

Fairness or Efficiency?—Value Choices for Solving the Major Social Contradictions in the New Era

Yanting Dong

School of Management, Beijing Normal University, China

Abstract. Value is the precursor of practice, and changes with the development of practice. As the main social contradiction is the concentration of the real problems in a specific period, how to solve it is the most important practice of the times, which cannot be separated from the correct value guidance. In different stages of China's socialist construction, different social major contradictions are faced and different value choices are made. Whether it is the value orientation of fairness in the period of socialist construction or the value orientation of efficiency in the period of reform and opening up, they are the choices of the times and play a positive guiding role in solving the major social contradictions at that time. In the new era, in the face of the new major social contradictions, it is important to appreciate the changes in value choices behind the contradictions and choose the correct values to guide the resolution of the major social contradictions.

Keywords: social major contradiction; value choice; equity; efficiency.

1. Introduction

Value, as the logical starting point and cornerstone of value philosophy, is widely used in humanities and social sciences research, but human beings have diverse opinions about the connotation of value. Marx combined the practical viewpoint with value to provide a basic perspective for understanding the essence of value. He believed that “the universal concept of ‘value’ emerges from the relationship of people to external objects that satisfy their needs”, and is “the property of things that people make use of and express the relationship to human needs”. Therefore, value is essentially a relational category, and at the same time “value is a practical category, which is the ‘effect’ of purposeful practical activity of people and the positive meaning of its results for their own existence and development”. It can be said that value and practical activity are inseparable. Logically, value belongs to practice, and value can only be produced in the practical activity of man and in the relationship between subject and object formed by practical activity; at the same time, any practical activity of the subject is permeated with the value factor, and it is this value factor that guides the subject to act on the object according to its own needs and purposes, so that the object forms properties that meet the subject's needs, thus creating value.

The main contradiction in our society has transformed into the contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and unbalanced and insufficient development. This new assertion not only indicates the new content of practical activities, but also implies a change in value orientation. In the face of this new change, scholars have mostly focused on the interpretation of the connotation of the contradiction and the specific solution, but neglected the new value concept hidden behind it. In this paper, the author argues that the value of practice is of fundamental orientation, and the practice of solving the major social contradictions after the founding of the nation has always been guided by the value of fairness or efficiency.

2. Fairness: the value choice for solving the main social contradiction during the socialist construction period

At the Eighth Congress of the Communist Party of China in 1956, it was pointed out that “the main contradiction in our country has been the contradiction between the people's need for rapid economic and cultural development and the current situation in which the economy and culture cannot meet the needs of the people”. The main social contradiction put forward at the Eighth Congress was the CPC's initial exploration of the main social contradiction at the primary stage of

socialism, and the basic direction was correct in that it recognized the importance of economic development. Focusing on the main social contradictions faced in that period, and from the standpoint of solving the main social contradictions in that period, the state implemented a highly centralized planned economy, a single public ownership system as the main feature of the ownership of the means of production, and a distribution system based on the distribution of labor in the mode of economic operation. Obviously, the value that guides the state in solving the main social contradictions in the period of socialist construction is equity.

During the period of socialist construction, choosing the value of fairness to guide the solution of the main social contradictions has been proven by history to be the right choice. Twenty years after the founding of the country, the socialist undertakings have achieved remarkable results. From 1956 to 1976, during these two decades, the level of productivity in China has changed dramatically. In agriculture, grain production increased from 192,756,000 tons to 286,305,000 tons, and per capita grain remained at 306.8 kilograms; in industry, industrial output value rose from 103.07 billion yuan to 298.86 billion yuan, a twofold increase, and by 1976, China had formed an independent and complete industrial system; in addition, there was also a significant development in science and technology, and China relied on its own strength to successfully launched two bombs and one star, etc. Under the condition that the comprehensive national power was not strong at that time, the reason why we could achieve such remarkable achievements was inseparable from our adherence to the value of fairness, which provided the basic guarantee for concentrating national power to do great things. It is the right choice to choose equity to guide the practical activities of solving the main social contradictions, which is conducive to stabilizing the state power and social order, promoting social equity and economic development.

In summary, it can be seen that efficiency is of great significance to a country's economic development and social equity, and lays a solid material foundation for the realization of equity and social harmony. China's choice of efficiency to guide the resolution of major social contradictions during the reform and opening-up period reflects the change of social development philosophy at a specific historical stage of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and has once again been proved to be the right choice.

3. Efficiency: the value choice of solving the main social contradiction during the reform and opening-up period

In June 1981, at the Sixth Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee of the Party, the main social contradiction was formally expressed as "the contradiction between the people's growing material and cultural needs and backward social production". Since then, the work of the Party and the government has been centered on economic construction, vigorously developing the productive forces, and with the gradual establishment of a socialist market economy in China, efficiency has become the main pursuit guiding the resolution of the main social contradiction in this period.

In the 40 years of reform and opening up, China has achieved remarkable economic construction. The GDP is the second largest economy in the world; the living standard of the people has been improving, and the contradiction between the people's growing material and cultural needs and the backward social production has been basically solved; the comprehensive national strength has been increasing, and the international status has been improving, and we have a certain right to speak in the international arena. All of this is due to China's adherence to the principle of "the people's growing material and cultural needs and backward social production". All this is due to China's insistence on the value of "efficiency" to guide the resolution of the major social contradictions. Without the value of "efficiency" as a guide, our country could not have achieved so much in just 40 years, and finished the road taken by the Western industrial countries in 40 years.

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4. Unity of fairness and efficiency: the requirement of the times to solve the main social contradiction in the new era

In response to the situation in the new era, Xi Jinping made a major assertion in the report of the 19th National Congress: "Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and the main contradiction in our society has transformed into the contradiction between the people's growing need for a better life and the unbalanced and insufficient development". It not only scientifically judges the new historical orientation of China, points out the historical mission and main tasks of the Party and the State in the new era, but also implies the value choice for solving the main social contradiction in the new era to adhere to the unity of equity and efficiency.

4.1 The unity of equity and efficiency: the inevitable choice of historical lessons

Throughout the period from the founding of the country to the present, the main social contradiction in China has always revolved around economic construction and development of production since its determination in 1956. In order to solve this contradiction, we have adopted different value choices in different historical periods to guide the practice of solving the main social contradiction under different economic systems. Whether it was the value orientation of equity during the period of socialist construction or the value orientation of efficiency during the period of reform and opening up, they were both choices made according to the specific national conditions at that time, which were a historical necessity and eased the major social contradiction at that time to a large extent. However, there are two sides to everything, and they inevitably have historical limitations.

4.2 Harmonization of equity and efficiency: an inherent requirement for solving the major social contradictions in the new era

The unity of fairness and efficiency as the value choice for solving the main contradiction of socialism in the new era is determined by the main content of the main social contradiction in this period, and only by fully understanding the rich connotation of the main social contradiction can we make the correct value choice to guide the resolution of the contradiction accordingly. The main social contradiction in the new era includes the "people's growing need for a better life" and the "unbalanced and insufficient development". The people's need for a better life is a multi-angle, multi-level and multi-dimensional structural system. Unbalanced and insufficient development is the main constraint to meet the people's growing need for a better life and the main aspect of the main social contradiction in the new era, reflecting the "real" state of China's development nowadays and revealing the short board of our current development. Only by focusing on the unbalanced and insufficient development can we meet people's aspiration and pursuit of a better life.

In short, in different periods of China's socialist construction, facing different major social contradictions, the treatment of the relationship between fairness and efficiency has been constantly adjusted. During the period of socialist construction, the value of fairness was adopted; during the period of reform and opening up, the value of efficiency was adopted; in the new era, both the value of efficiency and the value of fairness are paid attention to, especially the expression of the main aspects of the main social contradictions, and even the "imbalance" is put before the "insufficiency". This is the first time since the reform and opening up 40 years ago that equality and balance of development are put before the speed, quality and efficiency of development. As we can see, the discussion on social contradictions at the 19th National Congress conveys to us an important change in the fundamental value choice, that is, equity is put on the same level of importance as efficiency, no longer the "efficiency first" of the reform and opening-up period, nor the "equity first" of the socialist construction period. Rather, it is a balance, equilibrium and unification of the two. In the

new era, in order to solve the major social contradictions, it is necessary to effectively grasp the changes in value choices conveyed by the two aspects of the contradiction, and unify the values of fairness and efficiency in the practice of solving the major social contradictions.

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