

# Socialism and Its Relevance

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**Abstract**— *Communitarianism, developed in the process of critiquing neoliberalism, is one of the dominant trends in contemporary Western political philosophy. Communitarianism is one of the mainstream political philosophical trends that emerged in the 1980s in the West and has had a profound impact on many fields such as philosophy and political science. This paper analyzes and evaluates the theoretical connotation of communitarianism and its rationality, and expounds the inspiration and significance of communitarianism for China's political practice.*

**Keywords**— *Communitarianism; community; individual; public interest.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Communitarianism is one of the mainstream political philosophical trends that emerged in the West in the 1980s, and it represents a challenge to the mainstream of Western liberalism in the context of multiculturalism<sup>1</sup>. Since the 1990s, the idea of communitarianism has had a profound influence in many fields such as philosophy, political science, ethics and sociology, and has played a role in political practice in different degrees worldwide. In China, with the gradual development of socialist modernization and the common prosperity of all people, the relationship between equity and efficiency has become more and more prominent, and social equity has become the focus of the general public, and the proposal of communitarianism has an extremely important reference value for the solution of this problem.

## II. OVERVIEW OF COMMUNITARIAN THEORY

The term "community" can be translated as "community", "community" and "cooperation", and generally refers to A group of people gathered for a common purpose. Not only do families, villages and nations belong to the category of community, but also classes, nationalities, religious groups and political parties are all specific forms of community. Communitarianism, which is built on the concept of "community" as its logical core, represents the latest trend in the field of contemporary Western political philosophy. Because it emphasizes the importance of the "good" over justice and appeals to the public interest, it is also referred to as the "politics of the public good" as opposed to the liberal "politics of rights". or "new collectivism."<sup>2</sup>

From its direct intellectual roots, communitarianism is an inheritance and development of the concept of community that has been present in Western political thought since ancient times, especially in Aristotle's and Hegel's theories of community<sup>3</sup>. In Aristotle's view, community means "city-state", which not only enables human beings to obtain more extensive economic self-sufficiency, but also gives rise to the pursuit of common life. "Man is a political animal by nature"<sup>4</sup>, and it is only in the public sphere that man can exercise his highest

capacities as a social animal. In terms of indirect sources of knowledge, communitarianism was developed by McIntyre, Sandel, Taylor and others in the process of reflecting on and critiquing neoliberalism represented by Rawls. In 1991, 50 scholars and politicians came together in the United States to publish the manifesto "A Platform for Responsible Communitarianism: Rights and Responsibilities", which aimed to promote communitarianism as opposed to individualism. The manifesto emphasized that "all the major social, moral, and legal issues of our time must be addressed from a communitarian perspective. Since then, communitarianism as a political philosophy has been widely and rapidly spreading and developing around the world. In the controversy with neoliberalism, communitarians put forward their theoretical demands and political propositions around the core issues of "individual and community" and "rights and the public good".

*Communitarianism emphasizes the priority of the collective over the individual*

The individual or the self is the logical starting point of liberalism, and the concept of the individual becomes the perspective and standard through which liberals observe and judge all social issues. Therefore, all complex historical events, political movements and their changes will eventually be reduced to the behavior of individuals. Therefore, the methodology of liberalism is individualism or "atomism". In contrast, however, communitarianism takes the "community," the counterpart of the individual, as the basic starting point for thinking. Groups of various kinds, rather than individuals, become the central paradigm for analyzing and explaining socio-political phenomena. Fundamentally, the methodology of communitarianism is collectivist in that it attributes the original motivation of socio-historical events and political and economic changes to a number of communities, such as families, communities, classes, nations, peoples, and groups. The prioritization of collectivist principles over traditions of individual supremacy is a major contribution of communitarianism at the methodological level.

*Communitarianism forms systemic values*

<sup>1</sup> Wang Yunhong. Socialism and China Today[J]. Journal of Tianzhong Studies, 2006, 8(4): 31-32.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Shuangxi. The social background of the rise of communalism and its practical significance[J]. Journal of Yunnan Normal University, 2004, 9(5): 41-

43.

<sup>3</sup> Yu Keping. Socialism [M]. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2005: 121.

<sup>4</sup> The complete works of Marx and Engels [M]. Vol. 43. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2016(339).

From an epistemological point of view, communitarianism, in its critique of neoliberalism, has developed its own systematic values of power, virtue, the public good, and the state in the light of the universal good and the common good.

First, the communitarian view of rights. McIntyre believes that the rights enjoyed by individuals are premised on certain specific social rules and social conditions, and these specific rules and conditions exist only in a specific historical period and a specific social environment, and there cannot be rights shared by all people under the sky. Socialists believe that liberalism's moral rights doctrine, which is based on abstraction, is often weak in real life, and advocate a legal rights doctrine as opposed to it. They believe that rights are a kind of social relationship between human beings stipulated by law, and are an institutional arrangement to protect the legitimate rights of individuals. Communityism emphasizes the superiority of the community over the self and the individual on the premise of respecting the individual. The individual must live in a certain community, and cannot freely choose the community. In other words, people always live in certain socio-historical and cultural relations, and no one can escape the constraints of socio-historical and cultural traditions. In reality, all people have certain purposes, ideals, and values, which are determined by the community, and the community constitutes the identity of the self and ultimately defines who the self is. All people belong to a certain community and have priority over individuals.

Second, the communitarian view of virtue. MacIntyre believes that only those who possess virtue can better apply the moral law, and that for the individual, not rights should take precedence, but virtue should take precedence. Virtue is a personal character that is historically developed in the community through the practice of individuals, and those who rely on it can achieve intrinsic personal benefits in practice. The communitarian view of virtue is essentially an inheritance and promotion of traditional virtues. Although the various virtues advocated by communitarianism differ from traditional virtues in their specific meanings, the types and forms of virtues basically do not go beyond the scope of traditional virtues, and the main thread running through these virtues is the public good, or the public interest of the community. Because virtues are acquired through practice, tradition, and experience, virtue education has received significant attention from communitarians.

Third, the communitarian view of the common good. Members of a community should pursue virtue and realize a life of "goodness" in the process of pursuing virtue. They believe that "goodness" in a community has two connotations, one is the goodness of the individual and the other is the goodness of the community. The true "good" is the organic combination of the good of the individual and the good of the community, that is, to ensure the full realization of the individual's own interests while maximizing the realization of the common good. They advocate the unification of the individual and the community, and the use of this "common good" as a reasonable criterion for evaluating the way of life of the community.

Fourth, the communitarian view of the state. The communitarian view of the state rejects liberalism's indifference to the political life of the state and advocates citizens' active participation in the public life of society and the widest possible scope of political participation. In contrast to liberalism's "weak state" theory, which advocates minimal state interference with individual free choice, communitarianism calls for a "strong state" theory. A society that lacks public interest is not a good society, even if it is just; only the state can sacrifice the interests of individuals for the sake of the state and the community.

### III. THEORETICAL REVIEW OF COMMUNITARIANISM

#### *Progressive search for communitarianism*

The introduction of communitarianism has brought about a shift from "politics of rights" to "politics of the common good." Western individualism overemphasizes the rights of the individual and places the individual above the group. Socialism, on the other hand, emphasizes social cooperation, solidarity, mutual equality, and the pursuit of the common good. This change in political conception is a reorientation based on the recognition of the shortcomings of the liberal tradition, and is of great value in making up for the shortcomings of the self-concept, the principle of universalism and the methodology of atomism that have been developed since Adam Smith.

The proposal of socialism is conducive to solving the problem of moral crisis in society. With the rapid development of capitalism and the deepening of liberal concepts, a liberal society with a highly developed civilization but increasingly corrupt morality has gradually revealed its shortcomings. Moral theories based on utilitarianism and rights have replaced the role of traditional concepts of virtue in society, and the trend of excessive individual autonomy and loss of social responsibility is threatening the order and stability of society. Therefore, actively advocating the replacement of the autonomous individual with the social origin, the replacement of individual freedom with the community interest, and the replacement of individual rights with the common good has important reference value for the resolution of the crisis in the moral field.

The emergence of communitarianism is a reflection of the respect for and expansion of human rights, and the human rights movement that emerged after the 1970s provided strong conditions for the emergence of communitarianism. Political scientists refer to civil and political rights, founded on the principles of individualism, as the first generation of human rights. It is characterized by the struggle for individual freedom and the restriction of government intervention; the economic, social, and cultural rights that citizens received after World War II as a result of active government efforts are called second-generation human rights, characterized by the benefits that accrue to individuals through appropriate government intervention. The third generation of human rights refers to the collective enjoyment of rights such as the "right to peace," "right to development," and "right to share resources" that emerged after the 1970s. These rights are characterized by the fact that they must be based on community relations and shared

collectively by the community.<sup>5</sup> The rise of communitarianism has touched on the core of third-generation human rights.

#### *Exploring the dilemma of communitarianism*

Although it is a significant improvement over liberalism, it does not mean that communitarianism is the cure for modern society. Communitarianism suffers from a vague concept and a lack of operationalization. What is communitarianism, what are its characteristics, and how does it differ from neoliberalism? Since the understanding of "goodness" is based on multiculturalism, it is difficult to unify the value standard and judgment basis in the real society. "Goodness is an indefinable concept, and in practice, it has lost its operability. As a result, communities with different values have lost the possibility of common agreement, and the ensuing conflicts of interest and conflicts between communities have created difficult practical problems.

The proposition of communitarianism that "good takes precedence over right" harbors the danger of totalitarianism. The logical implication of the proposition of communitarianism is that states and communities have two functions: the power to compel individuals to do good, and the power to compel individuals not to do evil. The first of these functions is more effective than the second. Thus, political communities such as the state can sacrifice the interests of individuals for the sake of the "common good"<sup>6</sup>. The danger lies in the variability of the understanding of "good". When the "good" as understood by the political leaders in power does not coincide with the "good" as understood by the majority of citizens, the principle of "coercion to do good takes precedence over coercion not to do evil" will inevitably This leads to political centralization and authoritarian dictatorship. Therefore, it is reasonable to be wary of all "common good" in the name of the state, the nation, and the collective, especially in countries with a long tradition of authoritarianism, and to avoid the danger of totalitarianism.

It is evident that communitarianism is a product of the extreme development of individualism and a remedy for its inadequacy. Sandel has argued that liberal liberals defend the private economy, while egalitarian liberals defend the welfare state; communitarians defend the public life corresponding to the private economy and the welfare state. The value of communitarianism can only be compensated for by the extreme development of liberalism and individualism. Communitarianism cannot be truly understood apart from developed liberalism, and talking about communitarianism apart from liberalism leads to a misalignment of the times.

#### IV. THE RELEVANCE OF COMMUNITARIANISM TO CHINA'S POLITICAL PRACTICE

As a discourse of the post-liberal era, socialism has a specific historical and cultural background for its emergence, development and application. Today's China, which is on a slow journey of modernization, is far from achieving the transformation from traditional to modern in terms of politics, economy and culture. Due to the lack of liberalism in traditional Chinese culture and the prevalence of collectivism under the

former planned economy system, it has been difficult to develop and bring the sense of freedom and rights into full play. Therefore, the use of communitarianism in China's political practice should be approached with caution. China today should call for individual rights and universal principles of democracy and freedom, rather than blindly pursuing trendy Western ideas and theories. However, some values of communitarianism are still worthy of our consideration and reference in building a harmonious socialist society.

#### *Communitarianism requires respect for members' rights to voice and political participation*

It has been argued that Chinese society is now a fractured society, and that the pattern of social power characterized in China since the 1990s is uneven, with great differences between powerful groups and disadvantaged groups in terms of both their influence on public policy and their access to social opportunities, with powerful groups having increasing influence on the formulation of policies by state institutions, while disadvantaged groups in society have less influence on public opinion and public policy is small. In the real socio-political system, the powerful groups firmly occupy the dominant position and the disadvantaged groups are placed in an awkward position of marginalization. The huge contrast in resources and status fundamentally leads to deviations and failures in the practical application of public policies. Under such circumstances, institutional innovations and adjustments must be made to tend to ensure the political voice of the disadvantaged groups, so that the wishes of various groups can enter the highest decision-making level. The ongoing construction of grassroots democracy, such as rural villagers' autonomy and enterprise workers' representative assemblies, is an effective move based on respecting the general public's rights to information, participation, expression and supervision. Only when members of the community enjoy the right to participate and speak on an equal footing can the social and political system function harmoniously and social power gain legitimacy and authority.

#### *Communitarianism requires the practical strengthening of virtue education*

With the further development of China's socialist market economy, some prominent contradictions and problems have emerged, and social morality has become increasingly serious, such as the crisis of integrity, commercial fraud, financial speculation, corruption and other undesirable phenomena that go against the spirit and principles of the market. Faced with a series of problems, communitarianism calls for a return to traditional virtues and respect for the role of virtue. Under the conditions of socialist market economy, inheriting and promoting traditional virtues such as solidarity and love, mutual help and cooperation, self-giving and the pursuit of win-win situation, which are in line with the spirit of community, will not only help the formation of individual good virtues and good deeds, but also help the realization of the common good of society. Strengthening virtue education, improving the quality

<sup>5</sup> Yu Keping. Socialism [M]. Beijing: China Social Science Press, 2005: 123.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Hengliang. On communitarianism and its revelation[J]. Lanzhou

Journal, 2008(11): 45-47.

of citizens, promoting moral construction, and promoting social harmony are not only in line with the political demands of communitarians, but are also key tasks that cannot be ignored in the construction of socialist modernization.

*Communitarianism requires the construction of a good social structure based on the rule of law*

They believe that the establishment and maintenance of a good social order and a reasonable social structure depend on systematic and reasonable legal rules, and that a reasonable division between the state, public interests and individual rights must be clearly defined by law, and that various contradictions and conflicts between the state, the collective and the individual must be regulated by law to achieve social justice as much as possible. Without legal regulation and restraint, society will easily fall into anarchy under liberalism, leading to the abuse of governmental rights. The law must restrict the actions of the government in the name of public interest in exercising its power, whether it is individual rights or public interest, and operate within the scope of the law, thus constructing a harmonious society full of vitality and in line with justice.

*Communitarianism guarantees the smooth realization of individual values*

While emphasizing the "common good," communitarianism recognizes and respects the basic rights of individuals (especially the rights to life and property) and advocates finding a balance between individual and collective interests. At present, the traditional collectivist influence of the planned economy era still exists, and the emphasis is on sacrificing the interests of the individual for the sake of the collective good. Under such circumstances, the basic rights and interests of individuals cannot be effectively protected, and the good economic order suffers fundamental damage. Therefore,

while the government strives to improve its governing ability, it should regulate people's words and actions with a new type of collectivism, try to protect the legitimate interests of individuals and promote the realization of individual values while emphasizing the collective interests, so that the individual's personality and talents can be fully developed in the collective.

*Communitarianism requires paying attention to social welfare*

The theory of communitarianism holds that it is the highest political ideal to strive for the "common good" of individuals and society, and that a good community should create more public benefits. In recent years, the "community movement" that has gradually emerged in Western developed countries has provided a powerful environment for the practice of communitarianism. It advocates "service to the community," "doing good for others," "making all people feel the warmth of the community," and "friendly interpersonal relationships. The spirit of the community movement, which advocates the concepts of "serving the community," "doing good for others," "making all people feel the warmth of the community," and "promoting the community with friendly human relations," is basically consistent with the concept of communitarianism, which has an important role and value in alleviating the difficulties of the government, sharing the responsibilities of the government, and coordinating the relationship between individuals and the government, and the state and the government. At present, there are more and more non-governmental organizations and voluntary associations in China, how to guide them to engage in social welfare and serve the great cause of socialist modernization, undoubtedly need to draw nutrients and essence from the idea of communitarianism.