

Social Equity in Current Context of Scientific-Technological Revolution in Vietnam

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Abstract: Vietnam has made great achievements in implementing social equity. However, the level of social equity in the country is still not yet as expected, while the rich-poor gap keeps widening. In the next ten years, when the achievements of the scientific-technical revolution as well as the scientific-technological revolution, Industrial Revolution 3.0 and Industrial Revolution 4.0 are brought to Vietnam more and more, their impacts on Vietnam will be stronger. On the one hand, they contribute to ensuring social equity on a more solid, broader and deeper foundation. On the other hand, social equity on the vertical dimension is accelerated by the scientific-technological revolution creating a more reasonable rich-poor gap. However, in order to achieve that, it is necessary to promote the maximised and effective use of the achievements of the scientific-technological revolution to narrow the gap between the rich and the poor. To properly take advantage of the scientific-technological revolution for humanitarian goals and social progress has become an urgent task and requirement of the modern society.

Keywords: Social equity, scientific-technological revolution, industrial revolution, rich-poor differentiation.

Subject classification: Philosophy

1. Introduction

Equity and democracy are the aspirations of every society, every nation that has social polarisation, or oppression or exploitation. Both of them are the measures for social progress, the common values of humanity, the target of modern societies. At the same time, they are the strong driving force of development of countries, nations and the

international community. Equity and democracy in the societal history have a close relationship. However, that relationship is similar to many other social relations, and it is impossible to describe or shape them in terms of mathematical formulae or functions that are proportional or inversely proportional. Such relationship is complex, diverse, multidimensional and contains various contents depending on objective

conditions. In each country, in each historical period, the relationship has its own specific characteristics different from other periods and other countries.

One of the manifestations of the level of social equity is the rich-poor differentiation and social polarisation. Therefore, one of the ways to implement social equity is to regulate the real income of social entities so that equity becomes the most powerful and inclusive human and social development motivation. In Vietnam, social equity in the past decades has been implemented with many new contents in both theory and practice [5]. Regulating income by State policies is one of the main and common ways to implement social equity in Vietnam. The State adopts various types of policies to regulate income such as economic policies, taxes, social policies, policies on health insurance or education, etc. However, in reality, social equity is still not as desired and its implementation still faces with many difficulties. Poverty alleviation and income adjustment by different policies in the past few decades are really one of the great efforts, with significant achievements already recognised by many organisations and countries in the world. But, various recent statistics and surveys show that income disparities are widening, and the rich-poor differentiation in society is no longer ordinary as appearing are signs of social polarisation. In this article, we only mention the rich-poor differentiation from an economic income perspective. The differentiation has many other aspects, but, among them, that of economic income is a very fundamental one.

“In an hour, the richest person in Vietnam gains the income from assets nearly 5,000 times more than the income that the poorest 10% of Vietnamese spends daily on essential needs. The one-year income of 210 super-rich people in Vietnam is enough to bring 3.2 million people out of poverty to end extreme poverty across the country” [6], [7], [8]. “Vietnam is among the ten countries in the world with the rich-poor gap and the number of super rich people increasing the fastest. While property is increasingly accumulated among very few people in the society, the rate of income transfer of the poorest group to higher income groups is slowing down. The rich-poor gap is widening.” [10].

2. Causes of the rich-poor differentiation

Reasonable and legitimate rich-poor differentiation in the market economy and in societal history in general is the driving force of human and social development; however, the polarisation in general is a barrier to human and social development. Rich-poor differentiation and social polarisation are primarily due to income disparities. From the perspective of the relationship between personal income and institutional framework, which, in the narrow sense, is laws, rules, regulations and policies of the State, the management apparatus and their operation mechanism, in Vietnam today the rich-poor differentiation is due to four sources:

First, the differentiation is from legitimate, reasonable and lawful income in institutional term, that is the income from

talent, labour, other sources of income that are legal and suitable with the strongest capacities, competence and specific socio-economic conditions of each individual and community. The differentiation generated by such income sources is also legal and reasonable. The differentiation of this origin is the driving force for human and social development that should be strengthened and encouraged.

Secondly, the differentiation is from reasonable, but illegal income. These are proper incomes in line with the rules of in a positive and progressive direction. The elimination of the illegal source of such income is the task of the government, because it has created an institutional framework that is inconsistent with the human and social development. Regulations, laws and policies should be adjusted so that such income sources become legal and reasonable. In the context that the scientific-technological revolution is rising rapidly and exerting stronger impacts on production, people and society, the regular improvement of the institutional framework in this direction is an urgent requirement and a frequent and important task of the authorities at all levels. The nature and the extent of the government's effectiveness is clearly reflected there, therefore, it can be considered one of the criteria to evaluate the effectiveness and the extent of being "tectonic", i.e. facilitating and constructive, of the government, rather than relying merely on the GDP growth to assess it.

Thirdly, the differentiation is unreasonable, but legal sources of income, for example, from BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) toll gates where roads are not

newly built, but just the repairs of old roads were made. People having this source of income are often afraid of being discovered and blamed for, so they often find ways to rationalise or hide in different ways. The existence of this source of income is often due to the fact that the institutional framework is slow to be reformed to suit reality, or it reflects incorrectly the economic and social relations that need to be encouraged to develop. If the income this type is allowed to be long-lived or popular in the society, the consequences will be very unpredictable, because it does not encourage reasonable labour and income. Then legitimate interests and social norms will not be strictly followed and self-disciplined; the institutional framework become environments and tools to facilitate and encourage unreasonable and illegitimate income; people lose faith in laws, policies, the State's governance and management, social values, especially the value of fairness; the society will suffer crisis in the non-material life, being, first of all, the crisis in the political consciousness, and instability sooner or later will occur. Therefore, the rich-poor differentiation due to unreasonable but legal sources of income is very harmful to the human and social development. The regular task of the State is to promptly discover the sources to correct the institutional framework to suit the reality so as not to cause a negative social differentiation.

Fourthly, the social differentiation stemming from unreasonable and illegal sources of income is the most harmful. Income from corruption is one of those kinds of unreasonable and illegal income.

When more and more people in society have unreasonable and illegal income, and the situation persists, the social values are inevitably turned upside down, and, sooner or later, instabilities will appear, accumulate, converge and then trigger social conflicts. The rich-poor differentiation due to unreasonable and illegal income sources is one of the causes and sources of the rich-poor polarisation in society. The differentiation in such way is the typical injustice and serious violation of social justice. Of course, such differentiation will inhibit the development of production forces of the humankind and society. Removing as quickly as possible those sources of illegal and unreasonable income is an extremely important task of the State to ensure social equity and that is a condition for sustainable development of people and society. The existence of these sources of income represents inefficiencies, or impotence of institutions, primarily the State.

In fact, in Vietnam today, all the four above-mentioned sources of income exist, and, even, sometimes, in many places, the second, third and fourth types are predominant over the first one. And the emergence of the fourth has even caused social annoyance and seriously reduced people's confidence in the State. The rich-poor differentiation caused by the second and third sources of income is also a significant obstacle to the development of Vietnamese people and society. If reasonable income is considered illegal by the institutions, like in the case of a café named "Xin chào" (i.e. "Hello") in Ho Chi Minh City [12], [13], [14], or the case of exchanging USD 100 to Vietnamese

dong in Can Tho province, which were covered by the mass media recently [15], [16], [17], [18], exploration, creativity and innovation in business methods will not be encouraged. Such ways of handling will even squeeze talents, initiatives, and ideas towards new ways and new directions. The phenomenon of *xé rào* (breaking the hurdle) is the most focused and clear reflection of the situation that the institutions consider legitimate and reasonable activities and incomes of people and communities illegal, which causes the people and society "to break the institutional hurdle". It was reasonable to perform "*khoán*", or make use of contracts, in agricultural production in Vinh Phuc province and some other localities in the late 1970s to help generate more income for the local farmers, but it was considered illegal by the institutional framework. On the other hand, the unreasonable sources of income are, however, recognised by law as legal, which is also causing dissent in the public opinion. The "backwardness" of the institutional framework is a reality existing in many fields, industries and professions at different levels, causing considerable obstacles to the implementation of social equity.

The rich-poor differentiation based on legitimate and reasonable income, though it may not be legal at the beginning (for example, the incomes from "*khoán*", the "third plan" in industry at the end of the 1970s, which, due to being illegal, were termed as the phenomenon of "breaking the hurdle", etc.), of course will be the driving force for the human and social

development and ensure that social equity is to be realised in a sustainable way. It is also the foundation for a stable, developed, and united society with consensus. However, in practice, the above four types of income always go together, with interactions among them, though their degrees of significance are different from one another in different periods and social conditions. If one wishes for and only sees one type of rich-poor differentiation, which is reasonable and legitimate, that will not be a multifaceted view, and the social governance and management will be subjective and wrongful.

3. The trend of rich-poor differentiation in Vietnam in the future

In reality, the rich-poor differentiation and social equity performance depend on many different factors. In the next ten years, in our opinion, the more the market economy develops and the more strongly the scientific-technological revolution and Industrial Revolutions 3.0 and 4.0 develop, bringing more and more achievements to Vietnam, the more the opportunities and conditions for the rich-poor gap to expand. Meanwhile, it will be difficult for social institutions to make sufficiently strong changes to curb the increase in the rich-poor differentiation; consequently, narrowing the rich-poor gap that has existed over the last two decades will also be harder.

Today is the era of the scientific-technological revolution, in other words, one of the great characteristics of the current historical period is the enormous

development of that revolution. Studying the impacts of the revolution, we conceive that such revolution from the 2nd World War to the late 1970s and early 1980s was the theoretical foundation for Industrial Revolution 3.0 with great achievements and unprecedented significant impacts on human and social development on a global scale. The scientific-technological revolution that has been taking place since the 1980s to now has created the theoretical foundation for Industrial Revolution 4.0, which has just begun, and is being mentioned a lot in Germany and Vietnam. At the same time, the revolution is also continuing to boost and spread Industrial Revolution 3.0 to all over the world.

In the history, Vietnam was not able to carry out any scientific, technical and technological revolutions among those the world has made. Even, as regard to the three industrial revolutions, Vietnam could not participate in them due to its historical conditions and many other factors. The survey conducted by the National Research Project KX 01.11/16-20 in nine provinces of Vietnam's all three regions, namely the North, Central region, and the South², shows that the levels of production and industrial forces in regions, locations, industries and fields quite vary³. There are still places and regions where production is in the pre-industrial stage, and many other places which are at Industrial Revolution 2.0 stage. Only enterprises in industrial zones, big cities, some industries and sectors have already reached the level of Industrial Revolution 3.0, but merely at its early stage. However, the achievements of the scientific-technological and industrial

revolutions are approaching Vietnam in very fast paces.

In fact, the achievements of both the scientific-technical and scientific-technological revolutions are greatly affecting Vietnam. But, as seen from the industrial angle, Industrial Revolution 2.0 - the foundation of electromagnetic technologies, and Industrial Revolution 3.0 - the foundation of electronic technologies, are the foundation of Vietnam's industry today. We would like to emphasise this to note that there are a number of misconceptions about Industrial Revolution 4.0 and Industrial Revolution 3.0 when it comes to their impacts on Vietnam. There is currently not yet Industry 4.0 in the country because its technological base is artificial intelligence that has not yet appeared in Vietnam's industry as a popular technological platform. Considering the impacts of the scientific-technological revolution on social equity, one needs to pay attention to this important feature of the modern Vietnamese society, to avoid subjective illusions, basing merely on one's will, trying to bypass necessary stages, which can lead to serious mistakes with unpredictable consequences.

The development of the scientific - technological revolution and industrial revolutions (both 2.0 and 3.0) in Vietnam now contributes positively to ensuring social equity on a much more solid, broadened and profound foundation than the social equity that is based on agriculture or production yet to be industrialised. Technology and industry are both products of science; and, when taken into production and society, technology will change the people and society in the direction of progress and development. Science,

especially social sciences, has strong impacts on the awareness of people and society of social equity, creating ideals, methods and solutions to implement it on a reasonable foundation and making it fit with each development stage of production. The concept of equity has been changed towards a more progressive, comprehensive, complete, inclusive and profound direction, as analysed in a seminar [5].

But the important thing is that when the achievements of the industrial revolution approach Vietnam, turning the Vietnamese economy into an increasingly industrialised one, making its level higher and higher, there will be increasingly open and diversified opportunities to implement equity, and, as a result, more people will be able to achieve. That is because, on the one hand, science, technology and industry create various jobs and opportunities for workers to generate their incomes, which is a requirement to achieve equity. The pre-industrialisation society before could not have the conditions to carry out broad and complete equity, so it was forced to implement equity by means of egalitarianism. On the other hand, industry creates opportunities and conditions to free people from direct labour functions, such as motivation, transport, technology, and supervision, so differences in physical strength are less likely to affect the volume of products made, more sources of reasonable and legitimate income are created, and so are the opportunities to have them.

Along with the development of science, technology and industry since the end of the 20th century till now, the number of

jobs has increased rapidly, and the opportunity to access income has not decreased, but increased more and more instead. That is most evident in the fact that the number of workers has increased continuously and strongly, the number of careers has not decreased but still continuously increased, although some traditional industries have been removed. The development process of the industry has removed some sectors and at the same time created many new industries which are one of the important characteristics of the scientific-technical and scientific-technological revolutions and of industrialisation. That has created an opportunity for different human capacities to be utilised and thus the people can gain legitimate and reasonable incomes.

The means of science-technology and the industrial revolution create devices and tools that can correctly identify and monitor the quality of products and labour productivity of each individual and each community. This means that each person's labour can be objectively evaluated, more accurately and more reasonably. That is the condition and premise to implement social equity in a reasonably grounded way. In addition, science, technology and industry have helped increase labour productivity and production capacity of the economy, creating more and more products. More wealth is generated, and the basic needs of people and society are guaranteed to be the most important prerequisites for human and social development. Satisfying the basic needs of individuals and society is itself equality, humanity and progress of the human race. On that equal foundation, the modern society may provide other social equitable

contents at higher but more vital levels such as equity in education, healthcare, and environment, etc.

If previously, in the pre-industrialised societies, the saying "not to be afraid of shortage, but to be afraid of unfairness" was absolutely correct, then in the era of scientific-technological and industrial revolutions today, it is not any more. Correct is now the phrase "sufficiency does not always mean fairness, while shortage never does". This means that, under the impacts of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions, horizontal equity (equal treatment for those who contribute equally) is like a condition being firmly assured, as the type of equity that has the character of the human race, being universally humane. Vertical equity, i.e. treating differently those who are different from the common groups or live in different conditions, means that people with higher abilities, working better, and making more contributions are entitled to more benefits which belong to the upper layer of social equity, bears special significance in the era of scientific-technological and industrial revolutions. It is the vertical implementation of equity that really drives the human and social development.

The scientific-technological and industrial revolutions contribute to extending the reach of the hands and the vision of the eyes of each person and each social community, helping them to continuously boost their capacities in all aspects as well as their labour productivity. In addition to the aspect of social differentiation due to ownership differentiation that creates social classes, differentiation due to increasing capacity and labour productivity is an

important cause of social polarisation, despite the fact that this polarisation is reasonable and legitimate. In the early stage of industrialisation, most countries expressed an attitude of accepting and promoting rich-poor polarisation towards a vertical equity to promote rapid development of their people and societies. The differentiation here is due to fairness and therefore very reasonable and legitimate. It motivates people to be more active and utilise rationally all of their capacities and enhance their labour productivity and efficiency, developing the economy and generating more wealth. Social progress is as a result maintained regularly.

While vertical social equity is accelerated by the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions, creating a reasonable rich-poor diversification that is growing day by day, can this lead to social polarisation? That is a big question, which we have not found a valid answer in research documents. Certainly, in principle, the differentiation taking place over a long period of time will inevitably lead to polarisation. Logically, that is unavoidable. But in reality, it is not really the case, as the opportunity to increase income generated by the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions is not permanent or long-term for any specific individual or community. The opportunity to increase such income source is not confined to any specific type of subject, but to all subjects in society. Human development always takes place unevenly in all aspects. People's capacities and qualities also vary. Taking advantage of opportunities brought about by the scientific - technological revolution

and those by the industrial one are not the same. Therefore, it is essential to promote and expand the opportunity for maximum use of the achievements of the two revolutions. We should not be afraid of the rich-poor differentiation due to vertical equity under the impacts of the revolutions. The paradox of vertical social equity in the revolutions will create such a differentiation and social polarisation that is a reality which is tough to solve. But it is unadvisable to base on that to constrain the development of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions.

In Vietnam today, that paradox has not yet caused any consequences on the social development; on the contrary, it is the rich-poor differentiation due to other irrational sources of income that causes great harm to the human and social development. Therefore, in our opinion, the State should further encourage and accept the rich-poor differentiation due to vertical equity under the impacts of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions to promote people and society to grow stronger and faster.

On the other aspect, the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions often promote the horizontal equity level. They create more products to satisfy needs of living and improve the society's basic living standards. In other words, the achievements of the two revolutions always raise the people's average, and also, minimum, living standards. It also means that the scientific-technological and the industrial revolutions further horizontal social equity to be broader, more inclusive and at higher and higher levels. Horizontal equity, therefore, also rises and becomes

more sustainable. More products are included in the basic needs in a more diverse way that demonstrates the social progress at a higher level. However, when horizontal social equity is enhanced, vertical social equity will also be pushed to higher levels, the paradox of the situation "the more the equality, the higher the extent of division into layers/levels" continues to exist.

Along with the development of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions, the fairness in both vertical and horizontal ways is increasingly expanded into many elements such as environmental fairness and fairness in achievements of all development aspects: education, healthcare, sports, etc. To ensure the implementation of social equity in all elements, both horizontally and vertically, is very difficult when ones needs to, at the same time, ensure the development of a market economy at a rapid pace. Our survey shows that the majority of people deem the impacts of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions have not yet exerted great impacts on the implementation of social equity, and the paradox of the situation "the more the equality, the higher the extent of division into layers/levels" is not as strong, as under the impacts of the market economy and institutions. The shortcomings in the implementation of social equity today are mainly caused by the market economy and institutions. Therefore, it is necessary to accelerate the application of achievements of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions in socio-economic and human development, using them to limit

shortcomings caused by the market economy and institutions which can distort social relations and restrain the human and social development.

4. Conclusion

While the rich-poor gap is widening, causing the risk of social polarisation, the matter is how to effectively utilise achievements of the scientific - technological and industrial revolutions to restrain such widening and to narrow the rich-poor differentiation which is in existence today. The achievements of the two revolutions themselves neither create fairness nor cause injustice, and neither increase nor decrease the rich-poor gap. Their application in line with the defined purposes of individuals, social groups and communities based on market rules makes the rich-poor differentiation occur in different trends. The achievements are very fundamental tools, which are especially effective, to raise income for social groups, either widening or narrowing the rich-poor gap in and social polarisation. To properly apply them for humanitarian purposes and social progress has become an urgent task and requirement of the modern society.

Notes

¹ The paper was published in Vietnamese in: *Nghiên cứu Con người*, số 4, 2018. Translated by Van Thi Thanh Binh.

² The author uses research results of Project KX 01.11/16-20. The research team of that project has

conducted sociological surveys, in-depth interviews, workshops with managers, executives, researchers, university lecturers, secondary school teachers, workers, entrepreneurs in the provinces and cities of Lao Cai, Quang Ninh, Hanoi, Da Nang, Ninh Thuan, Dak Lak, Ho Chi Minh, Dong Nai and Vinh Long. Opinions assessing the impacts of the scientific-technological revolution on the Vietnamese people and society vary on the basis of differences in evaluating the country's level of industrial development. The majority of respondents said that Vietnam is currently only in the industrial period of 2.5, i.e. not yet reaching Industrial Revolution 3.0. But the impacts of the industrial and scientific-technological revolutions on Vietnam's people and society are now very strong and generating more and more pressure from many aspects. The impacts and changes in different aspects due to them are, even though uneven, gaining more and more strength, being disruptive, inevitably changing many aspects of life and people in a drastical manner. The impacts on social equity implementation and social relations are also stronger and stronger, creating many challenges in the years ahead. A 2017 report of the Vietnam Academy of Social Sciences on the impacts of Industrial Revolution 4.0 also contributes to affirming that, though laying more emphasis on the challenges created by the revolution. It is more and more obvious that impacts of the scientific-technological and industrial revolutions on social equity are stronger and stronger in Vietnam.

³ We believe that the main technology platform of Industrial Revolution 1.0 was the steam engine and internal combustion engine; Industrial Revolution 2.0 - the electromagnetic machines (power generators and electric motors); Industrial Revolution 3.0 - electronic devices; and Industrial Revolution 4.0 - to be artificial intelligence. Read more: [2, pp.3-14], [3, pp.3-16].

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