

# Study on the Birth Background of Mao Zedong's Water Conservancy Construction Thought

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## Abstract

**In the historical narrative of the Communist Party of China, Mao Zedong played a vital role in China's water conservancy construction. To accurately understand Mao Zedong's water conservancy construction thought, we must discuss its decision-making and reasons from its background. Mao Zedong must also consider water conservancy construction from the practical problems of winning revolutionary victory, consolidating the new political power and carrying out socialist modernization. Mao Zedong has always adhered to the attitude of seeking truth from facts, made decisions on water conservancy construction according to the basic national conditions, flexibly mastered the leadership method of "coming from the masses to the masses", which promoted the development of China's water conservancy construction.**

## Keywords

**Mao Zedong; Water conservancy construction; Time background.**

## 1. Introduction

In the narration of the history of the CPC, Mao Zedong has played a vital role in China's water conservancy construction. In fact, Mao Zedong is not a water conservancy expert, but a leader of China's revolution and construction. Chinese domestic scholars often subconsciously regard Mao Zedong as a water conservancy expert to discuss his water conservancy construction thought, or view its water conservancy construction in different stages in isolation, which obviously does not consider his views, decisions and opinions from the background of the times and the identity characteristics of the characters themselves. This paper intends to return to the specific environment in which Mao Zedong led China's revolution and construction, and discuss his understanding of water conservancy construction in Mao Zedong's specific propositions on revolutionary war, political power construction and national economic construction.

## 2. Construction of Water Conservancy During the Revolutionary War

Since ancient times, building water conservancy in peacetime is the basic means to be rich and strengthen the people. Therefore, most scholars only pay attention to the water conservancy construction after the founding of new China, and often ignore Mao Zedong's water conservancy construction and his ideas during the revolutionary war. This inevitably makes it impossible to fully understand Mao Zedong's water conservancy construction thought from a long-term perspective.

Carrying out the revolutionary war requires economic construction. The course of China's revolution is a process of striving for strength with weakness. Weakness means that there have always been economic difficulties such as insufficient supply in the revolutionary war. Mao Zedong once pointed out that "surrounded by white forces, the lack of daily necessities and cash has become a great problem". "If there cannot be an appropriate way for economic problems, under the stability of the enemy forces and a long period, the separatist regime will encounter great difficulties." [1] To solve the problem, Mao Zedong stressed that to ensure the existence

and development of the red regime, we must solve the economic problems, but such economic construction "must surround the central task of the revolutionary war", and all the Party's economic construction work "should be for the victory of the revolutionary war". [1]

Economic construction is achieved by mobilizing the masses to support the revolution. "Mobilizing the broad masses to participate in the revolutionary war" is the central task of the revolution. (The mobilization to support the war includes the mobilization of personnel and materials) How can we mobilize the masses to participate in the revolutionary war? Mao Zedong stressed that we should not neglect "the vital interests of the broad masses and the lives of the masses". If the actual living problems of the people are solved and the people really revolve around the Party, the Party can call on the masses to participate in the revolutionary war. [1] Therefore, since the agrarian revolution and even the victory of the revolution, the Communist Party members have always paid attention to the lives of the people in the base areas. During the Anti-Japanese War, Mao Zedong put forward that "the soldiers and the people were the foundation of victory" and stressed that "the deepest root cause of the great power of the war existed among the people". Starting from the needs of the successful development of the revolutionary war, only by solving the production and construction problems, including water conservancy construction, can we achieve the purpose of mobilizing the masses to participate in the revolution.

Based on this, during the agrarian revolution, Mao Zedong stressed the need to lead farmers to solve the practical difficulties in agricultural production, including water conservancy construction. Therefore, the township representative meeting to discuss the problem to be practical. In Mao Zedong's opinion, water conservancy work such as "repair Pezhen pond and water wheel" is one of the practical problems. [2] In the spring of 1933, when Mao Zedong called the Soviet cadres from Shuishi Township in Wuyang District to report on the spring ploughing, he instructed him to report the construction of water conservancy first, starting from the transformation of Pitang. After listening to the report, Mao Zedong instructed the Land Department of the Central Government to write the Outline of the Summer Cultivation Movement, introducing the experience of Wuyang and taking the restoration of water conservancy as one of the central work of summer tillage. At that time, the Ministry of Land of the Central Government asked the base areas: "Water pipes, water channels and ponds should not only repair the old ones, but also build new ones. The water shortage places should be excavated in the highlands, and the water wheel that is not repaired should continue to be repaired. Carts along the river should be set up, water is the lifeblood of rice paddy fields, if there is no water, the population's fertilizer will be in vain. The township government should organize a water conservancy committee to lead the development of water conservancy in the whole township." [3]

There were no large-scale water conservancy construction activities during the revolutionary war, but it is obvious that Mao Zedong's thinking logic on the relationship between water conservancy and revolutionary war can be seen, which was fully reflected in the water conservancy construction in the 1950s.

### **3. Water Conservancy Construction in Political Power Construction**

In the early 1950s, the flood control of major rivers was always regarded as a part of economic recovery. In fact, in the view of Mao Zedong and other CPC leaders, it was more closely related to the consolidation of the new regime.

The revolutionary war led by the Communist Party of China eventually had to build a new China. It was not easy to win the revolution, and it was harder to establish and consolidate new regime after the revolution. Mao Zedong had long realized that the inevitable difficulty was needed to establish the people's regime after the victory of the revolution, because some people in some

new liberated areas "were" confused in the face of economic and personal difficulties caused by natural and man-made disasters and the blockade of the enemy's lives ".[4] As Mao Zedong expected, the economic difficulties caused by floods and wars in the early days of the founding of the Republic of China were more serious than the war.

According to statistics at the end of 1949, compared with the large reduction of the national labor force before the war, the serious disaster famine led to food production reduction, productivity fell sharply, the most urgent is the serious flood disaster and the problem caused by the out of cooking. The flood in 1949 led to 12,160 mu of flooded arable land, 40 million victims, reducing grain production by at least 1 billion kilograms in a single year. [5] In northern Anhui, with the worst flood, "flooded about 28 million mu and the ridge of hundreds of miles. The affected population has reached eight million in the past eight months, and more than four million yuan". The phenomenon of ordinary people breaking from cooking is very serious. [6] Clearly, severe flooding has greatly threatened the stability of the newborn regime.

Mao Zedong had a deep understanding of the serious floods everywhere. According to the existing files and documents, Mao Zedong is directly concerned about the flood problem of the Huaihe River and the Yangtze River and the hanging river problem of the Yellow River. For example, in terms of flood of the Huaihe River, in July 1950, the report from northern Anhui to the East China Bureau and the Central Committee pointed out that "150 townships in Fuyang area were flooded, the depth of the ground was more than deep, and all the crops in the houses were flooded". [7] The severe flood followed the situation that Mao Zedong had expected before the founding of the People's Republic of China, and it can naturally understand why Mao Zedong attached so much importance to the large watershed governance of the Huai River, the Jingjiang River and the Yellow River.

To overcome difficulties, consolidate the new people's regime need production relief, solve the people urgently need to solve problems, in order to restore and develop agricultural production. Before the founding of the People's Republic of the country, Mao Zedong pointed out that once the soil reform was completed, "the Party and the democratic government must immediately put forward the task of restoring and developing agricultural production", including water conservancy, to increase production possible. [8] After the founding of the People's Republic of China, Mao Zedong and other leaders paid more attention to the watershed governance of great rivers to consolidate the new regime. For example, after Mao Zedong made the decision to govern the Huai River, the Northern Jiangsu District Committee worried that the commitment to the soil reform could not take the governance of the Huai River into account, and it would be difficult to manage the Huaihe River. However, Mao Zedong's instructions on this were "to guide Huai, Jiangsu, Anhui and Henan work at the same time, and the work plan of the Party committees of the three provinces must be taken as the center." [9] In this regard, Zhou Enlai explained that "building water conservancy is of great significance to cooperate with soil reform, otherwise, a flood is thousands of mu, and the achievements of rural land reform are difficult to consolidate". [10]

It can be seen that compared with the long-term socialist modernization task, the focus of the Party and state leaders represented by Mao Zedong should handle serious floods and restore and develop agricultural to increase production, and thus consolidate the new people's political power in this period.

#### **4. Water Conservancy and Modernization Construction**

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the Party's task was to develop China from a backward agricultural country to an advanced industrial country. Poor agricultural country means that new China is "poor" new China, all walks of life have "using simple backward tools and tools to work"; although the majority of farmers' lives have improved than before, but

"many people still have difficulties". And the construction funds needed for socialist industrialization, "a considerable part should be accumulated from agriculture", which requires the development of agriculture on the basis of cooperation, and then increase agricultural production. [11] The development of irrigation and water conservancy is the inevitable choice to achieve agricultural production increase.

Compared with the large-scale watershed management measures advocated by Mao Zedong in the early days of the founding of the country, Mao Zedong now preferred small irrigation and water conservancy projects. In 1956, when meeting with the delegation of the Mongolian People's Revolutionary Party, Mao Zedong proposed to build small water conservancy projects: well, storage reservoir, sluice, reservoir, flood storage ditch and other. "[12] A large number of small water conservancy" is also one of Mao Zedong proposals from the "17 Agricultural Articles", The "National Agricultural Development Program for the Period from 1956 to 1967" formed on the basis of the "Seventeen Agricultural Articles" emphasized that "from 1956, within 12 years, the development of national water conservancy undertakings will be used to build small and medium-sized water conservancy projects". The reason is that Mao Zedong obviously took into account the poor basic national conditions and the actual needs of agricultural development. Large and medium-sized water conservancy projects can effectively solve water and drought disasters, but there are both technical difficulties and material difficulties to build them in an all-scale way in poor China. Limited large-scale water conservancy projects can solve the floods of major rivers, but it is far from impossible to solve the common water and drought disasters everywhere. In fact, every year, a large number of farmland in the south suffer from water, drought and other disasters to different degrees.

Mao Zedong believed that only by organizing the masses to build small irrigation and water conservancy projects can we solve the problems of ordinary floods and droughts in a short term. First, small irrigation and water conservancy projects can make agricultural production "in addition to the irresistible early drought, to ensure water in drought and flood drainage". Secondly, the organization and cooperative masses to build small irrigation and water conservancy projects "for themselves, for the collective, for the country", [13] legal and reasonable; and can save the national financial expenditure, because all small water conservancy projects are "systematically responsible in a large number by agricultural production cooperatives", the state to assist if necessary. Third, "small water conservancy is what can be done by each county, district, township and cooperatives", which meets the urgent demand for water conservancy construction that the national technical conditions do not meet. [12]

Emphasizing the construction of small irrigation and water conservancy projects does not mean the neglect of large water conservancy construction. Small water conservancy construction in Agriculture Article 17 is the water conservancy construction idea combined with river basin planning. In other words, we should not only consider the large-scale construction of small water conservancy projects to solve the practical needs, but also take the long-term consideration, and the state invests in the construction of large water conservancy projects from the long-term consideration, and comprehensively control water and drought disasters.

To sum up, the water conservancy construction proposition proposed by Mao Zedong during the socialist modernization construction period was based on China's national conditions at that time and in line with the actual needs of the socialist modernization construction, which thus promoted the water conservancy construction cause in the 1950s and 1960s and laid the foundation for the follow-up water conservancy construction.

## 5. Internal Logic of Mao Zedong's Thought on Water Conservancy Construction

Summarizing Mao Zedong's exposition and basic viewpoints on water conservancy construction in different historical periods, Mao Zedong has a reasonable thinking logic, that is, the attitude of seeking truth from facts, the basic position of taking the people as the center and the leadership method of coming from the masses to the masses.

(1) Seeking practical from realistic attitude towards water conservancy construction. Mao Zedong has always emphasized seeking truth from facts, he opposed "only understand theory and not understand the actual situation". [8] In the revolutionary years, the victory was the biggest practical problem facing the Party, the establishment and consolidation of new regime and the socialist modernization became the new one. Therefore, in the revolutionary era, Mao Zedong stressed the need to investigate and study the practical problems in the Chinese revolutionary environment; after the victory of the revolution, the focus of the Party shifted from rural to urban, from revolution to construction, and study and economic construction. Water conservancy construction is one of the decisive factors of agricultural production, and agricultural production is closely related to the revolutionary war, the stability of political power and national economic construction. From revolution to construction, Mao Zedong on water conservancy construction undoubtedly closely around the revolution, regime construction and economic construction three different era themes, its decision on water conservancy construction fully takes into account the urgent demand of war for materials, the threat to the stability of regime and new China financial tension, technology and backward basic reality.

(2) Basic position on people-centered water conservancy construction. People-centered, Mao Zedong stressed that "the key to all problems is politics, and all politics lies in the people. Without solving the problem of whether the people, nothing is said." [14] To serve the people, "what should adapt to the interests of the people, we should adhere to, what should contradict the interests of the people, we should strive to get rid of, so that we can be invincible in the world." [14] Mao Zedong considered the Party's requirements for water conservancy construction in different historical periods based on the standpoint of the people. In the revolutionary war years, the Party and the government must first solve the production difficulties, including water conservancy, to realize the support of the Party to fully mobilize the people and the country to solve the safety of people's life and property; industrialization requires financial support for agriculture, but this support is based on the Party and government organizations to develop small irrigation and water conservancy projects to increase agricultural production.

(3) Basic methods of water conservancy construction of "coming from the masses, going to the masses". The revolution and construction cannot be separated from the people, the Chinese revolution is led by the proletariat, the peasants of the people are the main force; New China is the people's democratic dictatorship, the people are the master of the country and the main force of modernization. Relying on the masses to pay attention to methods, Mao Zedong stressed that all the people's actual work of the party, "where the correct leadership, must be from the masses, to the masses, to the masses", the scattered unorganized masses opinions concentrated (after research, into centralized systematic opinions), and to the masses, into the masses opinions, make the masses insist, see in the action, and in the masses action whether these opinions are correct, and concentrated from the masses, and then to the masses. [15] Undoubtedly, Mao Zedong's water conservancy decision in the process of revolution, political power construction and modernization was a systematic decision made after fully considering the opinions of the masses in different periods, and returned to the masses and relied on the masses to build a water conservancy project suitable for the needs of the people.



## 6. Conclusion

Summing up the basic views of a historical figure in a certain aspect, Chinese domestic scholars often treat the speech of the figure in isolation, and can not discuss the basic views and reasons for dealing with a problem from the historical environment of the figure, which often leads to the phenomenon of self-talk and too subjective tendency. Summarizing Mao Zedong's Thought on water conservancy construction is a decision made by Mao Zedong in line with the national conditions based on the needs and actual situation in different historical periods. It contains Mao Zedong's basic thinking logic of looking at problems: a realistic attitude, adhering to the basic position of taking the people as the center, and flexibly mastering the leadership method of "coming from the masses and going to the masses".

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