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**The Non-affiliates in China's
Political Party System: how to Play
a Role?**

**Os não afiliados no sistema de
partidos políticos da China: como
desempenhar um papel?**

Di Zhou

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**PROBLEMAS E PERSPECTIVAS DA RELAÇÃO ENTRE O DIREITO
PENAL, O DIREITO PROCESSUAL PENAL E A POLÍTICA CRIMINAL**

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The Non-affiliates in China's Political Party System: how to Play a Role?*

Os não afiliados no sistema de partidos políticos da China: como desempenhar um papel?

Di Zhou**

Abstract

This article examines the role of prominent individuals unaffiliated to any of the parties (Non-affiliates) in China's political party system. It also investigates the historical formation of non-affiliates in Chinese revolutionary history. Through nation-wide regulations and the results of a case study at city level, the article analyzes present systems and mechanisms guaranteeing the functioning of non-affiliates, as well as the obstacles they face. Our results suggest that the recognition of the uniqueness of non-affiliates in China's political party system is a prerequisite for the stimulation of their role. Moreover, we suggest that an appropriate organization, detailed prescriptions of intra-Party laws and regulations, strong institutional support of the Communist Party of China committee's United Front Work Department, and establishment of relevant channels and platforms can enhance the role of non-affiliates in terms of political participation.

Keywords: non-affiliates; role; China's political party system; partisanship; Communist Party of China.

Resumo

Este artigo examina o papel de indivíduos proeminentes não afiliados a qualquer um dos partidos (não afiliados) no sistema de partidos políticos da China. Também investiga a formação histórica de não afiliados na história revolucionária chinesa. Por meio de regulamentações nacionais e dos resultados de um estudo de caso em nível municipal, o artigo analisa os sistemas e mecanismos atuais que garantem o funcionamento dos não afiliados, bem como os obstáculos que enfrentam. Nossos resultados sugerem que o reconhecimento da singularidade dos não afiliados no sistema partidário político da China é um pré-requisito para a estimulação de seu papel. Além disso, sugerimos que uma organização apropriada, prescrições detalhadas de leis e regulamentos intrapartidários, forte apoio institucional do Departamento de Trabalho da Frente Única do comitê do Partido Comunista da China e o estabelecimento de canais e plataformas relevantes podem aumentar o papel dos não afiliados em termos de participação política.

* Artigo convidado

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Palavras-chave: não afiliados; papel; sistema de partidos políticos da China; partisanship; Partido Comunista da China.

1 Introduction

China's present political party system is a multiparty cooperation and political consultation system under the leadership of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It is neither a one-party system nor a multiparty system of mutual competition, but a multiparty cooperation system. Following the principles of long-term coexistence, mutual oversight, sincerity, and cooperation, the CPC rules and leads as the dominant party, and the eight other participating political parties¹ form important components whose basic functions include participation in political affairs, political consultation, and democratic oversight. In addition to the CPC and other political parties, prominent individuals unaffiliated to any of the parties (henceforth referred to as 'non-affiliates') are also a vital part of China's new political party system, both as co-founders of the multiparty cooperation system, and as important participants. The non-affiliates are naturally non-organized and non-group-oriented; they advocate freedom and independence, and have no relatively fixed masses to represent, due to which they are not part of any organizations, but usually stand alone.

Scholars interested in China's new political party system tend to focus on the leadership position of the CPC, and the political participation of the eight other political parties. The CPC Central Committee documents and the intra-Party² laws and regulations often deploy the function of non-affiliates together with that of the eight other political parties. Therefore, some people believe that political participation of non-affiliates can be directly referenced against the non-CPC political parties, without need for special research. This has led to an obvious mismatch between the theoretical attention and research on the issue of non-affiliates, and their unique status and role in China's new political party system. The study of non-affiliates has long been marginalized in academic communities both in China and abroad.

At present, there are few academic publications specifically focusing on the political role of non-affiliates; there are no monographs or doctoral dissertations, and there are only six master's theses and research papers published in journals.³ Of these, nearly all primarily explore the comparative advantages of China's new political party system⁴, and the relationship between the CPC and the non-CPC political parties, arguing that the formation of the system is a process of interaction between them. This is a process in which other political parties gradually recognize and accept the leadership of the CPC, and the unique positioning of non-affiliates is rarely mentioned⁵. The majority of extant literature has tacitly assumed that the issue of

¹ The eight non-CPC political parties are: the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, the China Democratic League, the China National Democratic Construction Association, the China Association for Promoting Democracy, the Chinese Peasants and Workers Democratic Party, the China Zhi Gong Party, the Jiusan Society, and the Taiwan Democratic Self-Government League.

² Intra-Party specifically refers to intra-CPC.

³ WEIJIA, Su. *Research on the role and mechanism of nonparty personages in universities*. 2018. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu Province, China, 2018; NAN, Wu. *Studies of work of non-party personages in colleges and universities of Liaoning province*. 2018. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Northeastern University, Boston, United States, 2018; ZHENGXUN, Yang. *On the nonparty personage of our country*. 2016. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - China Youth University of Political Studies, Beijing, China, 2016; TONG, Zhao. *The research on the system of the group process of the independents*. 2013. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Hebei University, Hebei, Baoding, China, 2013; JUNFENG, Hu. *On non-party personage's main historical contribution*. 2008. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Central China Normal University, Wuhan, China, 2008; ZHEN, Xing. *Studies on relationship of democratic parties and non-party personage and local society of Jiaonan city of Shandong province in new period*. 2008. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Huazhong Normal University, Wuhan, China, 2008.

⁴ SHUZHEN, Zhou. On the unique advantages of China's new-type system of political parties. *People's Forum*, n. 07, p. 6-13, 2018; MINGJIANG, Ai. Embedded logic: a new type of party system and China's National Governance. *Theory and Reform*, n. 05, p. 36-49, 2019.

⁵ TIANZHU, Huang. Characteristics of China's new type of party system in perspective of non-CPC political parties. *Journal of the Central Institute of Socialism*, n. 05, p. 10-17, 2018; LUO, Feng. The advantages and the function of new type of party system in perspective of CCPCC. *Marxism & Reality*, n. 1, p. 177-184, 2020; XIANSHENG, Zhang. The beginning of the cooperation between

non-affiliates can be treated in the same manner as non-CPC political parties⁶. Some scholars have explored the political attributes of non-affiliates in terms of partisanship⁷, representativeness⁸, and organization (working mechanism)⁹, and argued that non-affiliates have both individual and group attributes, and thus partly possess the characteristics of modern political parties¹⁰. Other scholars focus on the political participation of non-affiliates, exploring the channels and mechanisms of their political participation, and the question of how to enhance their role¹¹. While there are news and research reports on non-affiliates, they are primarily discussed from the perspective of the working mechanism of the CPC's united front work¹². Some foreign researchers have studied the political parties outside the CPC¹³. However, there are no studies on the participation of non-affiliates in the framework of multiparty cooperation; they are only mentioned in passing during the study of the united front work of the CPC or other political parties in China¹⁴.

Notably, non-affiliates under China's new political party system differ from the non-CPC political parties in various aspects, such as in terms of the attributes and the manner of political participation, and capacity building. The stereotypical thinking and working practices formed during multiparty cooperation, wherein non-affiliates performed their functions with reference to non-CPC political parties, have long objectively led to the neglect of the issue of non-affiliates in theoretical studies. This raises several questions: Are non-affiliates a group, or independent individuals? Why do non-affiliates who are not formally affiliated with a party have substantial partisanship? How do non-affiliates exist under China's new political party system, and how do they differ from other political parties? How do they participate in political life; can they play a practical role? What are the historical and practical bases for the participation of the non-affiliates in China's new political party system? It is important to answer these questions, and understand the values and functional advantages of non-affiliates, how they function in practice, whether they can truly play a role in political participation, and if so, how.

This paper firstly explores the historical formation of non-affiliates in the modern Chinese political party system considering non-affiliates as not only a product of China's revolutionary history, but also a process of political construction and institutional confirmation. Consequently, the paper attempts to understand why non-affiliates are the founders and participants of China's multiparty cooperation system. Secondly, within the framework of the new party system, the paper compares the existing systems and institutional guarantees for non-affiliate participation in multiparty cooperation. Finally, based on a study of non-affiliates

the CPC and non-CPC political parties. *Journal of United Front Science*, n. 4, p. 73-82, 2022.

⁶ YUHUAN, Wang; RUIQING, Wang. The recognition of deliberative democracy of the members of non-CPC political parties and non-affiliates. *Journal for Party and Administrative Cadres*, n. 3, p. 24-31, 2022; FAN, Nanxi et al. On the supporting mechanism in promoting the role of members of non-CPC political parties and non-affiliates. *Journal of Guangzhou Institute of Socialism*, n. 2, p. 26-30, 2022.

⁷ DEZHONG, Jia. The Partisanship of Non-Affiliates in Light of the Characteristics of Modern Political Parties. *Contemporary World and Socialism*, n. 3, p. 128-131, 2009.

⁸ YUAN, Si. The characteristics and function of non-affiliates as a political group. *China's United Front*, n. 1, p. 37-38, 2014.

⁹ SONG, Jian. Some reflections on non-affiliates and their political participation. *Journal of Chongqing Institute of Socialism*, n. 1, p. 39-42, 2011.

¹⁰ BINGQUN, He et al. The Mechanism of promoting the role of non-affiliates as a political group. *Journal of Socialist College*, 2012, n. 4, p. 27-31.

¹¹ RUI, Zhou; DAOQUAN, Xu. On the role of non-affiliates as a political group. *Journal of Chongqing Institute of Socialism*, n. 1, p. 41-45, 2013; TIANGE, Liu. The non-affiliates in China's United Front. *Journal of Sichuan Institute of Socialism*, n. 3, p. 26-27, 2003.

¹² WEIJIA, Su. *Research on the role and mechanism of nonparty personages in universities*. 2018. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Lanzhou University, Lanzhou, Gansu Province, China, 2018; NAN, Wu. *Studies of work of non-party personages in colleges and universities of Liaoning province*. 2018. Thesis (M. S. Degree) - Northeastern University, Boston, United States, 2018.

¹³ SEYMOUR, James D. *China's Satellite Parties*. Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, Inc., 1978.

¹⁴ FUNG, Edmund S. K. *In search of chinese democracy*. Jiangsu People's Publishing House, Cambridge University Press, 2011. p. 12, 25. "Small party groups and independents are an important political force and a force of public opinion."; VAN SLYKE, Lyman P. *Enemies and friends: the United Front in chinese communist history*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1992; JEANS, Roger B. (ed.). *Roads not taken: the struggle of opposition parties in twentieth-century China*. [S. l.]: Westview Press, 1992; GROOT, Gerry. *Managing transitions: the Chinese Communist Party, United Front work, corporatism and hegemony*. [S. l.]: Routledge, 2004; KATZ, Richard S.; CROTTY, William (ed.). *Handbook of party politics*. [S. l.]: SAGE Publications, 2006.

in a provincial capital city, it examines and evaluates the actual role played by non-affiliates. Non-affiliates are vital to the understanding of China's the new political party system; at the same time, they are easily overlooked.

2 Materials and Methods

The line of research developed as well as the research questions to be addressed in this paper call for the classical legal research methods which are predominantly a desktop study and legal/policy documents analysis, complemented with a case study of local city as well as questionnaires, face-to-face or telephone interviews, and symposiums.

The legal/policy documents are selected from relevant documents issued by the Central Committee of the CPC and its working departments, the State Council, and the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), mainly including the "Opinions on Adhering to and Improving the Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation System under the Leadership of the CPC" (1989 version)¹⁵, "Opinions on Strengthening the Work of non-affiliates" (2000 version)¹⁶, "Opinions on Further Strengthening the Capacity Building of the Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation System under the Leadership of the CPC" (2005 version)¹⁷, "Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on Strengthening the Capacity Building of Representatives outside the CPC" (2012 version)¹⁸, "Opinions on Consolidating and Strengthening the United Front in the New Century and New Stage" (2012 version)¹⁹, "Regulations on the Work of the United Front of the CPC" (2015 version²⁰ & 2021 Revised version²¹), "Opinions on Strengthening the Ideological and Political Work of non-CPC Intellectuals and Capacity Building of Non-affiliate Representatives" (2021 version)²², "White Paper on China's New Political Party System: Cooperation and Consultation" (2021 version)²³, "Regulations on Political Consultation Work of the CPC" (2022 version)²⁴. While few of the documents were classified and could only be accessed to part of the file, most of the documents were open to the public and were collected on the websites of the CPPCC, the State Council and the working departments of the CPC Central Committee and selective news websites.

¹⁵ FORMULATION of the "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China on Adhering to and Improving the Multi-party Cooperation and Political Consultative System Under the Leadership of the Communist Party of China". *News of Communist Party of China*, 1989. Available at: <https://cpc.people.com.cn/GB/64107/65708/65722/4444523.html>.

¹⁶ LOOKING at the development of the united front cause in the new era from the change of appellation of people without party affiliation. *CPPCC*, 31 may 2018. Available at: <http://www.cppcc.gov.cn/zxww/2018/05/31/ART11527731993875467.shtml>.

¹⁷ THE CENTRAL Committee of the Communist Party of China promulgated opinions on strengthening multi-party cooperation and political consultation system construction. *China News*, 20 mar. 2005. Available at: <https://www.chinanews.com.cn/news/2005/2005-03-20/26/552758.shtml>.

¹⁸ OPINIONS on Strengthening the Construction of Non-Party Representatives in the New Situation Issuing. *China Central Government Portal*, 23 feb. 2012. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2012-02/23/content_2075139.htm.

¹⁹ THE CENTRAL Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the opinion on consolidating and strengthening the united front in the new century and new stage. *China Central Government Portal*, 28 nov. 2006. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/jrzq/2006-11/28/content_455832.htm.

²⁰ THE CENTRAL Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the "Regulations on the Work of the United Front of the Communist Party of China (Trial)". *China Central Government Portal*, 22 sept. 2015. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2015-09/22/content_2937054.htm.

²¹ THE CENTRAL Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the "Regulations on the Work of the United Front of the Communist Party of China". *People.cn*, 25 jan. 2021. Available at: <http://politics.people.com.cn/n1/2021/0105/c1001-31990053.html>.

²² Classified document.

²³ CHINA'S New Party System. *China Central Government Portal*, 25 jun. 2021. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2021-06/25/content_5620794.htm.

²⁴ THE CENTRAL Committee of the Communist Party of China issued the "Regulations on the Political Consultation Work of the Communist Party of China". *China Central Government Portal*, 20 jun. 2022. Available at: http://www.gov.cn/zhengce/2022-06/20/content_5696832.htm.

Further, a case study was used to analyse the status quo and the challenges of local practices in implementing the central intra-Party regulations and policies. The documents explaining the local practices were collected from the CPC's United Front Work Department and CCPCC at city level. A total of 175 questionnaires were distributed to non-affiliates of the targeted city, and 102 were actually returned, with 100 valid questionnaires. 30 single-choice/multiple-choice questions were proposed in the questionnaire, and were divided into two sections, namely the basic personal information section and the thematic questions section. The personal information includes gender, age, education background, occupation, job level, overseas experience, etc. Thematic questions mainly involve basic knowledge on China's political party system, basic understanding of the function of the non-affiliates, the ways and frequency of interaction between the non-affiliates and the relevant work departments, the financial support for the activities of non-affiliates, the ways/channels/platforms for the political participation of the non-affiliates, the influencing factors on the role played by the non-affiliates, etc.

The open-ended interviews were conducted face-to-face or by telephone, with 12 interviewees, including 11 non-affiliates and one staff from the United Front Work in universities. Two seminars were held for the staff of United Front Work Departments and non-affiliates respectively, with nearly ten staff of the United Front Work Department of the Party Committees at the urban and municipal levels, and nine non-affiliates participating in the seminars. Questions that had been posed during the interviews and seminars included but were not limited to: (1) What is the criteria to identify the non-affiliates? (2) Evaluation (by the staff from the United Front Work departments) / Self-evaluation (by the non-affiliates) on the effectiveness of the role played by the non-affiliates in political life. (3) Are the systems & Mechanism that guarantee the function of the non-affiliates working well? What are the specific channels or platforms? (4) What are the factors that influence the function of non-affiliates? (5) What do the non-affiliates need/what do the relevant work departments could provide in order to further encourage the non-affiliates to play a role?

This paper provides an overview of the historical formation of the group of non-affiliates in contemporary China, and explains the core question of why a non-partisan individual unaffiliated with any political party could be characterized with a "partisanship". It also provides legal/policy background of the right and the responsibility of the non-affiliates in China's political party system. On the basis of the analysis on the past/present situation and in response to the primary obstacles, feasible recommendations are proposed. These recommendations, in the framework of better stimulate the role of the non-affiliates, aim to guarantee an effective mechanism for the function of China's political party system in a long run. The suggestions are formulated on the basis of the analysis and literature study in the previous sections.

3 Results: Historical Rationale, Systems & Mechanisms, Practices

3.1 The Historical Rationale for the "Partisanship" of non-affiliates

A non-affiliate is a non-partisan individual unaffiliated with any political party. However, during the formation of China's modern party system, the idea of non-affiliates and its related concepts have been distinguished from those of independents; they have had their own stage and specific group orientation since their emergence. China's non-affiliates emerged with modern political parties, and have a partisanship similar to that of the CPC and other political parties. The partisanship of non-affiliates was objectively created in the environment of the modern Chinese revolution, and it was formed through political construction and institutional confirmation.

During the New Democratic Revolution, Mao Zedong termed the CPC's three magic weapons as the United Front, the Armed Struggle, and Party Building²⁵. In particular, the United Front, as an important part of the Party's general line and general policy, has played an important role in the formation of the National Revolutionary United Front, the Workers' and Peasants' Democratic United Front, the Anti-Japanese National United Front, the People's Democratic United Front, and the Patriotic United Front within different historical periods of China's revolution, construction, and reform. At the Central conference on the United Front Work in July 2022, Xi Jinping noted:

The essence of United Front work is to call for great unity and union, and to address the issue of people's aspiration and strength... United Front work is to unite all Chinese sons and daughters of different parties, different nationalities, different classes, different groups, different beliefs and living under different systems.²⁶

Based on the tactical requirements and strategic considerations of the United Front during the democratic revolutionary period, people outside the Party²⁷ and their integration became the target of the CPC's United Front work. During the Great Revolution (1924-1927), the establishment of the Democratic United Front led to the first Kuomintang-Communist cooperation, and the inclusion of educated individuals who were not politically affiliated into the National Revolutionary camp. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, people outside the Party (or democrats) participated extensively as an independent political force in anti-Japanese rescue activities and democratic movements. Thus, there emerged a number of representative democrats outside the Party who had high social status and strong political influence. These representative figures had their own contact masses in the upper echelons of the Kuomintang and local power, in cultural, educational, industrial, economic, scientific, and technological circles, as well as among young students and overseas Chinese. Thus, they became an important force for the two parties to strive for and liaise with. A number of people outside the CPC participated in the "three-thirds system"²⁸ of regime building in the anti-Japanese base areas under the CPC leadership. As stated by Mao Zedong,

Affairs of state are the public affairs of the whole nation and not the private affairs of a single party or group. Hence Communists have the duty to co-operate democratically with non-Party people and have no right to exclude them and monopolize everything.²⁹

On October 10, 1945, the Kuomintang and the CPC signed the "Double Ten Agreement," where they agreed that

the National Government shall convene a political consultative conference and invite representatives of all parties and public figures to consult on national issues and to discuss the issues of peaceful nation-building and the convening of the National Convention.³⁰

Accordingly, in January 1946, the Political Consultative Conference was held in Chongqing with 38 delegates from five parties, including eight from the Kuomintang, seven from the CPC, nine from the China Democratic League, five from the Youth Party, and nine from the social elite. Guo Moruo (郭沫若), Mo Dehui (莫德惠), and nine other non-affiliates participated in the Political Consultative Conference

²⁵ ZEDONG, Mao. Introducing the communist: 1939. In: ZEDONG, Mao. *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung*: volume II. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967. p. 288.

²⁶ XI STRESSES unity of Chinese at home, abroad to pool strength for rejuvenation. *CCTV*, 31 jul. 2022. Available at: <https://english.cctv.com/2022/07/31/ARTIPkqtO4VkuJWcSVOPCVCO220731.shtml>

²⁷ The term "people outside the Party" was uniquely used during the Chinese revolutionary period to refer to independents other than members of the CPC. This term continues to be used at present.

²⁸ During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression, the regime of "three-thirds system" was applied in the anti-Japanese base areas under the leadership of the CPC. There were three levels of senators in the Border Region, counties and townships; one-third were members of the CPC, one-third were progressive people outside the Party, one-third were middle-of-the-road people who represented the middle bourgeoisie and the enlightened gentry individual landlords and rich farmers.

²⁹ ZEDONG, Mao. Speech at the assembly of representatives of the Shensi-Kansu-Ningsia border: 1941. In: ZEDONG, Mao. *Selected works of Mao Tse-Tung*: volume III. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1967. p. 33.

³⁰ CHONGJI, Jin. *Compendium of Chinese History of the Twentieth Century*: revised edition: volume II. [S. l.]: SDX Joint Publishing Company, 2021. p. 660.

as “social elites.” After the outbreak of the civil war, the “social elites” were divided, with Guo Moruo and others opposing the civil war, and participating in democratic anti-Chiang activities. Mo Dehui and others turned to the Kuomintang, participating in the National Assembly and the National Government that they organized. On April 30, 1948, the CPC Central Committee issued the “May 1st” slogan, calling on “all democratic political parties, people’s organizations and social elites to quickly convene a political consultative conference to discuss and realize the urgent people’s congress and establish a democratic coalition government”³¹. On May 3, Li Jishen (李济深) called a second meeting with the heads of the political parties in Hong Kong, and agreed to respond to the CPC’s “May 1st” slogan by means of a joint telegram. In particular, Guo Moruo called upon Mao Zedong to respond to the “May 1st” slogan in the name of “non-affiliates” and the leaders of the political parties in Hong Kong. In his response on August 1, Moa Zedong affirmed and used the term “non-affiliate democrats” for the first time³².

On June 15, 1949, the preparatory meeting for the New Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) began. After repeated consultations, 23 units with a total of 134 delegates were formed for the preparatory meeting of the new CPPCC. In particular, members of the non-CPC political parties, as independent participating units, had a total of six delegates, a number that was second only to that of the CPC, the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, and the China Democratic League. At the first plenary session of the Preparatory Committee, Zhou Enlai had pointed out that non-affiliate democrats “are not formally affiliated with a party, but are in essence partisan,” and are “partisan democrats without party organizations”.³³ On this basis, after repeated consultation and discussion, when the First Plenary Session of the CPPCC was held in September 1949, a special unit of “non-affiliate democrat” was established, in which ten official delegates, including Guo Moruo and Li Da (李达), were listed. Among the 46 units and 662 delegates of the new CPPCC, 44% were from the CPC, 26% were from labor, agriculture and other sectors,³⁴ and 30% were members of various political parties. Among the 14 party units, the unit of non-affiliate democrat ranked fifth after the CPC, the Revolutionary Committee of the Chinese Kuomintang, the China Democratic League, and the China National Democratic Construction Association³⁵. Additionally, non-affiliate democrats participated in the composition of the first Central People’s Government.

Table 1 - Non-affiliate democrats among members of the Central People’s Government

	Total	People outside the Party	Non-affiliate democrats
Central People’s Government Committee	6 Vice Presidents	3 people	0
	56 Members	27 people	8 people ³⁶
Government House	4 Deputy Prime Ministers	2 people	1 person: Guo Moruo

³¹ ZHUYUN, Chen; QICHENG, Chen. *Selected materials on the history of China’s non-CPC political parties*. Shang: East China Normal University Press, 1985. p. 16.

³² Committee of Cultural and Historical Materials of the Central Committee of the Democratic League of China, *Historical Documents of the Chinese Democratic League (1941-1949)*, Cultural and Historical Materials Publishing House, 1983. p. 422, 115, 127.

³³ DEPARTMENT OF THE UNITED FRONT WORK OF THE CPC CENTRAL COMMITTEE & LITERATURE RESEARCH OFFICE OF THE CPC. Central Committee. *Selected Work of Zhou Enlai on the United Front Work of the CPC*. 1984. p. 125, 127.

³⁴ According to Article 22 of the Charter of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference, The National Committee of the CPPCC shall be composed of representatives from the CPC, other political parties, from among public figures without party affiliation, from people’s organizations, and from ethnic minority groups and all sectors of society, compatriots from the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, the Macao Special Administrative Region, and Taiwan, and from among returned overseas Chinese, as well as specially invited individuals, all of whom shall be divided into a number of sectors.

³⁵ HONGMEI, Li; YANGDONG, Liu. The birth of the people’s political consultative conference: next volume. *China Literature and History Press*, p. 467-472, sept. 2019.

³⁶ Chen Jiageng (陈嘉庚), Ma Yinchu (马寅初), Guo Moruo, Shen Yanbing (沈雁冰), Chen Shutong (陈叔通), Fu Zuoyi (傅作义), Zhang Xiruo (张奚若), Zhang Nanxian (张难先).

From “people outside the party” and “democrats,” to “social elites,” and then to “non-affiliate democrat,” the political concept of non-affiliates has a distinctive history. During the revolutionary period, people outside the party actively participated in democratic political activities, joined anti-imperialist and anti-feudal struggles, proposed party-like political ideas, responded to the “May 1st” CPC slogan, and were consulted on the establishment of the country. The concept of non-affiliate democrats³⁷ has a distinctive historical character; they are a political group formed under the particular historical background of China’s New Democratic Revolution. The political identity of this group was formally recognized in the legal system in the early stages of the establishment of the People’s Republic of China, affirming the special historical role played by non-affiliate democrats in the revolution and state building.

3.2 Systems and mechanisms to guarantee the function of non-affiliates

3.2.1 Definition of non-affiliates

Historically, the basis of non-affiliates’ partisanship lies in the political consensus formed under their accepting the CPC, adhering to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and adhering to and improving the new Chinese political party system. This is also the prerequisite for non-affiliates to have partisanship. Additionally, the special history of the formation of non-affiliates also determines that this group does not have inter-generational inheritance of party affiliation, but reflects the characteristics of different stages of history. With the reduction of old generation non-affiliates from the founding of the country, after China’s reform, opening up, and the emergence of a new period of socialist modernization, a modern generation of non-affiliates formed a situation where multiple concepts coexisted: non-affiliate democrat, non-affiliates, non-affiliate patriots, non-affiliate eminent persons, non-affiliate representatives, etc.

Only with the formulation of the Opinions on Strengthening the Work of Non-affiliates in 2000 was it made clear that the group of non-affiliates are officially called so, and the representatives among them are officially called non-affiliate representatives. The Opinions also stipulate that the basic conditions for being recognized as a non-affiliate include having a certain social status and representativeness, having a strong desire and ability to participate in politics, and having a non-affiliated status. The amendment to the CPPCC Constitution adopted at the second session of the 10th CPPCC National Committee in 2004 changed the concept of non-affiliate democrats to that of non-affiliates. In 2005, the CPPCC changed the name of the sector of non-affiliate democrats to that of non-affiliates. The concept of non-affiliates was thus formalized and used.

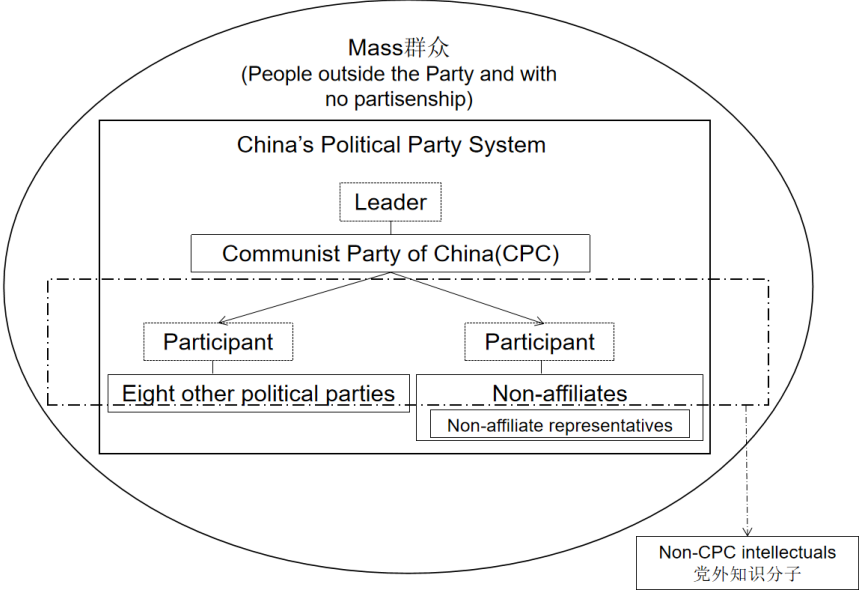
It must be clarified that the political identity of non-affiliates is not naturally occurring, but needs to be confirmed by the CPC’s United Front Work Department through certain procedures, and according to certain criteria.³⁸ The Regulations on the United Front Work of the CPC, revised and promulgated in 2021, defines non-affiliates as “people who do not belong to any political party, have the desire and ability to participate in politics, and make positive contributions and have certain influence in society,” and “the most of the non-affiliates are intellectuals.” Additionally, the 2012 Opinions of the CPC Central Committee on Strengthening the Capacity Building of Non-affiliate Representatives under the New Situation set “political

³⁷ In 1951, the United Front Work Department of the Central Committee of the CPC defined in a document titled “Answer to the United Front Work Department of the Northwest Bureau on the Definition of ‘Democrats’”: “Democrat’ is a political title for certain people outside the Party who participate in the people’s democratic movement. Generally speaking, a ‘democrat’ should have the following two conditions: (1) having participated more or less in the people’s democratic movement (including the uprising) before liberation or took a neutral attitude before liberation and participated in the people’s democratic activities after liberation; and (2) having a certain representation in the middle class or non-CPC political parties.”

³⁸ In 2021, the CPC Central Committee issued the Opinions on Strengthening the Ideological and Political Work of Intellectuals Outside the CPC and Capacity Building of Non-affiliate Representatives, which provided important guidelines for the capacity building of non-affiliates including the criteria for identification.

firmness, outstanding performance and public recognition” as the basic criteria for identifying non-affiliate representatives, and the fundamental requirement for their capacity building.

Figure 1 - Positioning of Non-affiliates



3.2.2 Motivation for the reform Regulations and policy basis for political participation of non-affiliates

The CPC Central Committee has formulated relevant intra-Party laws and regulations, and issued a series of documents on the safeguarding, support, and assistance of non-CPC parties and non-affiliates to strengthen their capacity building and internal supervision. While the existing relevant regulations and policies repeatedly confirm that non-affiliates are important members of the multiparty cooperation and political consultation system led by the CPC, they simultaneously clarify the political participation of non-affiliates with reference to non-CPC parties, inclusive of political consultation, democratic oversight, and political participation.

Table 2 - Policies and regulations related to political participation of non-affiliates

Year of promulgation	Document	Relevant stipulations
1989	Opinions on Adhering to and Improving the Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation System under the Leadership of the CPC	The multiparty cooperation include cooperation both between the CPC and non-CPC political parties and between the CPC and non-affiliates.
2000	Opinions on Strengthening the Work of non-affiliates	Strengthening the work of non-affiliates encourages them to adhere to and improve the multiparty cooperation and political consultation system, which is always an important task of CPC’s united front work.

Year of promulgation	Document	Relevant stipulations
2005	Opinions on Further Strengthening the Capacity Building of the Multiparty Cooperation and Political Consultation System under the Leadership of the CPC	i) Non-affiliates have an important status and role in the multiparty cooperation and political consultation system. ii) The advantages of non-affiliates should be fully inspired and institutional support should be enhanced to encourage them to play an active role in political participation and democratic oversight. iii) The appointment of non-CPC political parties and non-affiliates to leading positions in the government is an important method in the realization of multiparty cooperation.
2006	Opinions on Consolidating and Strengthening the United Front in the New Century and New Stage	Focus should be placed on the capacity building of non-affiliate representatives.
2012	Opinions on Strengthening the Capacity Building of Representatives outside the CPC	Clarifying the criteria of recognizing non-affiliate representatives; measures of enhancing the capacity building of non-affiliate representatives.
2021	Regulations on the Work of the United Front of the CPC (Revised)	i) Non-affiliates are an important part of political consultation. Relevant support should be enhanced for the non-CPC political parties and non-affiliates to participate in consultation in several areas, such as for the National People's Congress (NPC), the government, the CPPCC, etc. ii) The basic functions of non-CPC political parties include participation in political affairs, democratic oversight, and political consultation. The non-affiliates perform their functions with reference to non-CPC political parties.
2021	Opinions on Strengthening the Ideological and Political Work of non-CPC Intellectuals and Capacity Building of Non-affiliate Representatives	The non-affiliates, primarily intellectuals, are an important part of multiparty cooperation and political consultation, and are a force for political participation in socialism with Chinese characteristics.
2021	White Paper on China's New Political Party System: Cooperation and Consultation	China's new political party system includes the CPC and eight other political parties, as well as non-affiliates.
2022	Regulations on Political Consultation Work of the CPC	Explicit inclusion of non-affiliates as participants of political party consultation, and that of the CPPCC.

3.2.3 Primary channels and platforms for non-affiliates to play their role

The political growth of non-affiliates requires capacity enhancement and influence expansion, which depends on the provision of clear and complete institutionalized guidelines and guarantees. At present, there are three primary channels and platforms for non-affiliates to play their role. First, non-affiliates in the CPPCC organizations at or above the county-level play their role as a sector. The second is the consultation mechanism between party committees at the county level and above, and non-CPC parties and non-affiliates. Third, is that the United Front Work Department has set up organizations such as Intellectuals outside the CPC Association and the New Social Stratum Association.³⁹ It is now a common practice nationwide to use these platforms to contact and organize non-affiliates and provide them with political guidance.

³⁹ As China's reform and opening up deepens and our socialist market economy develops, a profound change has taken place in the

Accordingly, the political treatment of non-affiliates is primarily reflected in the “three major arrangements” made for them: political arrangement, arrangement of position with actual power, responsibility, and social arrangement. The political arrangements for non-affiliates are primarily reflected in the increase of the proportion of non-affiliates among the deputies to the NPC and CPPCC members at all levels. The arrangement of positions with actual power and responsibility primarily refers to non-affiliates taking up positions in government departments. Social arrangements primarily refer to how non-affiliates serve as members of the leadership teams of social organizations, such as the Intellectual Association and the New Social Stratum Association.

3.3 The Actual Situation of the Role of Non-affiliates: A Case Study of W, the Capital city of H Province

Together with the exploration of how non-affiliates are positioned in China’s new political party system, and the institutional guarantees for their role in political participation, it is necessary to specifically examine the role played by non-affiliates in real political life. This section considers non-affiliates and the current situation of the role they played in W, the capital city of H province, and its sub-districts, and carries out the research and analysis by distributing questionnaires, face-to-face or telephone interviews, and symposiums.

3.3.1 General evaluation of the role of non-affiliates in W city and analysis of influencing factors

Overall, the role of non-affiliates basically involves the three aspects of political consultation, democratic oversight, and political participation, and their effectiveness and influence varies greatly. In particular, non-affiliates who accept the three above arrangements are much more outstanding in their willingness and ability to participate in politics, and they play a greater role in the performance of their duties, as demonstrated by the questionnaire and interviews. This further proves that the three major arrangements for non-affiliates are effective channels to enable the realization of their roles in an appropriately organized manner.

Evaluating their own political participation ability, the feedback from the non-affiliates indicated three scenarios. The first rated the political participation ability of non-affiliates as high, even “much better than the non-CPC political parties,” because “non-affiliates are all high-level intellectuals who have already made achievements in their respective professions.” The second is that not enough is known about the current political participation ability of non-affiliates. Third, their ability of political participation is lower than that of members from non-CPC political parties, and requires further improvement. There is difference in evaluation as some believe that “the level and ability of political participation of non-affiliates is related to their personal will and their working fields, as well as their social influence,” and “related to the leadership and organization of the United Front Work Department and the social organizations led by the United Front Work Department.”

With regard to the factors that affect the performance of non-affiliates, the questionnaire demonstrates that both objective and subjective factors restrict their role considerably. In particular, poor channels and inadequate mechanisms (34%) are the most prominent reasons. The lack of relevant assessment and incentive mechanisms (12%) also affects the enthusiasm of non-affiliates to participate in politics; while the desire (26%) and ability (27%) of non-affiliates to participate in politics also have significant impact.

country’s economic structure - the emergence of a new social strata. The strata are mainly composed of non-public business people and freelance intellectuals, mostly working in new economic and social organizations. The new social strata comprise technologists in private technology firms, managers in foreign-funded companies, the self-employed, entrepreneurs, employees in brokerage firms and freelance professionals. Under the guidance of the Party and the government, they have made important contributions to the country’s social economic development through their honest labor and work and lawful business operations.

3.3.2 Primary obstacles to the role non-affiliates play in W city

As noted above, there are several obstacles faced by non-affiliates. The first is the lack of unified standard of political identification and the lack of accurate recognition of the positioning of non-affiliates in China's political party system. While the Regulations of the Central Committee on United Front Work provides a definition of non-affiliates, there is no specific standard for nationwide identification, nor is there a province-wide or city-wide implementation rule on how to identify non-affiliates based on the above definition, especially regarding judging their "having the desire and ability to participate in politics," and "having positive contribution and certain influence in society." Due to this, the specific identification criteria and working procedures of the United Front Work Department of W city and that of its districts differ greatly, and the development of personnel is also uneven. Although both the province of H and the city of W have successively carried out the registration and identification of non-affiliates, the lists and character pools of non-affiliates at each level are independent of each other, and have not yet been connected. This has led to a certain degree of duplication and omission in identification at different levels, and made it more arbitrary and lacking in authority and standardization; it also invited a situation where a small number of non-affiliates did not understand their political identity. After joining the CPC or being absorbed by non-CPC parties, their identity information is not updated in a timely manner. The lists and databases of non-affiliates are not updated frequently, and the accuracy of the information is poor. Therefore, the exact number of non-affiliates of W city are not officially known at present. From the data reported by some sub-districts, the number, age structure, concentration of industry fields, and the three major arrangements of non-affiliates in each district demonstrate significant differences.

Non-affiliates primarily apply to and are absorbed by the United Front Work Department, and since their identity recognition is different from that of non-CPC political party members, their identification needs to go through a certain cultivation process. Therefore, the identification of non-affiliates depends largely on the proper organization and cultivation of the United Front Work Department. However, the interviews and seminar with the United Front Work Department staff illustrates some inaccurate understanding and perception of the political attributes and proper role of non-affiliates, which has led to insufficient attention being paid to them. For example, some think that non-affiliates are only "individual" participants in politics, and that the three arrangements for non-affiliates are formalized and embellished. Inconsistent, inaccurate, and even deviant understanding of the political position and role of non-affiliates affects the development of related work within the United Front Work Department, and further affects the enhancement of their political identity, the stimulation of their willingness to participate politically, and the cultivation of their ability to participate.

The second obstacle is the poor political treatment of non-affiliates. Compared to members of non-CPC political parties, some identified non-affiliates are not provided with clear political development plans and arrangements. For example, in terms of political promotion channels according to general political practice, the chairmen and vice chairmen of non-CPC political parties at the central level serve as vice chairmen of the Standing Committee of NPC and of the CPPCC at the same level. Similarly, the chairmen or vice chairmen of non-CPC political parties above the municipal level also have corresponding leadership positions in the CPPCC at the same level. In contrast, there are fewer cases of non-affiliate representatives serving as vice chairmen of the CPPCC at the same level, as is the case in W city. This reflects the disparity in political treatment between non-affiliate representatives and leading cadres of non-CPC political parties. It also objectively leads to the generalization of the political identity of non-affiliate representatives, i.e., the identification of political identity does not guarantee the corresponding political treatment. This leads those who are selected and who have been waiting for a long time to change their minds and join the CPC or be absorbed by non-CPC political parties, to achieve relatively clear political development.

The questionnaire survey illustrates that while 70% of the respondents are willing to continue to retain their status as non-affiliates, about 15% still explicitly express their desire to join the CPC or be absorbed into non-CPC political parties, and about 15% are undecided about their future political identity plans. This reflects that a certain proportion of non-affiliates have a more diluted attitude toward their political identity, which manifests itself in the low enthusiasm of participation in relevant activities, inaccurate understanding of their identity, and mismatch between their willingness and ability to participate in politics and deliberation. The change in the mindset of non-affiliates reflects, on the one hand, misconceptions such as the belief that joining the CPC is better for personal development, or that their joining non-CPC parties is more likely to receive attention and care from the organization. On the other hand, it also reflects the reality of the lack of equality and clarity in the political development of non-affiliates in comparison to party members.

The third obstacle includes the lack of an appropriate working mechanism for non-affiliates to play their role. According to the questionnaire survey, the most prominent factors that affect the role of non-affiliates are poor channels and inadequate mechanisms. The United Front Work Department of the W city CPC committee has a division of non-CPC political parties, which is specifically responsible for the work activities of the non-CPC political parties. The work activities related to the non-affiliates used to be primarily undertaken by the division of intellectuals outside the CPC, and now the division of New Social Strata. However, intellectuals outside the CPC include both those who do not join any political party, and those who join a non-CPC political party; therefore, the work for non-affiliates is only part of the work of the division of intellectuals outside the CPC. Although most people from the new social strata are outside the Party-government system, they are not exactly non-affiliates. In other words, no specific working division dedicated to non-affiliates exists. Therefore, the platform for them to play their role is obviously weaker than that of non-CPC political parties, and they lack both the function of organizational absorption and cultivation.

With the lack of strong organizational support from the United Front Work Department, non-affiliates are in a relatively weaker position in the political arena in comparison to political parties and other social groups. The opinions and suggestions of non-affiliates are easily perceived as personal prejudices, which makes it difficult for them to achieve an effect of participation and democratic oversight similar to that of non-CPC political parties.

4 Discussion

Based on their distinctive historical formation and political opposition, the role played by non-affiliates in China's new political party system is unique. Non-affiliates have both individual and group attributes. On the one hand, non-affiliates are naturally individual. The basic manner in which they participate in political life is as individuals, not as a group. They are naturally individualistic and independent, and do not want to be "partisanized" or "organized." On the other hand, from the perspective of their growth pattern, non-affiliates have experienced the transformation from being "professional elites" to "political representatives." From ordinary intellectuals in various fields to outstanding professionals, this process primarily depends on the efforts of individuals themselves. This is also the reason why these professional elites are identified by the United Front Work Department, and recognized as non-affiliates. Non-affiliates have clear political aspirations at different instances, greater influence among the masses they associate with, and demonstrate outstanding performance and positive contributions in their respective fields. Therefore, they are also of a partisan nature in a substantial sense. The recognition of this uniqueness is a prerequisite for the stimulation of their role in political participation.

The appropriate organization of non-affiliates as a political group in some form is the first step to the promotion of their role. Standardized, serious, and authoritative criteria and procedures for the identifica-

tion of non-affiliates can enhance their self-identity and social identity, and thus promote their endogenous motivation to play their role. The United Front Work Department at all levels should conduct standardized identification and registration in a timely manner, establish a shared list that is linked up and down, and regularly update the information and data. Additionally, a hierarchical sub-unit system should be implemented for the list of non-affiliates and their representatives at various levels, and the United Front Work Department of the municipal party committee should coordinate the lists at all levels.

The intra-Party rules and policies should provide a relatively clear and complete chain of political development and growth for non-affiliates, especially the non-affiliate representatives who are politically committed, have outstanding performance, are socially visible, and have greater influence among the masses. Most of them are elites in various fields, have a certain influence, and are irreplaceable mediums for the CPC through which to contact the people. Additionally, intra-Party regulations and policies should provide clear institutional guarantees for political participation by non-affiliates. On the basis of the top-level design, local CPC committees should strengthen the formulation and introduction of targeted and operational implementation rules and opinions, in order to ensure that non-affiliates are treated on an equal footing with non-CPC political parties in the political participation.

The leading role of the United Front Work Departments at all levels should be fully stimulated to establish a regular working mechanism for non-affiliates, should incorporate the work related to non-affiliates into the overall planning of the grant united front work, and include it in the management of target responsibilities. It should be done to establish a special contact and information collection system for non-affiliates, and the staff of the United Front Work Department should contact non-affiliates regularly, as well as establish and improve the comprehensive evaluation system for the performance of duties and so forth.

With regard to the various platforms, at present, the diversified functions of the various associations such as New Social Stratum Association, the Intellectuals outside the CPC Association, and the Associations of European and American Alumni should be further stimulated; this would highlight the political leadership function of affiliated organizations, expand their think-tank function, and explore the political participation channels of affiliated organizations. Additionally, the CPPCC is an important platform for non-affiliates to play their role as a political group. Further attention should be paid to the role and effect of the participation of non-affiliates in the plenary sessions, consultation meetings, inspections, and proposals of the CPPCC. This would ensure a certain proportion of the sector of non-affiliates of the CPPCC, strengthen the degree of organization and standardization of the sector of non-affiliates, fortify the system of sector conveners, and aid the conduction of multiform and multi-level sector activities.

Although national laws, intra-Party regulations, and relevant policies have repeatedly confirmed the political status of non-affiliates as participants in the new party system, the role of political participation often requires a certain political identity and institutional mechanisms and platforms to guarantee participation effectiveness. Unlike the evaluation of the role of non-affiliates and non-CPC political parties as a whole, a city-based examination of the specific role of non-affiliates in political participation can more precisely identify extant problems and obstacles. Unlike political parties and social groups, non-affiliates cannot participate in politics as a formal organized group; thus, it begs the question of how to guarantee their political identity, enthusiasm for political participation, and the actual effect of performing their duties as “individual” non-affiliates. The case study also supported this by showing that the key issue that restricts the role of non-affiliates is promoting their role in an organized form without the establishment of formal political organizations.

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