



On Party Politics in Early Republic of China and Modern Political Civilization

Jianghong Xu

College of Politics and Law

Guangxi University for Nationalities

Nanning 530006, China

Tel: 86-771-326-0261 E-mail: xumail2008@gmail.com

Abstract

A tide of party foundation and activity appears in early Republic of China. During this period, party politics differs from that in western capitalism countries in its growth and decline, which is derived from China's special economic and political features after the 1911 revolution. By studying the growth and decline history of parties in early Republic of China, we find that: the fundamental problem of party politics in early Republic of China is that parties can not satisfy the requirements of modern political civilization.

Keywords: Early Republic of China, Party politics, Parliamentary politics, Political civilization

Party politics is originated from representative politics. It is an irreplaceable component of bourgeois democracy and also an achievement of human political civilization. Since the foundation of Republic of China after the 1911 Revolution, bourgeois revolutionary party takes the power. Accompanied with the south-north peace negotiation, China starts the republic constitutionalism experiment. Herein, party politics is an extremely important issue.

Since the foundation of Republic of China, Chinese political situations change significantly. During the collapse of past regime and the formation and consolidation of new, all political forces rush to form parties in order to participate in politics. "People are crazy for founding communities, and parties appear one after another. (Zai Shan)" Statistic data show that the number of national publicized parties reaches 682 from the 1911 Revolution to the dissolution of parliament in Jan. 1914. Hereinto, about 312 parties join in political activities (Qianmu Qiu, 1991, p7). It is an unprecedented wonder in Chinese politics history. Before the northward move of temporary government, domestic parties, besides Alliance Society, mainly include Civilian Association, Social Party, Civilian Community, Labor Party of ROC, Unification Party, Unified Republic Party, Republic Construction Congress, etc.

After the northward move of temporary government, especially before the parliament election, the alternation and recombination of parties are active, forming a "combining more small parties into less large ones" tide. At last, four dominant parties play in the state of early Republic of China.

(1) Republican Party. Republican Party is recombined by Associated Unification Party, Civilian Community, Civilian Association, and Public Union of ROC in order to resist Alliance Society. It is founded in May 9th, 1912.

Republican Party extremely emphasizes on national unity and nationalism, supporting national progresses by state power, meeting the world trend, and building China based on peace and interests. All political business should be considered from a national view instead of self-governance of province. In the political conflicts at that time, nationalism means to oppose the Alliance Society, regarding it as the primary political opponent. Republican Party supports Shikai Yuan and wins his great supports.

(2) Unification Party. Merely 8 days later after Unification Party joining in Republican Party, Binglin Zhang holds a meeting in Beijing on May 17th, claiming a separation from Republican Party openly. Unification Party resumes its independent status, turning the council system into the Premier system. Binglin Zhang is the Premier. Unification Party has similar political inclination with Republican Party. Hence, Unification Party only lives in a short period since it does not have special functions.

(3) Kuomintang. Kuomintang is founded in Oct. 25th, 1912, guided by Jiaoren Song and based on bourgeois revolutionary party. It combines Alliance Society, Unified Republic Party, Civilian Public Party, Civilian Progress Party, and Republican Progress Party together, in order to confront constitutionality party and restrict Shikai Yuan's autarchy. The political program of Kuomintang is: advocate political unification; develop local self-governance; execute nationalization of nationalities; pay attention to people's livelihood; sustain world peace.

(4) Democratic Party. Democratic Party is founded in Oct. 1912. According to Party Constitution and Party Program, Hualong Tang is elected as the chief secretary, and thirty people, including Liang Ma and Zhaochang Chen as executives. The Party Program is: popularize political education, support the freedom guaranteed by laws, construct a solidified government, integrate administrative reforms, and adjust social interests. Democratic Party centers on its vital position in democratic politics, with the hope of consolidating the republic institution by disseminating bourgeois political theories, laws, and coordinating social interests. However, under the condition that state powers are in the hand of Shikai Yuan, an absolute representative of feudalism, and basic democratic consciousness, institutions, and laws are unfounded, it is nothing but an illusion to guarantee the republic by popularizing political education, integrating administrative reforms, and adjusting social interests, not mention "construct a solidified government". It turns into a political slogan that drives Shikai Yuan to strengthen the autarchy. The essential error determines the role of Democratic Party, namely the allies of Shikai Yuan, in real conflicts.

At the very beginning of parliament, Republic Party, Democratic Party, and Unification Party form Progressive Party.

Along with developments and changes of domestic parties, three political parties, namely revolutionary school, constitutionality school, and feudal warlord and bureaucrat school, come into being. First of all, the revolutionary school, represented by Alliance Society and Kuomintang, regards themselves as the creator and protector of republic system. On one hand, they empower to Shikai Yuan. On the other hand, they do not trust Shikai Yuan. Hence, they want to restrict Shikai Yuan. The first way is to make up regulations for him. The second is to motivate organizational power ----- the party to take a portion of power from him. In their opinion, if progressive people can not combine together and work for a common goal, Progressive Party will lose its advantages over Conservative Party. The Republic may be hard to maintain and autarchy of few may come back to life. Therefore, it is a must to construct a "strong and kind" party as the political center power of Republic, which can suppress the autarchy of Shikai Yuan and make Republic of China lasting. Secondly, after the Wuchang Uprising, although the constitutional monarchy of constitutionality school loses its popularity, it is still influential as a political power and idea. They predict it is the constitutionality school that is responsible for the construction of Republic of China. However, the guideline of constitutionality school is to carry out constitutionalism by depending on powers and authorities. Under the condition of losing its monarchy and authority and considering the new political situation, the constitutionality school chooses to follow Shikai Yuan, with a hope of developing its branches in provinces by means of Shikai Yuan's power, what is determined by its history and political status (Wenjiang Ding & Fengtian Zhao, 1983, p600). So, to found a party is not only a way of rising for the constitutionality school, being a condition for confronting the revolutionary school under the new situation, but also a measure to gain more political capitals by forming a political alliance with Shikai Yuan. The constitutionality school becomes active and an important power in party activities after the Wuchang Uprising. Thirdly, the 1911 Revolution overthrows the feudal imperialism but does not ruin feudal comprador power, which includes feudal warlords and old bureaucrat school, guided by Shikai Yuan. Shikai Yuan steals the fruit of revolution by taking advantages over the complex political situations at that time, trying to maintain and develop the absolutism system continuously. However, the democratic tide and the revolutionary school, driven by the 1911 Revolution, force Shikai Yuan to give in temporarily. He allows the existence of democratic forms, including party activities, and makes use of them. Therefore, after the Wuchang Uprising, on one hand, Shikai Yuan instigates his followers to form sorts of communities and parties, preparing for taking the state power. On the other hand, he supports the constitutionality school for participating in battles with the revolutionary school. These facts show that in the political stage of early Republic of China, three political forces are competing for powers fiercely. They take parties as tools to extend their influences.

But, in real political practices, parties' political organizations are extremely complicated. Among hundreds of political parties in early Republic of China, several decades of them are relatively complete, and most of them are similar. And some parties or communities even do not have programs. For most parties, the practical program is the interests or benefits of certain politicians. In early Republic of China, the organizational components of parties are very complex. It is common for one party that includes politicians from the revolutionary school, the constitutionality school, and the bureaucracy. Therefore, in a specific party, it is hard to identify which class or group it stands for. As a result, alternations and changes of parties are frequent and unpredictable. One people may belong to different parties at the same time. During this period, most of important political figures, such as Xing Huang, Yuanhong Li, Tingfang Wu, Xiling Xiong, Hualong Tang, and Qimei Chen, join in six parties.

Therefore, in early Republic of China, numerous parties appear, and complex party competitions continue.

Characteristics of party politics in early Republic of China is caused by the economic and political environment in a

special history time in China after the 1911 Revolution. On one hand, national capitalism gains unprecedented development. Local industrial groups are founded after one another, which serve as physical bases for the emergence of numerous parties. Meanwhile, the decentralization and imbalance of national capitalism in development supply conditions for the frequent changes of parties. On the other hand, China's commodity economy is undeveloped at that time, with lower degree of social structural differentiation and division, and without relevant interests groups. Therefore, the development of parties and party politics is lack of sound social bases.

As for political situations, soon after the Wuchang Uprising, the Qing Dynasty has to release the ban for parties. The *Temporary Rules for Republic of China* regulates that assembly and community are people's basic political rights. Therefore, all politicians regard parties as the best way to realize their political goals. Meanwhile, the disturbing political situation drives civilians to seek for political protection by participating parties. And the rich become target members for all parties. As a result, the party politics becomes more complicated.

Party politics is based on legalization and democratic election. Western party politics helps to realize the integration of social orders in industrial society, forming a power alternation mechanism, power supervision mechanism, and stabilization adaptation mechanism for political struggle, ensuring a stable, regular, and orderly operation of political governance and management.

In contrast, the party politics in early Republic of China develops based on the collapse of feudal imperialism but the autarchy still lives. The party politics in early Republic of China is disorderly, anti-democratic, power-dependent, and power-controlled. At the very beginning, the foundation of parties and their activities create favorable conditions and channels for different political forces participating politics indeed. For example, the first Parliament is elected by people, which is the first institution that possesses the right of legislation and the right of supervising administration. Considering its composing, it includes China's new and old elites at that time. Leaders are professional revolutionists and constitutionality backbones. They dominate the activities of the first Parliament. In the Parliament, pure old bureaucrats, esquires, and intellectualists (never be affected by western thoughts) account for a very small percentage. Their effects on the Parliament are small. Besides, the Parliament is operated by parties, and most councilors are from certain party. Different parties firstly discuss certain important issue internally and make decisions, which will be carried out by their party members in the Parliament. For example, Kuomintang sets up "Kuomintang councilor conference" and makes up 12 rules (1913). As councilors from different parties disagree on certain issue, they will usually choose to reach a compromise out of the Parliament. Kuomintang and Progressive Party have ever negotiated for large loans for many times (1913).

However, along with the development and changes of political situations, party activities stray away from their objectives, principles, and basic regulations. For example, Jiaoren Song, as a Kuomintang, invites Bingjun Zhao, the main backbone of Shikai Yuan, to join in Kuomintang. By persuading present senior officials to join in Kuomintang, he wants to help Kuomintang control the power, which conflicts with the principle of associating party backbone with group interests. After the Second Revolution, in order to take the position of senate President, Kuomintang even wants to cooperate with the notorious Citizen Party, trying to barter several positions of committee president for the support of Citizen Party (1913). On Mar. 20th, 1913, Shikai Yuan assassinates Jiaoren Song, depressing the democracy by terrors. In Oct. 1914, he asks gangsters to surround the Parliament, forcing the Parliament to select Shikai Yuan as the President. All these actions destroy the democracy and legalization. Besides, Sun Yat-sen, the leader of Kuomintang, starts an uprising after Jiaoren Song Case. In essence, this action is just. But in procedure, it disobeys the democratic and legalization principle of modern democratic politics. In formal Parliament election, all parties compete fiercely. They make best use of any possible mean, no matter what it is legal or illegal, moral or evil, lacking of a consciousness of peaceful and fair competition (Huiqi Xu, 1988).

The orderly operation of party politics depends on people's rich legalization concepts and developed contract spirits. Western party politics operates on this base. However, the connotation of Chinese traditional politics culture is mainly Confucian ethical politics thoughts, which is based on family system. Families are chiefly sustained by ethics, especially ethical orders and duty allocation. From the Confucian view, the state is based on ethical relationships. State governance relies on the ethics of governors. This politics culture emphasizes on social relationships, especially the obligations among people. People should obey their roles and regulations in social relationships. In political life, authority stands for orders and ethics. Authority may center on certain individuals and combines with powers. People are negatively loyal to authority. The Confucian ethics impacts the political activities of parties in early Republic of China to a great degree, which makes party activities turn into disorderly and irregular activities instead of order activities under the regulation of laws.

The disorderly activities of party politics connect with parties main social bases either. In early Republic of China, the organizational base of party politics is mostly new esquires at that time besides intellectualists and industrial and commercial elites who support bourgeois democracy (or have this inclination). In the first half of 19th century, China has more than 1 million esquires, 600 or 200 esquires in average in each county (Wisheng Wang, 2004; Weikun Cheng).

Esquires, as a medium group between officials and civilians, firstly suffer from changes of China's traditional social structure. Most esquires center on rural society and pursue for development in local areas and countryside where the state can not reach. In early Republic of China, most of new nobles are from social grass-roots and edges. They climb onto the top class of society and step into the list of esquires. Compared with traditional intellectualists before the Qing Dynasty, the new esquires in early Republic of China depend on properties and forces instead of morals or authorities. New esquires turn into the dominants of grass roots society and the social base for parties in early Republic of China.

In early Republic of China, new intellectualists are another component of parties. The characteristics of modern intellectualists cultivated by new education system are: move freely in the society, mostly separate from farmers, workers, and business men, and hard to win the trust of the public.

In the organizational condition of parties in early Republic of China, most members of Republic Party are intellectualists between the old and the new states. Landlords and squires also occupy a large percentage. The Republic Party even tries to help corrupt officials to hide evils at the price of honors (1912). Leaders of Kuomintang mostly possess new education experiences and have bourgeois political thoughts (Yufa Zhang, 1985, p193-197). But its members are complex. No matter who are energetic youth, brave fighters, business men, rich men, or officials, Kuomintang take them in (Fangqin Shi, 1985, p410). Kuomintang is gradually turning into a complex of officials, politicians, bourgeois, and esquires (Kaiyuan Zhang, 1981, p432). Therefore, Kuomintang loses its independent interests groups' support, betraying the public, with complicated components, and without economic independence. It is not a real party, not mention the party politics.

Party and party politics are the necessity of modern social development. The development of party and party politics causes the fundamental changes of political battles' basic conditions, forms, and methods. In early Republic of China, the rise of party and party politics leads to the emergence of modern new parties and modern political struggles in modern China, creating new party institutions and parliament system, and developing the fruits of political civilization. But in early Republic of China, the development of party and party politics faces serious problems, in which the most important is that parties fail to meet the requirements of modern political civilization.

Firstly, as for the center of party activities, whether a party gives priority to personal wills and acts according to leaders' intention or gives priority to certain group and pursues for expressing and realizing the common interests of the group, is the most important signal for distinguishing modern parties from old political organization activities. In early Republic of China, the foundation of parties, on one hand, is originated from a fact that certain political elites pursue for realizing their political purposes. On the other hand, some social elites or members look for officials or political protection. Therefore, in organizational activities, political elites and officials become the objects of parties in competition. The wills of dominate elite become the center and principle of party activities, lacking of democracy. As a result, parties are personalized to a great degree. All party activities follow personal wills. Parties refuse to associate with certain group or reflect the wills and requirements of the group, not mention to struggle for the interests of certain group. All party activities are carried out centering the wills of Shikai Yuan or Sun Yat-sen. By this way, modern parties turn into old monarchy political organizations in the organizational aspect, such as Kuomintang and Progressive Party. Or, certain parties are not modern party organizations originally, such as some small parties that support Shikai Yuan. The history proves: these parties will be washed out and changed inevitably.

Secondly, as for the relationship between parties and political powers, modern parties aim at taking the power and the right of supervision in the front of political battle. They rely on certain groups instead of political powers. In early Republic of China, party activities are restrained by power support, which make them turn into tools for power manipulation. They are incapable of real political battles. For example, the expenses of parties are mainly from administrative finance. Kuomintang collects its expenses by its members in central and local governments (Yufa Zhang, 1985, p198-200). Er Cai has ever collected 100 thousand from Yunnan provincial finance as funds for the foundation of unifying the Republic Party (Qianmu Qiu, 1991, p228). Because parties can get few financial supports from the government in early Republic of China, many parties have to accept Shikai Yuan's supports. For example, the expenses of Unification Party are from different fields superficially, but in fact, are completely from Shikai Yuan (1981, p400). The Progressive Party gets more financial supports from Shikai Yuan. Parties depend on Shikai Yuan in economy and lack of independence, which make them cater for Shikai Yuan in politics. Without relevant support from interests group, all parties are under the control of powers. Therefore, they neglect programs or even have no programs. They just serve the power, which betrays the principle of party politics fundamentally.

Thirdly, as for the relationship between parties and the public, it lacks of wide participation of common people as a base. At that time in China, countrymen do not possess political consciousness and passion due to the lack of necessary political motives. Other social organizations, such as labor unions, farmer unions, and commercial associations, do not arouse the attention of parties. Giant warlords control the army but neglect party politics. All parties lose passion and patience for motivating the public and starting "national movement". Facing up with strong warlords, democratic powers fail to combine together to fight back. Sometimes, they may trigger some struggles. But most fail at last.

Meanwhile, democratic powers refuse to cooperate with each other, what benefits the warlords. Under this condition, party politics can not grow well. Its failure is a must.

Fourthly, as for the environment for party development, parties in early Republic of China are not in a basic legal environment. The existence of parties in early Republic of China is not recognized by laws and lacks of legal allowance as well. At that time, due to the fast collapse of old system, new powers could not form a set of effective new system at once. To inherit the tradition becomes the only choice. Facing the political mess in early Republic of China, on Mar. 10th, 1912, Shikai Yuan announces to implement the new political product in late Qing Dynasty ----- *Rules for Community and Assembly*, which becomes the only law for the foundation of parties in early Republic of China. However, because the new government is under the control of old powers, the detailed reports and regulation system merely offer more facilities for the control over parties' scales and activities. In the name of maintaining orders and protecting assemblies, the warlords closely supervise parties' assemblies and even interfere with parties' activities. Although the *Temporary Rules for Republic of China* endows people with the right of free community, the *Rules for Community and Assembly* practically restricts and denies the right.

In early Republic of China, the history of parties and party politics development proves: in China's modern history, a "multiple parties" time has ever appeared and existed for a short period, when the bourgeois power has been weakened heavily. Because of parties' loose organizations, complex conflicts, and serious disagreements, no party could accomplish the political task of protecting the Republic and opposing the monarchy.

History experiences still show: it is an unprecedented taste for China's democratic politics indeed. Meanwhile, it offers meaningful fruits for the development of China's political civilization. The appearance and development of party politics and parliament struggles are not for whether certain system is suitable or not but whether the history provides relevant conditions for its foundation and alternation.

References

- Cheng, Weikun. (?). On the formation, organization, and factions of republican party in early Republic of China. *Modern Chinese History Studies*.
- Ding, Wenjiang & Zhao, Fengtian. (1983). Chronicle of Qichao Liang. Shanghai: Shanghai People's Publishing House. p600.
- Qiu, Qianmu. (1991). Histories of Chinese Parties. Taiyuan: Shanxi People's Publishing House. p7, p228.
- Shan, Zai. (?). Parties in the first year of Republic of China. State Affairs. No.1.
- Shi, Fangqin. (1985). *Collection of Renfeng Tan*. Shangsha: Hunan People's Publishing House. p410.
- Wang, Qisheng. (2004). Changes of self-government organizations in early Republic of China. *Inside Information on Economic Reform*. No.12.
- Xu, Huiqi. (1988). On the first parliament election. *Modern Chinese History Studies*. No.2.
- Zhang, Kaiyuan. (1981). *History of the 1911 Revolution*. Beijing: People Press.
- Zhang, Yufa. (1985). *Parties in Early Republic of China*. Taipei: Institute of Morden History of Academia Sinica. p193-200.
- (1912). *Ta Kung Pao*. 2nd, June.
- (1913). News. *Minli Daily*. 17th, May.
- (1913). *Shanghai Daily*. 7th, 14th, 27th, May. 7th, June.
- (1913). News. *Shanghai Daily*. 21st, Oct.
- (1981). *Memorists of the 1911 Revolution (1)*. Beijing: Literature & History Materials Press. p400.