestly safeguarding the interests of the masses. In addition, we should conscientiously implement the people-oriented policies formulated by the central government; do good and practical things, so that the masses can always feel the care and concern from the Party and the government (Xi, 2013).” This is the most centralized and typical embodiment of the Party’s “Mass Line” and “Masses Views” in the new era.

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## 2. THE UNSWERVING IMPLEMENTATION OF THE “MASSES VIEWS”

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“Masses Views” is the Marxism Party’s stance and attitude towards the masses, and is the theoretical foundation and inherent requirement for the Communist Party of China to adhere to “Mass Line”. According to Marxism, the masses of people are the creators of history and are the decisive force for social changes. Over the past 90 years, the basic reason for the great achievements made by the Communist Party of China in terms of revolution, social construction and reform is that it has always adhered to the “Masses Views” of Marxism as well as has always regarded the masses as the foundation for CPC’s ruling and source of strength.

Mao Zedong has always fully affirmed and highly praised the historical role of the masses. During the Anti-Japanese War, he clearly pointed out that the masses are the real heroes who were the only driving force for the creation of the world history. “The fundamental difference between CPC and KMT is the former adheres to the ‘Masses Views’ while the latter does not; ‘Masses Views’ are the starting point and destination of the revolution of the Communist Party of China (*The selected works of*

Mao Zedong, 1996, p.71).” It is the combination of the universal truth that “the masses are the creators of history” and the reality of Chinese revolution and construction advocated by Chairman Mao that has accelerated the formation of the unique “Masses Views” and “Mass Line” thoughts. Besides, as a great Chinese Marxist in the modern times, Deng Xiaoping deeply understood that the masses were not only the creators of material wealth and spiritual wealth, but also were the decisive forces to reform the social system. He looked far ahead from a high plane and pointed out, “the masses are the source of our strength and the “Mass Line” and “Masses Views” are our precious heirloom (*The selected works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1994, p.368).” In this sense, he requested the cadres of CPC to establish “Six Masses Views”, namely, “to firmly establish the masses views that the masses are the creators of history, that we should learn from the masses, that we should serve the masses wholeheartedly, that the power of cadres is entrusted by the masses, that the responsibility we are shouldering for CPC is consistent with that for the masses, and that the Party should rely on the masses as well as educate and guide them to forge ahead (*The selected important documents since the 13<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 1991, p.93).” In addition, Jiang Zemin inherited and adhered to the views and principles of Marxism on masses, and regarded the masses of people as the ultimate arbiters of the work value of CPC and as the essential forces for determining China’s future destiny. “The fundamental difference between CPC and other parties built by exploiting classes is that the former serves the people heart and soul, works for the public and assumes power for the people (*The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, 2006, p.279).” So Jiang called on the whole Party to always represent the fundamental interests of the Chinese people, consider their fundamental interests as the starting point and destination, give full play to the masses’ enthusiasm, initiative and creativity, and give them tangible economic, political and cultural benefits on the basis of continuous social development and progress. After the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the central collective leadership represented by HU Jintao proceeded from a new historical starting point, met expectations of the masses, and considered the sincere concern given to the masses as well as the services offered to the people as touchstones of whether the leaders and cadres’ working style was proper. They also required the leaders and cadres at all levels to firmly establish a sense of public servant and develop the views of serving the masses, “assuming power for the people, bearing feeling for the people, and creating benefits for the people, as well as putting the good safeguarding, development and realization of the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people as the fundamental starting point and destination of our work (Hu, 2011, p.15).” Under the new circumstances where

both international and domestic situations are becoming increasingly complex, the Party is facing numerous challenges, and there are many problems in the Party remaining to be solved. The key to meeting the challenges and dealing with these problems is that all the Party members and cadres at all levels should uphold the “Masses Views” and firmly implement the “Mass Line”. As is clearly defined in the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, “we should always be people-oriented, work for the people, and maintain inalienable ties with the masses. Serving the people is the Party’s fundamental purpose, while centering around the people and work for the people are the supreme standards to test all the Party’s activities. In season and out of season, we should put the interests of the people first, share the same fate with each other, and always rely on the masses to push forward the history (Hu, 2012, p.50).”

### 3. THE FIRM ADHERENCE TO THE STAND OF THE MASSES

The stand that the Communist Party of China holds to is an essential political issue that determines the nature of the Party itself. In fact, the essence of the stand is to see who is served by the CPC. As for the CPC, its significant political stand is to serve the masses of people wholeheartedly and always represent the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. This is also the point which remarkably distinguishes CPC with other parties, and is the basic reason for the whole Party members to conscientiously implement the “Mass Line”.

During the Anti-Japanese War, Mao Zedong once threw out a question that “Why the issue of people is a fundamental problem and is a matter of principle (*The selected works of Mao Zedong*, 1991, p.857).” Since the Communist Party of China is always working for the benefits of the whole nation and the masses, thus it makes no self-interests, “all the words and deeds of the Chinese Communists should take the best interests of and support from the vast majority of the masses as the highest standards (*The selected works of Mao Zedong*, 1991, p.1096).” After the implementation of reform and opening up, the socialist modernization drive was faced with extremely difficult and complex tasks; many old problems remained to be solved; and new problems repeatedly cropped up. The key to solving these problems lies in whether the Party can hold firm to the stand of masses and safeguard the interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. “Our historical experience is that the more difficult the times we are in, the more care we should give to the masses. As long as you care for, mingle with, and share weal and woe with the masses rather than use your position to pursue personal interests and prestige, any problem will be easier to solve, and any difficulty will be easily overcome (*The selected works*

of Deng Xiaoping , 1994, p.228).” “Only if the Party can closely rely on and make contacts with the masses, can be ready to listen to their voices, understand their emotions, and represent their interests, powerful forces will be formed to ensure a success in the completion of the Party’s tasks (*The Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1994, p.342)” Apart from these, Jiang Zemin drew lessons from the development of human society including the lessons from the developed countries in the process of their industrialization and modernization. In particular, based on the profound summary of the experience gained from the past 20 years of China’s Reform and Opening up, and centered on the theme of building a moderately prosperous society in an all-round way, Jiang put forward that the Communist Party of China should come from the people, root itself among the people, and serve the people. He also advocated that the starting point and destination of all the work related to building socialism with Chinese characteristics was to work for the interests of the masses. “We must always take the will and interests of the people as the starting point and destination of all our work and must always regard people’s wisdom and strength as the basic work line to advance our causes (*The Selected Works of Jiang Zemin*, 2006, p.271).” This fully demonstrates the fundamental purpose of the Communist Party of China, profoundly reveals the nature of inalienable ties between the Party and the masses, and shows the basic political stand of the Communist Party of China to enhance its relationship with the masses. In addition, the central collective leadership represented by HU Jintao carried out their work based on the new circumstances of China, adhered to the most distinctive Marxism stand of working for the interests of the majority of the masses, and proposed the “Three People” thought (assuming power for the people, bearing feeling for the people and creating profits for the people) as well as the scientific outlook on development (put emphasis on a people-oriented, comprehensive, coordinated and sustainable development mode). The core of the latter is to “let the vast majority of the masses to enjoy the fruits of development (Hu, 2009, p.16).” At present, under the new situation of reform and opening up and modernization drive, the Report made in the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC gave a warning to the whole party members, “the challenges in terms of ruling the Party, reform and opening up, market economy, and external environment are lasting, complex and serious. Besides, the dangers posed by mental laziness, lack of capacity, divorce from the masses, low spirit and corruption become more acute to the whole Party members (Hu, 2012, p.49).” These “Four Challenges” and “Four Dangers” are the new conditions and problems for CPC to implement the “Mass Line” and carry out the work for the masses. In order to deal with them, the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping as the general secretary has carried out educational activities about the “Mass Line”

whose fundamental purpose is to engrave the thoughts of working for people, of doing practical things, and of being honest and upright in the thinking and action of the Party members. Moreover, it will keep the Party advanced and pure, enhance its creativity, cohesion and combat effectiveness, so that the Party’s ruling foundation and position will enjoy broad, deep, and reliable mass bases.

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#### 4. THE UP-TO-DATE ADVANCEMENT OF THE MASS WORK

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Mass work is an important approach for the implementation of the “Mass Line” and administrative measures of CPC among the masses, is an important way to turn them into conscious actions of the masses, and is an important manifestation of the “Mass Line” theory in the practical work. The core of mass work is closely related to the situations of times; in different historical periods and in different stages of development, it will have different characteristics and requirements.

As is stated in the paper “Caring for the masses’ life and noting the working methods” written by Mao Zedong in 1934, “The revolutionary war is a war of the masses; only by mobilizing and relying on the masses can we accelerate our work in the war (*The selected works of Mao Zedong*, 1991, p.136).” During this period, the main content of the mass work is: “Lead farmers to struggle for the land and distribute land to them; improve farmers’ enthusiasm for laboring work and increase agricultural production; safeguard the interests of workers; establish cooperatives; develop foreign trade; solve the problems of the masses including their clothing, shelter, food, health, marriage, and other mundane problems. In a word, all the practical life issues of the masses deserve our good attention (*The selected works of Mao Zedong*, 1991, p.136).” As for the important task of the mass work in the socialist construction period, it is ideological and political work, helping the masses to emancipate the mind and use the brains, and mobilizing the masses to join the socialist modernization drive. “Both revolution and construction need a number of pathbreakers who have bold thinking and the courage to make exploration and innovation. Without a large number of such pathbreakers, we could not get rid of poverty and backwardness, and could not surpass the advanced international level. We hope the Party Committees at all levels and each Party Branch will take the lead to encourage and support Party members and the masses to think, explore, and make innovation as well as promote the masses to emancipate their mind and use their brains (*The selected works of Deng Xiaoping*, 1994, p.143).” With the progress of the Reform and Opening up, profound changes have taken place in the relationships among interests and in the pattern of interests; besides, economic and social development has entered into a period filled with prominent contradictions. During this

period, the priority of the mass work is as follows: first, we should guide the masses to correctly understand the relationship between local interests and overall interests, between immediate interests and long-term interests, and guide them to actively support and participate in the reform. “The more prominent the contradiction is and the more complex the problem is, the more patience and care will be needed to carry out the propaganda work and education work for the masses. We should guide the masses to make a correct analysis of the situation, develop a correct understanding of the Party and state policies, and properly handle the relationships between personal interests and collective interests, between local interests and overall interests, between immediate interests and long-term interests. In addition, we should teach the masses to correctly understand their fundamental interests and get to know the ways to achieving their own interests, so that they will consciously contribute to the reform, development and stability of the society (*The selected important documents since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 2006, p.317).” Second, we should give full attention to and properly handle the contradictions among the people under the new circumstances, focus on the outstanding problems concerning the masses in the reform, and prevent the escalation of local issues into global issues. “In the present stage when reform continues to make progress, many interests and social conflicts tend to converge at the grassroots level, which requires the grassroots cadres to continuously improve the ability of coordinating the relationships among the masses and the ability of resolving conflicts. They should have a deep understanding and take into account the interests of different people, properly handle the contradictions among the people, and reasonably deal with the problems reported by the masses based on law without delay (*The selected important documents since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 2006, p.363).” Third, we should listen to the voices from the masses, understand their requirements, observe the conditions of the masses, and earnestly safeguard the fundamental interests of the masses. “We should sincerely care for people’s life and production, attach great importance to the problems concerning the fundamental interests of the masses, and wholeheartedly listen to the opinions put forward by the masses (*The selected important documents since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 2006, p.363).” “Leaders and cadres at all levels should go deep into the grassroots and the masses, listen to their voices, show solicitude to their hardships, and always put the people’s safety and well-being at heart, so as to assume the right for the masses, bear the feeling for the masses, and create benefits for the masses. In particular, they should be concerned about the people who meet difficulties in life and production, go deep into the poor areas and the companies with financial difficulties as well as penetrate among the laid-off workers, poor rural people and urban poor residents to

do everything possible to help them solve their practical difficulties (*The selected important documents since the 16<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC*, 2005, p.84).” Under the new background, people’s ideological activities and values tend to be more independent, selective, changeable and diverse; besides, the subjects of interests diversifies, relationships among interests of the people complicates, and appeals of interests varies. In this sense, the difficulties in terms of balancing the interests of all parties have unprecedentedly increased. New requirements have also been imposed on the implementation of the “Mass Line” and mass work due to the changes in the subjects, content, and environment of mass work. In addition, ever since the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Xi Jinping has repeatedly made statements on closely contacting the masses and successfully completing the mass work. He noted that “The ideal life that people are yearning for is our goal of work”, “In the final analysis, Chinese dream is the dream of the masses”, “we must largely rely on the people to achieve our goals, and we must continue to make benefits for the people”. Xi also demanded the whole Party members to uphold the “Mass Line”, come from the masses and go to the masses, and go deep into the grassroots to conduct researches. Moreover, he also advocated going close to, contacting, and serving the masses, striving for a success in the mass work under the new situation, and guiding the masses to make conjoint efforts for a moderately prosperous society and for the development of socialism with Chinese characteristics (Xi, 2012, p.18).” “We should be ready to listen to the voices from the people at any time, respond to their expectations, ensure their equal participation right and equal development right, safeguard social fairness and justice, and make progress in the work of letting everyone have an access to education, employment, medical care, old-age security, and housing. Furthermore, he suggested us to continue to accomplish, maintain, and develop the fundamental interests of the people, so that more and more development fruits will benefit the people fairly and that the masses will thus make steady progress towards common prosperity on the basis of the smooth development of economy and society.” All the important statements and requirements mentioned above have deepened the ideological connotations and work requirements of the Party’s mass line, and are of great significance to the realization of the “Two 100 Year” target put forward in the 18<sup>th</sup> National Congress of CPC as well as for the achievement of the Chinese dream—the great rejuvenation of China nation.

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