

Theoretical logic, practical pattern and spatial expansion of "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era

Jing Lv , Weibin Zhang, Ji Chen

School of Law, Anhui University of Finance and Economics, Bengbu 233030, China

Abstract

"Maple Bridge Experience" is a model experience in the socialist education movement. It has continuously innovated and developed in practice and has become the banner and paradigm in China's grassroots social governance. Guided by Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era has been greatly improved and sublimated in the main body, concept and pattern of social governance. At this stage, the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era has achieved remarkable governance results in the dimension of grassroots social governance and judicial practice, showing an advanced demonstration and leading role. In the future, it should further broaden the applicable space of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era in the Internet field, transportation and emergency fire protection, and solve the society. Contradictions, stimulate social vitality, and continue to innovate and carry forward the value of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era.

Keywords

"Maple Bridge Experience" in The New Era; Theoretical Logic; Practical Pattern; Spatial Expansion.

1. Introduction

During the Fifth Plenary Session of the 19th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, the "Proposal for Formulating the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Term Goals for 2035" was passed. This proposal emphasized that during the "14th Five-Year" period, significant efforts should be made to improve social governance, particularly grassroots governance. The 20th National Congress report further deepened and clarified this requirement, proposing the continued development of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in grassroots governance under the new era. The report emphasized the need to correctly address the internal contradictions of the people in the new situation, improve the urban and rural community governance system, and resolve conflicts at the grassroots level and in their infancy. This provides new governance concepts and strategic ideas for grassroots social governance in the new era. The "Maple Bridge Experience," created by grassroots cadres and the masses in Zhuji, Zhejiang Province, during the socialist education movement of the 1960s, became a model for learning across the country. It was widely promoted and played a significant role during a specific historical period. As socialism with Chinese characteristics entered a new era and the fundamental contradictions of the people gradually changed, the relevance of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in grassroots social governance began to wane. However, it is crucial to note that while its forms of expression may change, its core spirit remains unchanged. How to extract the theoretical essence embedded in the "Maple Bridge Experience" and apply it scientifically and rationally to grassroots governance practice—ultimately creating a social governance model based on co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits in the new era—holds significant theoretical and practical value.

2. Theoretical Logic of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the New Era

2.1. Theoretical traceability: the ever-lasting experience of Maple Bridge

The founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949 marked a period of severe domestic and international challenges. The international community, led by the United States and capitalist countries, adopted a policy of "political isolation, military threat, and economic blockade" against the new China. Domestically, the situation was also dire, with the Kuomintang retreating to Taiwan and inciting rebellion through agents, bandits, and counterrevolutionaries, all of whom engaged in violent activities that severely disrupted the economy and social order. Against this backdrop, Mao Zedong called for strengthening the Party's own construction and using the socialist education movement to correct the remnants of imperialist, feudal, and capitalist ideologies within China. The goal was to resolve contradictions at the grassroots level through the active involvement of the people. [1] In 1963, responding to the central government's call, the Zhejiang Provincial Party Committee initiated a pilot socialist education program in Maple Bridge District, Zhuji County, marking the birth of the "Maple Bridge Experience." The "Maple Bridge Experience" of the new era inherits the social governance model from the 1960s, which emphasized resolving small issues at the village level, larger issues at the town level, and preventing conflicts from being escalated to higher authorities, thereby resolving them locally. Over time, its scope has expanded, moving beyond the resolution of social security issues to include land expropriation, demolition disputes, labor disputes, and the management of migrant populations, covering all aspects and fields of social governance. China has always placed great importance on the rule of law, with successive leaders continuously improving and strengthening the national legal framework. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China's legal modernization has entered a new historical phase, with the principles of rule of law being implemented across all areas of national governance.

2.2. The Value Interpretation of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the New Era

The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era enriches and develops the theory of social governance with Chinese characteristics. Guided by Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the "Maple Bridge Experience" has undergone continuous transformation and elevation. At present, the core of the new era "Maple Bridge Experience" is the creation of a new governance model based on co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits. The concept of co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits can be traced back to fundamental Marxist principles. In Engels' work, *The Principles of Communism*, he discusses the formation of a collective union of all members of society, where productivity is jointly utilized according to a planned approach. Through industrial education and job diversification, all members equally share the benefits created by collective efforts. [2] This idea of "all members of society," "planned collective production," and "shared benefits" closely aligns with the concept of co-construction, co-governance, and shared benefits in the "Maple Bridge Experience" of the new era. In this sense, the new era "Maple Bridge Experience" represents a transformation of Marxist classical theory into concrete practice for contemporary social governance. Under the guidance of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era, everyone engages in labor and participation—achieving co-construction and co-governance. This leads to the creation of sufficient material wealth for all to use and the establishment of a harmonious social atmosphere—fulfilling the idea of shared benefits. The "Maple Bridge Experience" has evolved from grassroots social management to grassroots social governance, further being elevated into a typical paradigm for modernizing the governance system and governance capabilities of grassroots society. It provides a practical foundation for Xi Jinping's theory of social governance and injects vital momentum into the theory of social governance

with Chinese characteristics. It holds significant value for the governance model of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

3. Practical Forms of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the New Era

The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era exhibits unique, multifaceted dispute resolution capabilities and serves as a model for contemporary conflict-resolution mechanisms. Under the guidance of Xi Jinping's Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, the "Maple Bridge Experience" has been imbued with new value and significance. It plays an essential role in both grassroots governance and the judicial dimension, continuously infusing its theoretical foundations with new vitality and energy.

3.1. The Practice of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in Grassroots Social Governance in the New Era

If grassroots stability is ensured, then national stability follows. If grassroots governance is effective, national governance will be effective. Grassroots social governance is the cornerstone of overall social governance and serves as the foundation of national governance. The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era emphasizes the importance of social norms and continues to enrich and improve institutional safeguards. Through the active establishment of village regulations, community agreements, and other forms of social norms, it guarantees that citizens can equally and autonomously exercise their democratic rights and actively participate in the management and decision-making of social affairs. This approach has proven particularly effective in grassroots community governance. The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era advocates a "contract-based governance model"—a governance approach in which villagers (or residents) in specific local units (such as villages or communities) create social norms through extensive communication and democratic consultation. This model is based on principles of freedom and equality and follows transparent procedures while adhering to the rule of law. The "contract-based governance model" combines self-governance, rule of law, and moral governance. The governance model proposed by Zhuji City—"Party and government leadership, comprehensive coordination, public participation, social collaboration, and legal protection"—is a concrete manifestation of this contract-based governance concept. In contemporary social governance, which adopts a multi-centered, egalitarian governance model, the "contract-based governance model" significantly improves the efficiency of self-negotiation, decision-making, and action, thus maximizing the incorporation of societal will.[3]

3.2. The Practice of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the Judicial Dimension in the New Era

The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era is rooted in the people, originates from the people, and serves the people. Since its inception, it has achieved remarkable results in the field of judicial practice. For example, in its birthplace, the Shaoxing Court in Zhejiang province, the "Maple Bridge Model" was pioneered, leading to significant innovations. All six grassroots people's courts in the city have collectively stationed at county-level social governance centers as needed, while 30 district people's courts have been permanently assigned to town and village-level social governance centers. As a result, over 90% of disputes are initially filtered

¹ Contract-Based Governance Model: This model operates within defined local units—such as villages or residential communities—where, under the principles of freedom and equality, residents collectively establish social norms through extensive communication and democratic consultation. These norms, formalized as village regulations or community covenants, are adopted via transparent procedures and in compliance with the rule of law. The resulting governance approach integrates self-governance, legal governance, and moral governance into a cohesive framework.

through mediation. The city has also established 24 unique mediation teams, such as the "Shiye Mediation Team," and over 60 new mediation workstations and mobile trial points. These efforts have extended the reach of one-stop dispute resolution to communities and villages, creating a modernized, integrated grassroots judicial conflict resolution system.[4] Moreover, the Shaoxing Court has actively explored new models of conflict prevention and resolution, cultivating new "Maple Bridge-style" brands. The most prominent of these is the creation of the "Maple Bridge-style People's Court," which introduced a distinctive prevention and control mechanism involving early warning, prevention, prediction, and remediation of conflicts. This model was successfully selected as a national typical case for the construction of People's Courts in the new era. In 2022, the "Opinions of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council on Key Tasks for Rural Revitalization in 2022" specifically called for the accelerated establishment of "Maple Bridge-style" People's Courts to promote high-quality development in People's Courts work in the new era. The judicial practice of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era has been widely recognized and continues to evolve and innovate.

4. Spatial Expansion of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the New Era

The "new" dimension of the "Maple Bridge Experience" lies chiefly in its evolution from a single-center governance model to one of pluralistic, co-governance. Its governance objectives have likewise shifted from comprehensive public-security management to the modernization of grassroots social governance, positioning it as a flagship for community-level administration and an integral component of the Party's and state's overall governance strategy. General Secretary Xi Jinping has repeatedly stressed the importance of preserving and advancing the "Maple Bridge Experience," as well as faithfully upholding and implementing the Party's mass line.[5]

4.1. Expansion of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the Internet Sector in the New Era

According to the 50th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development released by the China Internet Network Information Center (CNNIC), by June 2022, the number of internet users in China reached 1.051 billion, with a total of 33.8 million domain names, and the internet penetration rate stood at 74.4%. [6] The number of internet users in China continues to grow, and the network access environment is increasingly diverse. The rapid development of the internet has revealed its immense commercial value. Driven by economic interests, some internet companies focus solely on profit, neglecting social responsibility; internet influencers, in a bid to boost their popularity, often abandon ethical boundaries; ordinary netizens, seeking recognition, blindly follow trends; and government regulation has lagged, leading to persistent network issues. In this challenging internet environment, characterized by frequent personal data leaks, prominent online disputes, and the growth of illicit online industries, internet governance urgently requires innovation to enhance comprehensive network governance capabilities. In this context, integrating the "Maple Bridge Experience" into internet governance becomes a viable solution. The concept of combining "rule of law, moral governance, and self-governance" is particularly applicable in the realm of internet governance. It can be used to improve the regulatory capacity of governments and relevant authorities—i.e., rule of law; enhance the social responsibility of internet users and platforms—i.e., moral governance; and encourage active participation from networks and platforms in governance—i.e., self-governance. By forming a collaborative effort among multiple stakeholders, we can jointly create a clean and healthy cyberspace.

4.2. Expansion of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the Transportation Sector in the New Era

In the past decade, China's civil aviation industry has developed rapidly, with an increasing number of stationed units and a growing presence of star-rated hotels and large shopping malls. Airports have essentially formed micro-societies. Due to the influence of these public security factors, various risks tend to concentrate, requiring continuous improvement of management standards, while governance challenges are intensifying. In the governance process at airports, it is essential to effectively allocate available social resources, actively unite various forces, and involve relevant units in the process. It is also crucial to strengthen the definition of safety functions and avoid situations where the pursuit of maximizing economic benefits leads to insufficient investment in safety or a shirking of safety responsibilities. Next, in the context of railway governance, there is a need to adopt the "block" implementation model of the new era "Maple Bridge Experience," innovating it to a "line-based" model. The railway network, which is dense and winding, combined with the recent construction of new railway trunk lines, has made the internal and external environments of railway governance increasingly complex. Relying solely on grassroots railway police and dedicated patrol teams for security management and crime prevention is insufficient. This is where the grassroots community-based, conflict-resolution, and social stability-maintaining approach of the "Maple Bridge Experience" becomes vital in railway governance. Firstly, railway management bodies should collaborate with local governments along the railway lines to establish a "Safe Railway Creation Working Committee," holding regular joint meetings to ensure coordination between different administrative units at various levels for collaborative security management. Secondly, the power of local communities along the railway lines should be fully utilized. By adopting a combined model of specialized railway security and community involvement, patrol teams and volunteers should be organized to work alongside police officers. Together, they can carry out preventive patrols, investigate railway-related conflicts, monitor key individuals, and explore the application of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the context of railway governance.[7]

4.3. Expansion of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the Emergency Firefighting Sector in the New Era

In 2018, emergency management reforms were implemented; however, these reforms did not extend deeply into township-level governance, leading to issues such as "breakdowns" and "disruptions" at the grassroots level. How to integrate grassroots emergency response with fire safety management has become a key research focus and challenge for experts in the field of emergency firefighting. Since fire safety services were transferred to the Ministry of Emergency Management, there has been a lack of oversight at the grassroots level, and the synergy between grassroots fire safety and emergency response systems has not yet been effectively realized. Furthermore, significant problems exist within the grassroots emergency systems themselves: emergency command centers at the grassroots level struggle to integrate and coordinate effectively, while the ability to provide adequate human, financial, and material resources for emergency management is insufficient. Additionally, the participation of the public, businesses, and social organizations remains limited both in scope and depth.[8]

Therefore, implementing the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the emergency firefighting sector in the new era, by allocating resources at the grassroots level, consolidating efforts at the grassroots level, and managing risks at the grassroots level, is the essential choice for forming an efficient and comprehensive grassroots emergency firefighting management model. It also contributes to advancing the modernization of emergency management governance capabilities. Relying on and mobilizing the masses is the core principle of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era. Grassroots emergency firefighting work is closely tied to the safety of people's lives and property, and the power of the public and social organizations is an

indispensable source of strength for effective grassroots emergency firefighting. In emergency firefighting work, a multi-stakeholder collaborative governance approach must be adhered to. It is crucial to harness the strength of the people, widely engage public participation, refine risk identification, conduct thorough research and investigation, and ensure scientific validation. By integrating resources from all sectors of society, we can build a vertically coordinated and unified emergency management system.

5. Conclusion

The "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era combines classic Marxist theory, the guiding principles outlined by General Secretary Xi Jinping, and China's grassroots social governance practices. It fully leverages the power of the people, emphasizing community-based defense and governance to foster social cohesion. The concept of "not treating the illness after it has occurred, but preventing it before it starts" in the "Maple Bridge Experience" highlights the importance of addressing the root causes of conflicts and disputes.² This approach emphasizes root cause governance of conflicts and disputes, which refers to preventing and resolving risks and conflicts from the very beginning, relying on the wisdom and strength of grassroots communities to resolve issues quickly and at minimal cost. It establishes the first line of defense in preventing and resolving social conflicts. The root of conflicts and disputes lies at the grassroots level, and the key to resolving them is also at the grassroots. Effective root cause governance of conflicts and disputes directly impacts whether the "last mile" of social governance can be effectively reached. A well-established mechanism for addressing the root causes of disputes can prevent conflicts that have the potential to escalate, addressing them at the nascent stage. By addressing the root causes, this approach reduces the increase in lawsuits,^[9] fundamentally safeguarding the security and interests of the people, promoting their happiness and well-being, and ensuring social harmony and stability. In the new phase of socialism with Chinese characteristics, it is essential to continue adhering to and innovating the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era. It is vital to focus on its integration and application across various fields, effectively broadening its scope. This will provide fresh impetus for the modernization of the national governance system and governance capabilities, contributing to the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Fund Project

This research was supported by the National Social Sciences Foundation of China (Project No. 24AFX026).

References

- [1] Han Bujiang: The historical logic of Mao Zedong's adherence to and development of the Marxist concept of practice in the early years of the PRC: Focusing on the period from 1949 to 1956. *Academic Forum*, 2016(09), p.8-14.
- [2] Xu Hanming, Shao Denghui.: The historical status and contemporary significance of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in the new era. *Rule of Law Studies*, 2019(03), p.94-108.
- [3] Wang Bintong: Institutional supply for grassroots social governance through the lens of the "Maple Bridge Experience." *China Legal Science*, 2018(06), p. 5-22.

² Root cause governance of conflicts and disputes refers to preventing and resolving risks and conflicts from their origin. By relying on the wisdom and strength of grassroots communities, it aims to resolve issues in the shortest possible time and at the lowest cost, establishing the first line of defense in preventing and resolving social conflicts and disputes.

- [4] Yao Haitao: Judicial practice and innovative paths of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in urban governance in the new era. *China Applied Law Studies*, 2023(02), p.127–136.
- [5] People's Daily Editorial: Let the "Maple Bridge Experience" flourish in the new era [N]. *People's Daily*, 2018(01).
- [6] Li Zhengmao: Release of the 50th Statistical Report on China's Internet Development [EB/OL]. Retrieved June 8, 2023, from https://www.sohu.com/a/581534224_119038
- [7] Jin Huizhong, Tian Zhen: Exploring the application of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in integrating railway security into urban social governance: A case study of the Kunshan Station Police Substation. *Journal of Railway Police College*, 2022(6), p. 25–28.
- [8] Xu Wenbiao, Liu Xiangwei: Application of the "Maple Bridge Experience" in emergency management: A grassroots practice survey in Shaoxing, Zhejiang. *China Emergency Management*, 2023(01), p.70–79.
- [9] Wang Bintong: Legalizing root-cause governance of conflicts and disputes: The New Era "Maple Bridge Experience." *Administrative Management Reform*, 2021(12), p.67–75.