

System Guarantee for Social Equity in Today's China

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Abstract

Social equity is balanced and equal distribution of rights and interests. A sound system is the fundamental guarantee for social equity. Unfortunately, imperfection of the current system in China obstructed social equity in today's China such as income distribution system, dual urban-rural system, market economic system, citizen rights and interests, protection system and social security system. To eliminate these barriers, strengthen system building and guarantee social equity, equity and justice should be taken as the primary goal of value for system building; a guarantee mechanism for social equity system should be built focusing on fairness in rights, opportunities, rules and distribution; and a system to guarantee social equity should be built and perfected with multi-tiered systems including macro basic system, medium operation system and microcosmic concrete system.

Key words: Social equity; System; Guarantee

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Social equity is not only the common desire and pursuit in human society, an important yardstick for measuring the progress of society, but also the political stand the Chinese Communist Party always adheres to. The Party's 6th plenary of 16th session stressed that system is the fundamental guarantee for social equity and justice and we must energize our efforts to build a system significant in safeguarding social equity and justice. The party's

17th national congress presented an important assertion that realization of social equity and justice is to develop socialism with Chinese characteristics. We should give top priority to strengthening system building, striving to solve issues on equity in reality and safeguard social equity.

1. GUARANTEE FUNCTIONS OF SYSTEM ON SOCIAL EQUITY

Social equity falls into the category of interest relationship, which is balanced and equal distribution of rights and interests among all members of a society in various aspects like politics, economy, etc. and includes people's subjective value judgment on such rights and interests whether it's reasonable or not. System is created and developed in production activities, which is a normative arrangement for relationships among people, reflecting an interest relationship among different people, groups and classes in essence. System has fundamental, overall, stable and long-term characteristics. System guides people's behavior effectively manages and controls the society and coordinates various relationships of social interests.

A sound system is the fundamental guarantee to social equity. Wu Zhongmin (2008) found the following: The society must have a system, more exactly, a sound system. If we lack necessary system and just stay in a state of random political direction, thus the society will inevitably face an uncertain future which will make people have unpredictable long-term goals to bring about various negative factors such as randomness, uncertainty and too much costs and risks, etc.. The modern society must be the one operates relying on standardized, reasonable and fair system (p.34). Under certain system framework, we will effectively guarantee realization of social equity. To be specific, guarantee functions of system on social equity are shown as following: first, the macro-level basic system provides a solid base on realization of social equity. In China, the socialist system concentrating on public owner-

ship of the means of production, distribution according to work and the people's congress system ensures equity for social members of in occupation of means of production, distribution and political rights, which provides a solid base on realization of social equity. Second, the medium-level operation system guarantees operational mechanism of realizing social equity. A dynamic and efficient social operational mechanism is a necessary requirement for realization of social equity. Third, the microcosmic-level concrete system provides a path to realization of social equity. It is a practical way to realize social equity, which is directly related to its realization.

2. SYSTEM FACTORS OBSTRUCTING SOCIAL EQUITY IN TODAY'S CHINA

There are various factors obstructing social equity in today's China, among which system factors are particularly acute, which are shown as below:

2.1 Imperfection of Current Income Distribution System Obstructed Social Equity

The past three decades since China's reform and opening up to the outside world are the periods in which Chinese residents have experienced rapid growth in income. However, residents' income gap has become increasingly wider, which exists within rural areas, within cities, among rural and urban areas, among different regions and different groups of people. "According to the World Bank estimates, the overall Geordie Coefficient for China's national income distribution has increased from 0.3 in 1982 to 0.45 in 2003, which attained an increase of 50% over the past two decades" (China Translation & Publishing Corporation, 2005, p.12). The growing income gap will be bound to obstruct realization of social equity. Primary distribution and redistribution of income are carrying out in China. The former adheres to the principle that distribution according to work is the leading factor and diversified distribution methods coexist, while the latter is that the government regulates income distribution by systems such as tax system, social security system, fiscal transfer system, etc. to compensate lack of equity by primary distribution under the market mechanism. However, absence of system and unfairness in system existing in primary distribution and redistribution resulted in a growing income distribution gap. In the system of primary distribution, the dominant position of distribution according to work has not been fully realized, some government departments gained a great deal of extra income through administration power, for example, many organizations especially those state-owned monopolies set various benefit items like allowance, which made their employees' actual income greatly exceed their nominal wage, triggering serious social inequity. In the system of redistribution, because of the government's absence and malposition in maintaining social equity, which led to ineffective regulation in income

distribution gap, illegal and off-the-books income have not been punished or restrained and social inequity becomes increasingly serious.

2.2 The Existence of Dual Urban-Rural System Is One of the Most Important Factors to Lead to Urban-Rural Gap and Social Inequity.

The dual urban-rural system has been carrying out for quite a long time in China and played a positive role in history to some extent. With social and economic development in China, this system gradually became a negative factor which made social and economic development inharmonious, social interests unbalanced, interest pattern irrational and the society unharmonious, which can be shown as below: first, under the dual urban-rural system, the government has been implementing unfair policies to farmers for quite a long time, for example, unequal pricing system for agricultural and industrial goods, low-cost compensation system for land requisition by the government, which led to a growing income gap between urban-rural residents. Second, differentiation of urban and rural household registration system and employment system made migrant workers were treated unequally in various aspects like low salary, long working hours, poor work conditions, lack of social security, frequent infringement of legitimate rights, etc.. Third, differentiation of the urban and rural investment mechanism by the government which led to unbalanced development of urban and rural areas, further intensified urban-rural gap and social equity.

2.3 Imperfection of Market Economic System Leads to Social Inequality

Since China is now in a transition period from the traditional planning economic system to market economic system, its market economic system is imperfect and there are conflicts between the two systems. A perfect system hasn't been built regarding market admittance, competition, allocation of resources, etc., which led to existence of phenomena such as fragmentation, local protection, industrial monopoly, power-for-money deal, etc.. Someone made illegal benefits with their positions and special relationship, which led to social inequity.

2.4 Citizens' Legitimate Rights Cannot Be Effectively Guaranteed, Which Led to Inequity in Interest Distribution Among Social Members

With social and economic development, the conflict of Interests among citizens has become a prominent issue. Zhou Zhibin (2007) found the following: Because of imperfection of the democratic system, single channel of expression of interest and imperfection of its mechanism caused that people's legitimate rights can not be protected, legitimate interests can not be guaranteed, the number of mass incidents growing, the size expanding and the confrontation intensifying (pp. 32-33). For example, some enterprises ignored employees' democratic rights and

interests in restructuring of state-owned enterprises; they arbitrarily made enterprises go bankrupt, sold, transferred, acquired enterprises, and even sold state-owned assets at a fire sale price. Some senior executives lined their own pockets while employees' basic rights and interests cannot be guaranteed, which led to social inequity and occurrence of a considerable mass incidents. Some non-public enterprises, there exist phenomena of holding down wages, wage arrears, unlawful deductions and extending the working hours. Because of lacking effective channel of expression of interest, workers' interests were infringed, which led to growing income gap among the owners of means of production, enterprise operators and management and workers and intensified social inequity to a certain extent.

2.5 Imperfection of Social Security System Intensifies Inequity in Interest Distribution Among Urban-Rural Residents and Residents of Different Sectors

There exist some problems in current social security system in China, among which urban-rural separation and differentiation of sectors in social security is a major factor to obstruct social equity. The country put efforts to the development of urban social security system with limited financial investment and has built a relatively perfect social security system, which is a powerful guarantee for urban residents' interests. However, loopholes and flaws of rural social security system brought about problems of "poverty caused by illness and returned by illness" and the aged care. Besides, social security programs of administrative agencies, public institutions and enterprises in city are separated, which leads to urban residents from different organizations enjoying unequal rights and benefits of social security. Urban-rural separation and differentiation of sectors in current social security system greatly hindered realization of social equity.

3. STRENGTHEN SYSTEM BUILDING TO GUARANTEE SOCIAL EQUITY

System building for guaranteeing social equity is a complicated, organic systematic social project. The top priority of system building in today's China is, based on sum-up of past experience and reality, to keep improving systematic project of system building in China, guide and drive rational distribution of interests of social members so as to strongly guarantee realization of social equity.

3.1 Take Social Equity and Justice as the Primary Goal of Value for System Building

The society consists of numerous individuals and groups with different interests. They have various conflicts and contradictions of interests among each other, thus it is necessary to establish certain social norms, rules and regulations, standards and principles to coordinate contradic-

tions among all interest subjects and rationally distribute rights and obligations, then the system comes into being. The history development shows that only fair and just social norms, rules and regulations, standards and principles can be approved and observed by the vast majority of social members, and can effectively and lastingly coordinate interest relationship among social members so as to maintain social order and promote harmonious and orderly development of economy and society. Accordingly, equity and justice should be taken as the primary goal of value for system building. That to maintain social equity should be taken as the primary goal of system design when designing the system while that to maintain social equity and justice should be treated as the principle and starting point to solve obstacles of system operation when operating system. In the course of supervision over the system, we should focus on social equity as a whole, strengthen supervision over the system to ensure actual effect of system operation.

3.2 Build a Guarantee System for Social Equity System Focusing on Fairness in Rights, Exchanges, Opportunities and Distribution

Fairness in rights is that all social members equally enjoy various rights to participate in social activities, which is the beginning of logic and practice for social equity. Lei Yucui (2009) advocated "Fairness in opportunities is that all social members participating in social activities equally enjoy space and contents of activities, which is mainly manifested in equal opportunities to participate and develop and the premise and foundation of social equity" (pp. 224-226). Fairness in rules is that the ruling party and the government can proceed from the overall interests of the society and long-term development, formulate rational policies, systems, laws and regulations and treat interests of all classes and social members equally. Moreover, all social members are equal before rules and regulations, being restricted and bound equally and rule breakers will be punished accordingly. Fairness in rules is manifestation form and essential guarantee for social equity. Fairness in distribution is that every laborer has rights to get legitimate rights and interests and social security, which is the actual embodiment and ideal goal of social equity.

To build a guarantee system for social equity system focusing on fairness in rights, opportunities, rules and distribution, that fairness in rights, opportunities, rules and distribution among social members should be guaranteed through system building. To be specific, great efforts should be made in following aspects: firstly, perfect various rights guarantee system to ensure fairness in starting point and rights of all social members in economy, politics, culture, society, etc.. Secondly, create a fair system environment to ensure fairness in opportunities; creating favorable conditions to ensure fairness in laborers' employment; reforming education system to ensure everyone to have equal opportunity in

education; improving the market climate to ensure every economic subject to have equal opportunity to invest and start business and engage in other economic activities. Thirdly, continuously perfect various policies, systems, laws and regulations to ensure fairness in rules; optimize policy system to ensure social achievements to benefit all social members; strengthening system coordination and optimization to effectively standardize the social order and perfecting legal system to improve social development and management standards. Fourth, rationally adjusting income distribution system to ensure fairness in distribution; perfecting the distribution system based on labor, capital, technology and management and weighing the percentage of capital and labor participating in income distribution; strengthening macro-level regulation, standardizing the structure of income distribution and promote harmonious development of efficiency and equity.

3.3 Build a System to Guarantee Social Equity with Multi-tiered Systems Including Basic System, Operation System and Concrete System

As an organic system, consists of macro-level basic system, medium-level operation system and microcosmic-level concrete system. Systems at different levels specify different contents and play a different role in guaranteeing realization of social equity. Absence and imperfection of anyone of them will certainly affect the result of the whole system guaranteeing the realization of social equity. Therefore, to strengthen system building, we must focus on the system as a whole and constantly perfect the system project for system building.

In order to achieve this, great efforts should be made in following aspects. First, continue adhering to and perfect the socialist system based on public ownership of means of production, distribution according to labor and people's democratic dictatorship under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party. To begin with, public ownership is the fundamental system guarantee to realization of social equity. Although we have established the principle of "public ownership economy as the main body while non-public ownership economy as a complement" and that the state-owned economy had a strong control over the country's economy lifeline for more than three decades since China's reform and opening up manifested the dominant position of public ownership, with the development of economic society and arrival of globalization, especially since China's entry into WTO, some sectors monopolized by state-owned enterprises have to face challenges from companies from all over the world. As a result, the dominant position of public ownership will be certainly weakened to some extent. Consequently, we should give high priority to "ensuring the dominant position of public ownership" and "manifesting the dominant position of public ownership" to practically ensure the guarantee function of public

ownership in realization of social equity. On the other hand, continue exploring and perfecting realization mechanism of distribution according to work and lay emphasis on increasing the share of labor income in national income. Finally, continuously perfecting the socialist democracy system and laws, vigorously drive standardization of party-government relation, adhere to and perfect the political party system and continuously promote a harmonious party-masses relationship and enhance citizens' capability of participation in politics.

Second, in terms of operation system building, great efforts should be made in following aspects. To begin with, break up the dual urban-rural system and build a unified urban-rural social system to promote integration of economic and social development of urban and rural areas. In order to achieve this, a unified and open market mechanism for urban and rural areas should be built to ensure free and sufficient flow of social resources. An effective public input mechanism should be built to promote harmony and balance between urban and rural areas in certain aspects such as infrastructure construction, public service, etc.. Zhang Li (2009) study found that the following: A system should be built and perfected to promote integration of economic and social development of urban and rural areas and to promote connection, mutual complementarities and linkage of various industries of urban-rural areas and ensure orderly and harmonious development of various industries of urban-rural areas (pp. 42-43). Consequently, great efforts should be made to build an interest coordination mechanism consistent with the actual situation in our country and form an overall planning and all-round interest pattern. We should build and perfect a system of expressing interests to ensure different social groups to fully express interests via broad channels without obstacles. We should build an effective interest consultation mechanism to ensure interested parties to participate in and consult when dealing with interests. We should build an interest guarantee system to ensure realization of fundamental rights of social members. We should build an interest regulating mechanism to increase income of low-income groups, expand the proportion of middle-income groups and regulate high-income groups so as to form a sound income distribution pattern favorable to social harmony and stable development of the society. Also, we should build an interest compensation mechanism to ensure related groups' legitimate interests. Finally, great efforts should be made to constantly perfect the social administration system so as to enhance standards of social administration. In order to achieve this, we should define roles and responsibilities of government departments to guarantee orderly and harmonious social administration by the government; we should advance construction of basic-level organizations focusing on local communities and make them play a role in ensuring realization of social equity. We should vigorously support development of

third sector and give full play to its intermediary function in maintaining interests of different groups and ensuring realization of social equity.

Third, as far as building of concrete system, great efforts should be made in following aspects: To begin with, perfect administration system and give full play to the government's vital role in guaranteeing realization of social equity. We should constantly reform system of executive decision-making and advance scientification, democratization and standardization of executive decision-making. We should build a transparent system for disclosing property of public officials, deepen publicity of government information, and strengthen supervision by public opinion over the administrative power to advance open and transparent administration. We should constantly perfect supervision system over the public power, further advance a political performance evaluation system separating anticipated targets from obligatory ones, constantly innovate a scientific performance evaluation system, guide the government's rational allocation of public resources and guarantee realization of social equity. Consequently, we should constantly perfect system building of market mechanism to guarantee rights of subjects of the market. To break up monopoly over industries and sectors to ensure fair market competition among subjects of the market and perfect unified and standardized market rules to ensure subjects of the market to enjoy equal rights. To perfect laws and regulations, strictly enforce laws to guarantee legitimate rights and interests of subjects of the market and maintain market order. Finally, we should break up

the multi-track social security system and build a unified one to ensure people's basic living needs and realization of social equity. We should build and perfect a unified urban-rural social security system to practically guarantee basic living needs of urban-rural residents, eradicate the difference of enjoying social security among employees from enterprises, public institutions and administrative agencies. We should build a unified and standardized social security system for employees from enterprises, public institutions and administrative agencies and build a rural social endowment insurance system to ensure a happy ending for the rural elderly.

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