

Original Research Article

The Development Path of China's Common Wealth Path from the Discussion of Fairness and Justice in The Republic of Plato

Xiao Zheng

State Information Center, Beijing, 100045, China

Abstract: The Republic of Plato delves deeply into the concept of justice and fairness, including considerations of the subjects involved and the consequences thereof, as well as the argument that rulers should prioritize the welfare of the populace. Plato's reflections in The Republic on justice and fairness offer significant insights for China's pursuit of common prosperity. When examining the prerequisites for government-led justice in The Republic alongside China's contemporary people-centered development philosophy, several challenges become apparent in advancing China's common prosperity. These challenges include disparities in regional development, income distribution gaps, and social security inequities. Addressing these requires optimizing mechanisms for regional coordinated development, refining the systems for secondary and tertiary income distribution, and improving the social security framework. These measures, grounded in the principle of justice and fairness, are essential to promote the realization of common prosperity for all citizens.

Keywords: justice and fairness; common prosperity; development pathway

1. Introduction

The Republic of Plato integrates philosophical concepts with statecraft principles, thus highlighting the general characteristics of European philosophical traditions^[1]. This seminal work delves deeply into the definitions of justice and fairness, considering both the subjects of justice and its consequences. It emphasizes that rulers must deliberate from the perspective of the populace's welfare. Plato^[2] elucidates the qualities of justice and fairness required in both individuals and the state. His reflections in The Republic offer crucial insights for China's goal of achieving common prosperity. As China accelerates reforms towards common prosperity, policies on fairness and justice become central to both top-level design and practical development strategies^[3]. By comprehending Plato's justice theories in The Republic, it becomes possible to deeply explore the key challenges China faces in pursuing common prosperity in the new era. Drawing wisdom from historical philosophical thoughts and aligning them with China's developmental practices, one can propose a roadmap for China's path to common prosperity in contemporary times^[4]. Specifically, the application of Plato's justice theories in The Republic necessitates China to prioritize the following areas to achieve common prosperity.

2. Solving the Problem of Unbalanced Regional Development as a Handle for Practicing the Concept of Fairness and Justice and Realizing Common Wealth

In the context of both The Republic and On Governing the Country and Securing the State, the status of all citizens is considered equal. From the perspective of Chinese economic geography, it is imperative to achieve harmonious economic development across all regions, ensuring that all citizens operate within an environment of relative equity. However, China faces several prominent issues of fairness concerning its regional development. First, the urban-rural gap is striking. Historically, China's economic practices have perpetuated a dual structure, leading to significant disparities in income, infrastructure, and living conditions between rural and urban areas.

This divergence starkly contrasts with the ideal of equal status proposed in *The Republic*. Second, there are substantial differences in development between the southeastern coastal regions and the western inland provinces. For instance, in 2020, Guangdong's GDP was CNY 101.5986 trillion yuan, approximately 500 times the CNY 190.3 billion yuan GDP of Tibet. *The Republic* asserts that rulers in an ideal state should act as protectors and facilitators of the nation. Thus, China needs to allocate more resources to bridge the developmental gap between the southeastern coast and the western provinces. Third, there is an imbalance between economic development and ecological preservation. In *The Republic*, a good living environment is fundamental to the conception of justice and fairness. However, the rapid economic growth in China has exacerbated environmental imbalances, leading to frequent pollution issues involving air, water, and soil. Incidents of smog in major cities have become common, severely threatening public health.

From the perspective of understanding fairness and justice in *The Republic*, regional coordinated development in China is an important path to achieving common prosperity, the fundamental solution to changing the long-term imbalance in development, and the basic guarantee for achieving equality among citizens in space. The main reasons for the uneven regional development in our country are as follows: as the policy maker, the government has implemented a period of unbalanced development strategy since the reform and opening up in 1978, paying more attention to economic efficiency to achieve rapid economic development. This has led to a gradual widening gap in the development of the urban-rural dual structure in our country, and the trend of uneven development between the western and eastern regions has become more prominent. The labor force in the western and rural areas continues to fill in and supplement the labor-intensive industrial development in the southeastern region. In the stage where the overall level of economic development is relatively low, focusing on efficiency to improve the level of economic development is a wisdom of the government in *The Republic*. Therefore, at a certain stage of economic development, it is also a wisdom of *The Republic* to allow fairness and justice to benefit more groups. In addition, from the perspective of society as a whole, the development between regions is difficult to balance, and a certain "Matthew effect" will be formed. This kind of "internal driving force" of society itself will further amplify this spatial and geographical gap, that is, the group with advantageous resources will further seize the resources of vulnerable groups, further exacerbating inequality between regions. If this inertia effect of society is allowed, then the so-called justice will become the interest of the strong in *The Republic*.

3. Optimizing the Income Distribution Mechanism is a Means of Practicing the Concept of Fairness and Justice from the Perspective of the People's "Sense of Gain"

Income distribution significantly affects social equity and justice. Optimizing the income distribution mechanism plays a crucial role in realizing the fairness and justice described in *The Republic* during the process of achieving common prosperity. However, China faces several issues regarding income distribution. Firstly, there are substantial income disparities across different industries. For instance, sectors like finance, information science technology, and engineering have higher incomes compared to agriculture, forestry, animal husbandry, and fisheries. The income in finance and insurance is nearly four times that in agriculture-related fields. Such disparities impact social equity and justice. Secondly, there are significant income gaps among different income groups. China's Gini coefficient remains around 0.45, indicating potential risks of widening income inequality. Income distribution inequality undermines social equity and justice. Citizens' income is fundamental for their

basic survival and happiness. Only when income distribution remains reasonable can the state approach the harmonious and orderly society described in *The Republic*. Thus, the income distribution mechanism directly impacts public happiness and fairness and is a pivotal factor for a country's sustained, stable, and healthy development.

The main reasons for the income distribution problem in our country are twofold: on the one hand, the unreasonable income distribution mechanism. In the book *The Republic*, there is a relatively systematic exposition of the social operation mechanism of leaders, guardians, farmers, and artisans. In this regard, they all have their own wisdom to fulfill their responsibilities. From the perspective of fulfilling government functions well in the new era, in terms of policy-making, it is necessary to fulfill the second distribution mechanism well. At present, the policy effect of China's secondary distribution tax system in regulating income distribution is still not significant, and it has not benefited low-income groups most efficiently and directly. Therefore, it is necessary to better utilize the government's "wisdom" at the policy level and optimize the income distribution mechanism to benefit the widest possible number of people. On the other hand, the income sources of low-income groups in China and the industrial structure distribution of China's economic development have led to an unsmooth income distribution mechanism, resulting in lower income levels for rural residents and fewer sources of property income for low-income groups. In terms of institutional design, land elements such as rural homesteads have not entered the market flow and been endowed with economic value. In addition, some traditional monopoly industries and emerging monopoly industries under the background of new generation information technology have widened the income distribution gap between industries. Therefore, these important institutional and market factors have deviated from the starting point and destination of justice in *The Republic*, and need to be corrected through new policy paths.

4. Strengthening the Construction of the Social Security System as a Handle for Realizing Social Justice from the Perspective of Basic Livelihoods

Social security forms the foundation of people's livelihood and serves as a crucial measure of social equity and justice. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the U.S. faced issues where citizens without health insurance couldn't access medical treatment, highlighting a sharp contrast with China's universal health coverage. This contrast underscores socialism's aim to benefit the largest population segments and achieve the equitable ideals described in *The Republic*. However, China still faces challenges in social security. There are discrepancies between urban and rural areas and between state and non-state sectors, despite the overall broad coverage. Also, policies driving social security system development need refinement. Management and responsibility alignments are inadequate, particularly affecting social security for newly employed individuals. On the financial side, the long-term funding mechanism needs improvement, with existing risks in fund management and sustainable returns.

5. Policy Recommendations

The first is to accelerate the development of new mechanisms and measures to achieve spatial and geographical equity and justice.

Achieving common prosperity in spatial geography means ensuring coordinated economic development across China's vast economic territories. Accelerate China's regional coordinated development strategy, including the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei synergy strategy, the construction strategy of the Guangdong-Hong Kong-

Macao Greater Bay Area, and the integrated development strategy of the Yangtze River Delta. Drive rapid growth in surrounding provinces through the radiation effect of urban agglomerations, utilizing urban clusters to achieve spatial economic coordination. Important strategies like rural revitalization, promoting the rise of central regions, and comprehensive revitalization of the Northeast will channel more funds, talent, and policies to underdeveloped areas. The Republic also proposed the concept of the rule of law in society, which regional coordinated development must further practice. Actively initiate attempts at regional coordinated legislation, and at the regulatory level, promote pilot implementations.

The second is to optimize the secondary and tertiary distribution systems to achieve fairness and justice in terms of the population's income.

In The Republic, the most important equality is in production and living, reflecting China's path to common prosperity. For secondary distribution, substantive tax reductions must ensure fairness among individuals, corporations, and various social entities. Tertiary distribution requires leveraging public welfare and philanthropy, guided and regulated by the government, to foster a societal wave of charitable endeavors, aligning with the moral standards of societal harmony in The Republic. Recognizing the interplay between secondary and tertiary distribution is essential; the former ensures distributive justice, while the latter complements it. Enhancing the coherence of policies between these distributions will form a more gradient-based income distribution system.

The third is to accelerate the construction of social security policies and improve the operational mechanism, so as to ensure that the basic livelihood of the people and realize fairness and justice.

To achieve more extensive, standardized, and effective social protection policies, as discussed in The Republic, it's essential to strengthen social security policy development. This effort should expand coverage through systematic policies and improve fund-raising methods for social security. According to The Republic, laws serve as social norms and instruments for justice, making social security legislation crucial for efficient operation. Furthermore, refining the social security mechanism is necessary because policy execution details determine effectiveness. This requires China to align with the analytical perspective of The Republic, considering basic national conditions. Therefore, a comprehensive approach that balances individual, collective, and national interests must establish a robust social security system for vulnerable groups, especially migrant workers, using government subsidies, bank loans, and social capital to enhance protection for these populations.

References

- [1] Whitehead. *Process and Reality*. [M] Cambridge University Press, 1929:5.
- [2] Plato. *The Republic*. [M] Beijing, Commercial Press, 2002.
- [3] Jia Keqing. The Justice Dimension of Common Wealth. [J] *Heilongjiang Social Science*, 2018(3):131-136.
- [4] Hu Zi'ao. The Concept of Justice in The Republic of Plato and Its Contemporary Revelation. [J] *Journal of Western*, 2019(5):31-33.