



# Why is Social Justice Possible?

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Social Justice Issues during  
China's Period of Transition

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Zhongmin Wu

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Party School of the Central Committee of CPC  
Beijing, China



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*Dedicated to  
My Father  
and  
My Mother*

## TRANSLATOR'S NOTE

I have used English editions of texts as the source for quotations in this work wherever possible. If no English edition of a text was available, I translated the quotations from the Chinese edition myself. The English translation was copy-edited by Malcolm Thompson, Phillip Neel, Kerry Allen, and Claudia Chen. I would like to express my gratitude to them for their meticulous editing and proofreading.

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## What Kind of Just Society Do We Need?

In order for every member of society to live with dignity and to develop in a better way, in order to meet their ever-increasing material and cultural needs, and for society to operate safely and to develop in a healthy way, we must hold to a common principle—social justice.<sup>1</sup> Social justice is a basic concept and code of conduct with eternal value in all human societies. As John Rawls says, “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (Rawls 1999a).

Social justice is of great importance to a society.

First, social justice is the foundation for the design and arrangement of basic institutions in a modern society. The “normal operation” of a society depends on the existence of systematic rules. The social order of a society without such rules will be vulnerable. Citizens in such a society lack protections for their behavioral and psychological safety, and they lack the trust that is necessary in their interactions with each other. Without rules, there would be no institutional support for citizens’ “long-term behavior.” However, the most important system of rules in a society is the set of institutions, and their design and arrangement require basic values as their foundation. In a modern society, that foundation should be social justice. Thus, the design of social institutions in a modern society must be established on the basic concept of social justice.

<sup>1</sup>Strictly speaking, the term “social justice” can be defined both broadly and narrowly. In its broad sense, it refers to justice within the “social organism,” which is roughly the same as justice in the general or overall sense and involves various fields, including economics, politics, culture, and society. Speaking more precisely, though, the term social justice refers only to justice in the social sphere of the “social organism.” Considering language habits and other factors, the term as it is used in this book mainly refers to justice in a broad sense. There are distinctions, however; emphasis is sometimes also placed on justice in the social sphere. Further, although there are nuances between the meanings of “justice” and “righteousness” (see the relevant analysis in Chap. 2), they are basically synonymous. For convenience, as the two terms are interchangeable in most circumstances, they are used indiscriminately in this book.



Otherwise, that society will become “unstandardized” or poorly formed. “A society is well-ordered when it is not only designed to advance the good of its members but when it is also effectively regulated by a public conception of justice. That is, it is a society in which (1) everyone accepts and knows that the others accept the same principles of justice, and (2) the basic social institutions generally satisfy and are generally known to satisfy these principles” (Rawls 1999a).

Second, social justice is of enormous significance in creating and improving efficiency. For stimulating social potential and developing human resources fully, rules of equal opportunity and distribution founded on contribution have an indispensable role to play. This can be interpreted from two aspects. On the one hand, the rule of equal opportunity requires a society to discard ascriptive factors (such as privileges, status, and rank) before it allocates its social resources, including the various forms of wealth. A society must not be improperly influenced by those unjust factors, in order to ensure that each member of the society can compete on equal terms, be treated with fairness, and exert their abilities to the maximum through their own efforts. On the other hand, in allocating social resources, a society must follow the just rule of distribution according to contributions, in order to enable all members of society attain their due share. If this is the case, the interests of all members of society can be steered onto a benign path and the vitality of the society will be fully stimulated.

Third, social justice is a necessary condition for a society to bring about safe operations. Only by following the rules of social justice can social classes engage in positive interactions and establish efficient and regular integration and cooperation. “Without common values, the competition for power is likely to be severe... in the absence of guidelines about what should constitute ‘reciprocity’ and ‘fair exchange,’ considerable strain and tension will persist” (Turner 1974). The most significant factors that make society potentially unstable are artificial barriers, distrust, and contradictions and conflicts between different social strata. By protecting people’s basic rights and dignity and making necessary adjustments to institutions, those social barriers can at least be reduced or removed to the greatest extent possible, and then the potential factors of unrest can likewise be reduced. As long as a society can improve its system of justice as fairness, it is less likely that social problems will increase or become more severe. At the same time, a society can also strengthen its efforts to solve existing social problems. For example, if a society effectively implements fair rules of social adjustment, the middle-income strata will become a central group in society and a powerful force in maintaining its safe operation.

Fourth, social justice can ensure the healthy development of society. The development of society should be people-oriented (以人为本 *yi ren wei ben*). This view is widely accepted. Here, “the people” refers to the vast majority of members of society, not a small minority. This can be put in another way: The basic purpose of social development is that everyone shares in it and benefits. This leads to a further question: How can we serve the purpose? Clearly, it is only by following the fundamental principles of social justice that this purpose

can be served. “A conception of justice must incorporate an ideal form for the basic structure in the light of which the accumulated results of ongoing social processes are to be limited and adjusted” (Rawls 1999b). By following the fundamental principles of social justice, a society can benefit the greatest number of its members, realize development in a true sense, and avoid the situation of growth-without-development in which only a few people benefit. By following those principles, a society can fully stimulate the potential of all classes and the greatest number of its members so that they can obtain different returns from their specific contributions, thus eliminating the possibility of egalitarianism. And by following those principles, a society can achieve effective integration and social unity. All of this undoubtedly ensures the healthy development of society as a whole.

The essence of social justice entails providing everyone with what he or she deserves. Social justice is of primary value to the entire society and its members. Along with the advancement of the processes of modernization and the market economy, social justice comes to play a more prominent role and its meaning and content have been updated. So, what kind of just society do we need?

## 1 WE NEED A SOCIETY IN WHICH EVERYONE SHARES AND BENEFITS UNIVERSALLY

Social development should be people-oriented. As Marx writes in “On the Jewish Question,” “Every emancipation is a restoration of the human world and of human relationships to man himself” (Marx and Engels 1956). People-oriented development has two meanings. From a material perspective—that is, in terms of science and technology and the economy—human beings should be the subject of the process, not its appendages. When we look at it in terms of this basic tenet, development should focus on the basic rights and interests of every member of society. Clearly, the latter meaning is directly related to social justice.

In a modern society built around people, everyone should be entitled to a fair share and be able to benefit from doing so. This should be a key objective, because then, the fruits of social development can be more widely enjoyed by the masses. As society develops, everyone should be entitled to more dignity. People’s potential should continuously be cultivated, their basic needs should be consistently met, and their living standards should constantly be improved. By contrast, if social wealth is amassed by only a few social groups, then the fruits of social development will only be enjoyed by those groups. Society will not “truly” develop; there will be “growth without development.” Social development is a driving force for the vast majority of people, and so ultimately, goals should be set that allow everyone to share and benefit from the fruits of their labor. As Engels states in his famous work *The Principles of Communism*: “The general co-operation of all members of society for the purpose of planned exploitation of the forces of production, the expansion of production to the

point where it will satisfy the needs of all, the abolition of a situation in which the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the needs of others, the complete liquidation of classes and their conflicts, the rounded development of the capacities of all members of society through the elimination of the present division of labor, through industrial education, through engaging in varying activities, through the participation by all in the enjoyments produced by all, through the combination of city and country—these are the main consequences of the abolition of private property” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

## 2 WE NEED A SOCIETY IN WHICH EVERYONE HAS DIGNITY

Before men evolved from apes, they had no dignity. It was only when people left the animal world and became self-conscious that they acquired a human “species-dignity” or a “human dignity.” As society has evolved, people’s sense of dignity has also evolved. Every human being has a sense of dignity; this is evident in every social group and among every individual.

In a modern society or a country moving toward becoming a modern society, everyone should possess this kind of dignity and be able to recognize their own value. Every member of the social community should have a sense of their basic dignity and basic, equal rights. If social institutions become fundamentally flawed, and the dignity of certain social groups (generally speaking, vulnerable groups) is trampled on (e.g., people lose their basic dignity and sense of independence due to extreme poverty and personal attachment), we should recognize that this impacts not only the dignity of those groups but everyone. Some people are subsequently regarded as being “inhumane,” and if their being trampled on is directly related to defects in the social institutions, then everyone could, in theory, be trampled on. Arguments are made that people avoid this kind of thing based on luck. However, if we think rationally, we would regard this “luck” neither as normal nor as an “inevitable” trend; we should simply be more vigilant. Safeguarding the dignity of every member of society is a basic form of justice in a modern sense.

## 3 WE NEED A SOCIETY THAT HAS EQUALITY AND LIBERTY

It is only when human beings have dignity that there will then be ideas about basic equality. Engels explained the concept of modern equality in this way: “The idea that all men, as men, have something in common, and that to that extent they are equal, is of course primeval. But the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common quality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a claim to equal political and social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society” (Marx and Engels 1995b). Adler also states, “The equality of all human beings is the equality of their dignity as persons... The truth of the proposition that all human beings are by nature equal is confined to the one respect in which that equality can be truly

affirmed; namely, their all being equally human, their having the species-specific properties and especially the differentiating properties that belong to all members of the species” (Adler 1984).

Liberty and equality are closely related to one another but also inseparable from one another. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity” is commonly used as a fixed term. Liberty without equality, just as equality without liberty, is unthinkable. If there has to be a distinction between the two, it is that equality focuses on the recognition and protection of the basic human species, while liberty focuses on respecting and protecting individual differences. “In governments, that is, in societies directed by laws, liberty can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will” (Montesquieu 1777). As Mill states, “The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it... The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign” (Mill 2001). Marx and Engels attached great importance to the idea of freedom. In 1894, the year before Engels died, he wrote a letter to Italian socialist Giuseppe Canepa, saying: “XI have tried to find a short epigraph of the kind you wish from the works of Marx, whom alone of the modern socialists, it would seem, is able to stand on a par with the great Florentine. However, I have found nothing except for the following passage taken from the Communist Manifesto (Italian edition of *Critica Sociale*, p. 35): ‘Al posto della vecchia società borghese divisa in class; cozzanti fra loro, subenta un’associazione, nella quale il libero sviluppo di ciascuno è la condizione per il libero sviluppo di tutti.’ (‘In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all’)” (Marx and Engels 1974).

Clearly, equality and liberty constitute the most basic conceptual bases of social justice and they are an important part of social justice in a modern sense. Without these bases, social justice cannot be truly distinguished from justice in a traditional sense.

#### 4 WE NEED A SOCIETY WITH EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

Opportunity is the space and scope of possibility for the survival and development of members of society. Opportunities are a kind of resource, and when people seize opportunities, there are principles that should be followed. That is, the equal should be treated equally, and the unequal should be treated unequally. Theoretically speaking, these principles should be followed before there is a certain degree of social wealth, so these principles should be regarded as ex-ante principles.

Broadly speaking, having equal opportunities means the following: first, having an equal start and being given the opportunity to survive and develop. Those with the same amount of potential should be given an equal start and the same prospects. “In all sectors of society there should be roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement for everyone similarly motivated and endowed. The expectations of those with the same abilities and aspirations should not be affected by their social class” (Rawls 1999a). This is the most basic requirement of the principle of equality of opportunity. Second is realizing equal opportunities. It is not sufficient enough to simply say that having the same starting point is important. The process of realizing opportunities is also of great significance in order to ultimately realize the principle itself. Any abnormal factors that might interfere with the process should be eliminated. “It was a demand that all man-made obstacles to the rise of some should be removed, that all privileges of individuals should be abolished, and that what the state contributed to the chance of improving one’s conditions should be the same for all” (Hayek 1987). People can only be guaranteed just results if they have an equal starting point and sustained opportunities.

Since opportunities have different meanings for people at different levels, equal opportunities can be divided into two types: shared equal opportunities (or shared opportunities) and differentiated equal opportunities (or differentiated opportunities). Shared opportunities mean that, on the whole, every member of society should have roughly the same opportunity to develop. Differentiated opportunities imply that people cannot have completely equal opportunities in order to survive and develop, and therefore, they should be different to some degree. In modern society, shared opportunities and disparity opportunities exist as an organic whole, together constituting the idea and criterion of equal opportunities.

Equality of opportunity is an important value orientation, and its idea and principle have a far-reaching influence on modern society. It provides them with a fair environment in which they can compete on equal terms and encourages them to eliminate “abnormal” factors that affect their development (e.g., their ascribed status). The idea of equal opportunities is to provide people with more choices and an effective space for development. Equal opportunities allow individuals to have higher societal expectations and at the same time establish basic rules. They bring vitality to society and facilitate social progress.

## 5 WE NEED A SOCIETY THAT DISTRIBUTES ACCORDING TO PEOPLE’S CONTRIBUTIONS

The question of how to distribute existing social resources directly reveals to what degree the principle of social justice is fulfilled. In theoretical terms, this occurs after the point at which social wealth and other resources have been accumulated, so it can be called the *ex post* rule of social justice.

In the process of the accumulation of social wealth and other resources, the quantity and quality of labor invested by each member of society is different, and similarly the factors of production they invest may also not be the same. Therefore, their specific contributions to society are different. The rule of distribution according to contribution embodies the idea of equality (especially equal labor rights). Additionally, the rule embodies the idea of liberty, fully respecting and recognizing the individual's different contributions to society.

The rule of distribution according to contribution connects individuals' vital interests closely with their own contributions. The results stimulate the enthusiasm of each member of society and the vitality of society as a whole. This rule is completely compatible with a modern society and also conforms to the practical principle of the market economy.

There is not much room for ambiguity about whether distributing according to people's contributions is an important principle. However, there are different views on the importance of distribution according to people's contributions. Rawls clearly favored "welfare socialism." He focused on "the least privileged" and was instinctively wary of people who were favored during the distribution process. He advocated with his "difference principle" that benefits should be distributed so that the least privileged can benefit the most (within a certain scope). His view has been praised by many. How should we regard Rawls' view? There is some justification to it; however, he proposed this idea in the climate of advanced modernization, amid a relatively mature market economy. His ideas cannot necessarily be adapted to serve most developing countries. For example, a major problem that China is facing is how to increase social wealth and related resources; otherwise, nothing else will work. If there is relatively little development in a society and there is an underdeveloped economy, Rawls' viewpoints could simply be applied without analysis; however, there would likely be a social effect whereby the "highest are being trimmed to level out the low." This could mean that egalitarianism becomes even more prominent, thereby weakening the vitality of society. Of course, we should not go to the other extreme and focus on only serving the "least disadvantaged."

## 6 WE NEED A SOCIETY WITH FUNCTIONS TO PERFECTLY ADJUST

The system for distributing social resources is far from perfect; what's more, there are risks with a market economy, and people have different skills and "genetic" advantages/disadvantages. After resources have been distributed, there are inevitably unfair phenomena, for example, gaps between the rich and the poor and ways of accessing opportunities to develop/survive. The disparities that exist between the rich and the poor go against the principle of social development that everyone should be able to share and equally benefit. Society will often be negatively impacted by such a trend: there will be less social integration and more social barriers and conflicts. There will also be less

industrialization and democratization, meaning that it is more difficult to develop modern culture. Society is obliged to adjust after the initial distribution of resources. An important factor of social justice is that there are established rules for when necessary adjustments need to be made that serve the overall interests of society so that members of society can continuously benefit and social quality can improve. “As a principle of community life, social responsibility requires every member of a community to play his part in maintaining and promoting the community’s interest. When they come into conflict, he must always give precedence to the community’s interest over his personal self-interest. Each member is responsible to the corporate membership of the community for meeting these requirements” (Milne 1986).

There is a wide breadth of content on such adjustments that cover: realizing full employment, establishing a perfect tax mechanism, mass education, essential social security and welfare, and the creation of a fair/equal social environment. Clearly, as long as the rule of social adjustment is effectively implemented, the very wealthy individuals or families at present are often rich for only a few generations. For example, when the rich are alive, they need to pay progressive taxes, and when they die, their successors must pay inheritance taxes, which are not small in number. Take the inheritance tax in the United States as an example: the specific tax rate is determined according to the value of taxable heritage. The rate is 30% for taxable transfer amounts of US\$100,000–150,000, and 41% for taxable transfer amounts of US\$1–1.5 million. The highest rate is 55%, which is applicable to taxable transfer amounts exceeding US\$3 million. In this way, no matter how much property a person owns, after paying progressive taxes and inheritance taxes and after several generations, most of these properties will eventually be owned by the society.

## 7 WE NEED A DEVELOPED AND JUST SOCIETY

Throughout different historical periods, people have had different understandings of social justice, and over the course of history, the meaning of “social justice” has been enriched and geared more toward human nature. Nowadays, what we are pursuing is “real” social justice in a modern sense. The idea behind this is that productive forces are a prerequisite for realizing a truly modern and just society. While this idea conveys a very simple truth, it is an easily overlooked piece of common sense.

Only on the basis of highly developed productive forces and a mature market economy can a society have the corresponding social and economic resources to provide the necessary conditions and means for the realization of social justice. A well-developed material base and a mature market economy make the supporting framework of a modern just society. We have noticed that classical Marxist writers, whether Marx, Engels, or Deng Xiaoping, always regard highly developed material conditions as the most important prerequisite when they talk about a just society. “The possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully

sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day fuller, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this possibility is now, for the first time, here, but it is here” (Marx and Engels 1995b). Deng Xiaoping points out that in essence, socialism is about liberating and developing the productive forces, eliminating exploitation and polarization, and ultimately, it is about achieving prosperity for all (Deng 1993). Obviously, Deng Xiaoping regarded the liberation and development of productive forces as the fundamental premise of justice.

Special attention should be paid to lax productivity, as when there are few social/economic resources, society cannot be truly “just.” If we want a just society, we must create an egalitarian society that appears to offer “equality.” In fact, egalitarianism is another kind of deprivation because it can throw people with strong abilities who make great contributions into deprivation. There are often confused understandings about what constitutes an egalitarian society with “absolute” equality because “their goal is any sort of mechanical equality which would deprive some people of advantages which cannot be provided for all... But to some extent the two conflicting desires of equalizing opportunity and of adjusting opportunity to capacity have become everywhere confused” (Hayek 1987). Egalitarianism emphasizes that equality is everyone’s aim and that people have similar aims rather than equal opportunities. It takes society as a whole as the standard and ignores the specific value of individuals. Sometimes, it exploits the interests of specific social groups and uses them as an excuse to deprive people of their normal and reasonable interests. This unfair phenomenon can lead to society experiencing great harm. In this respect, China has already learned a heavy lesson. If it wants to create a “just” society and avoid repeating previous mistakes, it should attach great importance to vigorously developing productive forces, as these are the prerequisites for establishing a just society. If it doesn’t, the idea of social justice will be inconceivable.

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## An Overview of Social Justice

As a basic concept of modern society, social justice has its own bases of existence, which include conceptual bases and bases in reality. People also need to follow certain principles when they establish the specific rules of social justice. Social justice is a system of rules, which include guaranteeing people's dignity and basic rights, equal opportunities, distribution according to contribution, and social adjustment. Social justice has specific value orientations and basic footholds. To better understand social justice, people need to grasp such important issues as the holistic nature of social justice, the priority among the rules of social justice, its sequence of realization, and the gap between the rules of social justice and their practical actualization.

### I THE BASIS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

As a concept and a criterion, social justice follows the history of human civilization. Social justice has different contents in different historical periods. However, as a universally recognized form of justice, it is only established and perfected in modern society. The basic concepts of modern society, such as equality, freedom, and social cooperation, constitute the direct conceptual basis of social justice in the modern sense, which is driven by the historical process of modernization and the market economy.

Social justice in modern society has two bases: a conceptual basis and a basis in reality.

#### 1.1 *The Conceptual Basis*

Equality, freedom, and social cooperation constitute the conceptual bases of social justice in modern society. They are the cornerstones of the principle of social justice in its modern meaning.

### *The Idea of Freedom*

Freedom, an important idea and behavior orientation, is crucial content and a major symbol of modern human civilization. The basic aim of social development lies in enabling every member of society to develop freely and comprehensively. At the same time, freedom has a wide and far-reaching influence on modern society and is an important driving force in its development. Freedom is so important that Marx believes “free, conscious activity is the specific characteristic of the human species” (Marx and Engels 1979).

The main contents of freedom are the following. First, individuals make choices independently. As Spinoza states, “It is impossible for one person’s mind to be absolutely under another’s control. For no one can transfer to another person his natural right, or ability, to think freely and make his own judgments about any matter whatsoever, and cannot be compelled to do so ... For these things are within each person’s own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so... If people could be so thoroughly stripped of their natural right that they could undertake nothing in the future without the consent of the holders of sovereign power, then certainly sovereigns could dominate their subjects in the most violent manner... Hence we must admit that each person retains many aspects of his right, which therefore depend upon no one’s will but their own” (de Spinoza 2007). Montesquieu also says: “In governments, that is, in societies directed by laws, liberty can consist only in the power of doing what we ought to will, and in not being constrained to do what we ought not to will” (de Montesquieu 1777). Second, society respects reasonable differences among individuals. Various factors impact an individual’s circumstances, including their endowments, abilities, social circumstances, living environment, and access to opportunities. Thus, people have different opportunities and a variety of development prospects. This means that they produce different results and attain different levels of wealth, prestige, and status. Within a reasonable range, the concept of freedom recognizes these differences. Third, rationality should be an important principle of freedom. Because people’s freedom should be restrained, it requires rational guidance. Locke points out: “We are born free, as we are born rational, and the liberty of acting according to our own will, never from compulsion by the will of others, is grounded on the possession of reason” (Locke 1964). Fourth, on the basis of these principles, there are spheres in which it is appropriate that people exercise freedoms, such as freedom of conscience in the broadest sense, freedom of thought and feelings, freedom to express opinion, freedom of interest and ambition, freedom to plan one’s own life to suit one’s personality, freedom to do as one likes, and freedom to unite with other people (Mill 2001).

The idea of freedom is of great significance in a modern society. First of all, it provides an essential space and the basic conditions for individuals to survive and develop. Otherwise, for an individual, “to renounce our freedom is to renounce our character as men, the rights, and even the duties, of humanity. No compensation is possible for anyone who renounces everything” (Rousseau 1985). Second, it directly enhances people’s creativity and promotes the great

progress of modern civilization and a modern social system. For example, “it is because freedom means the renunciation of direct control of individual efforts that a free society can make use of so much more knowledge than the mind of the wisest ruler could comprehend” (Hayek 1987).

The idea of liberty requires that different individual endowments, abilities, and concrete contributions be respected, that individual development and choice also be respected, and that different treatment be given according to the different contributions of each individual to society. We should also consider the possible negative impact on society of extreme freedom and should not deliberately widen the gaps between individuals in terms of different treatment.

### *The Idea of Equality*

The two ideas of liberty and equality are closely related and inseparable. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity” is commonly used as a fixed term. Liberty without equality, just as equality without liberty, is unthinkable. As Pierre Leroux says, “I believe in freedom, because I believe in equality. The reason why I imagine a political society in which everyone is free and gets along like brothers is because I imagine a society ruled by the creed of human equality. In fact, if people cannot get along with each other as equals, how can we declare everyone free?” (Leroux 1988). If there has to be a distinction between the two, it is that equality focuses on the recognition and protection of the basic human species, while liberty focuses on respecting and protecting individual differences.

The idea of equality takes people’s basic contributions and dignity into account, confirms their basic rights, guarantees their opportunities for development, and defines the minimum requirements of the principle of justice. Thus, equality is an important conceptual basis of social justice.

First of all, the idea of equality factors in people’s basic contributions and dignity. Human society cannot exist without individuals making contributions and having a sense of dignity. As Marx said: “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (Marx and Engels 1995a). It is the countless individuals that make up a society. So, “by being human, we are all equal—equal as persons, equal in our humanity. One individual cannot be more or less human than another, more or less of a person. The dignity we attribute to being a person rather than a thing is not subject to differences in degree. The equality of all human beings is the equality of their dignity as persons... The truth of the proposition that all human beings are by nature equal is confined to the one respect in which that equality can be truly affirmed; namely, their all being equally human, their having the species-specific properties and especially the differentiating properties that belong to all members of the species” (Adler 1984).

The affirmation of individuals’ fundamental contributions and human dignity should take on a concrete form. If individuals are not entitled to the same basic rights, their survival cannot be guaranteed, their dignity cannot be preserved, and equality will lose its practical significance. In this regard, the basic

rights of individuals are in line with natural law. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood... Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (United Nations 1998). A scholar summarizes seven main rights and argues that it is these which are human rights properly so-called. They are the rights to life, to justice in the form of fair treatment, to aid, to freedom in the negative sense of freedom from arbitrary interference to honorable treatment, to civility, and, in the case of children, to care (Milne 1986).

Obviously, the objective of equality is to safeguard the basic dignity of individuals—to provide fundamental protections for their survival and development.

We should not understand equality only on a surface level, but also grasp the deep levels of the spirit of equality. “As distant as heaven is from earth, so is the true spirit of equality from that of extreme equality. The former does not imply that everybody should command, or that no one should be commanded, but that we obey or command our equals. It endeavors not to shake off the authority of a master, but that its masters should be none but its equals” (de Montesquieu 1777). Equality should not be absolute; otherwise, extreme equality leads to a series of negative consequences, such as absolute egalitarianism and distribution based on that idea, anarchy, and collective despotism. Extreme equality inhibits the development of individual potential and then weakens the vitality of society. “It (equality) pushes them (men) and at the same time it stops them, it spurs them and attaches them to the earth; it inflames their desires and limits their strength” (de Tocqueville 2002).

From the above, we can see that the basic requirements of equality for the principle of social justice in the modern sense are the following. The individual should be regarded as an important foothold for the principle of social justice, and the individual should not be despised under the pretext of the needs of the whole society; we should take the principle of the universal benefit of individuals as an important content, recognize individuals’ contributions to society, safeguard their basic dignity, and genuinely ensure the realization of their basic rights in reality. Further, in view of the disadvantages of absolute equality, we should prevent the transformation of the principle of social justice into egalitarianism.

### *The Concept of Social Cooperation*

Without society, individuals cannot live and develop. Once this happens, the complete meaning of the individual person will cease to exist. So individuals need association and cooperation. “Find a form of association which will defend and protect, with the whole of its joint strength, the person and property of each associate, and under which each of them, uniting himself to all, will obey himself alone, and remain as free as before” (Rousseau 1985). In fact, this

is also the essence of contractualism. Only when individuals cooperate effectively in society can their respective values be realized. “It is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of the others. We are led to the notion of the community of humankind the members of which enjoy one another’s excellences and individuality elicited by free institutions, and they recognize the good of each as an element in the complete activity the whole scheme of which is consented to and gives pleasure to all” (Rawls 1999).

The body of social cooperation (the social consortium or social community) is most manifest in the state. Although a country is composed of many different members of society, it is not simply the sum of these members. Once a country is formed, it possesses a kind of relative autonomy. Theoretically speaking, the state is a primary public authority and bears both responsibility for and obligations to members of society. “State action is embodied in a system of rights, and there is no element of it which is not determined by a bearing upon a public interest” (Bosanquet 2001). Wilhelm von Humboldt says, “A State, then, has one of two ends in view; it designs either to promote happiness, or simply to prevent evil; and in the latter case, the evil which arises from natural causes, or that which springs from man himself” (von Humboldt 1969).

The principal significance of social cooperation, as the basis of the principle of social justice, is manifested in at least two aspects. First, the existence of effective checks and balances on the possible drawbacks of the ideas of equality and freedom. Equality and freedom are both based on the individual. Therefore, if equality and freedom exceed a certain limit, it will be extremely detrimental to social integration, which will in turn seriously damage the basic principles of social justice. In view of the possibility of this situation, it is necessary to check and prevent it with the concept of social cooperation. Second, it can prevent the principle of social justice being constructed entirely on the basis of the state. In a modern society, although the state’s purpose should theoretically be to promote social cooperation and to realize the concept of equality and freedom, due to various phenomena such as specific group interests and restrictions in specific areas of the state, the state can sometimes take over affairs too much and become an authoritarian machine to suppress the majority of members of society, thus directly damaging the concepts of equality and freedom and deviating from the principle of social justice. Thus, it is necessary to use the idea of social cooperation as a balance between the state and individuals, in order to urge the state to reflect the original intention of the idea of social cooperation as much as possible and prevent the possible alienation of the state machine.

The necessity of the concept of social cooperation for the principle of social justice is to provide what the rules of justice based on equality and freedom cannot achieved, and to reflect the spirit of a reasonable society as a whole.

## 1.2 *The Practical Basis*

As discussed earlier, equality, freedom, and social cooperation form the conceptual bases of social justice. It should be noted that the reason they become basic concepts generally recognized by the people in modern society, from a minor topic of concern of interest to only a few to a matter of great concern to the masses, lies in the enormous influence of the modernization process and the advancement of the market economy. Modern enlightenment thinkers' theories of the social contract (such as those of Rousseau, Montesquieu, etc.) and contemporary scholars' theory of the "veil of ignorance" (such as that of Rawls) try to establish the conceptual basis of social justice through transcendental methods. Although there are many insights to be found in these works, it is difficult to establish scientific and effective persuasiveness due to the lack of a solid historical basis. Clearly, only on the basis of the modernization process and the promotion of the market economy can we truly understand the conceptual basis of social justice and grasp the basic essence of social justice.

### *The Process of Modernization*

Modernization refers to the global transformation of all of society starting with industrialization.

Modernization is a great leap in the process of human civilization, which has brought unprecedented and profound changes in various important areas of human society, such as the mode of production, lifestyles, social institutions, and values. As far as values are concerned, modernization has made the basic concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation constructed by modern enlightenment thinkers into ones that are universally recognized by all members of society, who have further deepened and enriched them and internalized them into the basic value orientation and code of conduct of the social organism.

An important aspect of modernization is democratization. Although the basis of democratization is also the concept of equality and freedom, there is no doubt that the actual process of democratization has also rooted the concept of equality and freedom more deeply in the hearts of the people, and it is precisely under the impetus of democratization that the concepts of equality and freedom have penetrated into all of society. It emphasizes the democratization of citizens' participation in decision-making in social and political affairs, the importance of an individual's "civic awareness," and efforts to establish citizens' rights to equality and freedom in real social life. Democratization also requires the establishment of a basic social system that is compatible with equality and freedom. The concepts of equality and freedom have also been deepened and enriched in the actual process of democratization.

The strengthening of people's rational consciousness also has a positive impact on the concepts of equality and freedom. Rational consciousness is an important part of modernization. The process of modernization has created a general sense of reality among members of society. With a highly developed

economic foundation and widespread advanced knowledge, people are generally more aware that they can create an environment suitable for their own survival and development and that their ideals can be fulfilled in the real world, without having to seek them in the “other world.” Further, with the rapid advance of science and technology, people’s ability to know and grasp the world is improved, and the former solitary, closed, ignorant, and rigid mindset is gradually abandoned and the judgment of things becomes more objective. As a result, members of society understand the concepts of equality and freedom in a less and less purely idealistic way and thus become increasingly compatible with the reality of society, thereby becoming integral parts of the social organism.

Social differentiation and social integration have an important influence on the deepening and enrichment of social cooperation. Both are important elements of modernization. In its most general meaning, differentiation refers to the transformation of things from a state of homogeneity to one of heterogeneity. Social differentiation in the contemporary scientific sense refers to the process through which a certain social position in the social system that at one point assumed multiple functions develops into a variety of different social positions that assume a single function. Social differentiation has two important characteristics: functional specialization and status diversification. The level of specialization, high efficiency, and ever-expanding scale of modern production require society to explore and utilize social resources fully. To achieve this, it is necessary that functions of the social organism originally undertaken by a small number of units be undertaken by multiple units. As modernization advances, subunits in the social organism can naturally develop into multiple complex units to perform the social functions originally undertaken by a few simple units. The variety of trades and professions in the social organism is increasing day by day. On the other hand, because of social differentiation, the various subunits of the social organism possess a high degree of interdependence, and no subunit can exist independently if it is separated from other subunits. In addition, the social organism is not a simple summing together of the various social subunits but has its own specific overall function. Therefore, each subunit of the social organism also needs to provide indispensable support and coordination for the whole social organism. This creates objective requirements for the improvement of social integration. The higher the degree of social differentiation, the higher the requirements for social integration.

It is also necessary to note that, with the advancement of modernization, the degree of social mobility is likewise constantly improving. Members of society and subunits of the social organism can make necessary adjustments of position through social mobility in order to better generate and release energy. As a result, the degree of social integration has been greatly improved, and the necessary conditions have been created for the development, differentiation, and integration of a higher level of social organism. Against the background, the significance of social cooperation in people’s lives is increasingly clear, and social cooperation becomes indispensable to the survival and development of



every member of society. As a result, social cooperation has become the consensus view of all members of society and has also become a very realistic basic value and code of conduct for the whole society.

## 2 PROMOTING THE MARKET ECONOMY

The market economy and modernization are two sides of a single coin. If one is ignored, the other cannot exist. Not only do equality, freedom, and social cooperation have an important influence on modernization, but they also have a profound influence on the market economy.

In a sense, the market economy is a natural breeding ground for the growth of equality and freedom. Where there are limited resources, how to reasonably allocate these for different purposes in economic activities is a key issue that society should consider in the process of economic development. As far as this is concerned, the market economy can effectively solve this problem. The market price system can accurately reflect the social supply and demand of commodities, which is helpful for producers to decide their own product types and production scale. Moreover, the principle of profit maximization in the market economy urges producers to try their best to reduce the production cost of their products, so as to enhance their competitiveness. This is the process of the rational allocation of resources. As Adam Smith states, in the market economy, every producer “is led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of his intention. Nor is it always the worse for the society that it was no part of it. By pursuing his own interest he frequently promotes that of the society more effectually than when he really intends to promote it” (Smith 2007). Obviously, competition, rational choice, equal opportunity, and fair treatment have become important norms in the market economy and in society. These basic concepts, which undoubtedly contribute to equality and freedom, are generally recognized and widely accepted by the public and are thus effectively rooted in real social life. “As pure concepts, freedom and equality are an idealized expression of various elements in the process of exchanging values; As things that have developed in legal, political and social relations, freedom and equality are just the regeneration products of another party” (Marx and Engels 1980). A strong sense of competition and rational choice strengthens and deepens the concept of individual freedom, while the requirement of equal opportunity and fair treatment widens the recognition of the concept of equality by members of society. Tocqueville points out: “Commerce is naturally the enemy of all violent passions... It is patient, supple, insinuating, and it has recourse to extreme means only when the most absolute necessity obliges it. Commerce renders men independent of one another; it gives them a high idea of their individual worth; it brings them to want to handle their own affairs and teaches them to succeed at them” (de Tocqueville 2002).

The market economy also helps with the recognition of the concept of social cooperation by members of society. This can be understood from two aspects: First, within the scope of the market economy, there is an urgent need for

effective social cooperation among individuals. “A market economy is an elaborate mechanism for coordinating people, activities, and businesses through a system of prices and markets. It is a communication device for pooling the knowledge and actions of billions of diverse individuals” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). Being in such a complicated “economic machine,” individuals can only achieve their economic goals through highly effective social cooperation. Second, in the domain of “market failure,” “indirect” social cooperation is even more necessary. It should be noted that the market economy is not omnipotent and that the mechanism of the market economy has some insurmountable defects. For instance, the market economy is often too short-sighted to reflect long-term social needs. Many important principles of the market economy cannot be adapted to certain public areas that are related to the national economy and people’s livelihoods, such as education, culture, international exchange, railways, and environmental protection. The spontaneity in the market economy also leads easily to many monopolistic phenomena in the market, thus causing disorder and confusion in markets. For these problems, it is only by relying on an “indirect” form of social cooperation—that is, government intervention—that we can effectively solve them. With frequent use of this kind of social cooperation, members of society will certainly gradually adapt to and recognize it, thus gradually enriching the concept of social cooperation and making it an important basic concept at the public level.

### 2.1 *Enlightenment*

On the basis of the above, we can make the following points.

First, it is possible to establish a complete system of basic rules of social justice in modern society only on the conceptual basis of equality, freedom, and social cooperation, the modernization process, and the practical basis of the market economy. In other words, the basic system of rules of social justice in a modern society is established on these bases. (1) These bases directly stipulate the “guarantee principle” of social justice, that is, that everyone’s basic rights should be guaranteed. For example, the requirement of equality for justice is that only by practically guaranteeing the basic rights of all members of society can the basic contribution of individuals to society and the affirmation of people’s dignity as members of the human species be reflected in the sense of the minimum bottom line. To give another example, the practical basis of the market economy demands social justice, that is, that each individual be established in an independent and equal position; otherwise fair competition in a society with a market economy society is not possible. (2) The aforementioned bases also stipulate the principle of equal opportunities for social justice. The idea behind equality is that everybody should possess the basic right to develop so that when opportunities arise, they should be equal. (3) These bases also stipulate the principle of distribution according to contribution. For example, the rule of distribution according to contribution embodies the idea of equality (especially equal labor rights). This rule also embodies the idea of liberty, of

fully respecting and recognizing individuals' different contributions to society. (4) These bases further stipulate the principle of adjustment after the initial distribution of social justice. For example, based on the concept of social cooperation, society has a responsibility to make necessary adjustments on behalf of the members of society who are obviously disadvantaged after the initial distribution, in order to promote the overall development of the society.

Second, it is precisely because of the real existence of the above bases that social justice in its modern sense can be truly distinguished from justice in the traditional sense. Before the emergence of modern society, many thinkers made valuable contributions to the discussion of social justice. For example, Aristotle's explanation of "numerical equality" and "equality according to worth" in social justice shows the great historical transcendence of his thought. Even today we can still derive a great deal of valuable enlightenment and clarity from it, in order to construct the concrete rules and contents of social justice in the modern sense reasonable. However, we must also recognize that there is a limit to the conceptions and speculations of genius after all. On the whole, these thinkers' interpretations of social justice are still subordinate to the society that existed at that time. As Aristotle says, "The law-abiding man and the fair man will both be just and the law-breaker and the unfair man is unjust. For what is lawful is decided by legislature" (Aristotle 1990). The principal reason that social justice in the modern sense is different from social justice in the traditional sense lies in the difference of the basis of the argument. That is, the basis of modern social justice is the conceptual basis of equality, freedom, and social cooperation, as well as the basis in reality of the modernization process and the market economy. Without such bases, the idea and criterion of social justice lacks the necessary foundation, and its theoretical explanatory power and practical effectiveness is reduced, so that it cannot be raised to the modern level and play its proper role in a modern society.

Third, we should fully grasp the basis of modern social justice. Each element of this basis should be considered an integral part of the whole and ignoring any of these components will lead to a partial understanding of the fundamental content and rules of social justice. In this regard, Rawls' and Nozick's theories of social justice are very representative. Rawls' theory of social justice basically stands on the side of equality, trying to limit and restrict the gap between members of society with the "fundamental tone" of equality. He argues: "All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" (Rawls 1999). This standpoint leads to a certain degree of absolute egalitarianism and even utopianism in Rawls' theory of justice. Nozick, on the other hand, argues from the other extreme, belittling the position and function of equality. Although Nozick conceded that everyone should enjoy the basic rights of equality and freedom, he obviously focused on individuals' rights to freedom in his practical discussion. In particular, the problem of society's weaker

members hardly registers in his field of vision, and all kinds of unreasonable gaps among members of society hardly arouse Nozick's concern. In general this weakens the scientific nature of his theory of social justice.

### 3 PRINCIPLES TO BE FOLLOWED IN DETERMINING THE CONTENTS OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

Only by grasping the following questions can we reasonably determine the specific contents and rules of social justice in a modern society.

#### 3.1 *The Principle That They Are a Reflection of History*

The specific contents and rules of social justice that we have determined can only exist in the context of a modern society. Generally speaking, no form of social justice can be adapted to all eras. Every era has a social justice system that is adapted to it. Rawls assumes that under the condition of the "veil of ignorance," a social justice system beyond any particular era could be formed. Obviously, this is too idealistic and utopian. The basic principle and concrete contents of social justice determined by Rawls constitute a theory fashioned by modern people, bearing the obvious marks of a modern society. When talking about law, Marx says that "the law must be founded upon society, it must express the common interests and needs of society—as distinct from the caprice of the individuals... They are bound to change with the changing conditions of life" (Marx and Engels 1961). Engels also points out: "People forget the derivation of their legal system from their economic conditions of life, just as they have forgotten their own derivation from the animal world... The comparison assumes something common to them all, and this the jurists find by summing up that which is more or less common to all these legal systems as natural law. However, the standard which is taken to determine what is natural law and what is not, is precisely the most abstract expression of law itself, namely, justice. From this point on, therefore, the development of law for the jurists, and for those who believe them uncritically, is nothing more than the striving to bring human conditions, so far as they are expressed in legal terms, into closer and closer conformity with the ideal of justice, eternal justice. And this justice is never anything but the ideologized, glorified expression of the existing economic relations, at times from the conservative side, at times from the revolutionary side. The justice of the Greeks and Romans held slavery to be just. The justice of the bourgeois of 1789 demanded the abolition of feudalism because it was unjust" (Marx and Engels 1995c).

The historical principle can not only explain the derivation of social justice in the modern sense, but also provide some reasons for what members of society receive in the process of distribution so that, to a certain extent, we can determine whether their shares are fair. If distribution is considered in terms of absolute equality, then there is a tendency to view the set of things that are

available for distribution, such as rights and resources, as given and available to all members of society, without exploring whether this is reasonable or not. As Nozick states: “The entitlement theory of justice in distribution is historical; whether a distribution is just depends upon how it came about... past circumstances or actions of people can create differential entitlements or differential deserts to things.” However, current time-slice principles of justice are wrong. “An injustice can be worked by moving from one distribution to another structurally identical one, for the second, in profile the same, may violate people’s entitlements or deserts; it may not fit the actual history.” For example, “welfare economics is the theory of current time-slice principles of justice. The subject is conceived as operating on matrices representing only current information about distribution. This, as well as some of the usual conditions guarantees that welfare economics will be a current time-slice theory, with all of its inadequacies” (Nozick 1974).

### 3.2 *The Principle That They Reflect Common Tendencies of Human Society Beyond Specific Periods*

While grasping the historical principle, we should also concede that there are certain common tendencies that transcend specific periods in human society. This can be understood from two aspects. First, although human societies go through many stages of development, and despite the great differences in the lifestyles of ethnic groups, groups in different eras and regions are often faced with a number of common and constant themes. These themes and problems shared by human societies are not only transregional but, in a sense, also transhistorical. Thus, they have made different efforts to address these themes, thus establishing certain common pursuits and tendencies. Second, although a social structure is determined by its social constituents and specific conditions, once it takes shape, that structure has its own fixed rules and evolutionary logic. So, the emergence of a new social structure must, to a certain extent, take the past social structure as its starting point and absorb its valuable parts so that some inheritances of the past will become an organic part of the new society and be passed on. If we compare the old and new social structures, then we will find that there is a degree of consistency between them. This consistency shows that some components of the social structure are relatively constant. Besides, compared with its social constituents, a social structure is relatively stable and will not change immediately as its social constituents change, so the social structure can preserve components that are relatively constant.

These common tendencies beyond specific periods include a certain spirit that pursues social justice and methods for determining the content of social justice. Social justice in the modern sense does not appear out of thin air. It is not only a renewal of the contents of social justice in the past, but also an inheritance of it, including the inheritance of certain common tendencies that transcend time. For instance, Aristotle’s theory of “equality according to

wealth” is a point of reference and a source of enlightenment concerning justice in modern society. Therefore, when determining the contents and rules of social justice, these common tendencies beyond specific periods should be reflected. Obviously, we should take up their essence and discard what is inappropriate. Otherwise, it will just be a kind of regressivism.

### *3.3 The Principle That They Should Fully Embody the Three Concepts of Equality, Freedom, and Social Cooperation*

As the theoretical bases of social justice in the modern sense, equality, freedom, and social cooperation should be fully and properly embodied in the contents and rules of social justice.

The three ideas of equality, freedom, and social cooperation should be considered an integral whole. As mentioned earlier, freedom without equality, like equality without freedom, is unthinkable. Further, only with social cooperation can equality and freedom be truly realized. Similarly, only when equality and freedom are achieved can cooperation be conducted effectively among members of society. The unity of freedom, equality, and social cooperation will become more evident as modernization proceeds. When society becomes more advanced, the situation that Marx described as “the association of free people” will emerge.

Ignoring or even overemphasizing any of the three concepts will lead to a partial understanding of the contents and rules of social justice. Rawls’ emphasis on equality renders his theory of social justice egalitarian and utopian. Conversely, Nozick’s theory of justice focuses more on freedom, which leads to a one-sided situation in which the social gap widens and social cooperation is despised. These examples are enough to remind us that when considering the contents and rules of social justice, we should comprehensively, fully, and properly embody all three concepts.

### *3.4 Priorities Among Specific Rules of Social Justice*

Although the specific contents and rules of social justice form an integral whole, because of limited resources, the limitations of specific historical times, and people’s different demands for social justice in different periods, it is impossible and unnecessary to implement all of the contents and rules of social justice at once. Thus, the problem arises of the priority among the rules of social justice. That is, the implementation of the rules of social justice should be prioritized in a reasonable manner.

How should the priority be determined? Clearly, it should be based on the principle of the primacy of survival, then development, and then common development. For this, Maslow’s theory of the hierarchy of needs is quite instructive. There are five levels in his pyramid. From the base of the hierarchy upwards, the needs are physiological survival, safety and security, belonging and love, esteem, and self-actualization. Needs lower down in the hierarchy

must be satisfied before individuals can attend to higher needs. However, our understanding of the theory cannot be taken to the extreme. Maslow points out: “As for the concept of emergence of a new need after satisfaction of the prepotent need, this emergence is not a sudden, saltatory phenomenon, but rather a gradual emergence by slow degrees from nothingness. For instance, if prepotent need A is satisfied only 10 percent, then need B may not be visible at all. However, as this need A becomes satisfied 25 percent, need B may emerge 5 percent, as need A becomes satisfied 75 percent, need B may emerge 90 percent, and so on” (Maslow 1954). Although Maslow’s theory is certainly not the same thing as the contents and rules of justice, it is still enlightening. When it comes to rules of social justice, there are basic, less-basic, and least-basic rules, so the question of priority emerges, and our understanding of it cannot go to the extreme.

Understanding the priority among the rules of social justice has a real significance. Not only does it provide the rules a hierarchy, so that people can clearly understand them, but it also makes the concept of social justice feasible because it becomes convenient for people to implement the rules. Otherwise, two dilemmas will inevitably emerge: either the grasp of social justice tends to fall into generalization, or there is a lack of ways of assessing the feasibility of implementing specific rules of social justice.

## 4 BASIC RULES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

We should establish the concrete contents and rules of social justice in the modern sense reasonably and properly on the conceptual basis of equality, freedom, and social cooperation, and on the practical basis of modernization and the market economy, as well as in accordance with the basic value orientations of social justice.

The specific contents and rules are principally manifested in the following four aspects:

### 4.1 *The Guarantee of Fundamental Rights (the Rule of the “Safety Net”)*

This rule emphasizes that when a person enters the world, he possesses fundamental rights that are self-evident, including the rights to life, social security, education, and so on. These rights must be effectively protected by society.

Only by doing this can a society minimally recognize individuals’ basic contribution to a social community and their dignity, effectively serve the basic purpose of social development (i.e., the development of society should be people-oriented), and effectively provide the necessary conditions for the society to bring about its own safe operation. In terms of human rights in the modern era, the basic rights enjoyed by individuals are very broad. The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights recognizes the right of everyone to the opportunity to gain his living by work which he

freely chooses or accepts; the right of everyone to the enjoyment of just and favorable conditions of work; the right of everyone to social security, including social insurance; the right of everyone to an adequate standard of living for himself and his family; right of everyone to be free from hunger; the right of everyone to the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of physical and mental health; the right of everyone to education; the right of everyone to take part in cultural life, etc. The International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also states that every human being has the inherent right to life; everyone has the right to liberty and security of person; everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience, and religion; the right of peaceful assembly shall be recognized; everyone shall have the right to freedom of association with others; every child shall have the right to such measures of protection as are required by his status as a minor; every citizen shall have the right and the opportunity to take part in the conduct of public affairs, etc.

It should be noted that basic human rights were not as comprehensive at the beginning but were enriched and expanded along with the development of their times. And the requirements for each right gradually increase. For example, all countries have been continuously raising their poverty line (i.e., the definition of “absolute poverty”).

It should also be noted that developing countries still have a long way to go before they are able to establish broad areas of basic rights across society. What they have accomplished should not, in general, be measured by the standards of modern society. In any case, though, every person in developing countries should nevertheless be entitled to the rights to subsistence, employment, education, and social security, which are of greater significance than those in developed countries. For example, the right to subsistence is no longer a major problem for developed countries, but it is often a crucial issue for developing countries, especially those with low levels of development. Here is a more extreme example: “These physiological needs are the most prepotent of all needs. What this means specifically is that in the human being who is missing everything in life in an extreme fashion, it is most likely that the major motivation would be the physiological needs rather than any others. A person who is lacking food, safety, love and esteem would most probably hunger for food more strongly than for anything else” (Maslow 1954).

#### 4.2 *Equality of Opportunity (the Ex ante Rule)*

What kind of rules should people follow before the level of social wealth reaches a certain point or achieves a particular goal? The answer is the rule of equal opportunity, which can also be called the ex ante rule.

Opportunity is the space and scope of possibility for the development of members of society. Present opportunities directly impact how resources are distributed in the future, and different opportunities will lead to different outcomes in future development. Thus, in distributive terms, opportunity is a principle that is “arranged” in an ex ante sense. The importance of opportunity



for a just system should not be underestimated, as it provides a unified rule for the development of every person in society. Buchanan points out: “I attribute much more normative significance to efforts to make the economic-political game fair in an *ex ante* than in any *ex post* sense” (Buchanan 1986).

Equal opportunities carry two connotations. One is shared opportunities, implying that every member of society should have roughly the same opportunity to develop. The other is differentiated opportunities, implying that people cannot have completely equal opportunities in order to survive and develop, and therefore, they should be different to some degree.

The idea behind equality is that everybody should have the basic right to survive and develop, so when opportunities present themselves, they should be equal. In reality, people have similar development prospects in most common (non-complex) industries, and they also have the basic skills to handle the labor. Therefore, theoretically, equality should and can be achieved when it comes to shared opportunities to survive and develop.

### 4.3 *Distribution According to Contribution (the Ex post Rule)*

The question of how to distribute existing social resources directly reveals to what degree the principle of social justice is fulfilled. In theoretical terms, this occurs after the point at which social wealth and other resources have been accumulated, so it can be called the *ex post* rule of social justice.

In the process of the accumulation of social wealth and other resources, the quantity and quality of labor invested by each member of society is different, and similarly the factors of production they invest may also not be the same. Therefore, their specific contributions to society are different. The rule of distribution according to contribution embodies the idea of equality (especially equal labor rights). Additionally, the rule embodies the idea of liberty, fully respecting and recognizing the individual’s different contributions to society.

The rule of distribution according to contribution connects individuals’ vital interests closely with their own contributions. The results stimulate the enthusiasm of each member of society and the vitality of society as a whole. This rule is completely compatible with a modern society and also conforms to the practical principle of the market economy.

From a theoretical point of view, the key to the problem lies in how the role of social cooperation is understood. This is because scholars such as Rawls, who oppose significant disparities in the distribution process, often insist on a rationale like this: the accumulation of social wealth and other resources is inseparable from social cooperation, and it is difficult to distinguish the role that each member plays as they cooperate in society. An individual who makes greater contributions to society has fully utilized social cooperation; otherwise, they would accomplish nothing. Naturally, we may draw the conclusion that there should be no obvious disparities in distribution based on social cooperation.

Although the accumulation of social resources (such as wealth) is inseparable from social cooperation, it should be noted, first, that in a given form of

social cooperation, the roles played by each member cannot be exactly the same. Some members play a creative and organizational role, while others only play a minor participatory role. Second, a distinction exists between real and possible social cooperation. Not all possible forms of social cooperation will become a reality; some forms may not be realized because no one bothers to organize them, which is a potential waste at the level of society. If someone can turn possible forms of social cooperation into a reality, that person's role in social cooperation will be greater than that of other people.

Clearly, even if distribution is approached from the perspective of social cooperation, the different contributions of individuals to it should be adequately reflected. The indispensability of each member in social cooperation should not be used as a reason to render their roles equivalent.

#### 4.4 *Social Adjustment (the Rule of Social Adjustment)*

The term social adjustment refers to the necessary modifications made to the structure of social benefits after their initial distribution. These modifications are made for the benefit of society overall, such that a broad swath of society receive the benefits of development, thereby allowing the quality of society to be continuously improved. Different from the first rule of social justice (the rule of the "safety net"), the rule of social adjustment emphasizes a supplemental form of "development" or "growth," rather than the "maintenance form" of relief.

In order to achieve effective social cooperation, every member of society enjoys certain rights, but they also bear both responsibility for and obligations to society. And that society, in turn, has a responsibility to make necessary adjustments for those disadvantaged in the initial distribution, in order to promote society's overall development.

The rule of social adjustment for social justice is of great significance. On the one hand, it can further improve the living conditions of the vast majority of members of society who have been supported by the rule of the social guarantee, enhance their ability to develop, and continuously expand people's social spheres and improve the quality of public life. Ultimately, the living standards of all members of society will rise, and the developmental ability of the entire society and quality of the social organism will be improved, thus achieving a greater degree of overall development. On the other hand, the rule of social adjustment can to various degrees reduce some of the disparity in income caused by the initial distribution, alleviate many conflicts caused by different material interests between groups and between classes, and even eliminate some of the potential conflicts, thereby minimizing the rate of accidents and achieving the relatively stable operation of society.

In terms of social justice, the rule of the guarantee and the rule of social adjustment serve different purposes. The former aims for ensuring people's basic rights, while the latter focuses on higher goals by promoting the further development of the majority of members of society. For example, while the

emphasis placed on education is the same, the rule of the guarantee emphasizes universal access to primary education, whereas the rule of adjustment focuses on making higher education accessible to as many people as possible by increasing scholarships. It should also be noted that the two rules are related: the implementation of the rule of adjustment is based on the premise of ensuring the implementation of the rule of the guarantee. That is, in terms of the time sequence, one occurs after the other.

When discussing social adjustment for social justice, we should guard against two common biases caused by an overemphasis on society as a whole. One is that the interests of the whole society are overemphasized while the interests of the individual are ignored, and the latter is regarded as an attachment of the former that can be sacrificed at any time for the benefit of the whole society. The other bias is that everything is done in the context of society as a whole, leading to absolute egalitarianism as society treats all of its members in a single way, with one share per person, eliminating all disparities among them. Both of these biases existed in China for a long time after 1949 and have had a huge negative impact on Chinese society.

## 5 THE BASIC VALUE ORIENTATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

It is crucial to clarify what the basic value orientation of social justice is. A slight misunderstanding will lead to a huge deviation in understanding the basic rules (i.e., the basic contents) of social justice and in the institutional arrangements and policymaking based on social justice. A tiny error can lead to missing the mark by a vast distance.

From the above, we can see that in a modern society with a market economy, the basic value orientations of social justice include two integral parts, neither of which can be lacking:

First, members of society can share the fruits of social development.

Socio-economic development should be people-oriented and focus on all members of society. Friedrich Engels suggested “the abolition of a situation in which the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the needs of others,” means “the rounded development of the capacities of all members of society... participation by all means enjoyments for all” (Marx and Engels 1995a). As Deng Xiaoping says: “We are a socialist country, and the distribution of national income should benefit all people” (Deng 1993). If a society’s development only benefits a few people but most people suffer, then it has not achieved real development. That society would be a morbid society, not a healthy one.

As mentioned earlier, members of society sharing the fruits of social development means: (1) that every member of society’s dignity should be guaranteed, and their basic living conditions should be maintained and improved; (2) that the development of every member of society should be guaranteed; and (3) that every member of society’s living standard and ability to develop is capable of being continuously improved along with the progress of social development.

Second, sufficient space should be provided for every member of society to develop freely.

Achieving “the free development of all people” was Marx’s lifelong goal. Marx points out: “In the place of the old bourgeois society with its classes and its class antagonisms, there will be an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1974). The conditions of modern society and the market economy mean that every member of society is a “natural person” with a sense of autonomy and the right to independent choices. At the same time, we should note that differences exist between members of society. Various factors impact an individual’s circumstances, including their endowments, their abilities, social circumstances, and their living environment. Thus, people have different opportunities and differing prospects of development. This means that they produce different results and thus have different levels of wealth, prestige, and status. Because of this, protecting the space for individuals to develop freely so that they are able to contribute what they can and occupy the position that they deserve becomes another basic value orientation of social justice.

The main content of this basic value (i.e., providing sufficient space for every member of society to develop freely so that they are able to contribute what they can and occupy the position that they deserve) includes: (1) equal opportunities. Having an equal start and being given the opportunity to survive and develop. Those with the same amount of potential should be given an equal start and the same prospects. Realizing equal opportunities. Any abnormal factors that might interfere with the process should be eliminated. (2) Distribution should be based on contributions. In the process of the accumulation of social wealth and other resources, the quantity and quality of labor invested by each member of society is different, and similarly the factors of production they invest may also not be the same. Therefore, distribution ought to proceed according to contribution.

It should be noted that for the safe operation and healthy development of society, the two basic value orientations of social justice have their own specific functions. One is “guaranteeing the minimal safety net” and the other is “not setting a limit on the maximum.” Both are indispensable. The main function of the first value is to ensure and to constantly improve the survival and development of all members of society, in order to remove the factors that separate people, make development the common cause of all people, strengthen social unity and cooperation, and ultimately achieve the goal of overall development. The function of the second value is to combine closely each individual’s pursuits and contributions to society with their own vital interests. The actual results are helpful in mobilizing the enthusiasm of every member and stimulating the creative vitality of the whole society. These two basic values complement each other and are indispensable to one another. The function of the former is to provide everyone with a “safety net” guaranteeing their basic rights, while the function of the latter is to encourage the free and full development of each individual without setting a limit on the maximum and to

stimulate the creative energy of the whole society. If either of them is lacking, society will lack justice in its complete sense and society will become unjust. A society that follows only the first basic value (members of society share the fruits of socio-economic development) is bound to become egalitarian and a society without vitality. On the other hand, a society that follows only the second (every member of society has sufficient space to develop freely) will become a society in which the gap between rich and poor grows wider and more turbulent.

In understanding the basic value orientations of social justice, people sometimes concern themselves with only one of them and thus fall into generalization. Some people, for example, only emphasize sharing, while others emphasize equality of opportunity or distribution according to contribution. This is a partial understanding of the basic value of social justice, and this can have a harmful impact on society, as such views can impact institutional design and policymaking.

## 6 THE BASIC STANDPOINT OF SOCIAL JUSTICE

When discussing social justice, we must grasp an important issue: that of its basic standpoints. Otherwise, there will be a huge misunderstanding.

Social justice should be based on objectivity and neutrality. It should focus on safeguarding the reasonable interests of every member or group in society. This means that the state should not be preferential toward certain social groups in the formulation of overall social and economic policies and institutions. If the measures that people take to implement basic policies or institutions are biased toward the benefit of a certain group, unfairness is the necessary result, damaging the legitimate interests of other social groups.

The essence of social justice lies in providing everyone with what he or she deserves. That is, it lies in safeguarding the reasonable interests of every member of society no matter which social group they come from. As long as their interests are legitimate, they should be equally protected. In a modern society and a market economy, due to the professionalization and specialization of the social division of labor, the diversification of the structure of social interests, and the equal rights enjoyed by individuals who constitute social groups, every social group plays an indispensable role in the process of modernization and the market economy. At the same time, all social groups are equal to each other. In reality, every group may encounter the problem of unfair treatment. In view of this, based on a foundation of social justice, the state should not favor one group over the other or deliberately side with a particular group to support it while suppressing another. Social justice should be based on objectivity and neutrality, on safeguarding everyone's basic rights no matter which social group they come from. Whether poor or rich, members of the majority group or members of a minority group, yellow or white people, urban or rural residents—when it comes to basic rights all should be equally protected. Moreover, in solving the problem of unfair treatment faced by a particular

social group, the legitimate interests of other social groups should not be harmed.

We cannot even say in general terms that in every case, all policies formulated on the basis of the views of the majority, or opinions formed by a simple majority vote, must therefore be reasonable and fair. The rationale for this is, first, that the minority also have their own reasonable rights. Legally, these rights are equal to the basic rights of the majority and cannot be arbitrarily taken away. As long as the interests of any person or any group are legitimate, they should be equally protected by the state. Second, if the reasonable rights of the minority are not properly guaranteed, it often occurs that, in the long run, the reasonable rights of the majority do not have stable boundaries and cannot be protected. Today one minority might be sacrificed, tomorrow another, and the day after that yet another. In the end this increase amounts to a large total number of people. When considered over an even longer timespan, everyone in the majority group could become a member of the minority group. Therefore, the effective protection of the reasonable rights of the minority means that the reasonable rights of all members of society can be protected institutionally, permanently, and fundamentally.

It can be seen from this that only by placing social justice in a relatively objective and neutral position, and by focusing on safeguarding the equal rights and reasonable interests of every individual or group, will we be able to formulate impartial and relatively objective and just social and economic policies and institutions, achieve fairness and justice, effectively encourage all social groups to “do their best and attain their proper place” in a mutually beneficial way, improve the lives of the disadvantaged while advancing the interests of the wealthy, effectively prevent public power from expanding inappropriately, fully promote social vitality, and enhance the levels of trust and integration in the entire society.

Specifically with regard to the real society, if we do not grasp social justice properly, it is likely to cause two harmful tendencies. One is that, in the formulation of overall social and economic policies, the state is preferential toward the minority who have stronger abilities and who hold a strong position in society. For example, in a certain period, in order to rapidly boost the economy, some departments and some regions pay too much attention to the question of “incentives” for affluent groups, thus implementing certain policies that are excessively favorable to them. This practice may bring some positive effects in the short term. However, once it solidifies into a routine institutional arrangement and a basic policy, it leads to the situation that the minority benefits and the interests of the majority are damaged. In this case, the basic purpose of sharing the fruits of socio-economic development among people becomes impossible to achieve, resulting in the situation of growth-without-development. Another type of harmful tendency is that the state is preferential toward the majority who are in a weak state when formulating overall social and economic policies. For example, due to a partial understanding of the idea of sharing the fruits of social development, the state regards all the demands of the

disadvantaged groups as reasonable and takes them as the standard to formulate social and economic policies that are far too egalitarian. In the long run, this practice leads to egalitarianism and even populism, damages the legitimate interests of the minority, harms the engine of the economy, and ultimately reduces social vitality and creativity, thus delaying the development of the whole country.

It should be noted that in specific periods of time, due to differing historical conditions, the types and severity of unfair treatment encountered by different social groups are not the same, and the negative impacts on society are also different. Thus, the task of maintaining and realizing social justice should focus on different things in different periods. In the early stage of reform and opening up, in order to eliminate the negative impacts of egalitarianism and the planned economy, to maintain social justice, and to stimulate social vitality, it was necessary for society to protect and encourage the minority with strong abilities. At present, however, due to the large number of people with middle-to-low and low incomes, there is a huge gap between the rich and the poor, and this has had many adverse effects on China's socio-economic development. As a result, an important task of maintaining and realizing social justice now is to solve this problem, in order to realize the basic purpose of sharing the fruits of development among all members of society. However, regardless of what kind of task is carried out, it cannot harm the reasonable interests of other groups; otherwise, new injustices will emerge.

## 7 SEVERAL IMPORTANT ISSUES RELATED TO SOCIAL JUSTICE

In order to understand social justice fully, it is necessary to grasp the following important issues related to social justice accurately and properly:

### 7.1 *The Holistic Nature of the Rules of Social Justice*

The rules of social justice form an integral whole. From the above, we can see that each rule embodies a certain idea of social justice or embodies several ideas at once. Specifically, each rule performs a specific function. The rule of the guarantee aims at the safety net protecting the basic rights of every individual so that their human dignity is maintained and everyone's original contribution to society is affirmed. The *ex ante* rule aims at providing people with equal (though proportional) opportunities as far as possible, so as to develop their potential fully and then stimulate the vitality of society as a whole. The *ex post* rule aims to reflect the specific contribution of each member to society at the level of direct distribution, so as to ensure their legitimate interests. The rule of social adjustment aims at making certain necessary adjustments to distribution to members and social communities within a certain range from the perspective of society as a whole (especially in terms of social cooperation), in order to ensure social stability and to promote people's development at a higher level. Clearly, all of these rules fully embody the conceptual system of social justice,

and together their unique functions form the whole of justice, thus producing a holistic effect on all aspects of society.

It should be noted that when we discuss the holistic nature of the rules of social justice, we have assumed that the degrees of modernization and marketization are at a high level, because only in such circumstances can the integration of all the elements be fully revealed. In fact, such integration is gradually formed along with the development of the times. For some countries (societies) that are moving toward a modern society, while it is a trend to establish comprehensively specific rules of social justice, the integration of their rules of social justice may not be obvious for some time due to the low degree of modernization and marketization. This is because a society in the primary and secondary stages of development cannot yet have the relatively solid material foundation required to “fully” implement the rule of social adjustment for social justice.

### 7.2 *The Priority Among the Rules of Social Justice*

It is not enough to just discuss the holistic nature of social justice; we should also pay attention to the question of the priority among its rules. Otherwise, the system of rules of social justice will lack a hierarchy and their implementation will not be feasible.

In terms of feasibility, the implementation of the four rules of social justice, namely, the rule of the guarantee, the ex ante rule, the ex post rule, and the rule of adjustment, should be prioritized in a reasonable manner. That is, each rule is, in theoretical terms, superior to the rule that follows, and the former rule is a prerequisite for the latter rule. In other words, the implementation of the last three rules has as their necessary condition the implementation of the rules in the previous position. Otherwise, it will be difficult to proceed.

Let us analyze this question of priority in detail. First, the rule of the guarantee should take priority over other rules. This is because it is the very foundation of the entire system of rules of social justice. The guarantee of people’s basic rights has provided the most basic and necessary conditions for the existence of other rules of social justice: affirming the dignity of the human species. If the dignity of members of society cannot be guaranteed, then it is impossible for that society to achieve social justice at its most basic level, and some of its members will not be treated as normal people. The concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation thus become empty talk, not to mention other issues related to social justice. The second priority is the ex ante rule of social justice. “The focus of attention should be on the distribution of rights and claims prior to or antecedent to the market process itself rather than on some final distribution of social product” (Buchanan 1986). In fact, the fair provision of opportunities by society in advance not only embodies the spirit of equal competition to a great extent, but also stipulates a reasonable pattern of “ex post” distribution in an important respect, which makes the results of direct distribution have a certain “historical” rationality. In this sense, the rule



of equal opportunity should take precedence over the rule of distribution according to contribution. Third, the ex post rule takes precedence over the rule of social adjustment. This is true for two reasons. On the one hand, the rule of adjustment should depend on the specific situation that exists after the initial distribution; otherwise, it may be aimless and fail to play its proper role in adjustment. On the other hand, the material basis on which the rule of adjustment is based largely depends on the level of total social wealth, while the latter depends on the incentive effect of equality of opportunity (the ex ante rule) and distribution according to contribution (the ex post rule).

If the order of priority among the rules of social justice is arranged incorrectly, many disadvantages will occur. For example, if the rule of distribution according to contribution (the ex post rule) is placed in a position that takes precedence over the rule of equal opportunity (the ex ante rule), then the fairness of some distribution results will be impossible to determine. For another example, if the rule of adjustment is placed in a position prior to the ex ante rule and the ex post rule, then it will result in many egalitarian practices due to the loss of the rationale of its implementation, thus inhibiting the development of people's potential and affecting social vitality.

### *7.3 The Sequence of Realization of the Specific Contents of Social Justice*

The implementation of the specific contents (rules) of justice is characterized by a "time sequence" along with the advancement of modernization and the market economy.

This sequence of realization of the specific contents of social justice is not the same as the theoretical priority among the specific rules of justice. First, the question of priority is an active choice only under the condition that all the specific rules of justice are already in place (i.e., established), while the sequence refers to a historical regulation of the sequence of emergence (or formation) of specific rules of justice in history and in reality. The former is optional, while the latter is not. Second, the question of priority, as a general notion, is the same for all countries, and there should be no differences. Differences can only mean some kind of "variation" of justice. On the other hand, the sequence is bound to occur in diversified situations due to the different historical conditions of various countries, and it is impossible for the situation to be completely consistent.

From the sequence of realizing social justice in developed countries in Europe and America (the countries that developed first), the rules of equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution were established first, and finally the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment began to form (this is especially true in the Nordic welfare countries). This time sequence is consistent with the "natural" development of modernization and the market economy in these countries.

The sequence of realization of social justice in China is obviously very different from that of the first-developed countries, and this difference has a complex and far-reaching impact on Chinese society.

With the advancement of reform and opening up and the process of modernization, the principle of social justice in line with a market economy and a modern society is far from being established in Chinese society, but it is certainly underway.

It is worth noting that from the formation of social justice rules in China at the present stage, we see that while people in China gradually come to recognize the two rules of equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution, they also pay special attention to the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment. Especially in recent years, these two rules have become the complete contents of what people understand as justice and have a direct impact on the state and how it makes public policies. For example, when it comes to social injustice, many people believe that the gap in the possession of wealth among members of society is too large so that it needs to be adjusted.

Obviously, the sequence of realizing the specific contents of social justice in China is that the four rules are being implemented all at once. In a particular period, even the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment can take precedence.

China's special background of social transformation has produced the above situation. China's social transformation is very different to that of the first-developing countries and regions and also to that of other late-developing countries and regions. Compared with developing countries and regions, Chinese society has to complete a series of modernization tasks in a relatively short time, such as the transition from traditional economic forms to modern economic forms and from a traditional social structure to a modern social structure. However, this transition process was completed in the first-developed countries and regions over a long period. Compared to most other late-developing countries and regions, Chinese society still faces the arduous task of changing from a planned economy system to a market economy system. Because of the difficulty of this social transformation, China has been faced with greater pressure and more factors of uncertainty, leading to more extensive, complex, and prominent social problems, such as unemployment, the wide gap between the rich and the poor, poverty, and social anxiety. In order to prevent these problems from evolving into unstable social behaviors, to ensure the normal operation of society, and to ensure the satisfaction of people's basic living needs and the continuous improvement of their basic living standards, it is necessary for Chinese society to attach importance to the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment. Only in this way can China's modernization process be promoted continuously, stably, and effectively.

At present, Chinese society pays too much attention to the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment. This is helpful for these two rules to come to be gradually known and recognized by Chinese people. It is also helpful to their establishment and ultimately to the realization of all the contents of social

justice in Chinese society. If handled properly, the rules of the guarantee and of adjustment will likely become an important starting point for realizing all the specific rules of social justice in Chinese society.

From the point of view of practical effects, if the unique sequence of realization of social justice in Chinese society is handled properly, it may have certain positive effects. This practice can directly support weaker members of society, and it also has a certain psychological “soothing” effect for the wider public. In the period of social transformation, any action that lowers living standards will lead to widespread resistance. While advancing the process of development and reform, then, we must continuously benefit the broad masses and at least meet people’s most basic needs in their daily lives as widely as possible. In this sense, the sequence of realizing social justice in Chinese society is consistent with the model of progressive modernization, which can stabilize the lives of most people, avoid serious shocks in society, and reduce the costs of reform.

We should also see the other side of the problem. China’s current market economy is not mature. In a sense, China’s economy is in a stage of simulating a market economy. In this condition, if the rule of distribution according to contribution is not emphasized at the same time, then the rule of adjustment in social justice may be distorted. This is especially true because the influence of the planned economic system has not yet been eliminated, coupled with the existence of the old traditional concept of “equal distribution of wealth” within a certain range. As a result, all kinds of egalitarianism may emerge with the help of the rule of adjustment, thus distorting it and further causing direct damage to the rules of equal opportunity and of distribution according to contribution. If this potential harm is not prevented, the costs of reform in Chinese society will undoubtedly increase.

#### *7.4 The Gap Between the Rules of Social Justice and Their Practical Realization*

In actual society, there is often an obvious gap between the rules of social justice and their practical realization. “Pure” social justice rules are an ideal presupposition for members of society, and it is difficult to realize them “completely.” Even in the United States, a country with a high degree of modernization and a mature market economy, this phenomenon is quite obvious. Such is American society, “professing and pursuing an egalitarian political and social system and simultaneously generating gaping disparities in economic well-being... The contrasts among American families in living standards and in material wealth reflect a system of rewards and penalties that is intended to encourage effort and channel it into socially productive activity. To the extent that the system succeeds, it generates an efficient economy. But that pursuit of efficiency necessarily creates inequalities” (Okun 1975). This phenomenon is more obvious in developing countries with low levels of modernization and marketization.

The main reasons for this gap are: First, the resources on which social justice depends are scarce. The “complete” fulfillment of the specific rules of social justice requires sufficient material resources and social resources for distribution to members of society and social adjustment. So far, this has been difficult for any society to achieve. In this case, there is bound to be a gap between the rules of social justice and their degree of realization.

Second is the requirement of feasibility. As a social community, a country has different problems to solve in different periods, so the focus of its tasks varies from time to time, and the full realization of its rules of fairness should be carried out step by step and with differing degrees of emphasis. Take the gradual implementation of the specific contents of social justice in China, for example. In a certain period, in terms of the problem of feasibility, distribution according to contribution should be emphasized. If too much emphasis is placed on the full implementation of the specific contents of social justice in this period, then it may play the objective role of protecting egalitarianism to a great extent. We can see that the practice of implementing the specific rules of social justice with differing degrees of emphasis will inevitably lead to some gaps between the rules of social justice and their full implementation in a specific period.

Third, it can take time for people to identify and accept social justice. The process of modernization and the market economy involve gradually adjusting people’s interests, and therefore there is a process of realizing social justice. For those who lose their vital interests, social justice means that there is recognition of their reality. Obviously, introducing social justice means that people go through a process of gradually adapting to them before ultimately recognizing them. Therefore, in order for people to recognize social justice, there needs to be recognition that people’s ideas will naturally not match their reality.

Understanding the gap between the rules of social justice and their practical realization is of great significance for us in dealing with the issue of social justice scientifically. First, it is not appropriate to approach social justice in a real society in a too idealistic way. As mentioned earlier, due to various practical factors, there is inevitably a gap between the rules of social justice and their actualization, so the two should be clearly distinguished. Otherwise, it is easy to fall into the misunderstanding of being unsatisfied and dismissing the justice that exists in the real society. Such a perspective may even change from an overly idealistic attitude into an anti-social attitude. Second, we should see the importance of the actual effect of social justice. Obviously, the rules of social justice focus on the goal of justice, and the degree of actualization of rules of social justice focuses on its actual effect. Since there is a gap between the rules of social justice and their practical actualization, society’s task should be the effective realization of the rules in feasible ways, in stages, and without wasting any time. In a sense, for members of society, the degree of social justice in reality is of more significance in terms of justice.

## 8 THE EVOLUTION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IDEOLOGY

Although social justice in the real sense can only be realized in modern society, in its original meaning, social justice has existed since the ancient times. Further, social justice is extremely important for a society. “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (Rawls 1999). Because of this, thinkers throughout the ages have diligently explored the true meaning of social justice and excavated its practical value.

### 8.1 *The Discussion of Ancient Thinkers*

Since ancient Greece, thinkers have paid great attention to social justice and have carried out unremitting exploration of it. Among them, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and others are the most representative.

Socrates explored the essence of social justice all his life. “He said that he had been constantly occupied in the consideration of right and wrong, and in doing what was right and avoiding what was wrong.” As for what justice is, Socrates “thought that unwillingness to do injustice was sufficient proof of Justice... what is lawful is just” (Xenophon 1984). Socrates often simultaneously discussed justice and self-control, because “the destruction of justice comes from the people’s endless greed, or putting their feet into other people’s fields. Self-control implies a healthy soul, an orderly heart, and doing what is right for people and God” (Bao 1996).

Plato states that “justice was excellence of soul, and that injustice was vice or defect of soul.” He also links justice with national harmony and social division of labor by saying that “our aim in founding the city is not to make one group outstandingly happy, but to make the whole city as happy as possible. We thought we would be most likely to find justice in a city of this kind, and most likely to find injustice in the city with the worst institutions.” To him, the essence of harmony is that “among the rest of the citizen body they should assign each individual to the one task he is naturally fitted for, so that by applying himself to his own one task each may become a single person rather than many people, and in this way the entire city may grow to be a single city rather than many cities... the ability of the commercial, auxiliary, and guardian classes to mind their own business, with each of them performing its own function in the city—this will be justice, and will make the city just” (Plato 2003).

Aristotle interprets the concept of social justice from many aspects: “Everybody means by Justice that moral disposition which renders men apt to do just things... the law-abiding man and the fair man will both be just... and ‘the unjust’ means that which is illegal and that which is unequal or unfair... what is lawful is decided by legislature... Now all the various pronouncements of the law aim either at the common interest of all, or at the interest of a ruling class determined either by excellence or in some other similar way... But the law also prescribes certain conduct. And Justice is perfect virtue because it is the practice of perfect virtue; and perfect in a special degree, because its

possessor can practice his virtue towards others and not merely by himself; for there are many who can practice virtue in their own private affairs but cannot do so in their relations with another. Justice in this sense then is not a part of Virtue, but the whole of Virtue” (Aristotle 1959). Aristotle also explains the concept of justice in the political field: “The good in the political field, that is, the general advantage, is justice, it is therefore thought by all men that justice is some sort of equality, and up to a certain point at all events they agree with the philosophical discourses in which conclusions have been reached about questions of ethics.” He also sees the important role of justice in society. “Justice on the other hand is an element of the state; for judicial procedure, which means the decision of what is just, is the regulation of the political partnership” (Aristotle 1959).

Aristotle uses “numerical equality” and “equality according to worth” to interpret the contents of social justice. This is the main feature of his theory of social justice.

Aristotle argues: “Justice is some sort of equality... for justice is a quality of a thing in relation to persons, and they hold that for persons that are equal the thing must be equal. Literally, the just is (a just) something and (something just) for somebody.” This leads to a further question: What kind of situation is equal? Aristotle did not simply regard equal numbers as equality. He then points out: “But equality is of two kinds, numerical equality and equality according to worth — by numerically equal I mean that which is the same and equal in number or dimension, by equal according to worth that which is equal by proportion; for instance numerically 3 exceeds 2 and 2 exceeds 1 by an equal amount, but by proportion 4 exceeds 2 and 2 exceeds 1 equally, since 2 and 1 are equal parts of 4 and 2, both being halves... Hence the proper course is to employ numerical equality in some things and equality according to worth in others” (Aristotle 1959).

Aristotle’s explanation of “numerical equality” and “equality according to worth” in social justice shows the great historical transcendence of his thought. Even today we can still derive a great deal of valuable enlightenment and clarity from it, in order to construct the concrete rules and contents of social justice in the modern sense reasonable. In addition, it should be noted that Aristotle’s views on social justice are different from the concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation in the modern sense. Therefore, the specific contents of his discussion on social justice are not adaptive to modern society and cannot be transferred to modern society as is.

During this period, the people’s research on social justice has the following characteristics: First, they put forth the idea of social justice and regarded it as the most important virtue and wisdom of members of society. Socrates says that “justice and every other form of virtue is wisdom. For just actions and all forms of virtuous activity are beautiful and good. He who knows the beautiful and good will never choose anything else, he who is ignorant of them cannot do them, and even if he tries, will fail. Hence the wise do what is beautiful and good, the unwise cannot and fail if they try. Therefore since just actions and all

other forms of beautiful and good activity are virtuous actions, it is clear that justice and every other form of virtue is wisdom” (Xenophon 1984). Aristotle’s argument is more straightforward: “Justice in this sense, then, is not a part of virtue but virtue entire, nor is the contrary injustice a part of vice but vice entire” (Aristotle 1959). Secondly, many opinions with long-term value have been formed on the issue of social justice. For example, the explanation that the original meaning of justice is “giving everyone what they deserve” and the theory of “equality according to worth” are very enlightening for future generations. Third, their research has an obvious tendency to identify with the actual society. When ancient Greek scholars discussed social justice, they often showed a “natural” sense of reality; they regarded social justice as a realistic goal or an important basis of the actual society, but did not alienate it as purely conceptual. They either took social justice as the basis for understanding the actual society or induced social justice from the actual society. For example, they believed that division of labor and cooperation are the most important issues in society, and “the ability of the commercial, auxiliary, and guardian classes to mind their own business, with each of them performing its own function in the city—this will be justice, and will make the city just” (Plato 2003).

During this period, people had historical limitations in their discussions on social justice: First, there was a lack of research on the theory of social justice itself. The people’s research on social justice was often combined with the discussion of ethics, philosophy, economic affairs, legal affairs, and so on. Social justice was not studied as an independent field, so the topic sometimes extended too broadly. Second, there was a lack of sufficient exploration into the basis of social justice. Although people sometimes tried to establish the basis of their argument based on simple concepts such as freedom or equality, on the whole, their interpretations and analyses of social justice were often intuitions or generalizations about simple phenomena. Therefore, their research on social justice lacked a profound theoretical foundation.

## 8.2 *The Research of Modern Thinkers*

In modern times, thinkers began to look at social justice from a new perspective, making it possible to study social justice in a modern sense.

Helvetius argues that justice is based on established laws. Respect for justice presupposes that citizens are evenly matched. Maintaining this balance is the main task of science and legislation. A beneficial mutual fear forces people to treat each other with justice. If this fear is no longer mutual, from then on, a nation’s legislation has gone wrong. The premise of improving legislation is the people’s need for justice.

William Godwin states: “By justice I understand that impartial treatment of every man in matters that relate to his happiness, which is measured solely by a consideration of the properties of the receiver, and the capacity of him that bestows. Its principle therefore is, according to a well-known phrase, to be ‘no respecter of persons’... Justice is a rule of conduct originating in the

connection of one percipient being with another... Whatever deviates from the law of justice, though it should be in the too much done in favor of some individual or some part of the general whole, is so much subtracted from the general stock, so much of absolute injustice" (Godwin 2013).

Friedrich Paulsen makes such a statement on the general principle of justice: "Justice, as a moral habit, is that tendency of the will and mode of conduct which refrains from disturbing the lives and interests of others, and, as far as possible, hinders such interference on the part of others... Do no wrong yourself, and permit no wrong to be done, so far as lies in your power; or, expressed positively: Respect and protect the right... The system of rights, therefore, brings a certain degree of objective justice or legality into the life and conduct of the members of the legal community, and maintains it" (Paulsen 1899).

With the disintegration of the feudal society, the emergence of the market economy, and the advancement of modernization, modern scholars have fully demonstrated the theories of innate human rights, social contract, freedom, and equality. During this period, although Western scholars did not systematically study social justice, because the aforementioned issues are closely related to social justice, modern scholars actually raised their discussion on social justice to a higher level. First, research on the basis of social justice deepens. The theories of innate human rights, social contract, freedom, and equality are based on the basic rights of human beings, and the latter theories are actually the most basic conceptual basis of social justice. Only social justice established on the basis of people's basic rights is social justice in its modern meaning. It can be seen that modern Western scholars' discussions on the basis of social justice provide a broader space for its further study. This contribution even directly impacts today's scholars. Second, these scholars also provide useful insights into some important contents of social justice. For example, from the perspective of fair competition, some conduct valuable research on equal opportunities among people. Others, starting from the utopian ideal, construct the ideal distribution system with imagination. Although these discussions are not comprehensive, they are a point of reference concerning social justice in modern society. Third, they actually regard social justice as the eternal value that the whole society should pursue. Modern Western scholars try to establish an eternal ideal social model that transcends all times. No matter what name they call this society, they hold that its core content is social justice with an eternal value.

There were limitations to the people's research on social justice during this period. First, there was still no research on the theory of social justice itself. In a certain sense, modern Western scholars, like their ancient counterparts, still conflated social justice with other fields, rather than separating and studying it as a relatively independent field. On the contrary, research on the theoretical basis of social justice replaced research on the social justice theory and occupied a dominant position. In this way, it also limited the integrity and systematization of the research on justice. Second, it lacked an analysis of the practical basis of social justice. Although the Western scholars in this period furthered



their discussion of the theoretical basis of social justice, they neglected the analysis of its basis in reality. They tried to make social justice have an eternal value simply on a theoretical basis, which made the overall study of social justice take on an overly idealized feature and was therefore not feasible or operational.

What needs to be explained is that, although Marx, like other Western scholars, did not regard the idea of “justice” as a self-sustaining research topic, Marx’s practical and theoretical negation of non-human social relations is the negation of the relationship that destroys the basic class characteristics of human beings, and this forms an overview of the Marxist philosophical view of justice. Undoubtedly, the basic ideas and research methods of Marxism on social justice are of guiding significance to the research of social justice in the modern sense.

### 8.3 *Research in Modern and Contemporary Academic Circles*

In modern and contemporary times, scholars have taken a major step forward in the study of justice, making it a prominent discipline in the humanities and social sciences. Rawls’ and Nozick’s theories are the most representative in the field of social justice research in modern and contemporary Western countries.

Rawls is the scholar who has conducted the most in-depth and systematic research on social justice so far, and his great work *A Theory of Justice* represents the highest level in this research field.

Rawls believes that the principle (general conception) of justice can be expressed as follows: “All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1999).

In order to explain the above principles, Rawls puts forward two specific principles.

The first principle is: “Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.”

The second principle states: “Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity” (Rawls 1999).

The first principle is also known as the biggest principle of equal liberty or simply the principle of equal liberty. It involves a set of primary social goods—that is, basic freedom. It requires that each of us has equal rights to the same basic freedoms. It also requires that the basic freedoms be as extensive as possible.

The second principle actually includes two more specific principles. One is the difference principle, stating how to achieve equality under unequal

conditions. The other is the principle of fair equality of opportunity, which involves another set of primary goods such as the distribution of wealth, income, rights, and authority (Wang 1996).

Rawls further considered the order of priority among the two principles and then proposed two priority rules:

The first priority rule (the priority of liberty) states: “The principles of justice are to be ranked in lexical order and therefore liberty can be restricted only for the sake of liberty. There are two cases: (a) a less extensive liberty must strengthen the total system of liberty shared by all, and (b) a less than equal liberty must be acceptable to those citizens with the lesser liberty” (Rawls 1999).

The second priority rule (the priority of justice over efficiency and welfare) states: “The second principle of justice is lexically prior to the principle of efficiency and to that of maximizing the sum of advantages; and fair opportunity is prior to the difference principle. There are two cases: (a) an inequality of opportunity must enhance the opportunities of those with the lesser opportunity; (b) an excessive rate of saving must on balance mitigate the burden of those bearing this hardship” (Rawls 1999).

Rawls’ views and expositions on social justice are extensive, profound, and a source of enlightenment. They serve as a point of reference concerning the specific contents and rules of social justice.

It cannot be denied that there are some obvious deficiencies and defects in Rawls’ arguments. This is clear in the following areas, among others: first, the weak logical starting point. Rawls proposes the existence of the “veil of ignorance” and tries to arrange the specific contents and rules of social justice with it as a logical starting point. Only behind the veil of ignorance can people eliminate the influence of all natural and social factors and have the necessary “general knowledge”; in this way, people can arrange the specific contents and rules of social justice. In fact, the hypothesis of “veil of ignorance” attempts to apply the value-neutral research method. Obviously, this assumption lacks a historical basis. Rawls did not see the great influence of the historical process of modernization and the promotion of the market economy on the whole of human society, nor did he see the influence of the “natural” historical process on the stipulation of human nature, so he could not grasp the stipulation and influence of history and reality on the contents and rules of justice in modern society. Second, too much emphasis on equality, with some egalitarian nature. The general tone of Rawls’ social justice theory is equality. Judging from his determination of the two principles of social justice and the two priority rules, Rawls used the tone of equality to restrict and limit other contents of justice. Other aspects of social justice were put in a passive state and equality became the measurement and boundary of everything, which only is a partial view. Equality is of course crucial, but when the people’s most basic rights in society are guaranteed, we should further encourage them to develop their potentials and generate differences among individuals. Only in this way can we stimulate the vitality of the whole society and promote its continuous development. At different times, the realization of social justice can focus on different aspects.

Therefore, the first level of social justice (the equality of basic rights) should not be taken as the keynote of other levels in any case. Third, Rawls' arguments carry a certain utopian connotation. As mentioned earlier, Rawls' theory of social justice lacks historical basis and contains egalitarian elements. Rawls was very sensitive to the gap between individuals in the real society, for fear that it would damage the universal basic rights of members of society, and tried to prevent and limit various social gaps by means of equalization. However, this practice is too idealistic and utopian because it is divorced from the actual situation in society.

Unlike Rawls, Nozick attaches great importance to individual freedom. His views on social justice are based on this point.

Nozick believes that the term "distributive justice" is inaccurate because it is "not a neutral one. Hearing the term 'distribution,' most people presume that some thing or mechanism uses some principle or criterion to give out a supply of things. Into this process of distributing shares some error may have crept." Therefore, "it would be best to use a terminology that clearly is neutral. We shall speak of people's holdings; a principle of justice in holdings describes (part of) what justice tells us (requires) about holdings" (Nozick 1974).

The general outlines of Nozick's theory of justice in holdings are that "the holdings of a person are just if he is entitled to them by the principles of justice in acquisition and transfer, or by the principle of rectification of injustice (as specified by the first two principles). If each person's holdings are just, then the total set (distribution) of holdings is just. To turn these general outlines into a specific theory we would have to specify the details of each of the three principles of justice in holdings: the principle of acquisition of holdings, the principle of transfer of holdings, and the principle of rectification of violations of the first two principles" (Nozick 1974).

Nozick's theory of justice in holdings includes three principles of justice: the principle of acquisition of holdings, the principle of transfer of holdings, and the principle of rectification. According to the principle of acquisition of holdings, when evaluating whether or not a state is just, we should consider not only the distribution it embodies but also how this distribution occurs, because "past circumstances or actions of people can create differential entitlements or differential deserts to things." The essence of the principle of transfer of holdings is "from each as they choose, to each as they are chosen." This principle emphasizes the individuals' right of ownership and free disposal of things and whether the source of possession of things is reasonable, rather than passively accepting the results of distribution. The principle of rectification aims at solving the problem of the violation of the first two principles (Nozick 1974).

Nozick's theory of justice in holdings has important value and is a source of enlightenment. On the one hand, it elaborates on the important position and role of individual freedom rights in justice. This practice, which is in line with the spirit of the market economy and modern society, is conducive to the development of individual potential and stimulates the overall social vitality. On the other hand, his theory also reminds people that, when establishing the basic

contents of social justice, they should refer to historical and realistic principles rather than “current time-slice principles” only.

There are obvious biases in Nozick’s theory of justice in holdings. First, Nozick belittled the position and function of equality. Although Nozick conceded that everyone should enjoy the basic rights of equality and freedom, he obviously focused on individuals’ rights to freedom in his practical discussion. In particular, the problem of society’s weaker members hardly registers in his field of vision, and all kinds of unreasonable gaps among members of society hardly arouse Nozick’s concern. In general, this weakens the scientific nature of his theory of social justice. Second, Nozick did not pay enough attention to the social obligations and responsibilities that people should perform. In a certain sense, Nozick was only interested in demonstrating how the individual’s rights to freedom can be guaranteed and how their autonomy can be respected by the whole society, but rarely mentioned their obligations and responsibilities. This is not conducive to improving social integration and social cooperation. Third, Nozick paid too much attention to the procedures of justice and neglected the principles of justice. As a scholar states: “Nozick’s entitlement theory advocates procedural justice of this pure procedural type. There is no pattern of just distribution independent of the procedures of acquisition, transfer, and rectification, and justice is served whenever individual rights are respected in the protected operation of these procedures... some independent substantive criterion or pattern is essential to an adequate account of justice, even if there are no procedures that always produce outcomes in conformity with the independent standard” (Beauchamp 1982).

The characteristics of scholars’ research on social justice in this period are as follows: First, they focused on the research of the social justice theory itself. They studied social justice as a relatively independent field, rather than attaching it to other fields. Therefore, scholars were engaged and conducted extensive and in-depth research from the basic assumptions, categories, goals, and functions to the connotations and rules of social justice. Second, scholars made a comprehensive analysis of the conceptual basis of social justice. On the one hand, they inherited the Western modern social contract theory, the concept of freedom and equality, and the theory of democracy; on the other hand, they absorbed contemporary theories about basic human rights, thus creating a systematic theoretical basis for social justice. Third, different schools of social justice theory began to form. Starting from different research hypotheses and conceptual bases, scholars generated various interpretations of social justice and then formed different academic schools of social justice research, among which Rawls’ “theory of social justice” and Nozick’s “theory of justice in holdings” (the entitlement theory) are the typical theories. Disputes between different schools contributed to the healthy and in-depth development of social justice research. Fourth, the subject covers a wide range. Due to the increasingly prominent practical significance of social justice and the rich content of justice itself, the discussion of social justice in this period was not only limited to ethics and politics, but it also involved economics, sociology, philosophy, and law.

During this period, scholars' discussion on social justice also had obvious shortcomings: (1) There was no clear distinction between some important related concepts. For example, justice and fairness are two different concepts—justice is ideal fairness, and fairness is realistic justice. However, Western scholars in this period often mixed the concepts of justice, fairness, and equality in their specific research, which affected the people's accurate understanding of social justice. (2) Due attention was not paid to the practical basis of social justice. Many people always confirmed the rationality of social justice from an assumption consensus, such as Rawls' presupposition of the "veil of ignorance." In fact, social justice in the modern sense not only has a conceptual basis but also has a basis in reality. If their research did not factor in modernization and the market economy, then there was no way to grasp the ins and outs of social justice in the modern sense or even explain the historical rationality of its conceptual basis. (3) The importance of social cooperation was somewhat underestimated. When discussing the conceptual basis of social justice, scholars often overemphasized on either equality or freedom, such as Rawls and Nozick. Equality and freedom both make up the conceptual basis of social justice, and they are not either-or exclusive relations. In a certain sense, the concepts of equality and freedom, which seem to be poles of each other, can be solved through the concept of social cooperation. Moreover, without effective social cooperation, equality and freedom can hardly exist. Therefore, the contempt for social cooperation will inevitably lead to the weakening and failing strength of the explanation for the basis of social justice. (4) They did not pay enough attention to the timing and strategy of the realization of social justice. In this period, Western scholars' research on justice was often only based on the countries and regions that developed first, and generally speaking, these countries were already a part of modern society. They often lacked a necessary understanding of the specific process of realizing social justice in late-developing countries and regions and failed to see that the specific contents of social justice in these countries cannot be fully realized in one step. Therefore, special timing arrangements and strategy formulations are needed. (5) They neglected some variable factors that affect social justice. Western scholars in this period often failed to see that, apart from the commonness, social justice also had some particularities that varied from country to country, and these particularities were caused by variable factors such as national traditions or special social transformations. Ignoring variable factors is not conducive to accurately grasping the specific situation of social justice in different countries.

#### 8.4 *Marx and Engels' Ideology on Social Justice*

##### *Marx and Engels' Discussion on the Basic Contents of Social Justice*

Marx and Engels made an in-depth analysis on the basic contents of social justice in the modern sense, especially within socialist society (the first stage of communism), which is mainly manifested in the following aspects:

## (1) The basic orientation of social justice

Marx and Engels believed that social justice is the lofty realm of human society and the primary value of socialism and communism. “Real liberty and real equality are only possible under Community arrangements; justice demands such arrangements” (Marx and Engels 1956). Moreover, they take justice as the realistic goal that they strive for. They state that social justice should be the most important value of the working class. Marx states clearly in “General Rules” for the International Working Men’s Association that was published in 1871: “All societies and individuals adhering to it will acknowledge truth, justice, and morality as the basis of their conduct toward each other and toward all men, without regard to color, creed, or nationality” (Marx and Engels 1995b).

Marx and Engels believed that the development of society should be people-oriented. “All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself... Communism is the positive supersession of private property as human self-estrangement, and hence the true appropriation of the human essence through and for man; it is the complete restoration of man to himself as a social—i.e., human—being, a restoration which has become conscious and which takes place within the entire wealth of previous periods of development. This communism, as fully developed naturalism, equals humanism, and as fully developed humanism equals naturalism; it is the genuine resolution of the conflict between man and nature, and between man and man, the true resolution of the conflict between existence and being, between objectification and self-affirmation, between freedom and necessity, between individual and species” (Marx and Engels 1979). Since the basic purpose of social development is for the people, in Marx and Engels’ view, its ultimate goal is for everyone to share and generally benefit from it. “In a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labor, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labor, has vanished; after labor has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want; after the productive forces have also increased with the all-around development of the individual, and all the springs of co-operative wealth flow more abundantly—only then can the narrow horizon of bourgeois right be crossed in its entirety and society inscribe on its banners: From each according to his ability, to each according to his needs!” (Marx and Engels 1995c). Engels says: “The general co-operation of all members of society for the purpose of planned exploitation of the forces of production, the expansion of production to the point where it will satisfy the needs of all, the abolition of a situation in which the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the needs of others, the complete liquidation of classes and their conflicts, the rounded development of the capacities of all members of society through the elimination of the present division of labor, through industrial education, through engaging in varying activities, through the participation by all in the enjoyments produced by all, through the combination of city and country—these are the main consequences of the abolition of private property” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

## (2) Human dignity and basic rights

People cannot have a human “species-dignity” without individuals making contributions. It is the countless individuals that make up a society. As Marx says: “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (Marx and Engels 1995a). The form of dignity unique to societies of the human species means that, accordingly, every member of society possesses human dignity. This kind of dignity is further embodied in the basic rights that every member should have. “It is the duty of man to claim rights as a man and a citizen, not only for himself but for every man who does his duty; no rights without duties, no duties without rights” (Marx and Engels 1964).

According to Marx and Engels, due to the underdevelopment of productive forces and the existence of an exploitation system, human dignity and basic rights could not be guaranteed in the old society, and this situation should be changed.

Marx says that it is sad that “the old world belongs to the philistines... They require nothing more than a number of slaves to complete their society and slave-owners do not need to be free... men who do not feel themselves to be men accumulate for their masters like a breed of slaves or a stud of horses.” So, “man’s self-esteem, his sense of freedom, must be re-awakened in the breast of these people. This sense vanished from the world with the Greeks, and with Christianity it took up residence in the blue mists of heaven, but only with its aid can society ever again become a community of men that can fulfill their highest needs, a democratic state” (Marx and Engels 1956).

Engels believes that it should be an important task for the working class to restore human dignity and rid the inhuman state because “the English workers cannot feel happy in this condition; that theirs is not a state in which a man or a whole class of men can think, feel, and live as human beings. The workers must therefore strive to escape from this brutalizing condition, to secure for themselves a better, more human position... the working-man is made to feel at every moment that the bourgeoisie treats him as a chattel, as its property, and for this reason, if for no other, he must come forward as its enemy” (Marx and Engels 1957).

## (3) Equality and freedom

Marx and Engels attach great importance to the equality and liberty of the people, believing that they are the core issues to be solved in the process of social development.

Engels explains the concept of equality in the modern sense as follows: “The idea that all men, as men, have something in common, and that to that extent they are equal, is of course primeval. But the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common quality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a

claim to equal political and social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society” (Marx and Engels 1995c). Engels regards the realization of equality as a process: “Nowadays, however, equality of rights is recognized. Recognized in words ever since and inasmuch as the bourgeoisie, in its fight against feudalism and in the development of capitalist production, was compelled to abolish all privileges of estate, that is, personal privileges, and to introduce the equality of all individuals before law, first in the sphere in private law, then gradually also in the sphere of public law” (Marx and Engels 1995d). However, there are still many limitations to equality under capitalist conditions.

Marx and Engels attach extreme importance to the idea of liberty. In a letter Engels addressed to Italian socialist Giuseppe Canepa in 1894, he says: “I have tried to find a short epigraph of the kind you wish from the works of Marx, whom alone of the modern socialists, it would seem, is able to stand on a par with the great Florentine. However, I have found nothing except for the following passage taken from the Communist Manifesto (Italian edition of *Critica Sociale*, p. 35): ‘Al posto della vecchia società borghese divisa in class; cozzanti fra loro, subenta un’associazione, nella quale il libero sviluppo di ciascuno è la condizione per il libero sviluppo di tutti.’ (‘In place of the old bourgeois society, with its classes and class antagonisms, we shall have an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all.’)” (See Marx and Engels 1974.) How highly they valued the idea of freedom is revealed here. Marx believes that real and full freedom can only be realized in an advanced social form. Marx points out: “Relations of personal dependence (entirely spontaneous at the outset) are the first social forms, in which human productive capacity develops only to a slight extent and at isolated points. Personal independence founded on objective dependence is the second great form, in which a system of general social metabolism, of universal relations, of all-round needs and universal capacities is formed for the first time. Free individuality, based on the universal development of individuals and on their subordination of their communal, social productivity as their social wealth, is the third stage... In proportion as anarchy in social production vanishes, the political authority of the State dies out. Man, at last the master of his own form of social organization, becomes at the same time the lord over Nature, his own master—free” (Marx and Engels 1995c).

#### (4) Distribution according to work

On how to distribute social wealth, Marx and Engels advocate that the principle of distribution according to work should be implemented in the first stage of a communist society (i.e., a socialist society). Marx states: “Every child knows, too, that the masses of products corresponding to the different needs required different and quantitatively determined masses of the total labor of society. That this necessity of the distribution of social labor in definite proportions cannot possibly be done away with by a particular form of social



production but can only change the mode of its appearance, is self-evident. No natural laws can be done away with. What can change in historically different circumstances is only the form in which these laws assert themselves. And the form in which this proportional distribution of labor asserts itself, in the state of society where the interconnection of social labor is manifested in the private exchange of the individual products of labor, is precisely the exchange value of these products... Accordingly, the individual producer receives back from society—after the deductions have been made—exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labor... The right of the producers is proportional to the labor they supply; the equality consists in the fact that measurement is made with an equal standard, labor. But one man is superior to another physically, or mentally, and supplies more labor in the same time, or can labor for a longer time; and labor, to serve as a measure, must be defined by its duration or intensity, otherwise it ceases to be a standard of measurement” (Marx and Engels 1995c).

#### (5) Social adjustment

To serve the basic purpose of social development—the idea that everyone shares in and universally benefits from development, to eliminate injustices in society, and to improve the development level of the whole society—Marx and Engels argue that we should attach importance to the universal adjustment of society.

Marx and Engels put forward many concrete measures on the transition from a capitalist society to a communist society in *the Manifesto of the Communist Party*. We can regard many of them as a specific proposition for social adjustment, such as the “abolition of property in land and the application of all rents of land to public purposes”; “a heavy progressive or graduated income tax”; “the combination of agriculture with manufacturing industries; the gradual abolition of all distinctions between town and country”; “free education for all children in public schools. The abolition of child factory labor in its present form. The combination of education with industrial production, etc.” (Marx and Engels 1995).

Engels also proposes that some measures to be taken in the “democratic state system” be established by the proletariat in *The Principles of Communism*: “Limitation of private property through progressive taxation, heavy inheritance taxes, abolition of inheritance through collateral lines (brothers, nephews, etc.) forced loans, etc; organization of labor or employment of proletarians on publicly owned land, in factories and workshops, with competition among the workers being abolished and with the factory owners, in so far as they still exist, being obliged to pay the same high wages as those paid by the state; education of all children, from the moment they can leave their mother’s care, in national establishments at national cost; construction, on public lands, of great palaces as communal dwellings for associated groups of citizens engaged in both industry and agriculture and combining in their way of life the advantages

of urban and rural conditions while avoiding the one-sidedness and drawbacks of each; destruction of all unhealthy and jerry-built dwellings in urban districts; equal inheritance rights for children born in and out of wedlock” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

Marx believes that the expenses of the whole society managed by the society itself should include: “First, the general costs of administration not belonging to production... Second, that which is intended for the common satisfaction of needs, such as schools, health services, etc. From the outset, this part grows considerably in comparison with present-day society, and it grows in proportion as the new society develops. Third, funds for those unable to work, etc., in short, for what is included under so-called official poor relief today” (Marx and Engels 1995c). It can be seen that Marx also advocates for the establishment of a social security system from early on.

#### (6) Criticisms of social injustice

In a sense, one of the causes of socialism is the resistance to social injustice. Because of this, Marx and Engels spend a great deal of space on the in-depth analysis and criticism of social injustice (including historical injustice and the injustice existing in capitalist society at that time). Roughly, these contents include the following two aspects:

First is the criticism of the feudal autocratic system.

Marx points out: “Despotism brutality is a necessity and humanity an impossibility. A brutal relationship can only be maintained by means of brutality... Despotism’s only thought is disdain for mankind, dehumanized man; and it is a thought superior to many others in that it is also a fact. In the eyes of the despot, men are always debased. They drown before his eyes and on his behalf in the mire of common life from which, like toads, they always rise up again... The principle on which monarchy in general is based is that of man as despised and despicable, of dehumanized man” (Marx and Engels 1956). In a feudal society, “personal dependence here characterizes the social relations of production just as much as it does the other spheres of life organized on the basis of that production” (Marx and Engels 1972). Engels also says: “In the middle ages, it was not the expropriation of the people from, but on the contrary, their appropriation to the land which became the source of feudal oppression. The peasant retained his land, but was attached to it as a serf or villein, and made liable to tribute to the lord in labor and in produce” (Marx and Engels 1995d).

Second is the criticism of injustices in capitalist society.

Marx profoundly points out: “The capitalistic mode of production (essentially the production of surplus-value, the absorption of surplus labor), produces thus, with the extension of the working day, not only the deterioration of human labor-power by robbing it of its normal, moral and physical, conditions of development and function. It produces also the premature exhaustion and death of this labor-power itself. It extends the laborer’s time of production during a given period by shortening his actual life-time” (Marx and Engels

1972). Engels argues: “The pivot on which the exploitation of the worker turns is the sale of his labor power to the capitalist and the use which the capitalist makes of this transaction, the fact that he compels the worker to produce far more than the paid value of his labor power amounts to. It is this transaction between capitalist and worker which produces all the surplus value afterwards divided in the form of ground rent, commercial profit, interest on capital, taxes, etc., among the diverse varieties of capitalists and their servitors” (Marx and Engels 1995c). Marx says that under capitalist conditions, the modern laborer, “instead of rising with the process of industry, sinks deeper and deeper below the conditions of existence of his own class. He becomes a pauper, and pauperism develops more rapidly than population and wealth” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

### *Characteristics of Marx and Engels' Ideology on Social Justice*

#### (1) Combining the ideal of social justice with the spirit of history

It is the lofty ideal of Marx and Engels to eliminate exploitation, put an end to the situation where some people are ruled while others are oppressed, realize the goal of sharing and benefiting all, and make every member of society develop freely and comprehensively. Marx and Engels expound these ideals many times in the *Manifesto of the Communist Party*, *The Principles of Communism*, and other important works. It is in this sense that Marx and Engels show respect for the tireless pursuit of utopian socialists: “German theoretical Socialism will never forget that it rests on the shoulders of Saint Simon, Fourier and Owen, the three who, in spite of their fantastic notions and Utopianism, belonged to the most significant heads of all time and whose genius anticipated numerous things the correctness of which can now be proved in a scientific way” (Marx and Engels 1995b).

Importantly, while forming the ideal of social justice, Marx and Engels also instilled a historical spirit into their thoughts, arguing that the specific contents of social justice cannot be eternal, and any kind of justice needs a certain historical basis. When talking about law, Marx says that “the law must be founded upon society, it must express the common interests and needs of society—as distinct from the caprice of the individuals... They are bound to change with the changing conditions of life” (Marx and Engels 1961). Engels also points out: “People forget the derivation of their legal system from their economic conditions of life, just as they have forgotten their own derivation from the animal world... The comparison assumes something common to them all, and this the jurists find by summing up that which is more or less common to all these legal systems as natural law. However, the standard which is taken to determine what is natural law and what is not, is precisely the most abstract expression of law itself, namely, justice. From this point on, therefore, the development of law for the jurists, and for those who believe them uncritically, is nothing more than the striving to bring human conditions, so far as they are

expressed in legal terms, into closer and closer conformity with the ideal of justice, eternal justice. And this justice is never anything but the ideologized, glorified expression of the existing economic relations, at times from the conservative side, at times from the revolutionary side. The justice of the Greeks and Romans held slavery to be just. The justice of the bourgeois of 1789 demanded the abolition of feudalism because it was unjust” (Marx and Engels 1995c).

Marx and Engels integrated the lofty ideal of social justice with the spirit of history, which allowed their social justice theory to have a complete scientific explanatory power and a long-term vitality. In contrast, many modern and contemporary thinkers have failed in this respect, lacking scientific explanatory power. Just pursuing justice is far from enough; social justice needs a historical basis. Once the support of historical spirit and historical basis is lacking, the following two biases tend to appear:

First is the principle of eternal justice. The crux of the innate human rights theory of modern enlightenment thinkers lies in treating their own theories as eternal principles of human society. However, the “talent” as its historical basis cannot be established. As Marx states: “German chauvinists by temperament and enlightened liberals by reflection, seek our history of liberty beyond our history, in the primeval Teutonic forests. But how does the history of our liberty differ from the history of the wild boar’s liberty, if it is only to be found in the forests?” (Marx and Engels 1995a). “The average individual of the later stage was always foisted on to the earlier stage, and the consciousness of a later age on to the individuals of an earlier. Through this inversion, which from the first is an abstract image of the actual conditions, it was possible to transform the whole of history into an evolutionary process of consciousness” (Marx and Engels 1972). Even Rawls, a contemporary scholar, made the same mistake. Rawls tried to construct the basic rules of social justice in the way of the “veil of ignorance”: “We must nullify the effects of specific contingencies which put men at odds and tempt them to exploit social and natural circumstances to their own advantage. Now in order to do this I assume that the parties are situated behind a veil of ignorance. They do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case and they are obliged to evaluate principles solely on the basis of general considerations” (Rawls 1999). Obviously, this practice lacks the spirit of history and sufficient persuasiveness, so it has no scientific significance.

Second is the utopian theory. Separate from the theory of eternal justice, modern utopians believe that there is no justice in the real society. As a result, they pictured justice in a beautiful utopian society. Thomas More’s *Utopia*, Muenzer’s kingdom of God and prophesied millennium, Campanella’s *City of the Sun*, Saint-Simon’s industrial society, Fourier’s system of harmony, and Owen’s community ideas all show modern utopians’ yearning for beautiful societies. They meticulously and imaginatively depict a beautiful society that is very different from the real world. However, they did not see that “the final causes of all social changes and political revolutions are to be sought, not in

men's brains, not in men's better insights into eternal truth and justice, but in changes in the modes of production and exchange. They are to be sought, not in the philosophy, but in the economics of each particular epoch... the means of getting rid of the incongruities that have been brought to light must also be present, in a more or less developed condition, within the changed modes of production themselves. These means are not to be invented by deduction from fundamental principles, but are to be discovered in the stubborn facts of the existing system of production" (Marx and Engels 1995c).

- (2) Different interpretations of the relationship between individuals and society as a whole directly affect the people's views on basic issues of social justice. Marx made a scientific explanation of this issue, thus ensuring the legitimacy of his overall theory of social justice from an extremely important scientific aspect.

Marx and Engels believe that people are not abstract but concrete individuals. "The premises from which we begin are not arbitrary ones, not dogmas, but real premises from which abstraction can only be made in the imagination. They are the real individuals, their activity and the material conditions under which they live, both those which they find already existing and those produced by their activity" (Marx and Engels 1995). Men are the premises of the existence of the whole society. "Individuals have always built on themselves, but naturally on themselves within their given historical conditions and relationships, not on the 'pure' individual in the sense of the ideologists... Individuals have always and in all circumstances 'proceeded from themselves'... They entered into intercourse with one another as what they were, they proceeded 'from themselves', as they were, irrespective of their 'outlook on life'" (Marx and Engels 1960).

Marx further points out that, for a person in reality, it is impossible for them to exist in isolation. "Its premises are men, not in any fantastic isolation and rigidity, but in their actual, empirically perceptible process of development under definite conditions." People are bound to have all kinds of connections, "definite individuals who are productively active in a definite way enter into these definite social and political relations" (Marx and Engels 1995a).

Clearly, the relationship between individuals and society is: on the one hand, individuals cannot exist without society, and society is an indispensable environmental condition for them to exist and develop in. "The human being is in the most literal sense a political animal, not merely a gregarious animal, but an animal which can individuate itself only in the midst of society. Production by an isolated individual outside society—a rare exception which may well occur when a civilized person in whom the social forces are already dynamically present is cast by accident into the wilderness—is as much of an absurdity as is the development of language without individuals living together and talking to each other" (Marx and Engels 1979). "Only in community [with others has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the

community, therefore, is personal freedom possible” (Marx and Engels 1960). On the other hand, the basic purpose and significance of social development lies in making every member of society develop freely and comprehensively, and the realization of the overall social development also depends on the full development of the individuals. In an ideal society, “we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

Marx’s scientific explanation of the relationship between the individual and the society has prevented two possible drawbacks: first, the society becomes geared toward individuals while ignoring the significance of society itself, which will not only lead to social disorder but also hinder the normal existence and development of others and ultimately hinder the existence and development of itself. Second, the society becomes geared toward itself only while ignoring the value of its individuals, even sacrificing the normal and reasonable interests of individuals in the name of the interests of the society as a whole. The result is bound to deviate from the basic purpose of social development and restrain and weaken social vitality.

### (3) Unify the integrity and openness of the social justice theory.

Marx and Engels’ ideas of social justice are complete but at the same time are not closed to themselves, leaving a broad space for future generations to develop and deepen their thought.

Although Marx and Engels did not leave a single document that directly addressed social justice, they discussed its basic issues in many important documents, thus creating a relatively complete theory of social justice. First is the basic concept of social justice. This includes their basic idea of sharing and universal benefit for all, the idea of eliminating the three major differences, eliminating exploitation and realizing equality for all, the idea of obtaining human freedom and liberation and returning to real humanity, etc. Second is the basic rules of social justice. Their expositions on safeguarding the basic rights of members of society, distribution according to work, social adjustment, and systematic criticism of injustice constitute the basic rules of social justice in the modern sense. Third is the basic ways of realizing social justice. Marx and Engels clearly state that the basic root of all kinds of injustice in society lies in the existence of private ownerships, so private ownerships should be eliminated on the basis of fully developed productive forces. Marx also believes that the irrational social division of labor based on the specific stage of productive forces is also one of the important sources of social injustice, so the irrational social division of labor should be eliminated on the basis of developed productive forces. On the premise of eliminating private ownership and unreasonable social division of labor, “the possibility of securing for every member of society, by means of socialized production, an existence not only fully sufficient materially, and becoming day-by-day more full, but an existence guaranteeing to all the free development and exercise of their physical and mental faculties—this

possibility is now, for the first time, here, but it is here” (Marx and Engels 1995). In fact, this puts forward the most important path to realizing the idea and basic rules of social justice.

Marx and Engels did not close their theoretical system—on the contrary, they regarded their theories, including those about social justice, as a process of continuous enrichment and deepening. Engels states: “To my mind, the so-called ‘socialist society’ is not anything immutable. Like all other social formations, it should be conceived in a state of constant flux and change” (Marx and Engels 1971). Obviously, the theory should change as society changes. As Lenin says: “There is nothing resembling ‘sectarianism’ in Marxism, in the sense of it being a hidebound, petrified doctrine, a doctrine which arose away from the high road of the development of world civilization” (Lenin 1972).

After more than a century, many great changes have taken place in the environment. Therefore, today, Marx and Engels’ social justice thought obviously has some shortcomings. For example, they did not notice that the market economy should be an organic part of socialist society, nor did they put its important influence on social justice in a proper position. Accordingly, they did not regard principles such as equal opportunities and fair competition as an indispensable and important part of the system of fair rules. For another example, Marx and Engels’ discussion on some social justice issues is not detailed enough: its sequence of realization, the national characteristics of social justice, the social justice issues in the socialist modernization of underdeveloped countries, and so on. All of these issues are what contemporary Marxists should explore and answer.

### *The Significance of Marx and Engels’ Social Justice Ideology*

Whether from the theoretical level or from the practical level, Marx and Engels’ social justice thought has a very extensive and far-reaching influence and is of great significance.

From the theoretical and theoretical level, compared to other social justice theories, Marx and Engels’ social justice thought is obviously superior and has indisputable scientific significance. It is in this sense that Marx and Engels’ social justice thought is the unity of science and discipline. Marx’s social justice thought is based on historical materialism, so it has a completely scientific nature. At the same time, Marx and Engels systematically discussed social justice from many important aspects such as basic ideas, basic rules, and basic ways, which made their social justice thoughts have more complete academic significance.

In contrast, modern enlightenment thinkers such as Rousseau, Montesquieu, and Diderot and utopian socialist thinkers such as More and Saint-Simon have proposed many valuable ideas about social justice, but their ideas lacked historical, practical, or economic basis and their research scope was also limited, so their thoughts are not of scientific and disciplinary significance on the whole. The most influential thinkers in contemporary times, such as Rawls, Nozick, and others, have done systematic and comprehensive research on social justice.

Therefore, it should be acknowledged that their social justice thought has a relatively complete discipline form and has a very wide influence on the real society. However, their theories also lack historical, practical, or economic basis, so they had no scientific significance in a complete sense. For example, one of the fatal flaws of Rawls' social justice theory is the weakness of a logical starting point. Rawls set the existence of the "veil of ignorance" and tried to arrange the specific content and rules of social justice with it as a logical starting point. Rawls proposes the existence of the "veil of ignorance" and tries to arrange the specific contents and rules of social justice with it as a logical starting point. Only behind the veil of ignorance can people eliminate the influence of all natural and social factors and have the necessary "general knowledge"; in this way, people can arrange the specific contents and rules of social justice. In fact, the hypothesis of "veil of ignorance" attempts to apply the value-neutral research method. Obviously, this assumption lacks a historical basis. Rawls did not see the great influence of the historical process of modernization and the promotion of the market economy on the whole of human society, nor did he see the influence of the "natural" historical process on the stipulation of human nature, so he could not grasp the stipulation and influence of history and reality on the contents and rules of justice in modern society. Nozick's theory of social justice also lacks historical, practical, and economic bases as well as a scientific explanation for the relationship between individuals and society, so his theory has two defects: First, it belittles the position and function of equality. Although Nozick conceded that everyone should enjoy the basic rights of equality and freedom, he obviously focused on individuals' rights to freedom in his practical discussion. In particular, the problem of society's weaker members hardly registers in his field of vision, and all kinds of unreasonable gaps among members of society hardly arouse Nozick's concern. In general this weakens the scientific nature of his theory of social justice. Second, his theory did not stress the social obligations and responsibilities that people should perform. In a certain sense, Nozick was only interested in demonstrating how individuals' rights to freedom can be guaranteed and how their autonomy can be respected by the whole society, but rarely mentioned their obligations and responsibilities. This is not conducive to improving social integration and social cooperation, nor is it conducive to personal development.

From the above, we can see that Marx and Engels' ideology on social justice thought, by far, holds the most scientific theory regarding social justice. Therefore, when we study social justice, we should be guided by their ideology. Meanwhile, under the new historical conditions, we should also improve and enrich the Marxist social justice theory in order to make it more scientific.

Marx and Engels' ideology on social justice has great practical significance for the progress of human society and has changed the basic situation of human society to a great extent. The prospect of human society revealed by Marx and Engels' social justice thought, the criticism of injustice in real society, and the elaboration of the basic ways of human social progress have directly triggered the practice of socialist revolution and construction in the world, directly



promoted the development of the workers' movement in Western capitalist countries, and greatly promoted the development of the national liberation movement. All of this has influenced and improved the existence and development of human society, promoted the spread of socialist values, and greatly promoted the progress of human society. Even in today's Western developed countries, Marx and Engels have a very important influence. Even Giddens, the master of "the third way" theory, admitted that socialism and communism still have an important influence on the real world. "We cannot just put aside the values and ideals that drove them, for some remain intrinsic to the good life that it is the point of social and economic development to create" (Giddens 2008).

Marx and Engels' social justice ideology is of great guiding significance to China's socialist modernization drive. In the 30 years before 1979, China's socialist revolution and construction made great achievements. In this process, many important aspects of Marx and Engels' social justice thought have been realized in Chinese society, such as the fundamental elimination of the exploitation system in Chinese society, the initial and large-scale guarantee of the basic rights of Chinese people, especially the basic right to live, the initial realization of equality between men and women, the great development of mass education, and so on. However, it cannot be denied that, during this period, China also made many serious mistakes in terms of social justice. These mistakes are mainly manifested in the following aspects: First, it neglected that the basic premise for the establishment of Marx and Engels' social justice thought should be highly developed productive forces. For a long time, China has neglected the extreme importance of developing productive forces. Instead of shifting the focus of development work to economic construction, it still insists on taking class struggle as the key link, despises the construction of education, science, and culture, and exaggerates the class struggle in the ideological field until the "Cultural Revolution" took place. This practice will lead to "the abstract negation of the entire world of culture and civilization, the regression to the unnatural simplicity of the poor and crude man who has few needs" (Marx 1985). China has paid a heavy price for this. Second, the people-oriented concept has not been implemented. In the 30 years before 1979, in the process of modernization, China often ignored the basic needs of the people and blindly pursued higher, further, and empty goals, often at the expense of the basic needs of the people. Third, the relationship between individuals and society has not been properly handled. At that time, in front of the "collective," the individual was almost insignificant, the reasonable interests of the individual could not be effectively guaranteed, and the development of the individual was often seriously despised. Moreover, for the sake of the so-called collective interests, it seemed a normal thing to sacrifice individual interests and development.

Since 1979, with the advancement of modernization and the market economy, Marx and Engels' ideology of social justice has been gradually restored and generally recognized by the Chinese people. At the same time, their ideology thought has more and more practical significance. The Communist Party

of China (CPC), represented by Deng Xiaoping, put forward the theory of socialist essence. Deng Xiaoping points out that, in essence, socialism is about liberating and developing productive forces, eliminating exploitation and polarization, and, ultimately, achieving prosperity for all. This is the inheritance and development of Marx and Engels' ideology of social justice.

China's socialist modernization and market economy will go through a long historical process. In this process, a large number of social problems will inevitably appear. China's socialist modernization and market economy need a basic orientation and the solution for China's social problems needs a set of effective and reasonable rules, all of which are inseparable from the guidance of Marx and Engels' ideology on social justice.

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# The Difference Between the Concepts of Justice, Righteousness, Fairness, and Equality

Justice, righteousness, fairness, and equality are basic concepts that have supporting significance in modern society. Because there are some similarities between these concepts, many people regard them as the same, and even use them in a mixed way in most circumstances. However, strictly speaking, the four concepts are different and carry different connotations. If we conflate them with one another, it may mislead the design of social institutions and the formulation of socio-economic policies to different degrees. Therefore, it is necessary to clarify the similarities and differences between them.

## I THE NUANCES OF JUSTICE AND RIGHTEOUSNESS

The two concepts of “*gongzheng*” (公正, justice) and “*zhengyi*” (正义, righteousness) are basically synonymous, and both can be translated as “justice” in English. Both are also commonly used in most Chinese contexts according to the customary practice. It is recognized that justice and righteousness are two value goals of human society and are commonly pursued by people in different regions and in different times. This makes many people regard the two as the same, paying little attention to their nuances. People may feel that there is a difference between them from the perspective of language sense. For example, Mao Zedong says, “Our cause is righteous, and a righteous cause is unbreakable by any enemy” (Mao 1999). Obviously, the term “righteous” here cannot be replaced by “justice.” Even so, people are often unclear on what the exact difference is.

Although the two concepts are interchangeable in most circumstances, a closer examination reveals that there are some nuances between them in the Chinese context, and the scope of application is also somewhat different. In this respect, the Chinese is richer in meaning than the English, as “the confusion between the two concepts mostly occurs in the Chinese context because their Chinese expressions are different” (Xu 2010).

Specifically, the differences between the two concepts of “*gongzheng*” and “*zhengyi*” in Chinese context are as follows:

First, “*zhengyi*,” as a value of the highest level, is a purely deontic matter, while “*gongzheng*” is the “is - ought problem.” The latter arranges basic institutions of the actual society according to deontic values, integrating “the ideal” with “the actual.”

Relatively speaking, righteousness expresses the basic value orientation that society should have. It is a pure value, the orientation of the good, the moral high ground, the highest ideal goal of human society, and a “righteous path on earth.” As Confucius (551-479 BC) says, “How would you repay kindness? Repay a grudge with rectitude, and repay kindness with kindness.” The word “rectitude” here focuses on something “upright,” “reasonable,” and “proper.” Mencius (372-289 BC) says, “Righteousness is the right path for man.” Xunzi (300-230 BC) says, “Acting on the consideration of your own legitimate benefit is called business. Acting on the consideration of righteousness is called virtue.” Xunzi further explains what righteousness is from the opposite end: “If it is not righteous, then it is treacherous and evil.” In a sense, righteousness is a deontic matter that can be detached from the real world. Although some of Mencius and Dong Zhongshu’s remarks polarize “righteousness” and “profit,” they did illustrate the distance between righteousness and the actual society from another perspective. Objectively speaking, righteousness also has practical value. As human beings, we need to pursue ideal goals. It is through the pursuit of such a “pure” ideal goal that people can continuously improve the actual society.

Unlike righteousness’ emphasis on what ought to be, justice is based on righteousness to devise and arrange the basic social institutions, attempting to organically unify “the ideal” and “the actual,” so it focuses more on reality. Although there are distinctions between justice and righteousness, they are inseparable. For a society, institutions, especially normative, reasonable, and just institutions, are crucial and indispensable. “Institutions are the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction. In consequence they structure incentives in human exchange, whether political, social, or economic” (North 1990). The design of reasonable, fair, and practical institutions must be based on a certain idea, which is justice. As John Rawls says, “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought” (Rawls 1999). Thus, the actual cannot be separated from the ideal, and justice is the unity of righteousness and profit—the “is-ought” unity—and the combination of the actual and the ideal. Rawls also points out: “For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements” (Rawls 1999). The term “justice” Rawls uses here is equivalent to “*gongzheng*” in Chinese. It is precisely because justice takes on a practical nature that the

realization of it should consider how to integrate ideals into reality, the feasibility of institutional design and arrangements, and the common recognition, coordination, and even compromise of all social groups in the institutional arrangements.

From the above, it can be seen that, in the Chinese context, “*zhengyi*” (righteousness) focuses on philosophical values, while “*gongzheng*” (justice) focuses on social institutions (social institutions in a broad sense).

Other distinctions between the two concepts in the Chinese context are further derived from the above.

Second, the contents of righteousness are transhistorical and relatively constant, while the contents of justice will change as the times change.

As an ideal and motivational orientation, righteousness has some relatively constant characteristics that transcend specific historical stages. As one scholar says: “Righteousness manifests itself as conceptualized ideas and values, being oriented toward the ultimate goal of mankind. It is constructed in reality and transcends reality” (Xu 2010). No matter what era of society, there are always many similar themes. People have made similar and relatively consistent efforts on these themes. For example, people in ancient China attached great importance to the harmony between man and nature. Although their specific practices at a particular time in history hardly seem scientific and feasible now, their attitudes and efforts are worth learning from for later generations (Wu 1992). The same is true of righteousness. In ancient Chinese, leaders of peasant uprisings advocated for slogans such as “equalize the noble and humble; same share between rich and poor,” which reflected the constant pursuit of righteousness at a certain stage of history and the people’s struggle against social injustice under the feudal autocracy. Although it is impossible for us to copy the specific contents of the ancient people’s pursuit, as a value and concept that transcends the times and as a direction of effort, a behavior orientation, and a pursuit, righteousness has a certain relative constancy that transcends the times and is still worthy of recognition and reference in today’s society.

In contrast, justice is closer to reality, so its specific contents will inevitably change with the change of time. In other words, these contents will be progressive and updated. For example, today’s people recognize the ancients’ pursuit of righteousness, such as ancient Greek philosophers, but they do not necessarily agree with their interpretation of justice. The rationale is simple, because people in every era always achieve justice under certain historical conditions. As the times change, the people’s ideas and understanding also broaden, and their abilities to achieve justice also become greater. Therefore, different times will endow justice with different contents. In other words, the specific contents of justice will update and develop with the development of the times. People in traditional and modern society will have different understandings of justice and their abilities to realize justice will also vary. However, different endeavors to justice can all be carried out in the name of pursuing righteousness. Traditional society emphasized itself as a whole as well as the dependence of the people, so justice in such a society means order, an orderly society, and the “benevolent

governance” of the rulers. For example, Plato believed that justice is a reasonable division of labor and order. “The ability of the commercial, auxiliary, and guardian classes to mind their own business, with each of them performing its own function in the city – this will be justice, and will make the city just” (Plato 2003). Whereas in modern society, the contents of justice have been updated and carry new connotations. Justice in the modern sense emphasizes the extreme importance of individuals, the social association based on independent individuals and free people, the compatibility with the market economy, the encouragement of everyone’s free space and free development, the legitimacy of everyone’s pursuit of reasonable interests, and the fact that no one can harm the reasonable interests of others while pursuing their own interests.

Third, righteousness is something that few people can do, while justice is something that most people can follow.

In general, only a minority, rather than a majority, can devote themselves to righteousness and are willing to give everything for it. According to Confucius and Mencius, righteousness is essential for a person of virtue. They set a high standard of “righteousness,” which is difficult for ordinary people to achieve. Therefore, only a few members of society can meet this high standard. Under normal circumstances, most people cannot meet such standards and cannot devote their lives to the cause of righteousness. What they care about is their daily life, and what they are interested in is their immediate interests because profits come first. As Marx states, “Everything people strive for is related to their interests” (Marx and Engels 1956). Because of this, in any “normal” society, only a few people can reach high standards such as “people with lofty ideals” and “heroic models.” These people sacrifice their lives for justice in order to safeguard the long-term interests of most ordinary people and improve their daily lives.

In contrast, most members of society can consciously and voluntarily identify with justice and follow just rules and institutions. Justice involves the design and arrangement of basic social institutions, which is indispensable to the daily life and career of most people. In modern society, with the increase of risks and uncertain factors, people’s increasing expectations of lives, more space for people’s freedom and differentiated activities, and more emphasis that people place on their independence, equality, freedom, security, and development, most people increasingly rely on fair rules and institutions. Justice in the modern sense aims to create a “good” institutional system based on the value orientation of justice. This “good” institutional system can enable people to contribute what they can and occupy the position that they deserve, thus further forming a dynamic and orderly social situation in which there is rational division of labor so that the people can work according to the regulations and cooperate effectively. Clearly, just rules and institutions can provide a reasonable, safe, and predictable environment for most people, one that will be recognized and followed by these people.



## 2 DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN JUSTICE AND FAIRNESS

Because the two concepts are somewhat similar, many theorists use them alternately in most circumstances and regard them as the same. Sometimes people intuitively feel that there are differences between the two. For example, the term “fairness, justice, and openness” actually distinguishes between justice and fairness. However, the explanations of their meanings are often vague.

Strictly speaking, there is a difference between the two concepts. They can be defined in both broad and narrow terms. Broadly speaking, the two terms are frequently used, have similar meanings, and are interchangeable. However, the two terms in a broad sense are not suitable for formal occasions. While in the narrow sense—that is, in the strict sense—the two concepts have their own definite meanings, there are some obvious distinctions between them.

First, justice is a significant “value orientation,” one that focuses on the “basic value orientation” of society and emphasizes the legitimacy of this value. Fairness, on the other hand, is more “instrumental,” emphasizing the “same scale” of measurement standards to prevent the problem of double (or multiple) standards in social treatment. This is the most important difference between the two.

In the realm of social life, the difference between justice and fairness is obvious. For example, what the “financial tycoon” Soros did in the financial market of Southeast Asia a few years ago is a typical practice of following the “fair” rules of the game, but is indeed against the requirements of justice. Because of the lack of basic value orientations of justice, Soros directly caused the economic disaster in Southeast Asia through the “fair” rules of the game. In another example, let us assume that several people stole \$10 worth of property, and they committed the same exact “crimes.” After they were caught, some were sentenced to five years of imprisonment, some were sentenced to 20 days of detention, and others were acquitted. This practice is clearly unfair because it violates the rule of equal treatment. However, if they were all sentenced to five years of imprisonment, then it could be argued that this treatment is relatively fair, but, on the other hand, it is obviously too heavy a sentence and goes against the principle of justice. These two examples reveal that justice and fairness are not the same.

Rawls’ famous proposition of “justice as fairness” also illustrates the difference between justice and fairness. In order to develop a real, unbiased idea of social justice that is not influenced by any group interests, Rawls assumes that the parties are situated behind a “veil of ignorance.” “It is assumed, then, that the parties do not know certain kinds of particular facts. First of all, no one knows his place in society, his class position or social status; nor does he know his fortune in the distribution of natural assets and abilities, his intelligence and strength, and the like. Nor, again, does anyone know his conception of the good, the particulars of his rational plan of life, or even the special features of his psychology... More than this, I assume that the parties do not know the particular circumstances of their own society. That is, they do not know its

economic or political situation, or the level of civilization and culture it has been able to achieve.” In this way, Rawls tries to “set up a fair procedure so that any principles agreed to will be just” (Rawls 1999). The resulting idea is “justice as fairness.”

Although Rawls sometimes conflates fairness and justice, in his arguments and expositions, he still clarifies their respective functions and positions. Rawls uses the “veil of ignorance” as a “fair procedure” to produce the concrete contents of justice, which shows that as an instrumental or technical method, fairness is very effective. His “veil of ignorance” aims to minimize people’s personal preferences and prejudices in determining their basic value orientation while taking a value-free attitude. Rawls mainly used the idea of fairness in this sense. Although the “veil of ignorance” does not exist in actual society, this “fair” practice can play a role in limiting each “self,” so that the specific contents of justice are formed objectively and in a true state, making the values of justice that finally emerge more acceptable to the people. This practice also shows that fairness serves justice, and it should be subordinate to justice.

From the above, we can see, first, that the functional orientation of the two is different. Justice emphasizes the legitimacy of value orientation; it not only stresses whether the current situation and result meet the requirements or rules of justice, it also should pay attention to the procedural fairness that has caused this situation and result in order to ensure justice. One of the most important contents of procedural fairness is that the “same standard” should be followed—that is, the fair criterion—so as to prevent some groups from satisfying their own self-interests by double or multiple standards and at the same time harming other groups, thus creating an unjust social state. Because of this, justice must include fairness. Generally speaking, what is just must be fair, but what is fair does not necessarily have to be just. Compared with justice, fairness is much simpler. Fairness emphasizes objectivity and is value-neutral and instrumental. In a certain sense, it is only a matter of the operational level, although this level is sometimes of great significance. Fairness only requires people to follow the rule of “the same standard,” so what is fair sometimes is not necessarily just. Second, the basic value of justice determines the positive significance of fairness. If there is no basic value of justice, there will be no true fairness—that is, fairness in the positive sense—and the rest may be just “fair” rules of the game. Such rules only have a neutral meaning, which only refer to equal treatment under the same rules of the game. As for what the basis of such rules is and what social effects they may produce, it is often not the concern of the parties, but varies depending on specific people and events. Once society loses its basic value of justice, individuals or groups with various intentions may use fair rules as an excuse to adopt practices that are beneficial to themselves but detrimental to others. Therefore, sometimes such “fair” rules of the game will have a negative impact to the society.

Second, justice in the real sense can only be realized in modern society, while in traditional society, there is the possibility of fairness to a certain extent and within a certain scope.

Rawls precisely analyzed the basic purpose and function of justice and righteousness. He argues: “The primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation... The justice of a social scheme depends essentially on how fundamental rights and duties are assigned and on the economic opportunities and social conditions in the various sectors of society... Justice is the first virtue of social institutions... Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others. It does not allow that the sacrifices imposed on a few are outweighed by the larger sum of advantages enjoyed by many” (Rawls 1999). Obviously, the basic purpose and function of justice and righteousness can only exist in modern society.

In traditional society, it is possible to achieve the most elementary justice in some sectors; for example, from the utilitarian point of view, for the continuation of “species” (the life of society), rulers should try their best to prevent large-scale famine from occurring. However, this is only a biological, primitive, and very elementary “justice,” not justice in its real meaning. Generally speaking, in traditional society, justice was unlikely to exist. Traditional society was based on a special social group (such as the royal family), and due to its extreme scarcity of resources, it could only be a “dehumanized” society that opposed both equality and freedom and had a social hierarchy of hereditary monarchy. In such a society, the people’s basic dignity and rights could be trampled and damaged at will for the selfish interests of one family or clan. As Marx points out: “Despotism brutality is a necessity and humanity an impossibility. A brutal relationship can only be maintained by means of brutality” (Marx and Engels 1956). Under such circumstances, justice and righteousness became impossible. There were some demands for equality at the time, but mostly under egalitarian ideas. Such ideas lacked the theoretical basis of true equality and freedom and not to mention a realistic basis, so it could not become justice in the real sense.

Only in modern society can justice in the true sense be realized. In modern society, due to the great abundance of material wealth, the improvement of the market economy, and the concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation as primary values in society, society is built around people and becomes humanized. In modern society, sharing and universality are the basic social value orientations, and the dignity and rights of countless individuals are the basis of institutional arrangements. In this context, the basic goals of justice and righteousness will be realized across society through reasonable institutional design and the systematic implementation of economic and social policies. These existing facts reveal that, in a sound modern society, the requirements and rules of justice (the guarantee of basic human dignity and rights, equality of opportunity, distribution according to contribution, and social adjustment) can be realized on the whole.

Although justice could not be achieved in traditional society, fairness could be practiced to a certain extent (sometimes even to a large extent) and within a certain range (sometimes even within a larger range). The rationale for this is: as long as a society needs to function smoothly, it needs to devise rules for people and social groups to follow. If the rules are to be accepted by the majority, they should be fair. Therefore, even under the autocratic system of traditional society, some fair rules were still needed. Although the relevant results did not necessarily meet the requirements of justice, and in most cases their degree of fairness is limited (the restrictive fair rules generally did not apply to monarchs and royal families), these fair rules that were neutral and instrumental did play a role in maintaining social order. For example, the rule of “life for life” is applicable to most members of society, and even members of the upper class had to follow it. For another example, the imperial examination system in traditional Chinese society, to a large extent, recruited officials based on the candidates’ test scores, regardless of their family background; it cannot be denied that such practice is obviously fair.

Third, justice is more idealistic, while fairness contains more practical elements.

Since justice focuses on basic social values and institutions, it is sometimes far removed from the people’s daily life. In order to realize justice, we need to rely on fairness as an effective and instrumental way. First, in real social life, fairness can make necessary corrections to some improper “just” behaviors. As Aristotle points out: “When the thing is indefinite the rule also is indefinite... for the fair, though it is better than one kind of justice, yet is just, and it is not as being a different class of thing that it is better than the just. The same thing, then, is just and fair, and while both are good the fair is superior. What creates the problem is that the fair is just, but not the legally just but a correction of legal justice” (Aristotle 1990a). Second, when geared toward justice, fairness can deal with some specific things in a flexible way. On the surface, it seems that some “just” rule can be directly used to deal with these things. However, due to the complexity of real social life, these things are highly correlated with many other things that have different properties, which makes these specific things deserve another kind of “treatment.” As Marx states, “Although they are extremely similar things, appearing in different historical circumstances caused completely different results” (Marx and Engels 1963). Therefore, these kinds of “similar” things should be treated fairly and flexibly based on justice. Likewise, sometimes the same can be done for some opposite things of another kind.

### 3 DISTINCTIONS BETWEEN JUSTICE AND EQUALITY

Equality and justice are important values that people have been pursuing for a long time, and they are indispensable ideological pillars of modern society. The two concepts are similar in many aspects. This is reflected not only in the fact that equality is an important basis for justice, but also in the fact that the

contents of these two concepts overlap and are repetitive in many aspects; that is, they are consistent in some specific contents. Because of the high correlation between these two concepts, many people mistake them for the same thing, so they often use equality and justice interchangeably. Aristotle sometimes used justice and equality interchangeably as the same concept. When discussing “equality according to worth,” Aristotle says: “Since justice is equality, equality according to worth should be just... For example, those who own more pay more taxes, and those who own less pay less taxes. This is equal by proportion. Moreover, those who work more get more, and those who work less get less. This is equal by proportion” (Aristotle 1990b). Even in contemporary times, many people regard justice and equality as the same. Huntington’s *Goals of Development* and Arthur Okun’s *Equality and Efficiency* all reflect this situation.

In actuality, justice and equality are two different concepts, and the difference is much bigger than that between justice and fairness.

First, equality may become “excessive,” but justice will never be. Therefore, reasonable equality is just.

Equality is an extremely important value in modern society. Although many people have been pursuing equality since the ancient times, as a modern concept, it came into being on the basis of opposing the prior privilege and hierarchy of traditional society, and it was formed and improved along with modernization and the market economy. The concept of equality in the modern sense is the confirmation of the individual’s independent personality and subjectivity, and its formation is a historical progress. Since society is composed of countless individuals, the basic contribution of each individual is both indispensable and equal. The affirmation of individuals’ fundamental contributions and human dignity should take on a concrete form. If individuals are not entitled to the same basic rights, their survival cannot be guaranteed, their dignity cannot be preserved, and equality will lose its practical significance. In this regard, the basic rights of individuals are in line with natural law.

Although the idea of equality is crucial, we should note that it is not the only core value in modern society. Equality must be combined with values such as freedom and social cooperation, so that its positive function can be exerted. This is because everyone is not only born equal, but also born different. People are different in native endowments such as ability, psychology, and development prospects. At the same time, equal individuals must effectively cooperate in society, or it will be difficult for that society to function and develop smoothly. Thus, the three concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation complement each other and are indispensable, which together constitute the conceptual basis of justice in the modern sense. Marx said that the ideal goal of society is “the association of free people,” and the free people in the association should not only be free but also be equal, and at the same time, they must unite and cooperate in society.

The problem is that the three ideas should be considered as a coordinated one. Overemphasizing any of them will undermine the other two, thus causing harmful effects on society. Just as excessive freedom damages the social order

indispensable to the normal operation of a society, excessive equality will also damage the social order, weaken social vitality, and reduce social efficiency. In particular, excessive equality will directly damage freedom. “Equality can either be the best complement of freedom or its worst enemy. The relationship between equality and freedom is a love-hate relationship, depending on whether we demand an equality that suits diversity or an equality that sees inequality in every diversity. And, certainly, the more equality is sameness, the more an equality so conceived feeds a distaste for variety, self-assertion and eminence, and thereby, in the final analysis, for freedom” (Sartori 1987). Therefore, equality requires necessary restrictions or balance, which can only come from justice. In this sense, equality is subordinate to justice. “Out of liberty, equality and justice, only justice is an unlimited good...no society can be too just...When justice thus regulates the pursuit of liberty and equality, both can be maximized harmoniously within the limits set. The irresolvable conflict between the erroneous extremism of the libertarian and the erroneous extremism of the egalitarian vanishes. The sovereignty of justice has corrected the errors and resolved the conflict” (Adler 1984).

Second, the scope of justice is much broader than that of equality. Because the connotation of justice includes equality, freedom, and social cooperation, in actual social life, justice involves institutions, norms, rules and policies, etc. In this sense, justice is a systematic collection. In contrast, equality is only an attribute and a level in this collection, although this attribute or level is very important.

Third, the idea of justice tends to identify with the actual society, while equality tends to contradict society.

Although justice is a basic value, because it is the most important basis for institutions and policies of modern society, the concept of justice is closely related to the actual society (though less practical compared to fairness). The conditions of modernization and the market economy mean that if a society is not in a state of turmoil and disintegration, then justice often recognizes the basic norms, institutions, and order of this “normal” society. Therefore, there may be imperfections such as inequality in such a society, but justice is adaptable to reality. The idea of justice is so closely related to the actual society that, back in ancient times, scholars believed that law-abiding is justice. Socrates “thought that unwillingness to do injustice was sufficient proof of Justice... what is lawful is just” (Bao 1996). Aristotle also says: “The law-abiding man and the fair man will both be just... and ‘the unjust’ means that which is illegal and that which is unequal or unfair... what is lawful is decided by legislature... Now all the various pronouncements of the law aim either at the common interest of all, or at the interest of a ruling class determined either by excellence or in some other similar way... But the law also prescribes certain conduct” (Aristotle 1990a). Socrates and Aristotle’s statements are not accurate enough because they reduce the value of justice and raise the legal status of their country. However, both show from one side that the idea of justice is closely related to the actual society. The more civilized and modern a society is, the more

obvious this point is. In many developed countries, the social policy, which is the direct embodiment of justice, is closely related to and across society. In these countries, justice has penetrated into almost all levels of social life through systematic social policies. For example, the idea of justice can be found in Nordic countries through comprehensive social policies, protecting the majority of people across the circle of life from cradle to grave.

Things are different with equality. Equality is more of an ideal that can provide people with multiple explanations. For many social classes, especially intellectual groups, equality provides an imaginary space that can be almost freely developed and designed according to their wonderful goals. Therefore, most members of society are more likely to agree with equality, the eternal and beautiful pursuit of human society. However, we should note that the idea of equality is easily divorced from practical institutional design and policy arrangement to a great extent. The pursuit of equality can often ignore feasibility and operability. Sometimes people neglect freedom and social cooperation when discussing equality. They develop the idea of equality “freely and independently,” without other ideas to check and balance and without considering variables in reality, making it more likely to form an overly idealistic and purely spiritual pursuit. However, in the face of this “idealized” equality, the basic order of the actual society, which contains many unsatisfactory elements, is not easily recognized, thus causing conflict between equality and justice. Even Arthur Okun, who highly values equality, says: “The distribution of rights stresses equality even at the expense of equality and freedom. When people differ in capabilities, interests, and preferences, identical treatment is not equitable treatment, at least by some standards” (Okun 1975). This kind of disharmony or even conflict sometimes leads to a fierce attack and criticism of the concept of equality on the actual society, and such attack and criticism is almost endless.

#### 4 ENLIGHTENMENT

As the concept of justice is the most important basis for institutional design and policy formulation in modern society, clarifying their different meanings, applicable scopes, and different functions can help people avoid confusing and misusing them, especially the misleading effect caused by replacing justice with fairness or equality, and thus reduce the mistakes in devising institutions and formulating policies in modern society.

First, avoid the misleading effect of replacing justice with fairness.

As mentioned earlier, the concept of fairness focuses on “same scale” and “same treatment” to prevent the differential treatment of double or multiple standards. The concept itself does not have obvious value orientation, but emphasizes objectivity and is neutral and instrumental. Therefore, if a society lacks proper value orientation in a certain period, then emphasizing fairness at this time will undoubtedly encourage the spontaneous behavior of this society. In a market economy, if justice is not regarded as a basic value and functions as fairness, then fairness at this time can easily be subordinated to practice that is

oriented toward the market economy, thus increasing the inherent defects of the market economy. For example, it will widen the income gap between members of society. In the market economy, the mere emphasis on the fair, same scale and treatment cannot guarantee the true fairness of people in the starting point and process of competition. In this sense, the “fair” market economic criterion is beneficial to those with greater ability, abundant capital, and superior family background, while it is very unfavorable to the those without. This situation reflects more of a “competence-based” advantage. In the short term, this may result in an efficient society. However, such a society goes against the principle of social development that everyone should be able to share and equally benefit, and its economic efficiency is healthy but morbid and unsustainable. Moreover, in the long run, the disparities that exist between people in the wealth distribution are bound to widen, and the safe operation and healthy development of society will be deeply affected. If a society’s development only benefits a few people but most suffer, then it has not achieved real development. That society would be a morbid society, not a healthy one.

Obviously, only by taking justice rather than fairness as the basic value orientation of socio-economic development can we effectively prevent the inherent defects of the market economy. Only by following the four rules of justice (the rules of guaranteeing the safety net for and basic dignity of members of society, equal opportunities, distribution according to contribution, and social adjustment) can the inherent defects of the market economy be eliminated, and the positive effects be maximized. In this case, the society will be full of vitality and maintain stable operations and a healthy development, and thus its overall quality will continuously improve.

We should also note that, in reality, people confuse fairness with justice, which has obvious drawbacks. Making justice a matter of everyday life may lower the level of the idea of justice and thus create a misunderstanding, or at least an inaccurate understanding, of issues related to justice. What people often talk about as fairness and efficiency is really a matter of justice and efficiency. Because people often use the term fairness to replace justice, some unnecessary arguments arise. For example, when studying the relationship between fairness and efficiency, many people argue that we should give priority to efficiency with due consideration to fairness, while others hold a different view. Fairness in this case should be justice. If we replace “fairness” with “justice,” then people may easily understand the relationship between the two, and similar arguments will be significantly reduced.

Second, to prevent the negative social effects caused by replacing justice with equality.

Although equality is a basic value of modern society and a basis of justice in the modern sense, if it goes beyond its specific scope of application and takes the place of justice as the most basic value orientation of modern society, then it will inevitably have many negative effects on society. (1) The concept of equality easily falls into the situation of over-criticism and under-construction. The idea of equality has many ideal components, which can provide people with various spaces to develop and explain, but it is difficult to reach a



consensus. At the same time, the concept of equality is not very feasible. As a result, the concept is a very powerful and effective tool for attacking and criticizing various unfair and unequal phenomena in reality, but the role of the concept is relatively limited in terms of solutions to these problems. (2) If there are no necessary restrictions and limitations, the idea of equality will sometimes encourage egalitarianism. Equality is only a single modern concept, which must be combined with the concepts of freedom and social cooperation to have complete significance. In fact, based on the idea of equality, people sometimes pay special attention to the “identity” and “similarity” of people’s situations or final state, that is, “two or more persons or objects can be declared equal in the sense of being – in some or all respects – identical, of being the same, alike” (Sartori 1987). Therefore, if equality is based on this “identity” to arrange social institutions and formulate socio-economic policies, it will evolve into egalitarianism to varying degrees, and many just rules, such as the rules of distribution according to contribution, will be denied, which will suppress the interests of members of society and then society will lose its vitality. (3) The abuse of equality sometimes leads to the situation where most people damage the reasonable rights and interests of the “minority” in the name of society as a whole. Modern society should be people-oriented. There is nothing wrong with this view; however, this statement is somewhat general—to be exact, society should be based on countless individuals. If everything is done in the context of society as a whole, it will lead to absolute egalitarianism as society treats all of its members in a single way. In the name of equality, then, another form of “tyranny” can easily emerge, in which the majority undermines the legitimate rights of the minority and suppresses the freedom of the individual. For example, during the French Revolution, absolute equality led to absolute democracy, which in turn led to a “democratic dictatorship” in which the majority could make arbitrary and random decisions about the fate of the minority. A similar situation occurred in China during the Cultural Revolution. It can be seen that, in the name of distorted equality and democracy, an extreme injustice can also be created.

The above possible drawbacks of the concept of equality can be prevented by justice. Compared to equality, justice is more practical and feasible, and thus it can be a reasonable basis for institutional design and policy formulation in modern society. Justice not only recognizes that all people are born the same, but also advocates that the basic dignity and rights of every member of society should be guaranteed. It also recognizes the fact that all people are born different, the space for individual people to develop freely, and the reasonable gap in income among people. Therefore, justice can organically combine the prevention of the excessive gap between the rich and poor with the prevention of egalitarianism. Under the guidance of the concept of justice in the true modern sense, the relationship between the individual and the whole society can be reasonably and effectively coordinated, and the situation that one party damages the other party due to excessive expansion can be prevented.

Third, fairness and equality should be subject to justice.

Undoubtedly, justice, fairness, and equality are extremely important and supportive concepts in modern society. In terms of devising and arranging the basic institutions of modern society, it is more accurate and appropriate to take justice as its basic value orientation. Justice is the most basic conceptual basis for the operation and development of modern society. Compared with the practice that fairness emphasizes objectivity and the same scale, justice is a basic value orientation for society, so it can be effectively positioned to make it have a positive effect on the society. Compared with equality's emphasis on the maintenance and unremitting pursuit of people's basic dignity and rights, justice pays more attention to proper and reasonable value orientation. It considers not only the value of equality, but also the reasonable values of freedom and social cooperation. Therefore, it can form an effective balancing effect on equality and make it play its proper role. In summary, in terms of the relationship among the three, justice already contains the essence of fairness and equality and has been newly integrated with the essence of other important values, and thus it occupies a dominant position. Fairness and equality can play its due role effectively and avoid the possibility of deviation only by taking justice as the core and relying on it.

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# The Rule of Equality of Opportunity in Social Justice

Equality of opportunity is an important value orientation, and its idea and principle have a far-reaching influence on modern society. The principle of equal opportunities takes individuals at its core and advocates that they make efforts to stimulate their potential. It provides them with a fair environment in which they can compete on equal terms and encourages them to eliminate “abnormal” factors that affect their development (e.g., their ascribed status). The idea of equal opportunities is to provide people with more choices and an effective space for development. Equal opportunities allow individuals to have higher societal expectations and at the same time establish basic rules. They bring vitality to society and facilitate social progress. Equal opportunities are of great practical and theoretical significance value. It is important that they get sufficient attention in local academia.

## I THE SPECIFIC MEANING OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Opportunity is the space and scope of possibility for the survival and development of members of society. Opportunities are a kind of resource for every member of society.

The so-called equality of opportunity refers to the principle that members of society should follow when solving the problem of how to have opportunities as a resource. That is, the equal should be treated equally, and the unequal should be treated unequally. The principle of equality of opportunity is an essential part of social justice.

Broadly speaking, having equal opportunities means the following:

First, having an equal start and being given the opportunity to survive and develop. Those with the same amount of potential should be given an equal start and the same prospects. “In all sectors of society there should be roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement for everyone similarly motivated and endowed. The expectations of those with the same abilities and aspirations

should not be affected by their social class” (Rawls 1999). This is the most basic requirement of the principle of equality of opportunity.

Second, realizing equal opportunities. It is not sufficient enough to simply say that having the same starting point is important. The process of realizing opportunities is also of great significance in order to ultimately realize the principle itself. Any abnormal factors that might interfere with the process should be eliminated. “It was a demand that all man-made obstacles to the rise of some should be removed, that all privileges of individuals should be abolished, and that what the state contributed to the chance of improving one’s conditions should be the same for all” (Hayek 1987). People can only be guaranteed just results if they have an equal starting point and sustained opportunities.

Third, recognizing and respecting people’s potential and allowing some “unequal” opportunities that are based on people’s differences. People are different in their natural endowments; they have different levels of intelligence, different physiques, and different personalities. Their differences have an impact on their development prospects and their ability to seize opportunities. Although their differences are far less influential than their social environment, these differences are “natural” and unavoidable and a reason for inequalities. We should recognize and respect them, as they are normal and reasonable.

It should be noted that the principle of equal opportunities that we discuss here is within the scope of justice in the modern sense. Only a modern society can provide a solid conceptual and realistic base for equal opportunities.

Modern societies provide an appropriate conceptual base for equal opportunities. First, the idea of equality. The idea of equality factors in people’s basic contributions and dignity. Human society cannot exist without individuals making contributions and having a sense of dignity. As Marx said: “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (Marx and Engels 1995a). It is the countless individuals that make up a society. “By being human, we are all equal – equal as persons, equal in our humanity. One individual cannot be more or less human than another, more or less of a person. The dignity we attribute to being a person rather than a thing is not subject to differences in degree. The equality of all human beings is the equality of their dignity as persons” (Adler 1984). Clearly, the idea of equality is aimed at guaranteeing people’s basic dignity, and this influences the principles of equal opportunities, meaning that individuals are provided with opportunities that ensure their basic survival and development.

Second, the idea of liberty. The idea of liberty means the autonomy and selectivity of individuals. “It is impossible for one person’s mind to be absolutely under another’s control. For no one can transfer to another person his natural right, or ability, to think freely and make his own judgments about any matter whatsoever, and cannot be compelled to do so... For these things are within each person’s own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so” (de Spinoza 2007). It also means respecting people’s legitimate differences. Various factors impact individuals’ circumstances, e.g., their endowments, abilities, social circumstances, living environment, and accessibility to

opportunities. So people have different opportunities and varied development prospects. This means that they produce different results and have different levels of wealth, prestige, and status. Liberty allows for these differences to some extent. It recognizes the principle of equal opportunities, but requires that individuals are given reasonable room to develop in different ways.

There are solid, realistic grounds for equal opportunities in modern society. Modernization has brought about the principle of equal opportunities. The following factors have given room for people to be unemotional yet self-directed, motivated, specific, and universal: advanced industrialization, the market economy, secularization, democratization, social differentiation, and integration. This is how equal opportunities have manifested.

## 2 TYPES OF EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

There are different types of equal opportunities. Summarizing and analyzing these types helps us to reveal their implications and characteristics.

Since opportunities have different meanings for people at different levels, equal opportunities can be divided into two types: shared equal opportunities (or shared opportunities) and differentiated equal opportunities (or differentiated opportunities). The former means that, on the whole, every member of society should have roughly the same opportunity to develop. The latter implies that people cannot have completely equal opportunities in order to survive and develop, and therefore, they should be different to some degree.

The idea behind equality is that everybody should have the basic right to survive and develop, so when opportunities present themselves, they should be equal. In reality, people have similar development prospects in most common (non-complex) industries, and they also have the basic skills to handle the labor. Therefore, theoretically, equality should and can be achieved when it comes to shared opportunities to survive and develop.

Although the idea of shared equal opportunities sounds reasonable, if there is a fundamental approach and rational, differential opportunities are denied, there will be biased distributions. As Rawls argues: "Whether the social system is just or not depends on whether it corrects the misfortunes presented at birth (family and class), and factors in people's natural endowments and historical conditions (their situation during a certain period or during their lifetime)... only when people take responsibility for their differences, can these differences be factored into distribution" (Beauchamp 1982). This is an egalitarian view, and it almost denies that there can be rational, differential opportunities. It does little to encourage the free development of individuals. In practice, this approach would damage the vitality of society and lead to suppression. It is possible for there to be shared equal opportunities, but it is impossible to bring equalization to all opportunities.

Differentiated equal opportunities factor in people's freedoms and the principle of reality. "When we consider all members of the human species, we find that, in every respect other than their possession of the same species-specific

properties and powers, inequalities in degree prevail. In other words, though all human beings have the same generic and specifically distinctive properties and powers, some will have them to a higher, some to a lower, degree than others” (Adler 1984). So we should first recognize individuals’ dignity and equality, and then recognize their differences. This attitude is in line with the idea of liberty and the principle of reality. The idea of liberty focuses on respecting individuals’ choices, encouraging them to develop their potential and make use of various opportunities in order to realize their own value. The principle of reality allows people a realistic starting point and environment. It enables people to adapt to the market economy, fully grasp various opportunities, make effective decisions and pursue their own independent development. It does not seek to be idealistic and deny the idea that members of society face all kinds of opportunity in reality. The idea of liberty and the principle of reality must allow for some opportunities to be limited to certain members of society. As long as these limits are not too extreme and they don’t affect justice or shared opportunities, they can help people accumulate social wealth, and they can promote social progress and stimulate vitality in society. It should be properly affirmed that this is one of the positive consequences of differentiated opportunities.

Shared and differentiated equal opportunities aside, we can also divide equal opportunities into two other types. We can say that people either realize formal equal opportunities (formal opportunities) or actual equal opportunities (actual opportunities).

Formal equal opportunities refer to the equal opportunities that people “should” have in modern society. They are equal opportunities recognized by law and based on people’s basic human rights. They are “pure” equal opportunities. Formal opportunities have a significant direction or goal. However, it should be noted that “offering a formal opportunity may be a way of recognizing basic rights, but these must be distinguished from effective opportunities whereby people exercise their rights” (Bodenheimer 1974). The latter are actual equal opportunities.

Actual equal opportunities are opportunities that are allowed in practice, in society. In other words, they are formal equal opportunities that are genuinely fulfilled.

Clearly, there are practical limits when it comes to implementing equal opportunities. It is impossible to ensure that they are fulfilled to their full extent. Actual equal opportunities exist for a reason, as Giovanni Sartori said, “That egalitarian treatment does not eliminate differences, i.e., does not engender equal results (in conditions or otherwise), is by now a recognized fact. Equal laws, important as they may be, simply leave us equal before the law; but the underprivileged and the privileged, the gifted and the ungifted, remain as they are” (Sartori 1987). The main reason that actual equal opportunities exist is because there are social and historical constraints. First, modernization has had a huge impact on people realizing equal opportunities. During different stages of modernization, there are different equal opportunities. The two concepts are directly proportionate to one another. In a society

with a weak market economy, it is hard to imagine that a significant number of equal opportunities can be given; social integration is distorted, and people's differences are unclear, plus there is insufficient room for the public to participate in relevant discussions. We can't imagine an alternative scenario either. Second, in a society that is moving toward modernization, it can take time for people to identify and accept substantive equal opportunities. The process of modernization involves gradually adjusting people's interests, and therefore there is a process of people gradually realizing equal opportunities. For those who lose their vital interests, equal opportunities mean that there is recognition of their reality. Obviously, introducing equal opportunities means that people go through a process of gradually adapting to them before ultimately recognizing them; that can't be achieved overnight. Therefore, in order for people to recognize equal opportunities, there needs to be recognition that people's ideas will naturally not match their reality.

### 3 THE MAIN FACTORS AFFECTING EQUAL OPPORTUNITY PRINCIPLES

As mentioned earlier, the level of modernization in society impacts how many equal opportunities there are. Overall, there are factors that influence how many equal opportunities there are in society. Direct factors are people's skills, family, education, occupation, luck, personal choices, and preferences. Although these factors impact equal opportunities, they are not the overall factors. Below, we will look at the first four.

#### 3.1 *Individual Skills*

People have different genetic qualities. "It has been the fashion in modern times to minimize the importance of congenital differences between men and to ascribe all the important differences to the influence of environment. However important the latter may be, we must not overlook the fact that individuals are very different from the outset" (Hayek 1987). There are obviously factors related to intelligence and other factors (e.g., factors related to emotional intelligence), which mean that people have different abilities. This means that there are differences in terms of how people possess or grasp opportunities. "Persons enter the game in the first place, before choices are made, before luck rolls the economic dice, before effort is exerted" (Buchanan 1986). People's talents cannot be artificially eliminated.

#### 3.2 *Family*

The family is the most basic unit in society, and it has a direct impact on people's possession of opportunities. This is at least the case in terms of how basic qualities are cultivated. The family plays an irreplaceable role in terms of how someone is socialized. "As a rule, parents can do more to prepare their children



for a satisfactory life than anyone else... there are some socially valuable qualities which will be rarely acquired in a single generation but which will generally be formed only by the continuous efforts of two or three... belonging to a particular family is part of the individual personality, that society is made up as much of families as of individuals, and that the transmission of the heritage of civilization within the family is as important a tool in man's striving toward better things as is the heredity of beneficial physical attributes" (Hayek 1987). Second, the family also provides certain social resources. People come from different family backgrounds and so obtain different resources that are necessary for their survival and development. There will obviously be concrete differences among society members, and this is particularly evident in countries with strong family values, like China, Japan, and some eastern countries. Third, some family members also inherit property. In societies where private property is recognized, inherited titles and goods enable people access to exclusive opportunities. "Clearly, there is some tendency for the affluence or poverty of the father to be visited upon the son. As Christopher Jencks and his associates report, the sons of families in the top fifth of the socioeconomic pyramid have average income 75 percent higher than those coming from the bottom fifth... Some of the causes of that differential are undoubtedly genetic or hereditary" (Okun 1975).

### 3.3 *Education*

The education that people receive directly impacts the opportunities they have and their ability to seize opportunities. Education plays a more and more important role as society becomes more modernized. On the one hand, education is crucial because it cultivates people's basic qualities. "Equally if not more important is the role of education in enabling a person to enjoy the culture of his society and to take part in its affairs, and in his way to provide for each individual a secure sense of his own worth" (Rawls 1999). On the other hand, education is an important way for people to acquire specialized skills. The rise of modern industry has meant that the scale of production has expanded rapidly and labor has become more complex day by day. Workers are increasingly required to have specific professional knowledge and specialized skills. Naturally, people acquire these skills via education. Since education is so important, there are different levels of education, and this means different opportunities and the ability to seize different opportunities.

### 3.4 *Occupations*

Occupations determine whether a member of society survives and how they develop. "The occupational structure in modern industrial society not only constitutes an important foundation for the main dimensions of social stratification but also serves as the connecting link between different institutions and spheres of social life" (Blau and Duncan 1967). Occupations guarantee whether

or not a person can obtain opportunities, and different occupations mean different opportunities. “Unequal opportunity at one point in time generates unequal opportunity over time. Once people are excluded from good jobs, they are deprived of the incentives and opportunities to develop the skills that would otherwise qualify them for good jobs. A black will not invest in education for managerial positions if he has no hope of becoming a manager. If he is blocked from his firm’s ladder-climbing career program, he accumulates fewer skills on the job. Thus inefficiency can grow at compound interest” (Okun 1975). As modern society continuously improves, there is a wider scope for different occupations. As a result, specific jobs have more complex and far-reaching influences than others, in terms of what opportunities people can obtain and how.

#### 4 SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITIES

Equality of opportunity involves another issue: what should society (mainly through the government) do about it?

In order to create a just and vibrant (efficient) society and to take responsibility for all members of society, the social responsibilities regarding the issue of equal opportunities should be as follows: (1) To maintain the idea and principle of equal opportunities. (2) To ensure the implementation of all parts in the social justice system. Equality of opportunity is only one part of the system, and its effectiveness largely depends on whether other parts can be properly implemented, such as the principle of distribution according to contribution and the adjustment rules after distribution. Therefore, it is necessary to coordinate among the different parts of the social justice system. (3) To directly create some “equal” conditions that help implement equal opportunities.

It is evident that society should take on the first two responsibilities. However, what needs to be emphasized here is that it is also very important for society to take on the third responsibility.

Due to the limitations of realistic and historical conditions, it is difficult for many members of society to fully develop their potentialities and compete on a fair basis. Therefore, the state has the responsibility to “equally develop individual potentialities” and to give “everyone adequate initial power (i.e., the material conditions) to acquire the same ability and rank as everyone else” (Sartori 1987). Rawls has specifically addressed this issue. He argues: “In order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality. In pursuit of this principle greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent, at least over a certain time of life, say the earlier years of school” (Rawls 1999).

Clearly, the most important and effective way to “equally develop individual potentialities” is for the government to vigorously develop education,

especially basic education. “The availability of education serves to reduce rather than to increase the effects of such differences in starting positions... In this sense, education acts similarly to transfer taxation” (Buchanan 1986). Therefore, through large-scale education, members of society can not only receive indispensable “shared opportunities,” but also acquire the necessary abilities and equal start points to obtain “differentiated opportunities.”

It should be noted that, on the issue of equal opportunities, the government should not directly intervene too much or it may cause new problems, mainly new inequalities. Once the government considers the problem too much from the angle of equality, it is likely to further deliberately pursue equal end states. Giovanni Sartori says, “the pursuit of equal end states may jeopardize equal treatment to the point where no assurance remains as to the very pursuit of the alleged goal. Beyond the point of equality of access, policies of equalization are largely policies of redistribution and, ultimately, of dispossession... It is often less well understood that equal end states necessarily call for unequal means, that is, for discriminating (differential) treatments. Once we decide that given groups are disfavored with respect to the relevant characteristics  $x$  and  $y$ , in order to eliminate the inequality in question the disfavored must be overfavored, and, vice versa, the advantaged must be disadvantaged” (Sartori 1987). This has been verified in Chinese society.

On the contrary, if society goes to the other extreme and intervenes too much in the equality of opportunity, it is very likely to cause another kind of bias—“the meritocratic rank,” which will damage social justice as a whole. If everything is strictly based on the natural gap of human beings and other factors are excluded, then a new social hierarchy will be formed. Rawls has clearly expressed his concern. He says, “This form of social order follows the principle of careers open to talents and uses equality of opportunity as a way of releasing men’s energies in the pursuit of economic prosperity and political dominion. There exists a marked disparity between the upper and lower classes in both means of life and the rights and privileges of organizational authority. The culture of the poorer strata is impoverished while that of the governing and technocratic elite is securely based on the service of the national ends of power and wealth. Equality of opportunity means an equal chance to leave the less fortunate behind in the personal quest for influence and social position” (Rawls 1999). Fortunately, although there is a certain possibility for this “meritocratic system” to exist, due to various factors in society, it is just a possibility and very unlikely to be achieved in reality. As Arthur Okun states, “Only in academic hierarchies might IQ tend to dominate – since the test is structured in part to serve as a predictor of academic learning ability. Stress on IQ is a form of narcissism peculiar to intellectuals, and fortunately has no counterpart in the marketplace” (Okun 1975).

## 5 EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY AT PRESENT IN CHINA

With the deepening of modernization and the market economy, the idea and criterion of equal opportunities are becoming a realistic issue in Chinese society. It has been recognized and accepted by more Chinese people, and their behavior has become orientated toward it. This is a landmark achievement of China's modernization and an important symbol of China's social progress, which has an enormously positive significance. Due to the social transition in China, the issue of equality of opportunity at present has some distinct characteristics, but it is faced with some obstacles at the same time.

### 5.1 *Equality of Opportunity: Progress in Four Aspects*

The principle of equal of opportunities has been established during China's process of modernization and market economy. The following factors have given room for people to be unemotional yet self-directed, motivated specific and universal: advanced industrialization, the market economy, secularization, democratization, social differentiation, and integration. This is how equal opportunities have manifested.

Although the term "equality of opportunity" has been known to Chinese people for a long time, it has only existed in Chinese society for about 40 years as a common phenomenon in the modern sense. During the 40 years since 1978, with the advancement of modernization and the market economy, the social structure of China has undergone drastic and tremendous changes. Now, the idea and criterion of equal opportunities have been initially formed in Chinese society and have been recognized by its members. It has begun to have a wide and far-reaching impact on Chinese society and has become an integral part of it. This is mainly manifested in the following aspects:

#### *Social Mobility Has Changed from an Irregular and Semi-Stagnant State to a Relatively Normal, Effective, and Smooth State*

Social mobility can be regarded as a significant indicator of how well the principle of equal opportunity has been realized. Since opportunities always exist in a certain geographical space and social stratification system, normal and effective social mobility (especially unstructured mobility; that is, free mobility) is a necessary condition for realizing the equality of opportunity. During the 30 years before 1978, the people's positions were invariable and fixed in Chinese society. They fell into one of the four identities: urban residents, cadres, workers (which were subdivided into workers in state-owned enterprises and workers in collective-owned enterprises), and rural residents. These four identities were fixed and solidified through an extremely strict personnel file management system and household registration system. It was almost impossible for people to enter the higher status hierarchy. In this case, individuals had few choices and were not able to obtain equal opportunities through normal social mobility. In urban areas, an employee's identity was highly fixed and rigid

because it was often integrated with their occupation, the region they lived in, and the unit they worked in. Most employees rarely moved across regions, industries, or even units. On the other hand, there also was irregular social mobility. Some of the large-scale mobility that happened was more the result of government actions or collective behavior rather than the individuals' "free" choice. For example, a large number of the urban population moving to rural areas in the early 1960s and the movement of educated youth "going to the countryside" in the late 1960s and early 1970s were organized and implemented by the government. Obviously, such "social mobility" has nothing to do with the idea of equality of opportunity. Since 1978, with the advancement of modernization and the market economy, there have been normal, effective, and smooth channels for social mobility. People have gotten rid of the old situation in which they had fixed identities and jobs and unchanged residences. There have been more channels of vertical, horizontal, structural, and free mobility. This serves as a favorable starting point for the realization of equality of opportunity in Chinese society and has helped achieve some equalities to a certain extent and within a certain range. This is particularly evident in some industries, sectors, and regions, such as joint-stock enterprises, private enterprises, and economically developed areas along the southeast coast.

*People's Behavioral Orientations Have Shifted from Relying on Endowments to Self-Motivated Efforts*

During the 30 years before 1978, members of society acquiring a certain social position was mainly due to their ascribed status, especially their political status. When people obtained opportunities such as employment, joining the army, and getting promoted and joining the Communist Party of China, they mainly relied on the credibility of their family background and political identities rather than their own abilities and efforts. Those with good political identities could easily acquire a better social position, while those with bad political identities (such as landlords, rich farmers, counterrevolutionaries, bad influencers ["bad elements"], capitalists, etc.) were often labeled as "alien" and it was difficult for them to obtain a better social position. "Political review/political background check" became buzzwords. Obviously, rules based on congenital factors go against the principle of equality. In China's present time, things have changed dramatically. Now, with the establishment of the market economy, the law of equal competition has an increasing impact on the entire society. The influence of family and political background has almost disappeared, and the motivational orientations have prevailed. Members of society, especially the younger generation, are increasingly convinced that only by their own efforts, personal abilities, and performance can they obtain a more satisfactory social position. When labor markets, talent exchange centers, and employers recruit employees, they mainly examine basic qualities such as their personal abilities. Job promotion and salary increase have been gradually based on ability and performance. In order to improve their abilities, people began to pay attention to the education they can receive, and education (both academic education and adult education) has become more and more popular.

*The Urban and Rural Areas, Which Were Originally Isolated from Each Other, Have Been Connected, and There Is Now Large-Scale Social Mobility Between Urban and Rural Residents*

During the 30 years before 1978, China's urban and rural areas were almost separated from each other. Due to scarce opportunities, the planned economy, and the rapid advancement of industrialization at the expense of rural residents, the rural and urban areas were artificially separated. To ensure the separation, China had adopted a very strict household registration (hukou) system since its founding in 1949. This system set the boundaries between urban and rural areas by classifying each person as a rural or an urban resident. It was difficult for rural residents to change their "hukou" status; at that time, there were too few opportunities for them to live and work in cities. Only by being promoted to cadres after joining the army or by going to college and other extremely limited ways could rural residents change their status. This practice violates the basic principle of equal opportunities, limits reasonable social mobility, inhibits the development of the people's potential, affects social vitality, and hinders China's urbanization process. Since 1978, with the rapid advancement of modernization, the market economy, and the process of the reform and opening-up, the surplus labor force in rural areas has been increasing greatly, there have been more opportunities in urban areas, and the artificial urban-rural boundary has become blurred. All of this has broken the isolation between urban and rural areas. A large number of rural residents have flocked to the cities to find opportunities and end up living and working there, forming a spectacular "tide of migrant workers." This is a crucial and practical step for China to realize the idea of equal opportunities in general. The large number of these rural laborers moving to cities has become a relatively strong and realistic social grounds for realizing the principle of equal opportunities. They have had a huge impact on the original two identities, making equality of opportunity not just an idea in Chinese society, but also a realistic matter that involves extensive aspects.

*From Focusing on Equality of Results to Focusing on an Equal Starting Point*

A basic requirement for the concept of equal opportunity is that members of society should have an equal start and being given the opportunity to survive and develop. Those with the same amount of potential should be given an equal start and the same prospects. The concept also recognizes and respects people's potential and allowing some "unequal" opportunities that are based on people's differences. By contrast, before 1978, there was a typical egalitarianism in Chinese society. At that time, under the dual influence of ideology and the planned economic system, society as a whole was raised to a high level, while the individual as an indispensable component of society was seriously despised, and the differences between members of society were ignored. Individuals were seen only as one component of a larger planning system, as uniformly similar roles. In this case, society could only value the equality of the results and the similarity of end states for individuals; that is, the "similar acquisition," but not the equality of the starting point, which is "equal access." At

the time, the incomes of individuals were very similar. From the 1960s until the mid-1970s, much of the worker's income was fixed, with little growth. Moreover, the average wages of regular employees in units owned by the whole society in various sectors of the national economy were also relatively close. In fact, this is another kind of deprivation because it can throw people with stronger abilities who make greater contributions into deprivation of opportunities and distribution. After 1978, the aforementioned situation was greatly improved. In the context of market economy, social differentiation, social mobility, etc., the people increasingly value the equality of starting points and recognize that some "unequal" opportunities due to different development potentials are reasonable. Now, the people have abandoned egalitarianism from the bottom of their hearts and have gradually embraced the idea of equality of opportunity. They expect that society can provide everyone with an equal starting point in terms of survival and development, so that they can achieve their own development under the conditions of orderly competition rules. Moreover, many major social policies that have been issued and will be issued by the state are also conducive to the implementation of the principle of equal starting point. In addition, with society's recognition of the differences between individuals, the gradual formation of a social stratification structure system that is compatible with modern society, and the continuous differentiation of occupational structures, the people's income has shown a state of diversification.

### *5.2 Equality of Opportunity: Three Manifestations of "Chinese characteristics"*

Chinese society is undergoing a rapid transition; the market economy and the planned economy coexist in this special period. There is usually a dual structure in late-developing countries, such as the modern industrial sector and the old agricultural sector coexisting together. Unlike those countries, however, the current dual structure of Chinese society is highlighted by the coexistence of two different economic systems, the market economy and the planned economy. In the 30 years before 1978, China had implemented a strict planned economic system, which created a social model that matched it. After the 40 years of reform and opening up, the market economy has become an important part of Chinese society. However, it should also be noted that "in the reform process, various 'fast variables' and 'slow variables' have been disconnected from each other, making it difficult for the market economy to be fully and rapidly put into operation in a short period of time" (Wu 1993). Moreover, the market-oriented solutions that people proposed could not be completely accurate; therefore, the planned economy existed to varying degrees in a certain period of time, in order to prevent a vacuum in the process of economic reform. In this way, the two different systems are bound to coexist for some time during this specific period. This situation will have a significant influence on the idea and criterion of equal opportunities; thus the principle shows the following characteristics.

*Compared to Differentiated Opportunities, Shared Opportunities Are More Easily Accepted by the Public*

In modern society, shared opportunities and differentiated opportunities exist as an organic whole, together constituting the idea and criterion of equal opportunities. However, at China's present stage, there is an obvious separation of shared opportunities and differentiated opportunities. There are not many people who are truly aware of the market economy as well as have a corresponding development potential and competitiveness, so there will not be too many people who can accept the principle of differentiated opportunities. On the contrary, more of the population does not agree with differential opportunities, but they can accept the principle of shared opportunities. This is mainly due to following reasons. First, the influence of the planned economic system. China implemented the planned economy system for several decades, which has had a far-reaching impact on society and created the social model, behavior, and values that are suitable for it. Influenced by its inertia, there are still many people who yearn for the distribution mode of equal results in that period and the welfare guarantee policy that ran through the employees' lives. They are more likely to accept shared opportunities, and it is difficult for them to recognize differentiated opportunities. Second, the influence of egalitarianism in traditional Chinese culture. The concept of "not worrying over poverty but instead over equal distribution of wealth" is deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture, and continues to this day. It is difficult to recognize differentiated opportunities with this concept, but it can recognize shared opportunities to a certain extent. Third, anxiety in the period of social transformation. The rapid changes in Chinese society have led to large-scale and rapid changes in a social environment that the people used to be familiar with. In this period of change, there are bound to be a lot of new things, new ideas, and new behaviors. It takes time for the people to recognize these things. Furthermore, the people will not have very clear expectations about the outcome of the reform for a while. In this case, the people cannot predict their specific situation in the future, so it is inevitable that there will be a psychological anxiety of taking risks. Social anxiety will make members of society have a strong sense of self-protection, paying special attention to things directly related to their basic livelihood. In this case, it is easy for members of society to agree with the principle of shared opportunities. Fourth, the demonstrative effect of foreign countries. China had been in a closed state for 30 years before 1978; after 1978, China began to vigorously promote opening up to the outside world. Since the opening up at this time was not caused by foreign military pressure, the gap between China and foreign developed countries was first manifested as economic disparity. Undeniably, the social welfare and social security systems in some developed countries have had a great influence on the Chinese people. Therefore, it is natural for many members of society to recognize the principle of shared opportunities.



*The Gap Between Formal Opportunities and Actual Opportunities Is too Large*

Due to various historical and practical factors, there is often a “reasonable” gap between formal opportunities and actual opportunities. However, the gap in Chinese society at present is too large, exceeding the normal range. This is because, first, the human rights goals of Chinese society (including equality of opportunity) are rapidly converging with those of developed countries. For example, China has acceded to the *International Covenant on Economic, Social, and Cultural Rights*, the *Convention on Equal Pay for Men and Women Workers for Equal Work*, the *Convention on the Rights of the Child*, the *International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, and the *Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women* and has signed the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights*. Secondly, we should note that, at present in China, the processes of modernization and the market economy are still in the primary stage, so it is inconceivable that under such current conditions, the idea and criterion of equal opportunities can be fully fulfilled. Thirdly, the development of Chinese society is currently very uneven. Units (such as private enterprises and joint-stock enterprises), regions (such as Shenzhen, Pudong District of Shanghai, and other places) and social groups (such as managers, “white-collar workers”, lawyers, industrial and commercial self-employed individuals, and other powerful groups), which are highly and directly related to the market economy, are more likely to recognize the principle of equal opportunities than those who are on the contrary (such as government institutions, workers of large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises, employees of government institutions, retired workers, most areas in the central and western regions, etc.). Therefore, it is inevitable that there will be an excessive gap between formal opportunities and actual opportunities. In this respect, the problem of “migrant workers” entering cities is of typical significance. Theoretically speaking, this is in line with the principle of equal opportunities, and it is a great step forward in the issue of equal opportunities in Chinese society. But the reality is that the capacity of cities in China is limited at present, and a large number of unemployed people in cities are looking for employment opportunities as well. Too many “migrant workers” entering the city will increase the burden of the city and occupy the employment opportunities of some urban residents. As a result, cities often formulate some discriminatory policies and regulations and implement them against “migrant workers.” “At present, certain big cities have started to take administrative measures and even regulations again, strictly restricting rural residents from working and doing business and only allowing them to do the ‘dirty, tiring, and bad’ jobs that city dwellers don’t want to do” (Wang 1996). Obviously, this has seriously damaged the principle of equal opportunities.

### *The Principle of Equal Opportunities Sometimes Conflicts with the Normal Social Order*

This is prominently manifested in the dilemma between social order and social mobility. Normal social order is the prerequisite for the smooth progression of the modernization process, and the realization of free and orderly social mobility is not only a necessary condition for realizing the idea and criterion of equal opportunities, but it is also important contents for fully realizing equal opportunities. Only by realizing real social mobility can we effectively disintegrate the hierarchical system of traditional society, effectively eliminate the boundary between urban and rural areas, and then realize the ideas of “equality” and “freedom.” Essentially, the social order and social mobility of modern society are consistent, but in reality, they sometimes contradict each other. We still take the problem of migrant workers entering cities as an example. At present in China, there are not only a large number of unemployed people and a high hidden unemployment rate in cities, but there is also a larger idle labor force in the rural areas. In China’s agricultural production, the work of two people is done by three people, and this phenomenon is increasing year by year. After all, the rural society has limited ability to take in these surplus labors. In order to make a living, a huge amount of rural surplus labor force will flow to cities and towns. Such a huge floating population will have a great impact on the normal social order of Chinese cities. At the same time, within a certain period of time, the capacity of the city, especially employment opportunities, is limited. Therefore, in order to maintain necessary social order, the government must make some necessary restrictions on social mobility; that is, within a certain period of time, it is necessary to restrain social justice within social mobility for equal opportunities. However, the questions of how to grasp the degree of restriction and how to arrange the restricted rural surplus labor force without violating the principle of equal opportunities are really difficult to solve, which is a typical dilemma.

### *5.3 Four Obstacles to Equality of Opportunity*

From the above analysis, it can be seen that at the present stage of Chinese society, along with the advancement of the processes of modernization and the market economy, equality of opportunity has become an irreversible trend. However, the development of modernization and the market economy is only at a primary stage, so the realization of the principle of equal opportunities is also at a relatively primary level.

It should be noted that the full realization of the idea and criterion of equal opportunities in China is a gradual process. During the process, many factors are in conflict with the idea and criterion of equal opportunities, directly hindering the smooth realization of it. These direct obstacles mainly include the following.

### *The Household Registration Management System*

As mentioned earlier, China's unique household registration (*hukou*) management system directly damages the idea and criterion of equal opportunities and should be completely changed. Admittedly, this long-standing strict system has been loosened; however, we should also note that, for the sake of maintaining normal social order and preventing spontaneous social mobility, it is almost unrealistic to make fundamental changes to the system in a short period of time due to the objective existence of inter-regional and inter-industry interests. Obviously, only when the market economy and urbanization develop to a relatively high degree can China's *hukou* system be completely changed. At present, what we can do within a certain stage is to largely adapt and adjust the household registration system.

### *The Phenomenon of "unitization"*

"Unitization" is a unique phenomenon in Chinese society, mainly existing in government departments, public institutions, and large and medium-sized state-owned enterprises. Units originated from the planned economic system, but since 1978, the differentiation of the social organism and the specialization of various departments have become a trend, which have been accompanied by the enhancement of unit independence. In addition, with the advancement of the process of modernization, people's demand for social services is becoming more and more urgent. However, it will take a long time to form social service systems. This leads to the question: How can we meet the requirements of social services in the near future? As there is no better way, the unit is duty-bound but has to take on the task of solving these kinds of problems for its employees, because the employees can only rely on their units. This seems to be a paradoxical phenomenon: as a result of the social function differentiation, the unit with increasing independence has to take on what is beneficial to the needs of members of society for a while, but will eventually be harmful to the differentiation of social functions—establishing social service systems on a small scale. Once the unit undertakes this task, it will undertake more related tasks accordingly. On the whole, the unit plays a quasi-familial role. "The guarantee of the unit for employees and their families is not only to undertake unlimited obligations in life, but also to be accompanied by political insurance. That is, for the employees' political and social behavior, the unit shall bear joint liabilities" (Tan 1991). It can be said that, although "unitization" has solved the problems of a survival, security, and welfare guarantee to some members of society to a certain extent, it does more harm than good in the end. "Unitization" is a community of interests of some members of society with an obvious exclusiveness, which inevitably and directly damages the principle of equal opportunities. The phenomenon of "unitization" limits the equal opportunities of many members of society in choosing jobs, and shuts out those who are capable and willing to enter the units. At the same time, they may accept many members of society who are unqualified but have various connections with the units. In addition, "unitization" has aggravated unequal competition

among industries and units to a certain extent. Nowadays, due to the increasing pressure of economic life, people have a strong demand for increasing income. Therefore, although the unit is overburdened, at the same time, it must try every means to seek welfare for its employees. These points, coupled with the unhealthy psychology that people often do not earn income based on labor, often result in excessive “remuneration” from other units or members of society by making use of the “advantages” of their own units—that is, the “advantages” of industries and professions. Moreover, many units influence each other and become increasingly fierce. This is a major source of the current unhealthy practices in the industry. Clearly, this has severely damaged the principle of equal opportunities.

### *Egalitarianism*

Egalitarianism also directly contradicts the principle of equal opportunities. It should be noted that, for several reasons and for a long time, egalitarianism has never been able to quickly disappear in Chinese society, and it will still have a harmful influence on the principle of equal opportunities. First, the habitual influence of the planned economic system is far-reaching. As a dominant economic system, the planned economic system has existed in China for more than 30 years, and its influence on the whole of Chinese society is vast. Even now, the system still has a certain direct influence on Chinese society. The planned economic system is a natural breeding ground for egalitarianism, which can continue to exist with the elements of the planned economic system. Second, the traditional Chinese concept of “equal distribution of wealth” is deeply rooted in society. It is the product of the small-scale production mode, incompatible with the market economy and the idea of equal opportunities. It supports egalitarianism deeply from the psychology of many people, but rejects the idea and criterion of equal opportunities. Third, shared opportunities will provide some form of excuse for egalitarianism. As mentioned earlier, shared opportunities emphasize that every member of society should have roughly the same basic development opportunities. In modern society, shared opportunities and disparity opportunities exist as an organic whole, together constituting the idea and criterion of equal opportunities. Although those who agree with egalitarianism reject disparity opportunities, they will recognize shared opportunities, because egalitarianism and shared opportunities share some similarities in form. Therefore, even though the degree of realization of the principle of equal opportunities will continue to improve with the passage of time, egalitarianism can still continue to exist by virtue of its formal similarity with the part of equal opportunities, and distort the content of shared opportunities. Fourth, the adjustment of the interest structure of social groups. Great changes in Chinese society are bound to bring about the adjustment of the interest structure of social groups. In this process of adjustment, some social groups benefit and some suffer. The latter may miss the previous era—that is, the era of the planned economic system—and thus support egalitarianism.

*The Official Rank-Oriented Culture*

The official rank-oriented culture has a long history in China. The unique economic and social foundation in traditional Chinese society led to a highly centralized political system, which brought about the official rank-oriented culture (Wu 1995). In the 30 years before 1978, the culture persisted for various reasons, one of which was the influence of the planned economic system. The operation of the planned economic system required an all-inclusive administrative power system, and this power system ignored the importance of economic aspects. The official rank-oriented culture means that the economy is determined by power, not the other way around. After 1978, along with the advancement of the processes of modernization and the market economy, the culture should have disappeared; however, China's social transformation caused this culture to continue to exist. Because of the difficult social transformation, China has been faced with greater pressure and more uncertain factors, leading to more extensive, complex, and prominent social problems. Moreover, the allocation of resources at all levels of society needs effective coordination, and because the market economy was made from scratch, it needs something that facilitates and maintains it in its initial stage. All this determines that the government must concentrate the necessary power and strengthen its authority. But the complexity of the problem lies in that it is bound to objectively promote the official rank-oriented culture as a result. This is indeed another dilemma. In any case, at China's present stage, the official rank-oriented culture is very obvious, and it is eroding the idea and criterion of equal opportunities. It may provide certain privileges for areas closely related to the government, resulting in the monopoly of certain industries, and thus causing some unfair competition between industries contrary to the principle of equal opportunities. It may also provide "convenient" conditions for government officials or the individuals who have a good relationship with the government, so that the fair competition rules among members of society will be lost or distorted to varying degrees.

In summary, the realization of the idea and criterion of equal opportunities in China depends on the degree of elimination or alleviation of the above factors. Otherwise, equal opportunities will merely become empty talk for members of Chinese society.

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## The Rule of Primary Distribution in Social Justice

The rule of primary distribution in social justice stipulates distribution according to contribution. It is an important part of the system of rules in social justice. This rule enables its “upstream” rule, the rule of equal opportunity, to be fulfilled. It also provides its “downstream” rule, the rule of social adjustment (social redistribution), with the basic foundation of material wealth. Clearly, the rule of primary distribution plays an indispensable role in supporting a just society, and in a certain sense, it also directly embodies social justice.

People tend to think that primary distribution focuses on efficiency and redistribution focuses on justice. In actuality, primary distribution also is involved with the issue of justice. Although primary distribution does attach importance to efficiency, it must also follow the principle of social justice; otherwise, it will not be able to achieve real and sustained efficiency, and only receive an abnormal efficiency.

### I THE BASIS OF PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION RULES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

Primary distribution refers to the direct “income” obtained by members of society through their own labor or the input of production factors that has not been deducted by items such as taxes.

In the process of the accumulation of social wealth and other resources, the quantity and quality of labor invested by each member of society is different, and similarly the factors of production they invest may also not be the same. Therefore, their specific contributions to society are different. Primary distribution rules aim at direct and differential distribution in accordance with the people’s different contributions. “With a sprinkling of appropriate assumptions, it can be demonstrated that a competitive market will pay workers and investors the value of their contributions to output” (Okun 1975). Of course, “contributions” here refer to not only material products in the economic field

but also people's contributions to society, politics, culture, and corresponding products. In a certain sense, these rules can most directly and intuitively reflect to what degree the principle of social justice has been fulfilled.

Broadly speaking, factors of production include labor, capital, land, raw materials, energy, technology, management, education, and other factors related to the production process. Among them, labor, capital, and management are the most important; others can be directly or indirectly subsumed into the three factors. "By Labor is meant the economic work of man, whether with the hand or the head. By Capital is meant all stored-up provision for the production of material goods, and for the attainment of those benefits which are commonly reckoned as part of income" (Marshall 2013). However, business management, "this purely coordinating work we shall call the entrepreneur's function...it consists entirely in the establishing and maintaining of efficient relations between the agents of production" (Clark 1899).

Among the factors of production, labor plays the most important role, and its contribution even exceeds that of capital. Take American society as an example: "The United States is considered the country with the most abundant capital in the world, but 70% of its gross national product is still distributed on 'the basis of labor.' In the era of knowledge economy, the factor of technological innovation ability plays a greater role, so the proportion of income has increased; but in essence, this factor is still a kind of 'labor' rather than capital" (Expert Group 2002).

Labor is divided into simple labor and complex labor. Both require different costs and abilities, so the income they generate must also be different. What needs special mention here is that education plays an extremely important role in forming different levels of labor and, thus, income. With the advancement of modernization, the scale of production has expanded rapidly and labor has become more complex day by day. More and more workers are required to have specific professional knowledge and specialized skills. Education is no longer regarded as a consumption investment without economic benefits, but as a productive investment with positive significance. "Economic growth makes enormous demands for skills of many kinds. It is associated with a great increase in specialization, and therefore in the range of skills" (Lewis 2003). Generally speaking, different levels of education will lead to the difference in people's incomes. On the one hand, people who receive different levels of education will obtain different abilities, which will lead to differences in their economic income. On the other hand, receiving different levels of professional education will enable people to acquire different levels of professional knowledge, so as to enter different professional fields and obtain different incomes. According to the 1991 World Development Report, every additional year of education can increase the wages of white men by 6% and white women by 7% in the United States. In Malaysia, it can increase the salary of a man by 16% and the salary of a woman by 18%. In South Korea it can increase someone's wages by 6% (World Bank 1991).



Capital is a necessary condition and factor for the development of modern production. For the production process, all kinds of factors have certain functions and divisions of labor and are indispensable. Therefore, the owners of all factors involved in the production process should be qualified for and entitled to distribution. When analyzing the controversial issue of capital, we need to pay attention to the following two points: First, unlike the nature of capital in the “primitive accumulation” period, in a standardized and stable society with a market economy, capital is often accumulated by means of contribution rather than by deprivation, opportunism, or other abnormal means. Second, the influence of private capital on society is weakening. In developed countries, due to the separation of ownership from the management rights of means of production, the emergence of new economic forms such as shareholding system and cooperatives, and the high-intensity tax policy, the influence of private capital on the entirety of society has decreased. From the above, we can see that, in a modern and regulated market economy, the exploitation caused by capital may continue to decrease, while the positive effects it brings expand.

From the perspective of social justice, the rule of primary distribution according to contribution embodies the idea of equality (especially equal labor rights). Additionally, the rule embodies the idea of liberty, fully respecting and recognizing the individual’s different contributions to society.

First, the rule of primary distribution reflects the individual’s free choices. In traditional society, the strict hierarchy system meant that members of society could not have an independent personality. The majority of people could enjoy neither equality nor liberty, and they thereby had no independent choices. Most members of society had a strong personal attachment; their lives were decided by those with high status. In a modern society with a market economy, however, people have developed a sense of autonomy, and there is an equality between them. Members of society become “individuals” in the truest sense. Everyone is free, has an independent personality, and can be responsible for their own destiny without being controlled by others. “Freedom meant always the possibility of a person’s acting according to his own decisions and plans, in contrast to the position of one who was irrevocably subject to the will of another, who by arbitrary decision could coerce him to act or not to act in specific ways... Whether he is free or not does not depend on the range of choice but on whether he can expect to shape his course of action in accordance with his present intentions, or whether somebody else has power so to manipulate the conditions as to make him act according to that person’s will rather than his own” (Hayek 1987). The precondition of the primary distribution rules is that individuals can exist equally and make free choices. Otherwise, it is impossible for members of society to properly participate in the distribution of social resources according to their specific contributions to that society. Furthermore, the rule of primary distribution recognizes and guarantees the individual’s free choice in an institutionalized way.

Second, the rule reflects the differences among people. Unlike traditional society where all of its members were treated in a single and unified way, in

modern society, people's personalities are recognized and protected to the maximum extent. We should recognize that there are significant differences between individuals. It is in this sense that everyone is not only born equal, but also born different. "However important the environment may be, we must not overlook the fact that individuals are very different from the outset. As a statement of fact, it just is not true that 'all men are born equal'" (Hayek 1987). These differences are manifested in many aspects. "These differences consist not only in the variation of talents of the same kind (variation in strength and imagination, and so on) but in the variety of talents of different kinds" (Rawls 2001). Different people have different abilities, endowments, ideas, interests, behaviors, goals, choices, etc. Ability, choice, behavior, and other factors are closely related to income status. Therefore, these differences among individuals will further cause differences in their income. "Not everyone can be a concert pianist or a center for the Lakers, nor do they have, as Madison noted, equal facilities for acquiring property" (Fukuyama 1992). The rule of primary distribution recognizes the people's differential contributions, which means that it also respects and protects individual differences.

Third, the rule recognizes and guarantees personal development. It has been widely recognized by members of society that development should be people-oriented. The people-oriented concept implies that the potential of countless individuals will be fully developed. As stated in the Communist Manifesto, in an ideal society, "we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all" (Marx and Engels 1995a). Without the free development of each individual, the people-oriented concept will not be realized in social development. This can be understood as follows: freedom not only allows one to avoid inappropriate and excessive intervention by others, but also promotes active participation and positive creativity. Berlin divided liberty into two types: positive liberty and negative liberty. "For if to be free – negatively – is simply not to be prevented by other persons from doing whatever one wishes, then one of the ways of attaining such freedom is by extinguishing one's wishes." As for the latter, "the sense of freedom entails the absence of obstacles to possible choices and activities – absence of obstructions on roads along which a man can decide to walk" (Berlin 2002). Undoubtedly, both are necessary conditions for individuals to develop and improve. More specifically, the primary distribution rule of social justice guarantees the liberty condition necessary for individual development, and it recognizes and protects their full development. At the same time, this rule also provides a necessary standard for measuring each individual's specific development, which, to a large extent, is the status of their specific contributions.

Fourth, the rule of primary distribution recognizes equal competition results and self-motivated efforts. In contrast to the distribution rule of traditional society, the primary distribution rule of modern society excludes the interference of pre-endowed factors such as origin, privilege, race, and gender in the field of distribution. It emphasizes that members of society should make

different contributions to the social economy through self-motivated efforts and equal competition and take this contribution as the basis for participating in the primary distribution. Only in this way can it conform to the principles of equality and liberty and the basic spirit and rules of a market economy. “Let us consider why we all agree in rejecting the view that differences in race, sex, IQ, or social ‘rank’ are the grounds of just differences in wealth or income. Part of the answer seems obvious. People cannot by their own voluntary choices determine what skin color, sex, or IQ they shall have, or which hereditary caste they shall enter. To make such properties the basis of discrimination between individuals in the distribution of social benefits would be ‘to treat people differently in ways that profoundly affect their lives because of differences for which they have no responsibility’” (Feinberg 1973).

The rule of primary distribution in social justice is of vital importance to the normal operations and development of society. In a market economy, based on the idea of liberty and equality, the rule of primary distribution can greatly activate social potential, develop human resources to the maximum extent, and improve social and economic efficiency and sustainable development. This rule also has guiding significance for every member of society. It reminds many individuals that specific contributions to society should be taken as an important goal when determining their development path. The rule of primary distribution is a crucial part of the just system of rules, directly affecting all aspects of social justice. It has not only fulfilled people’s efforts based on the equal opportunity rule by solidifying equality of opportunity in modern society but also provided the material accumulation needed for the implementation of the rule of social adjustment (social redistribution).

## 2 THE CHARACTERISTICS OF PRIMARY DISTRIBUTION RULES IN SOCIAL JUSTICE

The rule of primary distribution has the following fundamental characteristics:

### 2.1 *Emphasizing the Symmetry Between “giving” and “receiving”*

The rule of primary distribution is just because it emphasizes the symmetry between the quantity and quality of the production factors invested by individuals (members of society) and their gains (benefits). That is, there is an appropriate correspondence between “giving” and “receiving.” When talking about the principle of distribution according to work, Marx stated that “the individual producer receives back from society – after the deductions have been made – exactly what he gives to it. What he has given to it is his individual quantum of labor” (Marx and Engels 1995b). This not only determines whether the primary distribution rule of social justice can be established, but it also determines whether the corresponding social system is “legitimate.” “To

each agent a distinguishable share in production, and to each a corresponding reward – such is the natural law of distribution... The right of society to exist in its present form, and the probability that it will contribute so to exit, are at stake. These facts lead to this problem of distribution its measureless importance... Having first tested the honesty of the social state, by determining whether it gives to every man his own... The right of the present social system to exist at all depends on its honesty” (Clark 1899).

If there is asymmetry between the contributions and benefits of members of society, and this asymmetry is sustained and stable, it means that there are some flaws in the distribution system of that society or even in that society itself. If some people give less and receive more but most people give more but receive less, there must be different degrees of “exploitation” in the society. If people receive the same no matter how much they give, there must be egalitarianism in different degrees in the society. This phenomenon is also a kind of “exploitation”; people with weak abilities and who make small contributions exploit those with strong abilities and who make great contributions. Therefore, the entire society should be on high alert to any sustainable and stable asymmetry.

## *2.2 Highlighting the Rewards That Individuals Receive Through Their Own Achievements*

The reason why members of society can make different contributions to the social economy is due to both personal efforts and social cooperation. However, the primary distribution rule emphasizes that the rewards people obtain are based on contributions through their own efforts. It recognizes the existing abilities and contributions of individuals and respects their differences. Obviously, the rule of primary distribution is indispensable to the complete justice system. It does not deny the vital importance of social cooperation; instead, the significance of social cooperation is manifested in the other two rules in the system of justice, namely, the guarantee rule of basic rights and the dignity of human beings and the social adjustment rule.

## *2.3 There Is a Relatively Large Gap Among Members of Society in the Distribution of Social Resources Such as Income*

The primary distribution rule is actually a logical extension of its upstream rule—the equal opportunity rule. As mentioned earlier, the differences in people’s personality such as natural endowments and the differences in factors of production owned by different people are relatively large. Under the condition of equal competition in a market economy, without any tax deduction, the differences between individuals will be directly transformed into a large gap in the distribution of social resources such as income. American society in 1970 illustrates this case. “Transfers are the big equalizer, flowing principally to families

whose earned incomes are low. By one statistical measure of income inequality, the degree of inequality of family incomes in 1970 would have been more than double its actual size in the absence of any government transfers” (Okun 1975).

The obvious gap in income or other social resources formed in primary distribution does not violate the spirit of social justice. On the contrary, if we consider how to narrow the gap here, there will be more advantages than disadvantages, which will cause many negative effects. It will directly lead to the egalitarian distribution, damage the equal competition and free development that is compatible with the market economy, and then seriously inhibit the vitality of social development. It will not only make the downstream rules of primary distribution unable to be implemented due to the lack of necessary material accumulation, but also produce a harmful “echo effect” to its upstream rules—equal opportunities rules. It must be noted that egalitarianism is most likely to appear at this time. The historical lessons of 30 years before China’s reform and opening up have repeatedly confirmed this point.

It should also be noted that if the obvious disparity in income or other social resources caused by the distribution is not adjusted or alleviated, it will have many adverse effects on the normal operations and development of society. An excessive gap between the rich and the poor will definitely weaken the people’s awareness of social cooperation, aggravate the estrangement and conflict between social groups, and even endanger the safe operations of society. The serious rich–poor divide will also damage the basic purpose of social development, which everyone shares and benefits universally, thus leading to the situation of growth-without-development. “Excessive inequality must diminish the sum total of human enjoyment, by subtracting from the masses of happiness of the greater number” (Thompson 1850).

Clearly, the primary distribution rule does not represent the complete system of rules of justice, and it is impossible to solve all social justice problems. Social justice is a system of rules (an organic whole), which includes guaranteeing people’s dignity and basic rights, equal opportunities, distribution according to contribution (primary distribution), and social adjustment. Each has its own functions. The main function of primary distribution is recognizing and guaranteeing individual differences of members of society and different contributions they make. We should also note that whether every rule of social justice can function normally depends on the complementarity of other rules, so social justice cannot just stay in the stage of primary distribution. This rule must be combined with its upstream rule (equal opportunities) and its downstream rule (social adjustment), so that it can play a comprehensive and positive role in society; otherwise, the justice of the society as a whole cannot be established. It is in this sense that the primary distribution rule reflects both the vitality of the market economy and its defects. As for the income gap caused by the primary distribution rule, that should be left to its downstream rule (social adjustment) to solve.

#### 2.4 *The Rule Becomes Less Important with the Improvement of Modernization*

The development history of developed countries reveals that, with the advancement of modernization, the role that social adjustment plays in a society becomes larger, as does social redistribution. Under such conditions, the importance of the primary distribution rule is decreased relatively. Of course, the “relative decrease” mentioned here will not be an endless decrease. When its “decreasing” trend approaches a certain critical point—that is, the equilibrium point between the primary distribution rule and the social adjustment rule can effectively function—it will stop.

The material (social wealth) foundation directly determines the distribution mode. In the era of material scarcity, primary distribution and redistribution were almost integrated. If there existed any redistribution, it was only used to maintain the simple functioning of society. At this point, the status of primary distribution is naturally crucial. Because of this, the problem of primary distribution has become the focus of people’s attention, as well as the venting of their dissatisfaction. Because we only rely on the primary distribution mode, we can only solve a series of drawbacks caused by the unreasonable distribution mode in a more drastic way. In the agricultural society, when the resulting contradictions intensified, people tended to destroy the existing social structure and then copy the original distribution model, but this would cause the original contradictions. People also made new attempts with egalitarian schemes in order to build a just society that was acceptable to all members of society. However, at that time, the material standard was very low, and this practice only replaced the old injustice with new injustice, which was not in line with human nature. Moreover, egalitarianism seriously inhibits the progress of productivity, so it will eventually be abandoned by the people. Even in the early stage of large-scale industry, there was still no possibility for social redistribution. Therefore, people pay no less attention to the problem of primary distribution. At the same time, some thinkers with a great sense of justice proposed utopian schemes of utopian socialism, but their schemes could not be realized as egalitarianism was in agricultural society. In the 30 years before China’s reform and opening up, due to the extreme backwardness of productive forces and the extreme scarcity of material wealth, in order to quickly change the previous distribution mode, the alternatives adopted by Chinese society were still the familiar egalitarianism and asceticism. Clearly, it is only with the development of productive forces and the continuous improvement of modernization that social wealth can accumulate in large quantities and the scarcity of social goods and services can be relatively reduced. Only under such conditions can society have goods and services for redistribution and adjustment, and social redistribution can become another important area of attention. Correspondingly, the importance of primary distribution may be relatively reduced.

In modern society, social adjustment—that is, social redistribution—not only becomes possible, but it also becomes a reality, thus making the primary

**Table 5.1** A Comparison of the primary distribution and redistribution of income in Japanese society

<i>Year</i>	<i>Inequality of income before redistribution (Gini coefficient)</i>	<i>Inequality of income after redistribution (Gini coefficient)</i>
1961	0.390	0.344
1966	0.375	0.328
1971	0.354	0.314
1974	0.375	0.346
1977	0.365	0.338
1980	0.349	0.314
1983	0.398	0.343
1986	0.405	0.338
1989	0.433	0.364
1992	0.439	0.365

Source: Tachibanaki Toshiaki (2003) *Economic inequality in Japan: an analysis in terms of income and assets*, translated by Yu Hongwei. Shangwu yinshuguan, Beijing, p. 71

distribution rule less important in society. If the society is designed and operated completely according to the rules of market economy, then the inherent defects of the market economy will have many negative effects on social life, which then leads to many unavoidable major defects in society. “We have no reason to think that incomes will be fairly distributed under laissez-faire capitalism. Market incomes might produce acceptable differences or enormous disparities in income and wealth that persist for generations” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). This has gradually become the consensus of society. With the progress of social civilization, safeguarding the people’s basic dignity and rights, improving the quality of the entire society, ensuring social unity, sharing the fruits of social development, and realizing the healthy development of society have become the concepts that are generally accepted by all groups in modern society. Under this background, social redistribution and social adjustment have become comparable to the primary distribution rules of social justice. Therefore, solid tax policies, effective transfer payment policies, and a systematic social security system have become the integral components of modern society. In this regard, Japan has been successful; the gap between the rich and the poor in Japanese society has been controlled to a reasonable range (See Table 5.1). Britain, France, Germany, and the Nordic countries have also been successful in this respect. The rising status of the redistribution issue in society will inevitably lower the status of the primary distribution rules.

### 3 SEVERAL RELATED ISSUES

Whether the primary distribution rules of social justice can be effectively implemented and play its due role largely depends on how the following problems are solved.

First, whether the design and implementation of the corresponding institution is fair and whether it is manipulated by a certain interest group.

The problem of distribution, including the primary distribution, concerns the vital interests of every group and every member of society, and its importance can never be overstated. If this problem is not handled properly, it will lead to a variety of social contradictions and even social conflicts. "Distribution is what social conflict is all about ... the struggle for control of the means of production is a distributive struggle" (Walzer 1984). Since the problem is so important, it must be steered onto the track of institutionalization. "In order to reduce the conflict of behavior and the uncertainty of the distribution subjects in the process of income distribution, we should maintain and form the distribution order of 'cooperation and competition,' regulate income distribution transactions with institutions, and protect the legitimate rights and interests of all parties in income distribution, which is an inevitable choice" (Han 1998). Clearly, only institutions can guarantee the fairness, effectiveness, and stability of distribution. As North states: "Institutions are a set of rules, compliance procedures, and moral and ethical behavioral norms designed to constrain the behavior of individuals in the interest of maximizing the wealth or utility of principals" (North 1981).

The primary distribution system itself must be fair, and it must reflect the will and requirements of all members of society, including vulnerable groups. The most basic requirement is that the designers and executors of the system, such as the government and the legislature, must be representatives of the public interest and be entrusted by various social groups to perform their own functions. The relationship between the government and the public is actually a relationship between the agent and the principal. Based on the needs of the professional division of labor, the public, as the principal, entrusts the government to handle matters closely related to public interests, and "engage the agent to perform some service on their behalf which involves delegating some decision-making authority to the agent." However, "there is some latitude in the decision-making power by the agent as a result of the inability of the principal to perfectly constrain the agent's behavior. Most individuals are agents in one role as employees, and principals in another role as consumers" (North 1981). This situation can easily lead to the agent's abuse of their power for personal gains. In particular, once a monopoly group of an important resource or a representative of an interest group becomes an agent of the public, it is inevitable that the designers and executors of the primary distribution system will make the system beneficial to their own interests or some certain interest groups. In this case, the primary distribution system will be unfair and harmful to public interests. Therefore, how to ensure that the system is not manipulated and controlled by interest groups becomes the primary issue in maintaining the fairness of this system.

The threat of the primary distribution system sometimes comes from the joint erosion of internal and external forces, resulting in a deformed system. This is prominently manifested as rent-seeking. Members of public institutions



often take advantage of their public power to gain personal interests through inappropriate trading between “insiders” and “outsiders.” They “use administrative law to safeguard or redistribute vested economic interests. This kind of rent-seeking behavior often involves maintaining or grabbing vested interests by means of hindering the free flow and free competition of production factors among different industries.” Rent-seeking behavior will not only distort the allocation of economic resources, but “these activities will also lead to other rent-seeking or ‘rent-avoiding’ activities. If government officials enjoy special interests in these activities, their behavior will be distorted, because these special interests will trigger a round of wasteful rent-seeking competition in pursuit of administrative power. At the same time, enterprises whose interests are threatened will also engage in ‘rent-avoiding’ in order to compete with the officials, thus consuming more social and economic resources” (Tang and Mao 1993). What is worse is that this “money politics” will seriously damage the fairness and credibility of the primary distribution system as well as the vital interests of the general public, resulting in an excessive gap between the rich and the poor. During the period of the Chinese social transition, due to various reasons such as the imperfect system of rules, some scholars estimated that, in the first few years of the 1990s, Chinese financial institutions lost about 300 billion yuan in interest margins. In the real estate industry, the state lost 400 billion yuan in profit margins, mainly due to land leases. Bribery in infrastructure projects, project approval, reselling of import and export approvals, and procurement has caused losses or asset losses to countries, institutions, and legal entities of about 500 billion yuan (Zhang 1999).

As a system, and an extremely important system, primary distribution should be a system of rules that all groups and members of society abide by, and it should have sufficient authority and an unquestionable universality of its implementation. In other words, no group can do anything else outside the system. However, this is sometimes challenged. Some social groups often go their own way based on their own interests, ignoring the system and thus damaging the fairness of the primary distribution field and causing serious negative effects. At present in Chinese society, there are prominent problems in this respect. When it comes to the income distribution mechanism, each department would act only in its own interest without any coordination. “They use their own economic or administrative means to intervene in distribution. If it is an enterprise or institution that is in a monopoly industry, it will try its best to maintain its monopoly position and distribute part of its monopoly rent to its employees. Those who are not in a monopoly position will grab as much income as possible and distribute part of their income to their employees through various legal and illegal or even ‘sidestepping’ ways ... Then, with the competition among various units (departments) to seize the commanding heights of the income distribution, the income distribution gap between employees in different units (departments) has been formed and widened.” In addition, this phenomenon has also evolved into local protectionism, artificially widening the income gap

between regions (Gao 2002). Obviously, these have seriously disturbed the primary distribution system of Chinese society.

Second, whether members of society have equal basic rights.

Whether the primary distribution system of a society is just can mainly be interpreted in this way: whether the people's basic rights have been universally established in that society. In this sense, if their basic rights are not guaranteed, then primary distribution in that society cannot be just.

The concept of equality and freedom determines the supremacy of people's basic rights. "Every human being has, or is entitled to have, 'rights' – legitimate, valid, justified claims – upon his or her society... Implied in one's humanity, human rights are inalienable and imprescriptible: they cannot be transferred, forfeited, or waived; they cannot be lost by having been usurped, or by one's failure to exercise or assert them" (Henkin 1990). In modern society or a society with modernization as its basic orientation, the basic rights of members of that society must be unconditionally guaranteed. "They (human rights) need not be earned or deserved... When a society recognizes that a person has a right, it affirms, legitimates, and justifies that entitlement, and incorporates and establishes it in the society's system of values, giving it important weight in competition with other social values... Human rights imply the obligation of society to satisfy those claims. The state must develop institutions and procedures, must plan, must mobilize resources as necessary to meet those claims" (Henkin 1990).

In the field of primary distribution, the people's basic rights include equal labor rights, employment rights, reasonable remuneration, and other rights. The right to work and the right to employment are necessary conditions for their survival and development. It is also a precondition for them to fit into that society. If there is no right to work and employment, primary distribution will be impossible. Accordingly, in the primary distribution process, we must also ensure the fairness of the people's labor remuneration. In the transaction process of income distribution, "transaction' should be based on the premise that both parties of the transaction mutually recognize each other's independent personality and rights. Transaction is a process of power conversion ... If the distribution subject's power is equal to his income share, it reflects the equality of rights between distribution subjects, and the transactions between distribution subjects are equal transactions. On the contrary, if the distribution subjects' rights are not equal to the income share, it reflects the unequal rights between distribution subjects, and the transactions between distribution subjects are unfair transactions" (Han 1998). In addition, a minimum wage limit should be established for workers to prevent excessive irrationality in the field of primary distribution. As John Stuart Mill says, "The purpose is to provide that the workmen shall have reasonable wages, and the capitalists reasonable profits" (Mill 2006).

In real social life, the people's basic rights will be somewhat infringed, resulting in many negative impacts on the field of primary distribution. This is mainly because of the following reasons. (1) The influence of hierarchy in traditional

society, where members belong to different levels, and those in the low level have a personal attachment to those in the high level. According to different ranks and identities, members of society further show a distinct difference in aspects such as income distribution and other social resources. The factors and concepts of traditional hierarchy still exist in different degrees in today's real society, especially in some societies with a low degree of modernization. This has led to situations such as labor market segmentation. For example, at the present stage of Chinese society, there is a great difference in income between rural residents and urban workers, so the primary distribution process is obviously unfair. (2) The infringement of rights by money. In the market economy society, the role of money is beyond measure; therefore, if there is no necessary constraint, money will inevitably have some negative effects on the basic rights of its members. "Money can buy a great many things that are not supposed to be for sale in our democracy ... better education and information help affluent people to take full advantage of the legal system as a means of realizing their goals and ambitions" (Okun 1975). Under such circumstances, the formulation of some specific rules and the judgment of some specific disputes in the field of primary distribution will inevitably present a situation that is beneficial to the affluent people. (3) The infringement of state power. If the power of the state is too small, it will be difficult to effectively curb the market economy failure and ensure the justice of the whole society. However, when the power of the state loses any restriction, is elevated to a supreme position, and can intervene in all fields of social economy at will, the state institutions may be alienated. Once this happens, the state power will violate the basic rights of members of society, and it will harm the fairness in the field of primary distribution. For example, the income of Chinese farmers is far lower than that of urban residents. It is in such a situation that farmers have to pay too many taxes and fees to the state and government. In 1995, "the per capita income of rural residents was equivalent to 40% of that of urban residents, while the per capita income of rural residents was nine times that of urban residents only in terms of taxes. If all kinds of miscellaneous fees are paid, it is equivalent to nearly 30 times that of urban residents." Actually, "the rural taxation system has been regressive" (Zhao 1999). This practice has unreasonably increased income inequality in the primary distribution of Chinese society and has artificially damaged the fairness in the field of primary distribution.

Third, whether there is an effective and fair negotiation and consultation mechanism between the parties.

Whether the primary distribution rules of social justice can be fulfilled depends on whether there is a consultation and negotiation mechanism between the parties (groups) to a certain extent. "The rights and responsibilities allocation clauses stipulated in the contract are reached through bilateral or multilateral negotiations and bargaining between the parties before signing the contract. Therefore, the size of the 'bargaining power' (advantages and disadvantages) plays a decisive role in the distribution of rights and responsibilities in the contract and the definition of each party's status" (Liu 2002). This

mechanism must be fair and effective in order to avoid situations that are unilaterally beneficial to groups in a relatively strong state, which will eventually lead to unfairness in the primary distribution results.

When it comes to the coordination between employers and employees in the field of primary distribution, it is necessary to give full play to labor unions. In this respect, labor unions play an irreplaceable role. “The source of union power is collective action. When workers join together in a union, they no longer negotiate as isolated individuals. The threat of a strike (or a work slow-down) poses many more difficulties for an employer than does the threat of any single employee quitting” (Stiglitz and Walsh 2011). Through labor unions, workers can negotiate with business owners to solve important issues in the field of primary distribution. “The wages and fringe benefits of unionized workers are determined by collective bargaining. This is the process of negotiation between representatives of firms and of workers for the purpose of establishing mutually agreeable conditions of employment” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). This practice of labor unions in negotiation can be used for reference by farmers and other groups when dealing with problems in the field of primary distribution.

It should be noted that, sometimes, one of the parties is obviously in a weak position, thus lacking the necessary negotiating power. The result of consultation and negotiation formed under such circumstances is likely to directly damage the fairness of the primary distribution result. In this regard, it is necessary for government institutions, as representatives of public interests, to intervene. For example, the state can make clear provisions on related matters in the form of laws and regulations such as *the Trade Union Law* and *the Labor-Management Relations Act*, and they can set up labor management departments to effectively supervise and coordinate them.

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## The Rule of Social Adjustment in Social Justice

A bias often emerges when people discuss the fundamental rules of social justice. They either take equality of opportunity or initial distribution as the most fundamental dimension of social justice, ignoring social adjustment. Even if they do discuss social adjustment, it is often regarded as a “complementary” rule with a limited function. In reality, however, social adjustment is an indispensable part of social justice in modern society, just as important as equal opportunity or distribution according to contribution. They are all complementary to one another. With the advancement of modernization and the market economy, social adjustment plays an increasingly important role in society, developing from a supplemental form of “relief” to a basic principle of social justice that can ensure the safe operation and healthy development of society, improve quality of life, and enhance the capacity for social regeneration. Today, the fundamental ideas, contents, and functions of social adjustment cannot be compared to those that prevailed in the past. It is no longer possible to imagine modern society’s normal operation and healthy development without social adjustment.

### 1 THE MEANING, NECESSITY, AND SIGNIFICANCE OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

Social adjustment is an important part of social justice in the modern sense. Together with the protection of basic rights, equal opportunity, and distribution according to contribution, it constitutes the fundamental system of rules for social justice in modern society. (Wu 2000) The term social adjustment refers to the necessary modifications made to the structure of social benefits after their initial distribution. These modifications are made for the benefit of society overall, such that a broad swath of society receive the benefits of development, thereby allowing the quality of society to be continuously improved. Strictly speaking, the term social adjustment has both a broad and a narrow

meaning. In the broad sense, social adjustment not only implies a “safety net” guaranteeing the right to and conditions for “basic survival” but also ensures that “development” can be achieved for members of society. In the narrow sense, social adjustment only refers to the latter. This book uses “social adjustment” in its broad sense. If issues of initial distribution mostly emphasize the economic domain, then social adjustment emphasizes the social domain. In a certain sense, commercial insurance is also a kind of social “adjustment.” However, in contrast to commercial insurance, social adjustment does not take profit as its primary objective.

In modern society, the basic purpose (the fundamental idea) of social development is that everyone shares in it and universally benefits. However, for various reasons, this universality is often limited, which results in certain deviations in the direction of social development away from its basic purpose, thus reducing the quality of development overall. The implementation of rules for social adjustment can enable the principle of social justice to be realized to the maximum extent possible under existing social and historical conditions, such that this deviation can be somewhat corrected for, and the quality of social development improved.

In both the economic and social sphere, numerous forms of inequality and uncertainty have created injustices within society, negatively affecting its stable operation and healthy development. The major forms are the following:

The first is an unjust and imperfect distribution of social and economic resources. In a certain sense, this distributive structure is the concrete expression of the self-interest of all social strata, and it is also the direct embodiment of which strata are “powerful” and which are “disadvantaged.” Sometimes, the distributive structure will be to the obvious benefit of one stratum, which is unreasonable and unfair to the other strata. Furthermore, because the social organism is extremely complicated—especially given that the various links wrought by modern society multiply this complexity—the distributive structure for social and economic resources will inevitably contain certain gaps and omissions, causing imperfections and even creating unjust social phenomena. In short, the irrational and imperfect distributive structure is the direct root of many injustices.

The second is the element of risk that exists within a market economy. The market economy is born in the process of modernization and accompanies its advance, acting as the fundamental economic system within modern society. The market economy plays an irreplaceable role insofar as it rationally allocates resources, improves the efficiency of the economy, realizes equity in the economic sphere, and even promotes the overall process of social development. While it is inappropriate to ignore the importance of the market economy, it may also be inevitable for bias to arise if the market economy is mythologized as the most effective way to solve all problems. It should be noted that it is one-sided to discuss the effectiveness of the market economy beyond the unique scope of its application. The market economy is risky and has its own limitations. In terms of the basic goal of universally benefiting from or sharing



in social development, the market economy does not at all seem to play a positive role in any direct or comprehensive sense. On the one hand, while free competition is an extremely important principle of justice in the economic sense, it is hardly suitable in the social sense. For example, it is difficult for free competition to be widely endorsed by vulnerable social groups or adapted to operate in accord with public welfare projects (such as education and environmental protection). On the other hand, even in the economic sense, the market economy has insurmountable limitations. For example, the market economy is sometimes too short-sighted to reflect long-term social needs. The spontaneity of the market economy also easily leads to “imperfect competition,” thus causing disorder and confusion in the market. Samuelson’s reflection on the doctrine of the “invisible hand” is very accurate: “After two centuries of experience and thought, however, we recognize the limited scope of this doctrine. We know that there are ‘market failures,’ that markets do not always lead to the most efficient outcome. One set of market failures concerns monopolies and other forms of imperfect competition. A second failure of the ‘invisible hand’ comes when there are spillovers or externalities outside the marketplace – positive externalities such as scientific discoveries and negative spillovers such as pollution” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010).

The third is the “hereditary” element of the family. Family certainly has an extremely important influence on an individual’s growth and social status. It plays an enormous role in children’s education, which directly affects how their abilities and other important qualities manifest and can even go on to influence the concrete conditions for their future survival and development. Generally speaking, people with better family backgrounds tend to have more ability, making it easier for them to obtain better social status. What’s more, such people are more likely to receive essential social resources, thus gaining a competitive advantage. In addition, the inheritance of property within the family also has an enormous impact on the specific opportunities afforded to members of society. “Clearly, there is some tendency for the affluence or poverty of the father to be visited upon the son. As Christopher Jencks and his associates report, the sons of families in the top fifth of the socioeconomic pyramid have average incomes 75 percent higher than those coming from the bottom fifth... Some of the causes of that differential are undoubtedly genetic or hereditary” (Okun 2010).

The fourth is individual talent and ability. From the perspective of genetics, there are large differences in individuals’ innate capacities. “However important the environment may be, we must not overlook the fact that individuals are very different from the outset. As a statement of fact, it just is not true that ‘all men are born equal’” (Hayek 1987). Accordingly, there exist large disparities in individual ability, because innate capacities are the essential foundation on which acquired abilities are formed. This disparity means that people from the same background with the same opportunities and working conditions can see mildly or even extremely different levels of achievement. If such an outcome directly corresponds to the distribution of income, without any

subsequent social adjustment, then in the long run there will be a huge gap between people in possession of wealth and those without, and this gap will constantly grow wider in a compounding fashion, resulting in a Matthew Effect of accumulated advantage which will ultimately create a wide gulf between the rich and the poor.

In addition to the above, there are many other factors of inequality, such as inequity in education, discrimination according to gender or race, and age and seniority restrictions.

If a society places blind and excessive emphasis on equality in everything (including starting points, outcomes, etc.), it will inevitably approach conditions of egalitarianism wherein individuals lose their ability to live different kinds of lives, lack developmental goals and motivation, and forfeit their sense of responsibility and trust in society. Obviously, this is not in line with the principle of social justice and will reduce the efficiency of society. However, if inequality and uncertainty are allowed to develop “freely,” they will cause numerous injustices that will adversely impact equality and impartiality from the very beginning. The most direct and obvious harm is the excessive, polarizing disparity between the rich and the poor. This situation is bound to make many individuals feel a sense of relative deprivation, which will dampen their enthusiasm in work and weaken their sense of social responsibility. It is easy for marginalized behaviors to emerge among impoverished groups or for these groups to adopt a conflictual attitude toward society. The rising trend of inequality has become a complex system of restrictions and obstacles for development, set to reduce the degree of social integration, weaken motivation for social development, and increase the possibility of unrest. Even further, social development will deviate from its basic aim—the idea that everyone shares in and universally benefits from development—and this will reduce society’s organic integration, limit the effective realization of social potential, and ultimately cause social development to go astray to differing degrees.

It is evident that many forms of inequity can be eliminated and risk factors can be avoided through the implementation of social adjustment, so as to ensure the stable operation and healthy development of society.

First, social adjustment helps to ensure social development’s fundamental objective: that everyone can share in and universally benefit from it. In other words, the dignity of every member of society should be better guaranteed as society develops. Their potential should be continuously cultivated, their basic needs sustainably met, and their living standards constantly improved. By contrast, if social wealth is amassed by only a few people, then the fruits of social development will only be enjoyed by those people. This sort of development is not true development but is instead “growth without development.” “Growth was a means to an end, not an end in itself. The objectives were to eliminate poverty, illiteracy and disease, to increase the range of human choice, to give mankind greater control over the natural environment and thereby to increase freedom” (Griffin 1999). As a scholar points out, “The questions to ask about a country’s development are therefore: What has been happening to poverty?

What has been happening to unemployment? What has been happening to inequality? If all three of these have declined from high levels, then beyond doubt this has been a period of development for the country concerned. If one or two of these central problems have been growing worse, especially if all three have, it would be strange to call the result ‘development’, even if per capita income doubled” (Seers 1969). Through effective social adjustment, it is possible to transfer social attention and a portion of social resources to those who find themselves in relatively unfavorable conditions with fewer means at their disposal, thereby closing or at least narrowing the wide gap between the rich and the poor. If this type of effective social adjustment can be carried on continuously, then the objective of social development—that everyone can share in and universally benefit from it—can be gradually realized.

Second, social adjustment helps to develop individual potential. In a society with a low degree of justice, the developmental prospects of individuals are limited, which has the effect of further aggravating injustice. This becomes a vicious cycle. Since those who only rely on social assistance to survive can only temporarily alleviate their anxiety over basic necessities, they don’t possess a genuine opportunity for fair competition and their ability to cultivate their own development remains limited. Therefore, even if the rule of distribution according to contribution is followed, it is still impossible for this subset of the population to enjoy “fair competition.” It must be noted here that social justice is not only concerned with the right to subsistence but also with the right to development. The latter is the principal objective of social adjustment. In the long run, if people lack the right to development, they will also lack the dignity they are due, will have few opportunities for development, and will not possess ability to grasp these opportunities. Through social adjustment, society should not only provide necessities for this portion of the population but must also offer other amenities such as essential educational resources, developmental opportunities, an impartial environment, and social welfare. If such amenities are provided, these members of society can be given an ordinary ability to develop or at the very least see their developmental ability increased, thereby universally cultivating their potential. As Rawls argues: “in order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality. In pursuit of this principle greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent, at least over a certain time of life, say the earlier years of school” (Rawls 1999). It is also worth noting that the positive effects of social adjustment are not short-term. Therefore, from an intergenerational perspective, the significance of social adjustment is possibly even more profound.

Third, social adjustment encourages social integration. Injustices such as social discrimination and the wide gap between the rich and the poor will ultimately produce various barriers, conflicts, and centrifugal forces dividing members of society, all of which will reduce social integration. The capabilities of

society are thereby consumed for no reason and the regeneration of these capabilities runs into numerous impediments, which cause malfunction to proliferate. Severe social injustice will directly hinder the normal operation and healthy development of society and may even threaten its security. Effective social adjustment can play a necessary role wherein, rather than pursuing egalitarianism, it “trims the high to level the low,” thereby gradually eliminating or alleviating social injustices and ensuring relative harmony between each group within society such that centrifugal forces are reduced to the greatest extent possible and social integration is enhanced.

Finally, social adjustment is conducive to the historical perpetuation of social justice. In other words, it helps to realize intergenerational social justice. Social adjustment objectively plays an important role, since it can dissolve hindrances to the principle of social justice that arise at the “horizontal” level of society through means of the “vertical” historical process. In this way, the social vitality between generations is continuously strengthened, and social justice can be gradually realized in the process of historical development. For example, in terms of wealth inequality, the rules of social adjustment require that excessive income or property held by one portion of society gradually flow to other parties through methods of adjustment such as the income tax or inheritance tax and thereby become widely accessible to all members of society such that both present and future generations can universally benefit. Thus, even though one portion of society seems to have immense wealth at present, most social wealth will eventually become communal with the passage of time. The elimination of various unfair “hereditary advantages” and the creation of equal opportunity between generations—both advocated for by the rules of social adjustment—help each generation to enjoy equal competitive abilities and the necessary environment of equality, thus contributing to the gradual realization of the principle of equal opportunity in social justice. Altogether, the rules of social adjustment can generate a kind of useful “mindset” for social justice which carries historical significance. Under the influence of the “inertial force” caused by this “mindset,” the implementation of social justice for each generation can be actively promoted.

## 2 THE “LEGITIMACY” OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

As has already been stated, social adjustment is indispensable. However, necessity is not the same as “legitimacy” or “validity.” In a certain sense, social adjustment is a kind of “levelling” (but not in the egalitarian meaning of the word) involving obvious “human intervention.” Social adjustment means that social resources are transferred or “adjusted” between members of society according to certain rules. Here, a question arises: Does social adjustment imply an inappropriate infringement on the personal domain (the basic rights of individuals)? In other words, is social adjustment “legitimate?” Does it have “validity?” To answer this question, three related questions also arise: How should the reasonable scope of the personal domain be demarcated? What is

the relationship between individuals and society? What kind of responsibility does society bear for individuals?

Marx states that “it is only possible to achieve real liberation in the real world... ‘Liberation’ is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse...” (Marx and Engels 1979). In traditional society, due to the extreme backwardness of productive forces and the extreme scarcity of material wealth, people’s potential could not be fully developed and their dignity could not be guaranteed. Therefore, individuals’ subjectivity and the corresponding concepts of equality and freedom directly related to them could not be universally formed. In traditional society, “personal dependence here characterizes the social relations of production just as much as it does the other spheres of life organized on the basis of that production” (Marx and Engels 1972). As a result, people did not enjoy an independent, private sphere. However, in modern society under the market economy, a sphere specific to the individual (the private sphere) has gradually taken shape, with liberty and equality at its core. The idea of equality affirms and protects individuals’ basic dignity, while the idea of liberty affirms and protects individuals’ difference and autonomy.

Since society is composed of countless individuals, the basic contribution of each individual (member of society) is both indispensable and equal. Due to the “prerequisite contribution” of each individual, the form of dignity unique to societies of the human species means that, accordingly, people possess human dignity.

The affirmation of individuals’ fundamental contributions and human dignity should take on a concrete form. If individuals are not entitled to the same basic rights, their survival cannot be guaranteed, their dignity cannot be preserved, and equality will lose its practical significance. In this regard, the basic rights of individuals are in line with natural law. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights* states: “All human beings are born free and equal in dignity and rights. They are endowed with reason and conscience and should act towards one another in a spirit of brotherhood... Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status.”

Obviously, the objective of equality is to safeguard the basic dignity of individuals—to provide fundamental protections for their survival and development.

The main contents of liberty freedom are the following. First, society protects the autonomy of the individual. As Mill states, “The only freedom which deserves the name, is that of pursuing our own good in our own way, so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it... The only part of the conduct of any one, for which he is amenable to society, is that which concerns others. In the part which merely concerns himself, his independence is, of right, absolute. Over himself, over his own body and mind, the individual is sovereign” (Mill 2001). Second, society

respects reasonable differences among individuals. Third, on the basis of these principles, there are spheres in which it is appropriate that people exercise freedoms. Fourth, rationality should be an important principle of freedom. Because people's freedom should be restrained, it requires rational guidance. See the first chapter for more details.

The idea of liberty requires that different individual endowments, abilities, and concrete contributions be respected, the individual development and choice also be respected, and different treatment be given according to the different contributions of each individual to society.

Although the private sphere is extremely important, it is only one aspect of the problem. What needs to be seen is that individuals are not isolated. As modernization and the market economy advance, social differentiation and integration gradually deepen. Social cooperation therefore becomes an increasingly essential condition and the basic form of social existence and development. "Such rules may be followed ... for the benefit of the group as a whole in the form of the goals of each being better served, even though each person might have been able to enhance the fulfilment of his or her own goals further by following a different strategy, given the strategy choice of others" (Sen 1991). Even the representative figures of liberalism, such as Rousseau, Rawls, and others, are agreed on this point.

Social cooperation is a prerequisite for the survival of each member of society. Social development requires the joint effort of all members of society. Individual talents can only survive and develop in the midst of this joint effort. Without society, individuals cannot live and develop. Society is an organic whole. "While the life of society is nothing but the life of individuals as they act one upon another, the life of the individual in turn would be something utterly different if he could be separated from society. A great deal of him would not exist at all" (Leonard Trelawny Hobhouse 2009). So individuals need association and cooperation. "Find a form of association which will defend and protect, with the whole of its joint strength, the person and property of each associate, and under which each of them, uniting himself to all, will obey himself alone, and remain as free as before" (Rousseau 1994). In fact, this is also the essence of social cooperation. Only when individuals cooperate effectively in society can their basic needs be met, their potential fully developed, and their respective values realized. "It is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of the others. We are led to the notion of the community of humankind the members of which enjoy one another's excellences and individuality elicited by free institutions, and they recognize the good of each as an element in the complete activity the whole scheme of which is consented to and gives pleasure to all" (Rawls 1999).

Social cooperation involves not only synchronous cooperation but also asynchronous cooperation—cooperation between the current generation, past generations, and future ones. Social development is achieved through the efforts of each generation, the entirety of human history is driven forward by the

cooperation between generations, and human civilization is perpetuated and developed through intergenerational social cooperation. Collaboration between generations is an obvious necessity and, in this sense, all generations have their own duties and responsibilities. Rawls says, “This community may also be imagined to extend over time, and therefore in the history of a society the joint contributions of successive generations can be similarly conceived. Our predecessors in achieving certain things leave it up to us to pursue them further; their accomplishments affect our choice of endeavors and define a wider background against which our aims can be understood. To say that man is a historical being is to say that the realizations of the powers of human individuals living at any one time takes the cooperation of many generations (or even societies) over a long period of time” (Rawls 1999).

Social cooperation is unique to human society. “By contrast with human-kind, every individual animal can and does do what for the most part it might do, or what any other of its kind might or can do that lives at the same time. The range of realized abilities of a single individual of the species is not in general materially less than the potentialities of other similar to it” (Rawls 1999). Only human beings can, through social cooperation, accomplish things that cannot be undertaken by any one individual.

The following conclusions can be drawn from the analysis above: In real life, although individuals and society exist as two relatively independent fields, together they constitute an organic social whole. They should not be treated as conflicting or exclusive poles. Doing so will result in many pointless debates and may even generate harmful conclusions.

Who, then, represents the whole of society (as social organism or social community)? Obviously, this representative cannot be an individual, but only an institution of social management such as the state.

The body of social cooperation (the social organism or social community) is most manifest in the state. Although a country is composed of many different members of society, it is not simply the sum of these members. Once a country is formed, it possesses a kind of relative autonomy. Even Rousseau, Paine, and other more radical theorists of innate human rights believed that a portion of these rights are “relinquished” to society. Theoretically speaking, the government is a country’s primary public authority and bears both responsibility for and obligations to members of society. “State action is embodied in a system of rights, and there is no element of it which is not determined by a bearing upon a public interest” (Bosanquet 2001). The obligation and responsibility of the state is realized through its guidance, coordination, and direct management of society—with these responsibilities and obligations especially prominent in the primary and intermediate stages of a country’s modernization. The “minimal state” advocated by Nozick is clearly incapable of fully realizing the principle of justice (Nozick 1974).

Social adjustment is primarily the responsibility of the state. First, individuals’ access to universal basic needs should be increased. These needs are multifaceted and include physiological needs, the need for safety, the need to belong,

the need for respect and the need for self-realization. Policymaking should be based on these needs and strive to meet them to the greatest extent possible. Second, an equitable social environment should be constructed. There are many reasons for the manifold diversity visible in the different circumstances of different individuals, some of which are “natural” reasons and some of which are social and historical ones. In terms of the latter, society bears the responsibility for resolving such differences. In the long run, the most important element of solving this problem is the creation of an equitable environment by, for example, actively creating conditions of opportunity, eliminating factors of privilege, formulating relevant social policies, etc., all to provide equitable external conditions for members of society. Third, vulnerable social groups should be offered necessary assistance. The problem currently faced by such groups is the question of how to obtain the most basic conditions of life. This is the most direct concern for social adjustment and, as its main executor, the government should naturally place this issue on its agenda. Fourth, the state should furnish adequate conditions for development, paying attention not only to people’s most basic living conditions but also to the conditions that every member of society ought to enjoy. In other words, there should not only be a “poverty line” drawn for society, but also a “development line” and, accordingly, the government should provide the necessary social welfare measures to establish adequate conditions of development for members of society. When the degree of social development is at a low level, the main issue of social concern is poverty. When the degree of social development rises, then developmental conditions will attract increasing attention.

When considering social adjustment, two basic standpoints must be grasped simultaneously: First, the general interest of all members of society acts as the principle of the whole society. In a certain sense, social adjustment entails readjusting the structure of social interests. This raises the question: who should be its beneficiary? The purpose of social adjustment is to coordinate the interests of all social strata such that the central concept of social development—that everyone shares in and benefits from it—can be realized. Obviously, vulnerable social groups should be the direct beneficiaries of social adjustment, through which they can obtain social assistance. However, the majority of people in society should also be beneficiaries, at least indirectly, since they benefit from having an equitable social environment. Only in this way can the principle of social adjustment be consistent with the basic purpose of social development—allowing all to universally share in and benefit from it—while also retaining its vitality and thereby promoting the normal operation and healthy development of society in an effective fashion. Second is the principle of history, which carries two connotations. One is that social development is an historical process, as is the implementation and refinement of social adjustment. Therefore, when considering issues of social adjustment, a long-term historical perspective ought to be adopted, with no expectation that social adjustment can be completed in a single generation. The other connotation is that, in certain cases,



the effects of social adjustment have a time lag. For example, for a party whose interests are temporarily “harmed,” social adjustment can help its offspring to obtain an equitable social environment, which will help them to enhance their abilities, develop their potential, and prevent possible injustices. Thus, in this sense, their offspring are also beneficiaries.

Social adjustment is in fact a form of social interference. A question therefore arises: Should there be a limit to this sort of interference? The answer is obvious: there should. Mill, in discussing the scope of individual freedom, offers the classic explanation: “Acts, of whatever kind, which, without justifiable cause, do harm to others, may be, and in the more important cases absolutely require to be, controlled by the unfavorable sentiments, and when needful, by the active interference of mankind. The liberty of the individual must be thus far limited; he must not make himself a nuisance to other people... that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others” (Mill 2001). Everyone’s basic rights, including the right to fair treatment, should not be violated. Given the premise that the basic rights of individuals be safeguarded, every member of society doubtlessly bears a certain responsibility and obligation to society as a whole. Just as distribution ought to proceed according to contribution, so too should the obligations and contributions of individuals toward society be differentiated according to the individual’s actual ability, at least in terms of the resources for social adjustment. This is the primary reason that it is necessary to adjust social resources between the better-off members of society and the poorer members of society. However, what requires our attention is the fact that, in addition to this, social adjustment can grow excessive and thereby impair the basic rights of equality and freedom. One type of notably harmful tendency is when the state’s powers of interference into the lives of individuals are excessively strengthened on the pretext of providing for the public interest, severely infringing upon the personal domain. This is a kind of “alienation” of political power that will have very serious consequences for the normal operation and healthy development of society and against which people must remain vigilant. Here lies a profound lesson for our country.

### 3 SPECIFIC FEATURES OF SOCIAL ADJUSTMENT

There are two specific objectives of social adjustment: first, to provide a “safety net” that guarantees the people’s basic survival; second, to improve their quality of life and development ability. In concrete terms, social adjustment implies realizing full employment, adopting reasonable taxation, implementing effective social welfare policies, vigorously developing education, creating an equitable social environment, and so on. The design and arrangement of social adjustment over the long run must consider and solve both current and future related issues.

### 3.1 *Full Employment*

Full employment implies that any member of society who is willing to work, has the necessary abilities, and is of the right age should obtain a job with financial reward. Full employment should be the priority goal of a society, as it is of great significance for a society to achieve justice in a broad sense. For workers, getting a job means having a relatively stable main source of economic income, obtaining a certain social status, prestige, and power, as well as carrying out necessary social activities on equal terms. For a society, full employment is a precondition to eliminating poverty and alleviating the gap between the rich and the poor, and it is also a prerequisite for maximizing the development of human resources, enhancing social vitality, and increasing the total wealth of society. A high unemployment rate is very harmful to a society. For economists, “unemployment represents an underutilization of resources. People who are willing and able to work at current market wages are not being productively employed. To the unemployed individuals and their families, unemployment represents economic hardship... Unemployment not only costs individuals their paychecks, it can deal a powerful blow to their self-respect... Young people who remain unemployed for an extended period are especially prone to becoming alienated from society and turning to antisocial activities such as crime and drug abuse... Unemployment is very costly to communities as well” (Stiglitz and Walsh 2011). Obviously, serious unemployment will cause many social injustices such as poverty, an excessive gap between the rich and the poor, and resistance among members of society, thus damaging social integration and hindering the normal operation and healthy development of society.

In view of this, society should give priority to full employment and try every means to create employment opportunities for all members of society. This should be the basic component of social adjustment.

### 3.2 *Reasonable Taxation*

Taxes are the main source of a country’s fiscal revenue, and it is also the main source and foundation of funds needed for social adjustment. The main types are income tax and inheritance tax.

Taxation has two functions that serve social adjustment: first, the government can obtain the necessary public welfare funds through taxes to maintain the basic livelihood of disadvantaged members of society, such as low-income people and those without income, and to improve the quality of life and development ability of all members of society. Second, through income taxes, inheritance taxes, and other taxes, the government can appropriately reduce the excessive income and property of high-income earners, so as to effectively adjust or alleviate the disparity between the rich and the poor in the society and ensure the necessary integration and stability of the society. For example, as long as the rule of social adjustment is effectively implemented, the very wealthy individuals or families at present are often rich for only a few

generations. The reason for this is that when the rich are alive, they need to pay progressive taxes, and when they die, their successors must pay inheritance taxes, which are not small in number. Take the inheritance tax in the United States as an example: the average tax rate of inheritance taxes and gift taxes in the United States is between 18% and 55%. The specific tax rate is determined according to the value of taxable heritage, and the highest rate is 55%, which is applicable to taxable transfer amounts exceeding 3 million US dollars (Chen 2000). In this way, no matter how much property a person owns, after paying progressive taxes and inheritance taxes and after several generations, most of these properties will eventually be owned by the society.

It is worth noting that the progressive tax and inheritance tax are fair in nature, although they play a kind of “levelling” role. In the long run, this practice will generate a “win-win” situation. This can be understood as follows. (1) High-income people should make special contributions to society. Every member has certain responsibilities and obligations to society, which manifests as their contribution to society. How much a person can contribute depends on his actual ability. It is a fair and reasonable way to link and synchronize one’s achievements in social wealth with the improvement of social public interests, so that the increase of the wealth of a few people and the improvement of the basic lives of disadvantaged people can be steered onto a benign path. As Rawls points out: “All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1999). (2) Judging from the marginal effect of consumption and the satisfaction of individual needs, a relatively high income tax will not have much adverse impact on the basic living conditions of high-income earners. (3) It also makes sense from the perspective of intergenerational justice. The “complete transfer” of social wealth between generations does not conform to social justice; neither “too rich” nor “too poor” should exceed one generation. The “intergenerational inheritance” of high-income people’s wealth will cause uninterrupted social inequality. Therefore, inheritance taxes give the descendants of high-income earners the same equal starting point as other members of society as much as possible. The more the society develops and the higher the degree of social justice, the less high-income earners have to worry about their future generations. (4) Taxes can indirectly benefit high-income earners. Taxation is conducive to the guarantee of the basic living standards of people in difficult situations and the general improvement of the living standards and abilities of all members of society. These are also beneficial to higher income-earners, so that the social environment in which they live and work can not only maintain stable and fair conditions, but also be continuously improved. This situation is also beneficial for the stability of their living conditions and the accumulation of their wealth. This is a virtuous circle. (5) For some high-income people with apparent social responsibility, their contribution to “taxation” is also an integral part of their value self-realization. (6) A part of the social wealth of high-income earners is indeed obtained through social cooperation. Rawls’ argument

that the increase of personal wealth is almost entirely attributed to social cooperation is certainly one-sided, but Nozick's contempt for the contribution of social cooperation is also one-sided. For example, "well-maintained local streets benefit property owners by enhancing the value of property. Thus, it is reasoned that property owners should pay in the form of property taxes for the benefits they receive from streets" (Register and Grimes 2016). In this sense, it is in line with the principle of social justice to impose progressive taxation on high-income earners.

### 3.3 *Social Welfare*

The goal of social welfare is, based on social justice and social security, to make individuals and families believe as far as possible that their living standards will not be seriously damaged by unexpected events in social and economic aspects. This includes not only meeting the ever-increasing demand but also preventing first-time danger and helping individuals and families to make the best adjustment when faced with unexpected or unforeseeable disabilities and losses. Social justice and safety can be achieved through social security schemes such as social assistance, old-age insurance, medical insurance, maternity insurance, industrial injury insurance, unemployment insurance, social welfare, and special care.

Social welfare policies cover a wide range. Academic circles and relevant government departments have made numerous discussions and explanations on its concrete content, and this chapter will not repeat them. Here, the author just emphasizes the importance of social welfare as a part of social adjustment in the following aspects.

First, to ensure a safety net that guarantees the people's basic survival. As mentioned earlier, there are numerous forms of inequality and uncertainty in society, such as the unjust and imperfect distribution of social and economic resources, the element of risk that exists within a market economy, and the "hereditary" element of the family. Because of this, the people have great differences in the specific situations of survival and development, and the disadvantaged may fall into a "survival crisis" due to the loss of their jobs or other reasons. For these members, society has the responsibility to provide them with necessary social assistance to ensure their basic living conditions. Otherwise, social development will deviate from its basic aim that everyone benefits universally.

Second, to improve the people's quality of life and development ability. Social welfare should not only solve problems involving the "poverty line" but also pay attention to the "development line." Society should provide the necessary "welfare" measures for all members of society, so as to continuously improve their quality of life and development ability. This is a higher level of social adjustment. It should be noted that these measures should be adapted to the specific level of social development and can be implemented step by step. Moreover, in terms of sequence of time, it should be implemented based on

the principle of “survival first, then development.” In other words, the implementation should be carried out under the premise that a safety net for members of society can be ensured.

Third, an effective guarantee for the people’s future survival and development. Social welfare is not only about immediate measures, it is also of long-term significance. As an important part of social adjustment, social welfare is a kind of pre-institutional preparation and arrangement. It can not only solve the “current” difficulties of the disadvantaged but also enhance the people’s ability to solve “future” difficulties.

### 3.4 *Universal Education*

As mentioned earlier, before the process of modernization, education was not popular and it only served a few members of society. Education was divorced from the economic sphere, where laborers only relied on the master-apprentice approach to acquire production experience and labor skills. The rise of the modern industry has meant that the scale of production has expanded rapidly and labor has become more complex day by day. More and more workers are required to have specific professional knowledge and specialized skills. At this time, it is impossible to cultivate competent workers in the field of economic production alone. Naturally, people acquire these skills via education. As a result, two remarkable changes have taken place in education. One is that education has become popular. If a person does not receive the necessary education, it is difficult for him to become a qualified worker. Another change is that education is no longer regarded as a consumption investment without economic benefits or a pure cultural activity of leisure groups, but as a productive investment with positive significance.

These lead to change at the social level. On the one hand, education is necessary for every member of society; on the other hand, due to limited educational resources, not all people can receive the necessary education. Generally speaking, income is related to ability, and ability is related to education. As a result, differentiated education has aggravated the income gap among members of society. For example, in the United States, “those men who never finish high school and who work full time earned \$19,000 in 1984; a male college graduate would earn about 70 percent more, at \$32,000. Moreover, the unemployment rate of college graduates tends to be only one-half of less educated groups. Although the incomes of women and minority groups are lower than those for white males, the relative earnings and unemployment rates at different education levels are quite similar to those of white males” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). In developing countries, “this correlation holds especially for those who are able to complete secondary and university education where income differentials over workers who have only completed part or all of their primary education can be on the order of 300% to 800%... if for financial and/or other reasons the poor are effectively denied access to secondary and higher

educational opportunities, then the educational system can actually perpetuate and even increase inequality in the Third World nations” (Todaro 1989).

Because of this, society should have the responsibility to pay attention to the people’s education, which is a necessary measure to eliminate or at least slow down the unjust factors in the entirety of society. Only when members of society receive education can they “enter” that society and the market on equal terms. In terms of education, society should pay attention to the following things: First, it is extremely necessary to popularize compulsory education in the entire society. Only in this way can most people acquire basic labor skills and competitiveness, so that amidst fierce social competition, there will not appear to be a large vulnerable group. “The availability of education serves to reduce rather than to increase the effects of such difference in starting position... In this sense, education acts similarly to transfer taxation” (Buchanan 1986). Therefore, through large-scale education, members of society can not only obtain indispensable “shared opportunities” but also acquire the necessary ability and equal starting point needed for “differential opportunities.” Second, society should continuously improve the level of education in the entirety of society and expand higher education. With the advancement of modernization, the social competition at the middle and high levels will become fiercer. Therefore, if we continue to limit higher education to smaller groups of people, it will encourage harmful “elite education,” and thus aggravate the income differences among members of society and increase social inequalities. Although higher education is not compulsory, the government can still increase investment in it, expand its scale, and ensure its quality. The government can also mobilize the enthusiasm of the entire society and attract the attention of all social groups, so as to increase public welfare in higher education. Thirdly, attention should be paid to the vocational education of workers, especially to the vulnerable groups.

### 3.5 *Constructing an Equitable Social Environment*

In the long run, in order to effectively implement the principle of social adjustment, it is necessary to create a broad social justice environment. Only in this way can social adjustment truly become an organic part of the social organism and be widely recognized by members of all social strata, so as to play its due role. In this regard, we must do the following:

First, pay attention to the formulation of relevant social public policies. Society should formulate systematic policies closely related to the people’s basic survival and development, such as social assistance, employment, minimum wage standard, medical insurance, old-age insurance, compulsory education, unemployment insurance, maternity insurance, industrial injury insurance, social special care and welfare, etc., and ensure the authority, continuity, and stability of these policies. These public policies can guide and coordinate the implementation of social adjustment rules.

Second, gradually expand public welfare undertakings and take them to higher levels. From a feasible point of view, it is necessary to arrange the development of public welfare in the right order. The scope of public works should be expanded in a timely manner in response to the development of society, and policies should be connected to each other. In addition, the level of public welfare should be upgraded in a timely manner as social development increases. For example, when the degree of social development is at a low level, the main issue of social concern should be the people's basic livelihoods. When the degree of social development rises, then developmental conditions should attract increasing attention. Once such an order is reversed, it will hinder the orderly development of public welfare in the future.

Third, to cultivate supporting forces at the social level. The government undoubtedly plays a major role in social adjustment. However, it is impossible for it to take care of all matters related to social adjustment. With modernization and the market economy advance, various social intermediary organizations, such as non-profit organizations and groups, are rapidly developing. Although these organizations cannot replace the government and play a major role in the implementation of social adjustment, they still play a positive and bigger role in promoting the concrete and effective implementation of social adjustment, because they can diversify the sources of funds needed for social adjustment and play a direct role in many other spheres. Therefore, the government can take advantage of these organizations and actively support and use their power to promote public welfare undertakings from various levels of society.

## 4 SEVERAL RELATED ISSUES

### 4.1 *The Historical Characteristics of Social Adjustment*

Strictly speaking, real social adjustment can only exist in modern society, because only in the modern society can we have sufficient social and economic resources such as social wealth as the basis for implementing social adjustment and a real social community.

Although social adjustment is an inevitable phenomenon in modern society, it should be noted that the implementation of social adjustment is also a process, and the gap between "the actual" and "the ideal" is narrowing with modernization advances. Moreover, the implementation of social adjustment is characterized by a "time sequence"; that is, it adapts to different historical development stages of modernization, and the implementation of social adjustment should show different contents.

The basic situation of modern economic development is the main reason why social adjustment takes on a historical character. "The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life" (Marx and Engels 1956). Modern economic development plays a restrictive role in the implementation of social adjustment

because, first, the basic situation of modern economic development directly affects how social adjustment is implemented. Only when the modern economy develops to and its social wealth reaches a certain degree can a society have a certain amount of “surplus social wealth” after meeting the basic survival needs of its members. Only based on this social wealth can that society have social resources to implement social adjustment. Otherwise, social adjustment is impossible. Second, the basic situation of modern economic development has formed the general requirements of social adjustment for society. When a society’s economic level and market economy reach a certain level, the boundaries between individuals and social fields can be clearly defined, and the social risks rapidly increase. At the same time, the concept that everyone shares in society and universally benefits from it has become the basic purpose of social development, and thus social adjustment will be recognized by the entire society.

The historical characteristic of social adjustment reveals that, in any modern society or a society in the process of modernization, social adjustment is an inevitable social trend. Moreover, social adjustment is gradually implemented in accordance with the different development stages of modernization.

#### *4.2 Social Adjustment and the Fundamental System of Rules for Social Justice*

Social adjustment is an organic part of the fundamental system of rules for social justice. Together with other rules such as equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution, it constitutes social justice as a whole.

Although these basic rules of social justice play their roles at the same time in real social life, they have a logical order. Social adjustment is the downstream rule of social justice, and the upstream rules are equal opportunity and distribution rules according to contribution. It is precisely after the upstream rules have played their respective roles in society that there is a “gap” that needs to be filled, and thus the social adjustment rule exists and effectively plays a specific role in response to this requirement. Otherwise, social justice will be missing a part. In this sense, if there is no equal opportunity and distribution rule according to contribution, then social adjustment will lose the logical premise and the legitimate reason for its existence. This special order of social adjustment in the basic rules of social justice is a reasonable angle to understanding the organic nature of the basic rules of social justice and the functional scope of social adjustment itself.

Social adjustment also plays an important role in implementing equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution, ensuring that they can function normally and effectively. First, social adjustment is conducive to creating a good social environment for the implementation of equal opportunity. It secures the basic livelihood of the members of society, constantly improves their basic development conditions, develops their potential in general, and eliminates or at least alleviates inequitable factors and risks to a certain extent,



so that members have “equal access” to their society. All of these have laid an indispensable foundation for the normal and effective implementation of equal opportunity. Secondly, social adjustment is also helpful for the effective implementation of distribution according to contribution. Although this rule is necessary, it should be noted that after its implementation, some new social gaps will inevitably be created. If we allow these gaps to develop without necessary adjustments, they will have a negative impact on the overall social justice, which will make it difficult to implement distribution according to contribution. Therefore, social adjustment creates the necessary conditions for the normal implementation of distribution according to contribution.

The integration of social justice rules also requires that, in a certain period of time, there should be a limit to the implementation of social adjustment. In other words, equality of opportunity and contribution-based distribution should be properly implemented so that the social justice rules reinforce each other and develop together rather than undermine each other. Liberalism pays too much attention to the first two rules—that is, equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution—so underestimating the rule of social adjustment is inevitable. Communitarianism, on the other hand, focuses too much on social adjustment, which actually damages the rules of equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution. If this is the case, it not only cuts off the upstream source of social adjustment but also makes social adjustment lose its legitimacy and seriously damages the vitality of society, which inevitably means that there are biased results. This is a problem that requires our attention. In addition, attaching too much importance to social adjustment, even to the point of extreme, will easily provide a “modern” excuse for some types of totalitarianism, thus causing very serious social consequences.

### 4.3 *The Trap Regarding High Social-Welfare Spending*

This issue is related to the above two issues. If a society does not manage well the historical and holistic characteristics of social adjustment, it will fall into the trap of spending too much on social welfare.

The basic purpose of social development is that everyone shares in it and benefits universally, which is an inevitable trend of human society. In order to serve its purpose and conform to the trend of social development, social adjustment is a necessary way and rule. However, when social adjustment is implemented, if its content accounts for a large proportion of the system of rules for social justice—that is, if a society invests much more in social adjustment than in equal opportunity and distribution according to contribution—then the abnormal or even morbid phenomenon known as high social-welfare spending will occur.

In some developed countries, this phenomenon is obvious. Since the 1940s, many western countries have attached great importance to welfare systems. “The pursuit of equality has been a major concern of all social democrats, including the British Labour Party. Greater equality is to be achieved by various

strategies of levelling. Progressive taxation, for example, via the welfare state, takes from the rich to give to the poor. The welfare state has two objectives: to create a more equal society, but also to protect individuals across the life cycle” (Giddens 2008). After years of practice, these countries have established welfare systems with comprehensive programs, protecting individuals across the circle of life from cradle to grave. For example, “Scandinavian or Nordic welfare states, having a very high tax base, universalist in orientation, providing generous benefits and well-funded state services, including health care” (Giddens 2008). In the 1980s, in then West Germany, the social transfer payment rate accounted for 55% of the average tax rate, while Sweden and Britain reached over 78% (Zhou 2001). Admittedly, these welfare systems have played a positive role in guaranteeing the basic living and development conditions of most people in these countries. However, these countries often fall into the trap of “higher welfare” because they spend too much on social welfare.

This trap brings about various problems: first, a negative impact on efficiency. For many low-income earners, because their basic livelihood is fully guaranteed by the state, their enterprising spirit of work and even their enthusiasm for employment is reduced. For those with higher incomes, because they must pay too much tax, they will also lose their enthusiasm for work. For enterprises, “high tax rates are followed by attempts of ingenious men to beat them... One form of misplaced effort is on-the-job luxury financed by tax-deductible business expenses” (Okun 1975). For the entire society, because the expenditure on social welfare is so large and the national financial burden is so heavy that the society will cut the investment in production. Moreover, “because the people are used to relying on excessive welfare and public services, their desire to work is weakened, thus damaging their self-reliance” (Huang 2001). All this will reduce the productivity of the whole society. For example, “as a typical ‘welfare state,’ the thorny problems that Britain encounters is not only the financial burden and the inflation caused by it, but also economic inefficiency—that is, low labor productivity and the waste of economic resources. This problem makes the British government feel distressed as well” (Luo and Li 1982). Second, the damage to social justice. In a sense, excessive welfare has a certain element of egalitarianism, although it is a kind of “higher level” egalitarianism. Egalitarianism not only distorts equal opportunity but also undermines distribution according to contribution. Egalitarianism emphasizes that everyone has similar gains; in fact, egalitarianism is another kind of deprivation because it can throw people with strong abilities who make great contributions into deprivation. Egalitarianism is obviously against the trend of modernization and the law of the market economy.

Although China is not highly modernized, due to traditional egalitarianism and other factors, it is possible to cause some premature phenomenon of excessive welfare when implementing social adjustment, and against which the people must remain vigilant.

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## Intergenerational Justice

During the historical process, the fundamental content and rules of social justice are manifested as intergenerational justice. At the same time, intergenerational justice exerts a significant influence on the content and rules of social justice. If issues of intergenerational justice are not understood in sufficient depth, the overall study of social justice will not be comprehensive, it will lack necessary persuasive power, and its practical impact will be weakened. Obviously, issues of intergenerational justice ought to have always been an essential part of social justice research. However, within the field of social justice, the existing research on the issue is relatively weak. Only a few scholars such as Rawls have addressed it, but even these scholars have not treated the issue in a systematic and rigorous manner. In view of this, it is necessary to investigate intergenerational issues and thereby fill the gap within existing social justice research.

### 1 HOW DOES INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE COME INTO EXISTENCE?

The “inter” in intergenerational refers to the relationship between generations, of which there are two types: The first is the synchronous relationship between neighboring generations within the same time period, characterized by direct interaction. The other is the asynchronous relationship between the current generation and both past and the future generations, characterized by indirect interaction. Rawls only addressed the asynchronous relationship between “previous” and “later generations.” But this is not comprehensive. Although the two types of relationship overlap somewhat, they are not identical. Moreover, the specific requirements for intergenerational justice differ between the two. The synchronous relationship requires not only an emphasis on the fundamental rules of social justice but also on its specific practices, including the concrete methods of “consultation” and “pragmatic accommodation,” which must be implemented according to direct and effective rules for social justice. The

asynchronous relationship also requires an emphasis on the fundamental rules of social justice, which must be guaranteed via the relatively fixed responsibilities and duties that each generation holds toward the others and integrated via the institutionalization of social justice according to relatively fixed rules. When addressing issues of intergenerational justice, it is important that the asynchronous relationship not be ignored or overlooked just because the synchronous relationship is immediate and realistic. The asynchronous relationship is better able to embody both a specific type of historic social justice and the persistent need for social justice throughout human history.

As the historical continuation and embodiment of social justice, intergenerational justice is based on intergenerational equality, intergenerational liberty, and intergenerational cooperation—each of which is essential to social development.

### 1.1 *The Idea of Intergenerational Equality*

Intergenerational equality emphasizes the recognition of each generation's basic contribution and the protection of its fundamental dignity. From a horizontal perspective, society is composed of countless equal individuals. The contribution of each individual is both indispensable and equal. At the same time, the form of dignity unique to societies of the human species means that, accordingly, people possess human dignity. From a vertical perspective, the perpetuation and development of the human species is achieved through the unremitting efforts and unbroken contributions of each generation—with these contributions composing the essential links in the chain of the sociohistorical process. As a result, each generation possesses the same dignity and equality as the species in its entirety.

It must be acknowledged that human beings have various levels of needs. The satisfaction of basic human needs is one of society's fundamental goals, essential for the realization of people's basic rights and, at the same time, a prerequisite for safeguarding the dignity of each generation. Therefore, to achieve intergenerational justice, the idea of intergenerational equality requires that each generation possess both fundamental rights and the means for basic subsistence. Only in this way can the elementary conditions for the survival and development of each generation be ensured.

### 1.2 *Intergenerational Liberty*

The concept of intergenerational liberty emphasizes respecting and protecting both the free agency of each generation and the differences between them. As Spinoza says, "It is impossible for one person's mind to be absolutely under another's control. For no one can transfer to another person his natural right, or ability, to think freely and make his own judgments about any matter whatsoever, and cannot be compelled to do so... For these things are within each person's own right, which he cannot give up even were he to wish to do so"

(de Spinoza 2007). Free agency is as crucial for generations as for individuals. Meanwhile, due to the distinct conditions of their survival and development, alongside other factors, there also exist certain differences between generations—especially those contemporary to one another. For example, there are numerous variations in the developmental prospects, behavior, perceptions, and the ability to create wealth between the young and the elderly. Accordingly, the social contribution of each generation in a given historical period cannot be exactly the same, and it follows that there should also be differences in the returns received by each generation, leading to an inevitable divergence in their concrete conditions of life and development. The concept of intergenerational liberty acknowledges these differences.

Intergenerational liberty requires that the reasonable differences between generations be protected and respected rather than artificially restricted. To this end, the principle of equal intergenerational opportunity ought to be fully realized and, since this can only occur through a historical process, each generation should be continually building the social environment necessary to achieve equal intergenerational opportunity.

### 1.3 *Intergenerational Cooperation*

Since intergenerational cooperation is where questions of intergenerational justice take on a concrete form, the concept of intergenerational cooperation is the ultimate foundation for intergenerational justice. Social development is achieved through the effort of each generation and the entire history of humankind is driven forward by cooperation between generations. Collaboration between generations is obviously necessary and, in this sense, all generations bear their own responsibility. “Persons in different generations have duties and obligations to one another just as contemporaries do. The present generation cannot do as it pleases but is bound by the principles that would be chosen in the original position to define justice between persons at different moments of time. In addition, men have a natural duty to uphold and to further just institutions and for this the improvement of civilization up to a certain level is required” (Rawls 1999).

Intergeneration cooperation is an important dimension of social cooperation overall. First, whether speaking in the synchronous or asynchronous sense, previous generations have provided the most fundamental basis for the survival and development of future generations. People always begin their lives and reinvent themselves on the foundation left by their predecessors. “Men make their own history, but they do not make it as they please; they do not make it under self-selected circumstances, but under circumstances existing already, given and transmitted from the past” (Marx and Engels 1995).

Second, in the synchronous sense, the cooperation of several generations is often required for society’s everyday operation and further development. For example, previous generations bear natural responsibility for the growth of subsequent generations, who are their descendants. This entails nurturing,

education, and other forms of care. Meanwhile, the offspring are also responsible for supporting and caring for the elderly after they have lost their ability to work. Rawls' assessment of social and intergenerational cooperation is meticulous: "it is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of the others... This community may also be imagined to extend over time, and therefore in the history of a society the joint contributions of successive generations can be similarly conceived. Our predecessors in achieving certain things leave it up to us to pursue them further; their accomplishments affect our choice of endeavors and define a wider background against which our aims can be understood. To say that man is a historical being is to say that the realizations of the powers of human individuals living at any one time takes the cooperation of many generations (or even societies) over a long period of time." This kind of cooperation is unique to human society. "By contrast with humankind... the range of realized abilities of a single individual of the species is not in general materially less than the potentialities of others similar to it" (Rawls 1999).

Intergenerational cooperation requires that necessary social adjustments be used to make up for deficiencies in intergenerational justice—in accord with the principles of intergenerational equality and liberty. In this fashion, the relationships between generations can be better integrated and the potential of individuals in each generation can be developed to the fullest.

It is worth noting that intergenerational justice only has real significance within modern society. In traditional society, productivity was backwards and material wealth was scarce, it was impossible to consider the survival and development of future generations given the most basic material conditions. In traditional society, the deep-rooted character of the social hierarchy naturally rejected issues of intergenerational justice. Moreover, since the rationality of this society was low, it was difficult to compose a long-term plan for future generations. The attitude was instead to let "nature" take its course. Thus, at that time, people could only attend to "immediate" matters. For example, under a tribal aristocracy, "social life is determined by social and religious taboos; everybody has his assigned place within the whole of the social structure; everyone feels that his place is the proper, the 'natural' place, assigned to him by the forces which rule the world; everyone 'knows his place'" (Popper 1994). Even though traditional Chinese society placed emphasis on the ethics of human relations, these considerations were limited to synchronous relationships, and it proved difficult to make any long-term institutional arrangements for future generations. Meanwhile, the existing hierarchy made it hard to even achieve justice between different generations in the same time period. Obviously, it is only within modern society that this sort of synchronous intergenerational justice becomes possible and takes on any real significance. Only within modern society can the concepts of equality, liberty, and social cooperation emerge in their true sense, allowing these ideas to penetrate deep into the social organism and draw out the question of intergenerational justice. For



example, the process of modernization and the growth of the market economy have resulted in a high degree of social integration, which in turn has facilitated the emergence of the concept of social cooperation in its true sense—and society’s concern for intergenerational justice and cooperation is the logical extension of this concept.

## 2 SPECIFICATIONS FOR INTERGENERATIONAL JUSTICE

The specific requirements for intergenerational justice are as follows:

### 2.1 *The Determination of a Suitable and Socially Just “Savings Rate”*

The “savings rate” refers to the ratio of the social resources that each generation should consume and the amount that it should accumulate and preserve for future generations.

Intergenerational equality and cooperation require that every generation have access to the fundamental means for survival and development. Accordingly, Rawls proposed a “just savings principle.” He argues: “Each generation must not only preserve the gains of culture and civilization, and maintain intact those just institutions that have been established, but it must also put aside in each period of time a suitable amount of real capital accumulation. This saving may take various forms from net investment in machinery and other means of production to investment in learning and education.” This kind of just savings is of great significance. “Every generation, except possibly the first, gains when a reasonable rate of saving is maintained. The process of accumulation, once it is begun and carried through, is to the good of all subsequent generations. Each passes on to the next a fair equivalent in real capital as defined by a just savings principle. (It should be kept in mind here that capital is not only factories and machines, and so on, but also the knowledge and culture, as well as the techniques and skills, that make possible just institutions and the fair value of liberty.) This equivalent is in return for what is received from previous generations that enables the later ones to enjoy a better life in a more just society” (Rawls 1999).

There are two different types of socially just saving. First, there are stockpiles of renewable social resources. This mainly refers to the social wealth created by each generation. In modern society, the extent of the growth of social wealth within a generation is apparent. Moreover, as one constituent part of the overall historical process, each generation is obligated to ensure society’s continuous growth, otherwise intergenerational cooperation will lose its meaning. Each generation should therefore be continually increasing its contribution to social growth and, thereby, increasing the stockpile of renewable social resources. The resources set aside by the present generation should, accordingly, be higher than those of the previous generation.

Second, there are stockpiles of non-renewable resources. These resources are the drivers of modernization and are shared by human society across multiple generations. But they are not inexhaustible. Excessive consumption of non-renewable resources by previous generations means that future generations will possess less of them. Over-exploitation will directly damage the biosphere on which human beings depend, break the ecological balance, and cause the corrosion and contamination of the human habitat, thus harming the vital interests of future generations. In view of this, the preservation of non-renewable resources and the establishment of a sustainable development model ought to be emphasized. In other words, we should ensure that sustainable development “meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs” (World Commission on Environment and Development 1987).

As for how to determine a socially just savings rate, two principles should be considered simultaneously. The first is to do what one can. The social wealth created by any given generation is always limited. In general, a reasonable order of expenditure is for the generation that possesses the social wealth to consider saving for future generations only after meeting its own basic needs for survival and development. It goes without saying that the exact quantity that needs to be set aside depends on the “surplus” left after the aforementioned expenses. Simply saving without considering necessary expenses in the present will have an adverse effect on the survival and development of the current generation. The second principle is to determine the “social minimum.” Rawls offers a reasonable analysis: “Suppose for simplicity that the minimum is adjusted by transfers paid for by proportional expenditure (or income) taxes. In this case raising the minimum entails increasing the proportion by which consumption (or income) is taxed. Presumably as this fraction becomes larger there comes a point beyond which one of two things happens. Either the appropriate savings cannot be made or the greater taxes interfere so much with economic efficiency that the prospects of the least advantaged in the present generation are no longer improved but begin to decline. In either event the correct minimum has been reached. The difference principle is satisfied and no further increase is called for” (Rawls 1999).

Two one-sided approaches need to be guarded against. The first is the short-sighted view that only considers the interests of the current generation, pays no attention to the accumulation necessary for future generations, and even goes so far as to over-consume the non-renewable resources that should be shared with future generations, polluting the environment and destroying ecosystems—thereby cashing out the benefits due future generations in advance, to its own favor. The other is the overly idealistic and self-sacrificing view, which can also be described as “suicidal” in its extreme methods. In this case, everything is done for the sake of future generations and the life of the current generation is only maintained within the limits of simple reproduction—thereby overdrawing from the pool of benefits due the present generation in favor of its descendants. Although these two approaches are opposites, they

share a few common defects. They both deviate from the ideas of intergenerational equality, liberty (since every generation has the right to pursue happiness), and cooperation, while also abandoning the principle of universal benefit that acts as the fundamental objective of social development. They are therefore lacking in intergenerational justice and will have an entirely detrimental impact on long-term social development, possibly unbalancing the equilibrium of the overall process. In this regard, the lessons accumulated in the course of China's social development during the past seven decades are extremely profound.

## 2.2 *Ensuring Equal Opportunity*

The principle of equal opportunity between generations is directly determined by intergenerational equality, liberty, and cooperation. Intergenerational equality requires that each generation should possess the means for its basic survival and development. Intergenerational liberty requires that the autonomy and free choice of each generation not be infringed upon. Intergenerational cooperation requires that the previous generation should be continuously creating the social environment necessary for future generations to enjoy equal opportunity.

In concrete terms, equal opportunity between generations implies, first, that each generation should have an equal starting point (i.e., "equal initial material conditions for equal access to opportunities") (Sartori 1987). And second, that there must be equality in the process of realizing this opportunity. In other words, it is necessary to eliminate any anomalous factors that might perturb the process. Only equal starting points and an equitable process throughout can guarantee just results.

A gap clearly exists between an equality of opportunity that is pure, ideal, and goal-oriented and one that is both realistic and achievable in the present. Viewed from the perspective of historical development, this gap has been constantly narrowing. In terms of intergenerational justice, an important task of each generation is to continue to contribute to the narrowing of this gap. To this end, society should set itself two tasks:

First, the privileged "hereditary advantages" that exist between generations must be gradually eliminated. Family background exerts an enormous influence on the specific circumstances of each member of society and their individual growth. For example, the offspring of a very wealthy family are often better off than those of poorer families. This is because the former are able to provide their offspring with advantages that are inaccessible to the latter, such as the social resources necessary for survival and development or the inheritance of property. This constitutes an extremely unfair "hereditary advantage" that directly undermines the principle of equal opportunity between generations. In such a situation, if society does not intervene as necessary, then certain families will continue to enjoy the privilege of such "hereditary advantages." It is therefore imperative that society make use of income and inheritance taxes to

gradually eliminate or at least weaken this “hereditary advantage” that stands in the way of intergenerational justice. The goal should be, as far as possible, to ensure that the wealth or poverty of a single member of society is not perpetuated beyond a single generation, thereby allowing members of the same generation to cast off the inequities of previous generations and truly obtain an equal starting point for survival and development.

Second, society must directly create the “equal conditions” necessary for the principle of equal opportunity between generations to be implemented. Due to the limitations imposed by practical and historical conditions, it is difficult for the potential of individual members of society to be fully developed between generations and thereby difficult for them to enter into a state of equal competition. The government of each generation therefore has the responsibility to develop individual potential equally, giving “everyone an adequate initial power (material conditions) to acquire the same ability and rank as everyone else” (Sartori 1987). For example, by making certain adjustments, society can obtain a given sum of funds that can then be used to develop the potential of the relatively disadvantaged individuals in each generation—in terms of both innate and acquired factors—such that their potential can be shaped into a real ability to seize and realize opportunity. Empowering this segment of society and providing them with opportunities for development can also prevent them from passing on their disadvantages to the next generation. In the long term, this approach is extremely helpful for realizing the principle of equal opportunity between generations. Rawls pays special attention to this problem: “In order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality. In pursuit of this principle greater resources might be spent on the education of the less rather than the more intelligent, at least over a certain time of life, say the earlier years of school” (Rawls 1999). It is important to note that this should be an ongoing activity spanning many generations.

### 2.3 *Distribution According to Contribution*

Each generation’s contribution to society is different. Under the conditions of modern society, future generations will make greater contributions in absolute terms. From the perspective of intergenerational equality, the relatively independent status of each generation should be recognized. In accord with the concept of intergenerational freedom, these different contributions should also be recognized and respected. Therefore, the question of how to allocate resources between generations should be based on the principle of distribution according to contribution. Otherwise, egalitarian ideas and behaviors might arise that go against the ideals of intergenerational equality and liberty.

In terms of the asynchronous relationship between generations, even though the intensity of labor decreases for future generations, their contribution to

society is constantly increasing. This is because the historical starting point of each generation rises over time, the factors of production are being continually updated, science and technology are rapidly developing, and social management improves. Based on this, the distribution of income for future generations should naturally be higher than that of previous generations.

In terms of the synchronous relationship, since differences of potential exist between the older and the younger generations, their specific contribution to society cannot be the same. Because it has a different energy level and possesses superior knowledge—and since the older generation is mostly retired—the younger generation’s contribution to the current society is higher than that of the older generation. Accordingly, the younger generation should be paid more than the older generation, at least in terms of income. Such a situation ought to be equitable. If the actual situation in a given society is exactly the opposite, then the society is inequitable.

For elderly retirees, society should provide necessary assistance according to the principle of adjustment. This should include things such as the provision of pensions and necessary assistance, as well as the establishment of systems for social security and healthcare. The experience of many other countries demonstrates that relying solely on a fixed pension payment is insufficient. As living standards improve across society and inflation follows, elderly retirees are caught in a predicament. In such a situation, they can easily become a vulnerable social group or even sink into poverty. Society therefore has a responsibility to ensure that the living standard of these retirees can be adjusted by various means until it rises to the social average. Only in this way can society genuinely recognize and repay those who have already expended their labor and made their contribution—thereby embodying intergenerational justice.

Another situation is worth noting. In a synchronous sense, although the older generation does not make as much contribution to present society as that of the current generation, they also made enormous sacrifice and contributions when they were young. However, the previous generation didn’t receive certain benefits that it deserved. Society should make special regulations and compensate them for their contributions.

#### *2.4 Creating the Equal Conditions Necessary for the Development of Younger Generations*

The creation of necessary and equal conditions for the development of younger generations must also be specifically addressed since this problem is of great practical significance in countries with an extensive history such as China, Japan, and many others. Under the influence of tradition and habit, the younger generations of these countries remain relatively more oppressed to this day. Thus, this dimension of social justice is more prominent.

In traditional society, elders had supreme authority and decisive authority over the young. To take traditional Chinese society as an example, the development of individuals was often restricted by seniority, and seniority was often

linked to age. In this sense, old age was a species of “hierarchical” privilege. Older people therefore often played a certain role in suppressing and hindering the development of the young. “Children and youths had no say. In China, the young faced excessive hardship within feudal society and the feudal family” (Mao 1993). In short, the basic attitude of traditional society toward the younger generation was, first, to monopolize certain social resources according to age and seniority, and then to restrict and suppress the development of the younger generation. This practice was not only detrimental to the development of human resources, but also inequitable and unjust.

Obviously, a society that restricts and suppresses the younger generation is not only inefficient, but also unjust.

In sharp contrast to traditional society, modern society emphasizes intergenerational justice, equality, freedom, and cooperation. Since young people are members of society, they should possess equal status with their elders and should not be discriminated against in any way. In fact, society should adopt a more positive and encouraging attitude toward the younger generation, since it has more potential for development. Accordingly, society’s approach should be as follows: First, emphasis must be placed on cultivating the ability of the younger generation. Possessing the necessary ability is a prerequisite for members of society to better their circumstances. Meanwhile, the acquisition of ability is inseparable from education. Society should therefore attach importance to public education, enabling the young to receive the maximum benefit from the educational system and thereby improve the ability of the generation overall. Second, emphasis must be placed on providing as many opportunities as possible for the development of the younger generation. For this reason, modern society bases access to opportunities on factors such as performance and practical ability and opposes restrictions based on inequitable factors such as rank and seniority, which constrain all members of society, including the young. Only in this fashion can intergenerational justice be realized and the potential of the younger generation cultivated to the greatest extent possible.

### 3 POSITIVE IMPACTS ON SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

Research on intergenerational justice enriches and deepens social justice research overall, extending the vision and scope of the field to encompass the historical process—ensuring, for example, that research not only pays attention to “horizontal” issues of social justice but also “vertical” ones. From a dynamic point of view, it also adds depth to some of the key issues that social justice is concerned with. In this sense, research on intergenerational justice is an indispensable part of the broader field.

Intergenerational justice plays an important and positive role in ensuring the healthy sustainability of social development and improving its quality.

First, intergenerational justice helps to perpetuate social justice through history. It therefore plays an objectively important role, overcoming certain “horizontal” hindrances to social justice by intervening in the “vertical” process of

history—not only enhancing the social vitality between generations, but also gradually realizing social justice in the process of historical development. For example, in the case of wealth inequality, intergenerational justice requires that the excessive income or property possessed by certain members of society gradually flow back into society overall via income taxes, inheritance taxes, and other methods of adjustment. Gradually, this wealth becomes accessible to all, allowing both present and future generations to benefit. Although some members of society clearly wield enormous social wealth at present, with the passage of time, the majority of this wealth will become the common wealth of society. The elimination of various inequitable “hereditary advantages” and the creation of equal opportunity between generations—both advocated by the principle of intergenerational justice—are conducive to the formation of equal competition between generations and the equal conditions necessary to ensure this competition, thus contributing to the gradual realization of the socially just principle of equal opportunity. Meanwhile, the establishment of the intergenerational “savings rate” can lay the material and institutional foundation necessary for future generations, contributing to the implementation of social justice, at least to a certain extent. Based on the above, it is easy to see how the principle of intergenerational justice can create a beneficial “mindset” for social justice that possesses significance within the historical process. Under the “inertial force” of social justice that this sort of “mindset” exerts across history, it becomes possible to actively strive toward achieving justice for each generation.

Second, intergenerational justice encourages social integration between generations. In terms of their synchronous relationship, intergenerational justice stresses coordination, emphasizing the equal status and free rights of the older and younger generations, as well as the necessity of their mutual cooperation—while also rendering each of these principles into concrete responsibilities and obligations. If the theory is enacted through the necessary social institutions and policies, intergenerational justice can reduce the various types of misunderstanding, friction, tension, and conflicts that arise between contemporaneous generations, whether rooted in the allocation of benefits or differences in ideas. This will reduce the centrifugal forces that push generations apart and, thereby, help to integrate their synchronous relationships with one another, which will also contribute to greater social integration overall. In terms of the asynchronous relationship between generations, intergenerational justice suggests that the previous generation establish a reasonable “rate of savings” for the benefit of future generations. If this practice is generally recognized by society and effectively implemented, it will promote social integration for “many generations,” or, in other words, throughout society’s developmental process over the long term. Similarly, if the principle of equal opportunity between generations can also be recognized at the level of the entire social system, it will undoubtedly contribute to increased social order and thereby improve social integration both in the present and throughout the historical process.

Third, intergenerational justice is conducive to the development of human resources. Every generation possesses a vast, untapped potential. The full cultivation of this potential depends on three basic conditions: socially just rules and regulations, a socially just environment, and the necessary ability of individuals. Intergenerational justice is precisely attuned to the formation of each of these three conditions. One important purpose of intergenerational justice is the full development of each generation's potential. It directly stipulates the socially just guidelines that should be followed in relationships between generations, while also laying the foundation on which the social policies necessary for social justice can be formulated. Meanwhile, the principle of equal opportunity between generations prepares an extremely favorable and socially just environment for the development of individual potential within each generation. Intergenerational justice advocates for the elimination of all unfavorable factors that hinder the construction of a fair environment, such as asynchronous "hereditary advantages," and synchronous issues of rank and seniority. This is also a prerequisite for the full development of human resources. Finally, the cultivation of individual ability promoted by intergenerational justice directly develops the potential of each generation. It is necessary to view intergenerational justice as a continuous process for the development of human resources, which also means that it provides continuous impetus for social development overall.

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## Procedural Justice

When discussing issues of social justice, questions of procedural justice cannot be ignored. We should note that procedural justice and substantive justice (which focuses on just outcomes) together constitute social justice in its fullest sense. Procedural justice is one of the components of social justice and, at the same time, plays an irreplaceable role insofar as it ensures that social justice can be actualized to the greatest extent possible and guarantees the stable operation and healthy development of society.

### 1 THE DEFINITION AND FUNCTION OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Procedural justice refers to the fundamental rules and procedural arrangements that should be followed in the formulation and implementation of laws, regulations, rules, and any other policies related to social justice. Social justice can be embodied in procedural justice in two ways: first, the rationale given in the formulation of laws, regulations, rules, and any other policies should be just; and second, the process itself should also be just.

In contrast to “substantive” justice (which focuses on the actual effects and outcomes), procedural justice focuses on the formal and “pure” rules of social justice. In a certain sense, procedural justice approximates an ideal social justice, rather than an actual one. As David Miller explains: procedural justice “is a rule or mechanism whereby one agent—an individual or an institution—assigns benefits (or burdens) to a number of others... An outcome, by contrast, refers to the state of affairs whereby at any time different individuals enjoy various resources, goods, opportunities, or entitlements” (Miller 1999). Procedural justice and substantive justice together constitute social justice in its fullest sense.

Procedural justice plays an irreplaceable role insofar as it ensures that social justice can be actualized to the greatest extent possible and guarantees the

stable operation and healthy development of society. Its basic functions are as follows:

First, it helps to guarantee the fundamental rights of members of society. As part of society, every individual has a human “species-dignity” and certain prospects and potentials for development; they should therefore enjoy equal rights. “All human beings, or at least all citizens of a state or all members of a society should enjoy equal political and social statuses” (Marx and Engels 1995). The state has a responsibility and obligation to protect these rights. “The state must develop institutions and procedures, must plan, must mobilize resources as necessary to meet those claims.” Meanwhile, “society must provide some system of remedies to which individuals may resort to obtain the benefits to which they are entitled or be compensated for their loss” (Henkin 1990). The guarantee of the fundamental rights of members of society must be achieved through institutional arrangements. Verbal commitments, customary practices, and one-off interventions cannot effectively guarantee people’s basic rights. Procedural justice is an important aspect of the institutional arrangements necessary to guarantee these basic rights. Through equitable procedures, people can not only “protect against” potential infringements on their rights but also correct or remedy damage already done. Another point that should not be overlooked is the fact that, when a person infringes on the rights of others or of society itself—and when this infringement exceeds a certain “degree”—and must therefore be punished and deprived of certain fundamental rights, the state must also implement these punitive measures using equitable procedures, instead of dealing with each case at will. In this way, fundamental rights are protected from a different angle.

Second, procedural justice helps to coordinate the complexity of social interests. As modernization and the market economy advance, the degree of social differentiation becomes higher and higher, which is manifested as follows: the social division of labor grows more intricate, social specialization becomes more diverse, different social components increase, and the network of social interests becomes more complicated. As a result, the specific demands of various interest groups are bound to become more explicit and more diverse. On the other hand, social integration will also tend to increase, making it less and less possible for any interest group to exist independently from others. In order to construct a win-win situation, unnecessary friction and conflict between various interest groups in society must be reduced and social cooperation must be carried out effectively. Society therefore needs a mechanism that can coordinate and “arbitrate” the various demands made by different interest groups, and this mechanism must be impartial and equitable. Procedural justice provides the practical grounds for all interest groups within society, including the marginalized, to fully express themselves and negotiate with one another—premised on all following the necessary and equitable rules and procedures recognized by everyone involved—and, on this basis, all interest groups can accept the opinions and practices of the others. Perhaps a particular interest group clearly gains a “benefit.” If this benefit is the result of consultation and

coordination, however, it can be acceptable to the other interest groups. Moreover, because this outcome was in accord with the requirements of procedural justice, it also signals that the reasonable interests of other groups will be guaranteed in the future. “Given the universal satisfaction of basic human needs, those procedures for producing and distributing goods are the best that best promote the common good, and there may be no clear and convincing criterion for the just distribution of ‘surplus goods’ other than the fair operation of those procedures, whichever they may be” (Feinberg 1973). Therefore, in the long term, procedural justice can effectively coordinate the complex network of social interests and prevent the dominant interest groups that control greater social and economic resources from influencing socioeconomic policies. In this way, it effectively promotes both social cooperation and social integration.

Third, procedural justice helps to restrict the improper interference of governmental power in matters of social justice. Originally, state power’s principal functions are oriented toward the overall interests of society, the safeguarding of social justice, and the promotion of public utilities. Rather than creating injustice or aggravating it, an important function of state power is the maintenance of social justice—as well as eliminating injustice and preventing it from appearing in the future. Sometimes, though, due to the excessive concentration of power or because the boundaries between authority and the self-interest of those in power are not clear enough, abuses can arise wherein authority is used to serve the interests of those who hold it. As a result, the government will be openly preferential toward certain interest groups in the formulation or implementation of relevant social justice policies, causing harmful consequences and damaging the public interest. Procedural justice can, to a great extent, limit the interference of authority in matters of social justice. Through means such as necessary public participation, professional consultation, division of labor, compartmentalization, and democratic decision-making—all placed within the scope of procedural justice—the formulation and implementation of relevant social justice policies can be ensured and the fusion of special interest groups with governmental power can be prevented. For example, in the field of law, due process serves this sort of purpose, preventing groups of legal professionals from engaging in inequitable practices: certain activities that carry privileges or possess an authoritative character are separated from the application of the law and are instead handed over to other agents or carried out jointly.

Fourth, it is helpful to reduce technical errors. Even if people are able to formulate and implement relevant laws and policies in accord with the basic idea of social justice, this is simply a necessary condition for ensuring a just outcome. It is not a sufficient condition and therefore cannot guarantee the just character of the result. We should note that procedural justice involves many technical and operational components, all of which are very important. Without these, procedural justice will remain incomplete. Arbitrary and blind decisions will be unavoidable, leading to inefficiency or ineffectiveness or, in

severe cases, even generating negative social outcomes. In sharp contrast to traditional society, modern society raises the technical requirements for procedural justice. For example, the complete collection, collation, and disclosure of relevant information, the feedback and correction mechanisms necessary for the implementation of relevant policies, and the calculation of fair amounts for the allocation or loss of certain resources are all indispensable components of a complete procedural justice. Obviously, through accurate and public requirements, procedural justice can reduce technical errors that may arise in the formulation and implementation of relevant policies, maximizing the equity of outcomes to the greatest extent possible.

Fifth, it is helpful to cultivate universal recognition and trust among members of society. Procedural justice also bears the weight of individuals' expectations for social justice. It has the greatest probability of ensuring that social justice is realized. Although procedures can't guarantee that each concrete outcome is just, it can guarantee that most are while also leaving room for certain injustices to be corrected. In a sense, people value procedural justice as much as the justice of outcomes themselves (substantive justice). "Procedural justice is a value standing over and above the justice of the results it achieves, and we can best understand this distinct quality of procedures as involving a respect for the people who are subject to them... This idea that procedural justice has a value that is not merely instrumental finds support in studies of popular opinion, which have found that people's reactions to distributive practices are conditioned more strongly by the procedures that are used to reach the outcomes than by the outcomes themselves; even if a person does quite badly in the final result, provided that it is arrived at by methods that match her standards of fairness, she will accept the outcome as a legitimate one" (Miller 1999). Only through procedural justice can people feel that justice is possible across society in general. Therefore, once procedural justice becomes an organic part of society, individuals will more easily adopt the generally accepted attitude toward society, and a sort of universal trust can take shape. This kind of recognition and trust can help to reduce the barriers and conflicts that arise between social groups, reduce the factors that generate social unrest, and contribute to the secure operation and healthy development of society overall.

In summary, procedural justice plays an irreplaceable role in the realization of social justice and, subsequently, in the secure operation and healthy development of society. This role might be better explained from another angle: What does it mean to lack procedural justice? If a society does not possess procedural justice, the universal recognition and trust of individuals will rapidly decline, the interference of authority in social justice will be inevitable, a large number of technical errors will arise in the process of realizing social justice, people's fundamental rights will not be effectively guaranteed, and the complex network of social interests will be difficult to coordinate. Under such conditions, any laws or policies that are formulated will be random and uncertain and may even pose a threat to members of society. As Nozick argues: "The person who uses an unreliable procedure, acting upon its result, imposes risks upon others,

whether or not his procedure misfires in a particular case.” For example, “no one has a right to use a relatively unreliable procedure in order to decide whether to punish another. Using such a system, he is in no position to know that the other deserves punishment; hence he has no right to punish him” (Nozick 1974).

## 2 THE BASIC FUNDAMENTAL CHARACTERISTICS OF PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Procedural justice in the modern sense has the following fundamental characteristics:

First, it is universal. In traditional society, an unambiguous distinction existed between powerful and marginalized social groups. Groups with powerful vested interests tended to shape the formation of all laws, regulations, and policies according to their own preferences, protecting and expanding their interests by encroaching on or depriving the interests of others. The basic dignity and interests of most members of society and marginalized social groups could not be effectively guaranteed. They also found themselves in an extremely disadvantageous position when confronting questions of justice. In modern society, basic values such as equality, freedom, and cooperation of human beings gradually come into being and grow more widely recognized, thereby becoming an organic part of society. Accordingly, procedural justice becomes fused with the fundamental values of equality, freedom, and cooperation. This basic value orientation is first and foremost reflected in inclusiveness. The purpose of justice is to protect the interests of all members of society and work toward their general benefit. The inclusivity of procedural justice requires that the dignity and interests of every member of society and every social group should not be guaranteed at the expense of others’ dignity or interests. As Rawls said, “All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage... social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all” (Rawls 1999a). Universality is the primary principle and cornerstone of procedural justice, tying together all of its segments.

Second, procedural justice is impartial. In a sense, this characteristic embodies the universality of procedural justice. Impartial treatment is the embodiment of individuals’ fundamental rights at the practical level. It carries at least two connotations. First, when handling similar matters, one ought to use a similar yardstick. If there is any difference, one ought to vary according to the facts of the case, rather than varying from person to person. What needs to be explained is that the main purpose of impartiality is to protect everyone’s fundamental and equal rights, not to create an egalitarian outcome. Since egalitarianism seeks to eliminate all differences, it denies not only the differences

between people but also the differences between the facts of each case. The second connotation is similar to what the legal profession calls “impartial neutrality.” Those resolving disputes should remain neutral. Judges should not participate in disputes, they should be free from the influence of any individual or organization, and they should be impartial and unbiased. The results should not embody the interests of those resolving the dispute, who should not show preferential support or opposition toward either party. The impartiality of procedural justice requires the adoption of the measures necessary to implement the requisite regulatory system, which ensures that the parties who directly formulate and carry out policies are unable to orient policy around their own interests and preferences. This is necessary because any given social group is likely to emphasize the protection and expansion of its own interests. Moreover, even in the absence of such a problem, it is difficult for any social group to cast off the psychology of the “looking-glass self.” They will consciously or unconsciously take their own group as the standard, using it as the reference against which problems are appraised.

Third, procedural justice should involve multiple parties. Within modern legal practice, procedural law includes a “principle of participation.” “This principle is evidenced in the common notion of having one’s day in court. If one cannot participate, then one is denied one’s day in court. The principle contributes to dispute resolution, because parties that have been able to participate are more likely to accept a decision; although they might not agree with the decision, they are more likely to comply with it... One value underlying the principle is participation in decisions that significantly affect one’s life. One reasonably desires to at least be heard, to have one’s say, before decisions affecting one are made. Being permitted to participate also evidences others’ respect, that one is to be considered seriously” (Bayles 1987). This principle helps us understand the participatory character of procedural justice. In the process of making and implementing laws and important policies within traditional society, people’s participation and related channels of communication were extremely limited and, for many social groups (especially those at the bottom of society), participation and communication were out of the question altogether. With the advancement of democratization under modern society, a sense of participation has taken shape among the populace, and people have assumed the responsibility, ability, and desire to participate in the discussion and formulation of important social endeavors. Therefore, when formulating laws and important public policies, it is imperative that different parties be involved (especially from the relevant social groups) so that they can fully express their opinions and safeguard their own interests. For example, when formulating certain policies related to workers’ groups, farmers’ groups, or women’s groups—such as employment laws, unemployment protection policies, farmer protection policies, or policies to protect women workers—representatives from these groups must be allowed to participate and express their opinions. Otherwise, the process will be unjust, and this will cause the relevant policies to lack the minimum “validity” (legitimacy). The impartiality of

procedural justice not only demonstrates a certain kind of respect, making the laws and policies related to social justice easier for people to accept and thus increasing their feasibility, but can also prevent numerous abuses of procedure and improve the credibility of relevant institutions. Meanwhile, it is necessary to point out that special channels for participation and expression should be reserved for marginalized social groups so that their rights and interests can be effectively protected.

Fourth, procedural justice should be open. The formulation and implementation of social justice policies are all based on the premise that policymakers possess necessary information. It is worth noting that, for procedural justice, there remains the question of who “enjoys the benefits of” information. This involves a question of information symmetry. Social groups and individual members of society have equal rights to acquire information that concerns their personal interests. “Every individual does have the right that information sufficient to show that a procedure of justice about to be applied to him is reliable and fair (or no less so than other procedures in use) be made publicly available or made available to him. He has the right to be shown that he is being handled by some reliable and fair system. In the absence of such a showing he may defend himself and resist the imposition of the relatively unknown system. When the information is made publicly available or made available to him, he is in a position to know about the reliability and fairness of the procedure” (Nozick 1974). Symmetry in the acquisition of information is a necessary precondition of procedural justice. If there is information asymmetry wherein one party possesses all relevant information while the other party lacks it, then it will be difficult for groups and individuals to effectively participate in society and be treated impartially, making procedural justice an impossibility. Aside from this, one party will be able to cheat and mislead other social groups by monopolizing information. Therefore, to prevent such an asymmetry from taking shape, an effective method is to openly disclose all relevant information to society as a whole.

Fifth, procedural justice should be scientific. Since procedural justice ought to be just, effective, and stable, it also carries several technical requirements. This includes at least two dimensions: First is the sufficiency and accuracy of relevant information. “A fair procedure must attempt to uncover all the information that is relevant to the allocation being carried out. This is so even in cases in which a more peremptory approach can be shown to yield good results overall” (Miller 1999). Moreover, in the process of collecting information, data is transmitted through various nodes, and it is inevitable that it will suffer different degrees of distortion. In addition to this, even some of the most original information is not necessarily authentic and thus needs to be screened. Only by ensuring that information is sufficient and accurate can procedural justice possess a minimally factual basis. Otherwise, procedural justice is out of the question. The second dimension concerns the necessary mechanisms for evaluation and correction. Due to the complex diversity of actual society and peoples’ various limitations in comprehending this complexity, many key



policies require gradual improvement, including improvements in their degree of equity. It is therefore necessary to evaluate the actual effect of a policy's implementation, to analyze its shortcomings, and then to make necessary amendments to attain a relatively equitable and effective final state. In short, the scientific formulation and implementation of policies will help to ensure the timeliness and relative stability of procedural justice and, subsequently, help to enhance the credibility and authority of procedural justice as a whole.

### 3 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PROCEDURAL JUSTICE AND SUBSTANTIVE JUSTICE

Procedural justice and substantive justice (the justice of outcomes) are inseparable. Procedural justice is the basic premise for and guarantee of substantive justice. In modern society, people's need for procedural justice becomes especially urgent. Meanwhile, substantive justice is also the ultimate standard and goal of procedural justice. If it is divorced from substantive justice, then, procedural justice will lack practical significance and will have no final standard against which it can be tested. It is in this sense that "the justice of a procedure always depends (leaving aside the special case of gambling) on the justice of its likely outcome, or on substantive justice. Thus, procedural and substantive justice are connected and not separate" (Rawls 1999b).

When appraising the relationship between procedural and substantive justice, there will occasionally be an obvious bias wherein too much emphasis is placed on procedural justice, leading to a certain kind of "alienation." For example, Rawls attached great importance to procedural justice, even to the extent that he took a position of "pure procedural justice." Such a view admittedly has its rational elements. Moreover, it is quite enlightening for people to understand the importance of procedural justice, and this serves as a useful corrective to views in which only substantive justice is valued. However, Rawls' "pure procedural justice" has largely gone too far toward the other extreme, such that procedural justice comes to appear as something that can separate itself from substantive justice and exist independently. To a certain extent, this causes procedural justice to lose both its foundation and its criteria for judgment. In real life, paying too much attention to procedural justice and neglecting substantive justice will cause many forms of malpractice. For example, some people have observed a tendency for US courts to exhibit "a pervasive concern for procedural niceties coupled with broad tolerance of substantive inhibitions on freedom." Some scholars pointedly argue: "To rely on procedure alone to produce justice is the fallacy of modern liberalism. It has made possible the legality of totalitarian regimes such as Hitler's" (Hayek 1987).

Although procedural justice and substantive justice (the justice of outcomes) are inseparable, procedural justice sometimes deviates from substantive justice (the justice of outcomes). "The fairness of the procedural rules is determined entirely by their conducibility in general to just results, but there is no

guarantee that even the most fastidious adherence to the rules will lead to a just outcome in a given case” (Feinberg 1973). The main reasons for this are as follows:

First, there is cognitive bias. Although, when compared to the non-procedural approach, the procedural one is much more equitable, reasonable, and accurate, this is only true in terms of total probability, which does not mean that all policies formed through the procedure are necessarily equitable. It must be recognized that rational factors cannot prevail at all times and in all circumstances and that the judgment of the public or the majority cannot always be consistent with justice and rationality. Sometimes it is just the opposite, especially when it comes to the protection of minority interests. From the perspective of social psychology, noncognitive factors have great influence on people’s judgment. For example, when encountering certain widespread and controversial social issues, public sentiment and hyperbolic social discourse can endow the issue with a “halo effect” that exceeds the actual matter at hand. In such moments, policymakers may have to pander to psychology to make the policy acceptable for most people. This will inevitably have an adverse impact on the formulation and implementation of policies, and it will create variation in the actual application of procedural justice. Even in the absence of these adverse effects—speaking only of people’s judgment—certain forms of uncertainty nonetheless persist, such as insufficient or incomplete grasp of the relevant facts, deviations in peoples’ understanding of social justice, imprecise application of certain techniques, and so on, exerting a negative influence on procedural justice. “The procedure requires the person implementing it to make judgments about the people with whom he or she is dealing, but the judgments are subject to a degree of uncertainty, and so the outcome is not the one that the procedure was designed to produce” (Miller 1999).

Second, there are procedural intersections. Procedural justice in its entirety is made up of many concrete and multidimensional forms of procedural justice. However, due to society’s extreme complexity and the existence of uncertainty, these concrete forms of procedural justice must be able to solve specific problems in a targeted manner. It is therefore inevitable that each concrete form of procedural justice has its own regulations and standards, even within developed countries. But a problem arises here. Sometimes, it is difficult to achieve complete coordination and consistency between the different dimensions of procedural justice. Certain people, certain social groups, and certain matters will be confronted with more than one process for resolution, which will lead to inconsistency or even conflict between procedural justice and substantive justice. For example, it is now recognized that severe inequality exists between urban and rural areas in China. Compared with urban residents, those from rural areas are treated unfairly in matters of security, welfare, education, and mobility, and these are problems that must be addressed. However, it should also be noted that rural residents enjoy some “preferential” treatments in matters of family planning and land management rights. Therefore, if the issues of rural residents are completely resolved according to the standards of urban

residents, this must be premised on the simultaneous cancellation of the “preferential” treatments enjoyed by those from rural areas. For example, in some developed countries, “consider what may happen when an unemployed person receiving cash benefits from a number of state sources decides to take a job. The classic case of a poverty trap arises because this previously unemployed person begins to receive income from an employer but simultaneously loses some or all of what he was getting from the state social security system; thus there is little financial advantage in working at what may be an unpleasant job. Both institutions have employed fair procedures, but the outcome, when the worker’s overall position is compared with that of his twin brother, who stayed unemployed, seems unjust to us” (Miller 1999).

Third, there is the relatively low degree of modernization and marketization within a given society. This reason is common in developing countries. In fact, in modern society, procedural justice has a necessary premise: the idea of social justice, an awareness of rules, and good social order must already prevail across society; otherwise, it will be difficult for procedural justice to be truly effective. “It is quite plausible for a reasonably well-ordered society, for with well-framed and decent democratic institutions, reasonable and rational citizens will enact laws and policies that would almost always be legitimate though not, of course, always just” (Rawls 1999b). If a society’s level of modernization and marketization is relatively low, the awareness of rules, including a sense of justice, has not yet taken root among individuals, at least insofar as the awareness of rules has not yet become widely recognized. Such a society lacks a minimum system of trust, and the populace has not yet formed modern ideas or practices of participation, nor has it formed an urgent sense of and need for communication. There may even be a lack of good social order, especially in societies that find themselves in periods of rapid transformation. Under such circumstances, while procedural justice may be standardized and modern in its design, since it is out of touch with the actual situation of society on the ground, an inevitable and obvious gap arises between “due” justice and “actual” justice. Procedural and substantive justice easily deviate from one another. In these conditions, procedural justice has not yet become customary. At the same time, the lack of a dedicated corps of professionals often results in procedural justice becoming more or less ineffective or even suffering deformation, thus reducing the credibility and authority of procedural justice to varying degrees. The populace is still used to solving problems by “super-procedural justice,” which is to say through traditional, impromptu, and non-procedural methods.

Fourth, there are cases in which the government has taken on too many tasks. The government is the public authority of society, and it has an unavoidable responsibility for public affairs. But, since procedural justice is directly related to public affairs, it is inevitable that a complicated situation will arise where the boundaries of public power are sometimes difficult to accurately identify, such that government power comes to interfere with procedural justice in an improper fashion. Sometimes, this is merely customary and involuntary, but it nonetheless objectively extends the government’s power into the

field of procedural justice in an inappropriate manner. In other cases, this may occur for understandable reasons—for the sake of convenience (cost reduction), for example, or because some problems set to be solved by procedural justice intersect with or are proximate to matters of concern to the government, making it easy to overstep the boundary between the two in the regular course of operations. This can create a situation in which duties are usurped, adversely influencing the effective implementation of procedural justice. It is worth noting that the inappropriate intervention of state power in procedural justice is more apparent in developing countries because these countries are in a period of social transformation where many rules have not yet been established and many gaps exist between the rules that have been. Meanwhile, due to the insufficient degree of social specialization, the number of non-governmental organizations that have taken shape within the field of public affairs remains low, or those that have formed are unable to operate effectively, leaving a large space for the improper intervention of the government in matters of procedural justice. Furthermore, in developing countries there exists a period of time in which it remains difficult to thoroughly transform some of the customary practices of governmental organizations inherited from traditional society and in which the arbitrary deployment and extension of power still persists as a general attitude. For these reasons, it is more difficult for procedural justice to coincide with substantive justice (the justice of outcomes) in developing countries.

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## Social Justice Rules in Social Stratification

Driven by modernization and the market economy, the degree of social differentiation and integration in society is increasing, and accordingly, there are more frequent interactions among various social strata. Positive interaction among all social strata is essential. This raises a question: What kind of rules should be followed in order to form mutual trust between all social strata and ensure the stable operation and healthy development of society? Clearly, we must follow the fundamental rules of social justice. As Rawls says: “A conception of justice must incorporate an ideal form for the basic structure in the light of which the accumulated results of ongoing social processes are to be limited and adjusted” (Rawls 1999a). What social justice rules should be included in the field of social stratification? What factors in reality are damaging or misinterpreting the social justice rules in social stratification? These are the issues to be discussed in this chapter.

### I THE MEANING AND POSSIBILITIES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN THE FIELD OF SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Due to the existence of social specialization and the division of labor, different social components, the people’s differing possessions of various resources, and their diversified orientations, a society is bound to form a certain social stratification system. Therefore, people in different states and statuses form different social strata, and those in the same state and status fall into the same stratum. It is in this sense that social stratification is accompanied by civilized society. As modernization and the market economy advance, the structure of social stratification has greatly changed. For example, unequal factors such as original privilege in social stratification will gradually decrease, the equal factors will increase, and the professional factors will play an increasingly important role. However, social stratification itself is hard to get rid of. When Fukuyama compared hierarchies (not the hierarchical system in traditional society) that are

closely associated with social stratification and the network (an intermediate form of organization between hierarchies and traditional markets), he believed that “it is highly doubtful that formal hierarchies are about to go away anytime soon. To the extent that networks become important, they will exist in conjunction with formal hierarchies... One answer has to do with the problems of coordination through hierarchies under conditions of increasing economic complexity” (Fukuyama 1999).

Since society is in a stratified state, it inevitably implies that there are different levels among all social classes and that the social stratification structure contains elements of inequality. “Inequality refers to the distribution of people in terms of a status dimension – how widely they differ in power or wealth, education or income. Social status assumes a variety of forms, and so does inequality, since every analytical dimension of status is also one of inequality, though empirically various status distributions are often correlated” (Blau 1977). It should be noted that not all inequalities are unjust, although there are indeed many inequalities that are unjust and play a detrimental role to society. When Rawls talks about economic and social inequalities, he says: “When those two kinds of inequalities are large, they tend to support political inequality... This power allows a few, in virtue of their control over the machinery of state, to enact a system of law and property that ensures their dominant position in the economy as a whole. Insofar as this domination is experienced as a bad thing, as making many peoples’ lives less good than they might otherwise be, we are again concerned with the effects of economic and social inequality. Significant political and economic inequalities are often associated with inequalities of social status that encourage those of lower status to be viewed both by themselves and by others as inferior” (Rawls 2001). And inequalities that violate the principle of justice are bound to have many negative effects on the stable operation and healthy development of society. “The generally accepted sociological assumption that individuals seek to maximize the esteem in which they are held implies that those who are in low-valued positions experience such disesteem as punishment. Consequently, there is an inherent tension (contradiction) between the need to maximize esteem and the requirements of a stratified system” (Lipset 1985). Only in a developed modern society it is possible to realize social justice in the field of social stratification. This can be understood from the following aspects:

First, the prerequisite for social justice is eliminating scarcity and the shortage of wealth resources. When material wealth is in short supply, it is impossible to realize justice in the real sense of social stratification. Even if it is forcibly realized, it will only be a pseudo-just society similar to a utopia. “The postulate of scarcity has underlain the dismal view of society held by many philosophers... Because men begin in an environment of scarcity, each man takes his needs as the starting point for the social image of society; scarcity pits men against each other in the competitive struggle for survival. Each man sees in his fellow man the other who is a constant threat to him. Scarcity is ‘the negation within man of man by matter,’ the ‘negative unity’ imposed by matter on

society through labor and social conflict” (Bell 1973). We have noticed that classical Marxist writers, whether Marx, Engels, or Deng Xiaoping, always regard highly developed material conditions as the most important prerequisite when they talk about a just society. Only on the basis of highly developed productive forces and a mature market economy can a society have the corresponding social and economic resources to provide the necessary conditions and means for the realization of social justice. A well-developed material base and a mature market economy make the supporting framework of a modern just society. The reason why modern developed countries are able to carry out large-scale social adjustment is that their economies have developed rapidly, and the total wealth of their society has been greatly increased.

Second, the negative effects of private property rights have weakened and the positive effects have increased. Compared to the past, in many developed countries at present, the specific situation of private ownership and its effects on social structure have undergone great changes. New forms of economy such as the joint-stock system and cooperatives, as well as the separation of ownership and the management of the means of production, have reduced the influence of private ownership on society as a whole, and its importance has relatively weakened. “Looked at both in value terms and in organizational terms, the differences between the ‘public’ and ‘private’ modes of structuring an economy are secondary in the sense that preference between them becomes a question of relative economic efficiency... In organizational terms... property rights no longer matter” (Parsons 1965). More importantly, through income tax, inheritance tax, and other taxes, society can appropriately reduce the excessive income and property of high-income earners, so as to effectively adjust or alleviate the disparity between the rich and the poor in the society and ensure the necessary integration and stability of the society. Therefore, as long as the tax policy is effectively implemented, the very wealthy individuals or families at present are often rich for only a few generations, and the “complete transfer” of private property is no longer possible. Furthermore, from point of view of the affluent class or the powerful group, “a willingness to make concessions may also be encouraged by the principle of marginal utility. This principle serves as a reminder that the first million dollars normally has greater value to a man than any subsequent million he may acquire. In societies with very productive economies, many members of the elite may be prepared to make some economic concessions in order to maximize other kinds of rewards, such as safety, respect, and leisure... because elites have multiple goals, and are not concerned with maximizing material rewards alone, they may be willing to make certain economic concessions in a highly productive and expanding economy” (Lenski 1966).

Third, the remarkable progress of social civilization. Under the influence of socialism, driven by various undertakings of social progress such as human rights and democratization, and with the rapid increase of public components in the social power system, the social civilization of developed countries has made remarkable progress. This progress is manifested in many aspects,



especially in the formulation and effective implementation of social policies. The social policies of developed countries can be divided into two types. Social policies in the narrow sense mainly solve or alleviate existing social problems, aiming at the life and work of members of society who are at economic and social disadvantage. Social policies in the broad sense entail laws, regulations, and measures aiming at improving the quality of life of the society as a whole, promoting its progress, and preventing a large number of social problems. In short, the former focuses on protecting the people's rights of "survival" and "dignity," while the latter focuses on guaranteeing their "development." Today, social policy has a far-reaching impact on developed countries, directly guaranteeing justice in the sphere of social stratification, and it has become an integral part of these countries. It is no longer conceivable that developed countries can survive in the absence of social policy.

In order to ensure a just social stratification structure, it is necessary to create corresponding institutional arrangements and policy formulations at the macro level. And we should stick to a certain value orientation when we design and formulate these fundamental social institutions and policies. Clearly, the institutional arrangements and policymaking should be oriented toward social justice. Rawls says, "For us the primary subject of justice is the basic structure of society, or more exactly, the way in which the major social institutions distribute fundamental rights and duties and determine the division of advantages from social cooperation. By major institutions I understand the political constitution and the principal economic and social arrangements" (Rawls 1999b).

What needs to be mentioned here is that many people are oriented toward the concept of "equality" or "social equality" in social stratification. Strictly speaking, it is not comprehensive and accurate enough to adopt the idea in the context. In fact, justice and equality are two different concepts. Equality includes both just equality and some "unjust equality." In *Equality and Efficiency*, Arthur Okun argues: "Social decisions that permit economic inequality must be justified as promoting economic efficiency" (Okun 1975). This shows that equality does not exactly equal justice, and sometimes inequalities may conform to the principle of justice. Even Rawls, who highly values equality, points out: "Any modern society, even a well-ordered one, must rely on some inequalities to be well-designed and effectively organized" (Rawls 2001). The idea of equality mainly applies to emphasizing the equality of the people's social identity and basic rights, the equality of opportunities, the rationality of social adjustment, and so on. In these respects, equality and justice overlap. However, placing an excessive emphasis on equality will lead to an idealized situation, making it difficult to apply and realize the idea. "Writers on the subject of equality are eloquent and persuasive in voicing a cahier de doléances when denouncing the evils of inequality. But their arguments become thinner and less convincing as they tackle the question of how the ideal of equality is to be realized" (Sartori 1987). Overemphasizing the idea of equality by elevating it to an extremely high level may adversely affect the idea of liberty, which despises or even denies the differences between individuals and their free

choices, denies the reasonable differences between social classes, causes egalitarianism, and emphasizes the similarity of the people's living conditions, thus damaging the principle of justice to varying degrees and inhibiting the vitality of society. To conclude, when discussing the orientation of social stratification, it is much more accurate and reasonable to use the idea of "justice" rather than "equality."

What is the conceptual basis of social justice rules between social strata? Only by clarifying this question can we determine the basic content of social justice rules between social strata. As mentioned earlier, the rules of social justice between social strata are to be based on the idea of equality, the idea of liberty, and the idea of social cooperation. (1) The idea of equality. The idea takes classes' basic contributions and dignity into account, confirms their basic rights, guarantees their opportunities for development, and defines the minimum requirements of the principle of justice. Thus, equality is an important conceptual basis of social justice. Clearly, the objective of equality is to safeguard the basic dignity of each class—to provide fundamental protections for their survival and development. (2) The idea of liberty. Liberty and equality are closely related to one another but also inseparable from one another. Liberty without equality, just as equality without liberty, is unthinkable. If there has to be a distinction between the two, it is that equality focuses on the recognition and protection of the basic human species, while liberty focuses on respecting and protecting individual differences. The idea of liberty requires that different individual endowments, abilities, and concrete contributions be respected, the individual development and choice also be respected, and that different treatment be given according to the different contributions of each class to society. (3) The idea of social cooperation. Only when classes cooperate effectively in society can their respective values be realized, thus acquiring a united social strength that is greater than the sum of its parts. The necessity of the idea of social cooperation is to provide what the rules of justice based on equality and freedom cannot, and to reflect the spirit of a reasonable society as a whole (Wu 2000). We should also note that these three bases should be considered as an integral part, and ignoring any of these components will lead to a biased understanding of the fundamental rules of social justice between social strata. For example, if the idea is based only on equality, it will result in an egalitarian rule; conversely, if the idea is based only on freedom, it will lead to a situation where the gap between the rich and the poor is too wide, thus undermining social solidarity and the safe operation of society.

For all social strata, what needs to be distributed, arranged, and guaranteed by just institutions and policies? Many people think that the distribution of income is the most important, to the point where the status of income distribution has almost become synonymous with whether a society is just or not. It should be noted that it is extremely important whether the income distribution is fair or not, as it also involves many other aspects of society, but if it is regarded as the fundamental problem of social justice, it is a very one-sided and narrow view. This view merely classifies the problem between social classes as an

economic problem, and it is only one aspect of the economic field, although it may be the most prominent one. In addition to income distribution, all social strata are faced with a series of problems such as social equality, social dignity, basic rights of members of society, their basic development opportunities, and the rest. In order to avoid this one-sided view, can we use social and economic resources in a broad sense and positive social and economic resources (hereafter shortened to “resources”) to refer to things that need to be distributed, arranged, and guaranteed by just institutions and policies? Naturally, the resources mentioned here need to be further refined into concrete content before they have a definite significance. As for the concrete content of resources, we might as well enrich it with Rawls’s “primary goods.” “These are various social conditions and all-purpose means... These goods are things citizens need as free and equal persons living a complete life.” Rawls distinguishes five kinds of primary goods: “(1) The basic rights and liberties: freedom of thought and liberty of conscience, and the rest. (2) Freedom of movement and free choice of occupation against a background of diverse opportunities, which opportunities allow the pursuit of a variety of ends and give effect to decisions to revise and alter them. (3) Powers and prerogatives of offices and positions of authority and responsibility. (4) Income and wealth, understood as all-purpose means (having an exchange value) generally needed to achieve a wide range of ends whatever they may be. (5) The social bases of self-respect, understood as those aspects of basic institutions normally essential if citizens are to have a lively sense of their worth as persons and to be able to advance their ends with self-confidence” (Rawls 2001).

## 2 THE BASIC RULES OF SOCIAL JUSTICE IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

Amartya Sen pointed out: “The basic ideas of justice are not alien to social beings, who worry about their own interests but are also able to think about family members, neighbors, fellow citizens and about other people in the world... Space does not have to be artificially created in the human mind for the idea of justice or fairness – through moral bombardment or ethical haranguing. That space already exists, and it is a question of making systematic, cogent and effective use of the general concerns that people do have” (Sen 2000). As for the rules of justice in social stratification, there is the problem of how to sort them out. The basis used for sorting can only be the concepts of equality, freedom, and social cooperation that people are most concerned about in modern society. According to the concept of equality, freedom, and social cooperation, the basic rules of social justice in social strata should include three important parts: mutual opening and equal access, different and appropriate rewards (distribution) for different strata, and reciprocity and mutuality.

### 2.1 *Mutual Openness and Equal Access Between Social Strata*

This is the most important social justice rule that should be followed in the stratification of modern society, and it is also the most important standard by which to judge whether the social stratification system is fair or not.

In modern society, every member of society should enjoy an equal basic right as a citizen—that is, “everyone should have an equal right to a similar freedom system compatible with the most extensive and equal basic freedom system owned by all” (Rawls 1999b). Based on this basic right of equality, no class, especially a class with a higher social position, should artificially set up obstacles for any reason to exclude members of other classes from entering this class, so as to safeguard their unique interests. Moreover, as long as a person has a certain ability, he/she should have the opportunity to obtain the corresponding social position as they wish. “Those with similar abilities and skills should have similar life chances. More specifically, assuming that there is a distribution of natural assets, those who are at the same level of talent and ability, and have the same willingness to use them, should have the prospects of success regardless of their initial place in the social system. In all sectors of society there should be roughly equal prospects of culture and achievement for everyone similarly motivated and endowed. The expectations of those with the same abilities and aspirations should not be affected by their social class... and at the same time, positions of authority and responsibility must be accessible to all” (Rawls 1999b).

In traditional society, there were strict hierarchies. Members in such a hierarchical society fell into either the “privileged” class or the “commoner” class. For most people, there were no equal rights. There was an insurmountable boundary between those of higher statuses and those of lower statuses. Clearly, it is extremely unfair to use ascriptive factors as a reason to divide classes or exclude others from entering higher statuses. The problem is that “to make such properties the basis of discrimination between individuals in the distribution of social benefits would be ‘to treat people differently in ways that profoundly affect their lives because of differences for which they have no responsibility’” (Feinberg 1973).

Under the condition of modern society, the ascribed social statuses should be eliminated; otherwise, social justice between different classes cannot be realized. However, we should also see that there are actually two categories of ascriptive factors: one is social factors, such as birth, status, and rank, and the other is natural factors, such as natural endowments. Fukuyama believes that “social inequality falls into two categories, the sort that is traceable to human convention, and that attributable to nature or natural necessity. In the first category are legal barriers to equality – the division of society into closed estates, apartheid, Jim Crow Laws, property qualifications for voting, and the like... Natural barriers to equality begin with the unequal distribution of natural abilities or attributes within a population” (Fukuyama 1992). It is not appropriate to confuse these two categories. The social factors are

unreasonable and unfair from the beginning, so they should be eliminated. However, natural factors are somewhat rational and legitimate. This is because everyone is not only born equal, but also born different. If the natural predisposing factors are restricted in general, it will violate the principle that people are born different and free. In a sense, it will limit some people's independent development and self-motivated efforts. An important manifestation of injustice is that the differences between individuals are excessively restricted. However, if these "differences" are allowed to develop naturally, there will be too wide a gap in income and social status among members of society. In this case, we can only deal with inequalities from the perspective of the entire society through social adjustment. In addition, some members of the society are affected by both social and natural factors, which further complicate the problem. Rawls believed that citizens' life-prospects are affected by three kinds of contingencies, including "their native endowments (as opposed to their realized endowments); and their opportunities to develop these endowments as affected by their social class of origin" (Rawls 2001). This makes it more difficult for society to solve any related problems of social injustice.

To a great extent, the people's pursuits of equal rights and freedom are realized and guaranteed through a social mobility mechanism. Although not all social mobility is just, it does have a significant impact on social justice in social stratification. Its situation will reflect how social justice is in social stratification. In a certain sense, social mobility is not only an important precondition to realizing social justice rules, but it is also an important part of social justice in social stratification. The important function of social mobility is that it can provide the disadvantaged groups in lower social positions with equal opportunities for their improvement and, at the same time, it can provide effective ways for the self-motivated winners. Generally speaking, the higher the degree of mobility in a society, the more opportunities and hopes that society can provide for its members. On the contrary, if the mobility is too low and all social strata are isolated from each other, then the injustice of this society will be aggravated. "The insulation of a group from others increases its chances of being exploited and its chances of actively resisting the exploitation. Groups whose geographical insulation, ethnic differences, or distinctive beliefs set them apart from the rest of the community can more easily be exploited by dominant powers, because lack of identification of the majority with these groups has the result that their exploitation is not discouraged by general social disapproval" (Blau 1964, 1977).

During the transition from traditional society to modern society, due to rapid economic development and the continuous upgrading of industrial structure, a wealth of new types of occupations appeared; thus the upward movement keeps increasing, compared to the past. "The dominant pattern of mobility in agrarian societies was downward. In industrial societies the volume of upward movement is so much greater that a balance is usually achieved, and, in most cases, the amount of upward movement exceeds the downward" (Lenski 1966). Clearly, under such circumstances, maintaining a fair state of

mutual openness and equal access between social classes is not only in line with the historical development trend but also conducive to beneficial social mobility. Therefore, a society should ensure openness and equal access among social strata through necessary institutional arrangements and policy formulations. From another point of view, a society must prevent unfair situations such as the higher stratum stopping and restricting members of the lower stratum from upward movement by formulating their own favorable systems and policies, setting all kinds of artificial obstacles for other strata, and adopting differential conditions such as privileges or identities.

## *2.2 All Classes Should Receive Differential and Appropriate Rewards*

This is another important social justice rule that should be followed in the social stratification system.

How do we realize the fair distribution of resources? This is the most straightforward problem that all social strata face.

The first question involved here is what the basis for distribution should be. In this regard, there are only three possible choices: absolute average distribution according to the number of people, distribution according to actual needs, and distribution according to contribution. The first choice denies that people, as “Homo oeconomicus,” are reasonably interest-driven, and it also denies their differences and diversity. Moreover, this practice will inevitably deny that different people have different contributions to society, so that some can occupy the reasonable interests of others for free. “Particular distributions cannot be judged at all apart from the claims (entitlements) of individuals earned by their efforts within the fair system of cooperation from which those distributions result” (Rawls 2001). History has repeatedly proved the absurdity of this “utopian” approach. Distribution according to actual needs does take into account the people’s differences and various needs, but this practice implies a prerequisite, which is that the resources available for distribution in society must reach infinity. However, this prerequisite does not exist—at least for a very long period in history it did not. Therefore, it cannot be practiced. Obviously, in modern society, distribution can only be made according to contribution. The “contribution” mentioned here is not only limited to the people’s contribution to “economic benefits,” but also includes their contribution to various fields of social economy.

The fair rule of distribution according to contribution reflects the direct contributions of all social strata (indirect contributions are reflected by social adjustment) and recognizes legitimate and reasonable differences among social strata and industries. It should be noted that different industries and occupations have different requirements for laborers in terms of labor complexity, specific work skills, and difficulty. Moreover, the market has different demands for different products, and employees in different industries make different contributions to the society. Furthermore, contributions of different degrees

are often positively related to different costs and energies. In the process of acquiring necessary labor skills, employees from all walks of life and industries often invest different economic costs and levels of energy. In this sense, it is reasonable to keep a balance between costs and benefits. In other words, even from the perspective of the relationship between costs and benefits, it should be distributed according to contribution. Different energy inputs and costs should bring different returns. “It should authorize the social and economic inequalities necessary, or else highly effective, in running an industrial economy in a modern state. Such inequalities cover the costs of training and education, act as incentives, and the like” (Rawls 2001).

For all social strata, the social justice rule of distribution according to contribution can act as very effective incentives. “Underlying much of economic analysis is the basic assumption of rational choice: that is, people weigh the costs and benefits of each possibility whenever they must make a choice... In the case of individuals, the rationality assumption is taken into mean that they make choices and decisions in pursuit of their own self-interest” (Stiglitz and Walsh 2011). From this point of view, the principle of distribution according to contribution is in line with a nature driven by the people’s interests, meaning it can fully stimulate the potential of all social strata, arouse the enthusiasm of all social strata, and then create a positive state of interaction, competition, and progress among all social strata, ensuring a normal social differentiation process that is compatible with modern society and the market economy. This situation is also of indispensable significance for promoting social integration, because only by stimulating the vitality of the society it is possible to increase the total amount of social wealth. Only then can we make reasonable and effective social redistribution (social adjustment).

It should be noted that if absolute egalitarianism appears in a society as a whole, then it is most likely to occur in the field of primary distribution and will cause the worst harm. Once this happens and we confuse primary distribution with redistribution, it will fundamentally shake the just foundation of a society. As a result, the potential and vitality of all social strata will be suppressed, and social redistribution will not be carried out effectively due to the lack of pre-conditions. Accordingly, it will become meaningless to talk about social justice.

### ***2.3 Reciprocity and Mutuality Should Be Maintained Among All Social Strata.***

This is the third important social justice rule that should be followed among social strata.

What we must see is that society is an organic whole composed of all classes. As modernization and the market economy advance, the specialization, high efficiency, and ever-expanding scale of modern production require society to fully explore and utilize social resources. To achieve this, it is necessary to change the functions of the social organism originally undertaken by a few units to be undertaken by multiple units. Under the condition of the market



economy system, the original few units in the social organism can naturally develop into multiple complex units, so as to undertake the social functions originally undertaken by a few simple units. In this way, the social division of labor becomes more complicated and various trades and professions in the social organism increase day by day, as are various components of different natures. Because of the phenomenon of social differentiation, any class or group cannot exist independently without other classes or groups, and each class plays an important and indispensable role in the whole of the social organism. Additionally, the social organism is not a simple adding together of various social sub-units but has its own unique overall function. Therefore, each sub-unit of the social organism also needs to provide indispensable support and coordination for the whole social organism. These put forward objective requirements for the continuous improvement of social unity and social integration. The higher the degree of social differentiation, the higher the requirements for social unity and integration. “There is no alternative to social cooperation except unwilling and resentful compliance, or resistance and civil war” (Rawls 1999a).

For a united and integrated society as a whole, it is necessary to maintain a kind of cooperation and positive interaction among all social strata. Only in this way can the potential of social organism be fully and positively released. On the contrary, if there is too much friction and conflict among various strata in a society, it means that there are serious faults in this society; the potential of the social organism will be wasted for no reason, and the society itself will even suffer different degrees of damage. In short, all social strata should cooperate to achieve a “win-win” rather than a “total loss” state. “The interdependence of its parts makes the modern order much more sensitive than a simpler form of economic organization. Indeed, the more minutely the individual parts of a large mechanism fit into one another, and the more closely the single elements are bound up together, the more serious are the repercussions of even the slightest disturbance”. What is more serious, “the political insanity of one country determines the fate of others, and the brutal, impulsive, emotional outbursts of the masses in action signify a catastrophe for a whole society and even for the entire world, since the interdependence of the modern social organism transmits the effects of every maladjustment with increased intensity” (Mannheim 1923).

In order to ensure unity and integration among all social strata, it is necessary to realize mutually beneficial social justice rules among them. According to Rawls, the idea of reciprocity and mutuality means that “all who cooperate must benefit, or share in common burdens, in some appropriate fashion judged by a suitable benchmark of comparison... Whereas the notion of fair terms of cooperation is shared, participants’ conceptions of their own rational advantage in general differ” (Rawls 1999a). Fukuyama defined it in more detail, and distinguished the two meanings of reciprocal altruism: “In the case of reciprocal altruism, the exchange is time-shifted; one party can give a benefit without expecting any immediate return and does not expect to be exactly



compensated. Reciprocal altruism is much closer to what we understand as moral exchange within a community, and as such is invested with a very different emotional content from market exchange... almost all behavior we understand to be moral involves two-way exchange of some sort and ultimately confers mutual benefits on the parties participating in it” (Fukuyama 1999).

Reciprocity and mutuality between social strata should first be shown as follows: the interests of the higher strata cannot be improved at the expense of the interests of the lower strata. On the contrary, when the interests of the higher strata are improved, the situation of the lower strata should be improved. A phenomenon that appears relatively easily is that, because the higher strata have obvious advantages in various resources, these strata correspondingly have greater influence in the institutional design and policy arrangements related to their interests, and then they may make use of the advantages to create a situation that damages the lower strata and benefits themselves. Once this happens, it is very unfair to the other party—that is, the lower class—and it will certainly lead to situations such as dissatisfaction, conflict, and even resistance among the lower class, resulting in vicious interaction among all social classes. This will be very detrimental for effective social cooperation, especially sustained cooperation, and even to the stable operation of society. In order to avoid this, we must do as follows, “the difference principle requires that however great the inequalities in wealth and income may be, and however willing people are to work to earn their greater shares of output, existing inequalities must contribute effectively to the benefit of the least advantaged. Otherwise the inequalities are not permissible” (Rawls 2001).

Reciprocity and mutuality between social strata should also be manifested as follows: social strata in similar positions should maintain a state of coordination. There will be resistances, frictions, and conflicts not only between the upper class and the lower class but also between social classes in similar positions. For example, limited resources such as the shortage of job opportunities increase competition among low-income groups in similar positions, and thus easily lead to friction and conflict. “Gunnar Myrdal, in his investigation of the Negro problem in America, pointed out that class antagonisms are strongest between ‘adjacent’ classes rather than between the very bottom and the top. Thus, in the South, the deepest emotional resentment of the Negro has come from the poor whites, and particularly from those once-poor whites who, having risen, sought more than ever to emphasize their distance from those below them” (Bell 1988). Coincidentally, in Chinese cities, some members of low-income groups have a similar resistance or rejection psychology toward migrant workers, even among different groups of migrant workers. This only leads to loss on both sides. Therefore, we must formulate and follow corresponding fair rules, and negotiate and compromise through some organizations to prevent vicious competition and conflicts between classes in similar positions.

The specific situation of reciprocity and mutuality is mainly reflected in whether the resource possession of social strata is just—that is, whether the gap in resource possession among social strata is kept within a reasonable limit. A

healthy modern society should have a resource allocation structure that is olive-shaped (tapered at the top and the bottom, and wide in the middle). The numbers of both the upper class with more resources and the lower class with less resources should be small, while the number of the middle classes should be large, as it includes the vast majority of society. (Lu 2002)

For society as a whole, it should have the responsibility and obligation to carry out necessary social adjustments—that is, social redistribution—in order to effectively assist the poor. There is a prerequisite for reciprocity and mutuality among social strata, which is that all strata should be able to survive and develop—otherwise social cooperation will be impossible. However, due to various reasons such as poverty, some groups have lost these necessary abilities to varying degrees. “Poverty must be seen as the deprivation of basic capabilities rather than merely as lowness of incomes, which is the standard criterion of identification of poverty. The perspective of capability-poverty does not involve any denial of the sensible view that low income is clearly one of the major causes of poverty, since lack of income can be a principal reason for a person’s capability deprivation” (Sen 2000). Therefore, society has the responsibility to actively assist the disadvantaged in getting rid of poverty and restoring their ability in social cooperation. Furthermore, in order to guard against threats posed by uncertain factors and risks to most members of society, and to jointly improve the cooperation ability of all social strata, it is necessary for society to establish positive social welfare schemes. “Schemes of positive welfare, oriented to manufactured rather than external risk, would be directed to fostering the autotelic self... It refers to a person able to translate potential treats into rewarding challenges, someone who is able to turn entropy into a consistent flow of experience” (Giddens 2007). The ‘Welfare State’ attempts to manage class chances without modifying basic class structure; in its several meanings and types, it favors economic policies designed to redistribute life-risks and life-chances in favor of those in the more exposed class situations, who have the power or threaten to accumulate the power to do something about their case” (Mills 1951).

Social adjustment is undoubtedly realized by powers of public sectors (mainly government systems). In this regard, their main responsibility lies in: creating a fair social environment, eliminating privileged factors in society, formulating corresponding social policies, etc., so as to provide an external condition for all social strata to be treated fairly. They must also provide necessary help to the vulnerable social groups directly, pay attention to the basic living conditions of members of society, and attach importance to the development conditions that these members should generally have. It is in this sense that “class and status situations have been removed from free market forces and the persistence of tradition, and been subject to more formal rules. A government management of the class structure has become a major means of alleviating inequalities and insuring the risks of those in lower-income classes” (Mills 1951).

To summarize, the above-mentioned three just rules between social classes are a unified whole and indispensable. The rules of mutual opening and equal

access between social strata are mainly to solve the problem of an equal starting point and equal conditions within all social strata. The rule that different classes receive different and corresponding rewards is mainly to solve the problem of how to treat the contributions of different classes, while the rule of reciprocity and mutuality is mainly to solve the problem of how to carry out effective and sustained social cooperation among different classes in society. Only on the basis of these three just rules can we establish a just social stratum structure.

### 3 THE MAIN FACTORS HINDERING THE IMPLEMENTATION OF SOCIAL JUSTICE RULES IN SOCIAL STRATIFICATION

In real society, there are often many unfavorable factors for social justice rules in social stratification. These unfavorable factors either hinder the implementation of social justice rules or distort them.

#### 3.1 *The Misunderstanding of a Meritocratic Society*

Objectively speaking, as far as the influence of ability, power and position is concerned, there are obvious differences among all social strata. According to Vilfredo Pareto, the pioneer social scientist who propounded the elite theory of power, all members of society are divided into two classes: the lower class and the upper class (the elite). The class of elite is further sub-divided into a governing elite and a non-governing elite. The “governing elite” comprises of individuals who obviously play some considerable part in society.

The basic development trend of modern society is that the social organism becomes more complicated, and the social division of labor becomes more specialized and intricate. In line with it, the number of people in social management and technology is bound to increase continuously, and because society has higher requirements for their “capacity,” a unique and large-scale group is formed. For example, “there are two reasons for the expansion of office. The first has to do with the political control of activities and employments vital to the well-being of the community; the second has to do with ‘fair equality of opportunity.’ The inevitable tendency of all efforts to achieve political control and equality of opportunity is to reinforce and enhance centralized power” (Walzer 1984). This group has a wide and significant influence on the whole of society because, in the social stratum system, this stratum occupies a high position and enjoys a good reputation. At the same time, we should also note that the elite is a relatively closed and homogeneous circle in terms of its specific composition and living state. “They (elites) are self-recruiting; their members have similar biographies; most of them have degrees from the same select group of colleges or universities and studied the same subjects; they know each other and speak a common language in more ways than one” (Dahrendorf 2009).

It should be acknowledged that the elite class is indispensable to a society, whether from the perspective of efficiency or justice. The complexity of

modern society and the existence of various uncertain factors require an elite class with professional skills to manage daily affairs, design long-term plans, and formulate and implement policies. Moreover, as long as the just rule of equal opportunity is followed—that is, the “principle of achievement”—members of the lower class can also become the elite through their efforts.

The problem is that if the elite becomes a force that influences the social fundamentals, they would cause a series of negative social effects. First, a meritocracy will distort the rules of equality between social classes, especially the rule of equal opportunities. Equality of opportunity is not the only social justice rule. The rule of social justice is an organic system, and the rule of equal opportunity must be organically combined with the guarantee of the people’s basic rights, which is distribution according to contribution and social adjustment, so that its positive function can be effectively exerted. If we break away from the guarantee of the people’s basic rights and the social justice rules of social adjustment, we will lose the prerequisite of equal opportunities—that is, the starting point and environment of equal competition—and lose the possibility of making many members of society that are in a weak state recover their abilities. It can be seen that social justice rules that only emphasize equal opportunities will surely lose their proper meaning. “This form of social order follows the principle of careers open to talents and uses equality of opportunity as a way of releasing men’s energies in the pursuit of economic prosperity and political dominion. There exists a marked disparity between the upper and lower classes in both means of life and the rights and privileges of organizational authority”. Under such circumstances, “equality of opportunity means an equal chance to leave the less fortunate behind in the personal quest for influence and social position” (Rawls 1999b).

Second, a meritocracy will create new hierarchy. As mentioned before, in order to achieve effective and sustained social cooperation, social strata should follow the rules of reciprocity and mutuality and avoid situations of excessive gap. However, in a society, if the elite is in an overwhelming position, then a new hierarchical system with excessive gap between classes will be formed. As Giddens says: “a radically meritocratic society would create deep inequalities of outcome, which would threaten social cohesion... a full meritocracy would create an extreme example of such a class, a class of untouchables. For not only would groups of people be at the bottom, but they would know their lack of ability made this right and proper: it is hard to imagine anything more dispiriting” (Giddens 2008).

Third, the expansion of the meritocracy and the decline of its positive effect. If the elites in a society become excessively strong, then that society has less restriction on them. Under such circumstances, the elite class, especially the “governing elite,” will inevitably expand, and at the same time its positive role will be correspondingly weakened. “The more elites there are in a society the more each individual elite tends to lose its function and influence as a leader, for they cancel each other out. In a democratic mass society, especially one with

great social mobility, no group can succeed in deeply influencing the whole of society” (Mannheim 1923).

Fourth, a meritocracy will encroach on the interests of other classes. The excessive expansion of elite classes means that they have great influence on institutional arrangements and policy making. Under such conditions, it is inevitable that there will be a “winner takes all” situation—that is, taking the formulation of public policies as an excuse to protect or even expand their own unique class interests. For example, some scholars have found that, during the transition period from a planned economy to a market economy, because the government has played the role of directly promoting the establishment of the market economy, “the income return of redistribution occupation has increased year by year” (Bian 1988). When this situation is not contained and allowed to fully develop, when it reaches a certain point, it will cause serious consequences: the normal order of the market economy will be disrupted, the interests of other classes will be encroached, and the whole society will experience serious social injustice until it leads to serious social conflicts.

### 3.2 *The Blurring Boundaries Between the Upper Classes*

As opposed to traditional society, in modern society, the boundaries between social classes are not only open but also clear. This situation is determined by the characteristics of the social division of labor in modern society. In modern society, the degree of occupational differentiation becomes higher and the specified responsibilities become clearer, which results in the boundaries between social strata becoming clearer. The complicated occupational differentiation and various boundaries between social strata are supported and guaranteed by various rules and systems. The rules and systems “have institutionalized firm patterns of rights and obligations which, within politically organized units of society, have cut across the lines drawn by the traditional ‘primary’ bases of social solidarity, and hence have become in certain respects independent of them.” According to Parsons, “these legal systems have embodied principles of universalism and of specificity.” By universalism he means “that rules have been formulated and held to apply to categories of persons or collectivities on the basis of generally defined characteristics independent of their statuses in these ‘lower-order’ particularistic solidarities” (Parsons 1965). By specificity he means “the definition of legal rules in such a way that the rights and obligations thereby created could be abstracted from the status and expectations of certain particularistic solidary memberships, without destroying that membership. The primary solidary structure would therefore be ‘insulated’ from the cross-cutting relationship.” This kind of situation not only ensures the efficiency of a society but also effectively prevents the exchange of interests between higher strata and the spread of kinship, thus ensuring social justice in an important aspect and effectively preventing the infringement of public interests by one or some higher strata to a great extent.

Once the boundary between classes in a higher social position is blurred, it often means that the public interests are encroached upon by upper classes—that is, some special interest groups. In this regard, the public management field of society is most easily encroached on by the public management class and the “wealth” class. In a certain sense, the external performance of public management is the production and distribution of public goods. “A pure public goods has two salient characteristics: jointness of supply and the impossibility or inefficiency of excluding others from its consumption, once it has been supplied to some members of the community... For such a good, the addition of more consumers (viewers) does not detract from the benefits enjoyed by others” (Mueller 2003). Originally, the public management class and the “wealth” class have different divisions of labor. The main task of the public management class is to manage public goods, formulate corresponding rules, and provide public services, so as to ensure the integrity and maximization of the utility of public goods and public services to all members of society, while the “wealth” class is mainly engaged in production and operation. However, it must be noted that these two classes have their own interest pursuits of differing degrees. If both the public management class and the “wealth” class cross the boundaries of their specific classes, professions, or industries and make alliances, then it is inevitable that the public management class will exploit public resources to expand the interests of its own class, its own group, and its own people in various “rent-seeking” ways. Meanwhile, the “wealth” class will rapidly increase the value of their assets through non-market and non-competitive means. Together, these two situations constitute “money politics.” On the one hand, the class that was originally in charge of public management would lose its “public” character. On the other hand, the “wealth” class would lose its “marketing” character. “When money carries with it the control, not of things only but of people, too, it ceases to be a private resource. It no longer buys goods and services on the market; it buys something else, somewhere else, where (given our democratic understanding of politics) buying and selling is ruled out. If we can’t block the purchase, then we have to socialize the money, which is only to recognize that it has taken on a political character” (Walzer 1984). The severity of this “money politics” is positively correlated with the blurring of the boundary between these two classes.

The blurring boundaries between social strata of higher social positions almost pose an all-around harm to the social justice rules among social strata. This phenomenon will inevitably make social public goods and services shrink, thus seriously weakening the guarantee of basic rights of members of society, especially members of vulnerable groups, and the provision of basic equality conditions; the social justice rules that make the social strata distribute according to their contributions cannot be effectively implemented, which aggravates the situation of obtaining benefits by unfair or even illegal means; the social justice rules of mutual benefit between social strata cannot be fulfilled, and the public resources needed for social adjustment are either in a shrinking state or are jointly occupied by many powerful groups to varying degrees, making it

possible for the benefits of one stratum to be based on the damages of the other stratum. This may be the main reason why at the present stage of China, an isolated and closed group at the “bottom of society” has emerged (Sun 2002). The seriousness of the problem lies in the fact that the blurring of boundaries between classes of a higher social position will certainly aggravate social instability. “The deprivation arising from violating the norms of fair exchange are viewed as translated, under specified conditions, into retaliation against the violators” (Turner 1974).

### 3.3 *The Imbalance Between Horizontal Differentiation and Vertical Differentiation*

With the advancement of modernization and the market economy, social differentiation is an inevitable historical trend. Social differentiation includes two types: horizontal differentiation and vertical differentiation.

Horizontal differentiation reflects the complexity and diversity of social structure and social components and also reflects the diversity of the people’s orientations, whether group or individual. Horizontal differentiation is compatible with modern society. Generally speaking, the higher the degree of modernization of a society, the higher the degree of its horizontal differentiation. On an economic level, horizontal differentiation brings about the improvement of efficiency; as far as the social level is concerned, horizontal differentiation brings about the improvement of social communication and social integration. As Peter Blau said, “increases in heterogeneity, by making intergroup relations less rare, weaken ingroup pressures that inhibit sociable interaction with members of outgroups and thus lessen discrimination against outgroups. As social practices in a group increase in frequency, group pressures that discourage them subside” (Blau 1977). Thus, for horizontal differentiation, there is no such thing as society restricts it, from the perspective of efficiency or justice.

Compared to horizontal differentiation, vertical differentiation is more complicated. The so-called vertical differentiation (also known as “inequality” by many people) “refers to the distribution of people in terms of a status dimension – how widely they differ in power or wealth, education or income” (Blau 1977). As mentioned earlier, inequality includes two types: reasonable inequality that conforms to just rules and unreasonable inequality that does not conform to just rules. It is worth noting that many kinds of differentiation may cause new inequalities, especially occupational differentiation. For example, new occupations related to emerging industries often contain new skills, so they often become scarce resources, and this new occupation and new skill obtain higher returns relatively easily. Especially in the period of the large-scale upgrading of industrial structure, when structural social mobility became the mainstream of social mobility, the aforementioned situation becomes a more prominent social phenomenon. Under such circumstances, if the



corresponding social adjustment fails to keep up, it will very likely cause substantial inequalities that do not conform to the social justice rules.

Once vertical differentiation is in excess, it will inevitably lead to the imbalance between horizontal differentiation and vertical differentiation. In a “normal” modern society, horizontal differentiation and vertical differentiation should be in a relatively balanced state, so that the social differentiation as a whole maintains a moderate state. However, once the degree of vertical differentiation is too high, it will cause an unfair inequality, which will have many negative effects on the horizontal differentiation and overall social differentiation. Originally, horizontal differentiation made social integration and social solidarity necessary for all social strata. As Marx points out, “The social division of labor causes his labor to be as one-sided as his wants are many-sided” (Marx 1975). The “many-sided” wants can only be achieved through social cooperation, and effective social cooperation depends on social integration and social unity. It can be seen that the continuous improvement of the level differentiation makes the just rules of reciprocity and mutuality between social strata more and more important. However, excessive vertical differentiation will definitely have a negative impact on the guarantee of equal conditions among social strata and the just rules of reciprocity and mutuality. Unfair inequality, such as the excessive gap between the rich and the poor, will not only seriously suppress the development of the potential of the main social strata but also lead to various barriers, resistances, and even conflicts among various social strata, thus reducing social integration in various aspects. “A highly unequal society is harming itself by not making the best use of the talents and capacities of its citizens. Moreover, inequalities can threaten social cohesion and can have other socially undesirable consequences (such as provoking high rates of crime)” (Giddens 2007). In view of this, it is necessary to impose necessary and strong restrictions on vertical differentiation through social adjustment.

### 3.4 *The Disappearance of the Integrity of Individual Members of Society in Different Degrees Within the Stratum*

When analyzing social justice among social strata, especially when analyzing the social strata’s justice in the period of social transformation, we should pay special attention to its precondition—that is, the meaning of the individual as a member of the stratum, or in other words, whether the integrity of the individual is reflected. The integrity of an individual has an important influence on social justice for social classes and among social classes. However, this problem is often easily overlooked by people.

There is no doubt that there is an inseparable relationship between the specific situation of individuals who are members of the class and the entire class. For society as a whole, the individual has a prerequisite significance. “Individuals have always built on themselves, but naturally on themselves within their given historical conditions and relationships, not on the ‘pure’ individual in the sense of the ideologists” (Marx and Engels 1960). At the same time, individuals



cannot live without society. Because of this, whether a class member can have complete individual meaning will have a far-reaching impact on this class and then on the specific situation of social justice between classes.

The basic characteristics of the individual are the attainment of “self-consciousness” and the possession of basic rights. Individual self-consciousness is mainly manifested in independent self-choice consciousness and self-responsibility ability. The basic rights of the individual are manifested in equal citizenship and other aspects. The “homogeneity” of a class refers to the similarity of a certain class of individuals in terms of occupation, wealth, prestige, power, etc. The “homogeneity” of a class does not exclude individual differences, free choices, autonomy, etc., and members of each class have the same basic rights as members of any other class. This situation is an important sign that modern society is different from traditional society. However, in a society with more traditional components, a society in the process of modernization, or an abnormal modern society, it is easy for the stronger social groups to suppress the “self-awareness” and basic rights of individuals in various ways, carry out a universal and wide-ranging infringement, and compulsorily “integrate” most classes and even most members of this class according to the low-level principle of “homogeneity” (wherein the boundaries of the individuals are unclear). Once this happens, the complete meaning of the individual person will cease to exist.

It is impossible to achieve real social justice within the same class and between different classes that are composed of members who do not exist as an individual. First, it lacks the basic premise of social justice. Ignoring the meaning of the individual person is not in line with human nature, so it can only be a kind of superficial justice, or pseudo-justice. It has become an indisputable problem that society should be people-oriented. However, this statement is somewhat general—to be exact, society should be based on countless individuals. Only when the basic rules of social justice are implemented by individuals can they have real significance. The justice of social class structure is of great significance because it can enable every individual to receive fair treatment. On the contrary, if a society is geared toward social class, takes social class as the ultimate goal of social justice, and only treats individual justice as an incidental, secondary, and subsidiary thing, then such social justice can only be “abstract” and superficial, which goes against its original intention and thus cannot have practical significance. The situation in the 30 years before China’s reform and opening-up is very telling of this. In that era of “taking class struggle as the key link,” due to the neglect of the people as individuals, the disregard of their rights to equal citizenship (basic rights of a natural person), and the emphasis on the strong personal attachment of each member to their class, each member of society belonged to a different class. However, in the era when people placed an excessive emphasis on class struggle, there was no equality between classes. Therefore, it was impossible to distribute universal, equal, and fair treatment to all members of society and every individual in Chinese society at that time. In the first 30 years after the founding of the People’s Republic of China, China

had not been able to formulate a complete Civil Code (civil law system) that is closely related to every member of society, which is proof of its ignorance of the individual. In this case, as citizens, many basic rights and interests of the members of society could not be effectively protected by law, not to mention their fair treatment as well. Secondly, it misinterprets the social justice rules between different classes. Neglecting people as individuals means the restriction of diversity, autonomy, and equality. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to allow normal mobility between social classes. Even if there is “social mobility,” it is a “scale shift” of members of society that is forcibly arranged and implemented by the office. Neglecting people as individuals also leads to rigid interaction between social classes—that is, in order to achieve some distorted justice (such as egalitarianism), the interaction of class structure can easily evolve into a simple situation in which one class is used to squeeze another class, or one class in a relatively strong state is used to destroy another class in a weak state. Here, it is easy for the majority to dominate everything and sacrifice the reasonable interests of the minority at the expense of the interests of the majority. “Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.” Then, “anarchy may as truly be said to reign, as in a state of nature where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger” (Accessed Sept 1 2022). In this respect, the Jacobin dictatorship during the French Revolution and China’s “Cultural Revolution” are typical examples of this.

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## Discrimination and Forms of Discrimination in China at Present

Discrimination is a normal social injustice that exists in societies to varying degrees. Discrimination has an extremely negative impact on the stable operations and healthy development of a society. This negative effect is even more intolerable in a modern society. In any modern country, ending discrimination is an important social goal. During China's social transformation, a large number of forms of discrimination emerge, which directly affect the safe operations and healthy development of Chinese society. It is of great practical significance for us to formulate reasonable and effective anti-discrimination policies and to safeguard social justice by carefully analyzing the types, causes, and other patterns of discrimination as well as the specific characteristics of discrimination in China at present.

### I DEFINITION OF DISCRIMINATION

Discrimination can be defined in both broadly and narrowly. In its broad sense, the term “discrimination” is not used frequently. It is commonly used in its neutral sense, referring to “differential treatment.” As *The Blackwell Encyclopedia of Political Thought* reads: “In its most general sense the perception of a difference, a differentiation, or different treatment. In this morally neutral sense discrimination in certain circumstances may be required by the Aristotelian principle of JUSTICE, which tells us to treat like cases alike and different cases differently. For example, a teacher who fails to discriminate between an excellent and a poor student may be unfair to both” (Miller et al. 1991). Discrimination as we use it in its narrow sense or in its negative sense “means that equals are treated unequally or that unequals are treated equally” (Register and Grimes 2016). Specifically, what is called discrimination is not based on ability, contribution, cooperation, and so on, but on status, gender, race, or socio-economic resources, and “differentiates” members of society in order to achieve “unreasonable” purposes. The result is the deprivation experienced by

certain social groups and members of society, creating unjust social phenomena. The opposite of “discrimination” in the narrow sense is fair treatment, equitable treatment, and in some cases its opposite is equal treatment. Generally speaking, the concept and question of “discrimination” in the narrow sense is what is commonly meant in and what is of concern to society and academia. In this book, the term “discrimination” refers to this narrow sense.

Discrimination has two specific features. First, it is exclusionary. In terms of resource allocation (including access to public resources), some groups of people exclude or restrict other groups of people on unreasonable grounds and in unfair ways. In this sense, discrimination reflects the unjust patterns and basic characteristics of resource distribution in a particular society at a particular time, as well as certain privileges, deprivations, exclusions, and restrictions. This is the most essential characteristic of discrimination.

Second, it is widespread (social). Discrimination involves a wide range of people. It refers to the exclusion of one or several groups of people from another group or other groups of people, and it is not limited to a small number of people or to relations between individuals. Because of this, discrimination is generally achieved through formal and informal institutions. The former refers to the institutional arrangements and policy formulations in which the elements containing discrimination are institutionalized by laws, rules, regulations, and policies, while the latter refers to the exclusion and restriction of certain groups of people by certain social customs, values, and habits.

Discrimination has a wide range of forms, including economic discrimination, social discrimination, political discrimination, cultural discrimination, and national discrimination. The relevant provisions in some international conventions with the important purpose of acting against discrimination actually explain the specific contents of discrimination from a negative angle. *The International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights*, to which China has acceded, stipulates that “the rights enunciated in the present Covenant will be exercised without discrimination of any kind as to race, color, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national or social origin, property, birth or other status” (Accessed 2 Aug, 2022). For example, it ensures remuneration which provides all workers, as a minimum, with fair wages and equal remuneration for work of equal value without distinction of any kind, in particular women being guaranteed conditions of work not inferior to those enjoyed by men, with equal pay for equal work as well as a decent living for themselves and their families. Another example is special measures of protection and assistance should be taken on behalf of all children and young persons without any discrimination for reasons of parentage or other conditions. In *the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination*, the term “racial discrimination” shall mean “any distinction, exclusion, restriction or preference based on race, color, descent, or national or ethnic origin which has the purpose or effect of nullifying or impairing the recognition, enjoyment or exercise, on an equal footing, of human rights and fundamental freedoms in the political, economic, social, cultural or any other

field of public life” (Accessed 2 Aug, 2022). According to *The Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women*, States Parties shall undertake to adopt appropriate legislative and other measures, including sanctions where appropriate, prohibiting all discrimination against women; to take all appropriate measures to eliminate discrimination against women by any person, organization, or enterprise. States parties are therefore obliged to work toward the modification of social and cultural patterns of individual conduct in order to eliminate prejudices and customary and all other practices which are based on the idea of the inferiority or the superiority of either of the sexes or on stereotyped roles for men and women.

In addition to certain important international conventions, *the Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* stipulates: “All citizens of the People’s Republic of China who have reached the age of 18 have the right to vote and stand for election, regardless of ethnic status, race, sex, occupation, family background, religious belief, education, property status or length of residence” (Accessed 2 Aug, 2022). The Law of the People’s Republic of China on the Protection of Women’s Rights and Interests stipulates that the state shall guarantee that women enjoy the equal right, with men, to work. With the exception of the special types of work or post unsuitable to women, no unit may, in employing staff and workers, refuse to employ women by reason of sex or raise the employment standards for women.

There is another special form of discrimination, which is egalitarianism. The essence of egalitarianism is “trimming the high to level the low,” and its purpose is to achieve similarity and consistency in people’s final results. Unlike general discrimination, egalitarianism is, in a sense, a form of discrimination by the majority against a minority who have stronger abilities and make greater contributions. Although unequal pay for equal work is wrong, it is unreasonable for different work to receive equal pay. If a minority makes greater contributions than the majority, but they get the same pay as others, then a situation of “equal pay for unequal work” arises. In other words, their special contributions are not duly recognized and rewarded, and their reasonable interests and rights are not duly protected. In fact, the members of this minority are deprived by the majority, thus violating the principle of social justice that “equals are treated equally and people who are not equal are treated unequally.” Clearly this is also a form of discrimination.

For the people who engage in discrimination, it is an important way to satisfy their own special purposes. “But the unjust man seeks dominion for the sake of aims such as wealth and security which when appropriately limited are legitimate. The bad man desires arbitrary power because he enjoys the sense of mastery which its exercise gives to him and he seeks social acclaim. He too has an inordinate desire for things which when duly circumscribed are good, namely, the esteem of others and the sense of self-command. It is his way of satisfying these ambitions that makes him dangerous” (Rawls 1999). In a society with limited resources for survival and development, people who engage in discrimination can, through this activity, form a pattern of resource allocation

that is beneficial to their own vital interests, and then solidify that pattern. Through discrimination, people who engage in discrimination can deprive other people of their sense of “equality,” reflect their own superiority, and produce their own authority, especially an absolute authority over the vulnerable groups who are discriminated against. Further, through discrimination, people who engage in discrimination can establish their own values in a strong position as the mainstream values of the whole society and exclude and restrict the non-mainstream values of other people, in order to achieve exclusive respect for their own values.

Discrimination deviates from and directly undermines the basic rules of social justice. Discrimination undermines the fundamental right of every member of society to equality and freedom and undermines the basic human dignity of specific members of society. Discrimination deviates from the rule of equal opportunity by inappropriately providing more opportunities for some members of society, while depriving other people, especially members of disadvantaged groups, of their own opportunities, and it restricts or even blocks those people’s prospects of development. Discrimination undermines the rule of distribution according to contribution by implementing the practice of unequal pay for equal work. That is, some people get less for working more while others get more for working less. Discrimination also ignores the vital importance of social cooperation and social integration, undermines the important rule of social transfers, and does not even consider the issue of sharing the fruits of social development among all members of society.

As a result, discrimination will inevitably produce serious negative social effects. This is principally manifested in the following areas:

First, discrimination hinders normal social differentiation. With the advancement of modernization and the market economy, the degree of social differentiation deepens: the social structure becomes more complex, the degree of social specialization improves, there are more differentiated elements of society, and social groups (including professional groups) become more diversified. At the same time, there exists a condition of organic connection among the various groups in all aspects of society. However, discrimination makes social groups artificially more rigid. That is, barriers of “no entry” or “restricted entry” block social mobility to varying degrees, thus hindering the normal process of social differentiation.

Second, discrimination weakens the degree of integration of society. Discrimination not only deprives some people of their opportunities for development but also puts them in a weak state and directly harms their dignity. Therefore, these people tend to develop a sense of separation and distrust toward society, and even, in extreme cases, form an antagonistic and anti-social mood. In addition, discrimination also produces very serious consequences for the descendants of people who are discriminated against, limiting their opportunities for development, hurting their self-esteem, and forming an attitude in them that makes it difficult to identify with the society from an early age, in which they lack trust in the society and others and lack the spirit of



cooperation. All of these undoubtedly reduce the degree of social integration. It is worth noting that, if discrimination can be tolerated and accepted by most people within a certain range and to a certain extent in a traditional society, then in a modern society, where the awareness of individuality and equality is generally enhanced, people are increasingly intolerant of discrimination and have a strongly contradictory behavior orientation. The exclusion and restriction of some social groups will lead to anti-exclusion and anti-restriction activities in these social groups. In such conditions, a society full of discrimination will necessarily be a society that is full of turbulent factors. For example, In American society, “the environments of the black and white population are so separate that the two races seem to live in two different countries, unable to cross borders, known to each other mainly through stereotypes created by the communications media. Because of the divisive effects of discrimination, 23 million people are unable to share fully in the life of the total society; and the society becomes more divided as the rest of the people try to maintain barriers” (Scarpitti 1974).

Third, discrimination hinders the development of human resources. For the driving force of social development, it is essential actively and maximally to develop human resources. However, the discrimination faced by some people means that those who are suitable for certain positions will be excluded, and some people who are not that suitable will take up these positions, so work in some departments will be inefficient, which is a waste of human resources. Furthermore, discrimination will dampen the enthusiasm of people who are discriminated against at work and, consequently, their potential will be reduced. Thus, discrimination undoubtedly plays an obstructive role in the development of human resources.

Fourth, discrimination reduces the quality of development of the whole society. There is an important law in the process of modernization, that is, with the advancement of social and economic development, the quality of social development is increasingly valued by members of society. With the substantial increase of social wealth, the public resources that are shared by members of society are also growing. From the beginning, this set of public resources should be used to improve the development and living standards of all members of society, so that all members of society can share in the fruits of social development, thus improving the quality of the whole society. However, discrimination makes the distribution of social wealth unreasonable, and the gap between the rich and the poor in society continues to widen, which reduces the quality of social development. When a society contains high levels of discrimination and the superiority and affluence of some people is based on the deprivation of others, then, on a general level, the development of that society has lost its basic meaning, and such a society cannot be healthy, but will instead be a morbid one. Accordingly, its quality of development must be relatively low.

In short, a society with high levels of discrimination can only be a morbid society, not a healthy one. It can only be a society without vitality and energy. It can only be a society full of turbulent factors rather than a well-functioning one.

Since discrimination causes enormous negative social effects, a society must eliminate it in order to ensure its safe operations and healthy development. Although it is impossible for a society to eliminate all discriminations completely, a modern and just society should, at the very least, reasonably design institutional arrangements and policies in order to eliminate and prevent formal discrimination—that is, discrimination at the institutional and policy levels—and to eliminate or reduce informal discrimination to the extent possible. In this regard, the state, as the representative of the public interest, has an inescapable responsibility.

## 2 CAUSES OF DISCRIMINATION

The causes of discrimination include social, economic, cultural, political, and cognitive factors, and these are often interrelated. Here, we select several typical causes (which can also be seen as variable factors) for analysis.

First, prejudice. Prejudice “normally implies a preconceived opinion, often an unfavorable one...Such a preconceived and hostile can be applied to people because of their race, religion, ethnic background or other kind of group membership” (Scarpitti 1974). Prejudice is often directly caused by cognitive biases such as the primacy effect, the recency effect, the halo effect, and social stereotypes. The scope and extent of discrimination are inversely related to the degree of rationality in a society, and positively related to the degree of prejudice in a society. Although prejudice is a very important contributing factor to discrimination, it is worth noting that some foreign scholars pay too much attention to this factor, to the extent that they often regard it as the most fundamental one, which inevitably leads to a biased understanding. This is because the cause of discrimination cannot be obtained only by observing cognitive factors. Even prejudice does not necessarily lead to discrimination. For example, if analyzed purely from a cognitive perspective, many rural residents, migrant workers, and poor people are very likely to have this or that prejudice against urban residents, officials, or the rich, but such prejudice will hardly lead to further discrimination. This example clarifies at least two problems. One is that discrimination often occurs when a member of society who is in a strong position and has a sense of superiority displays such an attitude and behavior toward someone in the opposite position, rather than the other way around. The other is that the causes of discrimination cannot be explained only from their cognitive aspects. Powerful social groups who are motivated by their own economic interests, the sense of inequality across the society, and the degree of separation between social groups are also important factors that contribute to discrimination.

Second, the scarcity of social and economic resources and their unfair possession. Economic interests are extremely important in determining a society’s specific situation. In important respects (though not in all respects), people are economic animals, and most people’s behaviors are oriented toward economic interests. In a sense, discrimination is a way for “vested interest groups” to

safeguard their own interests. They may also feel that a certain form of discrimination is unfair, but they will still insist on it in order to protect their interests. Economic interests are the basic driving force for the normal operation and development of society, especially in periods of relatively backwardness. The complexity of the structure of economic interests determines the complexity of social attitudes and behaviors. The condition of backwardness in terms of productivity means that social and economic resources are scarce, and their patterns of ownership and possession are often extremely unreasonable. Essentially, discrimination is an inevitable product of the scarcity of resources. In conditions of resource scarcity (except in primitive societies), the level of social public resources is so small that it is impossible to meet the basic needs of every member of society. In these circumstances, when they are coupled with private ownership, an economic hierarchy will emerge in order to “normalize” and “legitimize” differential structures of resource appropriation. Economic hierarchies then lead to social hierarchies, which in turn lead to differential social attitudes and behaviors, including privileges and forms of discrimination. For example, in accordance with the backwardness of the natural economy, the social structure of feudal society was a pyramid-shaped hierarchy. In this social hierarchy, the higher up the hierarchy a person was, the more privileges they had, and the lower down the hierarchy, the more discrimination they faced. In addition, due to the scarcity of resources, egalitarianism sometimes arose for short periods of time (for example, during peasant revolts) and thus eliminated hierarchy. The problem, however, is that this situation does not last long and, as discussed earlier, egalitarianism generates other kinds of discrimination.

Third, the sense of inequality. Certainly, in traditional Chinese society, discrimination had a major impact on society. Under the feudal autocratic system, the dignity of most members of society was denied. “Despotism’s only thought is disdain for mankind, dehumanized man; and it is a thought superior to many others in that it is also a fact. In the eyes of the despot, men are always debased. They drown before his eyes and on his behalf in the mire of common life from which, like toads, they always rise up again... The principle on which monarchy in general is based is that of man as despised and despicable, of dehumanized man” (Marx and Engels 1956). The idea of the equality of human beings is first and foremost equality in dignity. Thus, in the absence of basic human dignity, there is no sense of equality. The sense of inequality inevitably produces unequal institutional arrangements and unequal behaviors, thus generating various specific discriminatory behaviors, including formal and informal ones. With the advance of modernization and the market economy, the level of civilization is constantly improving. Accordingly, people’s consciousness of individuality is strengthened, their dignity is established and maintained, and their sense of equality is formed. This sense of equality is not only reflected in equal treatment among members of society (that is, the individual’s sense of equality) but also in the social sense of equality and the social protection of equality (that is, the society protects equality in the form of the rules of the system). With the

establishment of the modern sense of equality, although forms of discrimination are unlikely to disappear completely, it is difficult for them to become universal and legitimate social behaviors.

Fourth, the degree of separation in society. (1) With respect to the maintenance of the interests of a particular social system or a particular social group. When the degree of social mobility is relatively low, a high level of homogeneity exists within a given social system or group. Homogeneity at this time often means that group members have the same interests. Therefore, in order to protect their own interests, they exclude other social systems or groups, in order to avoid being “invaded” by others. The basic method for this group to reject other groups is based on the kinship circle and its derivatives. For example, they can distinguish degrees of closeness and distance according to blood relationships, and then determine different attitudes and behaviors accordingly. If they are related by blood, they will be ranked by generation or “seniority,” and then different attitudes and behaviors can be determined accordingly. India’s caste system, China’s clan system, and the traditional British hierarchy are typical examples of this. (2) With respect to the incompatibility of the lifestyles of different social groups. Each social group has its own specific lifestyle, which becomes more fixed due to its relative isolation from the outside world. So, it is difficult for social groups to communicate with each other, to identify or to tolerate others’ different lifestyles. Thus, a social group tends to adopt an exclusive attitude toward the lifestyles of other social groups and form discriminatory behaviors. (3) With respect to low social mobility. Social isolation implies a low degree of social mobility. When a society lacks the necessary channels of mobility, people who are in a disadvantaged position often lack the possibility of improving their situation, and their dissatisfaction will accumulate. On the other hand, social groups who are in a strong position will often adopt explicit forms of discrimination to delineate group boundaries for their own interests and security. Thus, the more closed a society or a social group is, the more likely it is to generate and aggravate forms of discrimination.

Fifth, ethnocentrism. The overall consciousness of a nation is not composed of purely cognitive factors, but of a combination of cognitive factors and certain non-cognitive factors. These cognitive and non-cognitive factors are generally coordinated and unified, and they are in a state of mutual constraint and balance. Cognitive factors are the dominant component in overall national consciousness, and they regulate the specific state of non-cognitive factors such as national feelings and emotions. At the same time, non-cognitive factors such as national feelings and emotions also occupy an important position, and this is the psychological basis for the establishment of national consciousness. However, in certain conditions, the non-cognitive factors in national consciousness will escape the constraints of the cognitive factors and expand, thus developing into a kind of blind and arrogant ethnocentrism. Based on this ethnocentrism, prejudice and exclusionary practices against other nationalities will emerge, and then discriminatory attitudes and behaviors will develop. From a global perspective, ethnic discriminations caused by this process are not

uncommon. Racism is rather similar to ethnocentrism, and it also inevitably leads to discrimination or even severe discrimination. Racism is based on ideas of race, which have two levels: “first, an individual’s biased attitude and discriminatory behavior towards members of a particular race; and second, discriminatory laws and regulations in a society against a particular race” (Zhou 1997). It is worth noting that ethnocentrism and racism are not simply related to specific economic interests but are also inextricably linked to specific values, so ethnic and racial discrimination are even more difficult to eliminate.

### 3 FORMS OF DISCRIMINATION IN CHINA AT PRESENT

During the 30 years from 1949 to 1978 in China, with the popularization of new ideas (such as the simple concept of equality), the reconstruction of the social structure, and the formation of new social fashions, unfair social phenomena such as the discrimination that defined the feudal hierarchy, ethnic discrimination, and gender discrimination were almost wiped out. This was driven by the strong political power and by intense social mobilization. For example, gender discrimination, regarded as the most serious social discrimination and one that had existed for thousands of years, has basically been eliminated, and the actual situation of Chinese women has undergone earth-shaking transformations.

We should also note that in those 30 years, China incorrectly defined the central task of the period as “taking class struggle as the key link,” wrongly implemented the planned economy while rejecting the market economy, and made certain mistakes in major development strategies. Because of this, new forms of discrimination emerged in the country, primarily organized around the political status hierarchy based on political backgrounds, the social status hierarchy based on urban/rural household registration and ownership, the resource distribution system in different life sectors based on egalitarianism, and so on. Accordingly, political discrimination, household registration discrimination, discrimination against particular units of ownership, and discrimination against people with strong abilities and greater contribution appeared. Among these, political discrimination caused the most widespread damage and lasted the longest. A large number of people were discriminated against politically, and their dignity and normal life and work were severely affected.

From 1978, with reform and opening up, and the gradual establishment of the market economic system, Chinese society began a drastic social transformation. During the transition, more forms of discrimination appeared. Compared with previous periods, forms of discrimination in China at present have some very specific characteristics. This is mainly manifested in the following areas:

First, economic discrimination is so severe that it occupies a major position among all kinds of discrimination.

In the 40 years since 1978, with the transformation of the center of the times and the replacement of “taking class struggle as the key link” by “taking economic construction as the center,” large-scale political discrimination has

basically disappeared. During this period, the economic consciousness and impulse of the whole society were strengthened to an unprecedented degree, and the process of secularization advanced rapidly. For a long period before 1978, under the influence of asceticism and absolutist ideology, society neglected people's basic needs, leaving the improvement of their basic living standards far below what it should have been. At comparable prices, the Consumer Price Index, set at 100 in 1952, had only increased to 177 by 1978 (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). Since reform and opening up and the beginning of modernization in 1978, people's consumption levels have greatly improved, and the contents and forms of people's daily lives have also undergone tremendous changes. People pay more attention to their own economic interests, the diversity of their lifestyles, and the continuous improvement of their quality of life. From the perspective of their values, people have oriented themselves toward a pragmatic attitude and away from utopian behavior, paying attention to their immediate interests and the realistic basis and feasibility of their goals. However, due to the long and deep impact of the past, people have shown an excessive impulse rebound after breaking free, overemphasizing consumption, the economic interests of individuals and small groups, and the accumulation of their own wealth. On the whole, the process of secularization at the present stage presents a situation of overcorrection.

The overemphasis of economic interests in the whole society will inevitably lead to the phenomenon of despising the poor and currying favor with the rich. This will then lead to economic discrimination, that is, the adoption of different attitudes and behaviors toward members of society according to the amount of wealth they possess. There is a great deal of this in everyday life. For example, certain beautiful scenic spots are exclusively open to the rich for them to live in. Even some helicopters for first aid are available only to the rich. Economic discrimination also exists in the sphere of compulsory education. A few years ago, some key middle schools in Beijing, such as the No. 2 Middle School, the No. 5 Middle School, and the No. 8 Middle School, charged school-selection fees of 60,000 yuan (\$8772) to 80,000 yuan (\$11,695). Some, like the high school affiliated to Renmin University of China, even charged as high as 100,000 yuan (\$14,620). "At present, money plays an increasingly important role in education in China. Children of high-income families enjoy better education, while children of low-income families receive poor education" (Zhong 2002).

Discrimination is very obvious in the economic life. This is highlighted in the area of market monopolies. Some economic sectors and industries that are closely related to the government and have high profit margins, such as civil aviation, electric power, telecommunications, and so on, often directly monopolize the related markets, manipulate the prices of products and services, and do not allow other economic organizations to compete on an equal footing, thus obtaining abnormally high profits. Another notable phenomenon is that under the influence of absolutist ideology and the planned economic system, society still discriminates against non-state-owned private enterprises. As some

scholars point out, “Under the current system, foreign capital and state-owned enterprises enjoy preferential treatment like ‘super citizens,’ while private enterprises are treated as if they were the oppressed daughter-in-law in old China. Under the guidance of GDP and investment attraction, good investment projects and industrial guidance tend to prefer the so-called Global 500 companies and the 500 biggest companies in China, which creates an unfair “Matthew effect” in the business environment of enterprises” (Wang 2011). For example, “a survey reveals that, in a certain province in China, state-owned enterprises can enter more than 80 industries and foreign enterprises can enter more than 60 industries, accounting for 75%, while private enterprises can only enter some 40 industries (less than 50%). This is obviously unreasonable and does not conform to the principle of national treatment” (Tian 2002). As another example, some scholars conducted an empirical study with a sample of private enterprises listed on the Shanghai and Shenzhen Stock Exchanges from 2003 to 2009. They determined whether these enterprises had political connections by investigating whether the ultimate controllers and executives of these enterprises were current or former state officials, NPC, deputies, or CPPCC members. The results showed that “private enterprises with political connections bear lower interest and financial expenses than those without such connections, and the more backward the level of financial development is, the more obvious is the credit cost effect of political connections” (He 2011).

Second, social discrimination is also obvious.

In a sound modern society, discrimination is rare. This is because such a society not only has a systematic economic policy, but also has a systematic social policy. The economic policy focuses on economic benefits and matters in the field of initial distribution, which embodies the rule of equal opportunity in social justice, while social policy focuses on redistribution, which to a great degree embodies the basic purpose of social justice—that everyone shares and benefits universally—and the social justice rule of social adjustment. Obviously, for a sound modern society, economic and social policies are indispensable, jointly guaranteeing the safe operations and healthy development of that society.

However, in the process of China’s development in the past 40 years, due to an overly utilitarian social orientation and an overemphasis on efficiency, the whole society seems to be suffering from economic hunger and thirst, infected with a kind of economic obsession. Everything takes the economy as the key link, and the economy has become superior to all other fields. It seems that as long as economic efficiency is improved, all other problems can be solved. For some time, the issue of economic efficiency has been the yardstick and the criterion of evaluation for everything. In a society driven by immediate economic benefits and direct economic interests, it becomes very difficult to formulate systematic social policies and to implement them. In a sense, at present China lacks required social policies, so it has neither a social justice orientation nor practical guarantees for the survival and development of vulnerable social groups. Under such circumstances, a large number of social forms of discrimination will inevitably emerge.

It cannot be denied that, at present, social discrimination is a common phenomenon in Chinese society. Meanwhile, gender discrimination has begun to resurface. Women often face various kinds of discrimination in employment and labor protection, and the phenomenon of unequal pay for equal work between men and women occurs frequently. There is a big difference in the area of retirement benefits. The benefits of those who retire from enterprises are far less than those who were employed by government agencies and institutions. And the elderly in rural areas simply have no concept of “retirement.” In particular, serious identity discrimination still occurs in China at this stage, and differential treatment based on urban or rural household registration is still very serious. Because of their official residence registration, rural residents cannot enjoy the same healthcare services and other public services as urban residents, and they have to pay higher daily living expenses than urban residents, such as high electricity bills. Moreover, most rural workers are not covered by the Labor Law of the People’s Republic of China. The incomes of migrant workers in cities are generally much higher than that of rural residents who are still farming in rural areas. However, migrant workers are discriminated against in cities. They are still rural residents in China’s social identity system, they are not recognized by the state as part of an urbanized population, and there is no difference between them and people who still live in the countryside. As a result, they cannot enjoy many kinds of welfare benefits given by the state to urban residents (Wang 1996). The working conditions of migrant workers are relatively poor, and they are often engaged in low-level jobs that are labor intensive, but their wages are low. From the early 1990s to the early twenty-first century, their monthly wages were generally between 400 yuan (\$62) and 500 yuan (\$77) (Lu 2002). Moreover, their basic labor rights and interests are often not guaranteed, and most employers in cities do not pay social insurance fees for migrant workers from rural areas. Their wages are also often in arrears. A survey by the Guangdong Provincial Committee of the Communist Youth League showed that “64.4% of the foreign-funded enterprises and private enterprises where migrant workers are employed delay, deduct, or refuse to pay wages, and some hard-earned money stays in arrears indefinitely” (Sun 2002). In 2006, the National Bureau of Statistics conducted a special survey on the quality of life of urban migrant workers. The results showed that urban migrant workers’ working and living conditions were generally poor. Migrant workers are mostly engaged in manufacturing, construction, and service industries, with long working hours, poor working environments, and low incomes. At the same time, the proportion of migrant workers who sign labor contracts and buy insurance is low: 56% of migrant workers have not signed labor contracts with employers. The participation rates of endowment insurance, medical insurance, unemployment insurance, and industrial injury insurance for migrant workers are only 27%, 26%, 15%, and 33%, respectively (Zhang 2011). Migrant workers are also discriminated against in daily life and in the handling of various documents and education for their children. They are a marginalized social group in the city, and some people even propose setting up a special area for



migrant workers on buses, which is rather similar to certain practices in the worst period of racial discrimination in the United States. To give another example, in order to curb the rapid rise of housing prices, many places have introduced a policy of preventing rural residents from buying houses in cities. This practice may be necessary at a certain stage, but it objectively aggravates the influence of the household registration system and makes it more difficult to move beyond it.

Third, the forms of discrimination are relatively comprehensive.

China is in a period of social transformation, from a traditional society to a modern society, and from the planned economy to the market economy. During this transition, all kinds of discrimination have occurred, involving in such areas as the market, prices, wealth, employment, industry, remuneration, labor conditions, gender, urban/rural identity, unit, age, seniority, education, academic qualification, social security, and the list goes on and on. From the horizontal perspective, discrimination involves economic, cultural, political, social, and other spheres. From a vertical perspective, discrimination in China at present originates not only from a traditional society with a planned economy but also from a modern society with a market economy.

At this stage, both formal and informal forms of discrimination are serious in China. Some laws, rules, and regulations lack relevant content or contain wrong ideas about anti-discrimination. Certain regulations issued by local governments even encourage and advocate discrimination, whether intentionally or unintentionally. For example, in 1996, the Beijing Municipal Labor Bureau issued the No. 2 Notice, which restricted employment of non-Beijing residents in the following industries and positions: management in the financial and insurance industries, salesmen, accountants, tellers, dispatchers, receptionists in star-rated hotels, cashiers, telephone operators, price auditors, taxi drivers, all kinds of ticket sellers, ticket collectors, computer entry clerks, and office secretaries. Further, since 1996, the Beijing Municipal Labor Bureau has updated the list every year. The number of these industries and positions increased from 15 in 1996 to 34 in 1997, 36 in 1998, and 103 in 2000 (Zhong 2002). In fact, most of the industries and jobs that are open to non-Beijing members of the labor force are ones with high levels of labor intensity, low incomes, poor labor protection conditions, and low professional prestige.

Informal forms of discrimination are also very serious. A typical example is the discrimination faced by people from Henan Province in the early twenty-first century. Some media and other publications fabricated false stories that undermined the credibility and the self-esteem of people from Henan, in order to create some “selling points.” This discriminatory practice was so damaging that it greatly damaged the social credibility of Henan people, to the extent that some units explicitly excluded Henan people in their job postings. Discrimination against Henan people is, in the end, a form of economic and identity discrimination. One can easily imagine that if Henan people were as wealthy as Shenzhen people and if Henan was as developed as Shanghai, this kind of discrimination would hardly occur.

Fourth, Chinese people, and especially urban residents, have a low level of tolerance for discrimination.

People's tolerance of discrimination varies across different times. In a traditional society, people generally lack the sense of individuality and equality, so they are therefore able to identify with the discriminatory social system in a submissive or at least resigned manner. The caste system in India is a typical example. The caste system is a discriminatory social system. Its core idea is that people are born with distinctions of nobility and inferiority, purity and dirtiness, and that they will remain that way for their entire lives. Due to the characteristics of this system, each caste becomes an isolated group. Ancient Indian society was built on "the equilibrium created by this mutual exclusion and inherent isolation" (Chen 2000).

Unlike those in traditional societies, people in Chinese society today have a very limited tolerance for discrimination. On the one hand, the long-term planned economy and the idea of egalitarianism have created a relatively deep-rooted sense of "equality" among Chinese people, especially urban residents. Further, urban residents have even formed a relatively superior psychological state on account of their status as "urban residents." Although this is not a healthy idea, it must be admitted that this phenomenon exists. It is this concept of parity that makes Chinese people very sensitive to discrimination in general. In particular, some disadvantaged urban residents (laid-off unemployed workers, for instance) struggle greatly with psychological imbalances when they experience a change from the psychological superiority they have always enjoyed to the discriminatory treatment they now experience. On the other hand, in the 40 years since reform and opening up, as the process of modernization and the market economy advance, Chinese people's sense of equality and of having independent personalities in the modern sense have been rapidly established, so they are bound to oppose and reject discrimination. In short, Chinese people cannot tolerate discrimination for these two reasons. In such circumstances, if society continues to generate forms of discrimination in one way or another, then people in that society will certainly form a variety of dissatisfactions, resistances, and even hatreds, which will potentially lead to factors of social unrest. It is worth noting that if these dissatisfactions and conflicts among the public lack channels of expression and cannot be reasonably resolved along with a significant number of forms of discrimination, the public is likely to take drastic measures to address the problem. If this happens, Chinese society will pay a huge price.

To summarize, then: Discrimination in China at the present stage has had a very negative impact on the safe operations and healthy development of society and will continue to have greater negative impacts. Everyone in society should pay sufficient attention to this.

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# Liberty

The important concept of liberty in the modern sense gradually took shape with the emergence of enlightenment thoughts. With the advancement of modernization and the market economy as well as the arrival of secularization and the mass era, it gradually became the orientation of behavior that is generally recognized by members of society. Liberty is an important concept and a major symbol of modern human civilization, and it is also an important supporting concept for social justice in the modern sense. The basic purpose of social development is to enable every member of society to develop freely and comprehensively. At the same time, liberty has a wide and far-reaching influence on modern society, and it is an important driving force for the development of modern society. Freedom is so important that Marx believes “free conscious activity” is characteristic of the human species (Marx and Engels 1979). He says, “Freedom is so much the essence of man that even its opponents implement it while combating its reality... No man combats freedom; at most he combats the freedom of others. Hence every kind of freedom has always existed, only at one time as a special privilege, at another as a universal right” (Marx and Engels 1956). As Marx states in the Communist Manifesto, in an ideal society, “we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1974).

## I THE DEFINITION, CHARACTERISTICS, AND TYPES OF LIBERTY

Liberty mainly means that, within the scope of reasonable laws, members of society can do what they want without being restricted and forced by others. Locke believes that liberty refers to “a state of perfect freedom to order their actions and dispose of their possessions and persons as they think fit, within the bounds of the law of nature” (Locke 1964). Montesquieu says, “Liberty is the right to do everything that the laws permit” (de Montesquieu 1777).

More specifically, the meaning of liberty can be further refined. In terms of individual behavior, the meanings of freedom are “first, that the individual is not accountable to society for his actions, in so far as these concern the interests of no person but himself... Secondly, that for such actions as are prejudicial to the interests of others, the individual is accountable, and may be subjected either to social or to legal punishment, if society is of opinion that the one or the other is requisite for its protection” (Mill 2001). In terms of basic institutional arrangements, freedom means that “coercion of some by others is reduced to as much as is possible in society” (Hayek 1987). Freedom, equality, and social cooperation constitute the basic conceptual basis of social justice.

Freedom has the following important characteristics:

First, individuality.

The subject of free behavior is the individual, and the individual is the basic starting point of free behavior. It is very important to clarify this issue. In this regard, there is a significant difference between traditional society and modern society. In traditional society, members of society can only be oriented toward God or society as a whole, so freedom could not become a universal behavior of the people. In modern society, with the improvement of the people’s productivity and cognitive level, their sense of autonomy is constantly awakening. In particular, the implementation of the market economy means that every member of society is a natural person competing on equal footing, so individual consciousness is bound to be generally formed and constantly strengthened. Countless individuals with self-awareness constitute modern society. The reason why the state and the collective are very important is that they can protect the basic rights of every individual. It is in this sense that modern society is based on countless individuals with equal rights. In such a society, the former consciousness of “subject” and “people” will inevitably disappear and freedom, as a universal phenomenon, will emerge.

Second, autonomy.

This feature mainly refers to the subjectivity and independence of an individual’s choice of his own behavior. This feature is a logical, further extension of the feature of freedom and individuality. Traditional society is a hierarchical society, in which the majority of people with low status show obvious dependence on the dominant minority and have no right to decide their own behavior. In this sense, Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s generalization is reasonable: “As regards the associates, they collectively take the name of people, and are individually called citizens as being participants in sovereign authority, and subjects as being bound by the laws of the state” (Rousseau 1994). In medieval western society, serfs were highly dependent on their masters, and everything they owned belonged to their masters. They were bought, sold, or transferred by their masters at will, and their descendants had to inherit this identity. In traditional Chinese society, most members of society also showed an obvious personal dependence. They either unconditionally accepted the instructions of the emperor as subjects or unconditionally accepted the instructions of their elders as the younger generation. However, in modern society, as people enhanced

their individual independence consciousness, they have become their own master. “Each is the proper guardian of his own health, whether bodily, or mental and spiritual”(Mill 2001). Because of this, every member of society has the right to decide his own behavior within the scope of the law. “It must be admitted that each person preserves a part of his rights, which is decided by himself and not by others” (de Spinoza 2007).

Third, rationality.

Liberty does not equate to doing whatever you want. Rationality should be an important criterion of freedom. Because the people’s freedom should be restrained, it requires rational guidance. Freedom should be a rational freedom. Rousseau believed that people should not “mistake for liberty an unbridled licence which is the opposite of freedom” (Rousseau 1985). Locke points out: “We are born free, as we are born rational, and the liberty of acting according to our own will, never from compulsion by the will of others, is grounded on the possession of reason” (Locke 1982). It should be noted that in modern society, because people make their behavior choices independently and at will, and their will is diverse, it is necessary to formulate a series of rules to determine people’s behavior boundaries, so as to avoid unnecessary conflicts. The institutionalization of this series of rules system is the legal system. Thus, rational freedom inevitably requires building a society ruled by law.

Fourth, diversity.

Since it is individual-oriented, respects the selectivity of individuals, and emphasizes rationality, the idea of liberty will necessarily respect and accommodate the differences that members of society have formed in accordance with nature. This is very different from the practice of traditional society. In traditional society, emphasis was placed on the uniformity of ideas, behaviors, and lifestyles, and those with non-mainstream ideas were often restricted, forcibly changed, suppressed, or outlawed. Modern society, however, has tolerance for the diverse behaviors and values of its members. Compared to equality, freedom focuses on the recognition that “all men are born different” and, by extension, it focuses on the inclusion of all legitimate differences among members of society. Admittedly, difference is an important characteristic that is inherent in human beings and manifests humanity. As Mill states: “Human beings are not like sheep; and even sheep are not undistinguishably alike. A man cannot get a coat or a pair of boots to fit him unless they are either made to his measure, or he has a whole warehouseful to choose from; and is it easier to fit him with a life than with a coat, or are human beings more like one another in their whole physical and spiritual conformation than in the shape of their feet?”(Mill 2001). If there are no differences in values, wishes, behaviors, and lifestyles among members of society, there will be no social vitality, and a modern society that is harmonious yet different and colorful will not exist. “If the differences are not very important, then freedom is not very important and the idea of individual worth is not very important” (Hayek 1987). In addition, the idea of liberty respects some reasonable differences of individuals in socio-economic aspects. It also means respecting people’s legitimate differences.

Various factors impact an individual's circumstances, for example, their endowments, abilities, social circumstances, living environment, and accessibility to opportunities. Thus, people have different opportunities and varied development prospects. This means that they produce different results and have different levels of wealth, prestige, and status.

Fifth, desirability.

Desirability is a necessary expression of human nature. It is a matter of the personal, private sphere and a matter of autonomous choice, and therefore reflects the proper meaning of the idea of freedom. From the perspective of human nature, the needs, personalities, specific environments, and lifestyles of members of society are very different. Their specific goals, interests, expectations, satisfaction, and measures formed on this basis also vary widely. Moreover, the more modernized and market-oriented the society is, the more the people's natures can be revealed and released, and the greater the differences among them will be. Clearly, it is difficult for people to adapt to a unified arrangement, because it is against human nature and does not conform to historical growth. Free choice of the will may not seem to be a big problem to some, but it can be very important for specific members of society.

The diversity characteristic of freedom emphasizes the tolerance between people from a social point of view, while desirability emphasizes the proper choice of individuals from a personal point of view. Desirability is an important part and measure of freedom; if this point is ignored, freedom cannot be said to be complete and concrete.

From different perspectives, freedom can be roughly divided into the following different types. From the perspective of the fields involved, there are intellectual, economic, political, and social freedoms. From the perspective of being active or not, there are "negative" and "positive" freedoms. "Negative freedom" and "positive freedom" can be respectively generalized into the patterns "freedom from..." and "freedom to do...". According to Isaiah Berlin, "negative freedom" is involved in the answer to the question, "What is the area within which the subject – a person or group of persons – is or should be left to do or be what he is able to do or be, without interference by other persons?" (Berlin 2002). The main significance of "negative freedom" is that "we must preserve a minimum area of personal freedom if we are not to 'degrade or deny our nature.'" "Positive freedom" is involved in the answer to the question "What, or who, is the source of control or interference that can determine someone to do, or be, this rather than that?" (Berlin 2002). The main significance of "positive freedom" is that individuals are able to act depending on themselves and be their own masters. Thirdly, from the perspective of whether freedom is in modern society, there are "the liberty of the ancients" and "the liberty of the moderns." Benjamin Constant explains in his classic works: "Among the ancients the individual, almost always sovereign in public affairs, was a slave in all his private relations... Among the moderns, on the contrary, the individual, independent in his private life, is, even in the freest of states, sovereign only in appearance" (Constant 1988).



In addition to the above classifications of freedom, the author believes that, from the perspective of social transformation, there are also two types of freedom: “disorderly freedom” and “institutionally guaranteed freedom.” From the perspective of time, these two types of freedom are successively connected.

“Disorderly freedom” often appears in the early stage of social transformation. In a period of rapid social transformation, there is often a situation where, with the breakup of the original ideological framework and constraints and the disintegration of the original economic system, the old rule system does not work effectively while the new rule system is not established in time, and a “rule vacuum” appears in society that loses control in some aspects. In such a situation, a large number of members of society obtain obvious “freedom” and “emancipation,” and sometimes the higher the degree of restraint in the past, the higher the degree of emancipation at this time. This is somewhat similar to the situation in Chinese history after many wars have been fought. In the period of social transformation, many people have gained great ideological and economic liberation after lifting the original shackles and forming unprecedented creative vitality, and their energy has been greatly released, thus pushing history forward a big step. Therefore, at the same time, it should be noted that the disorderly “freedom” present at this time, although it played a huge role in promoting historical growth, was not the freedom in a real and modern sense. More importantly, “freedom must not stand by itself as a goal, and must be held in by a suitable set of rules” (De Jasay 1991). Because the whole of society lacks a basic idea that the people all agree with, a complete set of basic systems that can guarantee the basic rights of all members of society, and in a word, a series of new substitutes, the freedom in this period is often characterized by “disorder” and “chaos”—therefore a “disorderly freedom.” This “disorderly freedom” is characterized by unevenness, uncertainty, leaps, instability, and a certain chaos. In other words, the people had varying degrees of self-awareness and freedom of choice, but there was no corresponding system of rules. “Disorderly freedom” has both positive and negative implications. On the positive side, in the state of “disorderly freedom,” members of society can sometimes make effective breakthroughs in important areas, thus promoting socioeconomic development. Moreover, in some areas where there is no competition, the success of some members of society does not harm the interests of others. On the negative side, “disorderly freedom” means that, because society as a whole lacks a basic system that protects the fundamental rights of all members of society, it is inevitable that the law of the jungle will appear when it comes to competition. The freedom of some people (often members of advantaged groups) is premised on harming the freedom of others, and the interests of those people are also premised on harming the interests of others (often members of disadvantaged groups). Moreover, since the basic ideas of modern society have not yet emerged, let alone been generally recognized by most members of society, members of society, although sometimes liberated to a great extent, are faced with the possibility of a significant “return” to the old ideology under the condition of “disorderly freedom.”

“Institutionally guaranteed freedom” often appears in the middle and late stages of social transformation. At this stage, the basic idea in the modern sense has been recognized by most members of society, and a basic system of modern society has been largely established. Under such circumstances, the basic rights of the members of society, including the rights of freedom, can be guaranteed at the institutional level. “Institutionally guaranteed freedom” is stable, regular, and sustainable, and a kind of real freedom. It can promote a large amount of energy release from most members of society, and it can also ensure that they can promote their own interests without harming the interests of other members of society.

## 2 THE FUNCTION OF LIBERTY

For modern society, the important idea of freedom and its behavior orientation is of great significance. This is mainly manifested in the following aspects:

First, freedom plays a vital role in promoting the innovation and development of ideology, science, and technology.

Among all living things, the most important feature of human beings is their thoughts. Although a society may possess types of ideology, science, and technology, it ultimately depends on the material and economic foundation of that society. However, ideology, science, and technology also have a vital influence on the socioeconomic situation as well. They largely determine the imagination and creativity of the human being as well as the civilization and innovation of a society and a country. However, the specific situation of ideology, science, and technology largely depends on freedom of thought. Freedom of thought can provide inexhaustible power and a huge space of development for ideology, science, and technology. “The heart of liberalism is the understanding that progress is not a matter of mechanical contrivance, but of the liberation of living spiritual energy. Good mechanism is that which provides the channels wherein such energy can flow unimpeded, unobstructed by its own exuberance of output, vivifying the social structure, expanding and ennobling the life of mind” (Hobhouse 2009).

Emancipating the mind is a necessary prerequisite for the development of ideology, science, and technology. In a power-oriented society, the influence of power will be extended to the ideological field, emphasizing the absolute dependence of ideas on power and the absolute consistency of ideas. For this reason, all kinds of restrictions are set on the development of the people’s ideas as well as science and technology, thus reducing their vitality. Berlin points out: “Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups that he or she or they are in sole possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be and do – and that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad; and need restraining or suppressing... This makes one certain that there is one goal and one only for one’s nation or church or the whole of humanity, and that it is worth any amount of suffering if only the goal is attained.” What we need to see is that the most

important characteristics of ideology, science, and technology are independence and diversity. Therefore, if a society wants to develop in terms of ideology, science, and technology, it must first emancipate its mind and get rid of blind obedience, immutable ideological superstitions and myths, and all kinds of original ideological frameworks. Only in this way can we provide a huge space for the development of ideology, science, and technology. At the same time, it should be noted that although ideological emancipation is very important, it is not the whole of ideological freedom, but only a necessary prerequisite for it.

Freedom of thought can provide a large number of indispensable references for the development of ideology, science, and technology, which depends on the normal existence of many ideas, and the mutual inspiration and promotion between various ideas, science, and technology. There is a simple reason. Different ideas, concepts, sciences, and technology are summed up and formed by many people in different specific living environments, aiming at the same or different problems and based on different feelings. Members of society have something in common. By learning from others' experience, it is easy to improve one's own ideas, science, and technology or to re-create and form new and valuable ones. Hayek believes: "Most of the advantages of social life, especially in its more advanced forms which we call 'civilization', rest on the fact that the individual benefits from more knowledge than he is aware of. It might be said that civilization begins when the individual in the pursuit of his ends can make use of more knowledge than he has himself acquired and when he can transcend the boundaries of his ignorance by profiting from knowledge he does not himself possess" (Hayek 1987). The freedom of thought will provide a large number of reference systems and experiences for the people's ideological development and science and technology, thus making the entire society's ideology, science, and technology develop by leaps and bounds. The history of human civilization shows that almost all the times when ideas, concepts, and science and technology have developed significantly, the society at that time provided them with a basic environment for freedom of thought. Mill thinks: "That mankind are not infallible; That their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable" (Mill 2001). Hu Shi also believed that the development of philosophy depended on the rise of "heresy", and that autocratic supremacy was an important reason for the demise of ancient Chinese philosophy (Hu 1997).

Freedom of thought can provide numerous and even necessary opportunities of trial and error for the formation of profound and vital thoughts or ideas. From the perspective of the development of ideas, science, and technology, there is a regularity that a profound idea or concept and an important science and technology, especially a vital ideological system, always takes shape after numerous attempts, trials, and errors, through constant revisions and corrections. An important function of freedom of thought is that it can provide a lot of trial-and-error opportunities for the development of ideology, science, and

technology, so that they can be “confirmed” or “falsified.” As Mill says: “The peculiar evil of silencing the expression of an opinion is, that it is robbing the human race; posterity as well as the existing generation; those who dissent from the opinion, still more than those who hold it. If the opinion is right, they are deprived of the opportunity of exchanging error for truth; if wrong, they lose, what is almost as great a benefit, the clearer perception and livelier impression of truth, produced by its collision with error” (Mill 2001). Clearly, without these opportunities provided by a free intellectual environment, many valuable and even significant ideas, science, and technology would not have been developed, and society would have suffered greatly.

Second, freedom will have an extensive and far-reaching impact on the people’s normative, secularized way of life.

Freedom has an important influence on the formation of a realistic and secularized lifestyle that conforms to humanity. Traditional societies that lack freedom and other types of societies often advocate ascetic lifestyles that are not in line with human nature, placing people’s happiness in a religious heaven on the “other side” or in a distant future. “By some process of deliberate self-transformation that enables them to care no longer for any of its values, to remain, isolated and independent, on its edges, no longer vulnerable to its weapons” (Berlin 2002). Modern society is completely different. Freedom emphasizes a realistic and rationalized way of life, the importance of realistic interests, a desirable and normal lifestyle, and a living state of the people. The concept of freedom and basic behavior orientation helps people awaken their individual consciousness, and at the same time it helps people focus on economic interests. Therefore, this creates a general sense of reality that makes people focus on their daily life, the quality of their lives, and the secular lifestyle as a legitimate thing, and accordingly abandons asceticism and over-idealized utopian behavior orientation. Furthermore, with a highly developed economic foundation and widespread advanced knowledge, people are becoming more rationalized, generally aware that they can create an environment suitable for their own survival and development and that their ideals can be fulfilled in the real world, without having to look for them in the “other world” or having a lifestyle prescribed by others (Wu 1999).

Freedom will necessarily lead to the diversity of people’s lifestyles. The wishes, ideas, pursuits, personalities, and preferences of members of society vary widely, so their lifestyles formed on this basis are also very different. The free and tolerant modern society respects their members’ choice of their own lifestyle and even respects and protects all kinds of personal privacy belonging to the members’ lifestyle. In this free and liberal social environment, as long as two necessary conditions are met—that is, not to harm the freedom and interests of others—then most personal behaviors can be tolerated to a great extent. This is a distinctive feature of modern society that is different from traditional society, and it is also the reason why modern society is vital and dynamic. As Mill states: “As it is useful that while mankind are imperfect there should be different opinions, so it is that there should be different experiments of living;

that free scope should be given to varieties of character, short of injury to others; and that the worth of different modes of life should be proved practically, when any one thinks fit to try them... Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress" (Mill 2001).

Freedom has an important influence on cultivating and perfecting one's personality. In a modern society with a market economy, the members have their own independent personalities, which is often manifested as a sound and perfect personality. It should be noted that the people's personality is not an isolated matter, and the personality that is generally possessed by members in a society determines the overall civilization of this society to a certain extent. It is in this sense that personality is one of the important foundations of modern society. "For the common good includes every individual. It is founded on personality, and postulates free scope for the development of personality in each member of the community. This is the foundation not only of equal rights before the law, but also of what is called equality of opportunity" (Hobhouse 2009). In this way, cultivating and perfecting people's personality is also an important aspect of modern social construction. In terms of cultivating and perfecting people's personality, freedom is an indispensable condition. As Wilhelm von Humboldt states, "The true end of Man, or that which is prescribed by the eternal and immutable dictates of reason, and not suggested by vague and transient desires, is the highest and most harmonious development of his powers to a complete and consistent whole. Freedom is the first and indispensable condition which the possibility of such a development presupposes" (von Humboldt 1969). Only in a liberal environment can one's personality develop naturally and healthily without artificial constraints. As the metaphor John Mill used: "human nature is not a machine to be built after a model, and set to do exactly the work prescribed for it, but a tree, which requires to grow and develop itself on all sides, according to the tendency of the inward forces which make it a living thing" (Mill 2001). Clearly, once there is a lack of a free, liberal environment, it is impossible for a person to develop and perfect his personality.

Third, freedom plays an essential role in promoting economic development.

Freedom can help achieve efficient economic development. First, freedom can combine the will and efforts of members of society with their own interests, especially economic interests. Everything people strive for is related to their interests. In real social life, interests, especially economic interests, are crucial for the vast majority of people. An important function of freedom is to break all kinds of artificial restrictions for members of society, regard the pursuit of interests as a legitimate behavior, allow members to pursue their own reasonable interests as independent and equal individuals, freely choose jobs, and start businesses as they wish. This enables people to release their energy into the economy, thus providing a strong impetus for economic development. Second, freedom can play an effective role in resource allocation. With limited

resources, how to rationally allocate resources in economic activities for different purposes is a key issue for a society to consider in the process of economic modernization. One of the important reasons why the planned economy is inefficient and wasteful is that it has not solved this problem. In contrast, the market economy which is compatible with freedom can effectively solve this problem. The market price system can accurately reflect the social supply and demand of commodities, which is helpful for producers to decide their own product types and production scale. Moreover, the principle of profit maximization in the market economy urges producers to try their best to reduce the production cost of their products, so as to enhance their competitiveness. This is the process of the rational allocation of resources (Wu 1993). Third, freedom can combine the pursuit of economic interests by members of society with the rules of peers. True freedom recognizes human independence and equality, which, in a market economy, is embodied in the agreements concluded between people. “The freedom of the sane adult individual... carried with it the right of concluding such agreements as seemed best to suit his own interests, and involved both the right and the duty of determining the lines of his life for himself” (Hobhouse 2009). Through agreements, society can effectively regulate and restrict people’s bad behaviors, thus integrating all kinds of freedom into orderly behaviors. In short, freedom can promote an orderly and efficient economy. Tocqueville points out: “It is certain that despotism ruins men more by preventing them from producing than by taking the fruits of production away from them; it dries up the source of wealth and often respects acquired wealth. Freedom, on the contrary, begets a thousand times more goods than it destroys, and in the nations that know it, the resources of the people always grow more quickly than do taxes” (de Tocqueville 2002). This is true in real life. Historically or realistically, economic efficiency under the condition of more freedom is usually greater than that under the condition of less freedom. For example, the efficiency of a market economy with a high degree of freedom is much higher than that of a planned economy without freedom. Another example is, at the present stage in China, the economic efficiency of private enterprises with a high degree of freedom is also much higher than that of state-owned enterprises with a relatively low degree of freedom.

Freedom can provide a broad innovation space for economic development. In a certain sense, compared with the previous economy, the modern economy is an economy of constant innovation—and economic innovation is inseparable from freedom. Under the condition of the market economy, members of society attach great importance to economic interests, which means that people will easily invest great enthusiasm in obtaining economic interests—and, so far, among all the practitioners in any society, the number of practitioners in the economic field and any related fields is the largest. Great economic enthusiasm and a large number of people, once placed in the space of free creation, will inevitably make the wisdom of wealth creation in the entire society gather and release to the maximum extent. In the environment of free creation, people try their best to carry out various economic innovation activities through

diversified efforts, methods, and ways. For example, various forms of company organization, various modern financial instruments, invention patent protection systems, mortgage consumption modes, social insurance systems, and new labor and capital policies are important innovations of modern economy, and these innovations have played a huge role in promoting the development of modern economy. It is through constant innovation that the modern economy can maintain sustainable development. Some scholars have summarized the economic development of the West, saying that “the underlying source of the West’s ability to attract the lightning of economic revolutions was a unique use of experiment in technology and organization to harness resources to the satisfaction of human wants. The key elements of the system were the wide diffusion of the authority and resources necessary to experiment; an absence of more than rudimentary political and religious restrictions on experiment; and incentives which combined ample rewards for success, defined as the widespread economic use of the results of experiment, with a risk of severe penalties for failing to experiment” (Rosenberg and Birdzell 2008).

Freedom has a significant impact on domestic consumption, an important driving force of the modern economy. When a society is equipped with a modern industrial production system, its capacity is often huge or even surplus. At this point, it is important to have the kind of consumer demand that is available—and what kind of freedom a society has will have a significant impact on the overall consumption of this society. This is because, if a society has a high degree of freedom, that society has a high degree of humanization, and a higher degree of humanization brings various normal lifestyles. Additionally, people in this society have a greater choice and range of options in terms of consumption patterns and needs, which means that this society is more inclined to pursue personalized, diversified lifestyles and development paths. This humanized, personalized, and diversified lifestyle will lead to diversified consumption demands: from the perspective of consumption types, it includes not only demands in material aspects such as food, clothing, housing, and transportation but also demands in cultural aspects such as leisure, tourism, culture, and education. From the perspective of consumption level, it includes both low-level and medium-high levels of demand. More importantly, freedom can create new consumer demand. All these can help place a large number of orders for economic development; in other words, it can effectively stimulate economic development. In contrast, if a society lacks freedom, then the lifestyle of the people in this society must be homogeneous and simple, and the resulting domestic demand for consumption must also be weak. In this regard, the Soviet Union and China during the planned economy era have clearly demonstrated this.

Fourthly, freedom has a vital influence on the formation of a reasonable, just, and dynamic social situation.

Freedom helps members of society form an important motivational orientation in their behavior. Generally speaking, traditional society was hierarchical. In such a society, members achieve different positions not through their own



abilities and efforts but through ascriptive qualities. Parsons explains that “ascription involves treating others in terms of particular qualities or characteristics that define their involvement in some social relationship. Family members, for example, would be treated differently from others simply because of their membership in the family” (Johnson 1981). Modern societies, however, emphasize self-motivation in the people’s behavior, requiring that each social position be obtained through their own abilities and self-motivated efforts. This kind of behavior is inseparable from freedom. Freedom emphasizes the independence and autonomy of the individual, who must be responsible for their own behavior choices. At the same time, the society should recognize their own efforts. The idea of freedom requires that the behaviors oriented towards native endowments should be eliminated, because they “reserve certain offices, certain forms of occupation, and perhaps the right or at least the opportunity of education generally, to people of a certain rank or class. In its more extreme form this is a caste system, and its restrictions are religious or legal as well as social.” The basis provided for free self-motivated behaviors is that “membership of a corporation should not depend on any hereditary qualification, nor be set about with any artificial difficulty of entry, where by the term artificial is meant any difficulty not involved in the nature of the occupation concerned, but designed for purposes of exclusiveness” (Hobhouse 2009). This kind of self-motivated behavior that aims at eliminating privileges of wealth and the associated families is not only fair and reasonable but also “desirable” for most members of society because they can do things as they wish through their own efforts. Therefore, it is relatively easy for them to find a career suitable for exerting their potentials. From the perspective of the specialized division of labor, this practice can fully develop the potential of members of society, thus effectively promoting social progress.

Freedom can effectively promote social mobility. In modern society, the increasingly specialized division of labor and the rational allocation of production factors in the market economy have become an inevitable trend. This requires a fair, smooth, reasonable, and effective flow among members of society and social strata. Compared to traditional societies, mobility (including vertical, horizontal, and structural mobility) in modern societies has substantially increased. “The dominant pattern of mobility in agrarian societies was downward. In industrial societies the volume of upward movement is so much greater that a balance is usually achieved, and, in most cases, the amount of upward movement exceeds the downward” (Lenski 1966). Fair, smooth, reasonable, and effective mobility is a prerequisite for a society to realize the value orientation of equal opportunities, for its members to seek free development, and to improve their own situation. At the same time, the entire society can realize the rational allocation of human resources through mobility, thus enhancing social vitality and improving development efficiency. Social mobility “will objectively promote the development of socialized production and form a virtuous circle in which the changes of economic structure and social structure promote each other. Such a society is known as an open society,” (Lu



2004) and free ideas and a free environment in a modern society with a market economy directly promote social mobility. Free migration, free choice of employment, free entrepreneurship, and openness are the proper meanings of freedom. In a modern society based on the concept and requirements of freedom and openness, man must eliminate all harmful factors that hinder social mobility, such as the separation of household registration status between urban and rural areas, industry monopoly, ownership discrimination, wealth discrimination, gender discrimination, regional market segmentation, and other phenomena that artificially block social mobility, so as to maximize the barrier-free status of social mobility.

Freedom helps form differentiated and just social and economic positions. In modern society, there are differences in the social and economic positions of its members. These differences are in line with the original purpose of freedom and with the requirements of autonomous choice and diverse lifestyles of members of modern society with a market economy. The existence of these differences is inevitable because (1) as the social division of labor becomes specialized, intricate, and complicated, different “career thresholds” require different majors, knowledge, and skills, which means that not any member of society can enter any professional field. (2) Different people have different wishes and abilities. “These differences consist not only in the variation of talents of the same kind (variation in strength and imagination, and so on) but in the variety of talents of different kinds” (Rawls 2001). (3) Since different members of society invest different costs and levels of energy, what they finally achieve will vary. In this sense, “it should authorize the social and economic inequalities necessary, or else highly effective, in running an industrial economy in a modern state. Such inequalities cover the costs of training and education, act as incentives, and the like” (Rawls 2001). (4) Different members of society have different contributions, so the rewards they receive in turn are naturally different. As Rawls said, “particular distributions cannot be judged at all apart from the claims (entitlements) of individuals earned by their effort within the fair system of cooperation from which those distributions result” (Rawls 2001). All these will inevitably lead to different social and economic positions of members of society. The different social and economic positions are not only inevitable but also fair and reasonable because, on the one hand, they conform to the original intention of freedom as mentioned earlier, and on the other hand, these differences are formed on the premise of eliminating various artificial obstacles, including egalitarian obstacles, and are based on the specific abilities and contributions of members of society.

Fifth, freedom plays a vital role in promoting modern political civilization.

Modern political civilization with constitutionalism and democratization at its core is an inevitable historical trend, one in which all countries must be involved. Marx points out: “Democracy is the resolved mystery of all constitutions. Here the constitution not only in itself, according to essence, but according to existence and actuality is returned to its real ground, actual man, the

actual people, and established as its own work. The constitution appears as what it is, the free product of men” (Marx and Engels 1995a).

The conception of freedom in the modern sense has a natural connection with modern political civilization. It is one of the conceptual bases of modern political civilization. Freedom can remove some major obstacles and hidden dangers for advancing modern political civilization.

Freedom also helps eliminate and prevent the influence and rise of feudal absolutism and totalitarianism. The first thing that modern political civilization must end is feudal absolutism. It emphasizes the dictatorship of the minority over the fate of the majority and the exercise of power by will rather than law. In essence, feudal absolutism is anti-humanity, anti-liberty, and anti-equality. Marx states, “Despotism brutality is a necessity and humanity an impossibility. A brutal relationship can only be maintained by means of brutality” (Marx and Engels 1956). There is no limit to the power of an authoritarian ruler, which can extend to any sphere at will and can arbitrarily deprive any member of society of his interests or even his life. “Princes become tyrants, according to medieval writers, when they seize the property or invade the family of their subjects. In political life – but more widely, too – the dominance of goods makes for the dominance of people” (Walzer 1984). Totalitarianism has a similar manifestation. It is a historical reflux that emerged in the early stages of modernization. Modern political civilization, on the other hand, is completely different from absolutism and totalitarianism. Its purpose, based on the concept of freedom, is to eliminate the influence of feudal absolutism and the possibility of totalitarianism, as well as to build a free, equal, and just modern society. The concept of freedom emphasizes that modern society is a people-oriented society based on countless individuals. In such a society, every member is free and equal and has basic equal rights. Such freedom, equality, and basic rights are effectively guaranteed by constitutional governments, democratic systems, and a law-based society.

Freedom helps eliminate another major pitfall in the construction of modern political civilization, the “tyranny of the majority.” The original intent of democracy was to eliminate the authoritarian practice of the dictatorship of the minority over the fate of the majority. However, if it is simply absolutized it will raise another serious problem, the “tyranny of the majority,” which Tocqueville and others first identified in their observations of American democracy. Tocqueville states: “It is of the very essence of democratic governments that the empire of the majority is absolute... Several particular circumstances also tend to render the power of the majority in America not only predominant, but irresistible... There is the seed of tyranny” (de Tocqueville 2002). Hamilton also points out: “Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If a majority be united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will be insecure.” At this time, “anarchy may as truly be said to reign as in a state of nature, where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger” (Accessed Sept 1, 2022). “Tyranny of the majority” deviates from the requirement that freedom should be based on the individual and their

diverse states of existence in society, thus constituting direct and indirect, real and possible damage to the basic rights of every member of society. This phenomenon has, or is likely to have, extremely serious consequences in at least two aspects. On the one hand, it will eventually harm the legitimate interests of most members of society. The reason is simple: if the reasonable rights of the minority are not properly guaranteed, it often means that, in the long run, the reasonable rights of the majority will not have stable boundaries and be protected. Today one minority might be sacrificed, tomorrow another, and the day after that yet another. In the end this increase amounts to a large total number of people. When considered over an even longer timespan, everyone in the majority group could become a member of the minority group. Therefore, an effective protection of the reasonable rights of the minority means that the reasonable rights of all members of society will be protected institutionally, permanently, and fundamentally. On the other hand, its social harm is sometimes unprecedented. Once the minority is opposed to the majority, it means that they are confronted with the entire society. Imagine: when a person's neighbors, former relatives, and friends become supervisors and informers, then this social oppression and psychological repression become almost pervasive, and this person will fall into an extreme "social fear." As Mill says, "When society is itself the tyrant – society collectively over the separate individuals who compose it – its means of tyrannizing are not restricted to the acts which it may do by the hands of its political functionaries... it practices a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself" (Mill 2001). The Jacobin dictatorship during the French Revolution and the various movements of one group of people to punish another during China's "Cultural Revolution" are typical examples of "tyranny of the majority." Clearly, in order to ensure the healthy progress of modern political civilization, it is necessary to emphasize the inviolability of individual rights and the diversification of human existence and development, which is at core of freedom.

Freedom also helps prevent the inappropriate expansion of public power. As a group of public authorities whose mission is to safeguard and promote public interests, it takes on the public characteristics that other groups do not have. At the same time, it has the mandatory capacity granted by the state to implement goals that other groups do not have. Generally speaking, public power, especially administrative power, has an instinct for expansion. "Administrative power is a kind of power, and power means a certain domination and control. It can make others obey their own will, thus influencing and controlling others; this influence and control does not require the prior consent of others. And this gives administrative power an inherent expansiveness" (Hu, 2005). Here, a paradox arises: public power groups, as professional defenders of the public interest, may sometimes take a higher position than the public and harm the public interest in real society. This leads to a very important issue: there must be a clear definition of the boundaries of the activities of public power groups,

in order to prevent the possible expansion of their power to the detriment of the public interest. The boundaries should be defined by policies and laws that strictly limit their activities to the scope of public affairs. Once the boundaries are broken, the public power groups will use the obvious advantages of public power to seriously damage the interests of the public, so as to expand their own interests. If so, it will not only cause a deformity in social and economic structure but also seriously hinder the advancement of modern political civilization. And freedom is an important barrier in preventing this phenomenon, because it emphasizes the indisputable right of every member of society to freedom and the fact that public power should serve all people, not the other way around. Marx points out: “Freedom consists in converting the state from an organ superimposed upon society into one completely subordinate to it; and today, too, the forms of state are more free or less free to the extent that they restrict the ‘freedom of the state’” (Marx and Engels 1995b). It is evident that, based on the idea of freedom and the criterion of protecting the legitimate interests of every member of society, it is possible to develop a series of systems that effectively prevent the expansion of public power.

### 3 THE PREREQUISITES FOR LIBERTY

There are some prerequisites that stipulate the unique boundary of freedom for real and reasonable freedom to exist. The absence of these prerequisites means that freedom lacks a minimum threshold or crosses the proper, reasonable boundary and becomes insufficient, excessive, or deformed in an unreasonable way.

At least three conditions are essential to liberty. In other words, there are at least three basic or minimum thresholds for liberty.

First, a higher level of socioeconomic development and the necessary market economy conditions.

Only in a market economy with high socioeconomic development it is possible for members of society to develop a general sense of liberty. When the level of socioeconomic development is extremely low, a few people of foresight such as some thinkers may have some awareness and ideas of liberty. However, for the majority of society, what is acceptable is often a dehumanized despotism. Although this is inhuman, it is a historical necessity. John Mill points out: “Despotism is a legitimate mode of government in dealing with barbarians, provided the end be their improvement, and the means justified by actually effecting that end. Liberty, as a principle, has no application to any state of things anterior to the time when mankind have become capable of being improved by free and equal discussion” (Mill 2001). Modernization and the market economy have changed this situation. Modernization has enabled man to have a great capacity for creativity, allowing man to begin to develop a real self-consciousness and get rid of their animal instinct, further forming a sense of “liberty.” The history of human development shows that a general sense of

liberty among members of society can only appear in a modern society with a market economy.

Only in a market economy with high socioeconomic development it is possible for members of society to have basic, humanized freedom options. Actually, freedom implies an important premise, which is that there should be multiple options. When a society is in a very backward and extremely poor situation, the people struggle for their basic survival, and their imagination is bound to be limited. The society cannot provide much references and multiple options are non-existent or almost non-existent, so it is impossible for people to have basic options for freedom. For example, in primitive societies, food gatherers were confined to the few miles where hunting activities were carried out; food growers were also confined to their own villages and the surrounding farmlands and pastures (Stavrianos 1982). Living spaces were small, and the people were so dependent on this space that they did not have choices beyond this narrow range; even their imagination of choice was limited. In ancient Chinese society, restricted by socioeconomic development, people were dependent on nature, and they had no other choices but to adapt to a certain form of the autocratic and totalitarian rule that was compatible with nature. As Ray Huang points out, the fine loess soil that is easy to cultivate, the monsoon rain that can bring abundant rainfall, and the Yellow River that sometimes moistens the earth and sometimes floods it are the three major factors that decide China's fate. They directly or indirectly dictate China's agro-bureaucratic management under a strong center (Huang 1997). With the great progress of modern production, the people's basic survival is no longer a problem, and their lifestyles are diversified. As a result, the people have a lot of references and a lot of choices for their lifestyles. At the same time, the market economy has greatly increased the degree of social mobility, and the people's activity space has been greatly expanded, which provides them with greater freedom of choice for various activities.

Only a market economy with high socioeconomic development can provide the necessary conditions for achieving freedom. Achieving freedom requires a certain material basis and the support of modern productive forces. When the development of productive forces is backward, there may be freedom of thought for a few people, but it is impossible for the society as a whole to achieve freedom. "If a man is too poor or too ignorant or too feeble to make use of his legal rights, the liberty that these rights confer upon him is nothing to him... liberty is one thing, and the conditions for it are another" (Berlin 2002). Only a higher level of social economy and market economy can make freedom a reality. Marx points out: "People cannot be liberated as long as they are unable to obtain food and drink, housing and clothing in adequate quality and quantity. 'Liberation' is an historical and not a mental act, and it is brought about by historical conditions, the development of industry, commerce, agriculture, the conditions of intercourse..." (Marx and Engels 1979). When the productivity reaches a certain level—that is, with modern productivity and the market economy—it is possible for most members of society to solve basic

survival problems and to have a basic platform for free choice. At the same time, freedom is actually divided into different stages of development, and these stages are also determined by different levels of modern productivity and market economy. Therefore, it is unrealistic and harmful to discuss “liberty in the complete sense” without discussing the development of modern productive forces and the actual situation of the market economy.

Second, the necessary equality.

The two ideas of liberty and equality are closely related and inseparable. “Liberty, equality, and fraternity” is commonly used as a fixed term. Liberty without equality, just as equality without liberty, is unthinkable. As Pierre Leroux says, “I believe in freedom, because I believe in equality. The reason why I imagine a political society in which everyone is free and gets along like brothers is because I imagine a society ruled by the creed of human equality. In fact, if people cannot get along with each other as equals, how can we declare everyone free?” (Leroux 1988). If there has to be a distinction between the two, it is that equality focuses on the recognition and protection of the basic human species, while liberty focuses on respecting and protecting individual differences (Wu 2000).

The reason why equality is crucial to liberty is that it can provide a basic guarantee for the people’s liberty; that is, it can establish the “greatest common denominator of liberty.” Equality is a fundamental right of every member of society. With this basic right, people can not only obtain what they deserve, but more importantly, they can prevent other members or groups from harming their legitimate interests using freedom as an excuse to undermine their own freedom. It is in this sense that Spencer’s “law of equal freedom” has some truth to it, because “the freedom of each must be bounded by the similar freedom of all” (Spencer 2017). It should be noted that members of society have different abilities, resources, and status. Under such circumstances, if they lack equal protection and are allowed to exercise their free behavior, the freedom possessed by some members will often damage the legitimate interests of others. As a proverb vividly quoted by Berlin in his *Liberty*: “Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep” (Berlin 2002).

Evidently, “everyone should have only as much liberty as justice allows, and no more than that” (Adler 1984). If you go beyond the limits, you will hinder others from seeking freedom and equality. According to Mill, there is nothing wrong with freedom itself, “so long as we do not attempt to deprive others of theirs, or impede their efforts to obtain it” (Mill 2001). However, once the boundary of equality is broken, extreme liberals only act according to their own wishes and impulses of interests regardless of others, which will inevitably damage the freedom and equality of others and encroach on their reasonable interests. For example, “there are libertarians, who not only place the highest value on liberty but also seek to maximize it at the expense of equality. They not only want an unlimited amount of freedom, but they are also willing to try to achieve it even if achieving it results in an irremediable inequality of conditions, under which some portion of a society, usually a majority, suffer serious

deprivations” (Adler 1984). If a society lacks a system of rules, and if not a few but many (and these people hold a strong position in society) want absolute freedom, then it will cause a serious social negative effect—that is, the strong become stronger and the weak become weaker. As a result, social barriers, exclusion, conflicts, and even riots may be inevitable.

Third, necessary social cooperation.

Social cooperation is essential for every individual person. Social cooperation is a necessary condition for freedom. Although the social community is composed of countless individual persons who are the basic units of social composition, it is necessary to see that the objective need for professionalization and specialized division of labor in society, the need to integrate members of society into common social life, the need for members of society to jointly cope with social risks, and the need for the comprehensive development of individual persons themselves make it necessary for individual persons to survive and develop through the basic form of social community and development. The individual person cannot leave society as a whole, and therefore social cooperation is necessary for each member of society. Their “multifaceted” needs can only be realized through social cooperation, and the resistance of the members of society to various risk factors can only be realized through the social community. “Only in community with others has each individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions; only in the community, therefore, is personal freedom possible” (Marx and Engels 1995c). Society has a common good that is essential for each individual and that can be shared by all, but it cannot be equated with individual interests. “The common good to which each man’s rights are subordinate is a good in which each man has a share. This share consists in realizing his capacities of feeling, of loving, of mental and physical energy, and in realizing these he plays his part in the social life, or, in Green’s phrase, he finds his own good in the common good” (Hobhouse 2009). Because of this, each individual must also have certain obligations and responsibilities toward their society. *The Universal Declaration of Human Rights*, adopted and promulgated by the United Nations General Assembly, states that “everyone has duties to the community in which alone the free and full development of his personality is possible.”

As you can see, there is a necessary condition for freedom, which is that the necessary social cooperation and reasonable public interest cannot be compromised. Otherwise, in the long run, it will damage the space for the development of freedom for each individual.

Once the necessary condition of social cooperation is lost, freedom becomes a polarized act of individual liberty and causes negative social effects. This is very detrimental both to society as a whole and to each individual member of society. Polarized individual freedom only emphasizes the rights of the individual and the supremacy of the individual over the social community, but ignores the obligations and responsibilities of the individual to its social community; it emphasizes the protection and convenience that the social community should provide to the individual, but ignores the public interests that are

related to the personal interests of every member of the society and ignores the contribution that he or she must make to the social community. Once the extremist concept of individual freedom becomes not an isolated but a widespread phenomenon, it will inevitably undermine the sense of identity and belonging of the members of society to the community, reduce the degree of social integration and social solidarity, and weaken the vitality of the society, all of which will have a harmful negative impact on the safe operation and healthy development of the society. It should also be seen that all members of society live in a social environment of mutual cooperation, so an environment of unfavorable cooperation in society as a whole will eventually have a harmful effect on the normal survival and development of every member of society. The greater the prevalence of polarized individual liberal behavior, the more serious its negative effects will be.

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# Equality

Equality, in the modern, just, and reasonable sense, is entirely different from egalitarianism and populism. It is a concept that complements freedom. Freedom, equality, and social cooperation constitute the basic conceptual bases of social justice. With the advancement of modernization and the market economy, and the popularity of the people-oriented concept, equality has become an important goal that members of society pursue. Equality also increasingly determines people's behavior. It plays an irreplaceable role in modern society. It should be noted that the concept of equality, the idea of people's urgent need for equality/dignity, and the intuitive appearance of equality are relatively independent ideologies, and they sometimes lead to ambiguous understandings. Furthermore, these ambiguities could cross the reasonable and necessary boundaries of equality itself, and lead to people taking equality and deviating from what it was originally meant to mean. It then, in a sense, risks becoming somewhat detrimental to people's freedoms and social justice, as well as to the healthy development and safe operations of society. Because of this, it is necessary to clarify the basic meaning, boundaries, and characteristics of equality, so that equality and social justice can be effectively understood and pursued in the correct way.

## I THE BASIC MEANING OF EQUALITY

Equality is an essential—but not unique—concept and a basic value in modern society. It implies the universal expectation that members of society should have the same basic rights, that their basic dignity should be protected equally, and that they should be provided with an equal platform that allows them to fit into that society and seek development. Hobbes states that “every man acknowledge another for his equal by nature,” and it is necessary “for man's life, to retain some; as right to govern their own bodies; enjoy air, water, motion, ways to go from place to place; and all things else, without which a

man cannot live, or not live well” (Hobbes 1998). Locke also believes that “there being nothing more evident, than that creatures of the same species and rank promiscuously born to all the same advantages of Nature, and the use of the same faculties, should also be equal one amongst another without subordination or subjection, unless the lord and master of them all, should by any manifest declaration of his will set on above another, and confer on him by an evident and clear appointment an undoubted right to dominion and sovereignty” (Locke 1982). Paine further asserts that there should be an equal relationship between generations. “The illuminating and divine principle of the equal rights of man (for it has its origin from the Maker of man) relates, not only to the living individuals, but to generations of men succeeding each other. Every generation is equal in rights to generations which preceded it, by the same rule that every individual is born equal in rights with his contemporary” (Paine 1981).

This idea and basic value orientation of equality directly determines how institutions are arranged in modern society. In turn, these institutions then determine how specific interests, rights, obligations, responsibilities, and risks are distributed to all members of society. Equality, freedom, and social cooperation constitute the conceptual bases of social justice.

Everybody’s contribution in a social community entitles them to equal rights. A community cannot exist nor maintain its dignity without individuals making contributions and having a sense of dignity. Marx points out, “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (Marx and Engels 1995a). People’s basic contributions are indispensable and equal, in terms of how they build a community. Everybody has “prerequisite contributions,” by which they form dignity in their community; accordingly, people possess human dignity. So, “the equality of all human beings is the equality of their dignity as persons ... The truth of the proposition that all human beings are by nature equal is confined to the one respect in which that equality can be truly affirmed; namely, their all being equally human, their having the species-specific properties and especially the differentiating properties that belong to all members of the species” (Adler 1984). It is “human” for people to have their basic contributions affirmed in society and means that people recognize their dignity; this is also how people recognize their basic rights. If people do not enjoy the same basic rights, then they cannot guarantee their “normal” development or survival. They cannot maintain their dignity, and they will find that “equality” loses its practical significance. Engels points out that “the modern demand for equality is something entirely different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common quality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a claim to equal political and social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society” (Marx and Engels 1995b).

Equality is the inevitable product of historical development. What we mean here by “equality” is equality both in the modern sense and in the real sense. This kind of equality will become a reality only when it is universally

recognized and accepted by the public in a modern society and in a market economy.

In traditional society, equality did not exist. Traditional society was based on a natural economy, where productivity was extremely low and producers could only exchange materials in order to play a role in a community. As Marx states, “The less social power the medium of exchange possesses ... the greater must be the power of the community which binds the individuals together” (Marx and Engels 1979a). Therefore, traditional society was an authoritarian and hierarchical society. Normally, members of the proletariat showed an unconditional attitude toward members of the bourgeoisie, and over time, they became accustomed to personal dependence and oppression. It was impossible to realize a universal concept of equality. Even if there was equality, it was only “equality” among the oppressed majority. It is in this sense that Montesquieu’s analogy has some truth to it: “In republican governments, men are all equal; equal they are, also, in despotic governments: in the former, because they are everything; in the latter, because they are nothing” (de Montesquieu 1777).

In a modern society and in a market economy, equality has become an inevitable trend, and it has been widely recognized and accepted in society. Modern productive forces have liberated people from social hierarchies, personal dependence, and oppression. People are more dependent on the economic system ensuring their development and survival. They are no longer limited to a specific small production base or a “blood circle” as they were in the past; they have become “individuals” with independent personalities, autonomy, and subjectivity. Marx believes that “man is only individualized through the process of history ... Exchange itself is a major agent of this individualization. It makes the herd animal superfluous and dissolves it. Once the situation is such, that man as an isolated person has relation only to himself” (Marx and Engels 1979a). The emergence and development of the market economy has meant that equality has been promoted and popularized. The market economy emphasizes equal exchanges between independent individuals who are qualified as “legal persons” (“natural persons”). Marx points out that “commodities are a born leveller and a cynic ... Commodities are things, and therefore without power of resistance against man. If they are wanting in docility he can use force; in other words, he can take possession of them” (Marx 1975). The reciprocal exchange of commodities between people has become a popular way of life in modern society, and this means that the spirit of equality has been popularized throughout society. This trend has broad and profound foundations. However, in short, it is due to the modern economy that equality has become a universal concept and trend. As Tocqueville states: “The gradual development of equality of conditions is therefore a providential fact and it has the principal characteristics of one: it is universal, it is enduring, each day it escapes human power; all events, like all men, serve its development” (de Tocqueville 2002).

Equality increasingly influences society. The scope of the concept is evolving, and there are more and more types of equality. There is no longer just

political equality; there is economic equality, social equality, cultural equality, gender equality, educational equality, intergenerational equality, ethnic equality, racial equality, religious equality, national equality, and equal opportunities. More and more people are being increasingly affected by equality, even within the same field(s). In developed countries, the right to vote has gradually been extended to everyone over the age of 18, without restrictions on property, gender, race, age, or education. Equality has clearly become an essential and integral part of people's daily lives.

## 2 THE MAIN FUNCTION OF EQUALITY

Equality is not only an important symbol of modern civilization; it is a positive influence on modern society. Equality is so important that modern society cannot survive without it.

### 2.1 *Equality Effectively Guarantees Freedom*

Freedom and equality are part of an organic whole, and they are prerequisites for one another. There is no equality without freedom, and there is no freedom without equality. Both concepts grow together and promote one another. They collectively allow people to progress as a civilization, and they facilitate socio-economic development.

With regard to the specific relationship between freedom and equality, freedom is more important than equality; equality is largely subordinate to freedom. If there is no freedom, there is no equality in the modern sense. First, freedom is the end, and equality is the means to achieve freedom. Equality essentially serves freedom. Obviously, freedom is essentially a human trait, and it makes us different from other animals. Marx points out that “free, conscious activity is man's species-character” (Marx and Engels 1979b). Equality guarantees that humans have freedom, and it enables humans to continue realizing freedom. Without equality, the majority of people cannot fully recognize freedom. When freedom is difficult for some people to realize, they lose their most basic dignity in society. If freedom is essentially a human trait, then equality is a matter of human dignity. People are essentially only categorized as humans if they have their basic dignity. Second, the premise of equality is that it allows for the existence of independent individuals. Giovanni Sartori states that “liberty must materialize, in time and in fact, before equality. Liberty comes first, then, on the simple consideration that equality without freedom cannot even be demanded” (Sartori 1987). Third, to a large extent, equality depends on how much certain freedoms are supported. Equality in the modern sense often depends on, or develops, according to specific processes, specific requirements, or according to how much support there is for certain freedoms. Equality can only be realized in a healthy fashion if it doesn't violate the basic attributes of freedom. “Freedom” has some basic attributes. These include individuality, autonomy, rationality, and diversity. If any of these are violated, people's

equality will become distorted, and this will mean that there are a great many hidden dangers in society. “The distribution of rights stresses equality even at the expense of equality and freedom. When people differ in capabilities, interests, and preferences, identical treatment is not equitable treatment, at least by some standards” (Okun 1975). For example, if equality affects people’s individuality and diversity, then equality will inevitably evolve into something harmful such as egalitarianism, or possibly lead to “tyranny” of the majority.

Although freedom is essentially more important than equality, equality effectively guarantees freedom. As a result, freedom, as a concept, is inseparable from equality. Equality can be described as the “greatest common denominator of freedom.” Rousseau believes: “If we seek to define precisely the greatest good of all, the necessary goal of every system of legislation, we shall find that the main objectives are limited to two only: liberty and equality; liberty, because any form of particular subordination means that the body of the state loses some degree of strength; and equality because liberty cannot subsist without it” (Rousseau 1985). It is in this sense that Spencer’s “law of equal freedom” has some truth to it, because “the freedom of each must be bounded by the similar freedom of all” (Spencer 2017). Three implications can be made about this kind of freedom. First, that equality helps to rid the world of autocratic forces and eliminate inequalities and various privileges, so that everyone can realize their basic dignity and have a platform where they can freely develop. Second, that equality helps members of society who are not able to reach the baseline of freedom in society. It should be acknowledged, however, that some natural and social phenomena have been the reason behind some vulnerable communities. Many people in disadvantaged groups have little education; they lack labor skills and have little opportunity to develop. Their circumstances inevitably have a very adverse impact on their basic living conditions and the basic living conditions of their descendants. For these people, it is difficult to realize freedom. Equality is important to these groups because it provides them with necessary social security, a compulsory education, public healthcare, employment opportunities, and other assistive services. They can then survive and develop at a basic level, and realize the baseline of freedom. As a result, freedom is enhanced as a whole across society. Third, equality can effectively prevent a phenomenon whereby the freedom possessed by some impacts on the freedom of others. Equality is a fundamental right to everybody in society. With equality, people can not only obtain what they deserve, but crucially, they can prevent other people or groups of people from harming their legitimate interests and using freedom as an excuse to undermine their own freedoms. It should be noted that, in reality, people have different abilities, resources, and status. If they are not equally protected and are allowed to behave as they freely like, some people will damage the legitimate interests of others. “There are libertarians, who not only place the highest value on liberty but also seek to maximize it at the expense of equality. They not only want an unlimited amount of freedom, but they are also willing to try to achieve it even it achieving it results in an irremediable inequality of conditions, under which some portion

of a society, usually a majority, suffer serious deprivations” (Adler 1984). As a proverb vividly quoted by Berlin in his *Liberty*: “Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep” (Berlin 2002).

## 2.2 *Equality Gives Momentum to Development and Stimulates Social Vitality*

When a society has the equality that goes with freedom, it will develop at a great pace and effectively stimulate its own dynamics.

Equality enables society to fully develop social resources. Since social resources (human resources, cultural resources, etc.) are the most important driving forces for developing society, when they are effectively mobilized, organized, utilized, and developed, there is social development (Wu 1995). However, these resources need to be actively developed in order for there to be real momentum; otherwise they simply offer potential. Different ideas and different social environments mean that there is different momentum behind social resources. If a society lacks equality, people will not cooperate equally or effectively, and it is unlikely that social resources will be fully developed. Only a modern society with a market economy can provide a platform for the vast majority of its members to survive and develop; that is, as long as people’s equality is compatible with their freedoms, and social resources are developed effectively and to the max. There will then be huge momentum for development and social vitality will effectively be stimulated. Having equal and basic rights is a necessary prerequisite for “the masses” in order that they can survive and develop. Since the differences between most people in their potential for survival and development are not that large, if society can provide them with a compulsory education and basic vocational training based on the concept of equality, then they will have basic cultural and vocational abilities, and they will be able to survive and develop. At the same time, people will realize that they are able to effectively cooperate with one another in society, as equality serves as a criterion for interactions. It should be noted that people’s ability to survive, develop, and cooperate happens at a public level and involves the masses; therefore, such momentum involves the large-scale development of social resources. There are large, sustainable results, and these fuel competition in society.

Equality helps to minimize internal frictions in society. It is difficult for different social groups to cooperate effectively in society unless they are able to reach a consensus; however, there may be frictions as a result of people’s completely different behaviors. When groups find it hard to cooperate effectively, the momentum will be consumed or offset by unnecessary frictions in society, as well as disputes and conflicts among different social groups. There will be unprovoked chaos, and this will be all-consuming. Obviously, the more internal frictions there are in society, the less effective the momentum is in that society. Equality can effectively solve these problems, and minimize social frictions. In a society where inequalities prevail, it is difficult for different social



groups to reach a consensus. Rousseau points out: “If you wish to give the state cohesion, bring the limits of wealth and poverty as close together as possible: do not allow either extreme opulence or destitution. The two are inseparable by nature, and both are equally damaging to the common good; one produces the instruments of tyranny, and the other produces the tyrants. It is always between them that public liberty is traded, one buying and the other selling” (Rousseau 1985). It is hard to imagine that if there is a differentiated and unequal socio-economic situation, different social groups will form a consensus on large goals. However, if equality becomes a common socio-economic phenomenon, people will have similar social and economic foundations. It will be easy for different social groups to reach a consensus. Similarly, equal social and economic conditions will allow different social groups to be able to recognize mutual benefits and reciprocity, and they will be able to move together in the same direction. Competitive behavior will even be on an equal playing field, and therefore will be beneficial and cooperative among different groups, rather than vicious, harmful, and useless. For example, if there is equal taxation and social transfer payment policies, the situation will be as follows: rich groups will develop continuously, but the living conditions of vulnerable groups will also improve at the same time. So there will be development among the wealthy, middle-income groups and vulnerable groups all at the same time. In short, the more equality there is in society, the more social cooperation there will be. There will also be fewer internal frictions between different groups, and so more positive energy in society.

Equality can also directly promote economic development. The specific situation of equality has a notable impact on domestic consumption. Generally speaking, domestic consumption is much more of a driving force behind the economic growth compared to export or investment activities. High-income groups have the strongest purchasing power, but their marginal propensity to consume is the lowest of any socio-economic group. The opposite is true of low-income groups. Their marginal propensity to consume is the strongest of any group, but they have the least purchasing power. Middle-income groups have a relatively strong marginal propensity to consume, and relatively strong purchasing power. Ensuring more equality in society means weakening the gap between the rich and the poor, and this leads to a social structure that is dominated by middle-income groups. In turn, this leads to a society with a fair and reasonable consumption structure. This “olive-shaped” social structure is a strong, driving force for domestic consumption. A pyramid-shaped social structure that is dominated by low-income groups would be unfair, and there would be little momentum for domestic consumption under this social structure. It should also be noted that establishing or improving a social security system and basing it on the concept of equality could effectively enhance domestic consumption. Social security systems function as “safety nets” and “stabilizers,” and they have a “crowding out” effect, that is, they can do things like prevent people setting money aside. People can use their social security system to understand important risks in society and the market, and this helps

them feel less worried about their pension, medical care, or being unemployed. They can have relatively stable expectations about what their future will hold, and this prevents them from making savings. Such systems lead to increased real-time consumption, or more advanced consumption habits, for example, taking out a large mortgage (a loan for consumption). In this way, equality, manifested in social security systems, can mean more expansive domestic consumption (Wu 2008).

### 2.3 *Equality Ensures That There Are Safe Operations in Society*

Whether society can operate safely or not depends on many factors, but it is largely down to people's interests. In a modern society with a market economy, people value their interests the most. Disputes, contradictions, and conflicts, which are rooted in inequalities of interests, can be common, long-lasting, and dangerous, thereby affecting how safe society is. The unfair and unequal distribution of commodities that are rooted in people's interests can have a broad, long-lasting, adverse impact on the safe operation of society.

Inequalities will inevitably lead to social insecurity. People feel deprived when they are treated unequally, and that leads to dissatisfaction and resistance in society. "From the unequal distribution of wealth and power arise all the disorders of which nine-tenths of the inhabitants of all civilized countries justly complain. From thence result to them privations, sufferings, humiliations, and slavery" (Buonarroti 1836). Mao Zedong wisely states that where there is oppression, there is resistance. Crucially, if inequalities are so severe that they directly affect the basic survival of some people, especially of too many people and main social groups, then there will be strong resistance. In some developing countries/regions, inequalities inevitably lead to serious social problems, intense social conflicts, social unrest, and social crises. These in turn have a negative impact on the safe operation of society. Society pays a price in terms of how it develops, and in serious cases, the development process is interrupted altogether. There is another phenomenon, whereby the "scope" of disputes and conflicts increases rather than decreases among people, as society becomes more advanced and civilized. In this context, social disputes and conflicts are less intense. But equality remains an important variable that affects the ability of society to function safely.

Obviously, introducing more equality in society can eliminate hidden dangers, such as social instability. Therefore, equality is necessary to ensuring that there are safe operations in society.

## 3 THE MAIN CHARACTERISTICS OF EQUALITY

In the process of the people's pursuit of equality, the idea of equality reveals the following main characteristics:

### 3.1 *Equality Often Contains Too Many Idealized Elements*

Compared to liberty, equality itself and the people's pursuit of it contain many idealized or even passionate elements, and the motivation for it is strong. Tocqueville points out: "But freedom is not the principal and continuous object of their desire; what they love with an eternal love is equality; they dash toward freedom with a rapid impulse and sudden efforts, and if they miss the goal they resign themselves; but nothing can satisfy them without equality, and they would sooner consent to perish than to lose it" (de Tocqueville 2002). Sartori also believes that equality is "the most insatiable of all our ideals. Other strivings can conceivably reach a point of saturation, but there can hardly be an end to the race for equality - among other reasons because the attainment of equality in one respect seemingly generates inequalities in others. If, then, one ideal exists that starts man on an endless race, it is equality" (Sartori 1987).

The reason why equality can contain so many idealized elements is that, for one thing, the term equality has broad implications, which leaves a wide variety of interpretations and room for people with different interests to interpret. It not only refers to fair equality (equality that is compatible with freedom), but also to parity, egalitarianism, populism, and so on, which are disconnected from the concept of freedom. Different members of society can often take what they need for different meanings of equality based on their own specific circumstances, unique requirements, immediate goals, and long-term expectations, and imagine the idea of equality freely. Therefore, the term equality embraces a wide range of ideals and expectations with very different or even conflicting goals. Secondly, the people's pursuit of equality is often divorced from the actual situation in society. To a great extent, the concept of equality is easily disconnected from the institutional design and policy arrangement of the society. When people talk about equality, they do not need to personally build the institutions related to it. More often, they just discuss what "should" be done or just express their resentment against inequality, their understanding of equitable goals, and their pursuit of equitable ideals by criticizing, attacking, and fighting against various inequalities. Accordingly, people tend not to consider feasible things such as "how to do it" and "whether it can be done," which are related to the design and construction of an equal system because they regard it as the business of others, especially of those in power. Because of this, equality carries many idealized elements that are divorced from reality. It has been found that "writers on the subject of equality are eloquent and persuasive in voicing a cahier de doléances when denouncing the evils of inequality. But their arguments become thinner and less convincing as they tackle the question of how the ideal of equality is to be realized" (de Tocqueville 2002).

This characteristic puts equality in a complex situation. A society cannot exist without ideals. Among all kinds of ideals, equality is an essential one. A proper ideal is an inexhaustible driving force in promoting social progress. However, if the ideal of equality is exceeded beyond reasonable limits, it can have a very negative impact on society because, elements that are too idealized

bring uncertainty to the actual forms of equality, which may cause some potential adverse effects or even harm the healthy development and safe operation of society. “The passion to which equality gives birth will therefore be both energetic and general” (de Tocqueville 2002). Many idealized equality goals are realistic and have too many errors. Under such circumstances, if the members who advocate for idealized equality take a dominant position and forcibly turn these goals into reality, then the existing social order will be destroyed; however, at the same time a new social order that can be recognized by the real society and the people cannot be established based on the idealized goals. If so, that society will fall into a state of chaos and disorder.

### 3.2 *Equality Has a Broad and Profound Public Base*

Compared to freedom, equality has a broader and stronger public base. “The charms of equality are felt at all moments, and they are within reach of all; the noblest hearts are not insensitive to them, and the most vulgar souls get their delights from them” (de Tocqueville 2002). Moreover, with the advancement of modernization, this base is likely to expand instead of getting smaller. “As citizens become more equal and alike, the penchant of each to believe blindly a certain man or class diminishes. The disposition to believe the mass is augmented, and more and more it is opinion that leads the world” (de Tocqueville 2002). Obviously, equality is more attractive to people than freedom. Tocqueville feels the same way by saying that “men in all times prefer equality to freedom” (de Tocqueville 2002). Sartori also states, “Yet no sooner does a situation of liberty open the way to the appetite for equality than the ideal of liberty finds itself at a disadvantage, and the appeal of equality proves stronger” (Sartori 1987).

Some scholars have analyzed the reasons for why equality has a public base. According to Tocqueville, the reasons are as follows: First, equality forms the distinctive characteristic of the period they live in. Second, people believe that equality will last forever. Third, the evils that extreme equality can produce become manifest only little by little, while the advantages of equality make themselves felt from now on. Sartori says, “This occurs for two major reasons. First, the idea of equality is more accessible, since equality can be given a tangible meaning (albeit a misleading one), whereas liberty cannot. Second, equality results in providing tangible benefits, material benefits, whereas the benefits of liberty are, as long as they are enjoyed, intangible” (Sartori 1987).

In fact, besides the aforementioned reasons, the following reasons also deserve the people’s attention.

- (1) In normal modern society, most people will value equality. The disadvantaged, such as members of vulnerable groups, rely on an equitable social security system to ensure their basic survival, so they naturally attach great importance to equality. A large number of middle-income people, who fear falling into the low-income rank, also need equality as

a necessary protective barrier. Together, these two groups make up the majority of society's members, and thus form a broad public base for equality.

- (2) Most members of a transitioning society attach great importance to equality. During the period of social transformation, due to an imperfect system and unbalanced development, the gap between the rich and the poor will widen rapidly, and many members of that society will fall into poverty (absolute poverty). Moreover, during such a period, there will be an obvious phenomenon of relative poverty, which means that the relatively poor are also unable to enjoy, or at least fully enjoy, the fruits of social development. The relatively poor are a group of relatively deprived members who have difficulty living up to and developing "social expectations." They "do not enjoy basic standards of diet, living conditions, leisure activities, and amenities which are socially perceived as 'customary' " (Webster 1990), nor do they fully participate in social life and thus cannot receive development opportunities such as education and employment like "normal" citizens. Clearly, both the poor and the relatively poor value equality, and they all hope to change their predicament through equitable policies. In fact, most members of society attach great importance to equality. The reason is simple. Social transformation means that the overall interest structure of the society must be adjusted in all aspects; in other words, the economic and social positions of a large number of people must be reshuffled. People cannot predict the future of the society and their own situations. In this case, most people especially hope to have a social security system that guarantees their basic survival and development—that is, they hope to have the safety net of a social security system.
- (3) It is easier for public management groups and citizens to reach a consensus on equality in modern society. The function of public management groups in modern society is to maintain justice and improve the people's livelihood. Since equality is an essential part of social justice and the people's livelihood, under normal circumstances, public management groups will certainly regard improving equality and the people's livelihood as an important task. Moreover, even from the perspective of winning the people's hearts and consolidating their ruling position, those in power must also emphasize equality. Therefore, under certain conditions, the people and the government will work together to advance the process of equality. The joint efforts are an important aspect that makes the public base of equality more reasonable and legitimate, before it becomes more extensive and profound.

### 3.3 *Equality Requires More and Higher Social Costs*

In general, society pays significantly more for improvements in equality than in freedom. The cost of freedom is relatively low. In a sense, the cost paid by the society involves issuing relevant systems and policies, drawing certain insurmountable boundaries, and setting up relevant protection agencies, and the costs for the coordination of social groups and these public funds are relatively small. Things are different with equality. The cost of social equality often includes not only major institutional measures or policies, but also significant human and material resources and public funds for social security, compulsory education, public health, and housing. These investments can be costly and quite expensive at a given time. Technically, the cost paid by the society for equality also includes the follow-up of supporting measures because equality is complex, as it involves various systems and policies that are often or even forever in conflict with each other. For example, “equality before the law and material equality are therefore not only different but are in conflict with each other; and we can achieve either the one or the other, but not both at the same time. The equality before the law which freedom requires leads to material inequality” (Hayek 1973). It requires a lot of manpower and material resources to carry out the necessary revision and coordination of laws and regulations, in order to match all kinds of equitable policies and minimize the adverse effects caused by conflicts and contradictions. Taking the migrant workers in present China as an example, we can clearly see that the cost of equality is much higher than that of freedom. It is relatively easy for migrant workers to obtain liberty, because it only requires some policies that allow them to move freely and lift the old, unfair restrictions. However, in order for migrant workers to truly enjoy freedom, they must be treated equally, and this requires relevant equitable systems and policies to follow. The cost for these is extremely high because they involve the household registration (hukou) system, labor-capital policy, social security scheme, children’s schooling, and especially housing security.

It is not difficult to understand the reason for why equality requires more and higher social costs. Freedom requires a relatively small cost to society, but a relatively high cost to the individual member of society. For example, when the necessary policies are already in place, the ability of individuals to move and migrate, to be employed, etc., becomes largely a matter of their determination and effort, and they face many risks. In contrast, the cost of equality paid by individuals is relatively small and is limited to actions such as appealing and striving. Equality is primarily a matter that requires the society to pay its cost. Furthermore, there is often a large gap between the expectations of members of society for equality and the ability of that society to satisfy them. The public is often unsatisfied with equality, while their expectations can easily and consistently rise. They will strive to have what they do not have, and they will strive to have more of what they already have. This inevitably leads to a rapid escalation of the social costs of equality.

This third characteristic of equality has a profound impact on society. Equality is an inevitable trend of history, and society should certainly pay the necessary costs for pursuing this important concept. However, it should be noted that equality requires relatively high and continuously increasing social costs, which tends to create a dilemma for a country. On the one hand, the high cost of equality makes a country continuously invest large amounts of public funds, which in turn tends to strain the country's finances. This will crowd out public funds that should be used for developing science and technology, enhancing economic competitiveness, etc., and thus weakens the vitality of society. On the other hand, when a country tries to alleviate the pressure in this area by making necessary cuts in public funds for equality, it will likely cause public discontent and even social unrest, resulting in social instability.

#### 4 TYPES OF DEFORMED EQUALITY AND ITS COMPLICATIONS

In particular, it should be noted that equality has a reasonable boundary, beyond which it will become excessive and unreasonable. The reasonable boundary lies in the recognition and tolerance of people's differences and mutual adaptation alongside freedom. If this boundary is broken, then equality will become excessive and even deformed, which will inevitably damage freedom. "Equality can either be the best complement of freedom or its worst enemy. The relationship between equality and freedom is a love-hate relationship, depending on whether we demand an equality that suits diversity or an equality that sees inequality in every diversity. And, certainly, the more equality is sameness, the more an equality so conceived feeds a distaste for variety, self-assertion and eminence, and thereby, in the final analysis, for freedom" (Sartori 1987). The damage to freedom caused by excessive equality can have serious consequences. It will obliterate social differences, undermine the people's freedom of personality and their property rights, deny the diversity of people's lifestyles, suppress the creativity and vitality of society as a whole, and actually go against the historical trend of modernization and the market economy. More importantly, once equality severely breaks through its reasonable boundary, then the three main features of equality will further expand the possible negative effects of excessive equality, which will in turn make excessive equality deformed and extreme.

Generally speaking, a society, whether it is a traditional or a modern one, is always more or less mixed with elements of excessive equality such as egalitarianism. However, the egalitarian elements do not become mainstream in that society, thus having no influence on its overall situation. However, under the influence of various factors, once excessive equality evolves into an extreme and deformed equality that influences the society, it will cause great damage to the whole society. "There is in fact a manly and legitimate passion for equality that incites men to want all to be strong and esteemed. This passion tends to elevate the small to the rank of the great; but one also encounters a depraved taste for equality in the human heart that brings the weak to want to draw the strong to

their level and that reduces men to preferring equality in servitude to inequality in freedom” (de Tocqueville 2002). In this regard, there are three major types of deformed equality.

First, institutionalized egalitarianism.

Institutionalized egalitarianism is achieved by combining the upper and lower classes with institutional arrangements. Although this is a deformed equality, the entire society is not out of control because there is still a specific order, and the social economy still runs (albeit irregularly) for a relatively long time. China (prior to the reform and opening up), the Soviet Union, and Eastern European countries practiced this type of equality. Among them, China was a more typical case of institutionalized equality, because at that time, China’s planned economy had a broader mass base. Additionally, the bureaucracy and privileges of the Soviet Union and Eastern European countries were much larger than those of China, resulting in fewer elements of absolute equality.

The institutionalized egalitarianism in China before the reform and opening up had three basic features, which are as follows:

- (1) Implementing an all-round monopoly of resources. At that time, the state monopolized all the resources which all members of society depended on for survival, work, life, and development, and every member showed a kind of personal dependence. No one could survive or develop without their work units, organizations, and the country. The people had no freedom and autonomy, so there was almost no possibility for them to choose freely in important aspects of life such as career, migration, and even lifestyle.
- (2) Suppressing thoughts and private property. Freedom of thought was regarded as a hotbed of heresy, so the state’s top priority was to control the ideological sphere by stressing the absolute unification of the whole society in terms of ideas and concepts. All the members’ thoughts must be highly consistent with what the state advocated for; anything different was labeled as heresy, and it was completely suppressed and blocked. This explains why universities and knowledge fields, which take ideological innovation as their duty, were shut down in all previous political movements. At the same time, private property was regarded as the root of all evil, so almost all private economy was banned and a public economy prevailed. By November 1958, some 26,000 people’s communes had been formed out of 740,000 agricultural cooperatives in the country’s rural areas. More than 126.9 million households joined the communes, accounting for 99.1% of the total rural households in China (Zhao 1989). Since then, China continued to upgrade and merge some collective ownership systems, while the individual economy was massively abolished or restricted. By 1978, the number of urban workers was 94.99 million, of which 150,000 were individual (self-employed) workers, producing a ratio of 633:1 (National Bureau of Statistics



1989). The high degree of communalization and the large scope of the system are evident.

- (3) Implementing high-intensity social mobilization. The core of social mobilization is the people's extensive and in-depth participation in social affairs. High-intensity social mobilization was an important feature of Chinese society at that time, which also lasted a long time. More importantly, the social mobilization gradually merged with political movements, with class struggle as the key link. In the 1950s, social mobilization was mostly associated with the content related to modernization. But from the early 1960s, this situation began to change. Social mobilization was mostly connected with political movements with class struggle as the key link, and they affected and induced one another. Social mobilization was abused, often used for ideological reform and the removal of dissidents, so that it almost lost control in the end. Both of them together led to the "Cultural Revolution" movement (Wu et al. 2002). Under the influence of the above-mentioned conditions of the times, China at that time had formed a typical institutionalized egalitarianism.

At the beginning, institutionalized egalitarianism objectively produced certain positive effects. Historically, the institutionalized egalitarianism in China and in the Soviet Union has made great contributions for ending unequal society, establishing a national heavy industry and military system, promoting mass education, women's liberation, and realizing national equality. However, with the passage of time, the harm caused by institutionalized egalitarianism to society increased, and eventually it even became a huge obstacle to social development, thus moving toward the opposite of equality in the truest sense. (1) Egalitarianism caused serious personal attachment and subordination. Under the condition of institutionalized egalitarianism, the state controlled the social and economic resources in an all-round way, so that public rights were expanded almost endlessly. Individuals must be attached to a certain unit or commune, and they did not have the space for self-choice or even the right to move independently. Moreover, when it came to the relationship between the state, the collective, and the individual, there is no doubt that the former had absolute priority over the latter, and the most costly interests of the latter could even be sacrificed for the benefit of the former's least costly interests. (2) A new identity hierarchy was formed. In the Soviet Union two levels were formed, one for the state management cadres and the other for the masses. The former had various privileges. Before China's reform and opening up, a strict household registration system resulted in the classification of individuals into either urban or rural residents. The two unequal identities allowed for different treatment in terms of people's lives and work. According to the political composition and "family background" of the individuals, people were divided into different political series with significant differences in political trust and social status (Wu 2006). (3) The private sphere of members of society was controlled and violated to

varying degrees. Under the condition of institutionalized egalitarianism, people often did not know what they should do, but they always knew what others were not allowed to do. There were no basic rights, privacy, or even the basic dignity as individuals. Even the individual's lifestyle was made uniform and strictly restricted, and the society advocated for asceticism. (4) Egalitarianism inhibited the creative vitality of society. Personal dependence, the new hierarchy, and the disappearance of the private sphere made most members of society lose their hopes in life and development prospects. Society is made up of countless individuals. The loss of hopes and development prospects of most members of society inevitably means the loss of the creative vitality of the whole society. No matter if it was in the Soviet Union, Eastern European countries, or China before the reform and opening up, it is completely consistent that social creativity and economic development efficiency declined, and the people's mental state flagged.

Second, "the tyranny of the majority."

"Tyranny of the majority" means that, when equality goes to the extreme, it is easy to form a situation in which the majority controls the behavior or even the fate of the minority based on the superiority of number rather than the principle of justice. This is divided into two subtypes. One is that some important policies and behaviors are formulated and selected according to the number of people or the opinion of the majority of people when the society is running relatively normally—that is, when there is no disorder in the society. The abuse of public opinion in the process of democratization in some developing countries and today's cyberviolence belong to this subtype. The other is the hasty decision of the majority on the fate of the minority when there is a lack of good social order. The latter is the most typical and has the greatest harm, which should arouse the people's attention and vigilance. It was fully embodied during the French Revolution and China's "Cultural Revolution."

The tyranny of the majority in the period of social disorder is a deformed equality from the bottom up. "Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If the majority are united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will not be guaranteed." Then, "anarchy may as truly be said to reign, as in a state of nature where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger" (Accessed Sept 1, 2022). This deformed equality is spontaneous, irrational, disorderly, and anarchic, and its duration is relatively short, but it causes more damage in a given time and its harm is far-reaching.

In a sense, the "tyranny of the majority" is no less harmful than the "tyranny of the minority." Equality originally has an idealized element and a broad and profound mass base, while deformed equality is more powerful because of strong passion and a strong mass base as a huge supporting force. Tocqueville describes the driving force behind the French Revolution as follows: "One, older and more deeply rooted, was the violent, inextinguishable hatred of inequality. This was ignited and fueled by the sight of inequality itself, and with constant and irresistible force it had long driven the French to seek to destroy, down to the very foundations, whatever remained of the institutions of the

Middle Ages, and once the ground was clear, to build upon it a society in which men would be as similar and conditions as equal as humanity would allow” (de Tocqueville 2002). “The tyranny of the majority” may reach the extreme since people are likely to behave irrationally and cruelly for an extreme ideal goal. “ ‘Through an ocean of blood to the Kingdom of Love’, said Robespierre” (Berlin 2002). Once the tyranny of the majority reaches its extreme, the social control system will fail accordingly, and the majority will take its place. Under such circumstances, there are no rules and laws in the whole society; the society is bound to fall into chaos, and the will of the majority will dominate the whole society. At this time, the will of most people will present random, changeable, and fanatical features. Moreover, the will of the majority is even worse than the autocracy of a minority since the latter at least bears a certain responsibility and is more likely to consider ways to maintain society in the long run—albeit from the perspective of a hereditary monarchy—maintaining social order and never daring to stoke social chaos.

The extreme “tyranny of the majority” will cause great disaster to freedom and even the whole society. Under the extreme “tyranny of the majority” situation, the problem faced by members of society is not whether they can keep their free choices, but whether their basic rights can be guaranteed in the least: personal property can be deprived at any time, and even personal life seems insignificant and may be deprived at any time. Moreover, it seems that the majority decides the fate of the minority, but in fact, everyone is in danger, because the future fate of any one of the majority is uncertain under such a background. Furthermore, the extreme “tyranny of the majority” has plunged the entire society into a state of full-scale civil strife and serious crisis, making it impossible for the economy and society to maintain normal operation, and making the society pay a huge price for it.

Third, “social tyranny.”

Extreme institutionalized egalitarianism and the extreme “tyranny of the majority” may cause the phenomenon of “social tyranny” as Mill has said. “Social tyranny” refers to the social control and oppression of the minority by the majority through human relations, social customs, and public opinion. This is another deformed equality and against which people must remain vigilant.

In the state of “social tyranny,” members of that society appear isolated and helpless: the most basic human relations that they could have relied on are unreliable, and basic groups such as families and relatives have lost their sense of trust and dependence; the lack of law makes it impossible for people to rely on the law for support; people cannot think beyond the scope stipulated by society, let alone think independently, otherwise it will be a dangerous “heresy” rejected by the entire society; people’s behaviors are restricted and monitored in all directions by huge, invisible, and almost all-pervasive social forces, and their spirits are tortured unprecedentedly. Members of society are always faced with various threats, and their lives lack the minimum predictability. “If private areas of life still survive, they do so ... on sufferance, as it were, from the government which at any time and for any reason may control, invade or take them

over” (Sartori 1987). Under such circumstances, for many members of society, it is not only a question of whether an individual has a future and hope, but also a question of fear an individual has to face in the real society. For example, during the Stalin era of the Soviet Union, which lacked legal protection, there were five Great Purges. Among them,

Of the 24 Central Committee members who led the October Revolution, except for two who were killed by reactionaries, seven who died naturally and one who died in a crash, the remaining 14 were treated unfairly or illegally executed. Of the 31 Politburo members from 1919 to 1935, 20 were killed. Of the 21 members of the People’s Committee chaired by Molotov in 1937, only 5 people, including Molotov, survived (one was dismissed), and the rest were all executed, including 4 vice-chairmen. This has made the top leadership of the party and the country feel insecure, resulting in an abnormal atmosphere in which everyone is at risk. (Huang 2003)

“Social tyranny” has caused the most direct damage and even destruction to freedom. People are the sum of social relations, and sociality is one of the most basic characteristics of humanity. Obviously, freedom refers to the freedom of people in the social environment to a large extent, and “social tyranny” directly damages freedom from the level of social environment. This kind of damage is extremely serious. In a certain sense, it is even worse than the damage caused by natural disasters to members of society, because when natural disasters come, people may hide in other places, but in the face of “social tyranny,” people have nowhere to hide. People are social animals, and they cannot go outside a society. As long as they are in the society, the people cannot find a place to hide from “social tyranny.” Similarly, in a certain sense, “social tyranny” is more serious than political oppression. Because it is often a certain group that is oppressed by politics, the members of this group can take care of and comfort each other. However, when members of society face “social tyranny,” the situation is much more serious. Mill says that “it practises a social tyranny more formidable than many kinds of political oppression, since, though not usually upheld by such extreme penalties, it leaves fewer means of escape, penetrating much more deeply into the details of life, and enslaving the soul itself” (Mill 2001). The damage of “social tyranny” to freedom means that it damages the foundation of social vitality. Under such circumstances, it is impossible for the society to maintain normal development.

On the basis of the above analysis, we can demonstrate the following points.

First, we should conform to the historical trend of equality. Equality is a people-oriented requirement and an inevitable trend. Under the conditions of modern society and the market economy, members of society hope to gain the barrier of freedom and the dignity that a person should have through equality. It has irreplaceable positive significance for the development of equality and freedom, the stimulation of social vitality, and the safe operation of society. Therefore, society should actively promote the process of equality. Especially at the critical stage of development, for example, when people’s basic survival and

dignity cannot be guaranteed, the gap between the rich and the poor is too wide, people's basic rights are damaged, and inequality has become a huge obstacle to the overall development, society should pay more attention to and promote equality. Otherwise, social vitality will not be stimulated as it should be, domestic demand will not be effectively boosted, and social security will not be guaranteed.

Second, we should seek fair, reasonable, and appropriate equality. Although freedom and equality are an organic whole, their status and weight in modern society are different. In contrast, freedom is something more essential. Marx put freedom in an extremely important position, thinking that freedom is a "species-character" (Marx and Engels 1979b). It is in this sense that equality is fundamentally subordinate to freedom. At the same time, it should be noted that equality has its own relative independence. In this way, freedom and equality need to develop in a balanced way and adapt to each other's development at a certain stage. Otherwise, both of them have the possibility of "excess." Further, both need the necessary restrictions. One of the important limitations is that everyone needs to take the other's certain development status as the boundary and premise of their own existence and development. In other words, from the perspective of equality, only by taking the necessary development of freedom as the boundary can fair, reasonable, and appropriate equality be formed. Otherwise, due to some characteristics of equality itself such as too many idealized elements, a broad and deep public base, and the need to pay more and higher social costs, it is sometimes easy for equality to cross the necessary boundaries. Once we go beyond the necessary boundary and break away from the foundation of freedom to deliberately pursue formal and idealized equality, then equality will most likely reach the opposite side; that is, it will evolve into "excessive" or even deformed equality, such as "institutionalized egalitarianism," "tyranny of the majority," and "social tyranny", etc., thus causing a harmful influence or even great damage to society.

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# The Evolution of Liberty and Equality in China over the Last 70 Years and Related Questions

Liberty and equality have an enormous and vital influence on almost all important aspects of modern society. Liberty and equality are the foundations for the design and arrangement of basic institutions in a modern society. Their specific conditions affect the free flow and allocation of resources in that society, as well as its economic systems and structures. Liberty and equality affect the creativity and vitality of social development. They also establish the basic structure of modern society, influencing interactions among all social strata. Liberty and equality affect people's livelihoods and their choices of lifestyle. And liberty and equality also directly determine the stability of modern society's operation.

Liberty and equality are so important that they constitute an important perspective through which people can analyze the basic situation, evolution, and characteristics of China's social development. However, this perspective is overlooked by many researchers. By analyzing the development and evolution of freedom and equality, and the trade-offs made between them during the 70 years of the People's Republic of China, as well as how either freedom or equality is overemphasized or undervalued during different historical stages before and after reform and opening up, we can, to a significant degree, reveal the evolution and characteristics of China's social development during those stages, and this can provide many experiences and lessons for its future development.

## 1 LIBERTY AND EQUALITY IN CHINA IN THE 30 YEARS BEFORE REFORM AND OPENING UP

The basic situation of freedom and equality in the 30 years before reform and opening up in China can be summarized thusly: "there was relatively more equality and significantly less freedom." In this context, "relatively more equality" implies two things: first, that the Chinese people enjoyed unprecedented equality compared with previous historical periods, and second, that compared



with the equality in the genuine modern sense, there was a huge gap because the equality that people experienced during this period was at a low level and greatly limited. “Significantly less freedom” means that freedom and equality should be regarded as an organic whole, which are mutually established and promoted. However, during this period, there was an obvious separation of freedom and equality. In other words, the Chinese people lost their freedom to a great degree while, in many respects, gaining equality.

In the 30 years before reform and opening up, due to the influence of historical conditions, equality was overemphasized across society. At the beginning, this overemphasized equality played a decisive role in eliminating inequalities in Chinese society, greatly liberating social productivity and motivating people to start businesses and to work hard. However, due to the neglect of freedom, the overemphasis on equality evolved into an extreme egalitarianism, which was very harmful and had a negative impact on almost all aspects of China’s socio-economic development.

### *1.1 Great Progress in Equality*

In the 30 years before reform and opening up, Chinese society achieved basic but large-scale equality through the planned economic system, the dominance of public ownership models, intense social mobilization, and other effective means, through the state’s comprehensive monopoly of socio-economic resources and its direct implementation of initial distribution and redistribution, and through thorough social transformation (Wu 2006). Equality at that time was mainly manifested in the following aspects:

#### *Elimination of Severe Inequality Between Classes*

After the founding of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, the most important task it accomplished was land reform. The majority of Chinese society, the peasants, were liberated and given an unprecedented degree of equality. In the East, countries or regions where modernization has been successful, such as Japan and Taiwan Province in China, carried out successful land reforms.

For Chinese society, land reform is particularly important. Before 1949, “the relationship of exploitation in China’s rural tenancy system was a feudal one. Capitalist exploitation also existed in China’s rural areas, but its scope was very small” (Wu 1984). Nationally, landlords and rich peasants, who accounted for about 10% of the rural population, owned more than 70% of the land, while the poor and lower-middle peasants, who accounted for 90% of the rural population, owned only 30% of the land (Zhao 1989). This unequal land ownership directly led to the poverty and low status of Chinese peasants. For example, from 1934 to 1935, the average percentage of indebted households among all types of rural households in China was 71% (Yan et al. 1955). Shortly after the founding of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, land reform was launched nationwide. In 1950, the central government promulgated the Agrarian Reform Law, which stipulated that the system of land ownership of

feudal exploitation by the landlord class would be abolished and the system of peasant land ownership would be introduced. By the spring of 1953, land reform was completed throughout the country except in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Taiwan Province. As a result, Chinese peasants were liberated and became masters of the land, realizing the millennial dream of “land to the tiller.” Peasants also gained an unprecedented status of equality in Chinese history.

At the same time, the transformation of capitalist industry and commerce in cities put an end to the miserable situation of Chinese workers: long working hours and high labor intensity, extremely low wages, miserable lives, and harsh working conditions and appalling labor disasters. Workers also gained an equal status, thus becoming the dominant force in society.

### *Women, Who Make Up Half of the Population, Were Liberated*

In the long history of Chinese feudal society, the status of women was extremely low, and their lives were extremely miserable. As Mao Zedong states, “A man in China is usually subjected to the domination of three systems of authority - political authority, family authority and religious authority... As for women, in addition to being dominated by these three systems of authority, they are also dominated by the men (the authority of the husband)” (Mao 1991). Economically, women had no rights of property ownership and inheritance, and they did not even own their dowry. Women were also not allowed to participate in politics. In daily life, they could not have an independent personality because they were obliged to follow the “Three Obediences (in ancient China, a woman was required to obey her father before marriage, her husband during married life, and her sons in widowhood) and the Four Virtues (fidelity, physical charm, propriety in speech, and efficiency in needle work).” What was especially inhumane is that during the Tang and Song Dynasties the practice of foot-binding became prevalent, and most women bound their feet from childhood. In modern China before 1949, many activists advocated women’s liberation, but they failed to combine their movement with the transformation of the entire society, so their influence was relatively limited.

In September 1949, the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) adopted a provisional constitution called the Common Program. It required that the feudal system that subjugated women be abolished, and that women should enjoy equal rights with men in every sphere—political, economic, cultural, educational, and social. The Constitution, the Marriage Law, the Election Law, Inheritance Law, Criminal Law, Civil Law, and many other laws and regulations promulgated by the country have clearly stipulated the protection of women’s rights and interests. More importantly, the liberation of Chinese women is not only reflected in the formal laws, regulations, and rules, but in actual social life and has become a reality.

In the 30 years after 1949, through the formulation and implementation of relevant social policies, Chinese women’s lives underwent earth-shaking changes. This is clear in the following areas, among others:

First, women enjoyed equal legal rights with men. On May 1, 1950, *the Marriage Law of the People's Republic of China* came into force. It abolished feudalistic marriages that were arranged and forced, in which men were superior to women, and in which the interests of children were disregarded. A new democratic marriage system was introduced featuring marriage based on the willingness of the two parties, monogamy, equal rights for men and women, and protection of the legitimate interests of women and children. This has legally guaranteed women's autonomy in marriage and improved their status in the family. The relevant laws and related regulations issued between 1951 and 1954 stipulated that women shall enjoy equal rights with men in politics, culture and education, labor, property, personal rights, and in marriage and the family.

Second, women's cultural and educational situation improved significantly. In 1951, girls in primary schools accounted for 28%; this rose to 45.5% in 1976. In 1950, girls in middle schools accounted for 26.5%, which rose to 40.4% in 1976. In 1949, female students in institutions of higher education accounted for 19.8%, and this rose to 33% in 1976. In 1950, female teachers in colleges and universities accounted for 11%; this rose to 24.7% in 1976 (Women's Research Institute of All-China Women's Federation 1991).

Third, the number of women in employment greatly increased. Economic independence is the foundation for women's ability to improve their social status. In the nearly 30 years after 1949, the number of Chinese women in employment increased rapidly. For example, in 1949, the number of female workers in nationally owned units was 600,000; by 1977, it had increased dramatically to 20.36 million (Social Statistics Department of National Bureau of Statistics 1987).

Fourth, women participated extensively in politics. Women fully participated in the management of the state and social affairs as well as in the activities of people's congresses, political consultative conferences, people's governments, and judicial institutions (Information Office of the State Council 1994).

Fifth, greater importance was attached to women's healthcare. The Chinese government enacted comprehensive labor protection measures for female workers. For example, 85.3% of urban female workers who give birth enjoyed three-month paid maternity leave (Information Office of the State Council 1994). China's maternal and child healthcare institutions developed rapidly. In 1950, there were 2880 maternal and child health hospitals at or above the county level, while by 1976 the number rose to 7952. In 1949, there were 9 maternal and childcare centers or stations; in 1976, there were 2239 (Women's Research Institute of All-China Women's Federation 1991).

The liberation of Chinese women in this period has great historical significance. This was not only the embodiment of real humanism, but also the real actualization of equality and freedom in society, as well as a huge development of China's human resources. This positive influence has continued to this day. For example, in 2000, the rate of participation of Chinese women in economic activities was as high as 72.7%, ranking first among European and Asian countries (United Nations Development Programme 2002). Overall, China's

achievements in women's liberation are far ahead of many other late-developing countries.

### *Equality Was Achieved Among Ethnic Groups*

After the founding of the PRC, the state accomplished a lot in terms of ethnic equality.

Ethnic equality was consolidated in the form of laws. According to *the Common Program of the CPPCC*,

All nationalities within the boundaries of the People's Republic of China are equal. They shall establish unity and mutual aid among themselves, and shall oppose imperialism and their own public enemies, so that the People's Republic of China will become a big fraternal and co-operative family composed of all its nationalities. Greater Nationalism and chauvinism shall be opposed. Acts involving discrimination, oppression and splitting of the unity of the various nationalities shall be prohibited. The People's Government shall assist the masses of the people of all national minorities to develop their political, economic, cultural and educational construction work. (Accessed Aug 1 2022)

Article 3 of the first Constitution of the People's Republic of China promulgated in 1954 also stipulates: "All the nationalities are equal. Discrimination against, or oppression of, any nationality, and acts which undermine the unity of the nationalities are prohibited" (Accessed Aug 1 2022).

Policies for regional ethnic autonomy were implemented. *The Common Program of the CPPCC* stipulates: "Regional autonomy shall be exercised in areas where national minorities are concentrated and various kinds of autonomy organizations of the different nationalities shall be set up according to the size of the respective populations and regions." In 1952, the central government issued *the Program for the Implementation of Regional Ethnic Autonomy*, and *the Constitution of the People's Republic of China* in 1954 further improved the system of regional ethnic autonomy. The system was different from that of the Soviet Union and other countries in that it has Chinese characteristics and acts as an effective basic policy for solving ethnic problems.

Necessary democratic reforms were launched. After 1949, as most ethnic minority people wished, the Chinese government launched democratic reforms in their regions, which were completed in the late 1950s. These reforms abolished the privileges enjoyed by lords, nobles, and tribal chiefs, eliminated the old systems through which some people exploited and oppressed others, so that millions of people who belonged to ethnic minorities were liberated, gained personal freedom, and became masters of the country and their own destiny (Accessed Aug 1 2022).

Specific policies were formulated and implemented to ensure the equal rights of ethnic minorities. In 1951, the central government issued the relevant instructions to abolish the insulting appellations and place names of ethnic minorities (Accessed Aug 1 2022). In 1952, the government decided that all the scattered and mixed ethnic minorities should enjoy the same rights

stipulated in the Common Program as the local Han people, and that no one could discriminate against them (Accessed Aug 1 2022). In addition, the state adopted special policies to ensure that representatives of ethnic minorities had sufficient opportunities to participate in the administration of state affairs.

With these set of powerful policies of equality, China's ethnic minorities achieved unprecedented equality and their economic, political, and livelihood conditions developed significantly.

In economic terms, in 1952, the total industrial and agricultural output value of minority autonomous areas was 5.79 billion yuan; this had risen to 36.77 billion yuan in 1978. In 1952, the grain output was 15.82 million tons, which rose to 31.24 million tons in 1978. In 1952, the output of steel was 0.06 million tons, which rose to 1.285 million tons in 1978. In 1952, the output of raw coal was 1.78 million tons, while in 1978 it was 60.81 million tons. In 1952, the output of crude oil was 52,000 tons; this rose to 5.777 million tons in 1978. In 1952, energy production was 0.8 billion kilowatt-hours, which rose to 17.40 billion kilowatt-hours in 1978. In 1952, the railway mileage was 3787 kilometers, and this rose to 9018 kilometers in 1978. In 1952, the road mileage was 26,000 kilometers, and in 1978 it had risen to 208,000 kilometers (Accessed Aug 1 2022).

In political terms, from the first session of the First National People's Congress (NPC), held in 1954, to the present day, the proportions of deputies of ethnic minorities among the total number of deputies in every NPC have been higher than the proportions of their populations in the nation's total population in the corresponding periods. In addition, in areas where ethnic minorities live in concentrated communities, each of them may have its own deputy or deputies sit in the local people's congresses. Ethnic minorities living in scattered groups may also elect their own deputies to the local people's congresses, and the number of people represented by each of their deputies may be less than the number of people represented by each of the other deputies to such congresses (Accessed Aug 1 2022).

In terms of people's livelihoods, in 1952, there were 3000 ethnic minority students in institutions of higher education, 92,000 students in secondary schools, and 1.474 million in primary schools; by 1978, these numbers had risen to 36,000, 2.526 million, and 7.686 million respectively (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). In the 1950s, 10 colleges for ethnic groups were established (Social Statistics Department of National Bureau of Statistics 1987). In 1952, there were 1176 medical and health institutions in minority areas, with 5711 hospital beds and 18,000 medical technicians. By 1978, these numbers had risen to 23,934, 253,520, and 279,000 respectively. The state established "ethnic region subsidies" in 1955 and the Flexible Ethnic Region Fund in 1964. It also adopted the preferential financial policy of raising the proportion of financial reserve funds of ethnic regions to help minority areas develop their economies and improve local people's livelihoods (Accessed Aug 1 2022). During this period, the state helped 12 ethnic groups, including the Zhuang and the Buyi, to create 16 Latin alphabet writing system. It also helped the

Qiang to create a Latin alphabet writing system, and four other ethnic groups, including the Dai, the Lahu, the Jingpo, and the Yi, to improve their five scripts, and the scripts thus created were approved for formal national implementation (Jin et al. 2009).

From the 1950s to the 1960s, compared with the representative country of the Western camp, the United States, and the representative country of the Eastern camp, the Soviet Union, the policy of ethnic equality in China was a success. In the United States in that period, racial discrimination was rather serious. “The Negro had been pushed into a devious, segregated channel on his way into American life. The urban experience which began to give him his opportunity to be himself had also separated him from other Americans, had stirred his resentment and deepened his sense of indelible racial identity. This inevitably aroused fears and hostilities among his fellow Americans” (Boorstin 2002). In the Soviet Union, “the implementation of a highly centralized political and economic system resulted in serious ‘big nation’ mistakes in dealing with ethnic issues. By virtue of the strong advantages of the Russian Federation, it excluded other republics, arbitrarily deprived others of political power, and weakened the political power of other ethnic groups. Some ethnic groups were even completely excluded from political power” (Yang et al. 2010).

#### *Mass Education Has Been Popularized and Greatly Developed*

Before 1949, education in China was very backward. More than 80% of the country’s population was illiterate, the enrollment rate of school-age children was only about 20%, and workers rarely went to school. Students in schools at all levels nationwide only accounted for 5% of the country’s population. Further, there was a great lack of teaching equipment and the teaching materials that were available were outdated. All this was due to the backward economic base, social structure, and educational concepts that existed at the time (National Bureau of Statistics 1989).

In the 30 years after 1949, the party and the government attached great importance to mass education. As the *Common Program* issued in 1949 points out: “The culture and education of the People’s Republic of China shall be new-democratic - national, scientific and popular. Universal education shall be carried out, secondary and higher education shall be strengthened, technical education shall be stressed, the education of workers during their spare time and that of cadres at their posts shall be strengthened ... All this is to be done in a planned and systematic manner.” The first *Constitution of the People’s Republic of China* states more clearly: “Working people in the People’s Republic of China have the right to education. To guarantee enjoyment of this right, the state establishes and gradually extends the various types of schools and other cultural and educational institutions.”

Based on the guiding ideology described above, China formulated and implemented many policies around mass education, which promoted its rise and development and had a significant impact on China’s society and economy. In the early 1950s, the state adopted the policy of “opening the door to

workers and peasants” and established workers and peasants accelerated secondary schools. In March 1956, China promulgated *the Decision on Eliminating Illiteracy*, requiring all localities to basically eliminate illiteracy within five or seven years, to eliminate illiteracy among government cadres in two to three years, to eliminate illiteracy in about 95% of workers in factories, mines, and enterprises in three or five years, and to eliminate illiteracy among rural and urban residents in five or seven years. That is, to reduce illiteracy by more than 70%. Illiteracy eradication targeted mainly people aged 14 to 50 (Editorial Group of the CPC Education Theory and Practice at Ministry of Education 2001). In China, various types of cultural literacy classes were set up in urban and rural areas, and vocational schools were established. A people’s bursary system was set up in schools above secondary level. In addition, mass education at the time also emphasized the combination of education and production: “In all schools, productive labor must be listed as a formal subject, and every student must participate in labor for a certain period of time as requested” (Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee 1992).

Although the development of mass education in this period occurred at the expense of hindering the normal development of higher education, and there were some problems in its quality and in the ideas that guided it, which sometimes violated the laws of education, on the whole, mass education made remarkable achievements. In 1949, the number of students in secondary schools was 1.268 million, which rose to 59.055 million in 1976. In 1949, there were 24.391 million primary school students, which rose to 150.055 million in 1976 (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). In 1965, China’s primary school enrollment rate was 89%, compared with 73% in the world’s low-income countries and 78% in the middle- and lower-income countries. In 1965, China’s secondary school enrollment rate was 24%, compared with 20% in the world’s low-income countries and 26% in the middle- and lower-income countries (Social Statistics Department of National Bureau of Statistics 1992). In the late 1970s and early 1980s, the illiteracy rate in Chinese cities was 16.4% and that in rural areas was 34.7%. While in India, the illiteracy rate was 34.9% in urban areas and 67.3% in rural areas. The illiteracy rate in Brazil was 16.8% in urban areas and 46.3% in rural areas. The illiteracy rate in Egypt was 39.7% in urban areas and 70.6% in rural areas (International Statistical Information Center of National Bureau of Statistics 1991). Obviously, China’s mass education is at the forefront among late-developing countries, especially among the large countries.

The significance of the rapid development of mass education in China during this period is far-reaching. Not only did it improve the cultural quality of the whole nation, but it also laid a solid foundation for the normal development of higher education in the future, the coordinated development of education in China, and even the all-round development of China’s society and economy today.

*Policies of Social Assistance, Labor Insurance, and Welfare were Formulated and Implemented (Wu 2004)*

After the founding of the People's Republic of China, the country attached great importance to social assistance. In urban areas, the relevant policy was "self-help by production, and mutual assistance by the masses, supplemented by necessary government relief" (Meng and Wang 1986). From 1952 to 1958, a nationwide policy was established to assist workers experiencing hardship with a combination of cash and in-kind assistance. The state also set up many welfare institutions to take care of the elderly, the disabled, and orphans. By the end of 1965, the state had established 819 comprehensive social welfare institutions and specialized welfare centers for children and the mentally ill (Meng and Wang 1986). In rural areas, social assistance policy took the form of collective provision supplemented by necessary state relief.

The labor insurance and welfare policies of this period were principally implemented in cities and towns. The State Council officially promulgated the Regulations of the People's Republic of China on Labor Insurance in 1951, which were then revised and implemented in 1953. This was the first regulatory document on social insurance in China and it was of great importance. About 94% of the employees of state-run, public-private, and private enterprises were entitled to this insurance (Feng et al. 1997). Various labor insurance systems for employees of state organs and institutions were also set up progressively.

## 1.2 *The Great Historical Significance of Equality*

The founding of the People's Republic of China was an earth-shaking change for Chinese society, producing a new atmosphere that was completely different from the previous historical period. "National pride at having achieved revolution and independence was palpable, and there was an uplifting, expectant feeling that China was taking charge of its own destiny, and that the people were united and making common cause in building their country" (Kuhn 2010). The fact that the people—formerly the "laboring masses"—had achieved unprecedented equality had a wide and far-reaching positive impact on Chinese society in the 1950s and early 1960s.

*Society Has Gained an Enormous Cohesive Power and Taken on a New Appearance*

The establishment of China and the reconstruction of society meant the end of China's century-long experience of humiliation, that the working people became the masters of the society, and that the Chinese people recognized and supported the new society. Against this historical background, the main strata have formed a great centripetal force. For peasants, "a more equitable tax burden, reduced rents, and finally land – in addition to leading posts for the most active – did much to convince the peasant masses of the rightness of the Party's cause ... and peasants could now confidently support the new system"



(MacFarquhar and Fairbank 1987). The same is true for the liberated workers. As for intellectuals, they reflected and repented. The attitude of Feng Youlan, a famous scholar at the time, is representative. Reflecting on this history later, he wrote, “After liberation, I also wrote something whose main content was repentance, first of all for those books I wrote in the 1940s.” At that time, Feng Youlan realized that “intellectuals from the old society must undergo ideological transformation to serve the new society. This is because the revolution we have gone through has changed from one social system to another, which is fundamentally different from the change of dynasties in previous Chinese history” (Feng 1985). After reflection and repentance, intellectuals wholeheartedly supported and devoted themselves to the cause of socialist construction. “After 1949, moreover, shared ideological commitment to Marxism and a broad consensus on ambitious industrialization and social transformation further contributed to elite cohesion” (MacFarquhar and Fairbank 1987).

The broadening of social cohesion and the strong centripetal force boosted morale in Chinese society.

#### *Equality Inspired Great Entrepreneurial Enthusiasm*

In the 1950s, as people had just gained equality, they displayed a state of great excitement and even exuberance. It was generally believed that because the people themselves were the masters of society, a happy life could only be created through their own hard work. Because of the high degree of social consensus and the unity and simplicity of the people’s goals, some of the original divisions and centrifugal factors affecting the nation could be weakened to varying degrees. As a result, the entire society was filled with high passion for labor and entrepreneurship. People only valued dedication, not reward. It was a time of idealism. Phrases like “change the world,” “ride the waves,” “create a miracle on earth,” and “man can conquer nature” became buzzwords of the time.

Throughout the historical stage of the 1950s and early 1960s, in the period of socialist construction, the Chinese people devoted themselves sincerely and enthusiastically, but also excessively or even to the point of exhaustion. The overall strength and potential of the society was released and developed to the limit. A large number of entrepreneurs made great sacrifices for this, giving their energy, their physical strength, and even their destiny to the country without any complaint or regret. Figures like the “Iron Man” Wang Jinxi, the model workers Chen Yonggui and Shi Chuanxiang,<sup>1</sup> and so on are typical representatives of this group of people.

<sup>1</sup>Wang Jinxi (王进喜, 1923–1970), a petroleum worker on the Daqing Oilfield in Northeast China, is honored as a national hero for his contributions to the country’s petroleum industry. Chen Yonggui (陈永贵, 1913–1986), a model peasant, who was the driving force behind the developments that turned Dazhai, Xiyang County, Shanxi Province, into a national model for socialist agriculture in 1964. Shi Chuanxiang (时传祥, 1915–1975), a national model worker in the 1950s, who spent 40 years shoveling waste out of public toilets in Beijing.

*This Laid the Initial Material and Economic Foundation of the Republic*

In a sense, the equal status of the Chinese people directly stimulated their unprecedented entrepreneurial enthusiasm, which laid the preliminary material and economic foundation of the Republic.

The initial establishment of the industrial system. Before the founding of the People's Republic of China, China's industry was not only small in scale, but it was also not systematic in structure. In 1947, China's total industrial output value was only 14 billion yuan (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). In 1949, China's major industrial output was very low, even lagging behind India. Raw coal was 32 million tons (India was 32 million tons), crude oil was 120,000 tons (India was 250,000 tons), power generation was 4.3 billion kWh (India was 4.9 billion kWh), steel was 158,000 tons (India was 1.37 million tons), and pig iron was 250,000 tons (India was 1.64 million tons). In 1949, in the total output value of industry and agriculture, China's machinery industry accounted for only 17%, which is far from a complete modern industrial system (Wang 1986). After the arduous and pioneering work of the Chinese people, the industrial system finally took shape. In 1976, China's total industrial output value was 327.8 billion yuan. The output of raw coal was 483 million tons (104 million tons in India), crude oil was 87.16 million tons (8.66 million tons in India), power generation was 203.1 billion kWh (95.6 billion kWh in India), steel was 20.46 million tons (9.31 million tons in India), pig iron was 22.33 million tons (10 million tons in India), and cement was 45.7 million (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). By then, China's set of industrial categories was basically complete, and its industrial system had been basically established. In addition to steel, coal, petroleum, textiles, and other industrial sectors, China also established modern industrial sectors such as machinery manufacturing, petrochemicals, automobiles, aircraft, the nuclear industry, and electronics. The transportation industry also made great progress. In 1949, the operating mileage of China's railways was 21,800 kilometers, which had risen to 46,300 kilometers in 1976. In 1949, China's highway mileage was only 80,700 kilometers, while in 1976 it had risen to 823,400 kilometers (National Bureau of Statistics 1989).

The preliminary foundation of science and technology. Before 1949, the development of China's science and technology had only just begun, and its scale was very small. In the early years of the People's Republic of China, the foundation of science and technology was very weak. In 1952, the number of natural science and technology personnel in units owned by the whole people was only 425,000, and the average number of natural science and technology personnel per 10,000 employees was only 269. In 1957, after several years of rapid development, China's science and technology still hadn't made very obvious improvements. Total expenditure on scientific research was only 523 million yuan, accounting for only 1.7% of fiscal expenditure (National Bureau of Statistics 1989). Further, China was still uninvolved in many important scientific and technological research fields. After nearly 30 years of effort, China's scientific and technological undertakings had made great progress and begun to

take proper shape. By 1978, the number of scientific and technical personnel in units owned by the whole people had reached 4.345 million, and the average number of natural scientific and technical personnel per 10,000 employees was 593.3. In 1976, total expenditure on scientific research was 3.925 billion yuan, accounting for 4.9% of the fiscal expenditure (Science and Technology Statistics Division of National Bureau of Statistics 1990). China had established and developed new scientific and technological fields such as atomic energy, electronics, semiconductors, automation, computing technology, and jet and rocket technology. Successful examples include the development of “two bombs and one satellite,” the first artificial synthesis of bioactive bovine insulin in the world, the launch and recovery of an artificial earth satellite, Chen Jingrun’s Goldbach conjecture, the theory and application of geomechanics developed by Chinese geologists represented by Li Siguang, and so on.

History is characterized by continuity, and it should not be interrupted intentionally. During the period of 1949 to 1976, and especially from 1949 to 1966, China’s modernization made great progress despite many setbacks and the huge costs paid by society. This progress constituted an indispensable stage in the process of modernization and laid an economic foundation for the next stage, also known as reform and opening up (Wu 2002).

### 1.3 *The Limitations of Equality During This Period*

It must be noted that the equality that characterized this period was not formed in a modern society with a market economy, but under the specific historical conditions of class struggle and the system of planned economy, and thus it had great limitations. These limitations are chiefly manifested in the following two areas.

#### *Members of Society Lacked Independence and Autonomy*

In a modern society and a market economy, individuals possess their own relative independence compared to society as whole. As Marx states, “The first premise of all human history is, of course, the existence of living human individuals” (Marx and Engels 1995). Individuals are the most basic component of social community. The conditions of modern society and the market economy mean that individuals are not passive beings; they have a series of equal rights such as their own autonomy and specific interests. However, in traditional society, where lacked the spirit of contract and everything was determined depending on blood ties, society was collectively over the separate individuals.

In Chinese society before reform and opening up, because of the ideological absolutism of the time and the extreme emphasis on the state, organizations, and collectives, individuals did not have independence and autonomy. They were completely subordinate to society and did not exist as individuals. As a result, the individual became insignificant and did not have the basic rights that every member of society should have. Taken to the extreme, this produced the paranoid concepts and behavior advocated during the Cultural Revolution

(1966–1976), such as “the smallest matter of the collective is the biggest thing, and the biggest personal thing is the smallest matter.” In such circumstances, the reasonable interests and basic rights of individuals could be sacrificed by some in the name of the collective anytime and anywhere. More seriously, in a society where a person’s legitimate interests and basic rights are compromised and sacrificed without reason, arbitrarily, and on a regular basis, this situation may extend to the majority of society, creating uncertainty about their future. Therefore, in the long run, equality would lose its real meaning and even cease to exist because the reasonable interests and basic rights of every member of society are not basically guaranteed.

#### *This Kind of Equality Gradually Evolved into Extreme Egalitarianism*

When we analyze how equality evolved in the 30 years before reform and opening up, we find that, in the early and mid-1950s, there were more reasonable components of equality relative to other periods. However, as political movements grew intense, equality was subordinated to the basic theme of the times, seeing class struggle as the key link (though it was an artificial theme). Over time, equality lost its reasonable elements and became distorted, one-sided, and extreme, and eventually evolved into the extreme egalitarianism typical of the “Cultural Revolution” (Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee 1988).

This extreme egalitarianism had the following distinctive features: First, an extreme emphasis on ideology. Egalitarianism gradually came to dominate the ideology of the time. This ideology was completely exclusive, and any idea or viewpoint that differed from it was considered reactionary, or at least unhealthy, and should therefore be removed and eliminated. Thus, extreme egalitarianism became an important theoretical basis for eliminating reasonable differences and combating dissenting forces. Second, institutionalization. At the time, China had a planned economic system. This system directly influenced not only economic interests and social life, but also, to a great extent, the political, cultural, and educational spheres. While extreme egalitarianism was not the only basis of the planned economy system, it certainly was the most important one. In other words, extreme egalitarianism had been institutionalized to a great extent. It became the distributive principle of the whole society as well as the guide for the daily behavior of the members of society.

#### *1.4 The Obvious Lack of Freedom*

If a certain degree of freedom existed in Chinese society in the early 1950s, the situation had changed significantly by the late 1950s. With the escalation of political movements “based on class struggle,” the strengthening of the planned economy, and especially the transformation of equality into extreme egalitarianism, there was no room for freedom to develop or even to survive in China. On the contrary, freedom inevitably became more and more deficient, and this deficiency became more serious as time passed.

*The Lack of Freedom of Thought*

In that period, because of the absoluteness of ideology and the indisputably overwhelming position of ideology in political and social life, all members of society could only follow one thought and one idea, and other forms of thought and ideas, such as those of the capitalist class, feudalism, and revisionism, were considered to be reactionary and heretical forms of thought that should be criticized and eliminated. In order to maintain the “purity” of the political line, the only way to prevent dissident forces from emerging, especially dissident political forces, was to keep freedom of thought and different views and voices at bay. The fact that almost all political movements in the 30 years prior to reform and opening up originated in the ideological and cultural fields shows that the entire society was extremely sensitive to and wary of these fields.

The control and remolding of intellectual organizations naturally became the top priority in previous political movements. Since the main function of intellectual organizations was the development and dissemination of knowledge and ideas, they would inevitably create a diversity of ideas and thoughts, which obviously contradicted the ideological absolutism of the time. Intellectuals were considered unreliable or even dangerous. As Chairman Mao points out, “But the majority still have a long way to go before they can completely replace their bourgeois world outlook with the proletarian world outlook” (Mao 1977). Thus, at that time, society adopted a basic attitude and policy of “organizing, educating, and remoulding” the intellectuals (Wu 2008a).

The main ways to control and remold intellectuals at the time included the following: First, strict control over their ideological activities. This control came both from the supervision of the Party organization in the department involved and from supervision and reporting by colleagues. Second, the elimination of the places required for the free expression of ideas, such as classrooms, publications, newspapers, and so on. To that end, exclusion zones and disciplines were set up to prevent the emergence and spread of possible “heresies.” Third, increasing the cost of freedom of thought and independent thinking. Once a person’s ideas were found to be “deviant,” that is, inconsistent with the current ideological views, he would be punished to different degrees. Punishments included review, warning, criticism and denunciation, expulsion, reeducation through labor and even prison sentences, and so on. In this way, the deviant thinker would pay an unbearable price for his actions. This left a deep impression on him and served as a warning to others. For example, in the “Anti-Rightist Movement” in 1957, hundreds of thousands of intellectuals were labeled as “rightists” and suffered almost all their lives as a result. Not only was the deviant punished, but their relatives would also receive “collateral punishment.” They would be adversely affected in their jobs or when they wanted to join the army or the Party, get promoted, and even choose spouses. Fourth, implementing the uninterrupted ideological transformation of intellectuals. At the time, society actually felt that the intellectuals were a kind of original sinner in the field of thought and that they were unreliable in politics, and thus society felt the need to revolutionize and transform them in

the depths of their souls. This transformation included various ideological reports, review, and criticism sessions, as well as regular visits to rural areas, factories, and “May Seventh Cadre schools” (labor camps) for hard labor and ideological transformation. With these measures, the entire society built a strong barrier against ideological freedom in all aspects, and it became impossible for intellectuals to think freely and independently.

*The Lack of Freedom of Career Choice and Entrepreneurship*

Since the planned economic system was in effect at the time, the state monopolized all the resources upon which members of society depended for survival, life, work, and development. No one could survive without his unit, organization, collective, or the state. In such conditions, people had no possibility of exercising free choice.

It was impossible for members of society to choose their occupations freely. Labor policy in China at the time had the following characteristics: workers did not have the right to choose their occupations freely, and everything was arranged by the state. In other words, workers were not the owners of their own labor power; all labor power belonged to the state. The employment of members of the society was carried out according to a system of quotas issued by the state. Moreover, once a person was assigned a certain occupation, then he basically had to remain in it the rest of his life. Thus, it was completely impossible for a peasant or a worker to become a state cadre. It was also impossible for a peasant to become a worker. It was even difficult for a worker in a large collective factory to become a worker in a state-owned enterprise.

Members of society were even less likely to have the freedom to start their own businesses. If they wanted to start a business, they needed both capital and “approval” from the state, and it was impossible for them to meet both conditions. First of all, because of widespread poverty, it was impossible for individuals to invest enough money or for banks to grant them loans. More importantly, due to ideological absolutism, people were very sensitive to the issue of ownership and never allowed any behavior that would undermine public ownership. The state would never allow any private economic activity and would crack down on it if it arose. In such a situation, even leaving aside private enterprises, even the approval of very limited numbers of private stalls was extremely strict. Moreover, the state strictly controlled the price of all goods, including goods sold by individual stalls, so it was hard for them to make even moderate profits. Campaigns around “cracking down on speculation” and “cutting off the tail of the bourgeoisie” occurred often. All economic activities were carried out at the behest of the state. Even peasants had to follow the team leader’s instructions on when to start and finish work. The number of chickens and pigs raised by peasants was also clearly defined and could not be exceeded. Clearly, in these circumstances, it is simply impossible for people to have the freedom to start a business.

*The Lack of Freedom of Migration and Mobility*

In line with the planned economic system, China implemented a strict system of household registration (the hukou system) in 1958. In the political context, the country also adopted a strict dossier or archival management system (the dang'an system) shortly after its founding in 1949. With these two systems, society formed a new, unfair status hierarchy in which members have a strong personal attachment and subordination to their urban or rural residents' identity and political identity. Generally speaking, the minimum mobility necessary for a society to function properly no longer existed. So, it was not possible for people to move horizontally, such as across regions and between urban and rural areas, as they wish, and it was also difficult to move upward in a developmental way.

China's household registration system, which can be called a wonder of the world, fixes people's identities and delimits the sphere of their activities. The hukou system identifies a person as a permanent resident of an urban or a rural area. More importantly, each person has access to different resources and benefits from the state according to their residency status. "At the core of the household registration system are two measures: dividing citizens into two categories – those with rural hukou and those with non-rural hukou – and putting them under local government administration with strict control over changes in hukou ... People's basic necessities of life – food, clothing, shelter and transportation; their birth, death, illness and old age; schooling and employment, welfare and social security – are all related to some extent to their hukou" (Lu 2008). Theoretically, under the hukou system, peasants will always remain peasants, workers will always remain workers, and cadres will always be cadres. Further, a Shanghainese will always be a Shanghainese and people from Linyi (in Shandong Province) will always be Linyi people because a hukou record officially identifies them as a permanent resident of that area. What's more, since a person's hukou status is often intergenerational, the hukou status of the previous generation (based on the mother's hukou) can affect later generations. Clearly, before reform and opening up, with the strict hukou system, normal social mobility could not exist because people and their descendants could not undertake horizontal mobility across urban and rural areas or between different regions as they may have wished. A small number of people with cadre or worker status sometimes had job transfers and relocated, but such movements were usually arranged by their work units instead of arising from their own initiative.

There were few opportunities for upward mobility—that is, "promotion" or development and the movement associated with that. Under the influence of absolutist ideology, society advocated that people should attach importance to national and world affairs rather than their own personal development. There were few opportunities for cadres to be promoted and receive pay rises. Even such limited opportunities as existed at first were gradually stopped. Even when certain cadres did get promoted, their wage remained the same. Workers' skill levels were ranked several times, and their wages were determined by these rankings, but then that stopped. At the time, when certain departments were short of

cadres, they supplemented their ranks with workers. However, the status of those workers who did cadre work remained that of workers in their official dossier, and their wages remained the same. Peasants' upward mobility was even more difficult. On the whole, the economic situation and the social status of Chinese peasants remained the same for 20 years. Second, upward mobility relied on ascribed statuses. At the time, an important feature was that within the limited opportunities for promotion that existed, people's political backgrounds were very important. A series of class statuses were established based on one's political and family background. In rural areas, class statuses included landlords, rich peasants, middle peasants, poor peasants, and agricultural laborers. In urban areas, class statuses included revolutionary cadres, workers, employees, freelancers, senior employees, urban poor, shop assistants, bourgeois, industrial and commercial landlords, small business owners, handicraft owners, and vendors (Zheng 1997). Later, a supplementary series of class statuses, such as rightists and capitalists, were added. These class statuses encompassed all members of society and were accompanied by the management of specific political archives, thus directly affecting the development prospects of every member of society.

#### *The Lack of a Free Life*

In that period, people's lifestyles were deeply influenced by the ideology of absolutism. A hard and simple lifestyle was advocated across the whole society, promoting the spirit of collectivism, and emphasizing that everyone should maintain the lofty ideal of having the nation in mind and the world in view. In fact, this was a deeply moralized and politicized way of life. In the most extreme period, that is, the "Cultural Revolution," it eventually became an ascetic and even dehumanized way of life. In such a context, society certainly did not pay attention to the daily life of the people. If people considered their normal lives, their personal or family interests, they were often regarded as "selfish" individualists. In this way, freedom of living became impossible.

People lacked the freedom to live their own lives for two main reasons. First, they had no freedom to choose their lifestyles. Politics and morality interfered with people's daily lives, including their personal and family lives. Individuals had no personal privacy at all. Family life was politicized and unrealistically moralized, rather than humanized. For example, even marriage or divorce, a purely personal matter, had to be approved by the party organization of the parties' work unit before going through the relevant formalities. Another example occurred during the Cultural Revolution:

when people choose a marriage partner, the first criterion they consider is the family origin; workers and poor and lower-middle peasants are favored, and CPC members are the best choice because they belong to the Red Five Categories. Members of the Black Categories (landlords, rich farmers, counter-revolutionaries, bad influencers ["bad elements"], and right-wingers) are discriminated against. No matter how handsome or beautiful a man or a woman is, they often end up marrying someone ugly or wicked. One's classification can also be passed on to their children. (Chen 2009)



Secondly, people had very little room in which to choose their lifestyles. Although any kind of free choice requires sufficient space and systems of reference, both were severely limited at that time. People had little space to choose their lifestyles, and there was a lack of systems of reference. Most pre-existing reference systems were banned as harmful “feudal, capitalist, and revisionist” lifestyles during the Cultural Revolution. For example, the already limited ways of dressing that were accepted before the Cultural Revolution were eliminated as harmful and unhealthy during that period. Cultural life, which is an important part of any way of life, also became increasingly impoverished. The extremely simple and monotonous cultural life left people with little choice. For example, by the 1970s, the main operas on the national stage were the eight revolutionary model operas (yangbanxi). “Later generations say that the eight model operas were watched by 800 million people for eight years.” In these plays, “none of the male leads had wives and none of the female leads had husbands” (Chen 2009).

### *1.5 The Dangers of a Situation in which There Is “Relatively More Equality and Significantly Less Freedom”*

Freedom and equality are an organic whole; they are prerequisites for each other. Without freedom, we can only rely on equality to stimulate the vitality of the whole society, which cannot be sustained for long. The history of the 30 years before reform and opening up verifies this point. In the early and mid-1950s, the Chinese people had just gained equality and were energized by this idea, and they even entered a state of exuberance, which for a time energized the whole society. However, as the novelty of equality and people’s enthusiasm for it wore off, and as the little room for freedom that existed in the 1950s disappeared, as social suppression and precautions against freedom intensified, as political movements developed, and as the planned economy was reinforced, the social dynamism inspired by equality faded significantly by the 1960s and had disappeared completely by the 1970s. Moreover, the absolute egalitarianism that evolved from equality caused widespread harm to Chinese society.

#### *The Loss of Ideological Creativity*

The direct consequence of the massive confinement and blockage of freedom of thought was a withering of the cultural and intellectual sphere and a loss of creativity for the whole nation. A scholar who has experienced difficulties in previous political movements knows it all too well: in that situation, in an atmosphere like that, everyone, regardless which school or faction he belonged to, is alienated into inhumanity as if he had drunk the soup of ecstasy (Ji 1998).

In modern society, the generation of ideas and knowledge creation are crucial. “Innovation has become an important way to solve the global problems faced by mankind, such as energy resources, ecology and the environment,

natural disasters, and the health of the population, and has become the main driving force of economic and social development. Knowledge is a centrally important resource for development, and innovation in knowledge has become a core element of national competitiveness” (Hu 2010). Clearly, after years of suppression, criticism, and transformation, by the 1960s and 1970s, China had hardly seen any creative ideas put forward by intellectuals, there was no leading role for intellectuals in the socio-economic domain, no enlightenment of the people, and, consequently, no prospects for national development.

#### *The Lack of Power for Economic Development*

In society at that time, there was a deep disconnection between the people and economic activities in two aspects. For one, since people did not have the freedom to choose jobs and were not allowed to start their own businesses, they could only passively engage in economic activity according to administrative instructions from the state. Therefore, the economic activities that people engaged in were not connected to their own wishes, and there was a serious disconnection. “The plan system’s hostility to entrepreneurship enforces uniformities that inflate firm-level rigidities into economywide excesses ... Under the plan, with both the volume and the direction of sales mandated by official fiat, producers experience neither the opportunity to expand through their own initiative nor the threat of being eclipsed by rival suppliers” (Brandt and Rawski 2008). As a result, producers could not develop the enthusiasm to start a business or to work, so a sustainable force to drive economic development was lacking.

Second, due to the ideological absolutism of the time, the question of interests was so sensitive in China that people felt uncomfortable discussing this taboo subject. People’s economic activities were not closely linked to their own interests; there was a complete disconnection between the two. It is a truism that economic interests are vital to the masses and “are the most sensitive nerve of public life” (Lenin 1987) because “everything people strive for is related to their interests” (Marx and Engels 1956). However, the distribution of income at the time was egalitarian, emphasizing “one share per person.” This mode of distribution was unfair because it trimmed the high to level the low, and those who contributed more did not receive more. This absolute egalitarianism “had a homogenizing effect on urban society, creating similar life experiences and social expectations across the urban landscape” (Gallagher 2005). It severely encroached upon or limited the reasonable interests of people with strong abilities and those who contributed more, which dampened their enthusiasm in work. Ultimately, society lost its vitality.

Although things like ideals and political enthusiasm can play an important role in economic development in a specific historical period, this kind of motivation cannot be sustained for a long time. In the long run, the complete disconnection between people and economic activities in the above two aspects results in a lack of hard work and dedication because people do not have initiative and enthusiasm in their economic activities and lives, which in turn

produces a lack of momentum for development. As one economist states, in a sustained, peaceful environment, people's material needs grow more rapidly, and economic interests become the major driving force in economic life. Before the economic reforms in 1978, the lack of economic motivation due to the lack of stimulation in terms of interests had become an insurmountable problem in the system and an obstacle to development (Liu 1998).

### *The Deformation of Social Structure*

The structure of modern society is constructed to meet the needs of modernization and the social division of labor in a market economy. As modernization and the market economy advance, the social division of labor becomes ever more specialized and intricate, and the social organism becomes more complicated. The original functions of the social organism that were undertaken by just a few units are now undertaken by many units. As a result, there are more and more industries and occupations. Apart from the original class of workers, peasants, and management, intellectuals, entrepreneurs, intermediary organizations, and NGOs are bound to appear and to play increasingly important roles, and the interdependence between these classes or groups also increases. In this sense, the modern social structure is heterogeneous, characterized by both high levels of differentiation and high levels of integration.

However, the structure of social strata in China in the 30 years before reform and opening up was deformed. A homogeneous social structure was formed artificially based on absolute egalitarianism, eliminating occupational and other differences in many respects. Such a deformed structure does not match the complex division of labor in a modern society. As we can see, in the deformed social structure of that period, certain important professional groups, such as entrepreneurs, were eliminated as a reactionary class, and the intellectual class was completely controlled, suppressed, and reformed as a dangerous group. From the perspective of the division of labor, then, there was neither an entrepreneurial class to lead economic development, nor an intellectual class to lead innovation and the dissemination of knowledge, while the two basic laboring classes, the workers and the peasants, were also occupied with political movements and social management, matters in which they did not have specialized expertise. Society as a whole was homogeneous and unified; it lacked a specialized division of labor and relied on government fiat for its organization and operation. Such a social structure was rigid and simple, lacked inclusiveness, and rejected citizens' independence and creativity. In the planned economy, the allocation of resources also occurred by government fiat in a singular way. In terms of access to opportunities, people relied on their ascribed statuses, and their efforts were constrained by various institutions and mechanisms. Thus, such a deformed structure could not adapt to an ever-changing socio-economic environment, generate social vitality, or sustain the healthy socio-economic development of China, but only played the opposite role.

In addition, the lack of freedom of movement and mobility in Chinese society during this period led to a lack of social mobility, which in turn resulted in

a lack of effective resource allocation mechanisms and a failure to generate the true endogenous dynamics that should be present in a society, thus stifling the vitality of society as a whole.

*The Constant Emergence of the “Tyranny of the Majority”*

“Different interests necessarily exist in different classes of citizens. If the majority are united by a common interest, the rights of the minority will not be guaranteed.” Then, “anarchy may as truly be said to reign, as in a state of nature where the weaker individual is not secured against the violence of the stronger” (Accessed Sept 1 2022). What is even worse is that extreme ideology and extreme egalitarianism are combined into one to form a “tyranny of the majority” with strong political features.

The “tyranny of the majority” not only limits the space for individual development but also excludes, suppresses, and even eliminates heterogeneous elements of society. Under the “tyranny of the majority,” the legitimate interests and basic rights of individuals are scarcely guaranteed. At any time the majority can, in the name of the collective or the majority, encroach on, impair, or even deprive the minority of its legitimate interests. People are very ruthless in sacrificing the interests of the minority, and under certain conditions they may even be very brutal. What is worse is that, because of continuous political movements and constantly changing political slogans, every person in the majority may at some point find themselves in the minority, to be excluded and purged. Thus, although in each case it is only a small group of people that is sacrificed, over time it adds up to a very large group of people. Today one minority might be sacrificed, tomorrow another, and the day after that yet another. In the end this increase amounts to a large total number of people. In the long run, the basic rights of almost anyone cannot be properly guaranteed. From the late 1950s to the end of the Cultural Revolution, the number of people who were criticized and punished during the political movements of that period is surprisingly large. The “tyranny of the majority” not only hurt many people at that time, but some people still suffer from the aftereffects, aggravating social distrust and estrangement.

*The Stagnation of Improvements in People’s Livelihoods*

A situation in which “there is relatively more equality and significantly less freedom” implies that, at that time, society encouraged people to turn their pursuit of equality into political enthusiasm to support the continuous political mass movements and prevent the “restoration of capitalism.” Society also advocated that people value morality more than material life while despising their pursuit of economic interests and personal or family wealth. Against this background, it was impossible for society to attach importance to the improvement of people’s basic livelihoods.

In the 30 years before reform and opening up, people’s basic livelihoods in China were far from being improved as they should have been. Two sets of figures can verify this point. The first is that at current year prices, China’s gross

domestic product (GDP) was 67.90 billion yuan in 1952 and had increased to 362.41 billion yuan by 1978; at comparable prices, the GDP index was 100 in 1952 and 471.4 in 1978 (National Bureau of Statistics 2005). These figures indicate rapid development. In sharp contrast, living standards remained low. Let us look at the second set of figures. If the average wage index of all employees in 1952 was 100, then the real wage index in 1978 was only 110.3 (Social Statistics Department of National Bureau of Statistics 1987). In 1978, the balance of per capita savings deposits in urban areas was only 89.8 yuan, and 7 yuan in rural areas. The balance of savings deposits per capita in China was 22 yuan (National Bureau of Statistics 2005). In 1978, the average Engel's coefficient per person in urban households was 57.5%, and the percentage in rural households was as high as 67.7% (National Bureau of Statistics 2005).

Other factors make the situation of people's livelihoods in the 30 years before China's reform and opening up even more problematic. For example, Chinese people were involved in endless political mass movements. These movements made many people suffer, resulting in distrust among various groups. In some years there were even large-scale man-made disasters. In 1960, the national mortality rate jumped from 14.59 per thousand in 1959 to 25.43 per thousand, resulting in China's only negative population growth since the formation of the People's Republic in 1949 (National Bureau of Statistics 1990). In some areas, the lack of improvement in livelihoods for a long time led directly to large-scale human smuggling. This is contrary to the original intention of emphasizing equality. Take Shenzhen, for example: public documents from the city reveal that there were four large-scale human smuggling operations in the history of Shenzhen, which occurred in 1957, 1962, 1972, and 1979. According to statistics from the Port Office of Guangdong Province, more than 565,000 people were officially recorded as "smuggled into Hong Kong" from 1954 to 1980 (Liu 2010).

## 2 LIBERTY AND EQUALITY IN CHINA 40 YEARS AFTER REFORM AND OPENING UP

There is a big contrast between the era 30 years prior to reform and opening up, and the era 40 years since reform and opening up. In terms of the specific situation of liberty and equality, the latter era can be summarized as a time of "relatively more freedom but less equality." "Relatively more freedom" means, first of all, that the Chinese people now enjoy unprecedented freedoms compared to previous historical periods. These freedoms have meant that China has seen tremendous socio-economic progress. Even "the U.S. Department of States notes that China's modernization has 'improved dramatically the lives of hundreds of millions of Chinese, increased social mobility, and expanded the scope of personal freedom. This has meant substantially greater freedom of travel, employment opportunity, educational and cultural pursuits, job and housing choices, and access to information'" (Bergsten 2006). However, the

freedoms that people have experienced during this period are rudimentary, divorced from equality, and should not be mistaken for real, institutionalized freedoms. There is “relatively less equality”; in other words, the concept of equality has not been fully developed. This has a negative influence on China’s development.

### 2.1 *Great Progress with Freedoms*

Since the reform and opening-up era, the planned economy has rapidly been disintegrated and replaced with a market economy. The resources that people rely on to survive, work, and develop are no longer controlled by any organization or work unit, and this has been the theme throughout society. The class struggle ended in China, along with an era where politics trumped everything else. Instead, the government “put people first,” and this ideology has become deeply rooted in people’s hearts. During this process, the Chinese people began to achieve extensive freedoms. “It was an extraordinary period that radically changed the mission of the Communist Party, from ideological purity and class struggle to political pragmatism and economic growth. It ushered in not only national development, but ultimately a greater change: the transformation of the spirit of the Chinese people and the increasing scope and depth of their personal freedoms” (Kuhn 2010).

#### *Freedom of Thought*

Forty years after the reform and opening-up era, “freedom of thought” became an important ideology. People in China saw their first steps toward freedom, and freedoms were directly promoted in many fields. As John and Doris Naisbitt have observed, “Thirty years ago China was like a huge forest in which all the trees had to be alike. Any plant that disturbed the uniformity had been cut down or torn out. But this kind of uniform forest proved to be unsustainable. Deng Xiaoping realized this, and his call for emancipating minds and allowing variety to take root was indispensable for China’s survival and development” (John and Doris Naisbitt 2010).

Emancipation of the mind. People’s thoughts guide their actions, and when minds are liberated, society will transform. “Emancipating the mind” is necessary in every country in order for it to advance. Ideological absolutism was once the shackles that bound Chinese people’s thoughts and hindered the country’s development. This concept took “class struggles as a key link,” and was common before the reform and opening-up era. As Deng Xiaoping states: “When everything has to be done by the book, when thinking turns rigid and blind faith is the fashion, it is impossible for a party or a nation to make progress. Its life will cease and that party or nation will perish ... Only if we emancipate our minds can we solve the problems left over from the past and new problems” (Deng 1994). After the reform and opening-up era, practically every government began by addressing ideological emancipation during major periods of Chinese development. During the late 1970s and early 1980s, China

greatly emancipated people's minds. There was a countrywide discussion about taking "practical experience as the only criterion for truths." "The Party's ideological line" was discussed and problems were solved over how to "proceed from reality in everything we do, integrate theories with practical solutions, seek truth from facts, and test and develop truth in practice" (Shen 2008). During the early 1990s, there was a debate about what direction reforms should take. This debate resulted in questions over such practices were capitalist or communist. Cadres and the masses were liberated from the shackles of this question, and a new round of reforms was launched, which were aimed at establishing a market economy. Nowadays, prioritizing ideological emancipation is a top priority in the country.

It should be noted that ideological emancipation has helped facilitate important achievements. These have not only been manifested in political pragmatism, but they have also led to the elimination of people's "pan-political" ideologies. During the 30 years before the reform and opening-up era, people were completely dependent on politics due to ideological absolutism. This concept determined almost every code of behavior in people's daily lives. Berlin points out: "Few things have done more harm than the belief on the part of individuals or groups that he or she or they are in sole possession of the truth: especially about how to live, what to be and do - and that those who differ from them are not merely mistaken, but wicked or mad; and need restraining or suppressing" (Berlin 2002). However, once people's minds were emancipated, people's pan-political views were basically eradicated. People also found that their most basic restrictions had been eliminated, and these conditions meant that there was more freedom of thought. As a result, people took a solid step forward in realizing their freedoms. Today, ideological emancipation and freedom have become historical trends in China, and it would be difficult to reverse these trends. There has also been an important phenomenon whereby the state has changed the legal terms for "crimes of the counter-revolution." These were included in China's Constitution and Criminal Law prior to the reform. However, specific historical conditions meant that there were arbitrary and flexible provisions for people held under "crimes of the counter-revolution." The legal institutions at that time were somewhat ineffective, so a few people could, simply based on the random political needs and slogans, subjectively argue that there was something wrong with someone's thoughts or speech, and convict them of a "counter-revolutionary crime." This practice not only deterred people from acting, but it was also enough to make people dare not think, thus losing their desire and ability to think. In *the Amendment to the Constitution of the People's Republic of China* (adopted on March 15, 1999), Article 28 of the Constitution, which reads, "The State maintains public order and suppresses treasonable and other counter-revolutionary activities; it penalizes criminal activities that endanger public security and disrupt the socialist economy as well as other criminal activities; and it punishes and reforms criminals," is revised to read, "The State maintains public order and suppresses treasonable and other criminal activities that endanger State security; it penalizes

criminal activities that endanger public security and disrupt the socialist economy as well as other criminal activities; and it punishes and reforms criminals” (Party Literature Research Center of the CPC Central Committee 2000). However, now that there are legal provisions in place to protect them, it is difficult for people to be convicted over what they say.

People have become more independent. It is obvious that people have gained a greater sense of independence due to their minds being emancipated, as well as due to advancements with modernization and the market economy. According to a comprehensive 2006 survey on China’s social situation, when respondents were asked what factors contributed to a person’s success, the top choice was personal factors, followed by family factors, social factors, and ascribed status. Among the factors related to their own personal characteristics, 31.2% of respondents felt that “dedication or ambition” and “hard work” were decisive, and 46.9% felt that they were very important (China Survey and Data Center, Renmin University of China 2009).

People have developed greater tolerance. Since the reform and opening-up era, Chinese people have grown increasingly tolerant of people who are different to them. As long as their behavior doesn’t hinder on people’s freedoms or harm their interests, they will not criticize them or intervene. They have especially gained respect for other people’s privacy. In a survey where netizens were asked: “How would you react at seeing another people’s unclosed e-mail,” 82.02% of users voted to “close the email for them.” There were four options given: “Close the email for them,” “Open the email to read it,” “Use the email to play a prank,” and “other.” This shows that web users highly respect the privacy of others (Wu 2010). This is evident in other areas, for example, people’s views on extramarital affairs. A 1994 survey showed that 74.4% of respondents agreed with the view that “those who engage in extramarital affairs should be condemned publicly.” Only 7% of respondents disagreed with this statement, and 18.3% were indifferent (Zheng and Guo 1995). A similar survey in 2005 showed that people’s views on extramarital affairs had dramatically changed. The proportion of respondents who thought that people should be condemned publicly for extramarital affairs dropped to 46.75%; 26.35% said that they “understood” extramarital affairs, 4.39% “approved” of extramarital affairs, and 15.07% of respondents said that extramarital affairs were “private matters” that “should not be condemned.” In other words, a third of respondents were tolerant of extramarital affairs (Wu 2010). It is also evident that college students have become more tolerant of homosexuality. Before the reform and opening-up era, society was largely intolerant of homosexuality. It was broadly regarded as being a serious crime. Nowadays, people have developed a certain tolerance toward homosexuality. A survey among college students in Xi’an showed that 57.9% of respondents agreed with homosexuality, 68% of them thought that homosexuality should be accepted in law, and 41.1% said that they could accept their relatives or friends being gay (Wang 2007).

There is much room for people to have intellectual freedom of thought. Nowadays, intellectuals work in innovation and knowledge dissemination. If



they have freedom, this is an important barometer for whether society has freedom. After the reform and opening-up era, China made great progress in this respect. Deng Xiaoping states,

We have admitted that we lag behind many countries in our study of the natural sciences. Now we should admit that we also lag behind in our study of the social sciences, insofar as they are comparable in China and abroad ... As a result of sabotage by the Gang of Four, a number of problems in the style of study have arisen in recent years, such as the stifling of discussion, refusal to share information, etc. It's not that we have too many debates and discussions among persons of different opinions, but too few. Erroneous views may crop up during discussions, but that is nothing to be afraid of. We must adhere to the policy of 'letting a hundred schools of thought contend', and promote debate. Different schools of thought should respect and complement each other. Academic exchanges should be promoted. (Deng 1994)

In 2004, the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China issued *Opinions on Further Developing and Making Prosperous Philosophy and the Social Sciences*. These "opinions" emphasized that philosophy and social sciences play an irreplaceable role amid the historical process of building a well-off society. They helped promote a new cause for socialism with Chinese characteristics and helped the Chinese nation realize a process of great rejuvenation. The committee stated that we should further understand the importance of philosophy and the social sciences, and vigorously develop these two subjects. During this period, some important, creative philosophies were made, and the remarks of some intellectuals played a vital and irreplaceable role in facilitating China's development. They carried out research on major issues, and these directly impacted China's socio-economic development. They researched the rural contract system, small towns, issues concerning agriculture, rural areas and farmers, market economy theories, economic development models, special economic zone theories, financial problems, the rule of law, international strategies, social development, modernization theories, social construction, social justice, social problems, social security, grassroots democracies, the theories of the ruling party, values, and traditional culture. If intellectuals didn't have freedoms, there would be no such achievements, and there would be no prosperity in modern China.

China has made much progress in allowing more freedom of speech online. By December 2017, the number of Internet users in China had reached 772 million, with a penetration rate of 55.8%. This was 4.1% higher than the global average (51.7%) and 9.1% higher than the Asian average (46.7%). The number of mobile Internet users in China had reached 753 million, and the proportion of Internet users using mobile phones was 97.5% (Accessed Sept 1 2022). This is something that no one could ever have imagined 40 years ago, or even 10 years ago. The convenience of the Internet has meant that many people have been able to freely and anonymously express their thoughts and opinions on topics that they are interested in. At the same time, they have been able to expand their horizons and learn about society, economies, cultures,

sports, entertainment, and other topics, whether at home or abroad. Web users have been able to see the views of other netizens, and this has helped them learn more and reshape their views on some issues. People have also been able to acquire and expand their professional knowledge by accessing relevant web-sites. Computers/mobile phones are virtually information publishing stations. Hundreds of millions of computers and mobile phones have enabled the Chinese people to have a huge platform for freely expressing their opinions and exchanging ideas. They have become a lifeline for some people, especially the young, as they enable them to purchase various goods and services. People in China have found the Internet to be a godsend, and it has provided them, over anyone else, a huge opportunity for development.

### *Freedom to Accumulate Wealth*

In the 30 years before reform and opening up, there was contempt in Chinese society toward wealth-building. Restrictions were imposed on the self-employed, and this meant that the country lose its vitality and was unable to sustain momentum for socio-economic development. People suffered a lot. During the 40-year reform, there was momentum for encouraging and helping some people to get rich first. At the same time, efforts were made to eliminate the idea that wealth was the “original sin,” along with the idea that private property was the “root of all evil.” The CPC said at the time: “let all the vitality of labor, knowledge, technology, management and capital burst forth, and let all the sources of social wealth creation flow in full, in order to benefit the people.” As a consequence of this, the Chinese people gained unprecedented freedoms to accumulate wealth.

There is now an authoritative legal basis to have private property. Private property rights are one of the three basic rights that people are entitled to. The others are the right to live and be free. Having private property means having subsistence and means for production. It is a basic necessity, a barrier against danger, and a necessary base that allows people to fit into society and freely develop. If private property is illegal, then people will be far from enthusiastic about accumulating wealth. Neither the market economy, nor modernization will be realized; the same goes for the idea of “putting people first.” There is value in having private property rights that goes beyond the material; they are not only an extension of individuals’ right to live, they are the patron saint of people’s freedoms. Therefore, they can be said to have a human right attribute. At the same time, having private property rights means that people can realize legal justice. In 2004, a clause stating that “citizens’ legitimate private property is inviolable” was formally included in China’s Constitution, so private property had constitutional status. In 2007, *the Property Law of the People’s Republic of China* was promulgated, and people’s private property was carefully defined and comprehensively protected by law. These were very important milestones in Chinese social and economic spheres after the reform and opening-up era. Under such conditions, people could legally pursue assets and accumulate wealth by taking ownership of property, and they gained legal protection provided by the state in doing so.

The non-public sector of the economy has received an unprecedented level of support from the state. Since the reform, the market economy has been developed, and “legitimizing” private entrepreneurs and the private economy has been important. These have gradually been recognized not only by the state, but society. The state has encouraged and supported the development of the private economy since the early 1990s, and it has been regarded in almost all important documents related to the economic system reform. In 2005, the state issued *Several State Council Opinions on Encouraging, Supporting and Guiding the Development of the Non-Public Economy, i.e. Individual and Private Enterprises*. With the support of the state, China’s private economy experienced unprecedented growth, and the number of private enterprises increased from 90,000 in 1989 to 98,000 and 108,000 in 1990 and 1991 respectively. After 1992, there was huge expansion, as a result of Deng Xiaoping’s Southern Talks and the state formally setting a goal to create a market economy. During the early 1990s, the number of private enterprises increased dramatically, from 140,000 in 1992, to 238,000 (1993), 432,000 (1994), and 655,000 (1995) year-on-year. The growth rate was unimaginable; it was recorded at 29.5% (1992), 70.1% (1993), 81.2% (1994), and 51.4% (1995). By 2005, there were 4.72 million private enterprises, and by 2008, there were a record 6.57 million (Zhang 2000, 2004; Ru et al 2009). By September 2017, there were 26,072,900 private enterprises (89.7% of the total number of enterprises) making 165.38 trillion yuan’s worth of registered capital (60.3% of the total registered capital) (Accessed Sept 1 2022). In 2016, 414.28 million people were employed in China’s urban areas. Of that population 120.83 m were employed in private enterprises; 13.05 m worked at investment firms in Hong Kong, Macao, and Taiwan; 13.61 m worked at foreign-investment firms; and 86.27 m were self-employed. In contrast, there were only 61.7 m people employed in state-owned units and only 4.53 m in urban collective units (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). Clearly, the private economy, with private enterprises at its core, had a key role to play in enabling Chinese people to accumulate wealth.

The identity constraints that people once had were eliminated. Self-employment became a trend 40 years after the reform and opening-up era. People’s original, personal attachments and accepted role of subordination disappeared, and citizens becoming more self-motivated, and more socially mobile. There were two notable phenomena. One was that there were important changes made to China’s employment system. Before the reform, the labor employment system meant that people’s jobs were lifelong, and employment was centered on permanent workers. Rural residents were excluded from this system. However, between the early 1990s and the start of the twenty-first century, China began to implement a new labor employment system, namely, the labor contract system. This new system did not guarantee that workers had permanent work, but it did not exclude rural residents. The other phenomenon was that people increasingly mobilized between urban and rural areas, and between different regions. This movement was regarded as “the largest migration in peacetime in human history” (Kuhn 2010). The household registration

system had not yet been abolished during this period. However, its practical significance had been weakened, and it was obviously no longer as restrictive over people's employment. A very large number of "migrant workers" from rural areas emerged in Chinese cities. In 2016, there were 286.52 million primary industry workers in China, of which 171.85 million were migrant workers (Accessed Sept 1 2022).

### *Freedom to Live*

After the reform and opening-up era, the Chinese economy was developed, and people were able to live more freely, as they had certain material foundations. As the basic idea of being more "people-oriented" gradually spread, people paid more and more attention to their livelihoods. Since the 1980s, the Chinese people have paid increased attention to the issues in their daily lives and those that affect their lifestyle. This trend meant that people's previously ascetic lifestyles ended, and they began living more normal, secular lives.

People's living standards have greatly improved. During the era of the planned economy, consumer goods were scarce. The government had to ration basic consumer goods. Every urban resident received a number of tickets: food stamps, oil stamps, meat stamps, egg stamps, etc., on a regular basis, and they bought their daily necessities with these tickets. Nowadays, this era has become nothing but a memory and has disappeared altogether. When we compare people's livelihoods before and after the reform and opening-up era, we can see that there have been drastic changes to the Chinese people's living standards. In 1978, the per capita disposable income of urban and rural households were 343.4 yuan and 133.6 yuan, respectively; these rose to 33,616 yuan and 10,772 yuan in 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). In 1978, the incidence of rural poverty was 30.7% (by 1978 standards), and this fell to 4.5% (by 2010 standards) in 2016 (National Bureau of Statistics 2017).

People's lifestyles are diverse. The ability to live more freely implies that people pay more attention to their livelihoods, and they have more autonomy over their lifestyles. Nowadays, there are more options available to people, so their lifestyles are diverse. There is diversity in terms of consumption, for example. People no longer simply "live within their means"; some have started borrowing in order to spend, and the growth rate of personal loans has increased significantly. In 2016, the total sum of personal medium- and long-term consumer loans amounted to 24,715 billion yuan (Accessed Sept 1 2022). People also spent much more on family services. In 2008, the service expenditure for urban households was 2919 yuan (26% of China's total consumption expenditure; rising 15.8%—from 10.2% in 1978). Rural residents' service expenditure increased from 447 yuan per capita in 2000, to 1042 yuan in 2008. It was 26.7% of China's total consumption expenditure in 2000, and 28.5% in 2008, so increased by 1.7% (Accessed Sept 1 2022). Because people spent more on family services, their quality of life not only improved, they had more leisure time. People also spent more on the tourism, culture, and entertainment industry. Since the 1990s, people have had more money and more leisure time, so they have spent more on

these three industries. Every year, people spend more and more on tourism, and the number of tourists is constantly rising. In 2016, there were 4.44 billion domestic tourist trips, and 122 million Chinese traveled abroad. This contributed 8.19 trillion yuan toward China's national tourism industry, and accounted for 11.01% of the country's total GDP (Accessed Sept 1 2022). In 1981, rural residents' per capita expenditure on the culture, entertainment, and education industry was only 10.1 yuan. By 2016, it had reached 1070 yuan. In 1981, urban residents' per capita expenditure on the culture, entertainment, and education industry was 35.8 yuan. By 2016, this figure had reached 2637 yuan (Accessed Sept 1 2022). There have also been some obvious changes over how people regard marriage and having a family. The family is widely regarded as being the most important unit. However, as people have gained more self-awareness, they have sought more desirable lifestyles, and some obvious changes have manifested. During the reform and opening-up period, the size of the family unit changed significantly. In 1982, 53.64% of the population were classed as being in "simple families," and 46.36% as being in "complex families." By 2006, 84.02% of the population had become part of simple families, and only 15.98% were part of "complex families" (Lu 2010). What's more, new trends are appearing in modern China: There is cohabitation, and there are DINK (dual income, no kids) families, floating families, "AA" (equal breadwinner) families, single-parent families, empty-nest families, families with left-behind children, "NEET" families, transnational families, and combined families (Yang 2007).

## 2.2 *Freedom Has Greatly Promoted China's Development*

Since the reform and opening-up era, the freedoms obtained by the Chinese people have meant that China has seen tremendous social progress.

### *The Freedoms Have Boosted Tremendous Economic Progress in China*

Freedom has become the most important endogenous force in driving China's development in this period. The essence of China's reform and development is

to mobilize all positive factors, liberate and develop productive forces, and respect and guarantee the freedom to pursue the happiness of the Chinese people. China's reform and opening-up extends from rural to urban areas and from economic to political, cultural, and social spheres. As reforms go deeper, they let all the vitality of labor, knowledge, technology, management, and capital burst forth, and all the sources of social wealth creation flow in full. All these advances in China have benefited from the reform and opening up and are ultimately due to the freedom-based creativity of the Chinese people. (Li et al. 2003)

Even some foreign politicians have seen this. In fact, freedom implies breaking down the barriers that people face in order to develop their vitality and potential. The people's original, personal attachments and accepted role of subordination have disappeared, liberating productive forces and unleashing the enormous potential of the Chinese society. Economic development has also

been organically combined with individual economic interests. For workers and entrepreneurs, this has created a huge profit motive. The enthusiasm, wisdom, and potential to do what they want to do is enormous, which in turn creates huge economic impetus and creativity. In addition, the freedom to live shows that the society attaches great importance to personal life or a high degree of secularization, and its members focus more on the improvement of their own living standards. This can provide a huge amount of orders and a broad market, resulting in enormous domestic demand. Clearly, China's freedom in this period has provided a strong, stable, and sustainable driving force for the development of the Chinese economy.

Evidently, during the process of reformation in China, all regions, industries, enterprises, and departments with a relatively high degree of freedom and relatively weak restrictions of the planned economy could always achieve considerable economic development as long as they were given flexible and free policies. For example, it is not the cities with a strict planned economic system that took the lead in China's development, but the rural areas with relatively weak restrictions. It is in the rural areas that the rural contract system for joint production was successfully established, which preliminarily and extensively liberated rural productivity. The establishment and development of the special economic zones also succeeded by bypassing the restrictions of the planned economy. Another example is the private economy. It has also made great contributions to the development of China's economy by bypassing various restrictions similar to those of state-owned enterprises and by obtaining flexible and free policies.

Since the reform and driven by various favorable factors, mainly freedom, China's economic development has made great achievements that have been recognized by the world. From 1979 to 2016, China's GDP has increased at an average annual rate of 9.6% (National Bureau of Statistics 2017). This is a miracle in the history of modernization among different countries. China's gross domestic product (GDP) accounted for 1.7% of the world in 1978, 1.6% in 1990, 3.6% in 2000, 9.2% in 2010, 13.3% in 2014, and about 15% in 2017 (National Bureau of Statistics 2015).

### *The Freedoms Have Promoted the Formation of the Modern Social Stratum Structure*

Social structure is the skeleton of social organisms. Its specific state determines whether a society has a reasonable division of labor, what kind of social and human resources (the allocation of social power) can be provided for the development and operation of this society, the size of a society's consumption demand, the degree of social solidarity and integration, and a possible space for social problems and risks. China's socio-economic development was abnormal and unsustainable before the reform because it lacked a market economy and a modern, rational social structure (Wu 2008b).

Since reform and opening up, the increasing scope and depth of the people's personal freedoms have directly contributed to China's modern social

structure. A basic requirement of the formation of modern society and the market economy is that factors of production, including labor, must be able to flow freely and be allocated rationally. As the planned economy disintegrated and was replaced by a market economy, various economic sectors emerged, the industrial structure upgraded, and the erroneous practice of “taking class struggle as the key link” was abandoned; the monopoly of social and economic resources was reduced, the free flow of resources in society emerged and increased, and the space for free mobility expanded rapidly (Sun 1994). More importantly, the elimination of previous restrictions on the people’s statuses, such as political identity and the hukou system, has enabled them to move freely and smoothly, which has provided the necessary conditions for the social stratum structure to develop in modern society. With the increase of the people’s self-initiated efforts and the need to increase their own interests and create wealth, they also want to move. Compared to the artificially enforced social structure before the reform, the social class structure after the reform and opening up has developed normally. In particular, the entrepreneur class and the intellectual class, which were severely suppressed before, have been restored and developed significantly, thus making up for the defects of the previous social class structure. Without these two classes, the social class structure of modernity would be incomplete and impossible to form and develop. By the beginning of the twenty-first century, the modern social stratum structure had basically taken shape, and none of the social classes necessary for the modernization construction and market economy operation were missing. “At present, China’s social class structure consists of ten classes: state and social management, private entrepreneurs, managers, science and technology professionals, clerks, individual industrial and commercial households, commercial service workers, industrial workers, agricultural workers, and the unemployed and semi-unemployed” (Lu 2010).

*The Freedoms Have Helped Establish a Legitimacy of and Reasonable Connotation for the Chinese People’s Humanized Lives*

The lives of the people are actually a matter of purpose, one that is neither political nor economic. On the contrary, political and economic development should be the means, tools, and ways to serve people’s lives.

Freedom establishes the legitimacy of people’s daily lives. Freedom emphasizes a realistic and rationalized way of life, the importance of realistic interests, a desirable and normal lifestyle, and a living state of the people. The concept of freedom and basic behavior orientation helps people awaken their individual consciousness, and at the same time it helps people focus on their economic interests. Therefore, this creates a general sense of reality that allows people to focus on their daily life, the quality of their lives, and the secular lifestyle as a legitimate thing.

Freedom also defines many connotations for people’s lives. Since people’s autonomous and desired life is essential, it is difficult for anyone else to represent themselves satisfactorily. Therefore, the people’s specific lives cannot be

defined and arranged according to rigid standards such as moral or political ones. As long as people choose a way of life that does not harm or interfere with the normal living and legitimate interests of others, it should not be prohibited. "Where, not the person's own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress" (Mill 2001). Furthermore, people's needs, preferences, and wishes vary widely, so modern society should encourage different lifestyles formed on this basis. People's lives involve many aspects, including not only material needs but also spiritual needs.

Clearly, freedom establishes the legitimacy of people's lives and stipulates content for their lives, which fundamentally changed the one-sided approach of ignoring people's lives before the reform, thus returning their lives to humanity and becoming something in line with the purpose of development. In the long run, this is of great importance to ensure the humane and healthy development of China. It will also continue to stimulate economic development through the increased consumer demand in many aspects, including material and spiritual culture.

### *2.3 The Main Characteristics and Limitations of Liberty and Equality After the Reform*

It should be noted that the era since reform and opening up can be summarized as a time of "relatively more freedom but less equality." Freedom in this period took place during the rapid transformation of Chinese society, so it had distinct characteristics and limitations. At the same time, equality in this period also showed relative underdevelopment.

#### *Freedom in This Period Often Lacked Rules*

China is currently undergoing a rapid transition from a traditional society to a modern society and from the planned economy to the market economy. Such a period is inevitable. During this period, the old rule system is not very effective, while the new rule system that can adapt to modern society and the market economy has not been systematically established. At present, China is rebuilding the rule system, or, in a certain sense, Chinese society is in a period of a vacuum of rules. The socio-economic sphere often lacks a normal order, a sound system of rules, and a regulated mechanism for coordinating social interests. Therefore, the freedom at this point is necessarily a freedom that lacks rules. We might think of it as version 1.0 of freedom; our next task is that the 1.0 version of freedom needs to be upgraded to a 2.0 version of freedom with rules.

Broadly speaking, the lack of rules in the 40 years after China's reform and opening up is mainly manifested in the following three aspects. First, the system is not sound. The system construction is obviously incomplete and mismatched. While the construction of institutions in the economic field is



relatively fast, the construction of institutions in the social and political fields is lagging behind that in the economic field. For example, the legal system lacks a social security law (social insurance law), which is very important in the field of social life. Secondly, the existing system is often not complied to, and the law is not strictly enforced. It should be admitted that during the 40 years since reform and opening up, China has enacted a large number of laws and regulations in order to adapt to its social and economic changes. But because many laws and regulations in real life often lack authority, it is difficult to get effective implementation. For example, in 2007, the state passed and issued *the Anti-Monopoly Law of the People's Republic of China*, which came into force on August 1, 2008. But nowadays, the phenomenon of departmental monopoly and industry monopoly has increased unabatedly. Third, there is a lack of awareness of rules. According to a survey, when asked about the “modern people’s ‘lack of virtue’ performance,” the respondents believe what most lack in society now is “sincerity,” ranking first with a proportion of 50.37%. In the survey 57.29% of the respondents strongly agreed or essentially agreed with the judgment that “honest and trustworthy people often end up getting the short end of the stick” (Wu 2010). In contrast, the negative impact of the phenomenon of lack of awareness of rules may have a more serious negative impact. This is because, if people lack a sense of rules, it is difficult to effectively implement rules, no matter how standardized and detailed.

*Freedom in This Period Is Often Combined with Too Strong an Impulse of Economic Interests*

With the formation of humanized life, Chinese people have shown great desire for their own health and a rich and stable life in this period. To achieve this goal, they must have a certain wealth base and economic strength. At the same time, for the Chinese people who had lived in poverty and asceticism for a long time, their material foundation is generally weak, so they more easily show an economic hunger. All these make the Chinese people generally show an unprecedented and excessively strong pursuit for economic interests. Compared to the 30 years before the reform, this situation is completely different. All the relevant investigations verify this point. For example, a survey by the research group of Beijing Normal University shows that a happy family and health rank first and second respectively in the column of goals pursued in life (Shi 2009). A survey by another research group of Beijing Normal University on the “values of two generations in China” among middle school students and parents in Beijing shows that among the choices of “what do you think is the most important in a person’s life: (choose three items and rank them in order of importance) money, social status, reputation, friendship, love, knowledge, health, power, family, career and others,” the highest percentage of both parents and middle school students ranked health as first, with 46.1% of parents and 34.4% of middle school students choosing health. The second place for parents was family (23.2%) and career (18.3%). At the same time, both generations believed that money is very important, with 88.4% of parents and 84.9% of middle

school students totally or comparatively agreeing that “nothing can be done without money,” and 81.4% of middle school students totally or comparatively agreeing that “money is the due reward for those who have made contributions to society” (Bao 2003). For example, a survey of the floating population in Beijing shows that “having a stable job” and “having a good love life” are regarded as the most important contents of life, ranking first and second, respectively, in the column of the floating population’s life values, while “getting paid/salary increase” and “doing well in business” rank first and second, respectively, in the column of “Happy things in personal life” (Horizon 2006). In addition, a survey by Horizon Consultant Company shows that both men and women, regardless of age or whether they are high income or low income, show a high fear of poverty. The people’s fear of poverty even far exceeds their fear of emotional betrayal and loss of friendship and dignity (Shuai and Song 2011).

There are several reasons why Chinese people have such a strong impulse for economic interests: First, social anxiety. China’s society is currently in a period of rapid transformation. In such a period, full of variables and risks, people are often uneasy about their family’s economic foundation and find it difficult to cope with their future life needs and risks. Therefore, their basic future life is full of uncertainty or unpredictability, forming a kind of social anxiety. This kind of social anxiety turns into a strong impulse for economic interests. According to a survey, from 1999 to 2005, the problem of laid-off employment and social security has been the core focus of public attention. From 2007 to 2008, the problem of rising prices topped the list of urban and rural residents’ “concerns” with a high reference rate. In 2009, the social problems focused by urban and rural residents were closely related to the series of national policies and measures in 2009 and the overall economic environment in 2009. The primary concern of urban residents was “medical system reform and medical expenses,” followed by laid-off employment and social security. The institutionalization of old-age care entered the rural residents’ field of vision and became the most concerned social issue of rural residents in 2009. The second and third places are the price issue and the rural medical reform (Ru 2010). In 2010, the top three issues that concerned the urban residents were commodity prices, medical reform, and housing prices, while the top three issues that concerned the rural residents were rural medical reform, commodity prices, the pension system, and related programs (Ru 2010). The key to prevent and solve these problems is to strengthen our own economic strength and accumulate family wealth as soon as possible. Second, the dual demonstration effect produced by the members of society who get rich first and the poor. It is a recognized fact that, in the past 40 years after China’s reform and opening up, on the one hand, a group of high-income people who have become rich and a group of middle-income people who live in a relatively comfortable state have rapidly emerged, and on the other hand, a group of low-income people who live in poverty has also formed. Groups with such different living conditions will inevitably have a double demonstration effect on the people. The ostentatious

living state of the high-income group inevitably leads to a complex psychology of envy, imitation, dissatisfaction, and even hatred from the low-income people; the relatively comfortable living conditions of the middle-income groups force the people to have a psychology of catching up, or at least not falling behind. However, the low-income group has some uneasy psychological influence on the people, for fear that they will fall into this group. All these make most members of society have a strong impulse for economic interests. Third, the government excessively strengthens the economic orientation. Due to the misunderstanding of understanding and the deviation of assessment indicators in the early stage of the reform and opening up, the government put too much emphasis on GDP in a short period of time, thus forming an attitude of being too poor and loving the rich to a certain extent. Some local governments often give various preferential policies to the rich people who have made direct contributions to GDP, but obviously pay insufficient attention to the interests of the general public. Over time, this will inevitably lead to an unfair and harmful social orientation and public opinion, which will further aggravate the impulse of people's economic interests.

The strong impulse of people's economic interests has created an unprecedented energy in Chinese society. This unprecedented energy, combined with the aforementioned rule vacuum in a certain sense, will inevitably have a very complicated adverse impact on Chinese society.

#### *"Equality Is Relatively Insufficient"*

The underdevelopment of equality is manifested in many aspects. The author does not intend to cover them one by one, but only selects three representative aspects to analyze.

The protection of workers' labor rights and interests is seriously inadequate. First, there are obvious problems with the labor contract. On the one hand, the signing rate of labor contracts for workers, especially migrant workers, is obviously low. Some statistics show that 79.3% of the migrant workers who went out did not sign labor contracts with their employers (Research Group of the State Council 2006). According to a sample survey conducted by the Ministry of Labor and Social Security in 40 cities in 2004, the signing rate of labor contracts for migrant workers was only 12.5% (Research Group of the State Council 2006). The low signing rate of labor contracts puts migrant workers in a disadvantageous position. In the case of labor disputes, it is difficult to defend their labor rights through the law. On the other hand, "Nasty, brutish, and short" describes the conditions in many other firms that use illegal labor contracts or other illegal means to maintain control over their workforce. For example, some labor contracts may require workers to pay a security deposit to work at the firm. Firms may lock workers in the factory grounds or confiscate their identity cards, making it dangerous for workers to leave and impossible to be employed elsewhere" (Gallagher 2005). Second, working overtime is relatively common and serious. At present, except for individual industries, urban employed people in China are working overtime in almost all industries, especially in industries with

a high concentration of manual workers, and, in the four years from 2003 to 2006, labor hours have increased year by year and have become longer and longer. In 2006, the most serious overtime was in the commercial and service sector, with 51.97 hours per week, followed by 50.81 hours per week for production and transportation equipment operators and related personnel (Population and Employment Statistics Department of National Bureau of Statistics 2007). Thirdly, the labor income of workers is not proportional to their labor input. In the distribution of national income, the proportion of labor compensation is declining year by year. This is a phenomenon that deserves attention. In recent years, in the composition of local GDP according to the expenditure method, the proportion of labor compensation has been decreasing. It had been above 50% until 2003, then dropped to 49.6% in 2004, 41.4% in 2005, and 40.6% in 2006 (Ru et al 2008). As measured by relevant data in the China Statistical Yearbook 2007, the share of total wages of Chinese workers in GDP has been declining year by year, from 15.2% in 1991 to 12.9% in 1996, 10.9% in 2000, and 11% in 2006 (National Bureau of Statistics 2007). Some data show that in mature market economies, the share of workers' compensation in GDP after the initial distribution is close to 70% in the United States and generally between 54% and 65% in other countries and regions (Xu 2006). In sharp contrast, from 2002 to 2006, the share of corporate income in national income rose from 20% to 21.5%, up 1.5 percentage points; the share of government income rose from 17.9% to 21.4%, which was up 3.5 percentage points (Chen 2008).

The social security situation is not optimistic. Social security is a matter of basic equality, and it is also a huge problem that involves the vast majority of members of society. Due to long-term neglect and huge debts, social security has become a serious problem in Chinese society. This is mainly manifested in the low coverage rate of social security for employees, especially migrant workers. In 2007, there were 114.27 million employees in urban units. At the end of the year, 102.29 million employees and 18.46 million migrant workers had basic old-age insurance. Among employees who had the basic medical insurance, 88.2 million were on-the-job employees. There were 31.31 million migrant workers who had medical insurance. In addition, 116.45 million people had unemployment insurance, of which 11.5 million were migrant workers. Moreover, 121.73 million people had industrial injury insurance, of which 39.8 million were migrant workers (Accessed Sept 1 2022). From this set of figures, it can be further estimated that the rate of basic old-age insurance for on-the-job employees was the highest, at 89.5%, while the rate of about 200 million migrant workers was less than 10%. The rate of the employees' basic medical insurance was 86%, and that of migrant workers was only about 16%. The rate of unemployment insurance for migrant workers was only about 5.8%, and the rate of their industrial injury insurance was about 20%.

There are relatively few opportunities for workers and farmers to participate in politics. The status of workers and farmers' participation in politics can largely show their status and influence in social and political life, and it is an important indicator in measuring the equality of workers and farmers. It is an

objective fact that, in the 40 years after reform and opening up, the space for workers and farmers to participate in politics is relatively narrow, and their right to speak in the formulation of major policies is relatively small. For example, in important legislative or deliberative bodies such as the People's Congress, the number of representatives for workers and farmers is relatively small and out of proportion to the total population. Therefore, it is difficult to fully reflect and effectively safeguard the vital interests of workers and farmers as the main groups in society when formulating relevant policies (Wu 2008b).

#### *2.4 The Negative Impact Caused by the Defects of Freedom and Equality in This Period*

In the 40 years since reform and opening up, the defects in free development and the lack of equality have had many negative impacts on Chinese society. This is mainly manifested in the following aspects.

##### *The Weak Power of Socio-economic Development*

From the general law of the evolution of freedom, firstly, by breaking the backward factors of the times such as external restrictions, imprisonments, and constraints of people such as personal attachment, freedom can be expanded to a certain extent and a certain space can be obtained, so that the people can be liberated and socio-economic development can be promoted. This is the primary stage of free development. Forty years after the reform and opening-up era, this has been successfully achieved. The problem is that, if freedom is limited to this, its potential to promote social and economic development is limited. Freedom must also develop to the second stage, which is the establishment of an equal social and economic system. On the basis of effectively protecting the basic equal rights of most members of society, freedom should be further developed and the vitality of the whole society can be continuously stimulated.

It is from the above angle that we observe the basic situation of freedom evolution in the 40 years after the reform, and we can find that at this stage, the freedom in China is only a primary freedom, and its potential has been basically exhausted, which weakens socio-economic development.

First, the social vitality is obviously insufficient. The potential of China's primary freedom has been released. Since the basic right of equality for many people cannot be guaranteed, the integrity of freedom that they should have as individuals is damaged. Further, the significance of freedom for them is bound to be damaged. As a result, their enthusiasm and initiative are severely weakened, thus limiting the potential release of the whole society and gradually losing social vitality.

Second, it directly weakens the driving force of domestic consumption for economic development. Specifically, domestic consumption is much more of a driving force behind the economic growth compared to export or investment activities. High-income groups have the strongest purchasing power, but their marginal propensity to consume is the lowest of any socio-economic group.

The opposite is true of low-income groups. Their marginal propensity to consume is the strongest of any group, but they have the least purchasing power. Both the marginal propensity to consume and purchasing power of middle-income groups are relatively strong. Obviously, a society dominated by middle-income groups has the strongest driving force for domestic consumption. On the contrary, a society dominated by low-income groups has the weakest driving force of domestic consumption. The existence of inequality in China means that the number of members in low-income groups is too large, and the proportion of members in middle-income groups is relatively small. This is very detrimental for domestic consumption. In 2009, China's final consumption rate (consumption rate) dropped to its lowest point of 48.0% since the reform and opening up (64.4% in 1979), while the capital formation rate (investment rate) reached its highest point of 47.7% in 30 years after the reform and opening up (National Bureau of Statistics 2010).

Obviously, freedom should end its primary stage and enter a new stage; that is, freedom should develop into a freedom based on an equal socio-economic system and the protection of the basic equal rights of members of society, and a freedom that can be organically integrated with equality.

*There Is a Non-benign Interaction Between Social Strata*

In a modern society that puts people first, the benefits of cooperation to one group must be realized on the condition that other groups also benefit, and not at the expense of their reasonable interests. "Everyone should have only as much liberty as justice allows, and no more than that" (Adler 1984). This mutual benefit depends on at least two important prerequisites, namely, a socio-economic system that embodies both freedom and equality. Without a socio-economic system that embodies the concept of freedom, a society cannot be dynamic. Without a socio-economic system that embodies the concept of equality, it is impossible to achieve mutual benefit. It should be noted that members of society have different abilities, resources, and statuses. If they are not equally protected and allowed to behave as they freely like, some people will damage the legitimate interests of others. As a proverb vividly quoted by Berlin in his *Liberty*: "Freedom for the wolves has often meant death to the sheep" (Berlin 2002).

Forty years after the reform and opening-up era, due to the relative deficiency of equality, the lack of an equal socio-economic system, and the lack of a systematic system of rules, Chinese society has lacked institutional guarantees in many fields, often showing a disorderly state, which in turn leads to the lack of equal, just, reasonable, and clear boundaries of interests among all social strata. In the space of relative freedom and lack of institutional constraints, the stronger interest impulses of people will often turn into a competition for their own strength. In this way, the strong group (the party with relatively strong strength—here, the word "strong group" is used in a neutral sense rather than a derogatory sense, and the "strong group" is regarded as the "dominant group") can easily cross its fair and reasonable interest boundary, directly

damage and encroach on the equal rights and reasonable interests of the weak group (the party with relatively weak strength), and even damage and encroach on public interests. Because of this, in the 40 years after the reform, it is inevitable that there are non-benign and even vicious interactions among all social strata in China. Sometimes, the promotion of the interests of the strong groups is based on harming the equal rights and reasonable interests of the weak groups.

On the one hand, this shows the extraordinary expansion of the interests of strong groups. During this period, the freedom present was mainly to eliminate the original restrictions and shackles on social and economic development, which led to a large number of socio-economic resources spreading to the society and thus becoming mobile or even unclaimed resources in a certain sense. At the same time, the social and economic field enters a “rule vacuum period” due to the lack of basic and standardized systems. In this case, whoever occupies a favorable position can occupy a priority position in the allocation of new resources. Therefore, for some strong groups with an obviously dominant position, obvious social discourse power and influence, what should have been “freedom-based creation” will often become a kind of “freedom-based interest expansion,” and their wealth and interests will easily be greatly or even supernormally expanded. It is a recognized fact that, in just 20 years, the proportion of wealthy groups in China in the wealth of all residents in society has increased rapidly. A survey shows that, as of August 2011, the households with the 10% most assets own 84.6% of all household assets. The financial assets of China’s richest accounted for 61.01% of all financial assets, and their non-financial assets account for 88.7% of all non-financial assets (Accessed Sept 1 2022). More importantly, in many cases, the extraordinary expansion of the interests of strong groups is often achieved through a large number of illegal behaviors such as the use of the gap between the two-track price system, the profit from the loss of state-owned assets, industry monopoly, forced land acquisition and demolition, corruption, tax evasion, tailor-made preferential policies, and so on.

On the other hand, it showcases the “low increase of interests” of the weak groups. The “low increase in benefits” here means that, compared to the 30 years before reform and opening up, the absolute income of the vulnerable groups has increased and their absolute standard of living has improved. However, compared to the strong groups—that is, other richer groups—the gap between them has widened rapidly, and their social and economic positions are also decreasing. According to the statistics of the World Bank, China’s poorest population, accounting for 20% of the total population, accounts for only 4.3% of income or consumption, while the richest population, accounting for 20% of the total population, accounts for 51.9% of income or consumption. These figures, among some representative countries, although lower than those of South Africa, Brazil, and other countries, are obviously higher than those of the United States, Russia, India, Iran, Japan, France, Poland, and other countries, and are in a relatively high position (World Bank 2008). In 2002, a survey on “Urban residents’ judgment on the groups that have benefited the most since the reform and opening up” showed that two groups were



considered by more than half of the respondents as the groups that have benefited the most since the reform and opening up: Party and government cadres (59.2%) and private entrepreneurs (55.4%). The following groups include entertainers, urban and rural self-employed individuals, and managers of state-owned enterprises, while workers and farmers ranked first (88.2%) and second (76.3%) among the “least benefited groups” (Li 2005).

### *Social Security Is Adversely Affected*

While the interests of some social groups expand beyond the norm and those of others are damaged, it should also be noted that, after the reform, the awareness of people’s interests demands is generally increasing. The market economy is a natural breeding ground for equality and independence. After the reform and opening-up era, especially after the 1990s, with the advancement of the market economy, the Chinese people’s awareness of equality and independence has developed unprecedentedly, and it has been positively recognized at the national level. In 2004, the statement that “the state respects and guarantees human rights” was included in the Constitution; in 2007, “freedom” and “equality” were included in the report of the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China (CPC). This practice conforms to the trend of modernization and is a major event in China’s social and political life. Since the people’s awareness of equality and independence has been generally enhanced, their awareness of safeguarding their rights will inevitably increase rapidly. Further, in the new era, it is an inevitable historical trend for people to safeguard their own equal rights, especially their basic equal rights. Under the new historical conditions, people’s demands for interests have emerged from an invisible level in the past to a now visible level, and they are more and more aware of choosing different ways to defend their rights and express their interests. Under such circumstances, a large number of practices that violate people’s basic rights will be generally resisted.

On the one hand, some social groups often cross the border and engage in activities that are directly detrimental to people’s interests; on the other hand, because people’s equality and rights protection are generally enhanced, many disputes, contradictions, and conflicts will inevitably arise in the interests of all social strata. In this period, the social contradiction has a very obvious feature; that is, the way people appeal for their interests became the major social contradiction. For example, the farmers’ struggles around various taxes in the 1980s and 1990s, the contradictions and disputes around the transformation of state-owned enterprises in the 1990s, the conflicts around forced land acquisition and demolition from the 1990s until now, and the migrant workers’ rights protection actions from the beginning of the twenty-first century are all social contradictions of the interest-appeal type.

If this kind of social contradictions is not solved well and is allowed to evolve to a certain extent, it will lead to more intense social conflicts, and thus pose a threat to social security. “The essence of the reform is the redistribution of interests and pattern adjustment, which will inevitably affect some vested



interests. The clash of ideas is not an arbitrary argument, but in the final analysis, 'interests prevail.' The 'sense of deprivation' of vested interests and the 'sense of relative deprivation' of vulnerable groups in the redistribution of interests may cause a certain dissatisfaction or even resistance in a certain period" (Song 1999). In recent years, all kinds of mass incidents, which are mainly caused by social contradictions of the interest-appeal type, have shown an increasing trend, clearly illustrating this point.

It is worth noting that the social contradiction caused by the labor-capital contradiction will become a very prominent social contradiction in Chinese society in the coming period. Because the basic working conditions and basic rights of a large number of workers have not been properly protected, and at the same time, because the awareness of workers' rights protection has begun to generally take shape, the government has begun to pay more and more attention to the issue of labor protection. Therefore, in recent years, labor disputes and contradictions have changed from recessive to explicit, and they are in a rapidly rising channel. From 1997 to 2006, the number of labor dispute cases in China increased rapidly, with an annual increase of more than 20%. In 2008, the labor dispute cases filed in the current period increased by 98% compared to the previous year. Importantly, with the rapid advancement of urbanization, the proportion of rural residents is rapidly decreasing, the number of employed people covered by labor relations is rapidly increasing, and the influence of labor relations is increasing. Moreover, the employees with workers as the main body have great potential energy because of their strong organization and discipline. In this way, in the coming historical period, labor disputes and conflicts in China are likely to intensify and may lead to more and more mass incidents. Among any future mass incidents in China, the proportion caused by labor disputes and conflicts is likely to be higher and higher. Obviously, if all kinds of social contradictions caused by labor relations are not solved well, it will inevitably cause many social risks, which will directly affect the safe operation of the whole society.

### 3 ENLIGHTENMENT

On the basis of the above analysis, we can demonstrate the following points.

First, freedom and equality should be regarded as an organic whole that is mutually established and promoted. Both have their own functions and are indispensable. If one of them is separated from the other, it will certainly become harmful with the passage of time.

Freedom and equality are the fundamental values of modern society. As long as a society is engaged in modernization, it must carry out a basic system construction on the basis of freedom and equality. Under the conditions of modern society and the market economy, freedom focuses on the protection of the people's autonomy, differences, and development space as individuals, while equality focuses on the protection of their common basic dignity and basic rights, which are things that people need. Thus, freedom and equality

constitute the two most basic and important conceptual origins necessary for the design of a basic modern society system. At the same time, only based on these two origins can we design and build a fair and reasonable basic system of modern society, shape a reasonable economic development pattern and a reasonable modern social structure, and ensure the safe operation of society in the long run.

Looking at the evolution of freedom and equality in the two periods before and after reform and opening up, we can see that freedom and equality always evolve independently of each other, which inevitably leads to the phenomenon that either freedom or equality is overemphasized or undervalued. In the 30 years before reform and opening up, equality was overemphasized across society. At the beginning, this overemphasized equality played a decisive role in eliminating inequalities in Chinese society, greatly liberating social productivity and motivating people to start businesses and to work hard. However, due to the neglect of freedom, the overemphasis on equality evolved into an extreme egalitarianism, which was very harmful and had a negative impact on almost all aspects of China's socio-economic development. In sharp contrast, in the 40 years after reform and opening up, Chinese society has shown an abnormally heavy tendency toward freedom and an abnormally light tendency toward equality. In the early stage of the reform and opening up, abnormal freedom played an irreplaceable role in eliminating the personal attachment of the people and the egalitarianism of the past, and made people become in "individual people" in the truest sense. "Individual freedom can be said to be the most lenient in China's history. The biggest change in China lies in the people's mentality and spirit—their attitude and vision, open mind, confidence in themselves and the country, enthusiasm for getting in touch with the world, and of course, personal freedom in real life" (Kuhn 2010). This has greatly liberated the productive forces, fully released social energy, established the legitimacy of the daily life of people, and promoted the tremendous development of China's social economy. However, due to the contempt for equality, this abnormal freedom has gradually produced more and more obvious negative effects with the passage of time, which not only makes the power of social and economic development weak but also leads to estrangement, dissatisfaction, and even conflicts among social groups, as well as serious social contradictions.

Obviously, the phenomenon of freedom and equality in the two periods before and after reform and opening up has provided important lessons for China's future development. Moreover, since this kind of lesson has been gained by our nation at great cost, it should be paid attention to by the people in particular and it must not be repeated. Compared to the level of freedom, China's current equality is obviously insufficient. However, the extreme egalitarianism before the reform and opening up must not be used to eliminate the hard-won freedom of Chinese society. Instead, while ensuring the full development of freedom, we should inject the equally essential equal elements into this society and establish a basic equality guarantee system, so that freedom and equality can develop in a coordinated and balanced way. Only in this way can

we promote the overall healthy and sustainable development of China's social and economic development.

Second, improving the people's livelihood is an important thing that China needs to urgently do at this stage. It cannot be denied that, since the reform and opening up, the development of equality is an obvious shortcoming compared with the development of freedom. In different historical stages, equality has different specific goals and tasks. At the present stage of China, the starting point of equality is relatively low. Under such circumstances, the main goal and realistic task that equality will face in the coming period is to make efforts around the safety net of the basic living conditions that people must have as individuals. In this regard, we should find an indispensable and effective breakthrough point. This breakthrough point is to improve people's livelihood and establish a middle and primary livelihood security system. The basic characteristics of the primary livelihood security system are at the low and medium levels, have wide coverage, and effective. Its indicators may not cover all aspects, but the main indicators should be available.

Through the establishment of the middle and primary livelihood security system, China's basic livelihood can be greatly improved. For example, it can not only provide a necessary guarantee for people's basic dignity, but also provide a basic platform for the further free development of most people.

Third, keeping wealth with the people can organically combine freedom and equality from an important aspect.

In terms of keeping wealth with the people,<sup>2</sup> it mainly refers to preventing or eliminating and alleviating the excessive gap between the rich and the poor, preventing a select group of people from expanding their own interests in ways that harm the reasonable interests of the people, preventing the improper possession and infringement of the people's wealth by public power, preventing the government from "competing with the people for profits," encouraging the people to accumulate wealth, inclining wealth to the people, and making middle-income people the main crowd. The process of modernization in the world shows that keeping wealth with the people is the only way for any country to truly prosper and maintain sustainable development.

Keeping wealth with the people and improving the people's livelihoods have different emphases. In contrast, improving the people's livelihood focuses on

<sup>2</sup>The concept of keeping wealth with the people has long been a part of Chinese political economy. Prior to the Qin Dynasty, the Confucian, Mohist, Daoist, and Legalist scholars as well as military strategists all expounded on this subject. A ruler is expected to be frugal and will not compete with the people for benefits, nor plunder their riches. Policies that are generous toward the people should be adopted, so as to permit and encourage them to become rich through justified means. The underlying assumption here is that a wealthy populace and a wealthy state are one and the same. A wealthy populace is the foundation of a state's wealth as well as the fundamental guarantee for the state to win popular support. A state's wealth is more than just about its riches, but about people's support as well. This is an extension of the concept of "putting the people first," and in the present day, keeping wealth with the people has become a defining feature of modern civilization.

the direct intervention and help of the state, which obviously improves the basic living conditions of the people. However, keeping wealth with the people focuses on the establishment of necessary systems and policies by the state and provides the people with a fair and reasonable social and economic environment, such as protecting the property rights of the people, ensuring full employment, eliminating discrimination, expanding the property income of people, etc., and providing necessary guidance and protection for their free and independent entrepreneurship. Under this condition, people will improve their basic living conditions through their personal efforts. Obviously, in this sense, keeping wealth with the people can organically combine freedom and equality.

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## The Improper Pursuit of Social Justice

In a modern society with a market economy, social justice is the fundamental value pursued by individuals. Social justice consists of two indispensable waypoints by which values are oriented: equality and justice. In other words, all members of society should share in the fruits of social development, and, at the same time, sufficient space should be provided for them to freely develop. The primary content (or fundamental rules) of these two waypoints is expressed in four ways: through the safeguarding of the basic rights of members of society, through equality of opportunity, through distribution according to contribution, and through social adjustment—all of which are guaranteed through equitable procedures. Social justice is the conceptual basis for the design of society's fundamental institutions and policies. As Rawls says, "Justice is the first virtue of social institutions, as truth is of systems of thought" (Rawls 1999).

Social justice is an extremely important goal that is universally pursued across modern society. However, due to cognitive bias, the divergent interests and preferences of different social groups, historical conditions, or practical circumstances, social justice is sometimes pursued improperly. The pursuit of equality or liberty might be taken to extremes, or procedural justice might be neglected or distorted. Once this occurs, social justice inevitably loses its original meaning, growing warped and even inclining toward injustice, thereby producing all sort of negative effects within society. Each of these issues ought to be given sufficient attention.

### I THE IMPROPER PURSUIT OF EQUALITY

Modern society is people-oriented. Communities are composed of numerous specific individuals. As mentioned earlier, each individual makes an indispensable contribution to the community while also possessing their own human dignity as members of the species—both of which entitle each to equal rights. As Engels pointed out: "The modern demand for equality is something entirely

different from that; this consists rather in deducing from that common quality of being human, from that equality of men as men, a claim to equal political resp. social status for all human beings, or at least for all citizens of a state or all members of a society” (Marx and Engels 1995a). Crucially, the emergence and development of modern productive forces has made it possible to achieve equality. Equality is a historical phenomenon. In practical terms, equality is only able to emerge in modern societies with highly developed levels of productivity. The enormous material wealth created by modern productive power has fundamentally ended scarcity in the basic resources necessary for people’s survival, thereby creating possibilities and laying the foundation for the protection of fundamental equal rights.

Within modern society and the market economy, equality carries an irreplaceable significance for social integration and social unity, for the stimulation of society’s overall potential, and for its stable operation.

Though equality is of the utmost importance, going too far is as bad as not doing enough. Once taken to the extreme and made into the only goal of social justice, divorced from freedom and specific historical conditions, equality becomes excessive. Accordingly, the excessive pursuit of equality becomes an inappropriate practice with harmful effects.

Although an excess of equality can take different outward forms, in essence it places undue emphasis on the similarity of individual living conditions and attempts to realize such similarity through a kind of “levelling,” all while denying the reasonable differences that exist between people. In other words, excessive equality only sees that “all are born equal,” but not “all are born different.” Nor does it acknowledge that individuals’ different situations are primarily shaped by their own self-motivated efforts.

### *1.1 Three Categories of the Improper Pursuit of Equality*

The improper pursuit of equality can be roughly divided into the following three categories, according to intensity and the degree of irrationality:

The first is egalitarianism. The crux of egalitarianism lies in exceeding the reasonable bounds of equality. Under the conditions that prevail in a modern society and market economy, society must ensure that the basic rights of all individuals—including their rights to subsistence, education, and social security—are guaranteed so as to safeguard basic dignity, to ensure social cooperation and solidarity, and to address personal and social risks. All members of society must enjoy the fruits of development. There is no doubt about this point, which is also a central element of social justice. The problem is that egalitarianism considers this to be the only element, ignoring the equally important and fundamental principle of distribution according to contribution.

Egalitarianism pushes for social wealth to be unconditionally distributed according to the principle of “one share per person.” This is obviously unfair. As social wealth and other resources are accumulated, the quantity and quality

of labor invested by each member of society differs. Similarly, the factors of production that they invest will not be entirely identical. Therefore, each individual worker's contribution will differ from that of others. Under such circumstances, egalitarianism's unconditional method of "one share per person" is actually a form of expropriation that takes from those who contribute more to the benefit of those who contribute less.

In many circumstances, egalitarianism is not necessarily expressed in an extreme fashion. On the contrary, it is often implemented through pre-existing systems and institutions. Before the period of reform and opening in China, egalitarianism was practiced through the planned economy. At that time, individuals had extremely similar status in terms of income, with only minor differences that had almost no relation to the concrete investment made by each worker. In certain developed countries in Europe today, egalitarianism manifests in the form of welfare systems that far exceed all reasonable limits. In West Germany in the 1980s, the rate of social transfers was 55% of the average tax rate, while in Sweden and Britain, it was above 78% (Zhou 2001). The National Health System (NHS) in the UK accounted for 9% of GDP in 2008, up from 5.8% in 1998 (Ran 2017). It ought to be admitted that such a high rate of social transfers clearly exceeds any fair and reasonable limits.

The second category is populism. This term originated with thinkers such as Alexander Herzen, Nikolay Chernyshevsky, and others in the mid-nineteenth century in Russia. Although the term has come to encompass many schools of thought, their basic viewpoints are roughly homologous. The concept, rooted in equality, has certain positive aspects visible in its criticism of absolutism and exploitation. However, insofar as it unconditionally takes the standpoint of the populace at large, populism proves to be one-sided and harmful. One reason for this is that it constructs a fantastic utopia. Populism thereby negates any sense of periodicity and rejects the historical trend toward modernization. Commenting on Sun Yat-sen's populism, Lenin argued, "That is the essence of Sun Yat-sen's Narodism ... From the point of view of doctrine, this theory is that of a petty-bourgeois 'socialist' reactionary. For the idea that capitalism can be 'prevented' in China and that a 'social revolution' there will be made easier by the country's backwardness, and so on, is altogether reactionary" (Lenin 1995). Secondly, populism denies social differences. As modernization and the market economy progress, the social division of labor inevitably grows more intricate while its constituent elements become more complex and its overall composition more heterogeneous. Populism, on the other hand, considers itself to be on the side of the people, opposing and attempting to eliminate all "elite" groups.

Populism's major misconception is its attempt to construct fundamental social institutions based on absolute equality and calculated in terms of the simple majority. This standpoint not only denies individuals' rational pursuit of freedom within modern society and the market economy—as well as their diverse conditions of existence and development—but also denies the crucial social justice principles of equal opportunity and distribution according to

contribution. More troublingly, when compared to egalitarianism, populist practices are more irrational and extreme. Populism not only rejects the historical rationality underlying modern society and the market economy, but also tries to invoke the name of “The People” and the principle of absolute equality as a sort of threat, organizing the modernization process under the banner of historical inevitability and thereby subverting the “normal state” and “regularity” of modern society. Also worth noting is the fact that, although populism is hostile to elitism, it often finds that it is easier to move toward “strongman politics” or even “dictator politics” than to progress in the direction of liberal democracy (Liu 2016).

The third category is the “tyranny of the majority.” This is the most extreme form of equality, and it has completely lost the proper meaning of social justice. Rooted in the mere numerical superiority of the majority rather than the principles of social justice, the “tyranny of the majority” directly determines the fate of the minority in the name of opposing inequality. Populism is already an extreme form of equality, but the “tyranny of the majority” is even more extreme and irrational since it uses threats and violence to “coerce” or eliminate dissidents. Furthermore, the “tyranny of the majority” is even more arbitrary and lacking in its sense of responsibility. Under certain conditions, it entirely disregards the need for social order that every society must take into consideration. In a sense, the will of the majority is even worse than the autocracy of a minority since the latter at least bears a certain responsibility and is more likely to consider ways to maintain society in the long run—albeit from the perspective of a hereditary monarchy—maintaining social order and never daring to stoke social chaos (Wu 2012).

### *1.2 The Negative Social Effects of the Improper Pursuit of Equality*

In practice, the improper pursuit of equality will inevitably lead to obvious or even severely negative social effects.

The improper pursuit of equality is bound to stifle social vitality and creativity. Within modern society and the market economy, excessive equality—which emphasizes the similarity between individuals—will suppress people’s pursuit of differentiated goals, limit the space for individuals to freely develop, and dampen their enthusiasm in work. “The relationship between equality and freedom is a love-hate relationship, depending on whether we demand an equality that suits diversity or an equality that sees inequality in every diversity. And, certainly, the more equality is sameness, the more an equality so conceived feeds a distaste for variety, self-assertion and eminence, and thereby, in the final analysis, for freedom” (Sartori 1987). Thus, the improper pursuit of equality will eventually undermine a society’s vitality and creativity to various degrees.

The improper pursuit of equality will also inevitably damage the material foundations for a society’s sustainable development. Modern society must ensure the necessary social welfare of its individual members. However, the

provision of welfare through the social security system must take place according to ability. Otherwise, the financial resources of the nation will be overdrawn and sustainable development weakened. The improper pursuit of equality can easily result in an overgenerous welfare system—that is, high welfare provisions that exceed the capacity of their material foundation—and this will obviously hinder a country’s long-term development. Such a situation exists to differing degrees in both developed and developing countries and regions.

Sometimes, the improper pursuit of equality even directly undermines the safe operation of society. Egalitarian leveling increases the unreasonable benefits received by those who contribute less by impairing the reasonable benefits of those who contribute more, which will inevitably lead to dissatisfaction among the latter. Populism harms the legitimate interests of the minority in the name of the majority such that it becomes impossible to guarantee the interests of all members of society. Today one minority might be sacrificed, tomorrow another, and the day after that yet another. In the end this increase amounts to a large total number of people. When considered over an even longer timespan, everyone in the majority group could become a member of the minority group. Accordingly, when viewed from a long-term perspective, the equal rights and reasonable interests of the majority will not have any stable boundaries and thus will not be guaranteed (Wu 2012). As a result, many people will find themselves in a state of anxiety and panic. Meanwhile, the “tyranny of the majority” easily stokes unrest across the entirety of society, which carries an enormous price. As Tocqueville commented with regard to the social unrest caused by the French Revolution: “One, older and more deeply rooted, was the violent, inextinguishable hatred of inequality. This was ignited and fueled by the sight of inequality itself, and with constant and irresistible force it had long driven the French to seek to destroy, down to the very foundations, whatever remained of the institutions of the Middle Ages, and once the ground was clear, to build upon it a society in which men would be as similar and conditions as equal as humanity would allow” (Tocqueville 2011).

## 2 THE IMPROPER PURSUIT OF LIBERTY

In “people-oriented” modern society, consensual free development is of the utmost importance. As stated in *the Communist Manifesto*, “we shall have an association in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1974). Moreover, the great abundance of modern material wealth, the huge demand for an efficient allocation of various factors of production within the market economy, and the substantial increase in opportunities for social mobility all also provide an ever-increasing space for the free development of individuals within society.

Just as modern society is inseparable from equality, so too is it inseparable from liberty. In a modern society with a market economy, the universal free development of individuals is a necessary condition for effective and sustainable economic development; a direct driving force behind the prosperity of

ideology, culture, science and technology; a catalyst for the diversification and enrichment of people's lifestyles; a necessary requirement for society to be full of vitality and creativity; and the desire of every individual member of society.

### 2.1 *Two Categories of the Improper Pursuit of Liberty*

It should be noted that, although free development is a common interest that appeals to individuals across modern society, it is not their only goal. "Everyone should have only as much liberty as justice allows, and no more than that" (Adler 1984). Once the pursuit of liberty exceeds a reasonable limit, it will become inappropriate and will grow to negatively affect the safe operation and healthy development of society.

The first category of the improper pursuit of liberty is the liberty of economic supremacy.

At the fundamental level, as far as the relationship between humanity and the economy is concerned, humanity is itself the end, and the economy, however important, is only a means or tool to meet this end. "Growth was a means to an end, not an end in itself. The objectives were to eliminate poverty, illiteracy and disease, to increase the range of human choice, to give mankind greater control over the natural environment and thereby to increase freedom" (Griffin 1999). However, in the early industrial period, the intense demands of the majority to meet the basic needs of survival and the intense desire of business owners to "make a profit" led to the emergence of "economic supremacy"—a seemingly inconceivable form of alienation possessing a certain type of historical inevitability. Economic supremacy takes the economy to be an end in itself, with humanity made into a tool for the expansion of wealth. Under such circumstances, the economy (capital) grows to dominate all aspects of society and is free to do as it pleases. At the same time, as the personification of the economy (capital), business owners (known in this early period as capitalists) grew into the "core group" influencing or even "dominating" the economic life of the entire society as well as the basic livelihoods of the employed population, with the latter attached to and subordinate to the business owners.

In the early industrial period, liberty typically took the form of economic supremacy (the supremacy of capital). With this as the starting point, the law of the jungle inevitably prevailed. On the one hand, business owners (capitalists) were free to accumulate wealth at a frantic pace, with no limits placed on this freedom even if it caused excessive harm to the employed population. As Marx argues, "But in its blind unrestrainable passion, its were-wolf hunger for surplus-labor, capital oversteps not only the moral, but even the merely physical maximum bounds of the working-day ... It higgles over a meal-time, incorporating it where possible with the process of production itself, so that food is given to the laborer as to a mere means of production, as coal is supplied to the boiler, grease and oil to the machinery" (Marx and Engels 1972). On the other hand, the employed had only the freedom to work in order to earn a meager income and maintain a miserable life. As described by an American worker at

the time, “factory laborers worked ten- to twelve-hour days, six days a week; in the steel industry they worked twelve hours a day. Many worked in appallingly unsafe or unhealthy factories. Industrial accidents were frequent and severe ... At least 1.7 million children under sixteen years of age were employed in factories and fields in 1900, more than twice the number of thirty years before. Ten percent of all girls aged ten to fifteen, and 20 percent of all boys, held jobs” (Brinkley 2014). Therefore, pushed to the extreme, the liberty of economic supremacy is not only unjust, but can sometimes become extremely unjust or even inhuman.

Even in the latter half of the twentieth century, economic supremacy existed in many developing countries and regions to differing degrees. Sometimes, it manifested as the “supremacy of GDP.” “‘Growthmanship’ has become a way of life ... In fact, for many years the conventional wisdom equated development with the rapidity of national output growth” (Todaro 1989). Although this phenomenon possesses a certain historical rationality, in the final analysis it is unsustainable and must be rectified.

The second category of the improper pursuit of liberty is the one-way liberty of vested interests.

For various reasons (such as the absence of a system of rules), in periods of social transformation some vested interests forge alliances and form their own spheres of influence, utilizing all kinds of privileges to enjoy a one-way liberty conducive to the expansion of their own interests. Marx argued that “every kind of freedom has always existed, only at one time as a special privilege, at another as a universal right” (Marx and Engels 1995b). What these vested interest groups possess is the freedom of privilege and exclusivity. This kind of unidirectional liberty is an injustice that seriously damages equality of opportunity.

On the one hand, the unidirectional liberty of these vested interests creates a “closed circle of interests” limited to their “own people.” Groups from different social spheres will often form such alliances, using various policies or unspoken rules beneficial to their own interests in order to build an exclusive sphere of influence that then further benefits their “own people.” These circles are what General Secretary Xi Jinping calls “barriers of solidified interests” that must be broken down. Since allied groups possessing vested interests can freely swap and stack interests within their own circles—with the winner taking all—they can thus expand their respective interests as they please and to the fullest extent possible.

On the other hand, the one-directional liberty of these interest groups also “erects barriers” against the interests of others. By obstructing the freedom of others, such groups restrict the opportunities available to those outside their sphere and limit the scope of these outsiders’ freedom to move and develop. More importantly, as time passes this typical form of social discrimination will solidify into an “intergenerational” phenomenon.

## 2.2 *The Negative Social Effects of the Improper Pursuit of Liberty*

The improper pursuit of liberty is also bound to have a number of negative and severe effects.

The improper pursuit of liberty will weaken social unity. The improper pursuit of liberty implies that those in groups that occupy relatively favorable positions are using their overpowering “freedom” in a way that undermines the freedom and dignity of those who occupy relatively unfavorable positions, inevitably creating a social structure marked by imbalanced interests. This imbalanced system, in turn, further enables certain groups to inappropriately encroach on the reasonable interests of other groups at no cost to themselves, thus gaining benefits through others’ loss (Wu 2008). As a result, many individuals who find themselves in a relatively unfavorable position are deprived of due benefits both in an absolute and relative sense. In this way, dissatisfaction and even hatred toward those who benefit under such an imbalanced system will be fostered among those who have lost out, weakening social solidarity and social cooperation.

The improper pursuit of liberty will impede the effective production and deployment of social potential. Firstly, it inhibits the ability workers to improve their technical skills. Since the improper pursuit of liberty causes widespread poverty, many workers and their children will not have the ability or opportunity to receive necessary education, making it impossible to improve their level of culture. In the long run, the productive potential of society will be suppressed. Secondly, it curbs domestic consumption. Again due to widespread poverty, many of the poor will lack necessary purchasing power, thus inhibiting the domestic consumption demand necessary for development. Thirdly, it weakens the vitality of the market. The improper pursuit of liberty generates numerous forms of economic privilege and monopoly, which in turn hinder the effective allocation of the factors of production. “When the market is imperfect, inequalities of power and wealth become an inequality of opportunity, which results in the waste of productive potential and inefficiency in the allocation of resources” (World Bank 2006). As a result, the economic vitality that the market economy should possess cannot be effectively stimulated.

The improper pursuit of liberty is not conducive to the safe operation of society. In modern society, freedom and equality have become individuals’ most important and universal demands. The improper pursuit of liberty will, however, diminish the baseline of equality and constrain the range of free development for the majority of individuals, thereby damaging their dignity and making them lose hope in the future. In addition, the improper pursuit of liberty by the few will directly harm the vital interests of the many. All of this will trigger resistance by those whose dignity, interests, and hopes have suffered, erecting barriers throughout society while also aggravating disputes and conflicts. For party strife is everywhere due to inequality. In this way, the safe operation of society will be seriously impacted. Moreover, once riotous disturbances or more widespread social unrest emerge, the interests of all



groups—including the former vested interests—will be damaged to differing degrees, with no one spared.

### 3 IMPROPER PROCEDURAL JUSTICE

Social justice cannot merely remain at the conceptual level but instead needs to be implemented at a practical level through relevant institutions. Going a step further, this institutionalization of social justice must be carried out through equitable procedures. Substantive justice and procedural justice together compose an organic whole, each indispensable for the other. Without procedural justice, substantive justice cannot be realized.

Procedural justice refers to the fundamental rules and procedural arrangements that should be followed in the formulation and implementation of laws, regulations, rules, and any other policies related to social justice. Social justice can be embodied in procedural justice in two ways: first, the rationale given in the formulation of laws, regulations, rules, and any other policies should be just; and second, the process itself should also be just (Wu 2002). Procedural justice is essentially a kind of “process value,” mainly reflected in the workings of the process, while also acting as a standard to evaluate whether the process itself is equitable (Xiao 1999). Procedural justice has the following fundamental characteristics: inclusivity, impartiality, the participation of many parties, openness, and a scientific character.

The complexity of the problem lies in the fact that, under certain conditions, procedural justice may be ignored or distorted. This improper form of procedural justice—which is still practiced in the name of procedural justice—emerges out of the preferential interests and influence of different groups, as well as the cognitive bias of individuals.

First are cases in which the relevant parties attempting to achieve just outcomes have done damage to procedural justice through technical error. In other words, this is the misconduct of “not doing a good thing well.”

The technical specifications or requirements laid out by specific guidelines in the procedural justice process must be strictly followed in order to achieve procedural justice. “The fairness of the procedural rules is determined entirely by their conducibility in general to just results, but there is no guarantee that even the most fastidious adherence to the rules will lead to a just outcome in a given case” (Feinberg 1973a). Sometimes, the relevant parties act in accord with the principles of universality and impartiality while ignoring or failing to follow other requirements. They thereby fail to realize procedural justice. First, in terms of the participation of multiple parties, even though the relevant groups may try to be objective and invite many individuals to participate, those who do participate are not sufficiently representative and certain groups are overlooked. Additionally, large numbers of unsuspecting netizens sometimes overexaggerate one-sided views on digital media such that certain participants in the procedural justice process are involuntarily swayed, their views hijacked by “public opinion” until they can no longer be objective or fair. Second, in

terms of openness, the process may be lacking in the collection and disclosure of information, which results in an asymmetry of information between relevant parties. Third, in terms of scientific requirements, the process may not have established or followed appropriate mechanisms for negotiation and compromise, which makes it difficult for the relevant parties to effectively communicate. Similarly, necessary mechanisms for correcting errors may not have been established, such that it is impossible to rectify miscarriages of justice after the fact. In each of these cases, the implication is that procedural justice is still not properly calibrated and obvious deviations still exist, making it difficult to guarantee substantive justice.

Second are cases in which the arrangement of the process is in fact manipulated and unilaterally controlled by vested interests, effectively “drawing water to their own mill.”

In certain circumstances, vested interest groups may use the guise of procedural justice to obtain formal “legitimacy.” However, this is a selective use of procedural justice that distorts or abandons key elements. First, in terms of universality, this practice only protects vested interests, rather than the interests of all. Second, in terms of impartiality, the parties and arbitrators involved are sometimes members of the same vested interest group, just performing different roles. Third, in terms of the participation of many parties, vested interests will sometimes appoint their own people to participate in the process as “relevant” or “neutral” personnel and thereby prevent other relevant parties from fully expressing themselves. Fourth, in terms of openness, by monopolizing the channels by which information is disclosed, vested interests may only publish select information beneficial to themselves, or they may release large quantities of false information beneficial to themselves, all while restricting or prohibiting other relevant parties from publishing and obtaining true information relevant to the case.

Obviously, this purely formal sort of procedural justice has lost its original meaning. In fact, this distorted “procedural justice” has become a method for vested interests to exert unilateral control while also giving their undue benefits a formal legitimacy. Over time, the process of “procedural justice” becomes a one-sided institutional arrangement used by certain groups with vested interests to “whitewash” these unreasonable benefits. In such cases, procedural justice not only fails to guarantee substantive justice, but also becomes the direct cause of much social injustice.

It is apparent that any of these improper forms of procedural justice will not only fail to guarantee substantive justice but will also cause or aggravate social injustice. What’s more, due to the formal legitimacy of procedural justice and the fact that it is easily trusted and respected by the people, certain social injustices can be given a deceptive surface appearance of “fairness.” Once this deception is exposed, the people will easily lose confidence in society’s general conditions of justice.

#### 4 CONCLUDING REMARKS

China has undergone tremendous changes in the 40 years of reform and opening. From 1979 to 2015, GDP increased at an average annual rate of 9.6%. From 2001 to 2015, the average annual growth rate was 9.7%. Looking at the process of modernization across various countries throughout history, this is a very rare phenomenon. Moreover, for the largest community in the world, such an achievement is even more difficult. It is no exaggeration to refer to this as an exceptional miracle of human history. At the same time, it must be acknowledged that there are obvious and even serious problems within Chinese society, visible in the way that social injustice has already become a major influence on China's overall development.

At the present stage, how can social justice be effectively safeguarded and promoted? Based on the analysis above, we can easily arrive at two conclusions:

First, an accurate grasp and scientific understanding of social justice is necessary to effectively maintain and promote social justice.

Social justice in the modern sense is strictly defined. Each of its elements should not only be complete and treated as indispensable, but also come together to compose an organic whole, each inseparably intermixed into the others. All should take one another as necessary conditions for their own existence. Meanwhile, all have reasonable boundaries, and pushing any beyond their limits is just as bad as falling short. The key to understanding social justice is as follows. First, the two fundamental waypoints orienting social justice must be grasped: all people should be allowed to share in the fruits of social development and sufficient space should be provided for the free development of all members of society. These two complement one another and are each indispensable. Second, the "procedural justice" of relevant institutions and policies must also be grasped. If either of these two key principles of social justice is ignored, society will be led astray down the path of injustice. If the first of these two is not properly understood—only valuing the latter while ignoring the former—the result will be the "improper pursuit of equality" or the "improper pursuit of liberty." Similarly, failure to correctly understand the second of the two will result in "improper procedural justice." No matter which of these errors is made, the result will be an incorrect pursuit of social justice with differing degrees of negative social impact.

Second, in essence, the rule of law is effective at protecting and promoting social justice.

At China's present stage, the interests of individuals within society have grown increasingly visible and diversified as modernization has deepened, the market economy has expanded, and a general sense of independence and equality has taken shape. Among the numerous interests within society are intermingled various kinds of reasonable and unreasonable demands, which create a complicated problem. Moreover, the influence of social anxiety and the ubiquity of the internet have the effect of amplifying these demands. At the same

time, it should be acknowledged that China's current legal system is imperfect, awareness of the rule of law is generally weak, and social justice cannot be effectively maintained at the institutional level. Under such circumstances, some local governments sometimes adopt arbitrary, case-by-case methods for settling disputes and maintaining order. Although this practice is a somewhat understandable last resort, in the long run, it makes it more difficult to effectively alleviate or solve social conflicts. On the contrary, the potential energy driving such conflicts may even be accumulating and growing more serious.

An effective way to solve the above dilemma is to emphasize the essence of the rule of law, using it to protect and promote social justice. Within modern society and the market economy, there exists an equality between individuals and between social groups. The essential spirit of the rule of law is impartiality. Solving social contradictions and disputes in this spirit, though not likely to satisfy all involved, can (with a high probability) establish the credibility of the whole system of social governance and the authority of the legal system over the long run, which ultimately helps every member of society consciously form a sense of reverence for the law and consciously abide by it. Taken further, this can effectively protect and promote social justice.

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## Modern People Are Increasingly Attached to Social Justice

In a modern society with a market economy, social justice serves as the basic concept underlying that society's fundamental institutional arrangements. It is also a fundamental social value. Thus, social justice is extremely important to the safe operation and healthy development of Chinese society. Scholars have realized the tremendous importance of social justice at a "macro level." However, they have not paid sufficient attention to the problem of social justice at the micro level, that is, as seen from the perspective of each individual in a modern society. This is a deficiency in social justice research thus far.

Evidently, with the development of the process of modernization and the market economy, modern people's demands for social justice will likewise inevitably grow, and its relative "weight" among their other needs will also increase.<sup>1</sup> By comparison with people in a traditional society, modern people are increasingly attached to social justice. This is a universal law that has been demonstrated in numerous countries and regions in the process of their modernization and their development of a market economy. People in developed countries are attached to the concept of social justice, including liberty and equality, as well as to a social and economic system based on social justice. People in China during the transition period of reform have also placed unprecedented emphasis on the idea of social justice.

Modern people are increasingly attached to social justice, because it is necessary for them to deal with the most important issues of survival and development, including equality, a sense of social belonging, the ability to live and develop freely, and resolving or mitigating various social contradictions and disputes.

<sup>1</sup>The term "modern people" here refers to the individual members of a modern society.

## 1 THE ACQUISITION OF EQUALITY AND SOCIAL BELONGING

The conditions of a modern society with a market economy entail that the characteristics of the period that people display and the social environment in which they live undergo great changes. The attainment of equality and social belonging has become a necessity for every member of society and a precondition for living in that society. This precondition must be established through social justice.

### *1.1 Equality and a Sense of Social Belonging Are Increasingly Universal Interest Demands*

In a modern society with a market economy, equality has become the universal interest demand of every person.

The consciousness of equality at the “mass level” and at the level of “practice” arises as a result of historical evolution. “The mode of production in material life determines the general character of the social, political, and spiritual processes of life” (Marx and Engels 1995a). In a traditional society with a natural economy, most people do not enjoy equality in a real sense. Hierarchy is a common social structure that is accepted by people at the time. As a result, relationships between people can only be ones of dependency, rather than ones of equality. As Marx pointed out, in a feudal society, “personal dependence here characterizes the social relations of production just as much as it does the other spheres of life organized on the basis of that production” (Marx and Engels 1972a). Thus, the majority of people could not enjoy human dignity. “Despotism’s only thought is disdain for mankind, dehumanized man; and it is a thought superior to many others in that it is also a fact. In the eyes of the despot, men are always debased. They drown before his eyes and on his behalf in the mire of common life from which, like toads, they always rise up again... The principle on which monarchy in general is based is that of man as despised and despicable, of dehumanized man” (Marx and Engels 1956).

With the advancement of modern productivity and the market economy, and with the progress of modern civilization, societies begin to emphasize the principle of “taking people as the foundation” (以人为本 *yi ren wei ben*). Accordingly, when people left the animal world, they became self-conscious. As Marx said, “All emancipation is a reduction of the human world and relationships to man himself” (Marx and Engels 1956). In a modern society, everyone has the dignity of being part of the “human species,” and they have developed the corresponding consciousness of equality, autonomy, and independence. They are entitled to equal rights, especially with respect to basic rights. Accordingly, there is equality between individuals, not personal dependence. “The equality of all human beings is the equality of their dignity as persons... The truth of the proposition that all human beings are by nature equal is confined to the one respect in which that equality can be truly affirmed; namely, their all being equally human, their having the species-specific properties and

especially the differentiating properties that belong to all members of the species” (Adler 1984). More importantly, everyone has an interest demand that requires the social safeguarding and promotion of their equal rights.

The transnational WVS (World Values Survey) found that “people’s values in almost all industrial societies tend to change from ‘traditional’ to ‘secular rationality.’ With the development of the knowledge society, people’s values tend to shift from ‘survival consciousness’ to ‘self-expression.’ More and more people think that ‘survival’ is a matter of course, and they don’t need to put it on the agenda any more ... The value ‘self-expression’ is most concerned with environmental protection, gender equality, tolerance for non-normative behaviors such as homosexuality and foreign cultures, and a strong demand for participation in economic and political activities” (Zhang et al. 2012). China has witnessed a similar situation since reform and opening up. In a survey with 2942 respondents, the question was asked, “What do you think of equality between people?” “960 people chose the answer ‘equality is a goal we should pursue,’ accounting for 32.8% of the total. 1073 people chose ‘equality is only an ideal, which is difficult to achieve in reality,’ accounting for 36.6% of the total. People regard equality as a goal they pursue in life, which shows that equality and justice occupy a significant position in their minds” (Xuan 2011). In 2013, the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences carried out a comprehensive survey on the social situation in China. It revealed that the top five social values were equality, democracy, civilization, justice, and harmony (Wang and Yang 2014).

The sense of social belonging is another primary concern among modern people, and its acquisition is also closely connected to social justice.

This sense of social belonging is an extremely important issue that concerns the position, orientation, and mentality of individuals who are “atomized” in a modern society. Individuals living in such vast, complex, and changeable social environments urgently need a sense of social belonging. A modern society is a highly differentiated and heterogeneous one, in which the level of social differentiation increases day by day. “Highly efficient modernization and socialized mass production have greatly improved humanity’s ‘species capabilities.’ This means that tasks that were originally done by one social unit are now done separately by a number of social units, and social units in themselves have changed from being ‘general’ in nature to being ‘specialized.’ Consequently, the degree of social differentiation has greatly increased. This is embodied in the increased number of economic, social, political, and cultural units, and in the increased number of social classes and the groups related to them. The sharp increase of social differentiation has created an increasingly complicated situation regarding the constituent elements and structures of modern society” (Wu 2015).

At the same time, with the rapid development of science and technology, the market economy promotes the rapid flow of every kind of factor of production, which accelerates changes in modern society. Further, families no longer serve the function of production, and as a result they have also become smaller. The



usual blood ties and support that were the most intimate and almost unconditional for family/clan members are greatly weakened. The increase in social mobility means that the strength of long-term neighbor relationships is no longer maintained. "People soon learn that the ethics of family love, which is placed first in interpersonal communication in a familial society, must give way to commodity trading in the market." The conditions of a modern society with a market economy mean that people's interpersonal dependencies are diminished and various constraints disappear. Along with that, their previous sense of dependence diminishes as well. Now they can only rely on themselves. In this sense, "after each citizen has established their own little society, they will not care about the wider society and will let it develop on its own" (Liu 2012).

Modern people living in such a vast, complex, changeable, and indifferent "strange world" often experience strong feelings of being insignificant, isolated, helpless, and adrift. This situation becomes especially obvious during a period of transition in China, which leads to social anxiety among large numbers of people. In a sense, people in a modern society become "atomized" and "isolated" while they simultaneously gain awareness of independence, freedoms, and equality. One survey shows that, in China at present, "for whatever reason, more than 90% of the respondents, both male and female, admit that they experience life pressure, while only 6% claim that they have no life pressure." Moreover, during the period of transition, when a system of rules is lacking and there is no clear set of rules for them to follow, people are prone to mutual distrust. According to the 2006 National Comprehensive Social Survey, "the majority of respondents said that they did not trust strangers that much. 9.1% of respondents said that they did not trust strangers at all, and 64% did not trust strangers in general. Only 4.0% and 0.2% of respondents felt that strangers were 'trustworthy' and 'very trustworthy' respectively" (China Survey and Data Center, Renmin University of China 2009). The atmosphere of distrust has aggravated the loneliness and anxiety of modern people. In such a heterogeneous society, "atomized" people urgently need to find a sense of social belonging. In other words, the sense of social belonging has become a necessary condition for modern people to settle down into their lives and get on with their pursuits.

The unprecedented personal and social risks faced by modern people also means that they urgently need a sense of belonging because they must rely on the system of integrated social forces to cope with those risks. Compared with the past, the risks faced by modern people are unprecedented. The risks mainly involve two aspects. On the one hand, in the course of their lives and careers, people face various personal risks such as unemployment, illness, and old-age care. On the other hand, the exponential growth of society's productive forces, the accumulation of huge amounts of social and economic energy, the increased rate of scientific and technological development, and the diversity of people's ideas and interest demands in modern societies have brought unprecedented

uncertainty to society, resulting in a variety of social risks. “In advanced modernity the social production of wealth is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks ... In the course of the exponentially growing productive forces in the modernization process, hazards and potential threats have been unleashed to an extent previously unknown ... Risk society in this sense is a world risk society” (Beck 1992). At China’s present stage of development, some people are even concerned about the lack of a safety net to guarantee their basic survival needs. One survey revealed that, in recent years, what most concerned Chinese people was the safety of their food, the security of their personal information, and the environment. On the issue of food, 55% of people felt it was “very unsafe,” “unsafe,” or “not that safe” (Wang 2017). When faced with these unprecedented risks, it is impossible for individuals to respond effectively on their own. Therefore, modern people have no choice but to rely on society, which forms a sense of social belonging. They hope to have a “safety net” that can provide them with social security, in order to cope effectively with the risks from both other individuals and from society.

### *1.2 The Protection of Equal Rights and the Universal Formation of the Sense of Social Belonging Cannot Be Separated from Social Justice*

Whether the problem is one of protecting rights of equality or of developing a sense of social belonging, this can only be realized through social justice.

Social justice is conducive to not only the protection of modern people’s equal rights, but also the universal formation of their sense of social belonging. First, an essential aspect of social justice lies in emphasizing the shared fruits of social development. That is, “every member of society’s dignity should be guaranteed, and their basic living conditions should be maintained and improved” so that “their living standards and ability to develop can continuously improve along with the progress in social development” (Wu 2002). Therefore, social justice can directly safeguard and promote the human dignity, consciousness of equality, and equal rights of modern people. Second, another important aspect of social justice concerns establishing a comprehensive social security system and crisis management mechanisms. With those systems in place, a society can cope with various personal and social risks by drawing on all its strength and can provide its members with a safety net to guarantee their basic survival needs. As a result, social justice is beneficial for modern people in eliminating their feelings of “isolation” and “aimlessness” by relying on the social community. It can also help people develop a sense of social belonging, and even a sense of social community, social morality, and social responsibility.

## 2 THE REALIZATION OF LIVING AND DEVELOPING IN FREEDOM

### *2.1 Living and Developing Freely Is the Universal Demand of People in a Modern Society*

Compared to traditional society, people in a modern society with a market economy not only value equality and the sense of social belonging, but also attach great importance to living and developing in freedom. In other words, it is their universal demand to live and develop independently, freely and “willingly” according to their own wishes rather than those of others. “Where, not the person’s own character, but the traditions or customs of other people are the rule of conduct, there is wanting one of the principal ingredients of human happiness, and quite the chief ingredient of individual and social progress” (Mill 2001). Here, “freedom” involves at least three meanings. (1) It is formed of an individual’s independent choices. People make their own decisions and bear the corresponding consequences. (2) People achieve their goals through their own efforts rather than relying on ascribed statuses. (3) People value mutual respect and tolerance, and they do not impose their will on others.

Many surveys show that, since reform and opening up, living and developing freely has become a common demand of Chinese people, and even a common way of doing things. This kind of freedom is reflected in their sense of autonomy, tolerance, and the spirit of contract. According to a comprehensive 2006 survey on China’s social situation, when respondents were asked what factors contributed to a person’s success, the top choice was personal factors, followed by family factors, social factors, and ascribed status. Among the factors related to their own personal characteristics, 31.2% of respondents felt that “dedication or ambition” and “hard work” were decisive, and 46.9% felt that they were very important (China Survey and Data Center, Renmin University of China 2009). This shows that the Chinese people have developed a sense of autonomy and that they rely on their autonomous efforts.

Another survey reveals that 80.4% of people in China have no religious beliefs personally, but 40.8% of them think that “religious belief is pious and should be respected,” while 33.6% think that “belief in religion is an entirely personal matter and has nothing to do with others” (Zheng 2009). As we know, there are great differences between religious and non-religious people in terms of cultural orientation. Thus, most Chinese people display a high degree of social tolerance and inclusiveness toward religion. Among 2942 respondents, 75% felt that “no matter what, we should have integrity,” 70% thought that “a contract is more reliable than a favor,” while only 7% believed that “a favor is more reliable than a contract.” Another 23% said it was hard to tell which is more reliable (Shi 2009). This shows that, in adapting to the market economy, Chinese people have developed the “spirit of contract.”

In a modern society with a market economy, the universal pursuit of “living and developing freely” has become a historical necessity.

The competitiveness entailed by a market economy requires that people exhibit the characteristics of self-motivation in their behavior. The important cornerstone of modern society is the market economic system. “The general law of the market economy is that the market determines the allocation of resources, and the market economy is essentially the economy in which the market determines the allocation of resources” (Xi 2013). The basic feature of market economy is its fierce competition. This kind of competitiveness requires that each participant have the status of a “natural person” (a legal status to which certain rights are attached, e.g., the right to enter into contracts) who can decide on matters concerning himself or herself. Moreover, the market economy is an institutional arrangement that seeks to maximize economic benefits. “The best way for producers to meet price competition and maximize profits is to keep costs at a minimum by adopting the most efficient methods of production” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). To this end, every participant in the market economy must rely on their own efforts and fully explore their own potential, in order to be able to gain a foothold in the fierce world of competition and in order to settle down in the society. Since the market economy system is one of the most basic institutional arrangements in a modern society, the self-motivated efforts of its participants have become an important behavior orientation among Chinese people. According to a survey, respondents were asked about “your favorite method of making a living.” The top three responses were knowledge and technical skill, hard work, and interpersonal skills. Among the 2942 respondents, 2429 (82.7%) chose “knowledge and technical skill,” 2126 people (72.4%) chose “hard work,” while 1523 people (51.9%) chose “interpersonal skills” (Shi 2009). More specifically, 86.9% of young people (ages 18–34) chose “knowledge and technical skill” while 84.1% of those over 55 chose “hard work” (Yi 2011).

Increasing social mobility provides modern people with more space and more choices with which to live and develop freely. In China’s traditional society, people’s freedom was restricted principally because there was limited space and opportunities for social mobility. Unlike traditional society, in a modern society with a market economy, with the growth of the productive forces, sustained and rapid economic growth means that the social division of labor deepens and there are more types of occupations, which in turn leads to a large number of job opportunities. The principle of maximizing efficiency that comes with the market economy means that the flow between various factors of production continues to accelerate. As a result, in a modern society, there are more opportunities for mobility and more space for social mobility, and people have more opportunities to choose from in such a society. “The dominant pattern of mobility in agrarian societies was downward. In industrial societies the volume of upward movement is so much greater that a balance is usually achieved, and, in most cases, the amount of upward movement exceeds the downward” (Lenski 1966). With the substantial expansion of social mobility, more and more people will be self-motivated and will work or start their own business as they wish. In general, the larger the space for social mobility in a

society and the more opportunities for social mobility exist, the more freedom and hope people have, and the more dynamic society becomes. “If there are smoother channels and more diverse mechanisms of social mobility, the degree of social mobility is higher and its scale is larger, and more people achieve it. The resulting structure of social class will become more just, rational, open, and dynamic” (Lu 2004). Accordingly, free living and free development have become part of the daily lifestyle and basic needs of modern people.

The increase of leisure time thus becomes a necessary condition for modern people to freely enjoy their diversified lives and development. In a traditional society with a natural economy, due to the extreme backwardness of productive forces, the greatest number of its members did not have leisure time. With the development of the productive forces, social wealth has greatly increased and social redistribution has been strengthened, so that people’s basic livelihoods are no longer a problem. At the same time, as the tertiary industries develop rapidly, people are increasingly liberated from heavy housework. All of these factors enable modern people to spend less time on labor and housework, while their leisure time is greatly increased. We must not underestimate the significance of this increased leisure time for people’s free living and development. Leisure time refers to the time that modern people control on their own, which is a unique wealth owned by themselves. As Marx points out, “this kind of time is not absorbed by direct productive labor, but used for entertainment and rest, thus opening up a vast space for free activities and development” (Marx and Engels 1972b). In the *Grundrisse*, Marx even points out that in a highly developed society, “the measure of wealth is then not any longer, in any way, labor time, but rather disposable time” (Marx and Engels 1998). Since reform and opening-up, the amount of leisure time that Chinese people possess has greatly increased. Between 1978 and 1994, the average rest time for people in China was only 62 days. That had increased to 97 days in 1995, 114 days in 1996, and 147 days in 2008 (Wei 2014). Further, their average working hours have also decreased, while their leisure time has grown. With increased leisure time, it is more likely that modern people will make a variety of independent and differentiated choices according to their own interests and hobbies, with the result that they have diverse lifestyles and form a diverse state of self-existence and development. In short, with the advancement of modernization, the free living and development that is based on leisure time has become a universal and realistic demand for modern people.

## 2.2 *People Cannot Live and Develop Freely Without Social Justice*

Since living and developing in freedom has become one of modern people’s basic needs, how can these needs be guaranteed? Albert Einstein pointed out, “I believe that the most important mission of the state is to protect the individual and to make it possible for him to develop into a creative personality” (Isaacson 2007). They can only be effectively guaranteed if the state maintains and promotes social justice. First, an essential aspect of social justice lies in the

principle of equality of opportunity, which aims at maintaining and promoting the behavioral orientation of people's self-motivated efforts. No individual or group can establish obstacles to the mobility or interests of others that hinder those people's free mobility and development. Because of this, "it was a demand that all man-made obstacles to the rise of some should be removed, that all privileges of individuals should be abolished, and that what the state contributed to the chance of improving one's conditions should be the same for all" (Hayek 1987).

A second important aspect of social justice—the field of primary distribution—lies in the principle of distribution based on one's contribution. This principle effectively safeguards people's diverse and differentiated lives and development. In the process of the accumulation of social wealth and other resources, the quantity and quality of labor invested by each member of society are different, and the quantity and kinds of factors of production they invest can similarly not be the same. So, their specific contributions to society are different. The principle of distribution according to contribution not only recognizes and protects people's behavior of freely choosing their life-path and development and the differential results of different efforts, but also prevents egalitarian ideas and behaviors that emphasize similarity of results rather than equality of starting points. Egalitarianism brings about serious harm. It is unfair because it can throw people with strong ability and who make great contributions into deprivation. It suppresses the vitality and creativity of social development, and it seriously hindered China's normal development for a long period.

### 3 THE RESOLUTION OF SOCIAL CONTRADICTIONS

#### 3.1 *Everyone in a Modern Society Necessarily Faces a Variety of Social Contradictions*

Social contradictions are widespread; they are ubiquitous and permanent. It is inevitable that members of society will be compelled to deal with them. People live and develop through social interaction. Just as development and a normal life constitute people's basic needs, so does normal social interaction. Marx stipulated that, "man is by nature, if not, as Aristotle indicates, a political, at all events a social animal" (Marx and Engels 1972a). Furthermore, since everyone necessarily engages in social interaction, people in different situations will mix together all kinds of interests and demands in the course of their interactions, and as a result all kinds of social contradictions inevitably arise.

If social contradictions necessarily emerge under any conditions, the conditions of a modern society with a market economy mean that people face a large number and a wide variety of social contradictions with complex causes and structures, and, furthermore, these contradictions will also evolve quickly. A traditional society is based on a natural economy, and its level of productivity is thus limited. Most people in such a society have similar demands: they simply want to survive and live. A traditional society is a largely homogeneous one. As

the economic foundation of this society, “each individual peasant family is almost self-sufficient, directly produces most of its consumer needs, and thus acquires its means of life more through an exchange with nature than in intercourse with society. A small holding, the peasant, and his family; beside it another small holding, another peasant, and another family. A few score of these constitute a village, and a few score villages constitute a department. Thus the great mass of the French nation is formed by the simple addition of homologous magnitudes, much as potatoes in a sack form a sack of potatoes” (Marx and Engels 1995b). Thus, certain basic elements and a relatively simple structure result in correspondingly simple interest demands on the part of members of society. This in turn means that relatively few social contradictions emerge, and the probability that social contradictions will emerge later remains low. Further, even though social conflicts occur in a traditional society, the scope and degree of transmission of those conflicts will be limited, due to the closed and isolated space in which that society functions.

Things are different in a modern society. In modern societies where productivity is more developed, people’s interest demands are not simply focused on basic survival; they have a higher level and more types of needs. A modern society is a heterogeneous one, in which there is a high level of social differentiation and an ever-increasing number of social elements. This entails the emergence of a variety of interest demands. Further, interdependence between people increases continually and the degree and rate of social mobility becomes higher than ever before, which means that people’s social interactions and interest demands likewise increase more than ever before. Moreover, with the rapid development of a modern society, the social environment changes greatly, and this inevitably leads to psychological discomfort among many people, such as social anxiety. This aggravates social contradictions. As a result, the points of formation and “points of ignition” of social contradictions increase in number, and subsequently the probability of aggravated social contradictions also increases (Wu 2015). A more serious consequence of increased interdependence between countries and regions is that social contradictions also acquire the property of transmissibility. As Karl Mannheim argues, “the interdependence of all its parts makes the modern order much more sensitive than a simpler form of economic organization... In a well-organized railway, for instance, the effects of an accident are more far-reaching than they were in the stage-coach system of transport...the interdependence of the modern social organism transmits the effects of every maladjustment with increased intensity” (Mannheim 1923).

As a result, people in a modern society with a market economy face an unprecedented number and variety of social contradictions. Among the most common of these are contradictions between the people and public power and contradictions between different social groups.

The contradictions between people and public power in a modern society are becoming more and more widespread and pervasive, due to several factors: public power is focused more on public service, people’s interests and demands



in the “public domain” increase rapidly, people’s awareness of equality, rights protection, and public participation is promoted, and people’s cultural quality and capacity for rational judgment increases.

(1) People in a modern society are very concerned about “corruption,” that is, whether public servants who exercise public power will use that power to seek personal gain. Objectively, in the public sphere, public power is actually easily abused, which leads to all kinds of corruption. This is simply because “common experience shows us that every man invested with power is apt to abuse it, and to carry his authority as far as it will go” (de Montesquieu 1777). Once corruption is exposed in the exercise of public power in a modern society, resistance will almost certainly arise on the part of people from various classes, and very fierce struggles will develop.

(2) People in a modern society are very concerned about the sources of public funds and how they are used. They attach great importance to the legitimacy and validity of taxes, as well as the phenomenon of public power competing with the people for economic resources. They are also concerned about whether tax revenue is used for unemployment security, old-age security, public health, and other aspects of people’s livelihoods. Moreover, people pay attention to whether their “shared” achievements of social development can be continuously improved. Given this, once inappropriate phenomena appear, widespread public dissatisfaction is the result. Sometimes, in a specific period, due to limitations on the quantity of public funds, the only reasonable approach is to select a livelihood project for investment in which the principal beneficiaries belong to a specific group, but not all groups. Even this approach may lead to dissatisfaction and resistance from groups that have not yet “benefited” from the decision.

(3) People in a modern society pay more and more attention to public policies that are related to their own vital interests, to the coordination of interests between various groups, and to whether these things are fair or not. Almost everyone is concerned about public policies that have a wide influence, such as those related to the environment and ecology. When a public crisis emerges, in particular, people have a strong sense of judgment, and they are able to evaluate whether public power can respond to the crisis quickly, devise valid strategies, and achieve effective results. Sometimes, people attribute the degree of fairness in their social environment to the activities of public power. Objectively, the problem of whether the social environment is fair or not (i.e., whether there are impediments of vested interests, obvious phenomena of “elite regeneration,” and large-scale discrimination) is extremely complicated, because the situation depends on many historical and practical factors, and it will take a long time to solve the problem. However, people often do not think much about it, and they are likely to attribute the problems to the state of public power at that moment. This creates various kinds of social contradictions.

As people in a modern society form diverse interest demands and as their demands converge quickly, contradictions between different social groups are easily aggravated or intensified. These contradictions involve all aspects of



society. The following two contradictions deserve special attention because of their exceptional influence.

(1) The contradiction between rich and poor. People in a modern society generally possess a basic sense of equality, and they attach great importance to the existence of a safety net that can guarantee their basic survival needs and dignity. There is a close relationship between the division between rich and poor and people's levels of income and property. The division between rich and poor is also an intuitive and accessible indicator that can be used to compare one's own living conditions with that of others. Therefore, the contradiction between the rich and the poor is a problem that attracts the attention of most members of society, and it will thus have a great impact on that society. Although the rich-poor divide is not the only indicator of whether a society is just or not, it is an important one. An egalitarian society is certainly not a just, stable, and sustainable one. However, if the gap between the rich and the poor is too great in a given society, and if the proportion of low-income and poor people is too high, this indicates the presence of serious social injustice in that society. If the majority of people are dissatisfied with the society, their sense of social identity is reduced, and this leads to the aggravation of social contradictions. From this perspective, "the relation between inequality and rebellion is indeed a close one, and it runs both ways. That a perceived sense of inequity is a common ingredient of rebellion in societies is clear enough..." (Sen and Foster 1997).

(2) The contradiction between labor and capital. With the rapid development of the process of modernization and urbanization, the proportion of the population engaged in primary industry becomes smaller, while the proportion engaged in secondary and tertiary industries is bound to become larger. So, the relationship between labor and capital increasingly involves the majority of employees and becomes one of the basic forms of social relationships. From the perspective of the division of labor in a modern society, it is necessary and legitimate for both "employers" and "employees" to exist because they are the two integral parts of the labor-capital relationship. However, their basic interests are completely different. For the "employer" or "capital," profit maximization is the basic interest demand. Without profit, enterprises cannot develop or even survive. For the "employee" or "laborer," their basic interest demand is the maximization of their income from labor, so that their basic living standard can be guaranteed. The conundrum arises from the fact that the basic interests of employers and employees cannot be satisfied at the same time. In such circumstances, the contradiction between labor and capital will inevitably emerge. Because of the extent to which the labor-capital relationship operates in a modern society, the contradiction between labor and capital has become one of the basic social contradictions. In other words, it has become an issue that almost everybody in a modern society has to face at some point in their lives. If this contradiction is not handled properly, many negative effects will arise. Some scholars have pointed out that, in the present stage, the contradictions between labor and capital and labor-capital conflict have had a great influence on

Chinese society in at least three respects: (1) they have increased economic costs and caused losses on the part of enterprises; (2) they have become important factors affecting general levels of social harmony and stability; and (3) whether contradictions and collective actions are handled properly will be politically influential (Chang 2009).

From the above, it can be seen that in a modern society with a market economy, every person inevitably encounters a large number and variety of social contradictions which, further, will continually increase. If these contradictions are not effectively resolved or alleviated, it will be impossible for people to acquire a sense of equality and social belonging, and to live and develop freely. Their life hopes will be affected. As a result, it will also be impossible for things to run smoothly in the entire society.

### *3.2 Social Contradictions and Disputes Cannot Be Resolved Without Social Justice*

Certainly, people in a modern society cannot resolve or alleviate social contradictions without social justice. This is because only social justice makes it possible to establish a system that will effectively resolve or alleviate social contradictions. Such a system enables people to act according to laws and regulations, thus reducing the probability and intensity of social contradictions, and aiding in the resolution or alleviation of those that already exist in reality.

This can be understood from at least two angles. On the one hand, having a basic foothold in social justice is key to resolving or alleviating social contradictions. In a modern society with a market economy, all people are equal, and because of the requirements of the social division of labor and social cooperation, every person is attached to society. Thus, social justice focuses on safeguarding the basic rights of every member of society; regardless of whether a person is rich or poor, a senior official or a regular citizen, a male or a female, their basic rights should be protected equally. This is also the starting point for resolving or alleviating social contradictions. If the measures that people enact to resolve or alleviate social contradictions are biased toward the benefit of a certain group's, unfairness is the necessary result. Such measures will not only fail to resolve or alleviate social contradictions but will aggravate them further.

On the other hand, it is only on the basis of the concept of social justice that we can establish a system to resolve social contradictions effectively. Social justice emphasizes reciprocity and mutuality among groups. The benefits of cooperation to one group must be realized on the condition that other groups also benefit, and not at the expense of their reasonable interests. Accordingly, when establishing the institutional mechanism for resolving or alleviating social contradictions, we ought to ensure that there is equal negotiation and open dialogue, so as to fully embody the spirit of mutual benefit transfer and "win-win" cooperation. At the same time, it is necessary to prevent specific groups from monopolizing the right to speak in institutional arrangements, and to prevent specific groups from having a unilateral right to decide on questions of

interests. Only in this way can we establish sound institutions to effectively resolve or alleviate the social contradictions that people currently face and establish mutual trust in preparation for the future emergence of further contradictions.

#### 4 ENLIGHTENMENT

On the basis of the above analysis, we can demonstrate the following points.

First, we need to understand the vital importance of social justice at both the macro and the micro levels.

People are often aware of the tremendous importance of social justice in a modern society at the macro level. This perspective is undoubtedly correct. However, our understanding cannot be limited to the macro level. Understanding social justice at the micro level, that is, from the perspective of each individual in a modern society, is also essential to understanding the concept. Only by doing this can we have a comprehensive understanding of the tremendous importance of social justice and can we attain a more “textured” and persuasive understanding of it. Clearly, at the micro level, social justice has become an integral part of every person’s daily life, an indispensable daily rule of behavior in all aspects, and a necessary aspect of every stage of people’s lives and future development. The more civilized and modern a society is, the more obvious this point is. It is precisely because social justice is of great significance at both the macro (the entire society) and the micro level (each individual) that we should pay close attention to it and regard it as the starting point and foothold of the process of modernization.

Second, social injustice is closely connected to social contradictions.

As discussed earlier, people in a modern society are most concerned about two things: the acquisition of equality and social belonging, and the realization of living and developing in freedom. Most people’s interest demands are formed around these two things. If it is impossible for these interests to be satisfied, all kinds of social injustices emerge as a result, which leads to a variety of social contradictions. Statistics reveal that China’s Gini coefficient remains high. It was 0.485 in 2005, 0.481 in 2010, 0.462 in 2015, and 0.465 in 2016 (accessed Sept 1, 2022). Further, the wealth gap in terms of family property is even greater. “The top 1% of households own 29.7% of the nation’s total wealth, the top 5% own 46.6%, and the top 10% own 57.7%” (Xie et al. 2017). Other data show that in 2014 “the savings rate of the top 5% of Chinese households was 70%, accounting for 50.6% of total savings” (accessed Sept 1, 2022). From the micro level, individuals in modern society do not feel good about social injustice. According to a 2016 survey, “When respondents were asked, ‘In general, do you think today’s society is fair?’, 5.5% of respondents felt that it was very unfair, 10.2% felt that it was unfair, 28.1% felt that it wasn’t that fair, 21.8% felt that it was relatively fair, 5.7% felt that it was fair, 1.4% felt that it was very fair, and 21.8% remained neutral.” So, more people thought it was unfair (43.8%) than thought it was fair (34%) (Wang 2017). Similarly, a 2013 survey

shows that “when rural migrant workers in cities were asked, ‘Do you think today’s society is fair?’, 25.7% of respondents felt that it was very unfair, 38.3% felt that it was relatively unfair, 30% felt that it was relatively fair, 5.9% felt that it was very fair” (Wang and Yang 2013). Thus, only by maintaining and promoting social justice can we reduce the probability and intensity of social contradictions at the source of their emergence.

Third, the key to satisfying people’s basic interest demands lies in effectively promoting both universal justice and differential justice.

Undoubtedly, social justice is the greatest common divisor of modern people’s interests and demands, so the key to satisfying their basic interests lies in maintaining and promoting social justice. The problem is that people tend to fall into a one-sided understanding of social justice. Some regard social justice as an issue of sharing the fruits of social development, that is, as a universal justice based on the idea of equality. Others regard it as a matter of differential justice based on the idea of liberty. From the above we can see that the acquisition of equality and social belonging and the realization of living and developing in freedom are the basic interest demands of modern people. Accordingly, social justice in the modern sense includes both universal justice and differential justice. They complement each other and are both indispensable, only thereby constituting the basic elements of social justice. “The social function of universal justice is that it is conducive to social integration and so helps improve social security. It is also conducive to boosting domestic consumption and to effectively developing society-wide potential. The social function of differential justice is that it is conducive to stimulating social vitality and creativity and to forming and enriching a diverse society so that individuals can have hope for their future development” (Wu 2017). Thus, only by promoting both universal justice and differential justice at the same time can we satisfy people’s basic interests and demands.

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# Social Cooperation Is Increasingly Inseparable from Social Justice

Specialization and professionalization have both increased within modern society under conditions crafted by market society. Accordingly, there is a growing need for cooperation among various social groups. As this social cooperation improves, everyone's individual potential can be more fully cultivated while also stimulating the potential of society overall, thereby promoting sustainable socioeconomic development. Social justice and social cooperation are closely related. The maintenance and promotion of social justice are necessary prerequisites for effective social cooperation. Higher degrees of social justice allow for the unnecessary abrasion caused by zero-sum or negative-sum competition to be reduced while also advancing effective and comprehensive social cooperation and improving the unit efficiency of both individual social groups and society overall.

## 1 THE STRENGTHENING CORRELATION BETWEEN SOCIAL COOPERATION AND SOCIAL JUSTICE

### *1.1 Social Cooperation Grows More Intensive*

Social cooperation has always existed in human society. As Marx said, “man, if not as Aristotle contends, a political, is at all events a social animal” (Marx 1975). By “social” Marx here meant the unique “social” attributes that make humans human. Namely, the need for social interaction that inevitably arises between people, including both social cooperation and social conflict.

Social cooperation is when different members of society or distinct social groups, each occupying a specific position within the social division of labor, achieve specific goals according to their occupational or professional position while also achieving other goals outside of their specific remit or a level of productivity otherwise unattainable under the sole power of one person or group—thereby bringing about development and ensuring the routine functioning of

society, as well as corresponding returns. “Social relations imply the cooperation of many individuals” (Marx and Engels 1960).

Obviously, individual members of society and distinct social groups can only survive and develop through cooperation. Survival and development are the innate and fundamental pursuits of all members of society but cannot be achieved through the efforts of a single individual. The most fundamental productive activities of all members of society are inseparably linked to social cooperation. Marx said that members of society “produce only by working together in a specified manner and reciprocally exchanging their activities. In order to produce, they enter into definite connections and relations to one another, and only within these social connections and relations does their influence upon nature operate – i.e., does production take place” (Marx and Engels 1995). It is only by relying on social cooperation and the strength of society as a whole that individuals can effectively respond to the risks posed by nature and other groups of people—which a “lone individual” cannot address—such as natural disasters, public crises, external invasions, etc. “For man’s development beyond the level of the animals, for the achievement of the greatest advance nature can show, something more was needed: the power of defense lacking to the individual had to be made good by the united strength and co-operation of the herd” (Marx and Engels 1995). Furthermore, it is only through social cooperation that individuals can acquire an entirely new, higher-level “social” ability that is greater than the sum of its parts. “It is through social union founded upon the needs and potentialities of its members that each person can participate in the total sum of the realized natural assets of the others” (Rawls 1999). What’s important is that such a “social” ability is helpful for individuals’ own development while simultaneously promoting both the specific interests of particular social groups and the common interest.

Although social cooperation has existed in human society since ancient times, it tends to deepen in modern society and under the market economy.

The deepening of social cooperation is an inevitable historical trend. On the one hand, with the improvement of modern productive forces, the social division of labor becomes specialized, intricate, and complicated. Thus, each social group and every individual member of society also needs to become more specialized in some fashion, because it is only through specialization that their potential can be fully expressed and their production efficiency successfully improved. “In modern society, organizational functions have become increasingly specialized, which is mainly due to the highly differentiated social structure brought about by industrialization, technological revolution and specialized and precise division of labor” (Wu 2002a). Furthermore, social cooperation becomes more necessary as the intricacy of specialization and the complexity of the social division of labor intensify. Thus, as the modern productivity of a society develops, it becomes more complex and the degree of social cooperation inevitably increases.



On the other hand, within modern society and the market economy there is an unprecedented accumulation of social risk that increasingly conjoined individual members of society to the requirements of social cooperation more generally. In the early stage of large-scale industry, “The bourgeoisie, during its rule of scarce one hundred years, has created more massive and more colossal productive forces than have all preceding generations together” (Marx and Engels 1995). In modern society, aggregate economic output has accumulated at an astounding rate and continues to see unprecedented expansion in the twenty-first century. Meanwhile, the development of science and technology has been advancing by leaps and bounds. After World War II, new technological revolutions have become a daily affair. In particular, the social networking technology that has become ubiquitous since the 1990s has had a multiplier effect on the development of science and technology.

Aside from this, the interests of particular social groups have also diversified and grown more complex, making it more difficult to achieve mutual balance between these interests. As society becomes more open, the speed at which different cultures intersect increases and achieving harmony between cultures thereby becomes more difficult, posing greater problems for social integration. Moreover, since these uncertainties are often intertwined, social risk takes on a systematic character. Social risks therefore expand with an astonishing speed once they have broken past a certain critical boundary and grown uncontrollable, threatening every member of society, every social group, and even society as a whole. Ulrich Beck phrased it this way: social risks “contain a ‘boomerang effect’, which breaks up the pattern of class and national society. Ecological disaster and atomic fallout ignore the borders of nations” (Beck 1992). These unprecedented risks are harmful to every social group. Since no single group can cope with these risks alone, it becomes necessary for all to work together. And this kind of collective response to social risks can only be conducted through social cooperation.

Clearly, social cooperation is a necessity for the survival and development of every individual and each social group, especially within modern society. Rawls argued that “everyone’s well-being depends upon a scheme of cooperation without which no one could have a satisfactory life” (Rawls 1999). However, in terms of its specific effects, social cooperation can be divided into different categories: the fullest or most optimal social cooperation (“Pareto optimality”), effective or better social cooperation, and the most inefficient or worst social cooperation (“Nash equilibrium”). Objectively speaking, in a modern society with an economy market, the most optimal or the fullest social cooperation (“Pareto optimality”) is excessively idealistic and therefore too difficult to achieve in terms of our purposes of social cooperation. But the worst social cooperation (“Nash equilibrium”) must be avoided, as must the most inefficient. Therefore, effective or better social cooperation is the most realistic and feasible goal for social cooperation to strive towards.

## 1.2 *Social Cooperation Is Bound by Social Justice*

It should be noted that, in modern society under the market economy, realizing effective social cooperation requires certain binding conditions. These binding conditions are provided by social justice. In other words, there is a high positive correlation between effective social cooperation and social justice. As Rawls said, “The idea of cooperation includes the idea of fair terms of cooperation: these are terms each participant may reasonably accept, and sometimes should accept, provided that everyone else likewise accepts them. Fair terms of cooperation specify an idea of reciprocity, or mutuality: all who do their part as the recognized rules require are to benefit as specified by a public and agreed-upon standard” (Rawls 2001). Without social justice—or without enough social justice—it is difficult to guarantee social cooperation sustainably and effectively. Moreover, modern society is heterogeneous, with many complex constituent elements, a growing diversity of individual interests, and more frequent interactions between members of society. Thus, even while there are more varieties of mutual cooperation—each with proliferating aspects—such cooperation also grows more difficult. From this it follows that social cooperation is increasingly dependent on social justice. Lacking social justice, many individuals and social groups also lack fundamental norms and, therefore, the overall quality of social cooperation inevitably declines. “Social justice is an indispensable prerequisite for solving social problems... We are unlikely to conduct effective social cooperation if social justice cannot be maintained through punitive mechanisms” (Ye 2012).

In short, within a modern society under a market economy, the question of whether effective social cooperation can be carried out smoothly and sustainably depends on three aspects for all involved: what benefits are attained at the micro level, how benefits are balanced at the macro level, and how these benefits are guaranteed overall. These three key aspects increasingly depend on whether all parties adopt the fundamental idea of social justice as their criterion.

## 2 SOCIAL JUSTICE IS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL COOPERATION AT THE MICRO LEVEL

### 2.1 *The Fundamental Significance of Effective Social Cooperation at the Micro Level*

At the micro level, social cooperation indicates the direct interest relationships between individuals or groups. At this scale, these are mostly or even primarily direct economic revenues between different social or economic organizations within the community. The most typical of these is the social cooperation between “employees” and “employers” (business owners) that lies at the core of the labor-capital relationship. Social cooperation at the micro level clearly occurs, for the most part, within the sphere of initial distribution. The key problem here is the question of how to “divide” and “distribute” the benefits created through the mutual cooperation of all parties.

To better understand this micro scale, we need to posit three preconditions. First, the organizations (communities) on which social cooperation depends are able to make a profit. If they went bankrupt, there would be no question of benefits to “divide” and “distribute” between the involved parties. Second, the enterprise is the typical unit on which micro level social cooperation depends. Although there are various types of organizations or units, in an economic organization such as enterprises, the concrete conditions of all cooperating parties can be fully manifest. Third, there is no “external force” involved when the parties of an organization are engaged in the contest of interests—except in the case of certain internal institutional spokespeople, as in the case of labor unions. Otherwise, the contest between all cooperating parties within the organization will have no “direct” or “representative” significance.

Micro level social cooperation is of fundamental and extensive importance for the everyday operation and healthy development of society overall.

Micro level social cooperation is a significant issue directly related to the efficiency of the market economy. “Although the market economy cannot solve all problems, especially the basic purpose of modernization, it can surely solve the problem of economic efficiency to a great extent” (Wu 2017a). The economy is the foundation for the operation and development of society in general, and the market economy is the foundation for the operation and development of modern society specifically. The fundamental dynamism and creativity of modern society and its prospects for development all largely depend on how resources are allocated. And the allocation of resources depends on how the economy works. “Theory and practice have proved that the market allocation of resources is the most efficient form. A general law and essence of the market economy is that the market determines resource allocation” (Xi 2013). Given certain conditions of resource allocation, the question of whether it is possible to produce better and greater benefits mostly depends on the state of micro level social cooperation. Just imagine, if labor and management cooperate well within an enterprise, their zeal for production will be fully mobilized and their potential will be fully cultivated. As a result, the efficiency of the enterprise will be greatly improved and conflicts between labor and capital will decline to relatively low levels. In a similar fashion, if labor and management in most enterprises are cooperating well this is a sign that the state of micro scale social cooperation is sound and, therefore, that society is brimming with creativity and vigor for development at the most fundamental level.

Since it concerns the basic income of most members of society, the state of micro level social cooperation is a major issue with a wide-ranging impact. The reason we say that “employment is the root of people’s livelihood” is because individuals obtain the necessary income for themselves and their families through work. Most people engaged in secondary and tertiary industry are employees who must cooperate with one another at the micro level to obtain the basic income necessary for their own survival. The employees in these sectors compose an extremely large group. At the end of 2015, the total number of employed individuals in China was 774.51 million, of which 226.93 million

were employed in secondary industry and 328.39 million in tertiary industry, accounting for 29.3% and 42.4% of the total, respectively (National Bureau of Statistics 2016). Obviously, the state of micro level social cooperation has a wide scope of influence: it not only affects the basic income of most workers and their families, but also impacts the platform and progress of their free development. Because income is extremely important for any member of society, when problems arise at the micro level of social cooperation they will inevitably trigger dissatisfaction among a proportionately large share of the population. Another element must also be taken into consideration here: some of the problems that arise at this micro scale of social cooperation originate in the unfair gains won by business owners (employers). Since this makes it easy for individuals to blame business owners whenever issues arise at this scale—and which therefore cause incomes and living standards to decline—employers are easily made into the direct “targets” of large social struggles.

When “dividing” and “distributing” the benefits that derive from this level of social cooperation, injustice inevitably leads to inefficiency. “When participating in social cooperation, there is a great possibility that an unjust cooperative relationship can be formed between the advantaged and the disadvantaged” (Li 2016). Employers with scarce resources (i.e., capital) will sometimes use their position to unilaterally tilt the distribution of benefits in their favor. They thereby reduce the income and welfare of workers, encroaching on the workers’ reasonable interests to enlarge their own benefits. This practice will inevitably mar the enthusiasm of the workers and aggravate the conflicts between all parties involved in social cooperation. Meanwhile, the corresponding forms of resistance mobilized by the workers, such as strikes, will lower the profits of the business owners. As a result, the interests of both employers and employees will be impaired. This kind of situation was quite common during the early stage of the industrial revolution. It is also important to note that, when modernization develops to a certain stage, the growing strength of trade unions—alongside numerous other causes—gives workers a disproportionate say in the division of benefits, causing the distribution to tilt in their favor and encroaching on the reasonable interests of employers. In the long run, both forms of injustice will harm the reasonable interests of all parties involved in social cooperation. This, in turn, will not only lead to inefficiency and weaken the further development of enterprises but will also periodically lead to conflicts and, in severe cases, interrupt social cooperation entirely.

## *2.2 Effective Micro Level Social Cooperation Is Inseparable from Social Justice*

It is apparent that the key to effective micro level social cooperation lies in adopting the fundamental idea of social justice as its guiding criterion.

Specifically, when the involved parties first “divide” and “distribute” benefits, they should follow the socially just rule of distribution according to contribution, keeping to the principle of “each according to their ability, each in their

proper place.” Namely: “With a sprinkling of appropriate assumptions, it can be demonstrated that a competitive market will pay workers and investors the value of their contributions to output” (Okun 1975).

In the process of producing wealth or output (benefits) through social cooperation, all involved parties make different yet indispensable contributions: Some put in a larger amount of labor, while others contribute a smaller amount. Some may not put in much labor, but the labor that they do contribute is very complex. Some contribute skill. Some invest their time and energy in administration. Others may not contribute any labor, skill, or administrative capacity, but they also make an important contribution nonetheless, since they provide the scarce capital that is essential for economic activity. All involved should “divide” and “distribute” the benefits of wealth or output derived from social cooperation according to their respective contribution. “To each agent a distinguishable share in production, and to each a corresponding reward—such is the natural law of distribution” (Clark 1899). Only in this way can the problem of how to fairly relate investments (contributions) and returns (gains) be settled, thereby establishing a just correspondence between the “gains” of each party involved in social cooperation and their concrete contribution.

Following the socially just principle of distribution according to contribution at this micro level not only ensures the net income of laborers (employees) but also the net profit of employers. In this way, social cooperation is kept in accord with the interests and needs of all parties and is thereby conducive to increasing their dynamism. Meanwhile, the practice is also mutually beneficial for all involved, helping enterprises increase their gross profit and improve efficiency in the future so that cooperation can continue in the long run.

When discussing socially just allocation, it is also essential to consider several related conditions: First, the fundamental rights of the laborers must be protected. Workers engage in social cooperation in order to obtain reasonable remuneration that can satisfy their subsistence needs, not out of “unconditional” duty. The protection of fundamental labor rights is therefore the necessary precondition of this “ordinary” labor. These fundamental rights include safe work conditions, working hours not being extended at will, the wage not falling below a certain standard level, and prompt payment of due income, just to name a few. If these rights are violated, the workers’ reasonable interests will be impaired and the mutual benefits of social cooperation will be tarnished, thereby making cooperation unsustainable.

Second, employers’ numerous “high risk and high return” endeavors must be recognized. While it is undeniable that some employers obtain substantial profits by unjust means and that this situation should be corrected, this does not imply that all high profits are infringements on the reasonable interests of others. It must be noted that some of the employers’ investments are venture capital, and that venture capital itself is a necessity within modern society and the market economy which could, in a sense, be classified as an “innovative” economic activity. In the long run, venture capital is beneficial to socioeconomic progress and provides a long-standing contribution to society overall. In

actual economic life “the market does reward such risk-taking with higher-than-average remuneration” (Samuelson and Nordhaus 2010). We should not only recognize investment, but even encourage it. Based on this, society ought to “protect entrepreneurs’ innovation rights and interests according to law... Create a social atmosphere that respects and encourages entrepreneurs to start businesses...Innovate the interactive mechanism between government and enterprises, improve the positive incentive mechanism for entrepreneurs, improve the property rights protection system, and enhance entrepreneurs’ innovative vitality and entrepreneurial motivation” (People’s Daily 2017).

Third, workers should share in a portion their company’s profits. After the first two conditions have been met, the problem of how to distribute the profits of the enterprise must be addressed. Even though, from the legal point of view, the allocation of profits should be decided by the board of directors—and in general profits should first be distributed among shareholders after sufficient funds are reserved for the development of the enterprise—in a certain sense, a portion of profits are derived from the joint contribution of all parties involved in social cooperation. Therefore, the profits that can be allocated should not solely be returned to “employers” (investors). Some portion should be distributed to workers in line with their contribution. Although this is not a necessity (since it is decided by the board of directors), it is nonetheless something that ought to be practiced (in accord with the socially just principle of distribution according to contribution).

### 3 SOCIAL JUSTICE IS NECESSARY FOR EFFECTIVE SOCIAL COOPERATION AT THE MACRO LEVEL

#### 3.1 *The Fundamental Significance of Effective Social Cooperation at the Macro Level*

Macro level social cooperation mainly refers to cooperation between various spheres (including various industries), between various communities, and between generations. Here, emphasis is not only placed on the direct interests that connect people but also on their indirect interests—and the goal is not only to achieve a balance between their immediate interests in the short term but to reach an equilibrium of interests over the long term as well. At this scale, the focus is on allowing the mutual realization of necessary interests in order to achieve an appropriate and just balance of interests overall, thereby enabling each group within society to contribute what it can and occupy the position that it deserves. This also serves to realize an integrated social unity, ensure the safe operation of society, and guarantee its healthy development. If micro level social cooperation addresses the questions that arise in society’s initial distribution of benefits, then macro level social cooperation addresses questions of redistribution.

Macro level social cooperation is essential for the safe operation of society overall and for its healthy development. If serious problems of socioeconomic

inequity arise within a social community, this will have an impact on the integration and unity of all social groups, leading to serious social conflicts that will severely hinder the safe operation and healthy development of society—in which case everyone loses, regardless of social group.

Another aspect that can't be ignored is the fact that macro level social cooperation is concerned with the important question of whether people are able to form a sense of social belonging. In traditional society, where the individual household rooted in the natural economy was the basic unit of life and production, people were unable to wield independence as “individuals.” The personalities that formed were instead marked by interdependence. However, in the modern world, under conditions crafted by an open society and a market economy, individuals have developed a sense of independence and autonomy. Although this is a sort of historical progress, it also means that they must face an unusually lively modern society filled with demanding interests and different lifestyles, clamoring with constant change, manifold diversity, and increasing complexity. At the same time, this is a strange world lacking in human feeling, which easily makes people feel isolated and helpless. “Therefore, when searching for a suitable partner for a cooperative enterprise in an anonymous, mobile, changing society one will not look out for persons who are moral only in regard to a particular circle of people, but for persons who in general have a moral attitude; persons, that is, who take a moral point of view, in the sense of being impersonal and impartial towards the interests of others. Only in such a society, which is the exact counterpart to the social life in a traditional community, will there be a reasonable interest in a universalistic morality. Every kind of group-egoistic morality would be judged as too risky for the members of respective group themselves” (Baumann 2002). Therefore, when viewed from the perspective of people's psychological needs, social cooperation among members of society is essential. Through social cooperation they can find companions with the same needs and, by helping one another, form a sense of belonging and community.

### 3.2 *Effective Macro Level Social Cooperation Is Inseparable from Social Justice*

Undoubtedly, effective macro level social cooperation depends on the resonance between social justice and the rules that govern the balancing of society. “The rule of social adjustment makes some necessary adjustments to the social interest pattern after the initial distribution based on the overall interests of the society, so that members of society can continuously get the benefits brought by development, and then the quality of society can be improved” (Wu 2002b). It is only through socially just rules for balancing society that the interests of all social groups can be brought into equilibrium, thereby achieving effective and sustainable macro level social cooperation. In this regard, there are three key matters that must be correctly dealt with: the fundamental eradication of poverty, the formation of an olive-shaped social structure, and the important issue of intergenerational justice.



The eradication of poverty is fundamental for effective social cooperation. Within a social community, the issue of poverty lies at the nexus of the numerous interests that must be brought into balance. Thus, if not effectively resolved, it will hinder the effectiveness of all the different aspects of social cooperation at their root. Within the field of psychology, attribution theory demonstrates that there are significant differences in how the causes of behavior are explained by better-off individuals in contrast to those who are worse-off. Those from better-off backgrounds tend to make “internal” causal attributions, understanding their good lives to be the result of their own efforts. But rather than finding causes in their own behavior, those from worse-off backgrounds tend to make “external” causal attributions, understanding their bad situation to be the result of factors within the social environment that are beyond their control, such as injustice and corruption. Those who make external attributions easily grow resentful toward society and find it difficult to cultivate a proactive attitude that allows them to identify with society in general. It therefore follows that, if there are too many members of impoverished groups within a society, there will be a proportionately large number of people lacking in basic dignity and fundamental standards of life who have grown resentful and who therefore make it difficult to form any general basis for identification with society. Under such circumstances, it becomes difficult to build trust across social groups. Instead, social exclusion and barriers to entry proliferate and, in the long run, a distinct “culture of poverty” will take shape among impoverished groups, tearing society apart and causing severe social disorder. “For party strife is everywhere due to inequality... for generally the motive for factious strife is the desire for equality” (Aristotle 1959). Eventually, the regular functioning of social cooperation—not to mention efficient social cooperation—becomes impossible.

Poverty can be subdivided into absolute poverty and relative poverty. Although it is impossible to fundamentally eliminate relative poverty within modern society and the market economy, it is nonetheless possible to fundamentally eliminate absolute poverty. If a society establishes a basic social security system (including a system to ensure minimal living standards for the poorest members of society), a public health system and a compulsory education system—all using social justice as the criterion for balancing interests—then that society can fundamentally eliminate absolute poverty and effectively alleviate relative poverty. Moreover, as modernization advances, the total wealth of society will grow larger, and the financial strength of the country will grow stronger. Accordingly, society will also become more capable of eliminating absolute poverty, making its fundamental elimination less and less of a problem. At this point, effective social cooperation can be carried out smoothly and sustainably, taking the fact that most members of society have basic dignity and equal rights as its foundation.

To ensure effective social cooperation, it is also extremely important that the number of individuals within middle-income groups be increased, expanding the range of these groups. An olive-shaped social structure (small at both the



top and bottom but large in the middle) is the shape most conducive to effective social cooperation. In such a social structure, wealth and interests are relatively balanced. Basic survival is not an issue for the vast majority of people. They have some family wealth, a certain level of education, a decent job, and are also able to rely on a stable and dependable social security system to hedge against various social risks. Because of this, they are more likely to identify with society, reducing conflicts. Under such circumstances, most people can easily perform their normal duties within the professional division of labor, ensuring that social cooperation functions effectively. By contrast, if middle-income groups compose only a small proportion of society, low-income individuals will compose a large proportion of the population even while they own a small proportion of social wealth. Similarly, the rich will own a large proportion of social wealth despite their small number (Wu 2017b). In such conditions, people will lack basic social security and ultimately lose hope in the future, making it less likely that they will be able to live and work in peace and contentment. Most individuals and social groups will have trouble identifying with society. “Some transgressions of money on rights...may be as important a source of cynicism, radicalism and alienation as the vast disparities in material living standards between rich and poor” (Okun 1975). In this context, it becomes difficult for effective social cooperation to take shape.

The main channels for expanding middle-income groups are as follows: First, personal property rights should be protected. China’s 2004 constitution included a clause stating that “citizens’ lawful private property is inviolable.” Xi Jinping has also stated that we must “strengthen the protection of property rights” and “enhance people’s sense of property security” (Xi 2016). Within modern society and the market economy, personal property is the foundation on which individuals—especially those in middle-income groups—can settle and pursue their interests. Only when personal property is truly protected can people expect to accumulate wealth. Second, the tax burden should be reduced for wage earners and small business owners. Both are important constituents of middle-income groups. Since they rely on wage income and business profits to accumulate wealth, heavy tax burdens have an adverse effect on their development. It is therefore necessary to reduce their tax burden, in accord with the principle of “keeping wealth with the people.” Third, property revenue channels should be expanded. For most middle-income people, accumulating wealth only through wages is too slow a process. Moreover, when general economic conditions are poor, wealth accumulation will begin to stagnate, and predictable growth becomes difficult to obtain. Because of this, the sources of property income available to middle-income people should be expanded—including direct and indirect investment in the stock market and property market, as well as investment via family finance. Only in this way can household wealth accumulation among middle-income people be effectively increased.

Another factor that cannot be ignored is intergenerational justice. The way that issues of intergenerational justice are resolved exerts a substantial influence on social cooperation. Viewed from the perspective of a community’s needs,

social cooperation not only includes the “horizontal” or “immediate” cooperation between social groups aimed at resolving “pragmatic” issues of coexistence and development, but also the “vertical” or “protracted” cooperation between generations aimed at resolving ongoing “long-term” issues of coexistence and development. Every generation bears responsibility for this “protracted” cooperation. The significance of intergenerational justice lies first and foremost in recognizing the wealth created by previous generations and giving fair returns in accordance with this contribution. Thus, each member of the current generation makes “horizontal” contributions as well as “vertical” ones. After all, the existing social wealth is not solely the product of the current generation but includes a portion that was created by members of society who are now retired from the workforce. “This community may also be imagined to extend over time, and therefore in the history of a society the joint contributions of successive generations can be similarly conceived” (Rawls 1999). It is normal for elders to receive social support, even if they aren’t wholly relying on others. Second, intergenerational social justice helps to make up for the historic deficiencies that have arisen in both “horizontal” and “vertical” social justice. For various reasons, “immediate” justice in the current society is inevitably faced with many different types of problems, and promoting intergenerational justice is an important method for correcting such problems. In this sense, promoting intergenerational justice can rebalance some injustices that arose in the previous period and prevent certain injustices from arising in the future. Third, intergenerational justice has a certain practical demonstration effect. Since it relates to the trust between generations and is concerned with whether the contributions of previous generations are recognized and reasonably rewarded, it also has a certain impact on the trust between various groups within society as it currently exists and, thereby, influences social cooperation.

Reasonable returns on the contributions of previous generations are mainly realized through the distribution of welfare benefits. Generally speaking, the allocation of these resources to previous generations should not result in a welfare level that is lower than the average current welfare of all members of society. In addition, there are two specific contributions made by previous generations that deserve additional compensation. First, due to mistakes of social policy at the time, the previous generation never received certain benefits that it deserved. This mistake ought to be compensated for by policy today. Second, the preceding generation also made enormous contributions to socioeconomic construction for which they expended exhaustive amounts of physical strength and energy, causing many to suffer from different types of disease and other physical ailments. At the time, the country’s weak financial position meant that there was no way to compensate them for this contribution. With socioeconomic development, the financial strength of society has now grown, and this should be used as an opportunity to repay the previous generation for this monumental contribution.

## 4 SOCIAL JUSTICE IS NECESSARY TO SAFEGUARD EFFECTIVE SOCIAL COOPERATION

### 4.1 *Equitable Public Revenues and Investments Actively Advance Social Cooperation*

To ensure effective social cooperation, two dimensions of the issue merit special attention. At the immediate and practical level, social cooperation should be safeguarded by giving public revenues and public investments wide-ranging financial latitude. Meanwhile, at the holistic and long-term level, social cooperation should be safeguarded by ensuring socially just institutional arrangements.

Equitable public revenues and investments can directly balance a number of important social interests and help achieve effective social cooperation. Society exists and develops in the form of the social community. At root, the reason that members of society seek to form a social community is because it can provide them the protection necessary for their survival and development. In other words, its significance lies in protecting the basic rights of all members of society and providing them with the necessary opportunities for development. At the same time, every member of society also has certain rights and obligations to the social community. All of this is, in a sense, achieved through fair and reasonable public revenues and investments. The funds necessary for equitable public revenue and investment are largely obtained through income taxes, inheritance taxes, and other forms of taxation levied on the “normal” incomes of individuals and socioeconomic organizations, especially business owners, high-income individuals, and economic entities. After deducting a certain amount for national defense and the day-to-day maintenance of public authority, the major portion of these tax revenues are converted into public investment, which will fund social undertakings that improve peoples’ quality of life while also advancing equity and balancing a number of important social interests. In this way, social unity and integration are achieved and effective social cooperation is realized. If pursued, the process must not only offer effective protection for the fundamental life and dignity of low-income people but also provide social security for high-income people as well—finally driving forward the construction of a social community and enhancing the common interests of all members of society.

Although public revenues and investments are necessary for social cooperation, there remains the issue of whether they are equitable. If this problem is not adequately addressed—and it can be caused by going too far or not doing enough—then it can impair social cooperation. Thus, there are two different issues to be solved. First, although the public revenue derived from taxation should be taken from the people, its proportion relative to income should not be excessive. At present, the tax burden of the Chinese people is too heavy. In 2016, total national budgetary revenue was 15.96 trillion yuan and the per capita real tax burden had exceeded 11,000 yuan (National Bureau of Statistics

2017). According to World Bank data, the average tax rate for Chinese workers is 45%, which is far higher than the average level of the OECD countries and is even slightly higher than the average rate in the 15 countries of the EU. Meanwhile, it is nearly double the rate in Australia and the United States (Ding 2012). Other data show that, at present, the “five types of social insurance plus one housing fund” guaranteed to Chinese workers draws 40%–50% out of their total wage (Ma 2014). This inequitable tax burden is not conducive to social justice. It will inevitably have a detrimental impact on people’s livelihoods and hinder social cooperation from taking shape.

Another problem is prioritizing public investment. Peoples’ welfare ought to be given precedence according to two principles. The first principle is that peoples’ livelihoods should take precedence in the prioritization of public investment overall. The reason is simple: “within modern society and the market economy, peoples’ livelihoods are a fundamental need for society and should take precedence in prioritizing public investment” (Wu 2017c). It must be admitted that, in recent years, the Chinese government has substantially increased its spending on peoples’ welfare, going a long way toward rectifying the backwards priority that used to prevail in public spending. However, for historical and practical reasons, public investment in China is still inequitable. This is evident in the fact that investment in peoples’ basic welfare is still inadequate, with China ranking low worldwide in terms of social spending, even while investment in the construction of opulent cities and luxury projects ranks high.

The second principle for prioritizing public investment is that, in the course of improving peoples’ livelihoods, fundamental welfare should be given priority. Social welfare involves a range of issues, including fundamental ones such as social relief and compulsory education, as well as relatively higher-order ones like public health and higher education. However, the public investment funds available for improving peoples’ livelihoods are limited. In terms of the marginal effect or “quality-price ratio,” using these limited funds to invest in fundamental welfare will have the maximum impact.

#### 4.2 *Equitable Institutions Safeguard Effective Social Cooperation*

In the long run, effective social cooperation depends on the construction of correspondingly equitable institutions.

The establishment of equitable institutions is a safeguard necessary for effective social cooperation to take shape. It is a weakness of human nature that, while engaged in social cooperation, individuals are partial to their own interests and thereby give rise to a form of individual rationality similar to that seen in the “prisoner’s dilemma.” Under these circumstances, it may be possible for the interests of one party to be advanced in a short period of time—but only at the expense of the reasonable interests of others. As a result, it is often difficult for lasting and effective social cooperation to take shape. Establishing equitable institutions is obviously key to solving this problem. The reason is simple:

Whether sustainable and effective social cooperation can take shape depends on whether there is continuous trust between the parties involved. Whether the stakeholders in social cooperation can form a lasting trust depends on whether they have sustainable and mutually reinforcing interests and are able to meet halfway. Furthermore, whether their interests are mutually reinforcing or not depends on whether they can collectively abide by equitable institutional arrangements. As Rawls said: “Social cooperation is guided by publicly recognized rules and procedures which those cooperating accept as appropriate to regulate their conduct... Fair terms of cooperation specify an idea of reciprocity, or mutuality: all who do their part as the recognized rules require are to benefit as specified by a public and agreed-upon standard” (Rawls 2001).

To ensure effective social cooperation, an equitable institutional arrangement should have the following characteristics: First, it requires unimpeded channels for the communication of interests. Within modern society and the market economy, there is an equality between individuals or social groups. When each party to social cooperation expresses its interests, they should find open channels of communication and their appeal should meet no obstruction. This not only prevents one party from monopolizing power in policymaking, ensures the equity of policies, and enhances the effectiveness of social cooperation overall, it also allows all involved to form trust through the equal and full expression of their respective interests, which is conducive to their cooperation in the long term.

Second, equitable institutional arrangements require an open and transparent mechanism for the disclosure of information. Obvious differences exist in the amount of relevant knowledge held by different parties due to differences in educational level and their ability to attain information. This has an adverse effect on the fairness of the contest between competing interests and thereby hinders social cooperation. Ensuring the transparency of information can prevent any one party from using its monopoly on information or its ability to obstruct the flow of important information to cheat or mislead the others, creating asymmetrical conditions that place the other parties in an unfavorable and unequal position within the contest of interests. From this it is apparent that the openness and transparency of information is a necessary condition for a fair contest and thus for social cooperation overall.

Third, equitable institutional arrangements require an equitable mechanism for negotiation. Although the interests of each party differ, in most cases they all hope to find a reasonable balance of interests and, on this basis, engage in mutual cooperation. This reasonable balance of interests can only be achieved through an equitable mechanism for negotiation. “When sincere and good persons differ, we are prone to think they must accept some procedure to decide their differences, some procedure they both agree to be reliable or fair” (Nozick 1974). Through equal and ample negotiation and consultation, all parties involved in social cooperation can make necessary compromises and ensure that their interests are met. For example, one stakeholder can use their reserved benefits to make some sort of concession, while another can make a

corresponding, incremental concession, thus ensuring that interests are balanced within a particular period of time and thereby enabling social cooperation to proceed.

Fourth, equitable institutional arrangements require an effective mechanism for the correction of errors. From a long-term perspective, no matter what kind of institutional arrangements the stakeholders follow, there will always be varying levels of inappropriate discord. If this discord cannot be corrected in the proper fashion, it will endanger social cooperation in the long run. Thus, an error correction mechanism should be an essential part of any equitable institutional arrangement. As Aristotle argued, “Therefore, this kind of injustice being an inequality, the judge tries to equalize it; for in the case also in which one has received and the other has inflicted a wound, or one has slain and the other been slain, the suffering and the action have been unequally distributed” (Aristotle 1999).

The key to creating socially just institutional arrangements lies in embodying the basic spirit of social justice. Namely: safeguarding the basic rights of every member of society no matter which social group they come from. Whether poor or rich, officials or common people, members of the majority group or members of a minority group, when it comes to basic rights all should be equally protected. To this end, three destructive situations must be guarded against: The first is when the “majority group” exerts control over a “minority” group. Even members of minority groups have a right to equal and indiscriminate protection. When the “majority” controls the “minority,” this creates a situation in which egalitarianism or populism is likely to emerge, reducing the efficiency of social cooperation or even disrupting it outright. When considered over an even longer timespan, everyone in the majority group could become a member of the minority group under different conditions. Therefore, if the fundamental rights of minorities are not protected, this means that the fundamental rights of all members of the majority group may not be properly protected and long-term, extensive, and effective social cooperation becomes impossible. The second destructive situation that must be guarded against is a situation in which capital carries inordinate power. In the market economy, there is no doubt that capital is an extremely important and scarce resource that wields an immense influence. As the proprietors of this scarce resource, business owners have advantages over other groups. Sometimes, with the help of this advantage, they will bias the distribution of benefits in their favor and impair the reasonable interests of the other parties. Over time, this will damage effective social cooperation on a larger scale and can even cause social conflicts that affect the safe operation of society. The third situation is the expansion of public authority. The harmonization of interests between stakeholders in social cooperation cannot be accomplished without the safeguard of the “middle party,” and a key component of this “middle party” is public authority (including government, the judiciary, etc.). The public authority capable of going beyond each party’s individual interests “to mediate, harmonize and balance powers” should be controlled by a just and impartial group. However, under

certain conditions, this public authority will nonetheless see some expansion, causing a certain degree of damage to the effectiveness of social cooperation. Therefore, society must “put power into the institutional cage” (People’s Daily 2013) and “adhere to the Constitution that all State power belongs to the people. No organization or individual shall have the privilege beyond the Constitution and laws. All violations of the Constitution and laws must be investigated” (Xi 2012).

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## Universal Justice and Differential Justice

So-called social justice means giving everyone what he or she deserves, that is, members of society “get what they deserve.”<sup>1</sup> The pursuit of social justice is doing everything in one’s power to get what one can through mutually beneficial interactions. Undoubtedly, social justice is extremely important and indispensable in modern society. Where there is a market economy, social justice is a basic value. Because social justice is so important, accurately understanding and promoting it has become a major issue in both policy and institutions.

Furthermore, universal justice and differential justice in a modern sense are integral components of social justice.<sup>2</sup> They complement each other and are indispensable, therefore constituting the basic elements of social justice. Many scholars obviously have differences in understanding the basic components of social justice, partly because they unilaterally value universal or differential justice. A tiny error can lead to missing the mark by a vast distance. Misunderstanding and biased promotion of either complementary element impacts safe operations and the healthy development of society.

<sup>1</sup>The first to eighth chapters analyze the basic content of social justice in detail. This chapter intends to summarize and further analyze the basic content of social justice from a concise perspective.

<sup>2</sup>Some scholars in China have raised the issues of “differential justice” or similar issues, such as Wang Haiming, Wu Zhongmin, He Lun, and Yi Xiaomin. Based on the relevant research results, this chapter attempts to make further analysis on the basic content and characteristics and the relationship between universal justice and differential justice.

## I UNIVERSAL JUSTICE AND DIFFERENTIAL JUSTICE ARE INTEGRAL COMPONENTS OF MODERN SOCIETY

### 1.1 *People Have a Historical Understanding of Social Justice, Historical Demands for It and “Weighty” Demands*

People understand social justice as a historical concept. They have historical demands for social justice, which involve a “weight” of demand, and a subsequent acceptance. Although people have pursued social justice throughout human civilization, in different societies with varied historical conditions, people not only have different understandings of the concept, but also have different demands, “weights” of demand and degrees of accepting it. Karl Marx said, “The conception of eternal justice, therefore, varies not only with time and place, but also with the persons concerned” (Marx and Engels 1964). Social justice doesn’t make sense if it is divorced from historical circumstances. Rawls’ “veil of ignorance,” to some extent, avoids explaining social justice in terms of specific groups’ interests. Its explanation can only describe “what it is” and not “why it is,” so it is still not convincing enough. Although “the veil of ignorance” implies a choice, that is, a judgment over what constitutes justice by modern citizens and the market economy, who have “independence” and “contracts” as well as “freedom” and “equality,” it excludes mention of people from past eras. Therefore, Rawls’ veil of ignorance lacks historical explanatory power. Because of that, “the veil of ignorance” cannot explain the historical phenomenon of “Greeks and Romans holding slavery to be just” (Marx and Engels 1964).

During the last millennium, some great thinkers such as Confucius, Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Mencius made valuable statements on social justice. They even put forward some views beyond the specific conditions of the times.

In ancient Greece, philosophers believed the essence of justice to be “giving everyone what he deserves” and equality according to worth. Such arguments not only have positive significance for some unfair social phenomena at that time, but they are also instructive for people to understand social justice issues. However, we need to understand that “according to historical materialism, the determining historical element was production and reproduction” (Marx and Engels 1995a). At that time, philosophers had historical limitations in their understandings of social justice. Some could only visualize moral “justice,” independent of the existing economic foundation and real life, which was therefore not feasible or operational. Some were limited to idealized goals of what “should-be” and set expectations far beyond people’s common interests/demands, meaning they were difficult for most society members to accept. Some simply bound social justice to the existing social order, believing that “what is lawful is just” (Xenophon 1984), and had different ideas about deviating from their ideal goals.

More importantly, many philosophers’ early discussions on social justice often could not grow and ferment into the basic concept underlying that society’s fundamental institutional arrangements. The reasons for this are quite

simple. Fundamentally speaking, “the mode of production in material life constitutes social, political and intellectual life processes. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being determines their consciousness” (Marx and Engels 1995b). In traditional society, productivity was backward and material wealth was extremely scarce. Most people lived simple lives of producing and reproducing, that is, in a state of maintaining their own basic living standards. Society as a whole was not able to effectively redistribute.

Moreover, as productivity was extremely backward, people lacked ideas about “subjects,” “independence,” and “humanism.” Marx said that when society has a natural economy: “personal dependence characterizes the social relations of production just as much as it does the other spheres of life organized on the basis of that production” (Marx and Engels 1972). However, personal dependence is essentially exclusive of freedom and equality.

Furthermore, where there was extremely backward productivity, the rationality of society was very low. Thus, obscurantism and a herd mentality dominated the masses. It was impossible then for the public to expect groups to be mutually beneficial and to form benign interactions with one another. The most important thing for the people was simply that they could adapt to basic living conditions (such as the weather) to survive and that a basic social order could be guaranteed. As long as such conditions were met, one could accept even the more unjust autocratic hierarchies like “the divine right of kings.” “Despotism’s only thought is disdain for mankind, dehumanized man; and it is a thought superior to many others in that it is also a fact” (Marx and Engels 1960).

Although some ancient thinkers’ views on social justice were “critically” significant, they had neither a broad, constructive effect nor a far-reaching impact on society.

It is different in modern society. There is not only a realistic material foundation for social justice, but society as a whole is dependent on it; it is a common interest. From an economic perspective, modern society provides the necessary conditions for the realization of social justice. One of the basic characteristics of modern society is highly developed productivity. Modern society, which began with the revolution of large machines (steam engines), has experienced an industrial revolution in the electric and automation era. Productivity has developed at a speed beyond imagination, and material wealth has greatly accumulated.

In modern society, whole communities are wealthy enough for redistribution to be implemented, thus solving the problem of vulnerable society members’ basic survival. It has become possible to realize mutually beneficial and benign interactions between various social groups.

Furthermore, the needs of most where there is a highly developed economy, is for a “people-oriented” principle and increased massification. The importance of social justice has become increasingly prominent and a common demand for people’s survival and development. It has mass interest and is a matter of great concern to all social groups.

### *1.2 Social Justice in the Modern Sense Includes Universal Justice and Differential Justice*

Since it is possible to realize social justice and make it a “popular” thing in modern society, there is further analysis to be had over what social justice actually includes.

To grasp the basic elements of social justice, we must discover what people most need in terms of basic interests and their value orientation. Only then can we reasonably explain how society members “get what they deserve” in a modern context.

Where there is a modern society and a market economy, people mainly have two common interests and basic value orientations. They pursue equal treatment (related to human dignity and basic survival) and the development of their own diversified needs. In line with this, social justice can actually be divided into two parts: universal justice and differential justice.

The first part focuses on protecting the needs of society members’ “dignity of their species,” that is, their needs and desires for equal rights. As some scholars have said, “people enjoy basic social rights equally, with their membership in community as a sufficient condition” (Zhang 2015).

Every member of society lives in a certain community and has prerequisites for their survival and development. At the same time, the communities themselves are made up of numerous types of people. Each member makes an indispensable contribution to the community, and they also have dignity as a member of the “human species” (“human dignity”). “The truth of the proposition that all human beings are by nature equal is confined to the one respect in which that equality can be truly affirmed; namely, their all being equally human, their having the species-specific properties and especially the differentiating properties that belong to all members of the species” (Adler 1984). The contribution of a created society and the dignity of the “human species” mean that every society member is entitled to equal “qualifications” that they, “as a human being,” should have and to the equal rights inherent in it. Rawls believed that “everyone should have an equal right to a similar freedom system compatible with the most extensive and equal basic freedom system owned by all” (Rawls 1999). Furthermore, in modern society, the concept of equality will inevitably lead to a common interest or demand for universal justice.

What is important is that the development of modern productivity makes it possible for most members of society to obtain equality. Equality is a historical phenomenon. In reality, equality can only appear in a modern society with highly developed productivity. In traditional society, the extreme shortage of living resources meant that society members inevitably resorted to “animal instincts” in order to have their basic necessities and to survive. In such circumstances, it was impossible to correct the problem of inequality. People’s pursuit of equality could only be a utopian goal or a weapon to criticize injustices. In other words, in traditional society, equality only had a subjective “humane” meaning, but not an objective “change the whole society” meaning. From an

objective point of view, when there was extremely backward productivity, there was only egalitarianism—which looked somewhat similar to equality but was difficult to sustain. At that time, the normal social phenomenon that was most accepted was for different hierarchies to correspond to the different amount of owned resources. The emergence of modern productivity has completely changed this situation. The huge material wealth of modern productive forces has fundamentally ended people’s extreme shortage of basic living resources. However, the formation and development of a market economy has made equal communication among society members a common social norm. “Equality and freedom are thus not only respected in exchange based on exchange values, but, also, the exchange of exchange values are the productive, real basis for all equalities and freedoms...Equality and freedom, developed to this extent, are exactly the opposite of freedom and equality in a world of antiquity...” (Marx and Engels 1995c). All these make the concept of equality and the behavior of society members more universal.

The second part focuses on society members’ diversified needs and pursuits, that is, their needs and pursuits for space to freely live and develop.

As human beings, every member of society is not only born equal, but also born different. “However important the environment may be, we must not overlook the fact that individuals are very different from the outset. As a statement of fact, it just is not true that ‘all men are born equal’” (Hayek 1987). Everybody has a “species-character” pursuit for the same dignity and equal rights, but they also have a “species-character” pursuit for free and diversified demands. As Marx said, “free, conscious activity is man’s species-character” (Marx and Engels 1979). These kinds of free, diversified demands and pursuits mean the existence of diversity, differentiation, and development among people. Diversity and differentiation manifest in people’s different types and levels of needs, but also in people’s abilities, families, and opportunities, as well as the resulting differences in the way people pursue their ultimate living conditions. In traditional society, where material wealth was extremely scarce and there was limited space for social mobility, if it was impossible to fully realize the “species-character” of people’s diversified needs/pursuits, then the advancement of modernization and the market economy, the great development of productivity, the great enrichment of material wealth and the substantial expansion of social mobility space mean that people’s “species-character” of diversified needs/pursuits can be fully revealed. Correspondingly, society can recognize people’s diverse needs and pursuits. Hobhouse said, “The difference between a civilized society and a barbaric society lies not in how much order it has established, but in its tolerance for pluralistic development” (Xu 2005).

In particular, the development of a market economy has greatly impacted people’s “species-character” of diversified needs and differentiated pursuits. “Where there are limited resources, how to reasonably allocate these for different purposes in economic activities is a key issue that society should consider in the process of economic development. As far as this is concerned, the market economy can effectively solve this problem” (Wu 2000). The market economy

is essentially a competitive economic system. In order to achieve high economic benefits, the market economy must have extremely high requirements for the effective allocation of resources. It urges society members, as independent individuals, to be responsible for their own actions. "Now the freedom of the sane adult individual... carrying with them the right to reach such agreements as best suits their own interests, involves him having both the right and the duty to determine the lines of life for himself" (Hobhouse 1911). The competitiveness of the market economy and the high efficiency of resource allocation enable society to expand its freedom of mobility, thus making the diversified, independent choices of society members not only a reality, but a demand for continuous accumulation and expansion.

To summarize, the conditions of modern society with a market economy mean that pursuing diversified demands has become normal behavior. People will inevitably form universal interest demands for differential justice accordingly.

Although equality and freedom are of vital importance and, in a modern sense, are the bases for the concept of social justice, it should be noted that equality and freedom can be "excessive" if necessary and reasonable restrictions are not imposed. Once "excessive" equality and freedom become reality, they will cause various social problems such as "egalitarianism," "populism," and "the law of the jungle," thus damaging the safe operations and healthy development of society to varying degrees. Obviously, equality and freedom both require necessary restrictions or balance, which can only come from justice. The reason is simple: proper and reasonable equality and freedom constitute justice. In this sense, justice is not a simple marriage of equality and freedom, but a basic concept rooted in equality and freedom. Therefore, "out of liberty, equality and justice, only justice is an unlimited good...no society can be too just...When justice thus regulates the pursuit of liberty and equality, both can be maximized harmoniously within the limits set" (Adler 1984). Compared to equality and freedom, the basic concept of social justice is more reasonable, and the systems and policies formed on this basis are less likely to make mistakes.

Much as there can be proper equality and reasonable freedom, we can divide the basic concept of social justice into universal justice and differential justice. Equality and freedom are ambiguous and easy to idealize, but universal justice and differential justice are more readily accepted as concepts by the Chinese people. As for whether they are feasible, they can be carried out relatively easily.

The above analysis demonstrates that people in modern society have basic interest needs and value orientations that determine social justice is part of two complementary and indispensable parts, namely, universal justice and differential justice. It should also be noted that since social justice includes universal and differential justice, it is closely related to the daily life and vital interests of society members. It is therefore a common interest and demand of people from all types of social group, who can find their own positions from it. We can therefore regard social justice as the greatest common divisor of wishes and interests/demands of all society members.

## 2 THE CONTENT AND CHARACTERISTICS OF UNIVERSAL JUSTICE AND DIFFERENTIAL JUSTICE

### 2.1 *The Main Components of Universal Justice and Differential Justice*

Of course, we cannot regard social justice as an absolute thing, set apart from history. Similarly, we cannot ignore history and regard social justice as a relative thing with no definitive meaning. Social justice is absolute and relative unity. “In (objective) dialectics, the difference between the relative and the absolute is itself relative. For objective dialectics, there is an absolute within the relative” (Lenin 1972), Social justice, in the modern sense, includes universal justice and differential justice. Once formed, society will have relatively long-term stability. As a core value for society members and a basic concept for institutes and law-makers, social justice has very broad and far-reaching impacts across modern society.<sup>3</sup>

So-called universal justice mainly revolves around the issue of “equal treatment.” It means that each social member’s dignity and basic livelihood can be protected, guaranteed, and improved with the continuous development of society. Each society member can continuously obtain benefits brought about by social development, and all society members can share the fruits of this development. Friedrich Engels suggested that “the abolition of a situation in which the needs of some are satisfied at the expense of the needs of others” means “the rounded development of the capacities of all members of society... participation by all means enjoyments for all” (Marx and Engels 1995d). John Rawls also said: “Each person possesses an inviolability founded on justice that even the welfare of society as a whole cannot override. For this reason, justice denies that the loss of freedom for some is made right by a greater good shared by others” (Rawls 1999).

Universal justice roughly includes the following: an aim to protect the basic rights of society members (the rights to subsistence, development, and education), social security (funded by society but mainly through the state), compulsory education, public healthcare, employment security, and housing for everyone through taxation and redistribution (which is compatible with the social economic level and financial strength).

So-called differential justice mainly revolves around the basic idea of “free development.” It means that the diversified needs of the people and their development space can be protected. With social improvement, people’s varied

<sup>3</sup>The term “distributive justice” is not accurate enough. It implies a hypothetical premise: in a society, there is a force that surpasses all groups in the society, and with its own conscience, wisdom, and skills, it “distributes” the resources that people rely on for their survival and development with greater flexibility. Once “distribution” is appropriate, a just society will be formed. Otherwise, it will lead to an unjust society. In fact, social justice is jointly formed, pushed, and owned by all social forces in modern society and guaranteed by various systems and policies. Although the government is playing an irreplaceable role, it is not the only one.

survival and development patterns can be increasingly accommodated or protected, and they can fully capitalize upon their development potential. Marx attached great importance to the free development of human beings, believing that a just and ideal society would be “an association, in which the free development of each is the condition for the free development of all” (Marx and Engels 1974).

Differential justice mainly has two components. First, each member of society should have the will to choose for himself his relevant chances of survival and/or development. The basic elements of differential justice include “the agents who are free, the restrictions/limitations they are free from, and what it is they are free to do or not to do” (Rawls 1999). These involve each society member having a differentiated development space. However, if members of society are prohibited in this respect, their future space will be squeezed and their pursuit of diversity will become impossible. In order to ensure their existence and space for development, society needs to create smooth flow channels for them. All discrimination should be eliminated, including birth, racial, gender, belief, household registration, wealth, and age discrimination. We should “break through the barriers of interest solidification” (Xinhua News Agency 2013). Second, distribution should be based on contributions. In creating social wealth and other socially beneficial products, the contributions of each society member are different. Therefore, in the field of distribution, society should make different distributions according to the different contributions of each person. Although in principle this seems simple, it is easy to be ignored or belittled by Rawls or other scholars, due to their overemphasis on the issues of “equality” and “redistribution.”

## *2.2 The Distinction Between Universal Justice and Differential Justice*

Since the focuses of universal and differential justice are respectively to ensure “equality” and “freedom,” there must be some obvious differences between the two.

First of all, universal justice emphasizes the concept of “one share per person,” while differential justice emphasizes different treatment. In modern society, equality and dignity are important factors of “humanization” and must be possessed by every member of society, so they should be guaranteed. Otherwise, it is impossible to talk about putting people first. Although the demand for the pursuit of diversity differs to that for equality, it is also an important “humanizing” element and must be carried out in accordance with the fair rules of equal opportunity and distribution according to contributions. Therefore, it should also be guaranteed. It can be seen that both universal and differential justice are necessary so that people are “humanized.”

Secondly, universal justice focuses on “assistance from society,” while differential justice focuses on the “personal efforts” of society members themselves. Generally speaking, universal justice depends on effective state-owned



institutions, that is, the direct operations of the state and their mandatory intervention. The social security system, compulsory education, and public health system are arranged as social redistribution systems. They cannot be organized or implemented by individuals or non-governmental organizations. The required public funds are drawn from other groups according to laws and regulations. However, differential justice is different. Although it depends on the relevant arrangements made by the state and on the encouragement of policy protection, differential justice can only be realized by society members through their own “personal experiences” of entrepreneurship, mobility, or hard work.

Thirdly, the social cost of universal justice is relatively large and the personal cost is relatively small. However, differential justice is the opposite. Relatively speaking, the promotion of universal justice comes at the expense of many social costs, whereas in contrast, personal costs are relatively small. For example, the establishment of social security and public health security systems not only requires complicated and careful system designs, but also years of public investment. A society with universal justice will have public investment policies such as plans for a public health service. But these form a huge bottomless pit and seriously drag down the entire development process of the country. In contrast, the cost of social investment is relatively small where there is fair promotion of differential justice. “In a sense, it is generally acceptable for society to issue relevant systems and policies, draw certain insurmountable boundaries, and set up relevant protection agencies to pay the free costs, while the input costs for coordination of social groups and public funds are relatively small” (Wu 2012). As far as the promotion of differential justice is concerned, although social costs are minimal, the cost of personal investment is relatively high. The reason is quite simple. When relevant systems and policies of differential justice are promulgated, personal entrepreneurship and pursuit need more physical and mental investment, as well as personal financial contributions. This means that individuals bear corresponding risks. Only in this way can members of society realize their diverse needs.

### 3 THE SOCIAL FUNCTIONS OF UNIVERSAL JUSTICE AND DIFFERENTIAL JUSTICE

Social justice is undoubtedly of vital importance to the safe operations and healthy development of society. And as integral components of social justice, universal justice and differential justice serve different social functions. The social function of universal justice is on promoting social integration and social security, as well as developing society’s potential. The social function of differential justice is to stimulate social vitality and creativity, formulating/promoting a colorful and flexible society and giving people hopes and prospects. Both are indispensable and they both help in promoting the progress of modern civilization.

### 3.1 *The Social Function of Universal Justice*

The social function of universal justice is as follows:

First, it is conducive to social integration and so helps improve social security.

Social integration is a basis for the safe operations and healthy development of society. It is necessary so that members of society have a sense of belonging and trust in each other. Universal justice is necessary because it helps to solidify that sense of belonging and trust. With this in mind, Muller said: "...for purpose of public utility; among which purposes the subsistence of the people is the foremost. Since no one is responsible for having been born, no pecuniary sacrifice is too great to be made by those who have more than enough, for the purpose of securing enough to all persons already in existence" (Mill 1909). Universal justice enables society members to acquire a human "species-dignity," based on which people can find equal footing in society. Through universal justice, those members of society on benefits, especially vulnerable groups, will feel the assistance that society offers. They will feel that there are people out there who care about them and that the society in which they live is "their own society," thus naturally feeling a sense of identity and belonging.

At the same time, universal justice helps to reduce the huge gap between rich and poor. It helps to promote mutually beneficial interactions between various social groups and further promotes trust among those groups. All of these enhance social integration. Increased social integration can weaken social contradictions and internal frictions, which in turn improve social security.

On the contrary, if society lacks universal justice, social integration and security are greatly reduced. A lack of universal justice puts large numbers of people in a state of poverty or disadvantage, and their basic "species dignity" cannot be guaranteed, thus making it difficult for them to enter "mainstream society." As a result, social barriers, exclusion, and conflicts are all inevitable. For example, if there are many who have been long-term unemployed, they will feel "abandoned" by society—"especially some young people will be likely to become alienated from society and turn to anti-social behavior such as crime and drug abuse" (Stiglitz and Walsh 2011). What's more, "from the unequal distribution of wealth and power arise all the disorders of which nine-tenths of the inhabitants of all civilized countries justly complain. From thence result to them privations, sufferings, humiliations, and slavery" (Buonarroti 1989). When there is little universal justice in society, resulting in a serious gap between the rich and the poor, the rapid expansion of some groups' interests inevitably means others' are damaged. In such circumstances, there will be resentment toward those groups that are benefited. Social integration will be seriously weakened, and social security will be greatly reduced. In serious cases, there may even be social unrest or social turbulence. Transgressions of money/rights "may be as important a source of cynicism, radicalism and alienation as the vast disparities in material living standards between rich and poor" (Okun 1975). We can't generalize and say that societies with small rich-poor gaps have high degrees of social integration and security, but we can say that societies with big

rich-poor gaps have little social integration, serious social conflicts, and unguaranteed social security. Looking at how things stand currently, we can say that, in general, countries/regions with a large rich-poor gap have little social integration and security. Some countries in Latin America and Southeast Asia are typical examples.

Second, it is conducive to boosting domestic consumption.

The driving forces behind economic development are mainly export, investment, and domestic consumption. Among these, the most important is domestic consumption. However, universal justice is just as conducive to stimulating domestic consumption. This can be understood in two ways:

On the one hand, universal justice can generally enhance the purchasing power of middle and low-income people. One of the key features of universal justice is that it can generally improve people's living conditions. It does this with social transfer payments, which increase incomes and purchasing power. Increasing low and middle-income people's purchasing power helps boost domestic consumption, increasing the corresponding market's commodity orders and thus effectively stimulating the whole economy.

On the other hand, universal justice can also significantly increase the proportion of people making instant and advanced purchases. In modern society with a market economy, everybody will inevitably encounter risks during their life and career, such as illness, elderly care, school expulsion, or unemployment. Faced with such risks, society members often use savings set aside for a rainy day. This kind of practice cannot remove risk completely. With regard to society's overall economy, this trend delays development. As many people "save" (actually "freeze") a large amount of funds, in a sense they artificially reduce productive investment and inhibit the economic pull. However, the establishment of a social security system means that individual responses to risks can be transformed into a collective response with society-wide backing. This kind of practice not only is effective at enabling people to resist risk, but also means they "greatly ease worries such as pension, medical care, unemployment, etc., and can have relatively stable expectations for future life, thus can greatly reduce [their] personal savings. Associated with this is an increase in real-time consumption, or even an increase in advanced consumption, that is, a mortgage (loan for consumption)" (Wu 2008). The promotion of immediate and advanced consumption greatly boosts and is a driving force for domestic consumption.

Third, it is conducive to effectively developing society-wide potential.

Universal justice is a big issue concerning whether society-wide potential can be effectively developed. If society lacks universal justice, society's holistic potential cannot be effectively developed. Here, we might as well hypothesize. In society, if there is no universal and just system, such as compulsory education, some children will be unable to attend school due to their poor families. If this is the case, these children's innate potential cannot be fully recognized. Moreover, if such children account for a large proportion of their peers, the potential of a large population cannot be fully recognized. This would be a

huge loss to society. Therefore, compulsory education, an inclusive and just institution, provides the necessary conditions for the effective development of most society members.

Universal justice is conducive to the development of all society members so that they obtain necessary equality. Through social security, compulsory education, public health services, employment, and other universal and just institutions, society members can acquire equal dignity and basic vocational skills and cultural knowledge. These should be basic conditions for everybody so that they integrate into society equally, have normal social lives, and obtain employment opportunities. As Rawls said, “in order to treat all persons equally, to provide genuine equality of opportunity, society must give more attention to those with fewer native assets and to those born into the less favorable social positions. The idea is to redress the bias of contingencies in the direction of equality” (Rawls 1999). For society members, equal development has not only realistic significance in justice, but vertical significance in just, intergenerational transmission. Without such a platform with universal justice as the foundation for society members’ general development, the effective development and realization of peoples’ potential would be impossible.

### 3.2 *The Social Function of Differential Justice*

The social function of differential justice is mainly illustrated in the following ways:

First, it is conducive to stimulating social vitality.

In order for society to have sustained development, it must stimulate social vitality or improve efficiency. In this regard, differential justice plays a key role.

A major part of differential justice is distribution according to contribution. Where there is primary distribution, differential justice emphasizes that each society member’s specific interests should be combined with their own contributions. He who contributes more gets more and vice versa. In fact, this means associating the specific contributions of society members improvement with their own vital interests. The results stimulate the enthusiasm and motivation of society members to create social wealth and develop vitality. People would inevitably become increasingly inert if their specific contributions were divorced from their own vital interests.

In modern society, the market economy, which is the cornerstone of economic operations, provides a feasible path for the concrete contributions of society members and their vital interests. This in turn can then be transformed into high efficiency. Chinese President Xi Jinping said, “It is a general rule of the market economy that the market decides the allocation of resources, and a market economy in essence is one in which the market determines resource allocation” (Xi 2013). The requirements of a market economy are to maximize benefits, maximize the cost-performance ratio of products, determine different types/quantities of products according to the changing needs of the market, and require relevant society members as production factors to carry out equal

and necessary—even fierce—competition with each other. In order to not become redundant, society members must upgrade their professional skills, increase their labor/capital input, and improve their technology and other production tools, all while reducing their production costs. The result is enhanced social vitality and efficiency, which can subsequently promote social development. As Adam Smith states, where there is a market economy, society members are “led by an invisible hand to promote an end which was no part of their intention. Nor is it worse for society that it was not part of it. By pursuing their own interests, they frequently promote society more effectually, more so than when they really intend to promote it” (Smith 2007).

Guaranteed differential justice, to ensure smooth social mobility, provides the necessary support framework for continuous social vitality and efficiency. By eliminating the unjust factors that hinder society members’ free development and maintaining a smooth, reasonable flow of social mobility, people can be productive forces. They can meet their own needs, plus those of the social economy, thus ensuring society-wide vitality and efficiency. Otherwise, “if opportunities, such as higher education, taking a civil service examination, starting an enterprise, taking on a project, getting a promotion, buying a house, looking for a job, giving a performance, going abroad, depend on relationships and the need to pull strings, those with prominent backgrounds will be given more care, and those without will not be able to stand out. This will seriously affect social fairness and justice” (Xi 2014). On the contrary, barriers to social mobility will inevitably stifle social vitality and reduce socio-economic efficiency.

Second, it is conducive to forming and enriching a diversified society.

With differential justice, society members’ individual wishes can be respected and protected, and this helps to create and/or enrich diversified lifestyles. With the development of modern productive forces and the abundance of material goods, people’s basic survival is no longer a problem, and people can pay more attention to their quality of life. It has become common for society members to create personalized and diversified lifestyles, based on their own unique needs in modern society. People’s lifestyles are becoming increasingly personalized and socially inclusive. “The wishes, concepts, pursuits, personalities and preferences of society members are very different, so the lifestyles formed on this basis must be quite diversified and colorful” (Wu 2012). People’s pursuit of diversified and personalized lifestyles makes society more energetic and full of vitality. At the same time, it means there is increased demand for more types of consumer products, thus enhancing domestic consumption.

Differential justice is conducive to the diversity of society. Traditional society was simple and homogeneous, but modern society is a highly differentiated heterogeneous society. “The specialization, high efficiency and ever-expanding scale of modern production require society to fully explore and utilize social resources... various trades and professions in the social organism are increasing day by day, as are various components of different natures” (Wu 1999). This kind of “heterogeneity” shows that there are many types of social component,

and there is a high degree of integration between them. “The interdependence of all parts in modern society makes the modern order much more sensitive than a simpler form of economic organization” (Mannheim 1960). The existence/development of this heterogeneous component is an important power source and integrated foundation in modern society. However, the inclusion of differential justice among these heterogeneous components, as well as smooth channels for social mobility, can be effective in promoting the development of necessary heterogeneous components in modern society. These include industry-related groups, geographical groups, interest groups, and various social organizations, which ensure the existence and development of society in its diversified form.

Third, it is conducive to the prosperity and development of ideology and culture.

Differential justice can be effective in protecting and promoting the diversity of ideologies and cultures. It can protect the space needed for their survival and development. Differential justice can provide necessary room for people to explore ideologies and cultures through “trial and error.” This can help people to understand various ways of thinking and the merits and cruxes of such viewpoints. The thoughts and viewpoints expressed in this sphere have room for development, yet firm foundations and creative significance. This is consistent with the laws of ideological and cultural development and means they can effectively promote prosperity and ideological/cultural development. “That mankind are not infallible; that their truths, for the most part, are only half-truths; that unity of opinion, unless resulting from the fullest and freest comparison of opposite opinions, is not desirable” (Mill 2001). Furthermore, differential justice allows for the existence of many different ideas and viewpoints. This can provide people with opportunities for confrontation in their thinking methods or viewpoints but can also provide opportunities for a large number of references, for full criticism and correction, or to further enable people to continuously improve and deepen their respective viewpoints, in doing so promoting the prosperity and development of ideology and culture. As Hayek said, “Civilization begins when the individual in pursuit of his own ends can make use of more knowledge than he has himself acquired and when he can transcend the boundaries of his ignorance by profiting from knowledge he does not himself possess” (Hayek 1987).

To summarize, when universal justice and differential justice exist together, society can maintain unity and integration. All social groups can have hopes for the future, and society can be full of vitality and creativity, thus “ensuring that the vigor of labor, knowledge, technology, managerial expertise and capital keep bursting forth, all the wealth-creating sources fully flow so as to benefit all people” (Xi 2014).

## 4 UNIVERSAL JUSTICE AND DIFFERENTIAL JUSTICE COMPLEMENT EACH OTHER AND ARE INDISPENSABLE FROM ONE ANOTHER

### *4.1 Universal Justice and Differential Justice Are Wholly Integrated*

As earlier mentioned, universal justice and differential justice are the basic components of social justice. They complement each other and are indispensable from one another. They constitute the greatest common divisor of the wishes and interests/demands of various social groups. Universal justice and differential justice help things run smoothly in modern society and ensure that society develops in a healthy fashion. We also need to notice that, in social reality, “justice has a Protean face, capable of change, readily assuming different shapes, and endowed with highly variable features. When we look deeply into this face, trying to unravel the secrets hidden behind its outward appearance, bewilderment is apt to befall us” (Bodenheimer 1974). However, we have often found that people have a biased understanding of social justice. There is a tendency to focus on just one of the components of social justice. Analysts either place too much emphasis on universal justice or differential justice, and they disregard the other component. When there is a one-sided view, these two components are treated as separate from one another. This inevitably means that there are biased results, which could lead to a negative impact on society, as such views can impact institutions and policymaking.

It is fair to say that researchers have not absolutely abandoned one component in favor of the other, nor advocated that one component is a “pure” and “singular” representation of social justice. However, it is often quite clear when their focus is on one of these components, that they have a certain disregard for the other.

### *4.2 The Problems When Placing an Excessive Emphasis on Universal Justice*

The common view is that too much emphasis is placed on universal justice and differential justice is disregarded. John Rawls and Ronald Dworkin are both examples in this respect. Rawls believes in a market economy and regards people’s freedoms and differences as prerequisites when it comes to society. However, he has obviously demonstrated that he is on the side of universal justice. Rawls places a lot of emphasis on the similarities of human beings and he focuses on their dignity and equality. He advocates improvements being brought to the lives of the “most disadvantaged” and “most vulnerable” members of society. He says: “All social values—liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect—are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage” (Rawls 1999). Similarly, Dworkin says, “The focus of my argument



will be the concept of not liberty, but equality” (Dworkin 1978). He says, “I am equally concerned about the sovereignty of the political community – without it, there is tyranny in the government” (Dworkin 2000). Such views might sound somewhat apt when considering a country like the United States, which has not done enough to achieve universal justice and has a relatively large rich/poor gap. However, these views are—generally speaking—not really applicable to a modern society or a country moving toward becoming a modern society. Neither of these academics have paid sufficient attention to differential justice, to the rules of distribution according to contributions, or to the motivations of people who make relatively large contributions. It is not necessarily the case that there is injustice or that “primary goods” are damaged due to those who contribute more, benefitting more. On the contrary, this practice is likely to strengthen “primary goods” and provide an essential foundation for justice in society. There is little evidence to suggest that those who contribute less and benefit less are unfairly treated in society or marginalized.

Admittedly, there is a certain logic to John Rawls’ and others’ arguments on universal justice, especially when the motivations are improving social integration/solidarity and making society more people-oriented, but going beyond the limit is as bad as falling short. When universal justice is regarded as the sole force behind social justice, and taken as the conceptual basis for institutional arrangements and policies, there will inevitably be egalitarianism because differential justice is ignored or belittled, even though it is extremely important. Society will be negatively impacted.

First, when there is a one-sided emphasis on universal justice, heterogeneous societies become somewhat suppressed and are unable to develop normally. With the advancement of modernization and the market economy, society has become more complex and diverse. There has been the gradual formation of a heterogeneous society. This has inevitably become a trend in many places. In a heterogeneous society, people will pursue diversity, will be self-motivated, and will seek to make choices freely. These are the hopes of every citizen. However, when there is an overemphasis on universal justice, people are not able to realize the importance or characteristics of a heterogeneous society. If one no longer exists or differential justice is absent from society, then in the long run, it will be impossible for people to achieve their goals. “The relationship between equality and freedom is a love-hate relationship, depending on whether we demand an equality that suits diversity or an equality that sees inequality in every diversity. And, certainly, the more equality is sameness, the more an equality so conceived feeds a distaste for variety, self-assertion and eminence, and thereby, in the final analysis, for freedom” (Sartori 1987).

Second, a one-sided emphasis on universal justice will lead to egalitarianism: a form of social injustice. “The equal treatment of people does not lead to differences being eliminated, i.e., it does not mean there are equal conditions or results. This is a recognized fact... an equal start does not necessarily mean an equal end...” However, when too much attention is paid to universal justice, there will be egalitarianism. This may come as unexpected to many people.



Universal justice emphasizes that in “the field of redistribution,” there is “one share [of basic necessities] per person.” If this kind of practice is extended to all areas, and differential justice is not viewed as necessary, there will be pure egalitarianism, and universal justice will become distorted. Not only will basic items be distributed as “one share per person,” all items will be distributed in this way. Universal justice will not only lead to “redistribution”; considerations will also be made about “primary distributions.” This kind of practice is unfair because some people get what they do not deserve, and others do not get what they deserve. There may be people who are able to work but have not made basic contributions to society who are still to get an equal share of the goods. An “all-gain-no-pain” system directly encroaches on the reasonable interests of “those who work more” and “those who contribute more.” Workers who contribute much may only receive a fraction of the reasonable benefits they are entitled to. This is social injustice.

Third, a one-sided emphasis on universal justice will stifle people’s vitality and creativity. If the only thing emphasized is people’s similarity/equality and the correlation between their different contributions to society is ignored, people will inevitably develop a sort of dependency and inertia when it comes to generating wealth. There will gradually become a “normal existence” phenomenon. Hayek had good reasons to worry about this. He said that “the more the status of individuals or groups becomes attached to the government’s actions, the more they will insist that the government implement some kind of just distribution plan that can be approved by them” (Hayek 1973, 1987). This will suffocate social vitality and creativity. Meanwhile, if there is no differential justice, most people will have few opportunities to develop and will see no prospects or hope, thus losing their will to work and strive. Society will similarly lose vitality, creativity, competitiveness, and sustained impetus, and there will be bad consequences as a result of this. Social injustice will make those who contribute more feel dissatisfied, and this will not be conducive to ensuring that society continues to run smoothly. Crucially, in a society without vitality and creativity, people will inevitably lose the enthusiasm for creating social wealth. Their ability to accumulate material and spiritual wealth—which is essential in any society—will be seriously hindered. When this happens, the material foundations for universal justice will become unstable. Society will not be able to sustain universal justice and it will soon be lost.

The Soviet Union is typical in this respect. It attached great importance to universal justice and established a comprehensive social welfare system. During the Soviet era, people not only enjoyed social security and compulsory education, but also enjoyed public health, housing, and other public services. However, the Soviet Union implemented a planned economic system, which, in essence, denied differential justice. This system monopolized the social and economic resources that people depended on for their survival and development. It also enforced the mandatory distribution of social and economic products; this was almost unilateral. The system placed a lot of emphasis on personal dependence and therefore meant that there was a severely restricted

space for people to develop freely in. They had little diversity, their autonomous efforts were ignored, and they were denied a rational, diverse existence. The social structure of the former Soviet Union was increasingly homogeneous and rigid. As a result, people felt increasingly hopeless; they lost out on prospects and had little hope of developing. Society lost its vitality and creativity. Eventually, the foundations of universal justice became unsustainable and the Soviet Union collapsed. There are profound lessons worth learning from this.

### 4.3 *The Problems When Placing an Excessive Emphasis on Differential Justice*

There is also a common view that too much emphasis is placed on differential justice and universal justice is disregarded. Nozick, Hayek, and Satolli all hold this opinion. Nozick places a lot of emphasis on diversity, which he insists is the foundation of society. He argues that individuals have rights and that there are some things that no person/group should do as these would violate their rights. He also argues that the redistribution efforts of the state can be harmful, so he advocates abandoning the term “distribution.” Nozick says: “Hearing the term ‘distribution’, most people presume that some thing or mechanism uses some principle or criterion to give out a supply of things. Into this process of distributing shares some error may have crept.” So, it would be best to use a terminology that clearly is neutral. “We shall speak of people’s holdings; a principle of justice in holdings describes (part of) what justice tells us about holdings” (Nozick 1974). In line with this, the minimal state is the most extensive state that can be justified. “The state may not use its coercive apparatus for the purpose of getting some citizens to aid others, or in order to prohibit activities to people for their own good or protection” (Nozick 1974).

Although some positives can be drawn from Nozick’s views—public power is restricted and people’s potential is stimulated—his views are one-sided and not very solidified. “Nozick’s mistake was arbitrarily rationalizing human diversity for the sake of laissez-faire. He ignores some improper, pre-existing differences amongst human beings and examples of transferred behavior, and regards individuals and society members as essentially individualized” (Yi 2015). It is important that society protects individual differences and that there is differential justice. However, a community should factor in all of its members, and their basic dignity should be protected. Universal justice, like differential justice, is indispensable. There is little place for Nozick’s minimal state in institutions because without sufficient tax revenue, the state cannot guarantee the dignity or equal rights of its members, not to mention social justice, unity, or integration. Even the most basic differential justice cannot be maintained.

Within academic circles, this view can only lead to arguments. If it is extended into the real world and applied to institutions or introduced into policymaking, there will be many negative consequences.

First, this view will lead to injustices and, to some extent, give play to “the law of the jungle.” It is realistic to surmise that “the worth of liberty is not the

same for everyone. Some have greater authority and wealth, and therefore greater means to achieve their aims.” However, “the lesser worth of liberty is compensated for, since the capacity of the less fortunate members of society to achieve their aims would be even less were they not to accept the existing inequalities whenever the difference principle is satisfied” (Rawls 1999). When too much emphasis is placed on differential justice and universal justice is neglected, the argument is that every member of society has reasonable differences and these cannot be changed; therefore, institutions should be based around this. Just imagine if the privileged and the rich took power and wealth as their starting point, while the disadvantaged and the poor began their lives penniless and vulnerable. This would inevitably lead to a “law of the jungle” mentality. “When differences in nature are the sought principles, and people only follow the principle of seeking common ground, rather than challenging the status quo, society will become full of animals” (Yi 2015). Society would inevitably suffer from non-reciprocity and nobody would benefit. If the interests of some people were promoted, then it is reasonable to surmise that the interests of others would be damaged. Moreover, this kind of social injustice would become more severe as it is passed down through generations. In severe cases, it would lead to solid social barriers and a hierarchy of social injustice. There would be a phenomenon of “the rich remaining rich while the poor remain poor” and “the strong would remain strong while the weak would remain weak.” This unjust trend would continue and worsen over time.

Second, it could lead to social unrest or even riots. On the one hand, if there was massive social injustice, or the law of the jungle manifested in society, some members of that society would have their interests harmed. “If everyone is able to live a decent life, yet in reality, a considerable number of people are not living decent lives, then these people will find themselves in difficult circumstances. Inequality hurts vulnerable groups the most, and makes them feel inferior” (Yao 2011). On the other hand, in modern society, people have developed an awareness of equality and how to safeguard their rights, so they will not tolerate acts that damage their status or dignity. As a result, conflicts often emerge among various groups. In serious cases, these could lead to severe social unrest. And when this happens, safe operations cannot be ensured, and people lack the necessary conditions for their healthy development. When there is a big problem with social security, there are no winners and only losers.

## 5 PROMOTE THE BALANCED DEVELOPMENT OF UNIVERSAL JUSTICE AND DIFFERENTIAL JUSTICE

### 5.1 *The Balanced Development of Universal Justice and Differential Justice Is of Vital Importance*

Although a society cannot exist without social justice, our understanding of it should not stop there. Even if social justice is valued, there are still questions about whether it can be properly implemented. As discussed earlier, universal

justice and differential justice serve different functions, and they ensure that there can be healthy development in society and that society can operate safely. Universal justice and differential justice are the core principles behind social justice. If one is missing or overemphasized/undervalued, there will be a warped social justice phenomenon. Society will plunge into “unbalanced” situation, and there will be harmful, negative consequences.

Therefore, it is important to ensure that there are practical ways of achieving a balance between universal justice and differential justice. They should promote and develop one other so that society can realize real social justice.

### *5.2 Promoting the Balanced Development of Universal Justice and Differential Justice in China*

As China undergoes a period of transition, this issue is particularly important. After 40 years of reform and opening up, China has undergone tremendous changes. There have been two “unexpected” phenomena. China’s economy has achieved universally recognized results, and major changes have taken place in various aspects of people’s social lives. However, there have been unbalanced and uncoordinated developments in China, and social construction has lagged behind, so social injustice has become increasingly prominent. Currently, there is a deficiency of both universal justice and differential justice in China, and this is how social injustice has manifested. At this stage, we cannot rely on relevant systems/policies based on Rawls’, Nozick’s, or Hayek’s theories, as these place too much emphasis on either universal justice or differential justice. If arrangements are made according to a one-sided theory, then social injustice will be aggravated in China.

As China transitions, it is important that universal justice and differential justice are promoted at the same time. This method will help China achieve more social justice. We should not only attach importance to one over the other. It is important to maintain balance and there should be mutual promotion of both concepts. “Promoting” does not mean “marching in unison”; we should promote universal justice and differential justice step by step and with oversight of both China’s historical and modern conditions. It is necessary for us to “moderately prioritize” and focus on the two concepts at a basic level so that we can lay solid foundations for their overall improvement.

#### *We Should Moderately Prioritize the Promotion of Universal Justice at a Basic Level*

Promoting universal justice at a basic level does not mean realizing universal justice in a comprehensive, all-round, integrated way, nor does it involve promoting a high welfare system. It means protecting people’s basic living conditions, that is, protecting people’s basic, equal rights.

When differential justice is damaged and egalitarianism becomes such a serious issue that society loses its vitality, we should naturally prioritize differential justice. Only then can we effectively break down egalitarianism and re-stimulate

social vitality. There were some practices that demonstrated the effectiveness of this during the early days of China's reform and opening-up era. "Farm output quotas were fixed by household" and "investment was invited." But now, after decades of reform and opening up, a market economy has been established, and there are structures in place that ensure the free allocation of some production commodities. There is much more vitality in society. At the same time, however, there are lots of social injustices in China, including a rich/poor divide, problems among poor and low-income populations, and unemployment issues. Some laborers enjoy little protection, and some people lack basic social security. In recent years, China's Gini coefficient has remained high. According to data released by the National Bureau of Statistics, China's Gini coefficients from 2003 to 2016 were: 0.479, 0.473, 0.485, 0.487, 0.484, 0.491, 0.490, 0.481, 0.477, 0.474, 0.473, 0.469, 0.462, and 0.465 (Yang 2013; National Bureau of Statistics 2017). Another survey shows that, as of August 2011, the households with the 10% most assets own 84.6% of all household assets. The financial assets of China's richest accounted for 61.01% of all financial assets, and their non-financial assets account for 88.7% of all non-financial assets (accessed September 1, 2022). Differential justice is extremely important, but going beyond the limit is as bad as falling short. As Adler said, "there are libertarians, who not only place the highest value on liberty but also seek to maximize it at the expense of equality. They not only want an unlimited amount of freedom, but they are also willing to try to achieve it even if achieving it results in an irremediable inequality of conditions, under which some portion of a society, usually a majority, suffer serious deprivations" (Adler 1984). Social injustice has meant that some groups/individuals have been unable to enjoy due reform and development achievements, and some have even struggled to obtain basic necessities that ensure their survival. There have been social exclusion, conflicts, and disputes, which pose an increasingly obvious threat to the safe operations of society. They also threaten society's healthy development. In view of this, China needs to ensure people's "basic survival" and provide the necessary conditions for differential justice. We should promote universal justice at a basic level as a matter of priority.

Based on people's general demand for universal justice and the country's public financial resources, we should make improving people's basic livelihoods a matter of priority. Improvements should be made to people's social security, compulsory education, public healthcare, employment prospects, and housing conditions. There should be an equal primary and mid-range livelihood security system that covers all members of society regardless of identities. We should also continue to improve the conditions that ensure people's basic survival at a reasonable rate and ensure that people's basic income increases at a moderate rate. Public investment should be prioritized to ensure people's basic livelihoods. We should prevent public funds being overused on luxury cities, vanity projects, buildings/halls, or administrations. We should also prevent public funds from being overused on universal justice regarding "higher welfare," as public funds that are earmarked for people's basic livelihoods might be diverted or misused.

*We Should Moderately Prioritize the Promotion of Differential Justice at a Basic Level*

It is feasible and practical to promote social justice, and it is a very important issue that we should face. From an operational point of view, it is necessary to moderately prioritize the promotion of differential justice because of China's specific national conditions and because there are important variables unique to Chinese society. There are two reasons we should make this a matter of priority.

First, egalitarianism has deep roots in the country. Essentially, egalitarianism emphasizes that people have similar living conditions. The concept negates differential justice. "Traditional and historical factors mean that egalitarianism is important to the Chinese people and part of their collective memory; it cannot be completely eradicated" (Wu 2015). For thousands of years, Chinese people have followed egalitarian principles. Thirty years before the reform and opening-up era, egalitarianism was implemented in Chinese society in line with the planned economic system. Consequently, it is unfeasible to think that egalitarianism will disappear quickly. However, egalitarian concepts and ideologies have had little space to grow since the market economy was established in China. Nevertheless, equalitarianism may rise in a certain way and to a certain extent, because the market economy has not yet been solidified and become standardized. People have not yet developed a strong individual consciousness, nor an awareness over how they might protect their property rights. If equalitarianism continues to rise, this will hinder differential justice and could potentially harm society. Things are different in many developed European countries, where the market economy is mature. Even if people there sometimes have excessive "egalitarian" welfare demands, these are unlikely to result in subversive, negative consequences. China has different national conditions and can effectively eliminate egalitarianism and prevent its possible rise. However, it can only do this by moderately prioritizing the promotion of differential justice at a basic level.

Second, people tend to have higher expectations. Objectively speaking, people's expectations of universal justice don't necessarily align with their efforts to secure it. They often have social and psychological expectations, and these are somewhat disconnected from "economic production." People at the same economic level often have "idealistic" expectations, and their "idealistic" goals sometimes become realistically attainable. However, people's expectations sometimes go beyond what the country's economic strength and fiscal revenue can provide, which is the basis for universal justice. For example, in terms of public health, "if the government wants to solve the problem of public health insurance by providing free healthcare to all, regardless of actual public financial resources, then society will spend more and more on it, and ultimately will not be able to afford it" (Wu 2015). Even in developed European and American countries, the growth of public services has resulted in intractable social problems. "In 1980, the total public social expenditure [in Europe] accounted for 15.6% of GDP. It increased to 19.2% in 2007, and has increased on average 1%

every 10 years” (Zheng 2011). During this era of public spending, the economic growth of European countries was generally far lower. The phenomenon of people’s expectations rising sharply will not only lead to a distorted form of social justice, but a degree of social inertia. People will generally become apathetic toward labor. Ultimately, society will lose its vitality and potential for social development. China should prevent a situation like this and stimulate people’s vitality and creativity. To this end, it should moderately prioritize promoting differential justice at a basic level and emphasize that people’s incomes should be directly linked to their own efforts/contributions.

We should moderately prioritize the promotion of differential justice at a basic level from the following aspects. First, a standardized market economy should be established to effectively allocate various means of production and it should seek to make economic activities more efficient. “Both theories and practical approaches have shown that resources are most efficiently allocated by the market” (Xi 2013). Second, people’s personal property rights should also be fully protected. These are the cornerstones of the market economy and they are necessary in order to enable people to develop in different ways. Third, there should also be smooth social mobility. The threshold should be lowered in China so that people can start a business. If the household registration system is canceled, and people are made exempt from taxes, or given reduced taxes, this would enable many to set up a business and develop freely. It would stimulate people to pursue their own wealth and to accumulate wealth within their society. Fourth, there should also be distributions according to contributions so that people can realize their own interests according to what they contribute. This would give impetus to society and enable it to develop. It should be noted that although there are some overlaps in terms of how universal justice and differential justice should be prioritized at a basic level (e.g., by protecting people’s personal property rights), each approach has a markedly different focus.

By contrast, our first priority should be given to promoting universal justice at a basic level. Although the vitality of society is a prerequisite and social unity is indispensable, it is much more important that there is social cohesion. Universal justice should be pursued at a reasonable rate alongside economic development. Economic development does not necessarily need to happen quickly, but it should be sustained, and in the long run, it should develop at a slightly quicker rate than the social welfare system. Otherwise, it will be difficult to sustain universal justice as the necessary supporting foundations won’t be in place.

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## EPILOGUE

It took the author 20 years to complete this monograph, and it contains pioneering social justice research. Since the first edition of this book was published in 2004, it has received a number of important awards. In 2007, it was nominated for the First China Publishing Government Book Award. It has been cited nearly a thousand times and has been praised by academics as a Chinese “masterpiece of social justice research.”

This book looks at the basis for social justice, and details the basic values and the basic standpoints when it comes to social justice. It differentiates between the concepts of justice, righteousness, fairness, and equality. It then lays out three social justice rules (related to equal opportunities, distribution, and social adjustment) and discusses the ideas of intergenerational justice and procedural justice. The book looks from a sociological point of view at social justice during China’s period of transition. It focuses on how certain rules affect the social strata, and how they lead to discrimination, inequalities, liberty, equality, universal justice, and/or differential justice. This book assesses improper pursuits of social justice in China. It also looks at how the ideas of liberty and equality have evolved, and some of the key problems over the last 70 years. This book also explains some of the more popular social topics that foster empirical discussions. Since the reform and opening-up era, China has made great achievements when it comes to social development. The country has made notable progress with social justice. There are more equal opportunities than ever before. Nevertheless, there remain worrying problems when it comes to the idea of justice. To some extent, these problems offset the achievements. In some form, the development processes have been somewhat misguided, and these have had a negative impact on Chinese society and how it functions and develops. Therefore, this book is of theoretical and practical significance when it comes to social justice research.