

Relationship between Economic Development and Social Development in Process of Reform and Opening up in China

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Abstract: Looking back on 40 years of economic development associated with social development in China in the process of reform and opening up, the paper discusses that the first phase of the process until the early 2000s when the Party and the Government of China paid due attention to prioritise growth and economic development at all costs, disregarding social development. In the period from the early 2000s to date, the Party and the Government of China have focused both on economic development and social development. However, to solve the social problems that arise in the transition from a centrally planned economy to a Chinese socialist market economy, progressing towards mutual wealth and prosperity², is a long and arduous process.

Keywords: China, open-door reform, Chinese socialist market economy, economic development, social development.

Subject classification: History

1. Introduction

Based on guidelines and policies on economic and social development expressed in leaders' statements, documents of the Communist Party of China (CPC) congresses and the Chinese Government reports since the country's process of reform and opening up was started to date, the article discusses the relationship between economic growth/development and

social development, showing that this relationship is expressed in the following two phases³.

2. The period of prioritised economic development

Looking back on the process of reform and opening up, economic and social development in China, it can be seen that during the first

phase of the process, the Party and the Government of China were determined to address the fundamental issue of social conflict, namely, "*The level of development of China's production capacity is very low, unable to meet the needs of the people and the nation.*" The 6th Plenum of the 11th CPC's Congress on 27 June 1981 pointed out: "*The main conflict of our country (China) that needs to be resolved is a conflict between the growing material and cultural needs of the people with obsolete social production capacity*" [4]. Therefore, facing poverty and backwardness, the Party and Government of China have established that "Economic development is a central issue", and "Development is hard morality" [5].

This also means focusing on prioritising economic development first, then step by step focusing both on economic and social development according to the thinking of Deng Xiaoping, namely, "*A region and a portion of the population can get richer first to entice and help other regions and other people step by step get wealthy*" [6]. With this policy, a fast growing economy became a prioritised social problem that needs to be addressed. The view of economic growth to make "the big cake" becomes a common perception and a common will of the whole society. Prioritised economic development has become a policy and platform of the Party and the Government of China, leading to a prioritised economic development strategy [7]. In order to create a driving force for economic development, in the process of reform and opening up, Chinese economic development associated with decentralisation of financial management stimulated local governments at all levels to pursue GDP

growth achievements and as a result China's economy grew rapidly. GDP growth has become the achievement of local officials in China's provinces and cities. The thinking of economic development first and solving environmental problems later was also popular in the early years of reform and opening up and economic development in the country.

Along with the transition from a planned economy to the development of Chinese socialist market economy, the subject of interests in Chinese society has also greatly changed. The scale of employment of the people, the source of income of the people also changed and diversified. Impacts of economic pluralism have led to pluralism of Chinese society. The period prior to the process of reform and opening up saw the two main social classes and one social stratum (i.e. the working class and the peasantry class, and the intellectual's stratum). However, after more than 20 years of reform and opening up, now 10 social strata have emerged in the Chinese society. The development gap between regions in China far exceeds that of other countries in the world and now China faces the reality of one China containing four worlds [8, p.91]. "The first world" is the one with high-income development regions such as Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen. "The second world" is the one with a big, medium size cities and a coastal area. "The third world" is the one with low middle income regions. "The fourth world" is the one with a poverty stricken areas in Central and Western regions [9].

The Chinese socialist market economy gives Chinese people the space to develop and freedom to choose the way of

development, but they also have to pay the price of taking own responsibility for such risks as unemployment, illnesses, old age problems, etc. The Chinese socialist market economy enables the fortunate part of the population to live like paradise, and the unfortunate and marginalised part of the population to live like hell [8, p.91]. Conflicts emerge in the process of urbanisation, especially the land acquisition where the compensation mechanism is not complete and the benefits of people losing land are not guaranteed, causing many people to be dissatisfied and giving rise to complaints. In the process of building and perfecting the Chinese socialist market economy, the social welfare of people migrating into the city is not guaranteed... [2, pp.57-61].

At the same time, economic development is coupled with serious environmental pollution. China's economic development model after more than 20 years of reform and opening up is generalised as "three highs and one low" (i.e. high pollution, high discharge, high energy consumption and low efficiency"). It is clear that this model is said to reenact the "pollution first, treatment of pollution later" model occurring in the original capital accumulation process of Western countries [10]. Thus, it can be said that the price paid for priority of economic development in China in the early stages of reform and opening up is huge.

3. The period of focusing on both economic development and social development

Entering the early years of the twenty-first century, China's economy has gained

certain achievements. However, because of its one-sided pursuit of economic growth, many social problems and great social pressures arise as mentioned above. The Party and Government of China began to realise the challenges emerging due to economic development priorities. After the 16th Congress of the CPC (November 2002), the viewpoint of scientific step-by-step development was formed. In the 17th Congress of the CPC (October 2007), this viewpoint became the fundamental development theory of the CPC and was included in the 17th Congress Report. The basic content of the scientific development viewpoint related to solving the relationship between economic development and social development is that focusing not only on economic development but also on social development, and economy and society developing in a well-balanced and harmonious fashion. Environment should not be underestimated, but on the contrary environment must be considered as living conditions of mankind, focusing on well-balanced development between urban and rural areas, and focusing on improving the quality of life of the people and harmonising social relations... [7].

Along with the viewpoint of scientific development, the Party and Government of China have also issued many guidelines on both economic development and solving social problems such as building a harmonious society (stipulated in September 2004) which was subject to focused discussions and then became a resolution at the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee of the 16th Congress of CPC (October 2006). Towards a smooth and balanced development between urban and

rural areas, among regions, between economic growth and environment concerns, both economic development and focus on social justice, focus on distribution of benefits to all walks of life so that the people can enjoy the achievements of reform and opening up, with special attention being paid to the marginalised [2, p.11].

Next to 2007, in order to address the issue of sustainable development, towards green development, low carbon and recycling, the Central Communist of the CPC approved the integrated synchronised testing zone to build "two types of society" (i.e. a resource-saving society and a society of good environment) in the Wuhan city cluster in Hubei province and in the city cluster of Changsha - Zhuzhou - Xiangtan in Hunan province [11].

At the 17th Congress of the CPC (October 2007), building a society associated with handling the people's livelihood became a new content item in the Report delivered at the Congress entitled "Building society with improving the people's livelihood as the key" with (i) emphasising "fairness" and "equality" enabling the marginalised and disadvantaged classes to enjoy fair and equal opportunities of education; (ii) completing the thinking on multi-level social security system where social insurance, social relief, social welfare are considered as bases; nursing care insurance and health insurance as fundamentals; a regime of insuring minimum living standards as a key; and charity work and commercial insurance as supplementation; and (iii) solving the problems and difficulties of the marginalised and disadvantaged class in society such as

consolidating a low-cost tenant system, solving difficulties in housing for low-income families in the city [1].

Along with focusing on people's affairs and livelihoods, the Party and the Government of China have gradually changed the function of the Government from playing the role of promoting economic development towards building a service government model. The 3rd Plenum of the Central Committee of the 18th Party Congress (September 2013) emphasised *the function and the role of the government were mainly to maintain macroeconomic stability, to strengthen and to well provide public services, etc., to build a rule-of-law government and a government consistent with a service model*. Prior to that, on 19 July 2012, the Chinese Government for the first time announced the Basic Public Service Plan aimed at changing the situation of a serious imbalance between the level of basic public service development and economic development, to improve the people's livelihoods, to stimulate consumption, to protect justice and the cause of righteousness, and to promote sustainable socio-economic growth. This plan identifies 8 areas, namely, public education, employment services, social insurance, social services, health, the people's livelihoods, ensuring housing, and public sports and culture to be included in the scope of building a basic public service system, and determines the timetable for implementation thereof on the basis of basic public services. From 2011 to 2015, the basic public service system covering urban and rural residents was gradually completed. By 2020, the gap in basic public services between urban and rural areas will

have clearly narrowed [3]. At the same time, in some localities, the government model to provide public services has been tested [3].

After 15 years of implementing the policy of both economic development and social development, compared to the early 2000's, GDP per capita for the first time in 2003 exceeded USD 1,000, reaching USD 1,090 [12], and in 2017 reaching USD 8,800 [13]. The living conditions of the Chinese people have been significantly improved, approaching the boundary of the group of high middle income nations⁴.

A remarkable progress has made been made in the level of economic and social development of China, especially in recent years. According to the statistics of the Chinese State Statistics Office, the disposable income of residents in the whole country was RMB 23,821 in 2016, an increase of 44.3% compared to 2012; and minus the actual price increase of 33.3%, the actual average annual growth rate was 7.4%, 0.8% higher than the average annual growth rate of GDP. At the same time, the income gap continues to be narrowed. From the perspective of urban and rural income gap, from 2012 to 2016, the average annual disposable income of rural residents increased by 1.5% points compared to the income of urban residents. From the perspective of narrowing down the regional development gap, the income gap between the East and the West, the Middle and the West, and the Northeast and the West in 2016 compared to 2012 narrowed by 0.06, 0.02 and 0.08 times respectively [14].

However, at the time of the 19th Congress of the CPC (October 2017), although the Chinese economy was the

second largest in the world, the portion of the population in China with the middle income level became the largest of the world [15], still China was facing many unsolved problems of social development as mentioned in the report of the 19th Congress of the CPC, "... development is not balanced, incomplete, unresolved, coupled with poor quality and efficiency; creative capacity is not strong enough, and environmental protection task remains time-consuming and heavy; many limitations remain in the field of the people's livelihoods, the task of getting out of poverty is still difficult, development gaps between urban and rural areas and in income distribution still remain relatively large, and those aspects related to the general population such as employment, education, health, housing, old-age nursing are still faced with many problems..." [16].

Therefore, the 19th Congress of the CPC continues to affirm its insistence on the "development is the key and the basis for solving all problems". Currently, China is continuing to implement the policy of focusing on both economic growth and development and social development. At the same time, adjustments are made to shift the policy of "economic development as a central focus" to "people-centered economic development", along with economic development, focusing on solving problems emerging in society to become "mutually wealthy". The 19th Congress of the CPC also pointed out a change in perception of conflicts in society compared to the early years of the open-door reform as mentioned above and identified a new conflict in the current period, namely, "*The*

main conflict of our society (China) has turned into a conflict between the growing needs for a beautiful life of the people and the unbalanced and inadequate development" [16]. Thus, in the past, the country was still poor and backward, mainly focusing on economic development, solving the problem of properly feeding and clothing for the population. So far, the national economy has developed to a certain level, and then efforts are focused on solving problems of development being skewed, unbalanced, and inadequate, and solving conflicts between development quality and growing demands of the people.

The 19th Congress of the CPC inherited the policies and guidelines of the CPC at the previous congresses and introduced a number of policies for both economic development and solving social issues such as "Persisting in the people-centred development policy, constantly promoting the comprehensive development of human beings, and the entire population getting wealthy", "making the fruits of reform and opening up to reach the people more equally..., ceaselessly promoting social justice and righteousness", ... [16]. In order to implement this policy and guidelines, the Party and the Government of China have come up with some key solutions as follows:

First, raising the people's income levels. In order to link economic growth with income growth, the 19th Congress Report pointed out "persisting in economic growth concurrently with realising synchronous income growth of the people, improving production efficiency concurrently with synchronously implementing enhanced labour remuneration" [16]. This policy was

explained by Chinese economists that the 19th Congress Report emphasised "concurrency" and "synchronousness" between economic growth and the people's income, between labour remuneration and labour productivity. This also means to prevent a situation where the people's income growth cannot keep up with the economic growth rate, and the raising of labour remuneration is slower than the raising of labour productivity. At the same time, it also prevents the opposite situation where income growth is too fast compared to the economic growth, and labour remuneration is separated from labour productivity [17]. Consequently, it leads to unsustainable development for the economy and society.

Second, employment solutions. The 19th CPC Congress Report for the first time raised the phrases "large scale", "full dimension" and "all the people" to emphasise the coverage of employment policies at a large scale and extent, and beneficiaries of development opportunities, such as "Implementing large-scale occupational skills training; providing full-dimensional public employment services; making all the people have the opportunity to work hard to develop themselves" [16]. At the same time, 19th CPC Congress Report also offered some solutions such as "Eliminating the diseases of the mechanism and institutions that obstruct the circulation of labour and talents in society, promoting the creation of many job channels for university graduates and farmers to work in the city" [16]. In rural areas, the CPC stipulated the implementation of the Village Revitalising Strategy (this is the new

strategy put forth for the first time by the 19th CPC Congress in the Congress Documents) [18]. In particular, solutions such as "Promoting the development of the combination of trades in agriculture, industry, and services in rural areas, supporting and encouraging farmers to proactively create businesses and to expand increased income channels"[16].

In recent years, the Party and the Government of China have paid great attention to promoting "creativity" and "making a career". In the field of economics associated with social development, the 19th CPC Congress Report considered, "creativity is the number one motivation of development", "encouraging and protecting entrepreneurship, encouraging more and more subjects of society to make creative investment in making a career. It is necessary to build an army of working people in such categories as intellectuals, skilled workers, inventors..." [16]. Creativity in the past years has contributed to promoting China's economy to develop, creating new professions in Chinese society such as the high-speed railway network, e-commerce, online payment, sharing economics, etc. Especially, the Internet has penetrated many trades. For example, e-commerce turnover in recent years in China has grown rapidly, with higher growth rates in the following year than the previous one. In 2017, the total volume of e-commerce transactions reached 29,160 billion yuan, an increase of 11.7% compared to that of 2016 [19]. The people creatively made their careers and developed quickly, creating a new situation of economic growth, changing the mode of production and the

people's way of life. In the last 5 years, the rate of new business start-ups of the people has increased from an average of more than 5,000 households per day to more than 16,000 households [15]. All this has been contributing to creation of a driving force for the economy and society of China continue to develop.

Third, getting rid of poverty. The 19th CPC Congress considered "getting rid of poverty" as one of the "three persevering wars" that needs to be done well in the coming years and becomes a commitment of the CPC: "Resolutely defeat the persevering battle to get rid of poverty, enabling the poor and disadvantaged areas together with the whole country to enter into a well-off society is our Party's serious promise (i.e. the CPC)" [16]. The specific solution is brought forward, "Mobilising forces of the entire Party, the whole country and the whole society; persistently supporting the poor correctly, getting rid of poverty correctly; persevering with the mechanism of the Central Government to provide general planning, the province to take the lead responsibility, the city and the district to implement, strengthening the responsibility regime of the head of the Party and the administration to take overall charge..., attaching due importance to supporting the poor and fostering strong wills and intelligence and wisdom, implementing linkage of supporting the poor between the eastern region and the western region, performing the key task of getting rid of poverty for areas faced with enormous difficulties..." [16]. In the five years after the 18th CPC Congress, China has reduced more than 68 million poor

people which is praised by the World Bank as an important achievement [20]. However, the issue of getting rid of poverty in China is also posing many problems that need solving step by step continuously.

Fourth, strengthening the social security system. Since China's embarking on the process of reform and opening up, building and developing institutions for socialist market economy so far, the Party and the Government of China have gradually built a social security system to adapt to economic development level in each stage. However, Prof. Trinh Cong Thanh, a Chinese social security researcher, maintained that reality shows that, from the time of starting reform and opening up to the 19th CPC Congress, with the guidelines directing development "considering economic development as a central focus", social security reforms were positioned synchronously in terms of mechanism with SOE reforms, or were defined as an integral part of China's socialist market economy system, playing only the role of necessary instruments or measures to serve economic growth, while subjects and objectives of the social security regime were not clear. This is an important reason why the Chinese social security regime was plunged into a long-term reform testing period [21]. The 19th CPC Congress determined to persist in the direction of a "people-centred approach", strengthening the building of social security system with solutions such as "It is necessary to implement the old-age nursing and health care insurance regime for urban and rural residents with a broader and more fair coverage, to perfect the

broader basic social service system; to adopt land-based and financial policies to implement the village revitalising strategy; to increase investment in higher education and vocational skills training, and to provide affordable housing to the people. For contracted land in rural areas with the contract duration of more than 10 years remaining, those land contracts will be extended to another 30 years" [22].

According to the report of the Chinese Government in 2018, evaluation of the results of implementing social security policies in the past 5 years shows that, currently, social old-age care insurance covers more than 900 million people and basic health insurance covers 1.35 billion people, thus forming the world's largest social security network. The average life expectancy is 76.7 years... [15].

Thus, with the current situation and policy solutions as mentioned above, it can be seen that in the current period, the social security system is still in its fledgling stage of basic formation. According to Prof. Trinh Cong Thanh's evaluation, many outstanding problems still remain to be solved. These include, for example, structural imbalance, inadequate development and conflicts still being prevalent. Although the coverage has been initially resolved, the issue of equality/ fairness still remains desirable... [21].

Fifth, solving the problem of environmental pollution. Along with the process of socio-economic growth and development, the problem of environmental pollution in China has become increasingly serious. Reality shows that China has sacrificed ecological environment in exchange for

economic growth. For many years, China has had many environmental protection policies. In the last 5 years (2013-2017), it has also achieved some results such as the focus on handling heavy air pollution so that medium smooth particle concentration (PM2.5) in key areas decreased by more than 30%. Over 71% of coal-fired power generating units achieved extremely low emissions. Energy structure has been optimised. Coal consumption rate decreased by 8.1 percentage points and the rate of clean energy consumption increased by 6.3 percentage points. Fuel quality has been improved and more than 20 million old and heavily polluted cars have been eliminated... Growth rate of using chemical fertilizers and pesticides has been reported to be zero percent [15].

However, at the time of the 19th CPC Congress, the problem of environmental pollution in China was still very serious, so the CPC continued to focus on and emphasise environmental protection and determined it to be a long-term heavy duty. Currently, environmental protection in China is taking place in a different context from the past that the country is transitioning from a period of high economic growth to a period of focus on improving the quality of growth. The 19th CPC Congress Report considered "human beings and nature sharing the same destiny... humanity hurts nature and ultimately hurts itself" [16]. At the same time, it emphasised the rapid reform of ecologically civilised institutions, building a beautiful China, persisting in the motto of "the main priority is given to savings, to protection and restoration of the nature"

[16], not development first and treatment of environmental pollution problems later as in the previous period.

4. Conclusion

It can be said that the socio-economic development process from poverty and backwardness to mutual wealth in the process of reform and opening up, transitioning from a planned economy to a Chinese socialist market economy, is a long process. The problems of skew and unbalanced development, inequity and unsustainability in the early stages of development are objective and highly unavoidable. The experience of China shows that the selection of socio-economic development strategies for realising both economic growth and development together with social development is difficult, related to many synchronously aligned policies and the need to have sufficient resources to implement as the Chinese slogan points out "considering economic development as a central focus", "development is hard morality" and "development is the key and the basis for solving all problems". Therefore, learning from the Chinese experience thereby to recognise this lesson soon and to adjust the policy and the path of development suitable to the level of development in each country in each stage is essential. Especially, how to develop the economy but still be able to maintain social stability, to move step by step towards sustainable inclusive development, is always an issue for countries with their economies currently in transition.

Notes

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² According to the explanation of Chinese economic experts, the basic characteristic of the Chinese socialist market economy is the persistence of the public ownership regime as the essential subject, the planning of the State being the guidelines, and to get mutually wealthy being the goal [24]. Although in the documents of the Party and the Government of China the Chinese media and experts use the phrase "socialist market economy", as of January 2019, only 81 countries have recognised China's full market economic status. Currently the EU, the US and Japan have not yet recognised China's full market economic status [25].

³ The article is the result of the Ministry-level research project entitled "Forty years of reform and opening up in China and some suggestions for Vietnam" chaired by the Institute of Chinese Studies.

⁴ According to the new definition of the World Bank announced in 2017, a low-middle-income economy has its GDP per capita from USD 1,006 to USD 3,955, a high-middle-income economy from USD 3,956 to USD 12,235, and a high income economy being the one that exceeds the threshold of USD 12,236 [23].

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