

BEIJING REVIEW

VOL.66 NO.22 JUNE 1, 2023

北方周末 WWW.BJREVIEW.COM



GENERATION NEXT

Democracy and modernity in Tibet

RMB6.00
USD1.70
AUD3.00
GBP1.20
CAD2.60
CHF2.60
JPY188

ISSN 1000-9140



9 771000 914239

邮发代号2-922 • 国内统一连续出版物号: CN11-1576/G2

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CONTENTS

EDITOR'S DESK

02 Political Progress

THIS WEEK

COVER STORY

12 Masters of Their Own Affairs

From serfdom to socialist democracy

16 A Zest of Zen

Plateau region vibes with a domestic penchant for travel

18 Never Forget

French manager at Sinopec shares his observations

20 Weaving Development

About the thread spun throughout Tibet's development: yak wool

OPINION

24 Scaling New Heights

The China-Central Asia Summit

26 G7 and 'De-Risking':

Deconstructing the Fables

The decoupling versus de-risking narrative

28 One for All, All for One

China's proposal for making the world better

29 One-China Principle Must Not Be Challenged

International consensus is clear

30 A Future Capital City

Inside the Jing-Jin-Ji city cluster

31 Japan's Nuke Water Dumping Plan Irresponsible

Concerns of stakeholders should be heeded

32 Streamlined Regulation Aims for A Healthier Industry

Reforming China's financial regulatory system

FEATURES

34 Charity—China Style

A new ecosystem for digital philanthropy

36 A Leading Light

Alibaba Health helps children in need, online and offline

38 Beauty Mark or Mole?

New medical beauty standards

40 Time to Dream Bigger

Young entrepreneurs thrive in Shenzhen

42 Small Courtyards, Big Potential

Micro-enterprises invigorate rural economy

CULTURE

46 Relics of Rapport

Exchange between ethnic groups through the ages

EXPAT'S EYE

48 Journeys of Growth and Learning

Exploring China as a student

Cover Photo: Children play in a valley in Ngari, Tibet, on January 6 (VCG)

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EDITOR'S DESK



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Published every Thursday by
CICG Center for Americas, 24 Baiwanzhuang Lu,
Beijing 100037, China

Overseas Distributor: China International Book Trading
Corporation (Guoji Shudian), P. O. BOX 399,
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Fax: 86-10-68412166

E-mail: fp@mail.cibtc.com.cn

Website: <http://www.cibtc.com>

General Distributor for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan:
Peace Book Co. Ltd.

17/FI, Paramount Bldg, 12 Ka Yip St, Chai Wan, HK
Tel: 852-28046687 **Fax:** 852-28046409

Beijing Review (ISSN 1000-9140 USPS 2812) is distributed weekly
in the United States for US\$64.00 per year by Cypress Books,
360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080
News Postage Paid at South San Francisco, CA 94080
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Beijing Review*,
Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48,
South San Francisco, CA 94080

Political Progress

Since the emancipation of 1 million serfs in Tibet 64 years ago, residents of the plateau region have become the masters of their house. In old Tibet, serfs accounted for 95 percent of the population. Today, the region has more than 35,000 deputies to people's congresses at township, county, city, regional and national levels and more than 8,000 political advisors.

The region's people gained the right to vote and stand for election for the first time during the democratic reform that began in March 1959. The First Session of the First People's Congress of Tibet Autonomous Region, the regional legislature, took place in September 1965. Democracy has permeated all aspects of life, from social administration to the public supervision of power. The people of all ethnic groups have embraced whole-process democracy, a substantive form of democracy that engages everyone in the policymaking process championed by the Communist Party of China (CPC).

Whole-process democracy comprises both electoral and consultative democracy. In September 2021, Tibet completed a new round of direct elections for people's congresses at the county and township levels, involving its more than

3.6 million residents. The autonomous region's delegation to the National People's Congress, the country's top legislature, currently has 24 deputies, including one from the Monba ethnic group, which has a population of only some 10,000. Consultative democracy is practiced at all levels from residential community governance to the regional committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, a key mechanism for the CPC-led multiparty cooperation and political consultation.

Since Tibet had no democracy to speak of before 1959, the development of both electoral and consultative democracy has been groundbreaking. Its transition from serfdom to modern politics has also contributed to improved wellbeing. Under the democratic system and with the support of the Central Government and other parts of the country, Tibet had eliminated absolute poverty as of late 2019 and is now embarking on a new journey toward modernization.

Whole-process democracy is an important driver of the region's continuous development and its implementation marks significant political progress on the Roof of the World. **BR**



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CANADA.....CAD2.60 SWITZERLAND.....CHF2.60
JAPAN.....JPY188 EUROPE.....EUR1.90
TURKEY.....YTL5.00 HK.....HKD9.30 NEPAL.....RS40

主管单位：中国外文出版发行事业局

主办单位：中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）

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印刷：北京华联印刷有限公司

北京周报 英文版2023年 第22期 ISSN 1000-9140

国内统一连续出版物号：CN11-1576/G2 邮发代号：2-922

广告许可证0171号 北京市期刊登记证第733号

国内零售价：人民币6.00元



ON TOP OF THE WORLD!

Members of a Chinese expedition team display the national flag at the summit of Mount Qomolangma on May 23. Earlier that day, the team reached the summit, the world's highest peak, where they carried out scientific research.

One important mission of this year's expedition was to maintain and upgrade the eight weather stations sitting at altitudes from 5,200 to 8,830 meters.

Since late April, 170 scientists in five teams have conducted research on the water, ecology and human activity around the region.



Care to Dance?

Residents perform a traditional dance to greet tourists on Liuxing Street in Yining City, Ili Kazak Autonomous Prefecture, northwest China's Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region, on May 19. The street is a well-known historical block and has developed into a tourist attraction integrating tourism, cultural exhibitions and artisanal production.

Financing Medical Students

This year, the Chinese Central Government will finance the study of 6,150 medical college students who will work in the country's less-developed central and western regions, the Ministry of Education announced on May 24.

The ministry cited a circular of its general office, saying that the Central Government will provide financial support to offer five years of free undergraduate education at the country's medical colleges and universities.

Free education is predicated on the condition that when students complete their degrees, they will serve in township

clinics in the central and western regions.

According to the circular, the program is open only to students from the country's rural areas and candidates also need to attend the national college entrance exam this year.

Pension Payments

China announced on May 22 it will raise basic pension payments for retirees in 2023, marking a 19th consecutive annual increase.

The average monthly payment for pensioners of enterprises, government agencies and public institutions is set to be lifted by 3.8 percent from the 2022 level, according to a circular jointly issued by the Ministry

of Human Resources and Social Security and the Ministry of Finance.

Last year, China raised the basic pension payments for retirees by 4 percent from the previous year's level.

China puts senior care high on the agenda as it faces the issue of a rapidly aging population.

Official data showed that by the end of 2022, the number of Chinese people aged 60 or above had surpassed 280 million, accounting for 19.8 percent of the country's total population.

The country recently released a set of guidelines to facilitate the creation of a "basic senior care system" amid efforts to pursue a proactive national

strategy regarding population aging and ensure equitable access to public services.

Ticket in Hand

No need to swipe a card or scan a QR code. A Beijing subway line now allows passengers to enter and exit "empty-handed" by scanning the palms of their hands.

A pilot program was launched on May 21 to apply the new technology on the Daxing Airport Express, connecting Beijing Daxing International Airport and Beijing city center, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport said.

Passengers can show their palms to pass through ticket gates at stops along the line after inputting their palm information at the station's ticketing machines and authorizing the use via Weixin, China's ubiquitous superapp. Fees are automatically deducted via the same app once passengers exit.

The ticket gates offer contactless recognition of the user's palm print, the commission said. It can allow passengers to take the subway even if they don't have any cash on hand when their smartphones run out of battery.

The commission said data masking and encryption technologies have all been applied to protect user information.

Overseas Invention Patents

A report on the patent index regarding the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area was released at a forum in south China's Guangdong Province on May 20.

The report on the patent index was released by the National Science Library of the Chinese Academy of Sciences at

a session of the Greater Bay Area Science Forum.

The Greater Bay Area has seen a surge in patent applications. Between 2017 and 2022, overseas invention patents in the area accounted for more than a quarter of the country's total overseas invention patents licensed, the report said.

The report added that enterprises play a pivotal role in driving technological innovation in the Greater Bay Area. From 2017 to 2022, the number of invention patent applications by enterprises in the area accounted for 73.44 percent of the area's total patent applications.

Data showed that the Greater Bay Area boasts technological advantages in industries such as next-generation information technology, new energy vehicles, and new materials.

Initiated by the Alliance of International Science Organizations and hosted by the Guangdong provincial government, the forum took place from May 20 to 23 in several of Guangdong's cities, including Guangzhou, Shenzhen and Foshan.

A Helping Hand

The Central Committee of the Communist Youth League

recently hosted a teleconference to beef up its work in promoting the employment of college students.

The league's officials said at the conference that college students are "precious resources and the league will continue to prioritize the group's employment in its works."

According to the league, college graduates from lower-income families will get priority in receiving the league's job-hunting assistance.

As of May 22, the league had collected information of around 897,000 vacancies from 52,000 companies nationwide. About 36,000 of the league's cadres have thus far offered one-on-one guidance and assistance to unemployed college students who graduated last year and fresh graduates from lower-income families, 35,000 of whom had successfully landed jobs as of May 22, according to a recent release from the league.

Trash PR

China plans to implement garbage sorting in over 90 percent of residential communities in cities at or above the prefecture level by the end of this year, and then raise the coverage ratio to 100 percent by the end of 2025.



Ready to Roar!

A Siberian tiger cub at the Siberian Tiger Park in Harbin, northeast China's Heilongjiang Province, on May 22. The park has welcomed more than 10 cubs this year.

Ni Hong, Minister of Housing and Urban-Rural Development, said at a recent meeting in Qingdao, east China's Shandong Province, that garbage sorting is one of the ministry's priorities this year.

More efforts should be made to improve related laws, build household waste management platforms with information technologies and strengthen waste incineration capacity, Ni said.

Garbage sorting is being carried out in 297 Chinese cities at an average coverage rate of 82.5 percent in residential communities. Daily waste disposal capacity has reached 530,000 tons, with 77.6 percent of it achieved through incineration.

Starting this year, China will promote a garbage sorting publicity week annually during the fourth week of May. This year's event ran from May 22 to 28.



Robot Games

A robot soccer game underway during the Seventh World Intelligence Congress (WIC) in north China's Tianjin Municipality on May 20. The WIC, a major artificial intelligence event in China, took place in the city on May 18-20.

Outbound Direct Investment

China's non-financial outbound direct investment (ODI) rose 26.6 percent year on year to 289.29 billion yuan (\$40.9 billion) in the first four months of the year, official data showed.

In U.S. dollar terms, the ODI went up 17.6 percent from a year earlier, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

The non-financial ODI in countries along the Belt and Road routes came in at \$7.53 billion, up 9 percent year on year.

The turnover of contracted projects overseas grew 10.6 percent year on year to 287.99 billion yuan (\$40.8 billion), while the contract value of newly signed projects amounted to 406.47 billion yuan (\$57.5 billion), up 2 percent from a year earlier.

Bad Loan Ratio

The non-performing loan ratio of China's commercial banks fell

to 1.62 percent by the end of the first quarter (Q1) of this year, with the quality of these banks' credit assets generally stable, official data showed.

The figure edged down 0.01 percentage point from the ratio seen at the end of 2022, according to the National Financial Regulatory Administration.

By the end of March, outstanding non-performing loans of these banks amounted to 3.1 trillion yuan (\$438.8 billion), up 134.1 billion yuan (\$19 billion) from the end of last year.

The banks' outstanding normal loans totaled 189.4 trillion yuan (\$26.8 trillion), the data revealed.

Power Generation

Power generation by industrial enterprises in China with an annual main business turnover of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) rose 6.1 percent year on year in April, official data showed.

During the period, their total

power generation reached 658.4 billion kilowatt-hours (kWh), according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Thermal power generation expanded 11.5 percent year on year in April, and nuclear power output increased by 5.7 percent from a year ago.

Wind power generation rose 20.9 percent year on year in April, 20.7 percentage points higher than that of March, NBS data showed.

Solar power generation dropped 3.3 percent year on year in April, while hydropower output fell 25.9 percent.

In the first four months of the year, total power generation rose 3.4 percent year on year to 2.73 trillion kWh, according to the NBS.

Freight Train Services

The number of China-Europe freight train services increased 17 percent year on year to 5,611 trips in the first four months of 2023, according to the China State

Railway Group Co. Ltd.

About 609,000 twenty-foot equivalent units (TEUs) of containers of goods were transported via the freight trains during this period, up 32 percent from a year ago, the company said.

In April alone, the number of China-Europe freight train trips surged 25 percent year on year to 1,459. The trains transported about 160,000 TEUs of containers of goods, representing an increase of 45 percent from a year ago.

As of the end of April, the number of domestic departure cities of the freight train services had reached 109, providing links to 211 cities in 25 European countries.

Self-Employed Businesses

A total of 5.03 million self-employed businesses were established in China in Q1, up 14.3 percent year on year, the State Administration for Market

NUMBERS

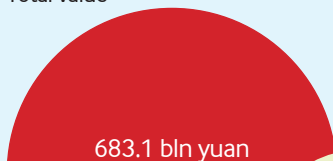
(\$1=7.07 yuan as of May 25)

China's Service Outsourcing Industry in January-April

(All growth rates are y.o.y.)

Service outsourcing contracts inked by Chinese firms

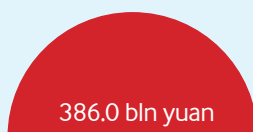
Total value



Executed contract value



Offshore service outsourcing contract value



Service outsourcing executed contract value

With members of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership



With the United States

51 bln yuan



With the European Union

34.2 bln yuan



Regulation, China's top market regulator, said.

As of the end of the first quarter, there were 116 million registered self-employed businesses, accounting for two thirds of total business entities nationwide, according to the administration.

New self-employed businesses in the cultural, sports and entertainment sectors registered the fastest year-on-year growth of 39 percent in the three months, the regulator said.

The administration will take effective measures to promote the high-quality development of the businesses, it said.

SME Performance

China's small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) have maintained a recovery trend this year, as evident from a notable upswing across a range of key indexes, Vice Minister of Industry and Information Technology Xu Xiaolan told a press conference on May 19.

Business performance has picked up and expectations have improved as the central and regional governments have introduced multiple policies to help SMEs recover from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, according to Xu.

The sales index of SMEs rebounded for the second straight month in March, while the little giant firms—the novel elites of SMEs that specialize in a niche market, boast cutting-edge technologies, and show great potential—saw their profitability reach 9.6 percent.

Xu, however, noted that the current SME recovery is not yet robust and emphasized the need for increased support to help them cope with challenges in order to enhance their competitiveness and boost their development.

Increasing Stake

Zhejiang Geely Holding Group announced on May 18 that it has increased its stake in British

sports car maker Aston Martin to about 17 percent.

Geely Holding first acquired a 7.6-percent stake in Aston Martin last September.

The increased stake makes Geely Holding the third largest shareholder in Aston Martin, the terms of which were announced by Aston Martin in a statement to the London Stock Exchange.

The increased shareholding in Aston Martin will form part of Geely Holding's strategic investment portfolio, which includes long-term equity stakes in global automotive brands, the Chinese automotive technology group said in a press release.

As part of the equity increase, Geely Holding will be able to appoint a non-executive director to the Aston Martin board, as well as a second person as an observer.

Foreign Direct Investment

Paid-in foreign direct investment (FDI) in the Chinese mainland

expanded 2.2 percent year on year to 499.46 billion yuan (\$70.7 billion) in the first four months of the year, the Ministry of Commerce said on May 17.

In U.S. dollar terms, the FDI inflow went down 3.3 percent year on year.

The manufacturing industry saw FDI inflow increase by 4.1 percent year on year to 130.05 billion yuan (\$18.4 billion) during the first four months, while that of hi-tech industries increased by 12.8 percent during the period, data from the ministry showed.

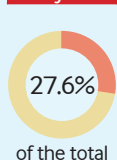
Specifically, foreign investment in hi-tech manufacturing jumped by 37.1 percent, while that in the hi-tech service sector rose 6 percent.

During the January-April period, investment from France and the United Kingdom surged 567.3 percent and 323.7 percent year on year, respectively. FDI from Japan and the Republic of Korea climbed 68.1 percent and 30.7 percent, respectively, year on year.

Executed contract value of outsourcing services

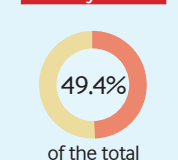
Of private enterprises

69.9 bln yuan



Of foreign-funded enterprises

125.4 bln yuan



In January-April

15.19 mln people

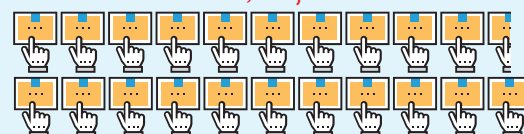


worked in China's service outsourcing industry

1 icon = 1 mln

The industry added

215,000 jobs



1 icon = 10,000

(Source: Ministry of Commerce)



JAPAN

A protester holds up a placard during a demonstration against the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Hiroshima on May 21. The protesters chanted anti-war slogans and hoisted banners calling for “No war”



FRANCE

Photo taken on May 22 shows the 216th Session of the UNESCO Executive Board at the organization's headquarters in Paris. UNESCO has chosen Shanghai as the site for a Category 1 Institute on science, technology, engineering and mathematics, the first of its kind to be established outside Europe



MONTENEGRO

President-elect Jakov Milatovic reviews the honor guard during his inauguration ceremony in Podgorica on May 20



SAUDI ARABIA

Leaders attending the 32nd Arab League Summit pose for a group photo in Jeddah on May 19. They gathered there to discuss regional and global issues crucial to the region's stability



UNITED KINGDOM

People take in the sights at the Royal Horticultural Society Chelsea Flower Show during the event's press and VIP day in London on May 22



RUSSIA

A vintage vehicle parade in the lead-up to the 320th founding anniversary of St. Petersburg on May 20. The city marked its 320th birthday on May 27

↓ EX-VICE GOVERNOR TAKES OVER FINANCIAL REINS

Li Yunze, former Vice Governor of Sichuan Province, has been appointed to head the newly formed National Administration of Financial Regulation (NAFR).

Born in Yantai, Shandong Province, in September 1970, Li worked at the China Construction Bank and the Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, two of the country's leading state-owned banks, before becoming a senior official in the Sichuan Provincial Government.

The NAFR was inaugurated on May 18 as the country's new financial regulator, in keeping with the Central Government's plan for institutional reform unveiled two months earlier.



Live-Streamed Satisficing

Guangzhou Daily

May 19

The rise of live-streamed sales, a new mode of e-commerce by which consumers can directly shop via the links included in live-streamed videos, have provided a powerful tool for the revival of China's vast rural areas. Many villagers have made their personal live-stream channels public to sell farm products while showcasing local scenery and cultures. However, the enormous popularity of these video channels has given rise to a new type of fake charity.

On some channels, scammers masquerading as live-streamers will "accidentally" come across some villagers, who will then

invite them to their places for a home-cooked dinner. The shabbiness of their homes, the crudeness of their meals, and the moving hospitality of these villagers all combine to evoke a feeling of compassion in the viewers. Persuaded by their own kindness, they are likely to make irrational purchases. In these cases, the villagers are often professional actors; the wrecked houses are deliberately chosen; the storylines are scripted; and the products sold are not their farm products.

Produced to mislead consumers, these videos are undermining the willingness of the public to participate in programs supporting rural communities. To prevent the ultimate loss of faith in rural live-streamers, video platforms should put more effort into developing a screening mechanism that can separate the good from the bad.



Libraries of the Future

Oriental Outlook

May 4

In an increasingly digitized age, libraries are no longer places where readers spend hours flipping through an entire room of card catalogues to find particular books. Now, visitors to a library can simply use its online catalogue to search, make reservations, and request scanned copies of library resources. However, while revolutionizing the ways in which people interact with libraries, the advent of the Internet has also challenged

"In the context of agri-food systems and rural areas, we need to consider a combined conservation of biodiversity and food diversity."

Qu Dongyu, Director General of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, at a certificate award ceremony for 24 new Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems sites on May 22

"For humanity, the most significant form of unsustainability is not the uncertainty caused by innovation. Instead, it lies in the diverse and unpredictable risks resulting from stagnation."

Robin Li, Chairperson and CEO of Chinese tech giant Baidu, during the Seventh World Intelligence Congress, in Tianjin from May 18 to 21

the role of libraries as a major repository of information.

This leads to a vital question: Do people still need libraries in the digital age? The simple answer is yes. The deluge of information, instead of broadening people's perspective, often limits their horizon by only feeding people with what they want to see. Libraries furnish readers with not only a sense of occasion, but also opportunities to make unexpected discoveries while wandering through the shelves.

In fact, data have shown that, by the end of 2021, the number of registered members of public libraries in China had exceeded 103 million, a 135-percent increase from that in 2012.

The past decade has seen many libraries turned into multifunctional spaces that integrate book loans, cultural events and leisure activities. A famous example is the new Guangzhou Library in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province. This library, which opened in 2012, is equipped with a canteen, a gym, an art exhibition hall and a coffee shop. Some others are also lending books to hotels and bed and breakfasts, thereby making books more accessible to readers.

Access for All

Workers' Daily
May 23

In the days leading up to May 21, the national day for helping people with disabilities, a recent lawsuit has caught public attention. A residential compound in Wuhan, Hubei Province, recently filed a case against a resident with a disability, who refused to pay property management fees because the compound had failed to fulfill its promise to install a wheelchair ramp at the building entrance. The dispute ended in a court decision in favor of the resident.

People with disabilities have the same rights as all other people to non-discrimination, access, privacy, inclusion and more.

Yet injustice still comes in many shapes and forms. Many employers have specified in their job requirements that applicants should not have any type of disability. Tactile pavements, a type of footpath designed for people with impaired vision, are often blocked by carelessly parked bicycles.

Having discerned these problems, many Chinese cities are upgrading their infrastructure and services to become more disabled-friendly. Some cinemas provide audio description services for people with sight loss. Smart wheelchairs powered by voice recognition and navigation technologies have also allowed people with disabilities to lead more independent and empowered lives.

NEW AMBASSADOR ARRIVES IN THE U.S.

Senior diplomat **Xie Feng** has taken over the role of Chinese ambassador to the United States, succeeding Qin Gang, who was appointed minister of foreign affairs late last year.

Born in Jiangdu, Jiangsu Province, in April 1964, Xie joined the Ministry of Foreign Affairs after graduating from the Foreign Affairs University in 1986. He gained experience in the Chinese embassies in Malta and the U.S. before becoming China's ambassador to Indonesia in 2014. He was appointed vice foreign minister in 2021.



Upon his arrival at the John F. Kennedy International Airport in New York on May 23, Xie urged the U.S. authorities to work with China to enhance dialogue, manage difference and promote cooperation, so as to bring bilateral relations back to the right track.

"In the context of our ever-globalizing world, it's crucially important that we not only acknowledge but celebrate our cultural differences."

Joan Deslandes, head teacher of Kingsford Community School in east London, the first school in the UK to make Chinese a compulsory part of its curriculum, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

"Something unique about the Asia-Pacific is a commitment of a lot of governments in the region to be part of an open multilateral trading system and to integrate their economy with other economies of the region."

Albert Park, Chief Economist at the Asian Development Bank, in a recent interview with Xinhua



COVER STORY

MASTERS OF THEIR OWN AFFAIRS

How people in Tibet Autonomous Region practice whole-process people's democracy By Li Nan