

National Capacity for Good Governance: Why Has the Social Project for Poverty Eradication Been Successful?

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Abstract

The absolute poverty eliminated by China has been a chronic affliction of human society. In the course of modernization, China has completed the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, thus embarking on a path of Chinese-style modernization that is committed to poverty eradication and common prosperity. Eradicating poverty and its root causes is a social project that transformed human society, creating a miracle on earth. The current and continuing success of this project lies in China's unique national capacity for good governance, including its national capacity for mobilization, organization, transformation, development, and integration. This capacity is determined by the nature of the socialist system; the "sacred mission" of the Communist Party of China (CPC) provides it with inexhaustible impetus and a fundamental institutional guarantee. The national capacity for good governance is a specific manifestation of China's institutional strengths.

Keywords: poverty governance, social project, capacity for good governance

Poverty is a chronic affliction of human society and a common challenge faced by the whole world. It has not been solved in the course of modernization, which may engender "the poverty of progress." The problem of poverty has thus become a negative effect of modernization.¹ Solving this problem is therefore an important issue ceaselessly addressed by countries heading towards modernization.

Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has launched a massive poverty alleviation project unprecedented in scale and intensity and benefiting the largest number of people in human history. By 2020, every rural dweller who had once suffered from absolute poverty had been lifted out of poverty as defined by the existing standard,²

1 See E. Bradford Burns and Julie A. Charlip, *Latin America: An Interpretive History*, p. 12.

2 See Xinhua News Agency, "The Great Battle Changing China's Destiny: A Record of Poverty Alleviation Led by the Communist Party's Central Committee with Comrade Xi Jinping at Its Core," p. 1.

thus realizing the poverty alleviation goal set out in the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development ten years ahead of schedule. The completion of this massive project has not only created a “human miracle” of poverty governance, but also explored a new path of modern state building for the elimination of poverty and achievement of common prosperity in the course of modernization.

Poverty intervention and governance is one of the fundamental responsibilities of the state. However, not all social projects involving state intervention are successful. A large number of state-implemented social projects are destined to fail due to their “utopian” nature. In contrast, China’s massive social project for poverty eradication has been successful thanks to the country’s unique capacity for good governance. This capacity for good governance is inherently defined by the nature of the socialist system, and the Party’s Sacred Mission and leadership provide an institutional guarantee for its realization.

I. China’s Massive Social Project for Poverty Eradication

Poverty is a social state of material and corresponding spiritual deprivation, and a long-standing socio-historical phenomenon that has lived in symbiosis with human beings. Human life depends on certain material conditions. In the old days, human beings lived in a primitive state where material resources were extremely scarce. With the development of productivity, their living conditions have improved to some extent. Since the end of primitive society, there have been two kinds of poverty: one is natural poverty, i.e., poverty caused by natural conditions. Human beings live in a natural environment; natural conditions constrain the development of productivity and affect the continuity of human life, thus resulting in deficient means of subsistence. The other is social poverty: poverty caused by social conditions. People always exist in certain production and social relations; some live in poor conditions because of the social differentiation caused by specific production and social relations. This is vividly described by the following lines of a poem: “Behind the red-lacquered gates, wine is left to sour, meat to rot. Outside in the street lie the bones of the frozen and the starved.”

In terms of productivity, the human race spent a long time in agrarian society. During this time, production was constrained by natural conditions and manual labor dominated, leading to a low level of productivity and poverty for most people. The transition from agrarian to industrial society has provided the material conditions for the reduction of poverty. During this transition, however, the peasants, as a factor of traditional agrarian society, suffered from striking poverty, even being sacrificed to industrial society and modernization. The peasant problem and the problem of poverty are intertwined. As a result, this has become a worldwide problem in modern times and has determined different approaches to modernization.

For some early modernizers, peasants and their poverty simply did not constitute a problem

for modernization. Even before the beginnings of modernization, the peasant problem was either already solved or of no moment, and this constituted the precondition for the development of modernization in these countries. As Karl Marx argued in his research on the origin of the capitalist system in Western Europe, the capitalist mode of production “is a peculiar mode of production, specifically defined by historical development”; and it is “the historical result and product of a preceding process.”³ Prior to its modernization, the United Kingdom underwent the “preceding process” of an agricultural revolution. A lasting process of commodification took place in rural areas, and the Enclosure Movement dealt a deadly blow to the traditional rural economic structure. The “elimination of small farmers” not only made a great contribution to the peaceful and democratic development of the United Kingdom, but also meant that modernization could proceed smoothly there.⁴ Before the advent of modernization, “The United States did not face the problem of dismantling a complex and well-established agrarian society of either the feudal or the bureaucratic forms... Nor has American society ever had a massive class of peasants comparable to those in Europe and Asia.”⁵ Except for a few countries such as the United Kingdom and the United States, most late-comers to modernization have been burdened with a large peasant society and the ensuing poverty problem. Due to the spontaneous market power and market-driven process of industrialization, it is a “simple and brutal fact” that sooner or later peasants will become the victims of modernization.⁶ That is why the path to modernization is always associated with wars and revolutions.

China started its modernization through revolution on the basis of a large-scale agrarian society. Until 1949, China had had the world’s largest poor population. Since the founding of the People’s Republic of China that year, the country has been committed to reducing and eliminating poverty in the course of modernization. It has made great achievements, embarking on a path of Chinese-style modernization to eradicate poverty and realize common prosperity. China’s poverty alleviation is far more than simply reducing and eliminating poverty itself; more importantly, it aims at continuously eradicating the natural and social roots of poverty. This massive social project involves transforming the circumstances and conditions of the existence of human society.

Changing the poverty situation is a human dream, and enormous efforts have been made to realize it. The inception of human society was accompanied by processes for alleviating poverty. Nevertheless, little was achieved during this long historical process. It is only through social projects aiming to systematically change both natural and social conditions that poverty can be reduced and its root causes continuously eliminated. Social projects are massive projects for changing the human condition and situation. For poverty alleviation, such

3 Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *Collected Writings of Marx and Engels*, vol. 7, p. 994.

4 See Barrington Moore, *Social Origins of Dictatorship and Democracy*, p. 22.

5 *Ibid.*, p. 88.

6 *Ibid.*, p. 379.

projects involve dual dimensions: on the one hand, they target not particular individuals or a minority of the people but all the poor; on the other hand, they are not only about changing the circumstances of poverty, but more importantly, about changing the natural and social conditions resulting in poverty and stopping its reproduction.

China's poverty management has been conducted in extremely difficult environments and conditions. The country "had long been plagued by poverty at a scale and a level of severity that has rarely been seen anywhere else in the world."⁷ First of all, China had a large poor population. In 1949, the Chinese accounted for 21.66 percent of the world's total population, but its poor population was more than 40 percent of the world total.⁸ China had not only the world's largest population but also the largest poor population. Secondly, it has unbalanced natural conditions: not only affluent plains, but also many regions with natural conditions that are simply unsuited for human habitation, in which generations of people lived in the depths of poverty in quasi-primitive conditions. Lastly, China's development of productivity was backward and unbalanced. When the PRC was founded in 1949, its southwestern frontiers still saw frequent primitive forms of slash and burn agriculture due to the constraints of natural conditions. As Mao Zedong observed, "China still has scattered and individual agriculture and handicrafts, constituting about 90 percent of her entire economy; this is backward, this is not very different from ancient times—about 90 percent of our economic life remains the same as in ancient times."⁹ China sped up its economic construction thereafter, laying a solid foundation for poverty governance, but the major contributor to massive poverty reduction was reform and opening up and the speedy course of modernization. Measured by China's absolute income poverty line in 2011, the incidence of poverty in rural China was 97.5 percent in 1978, but it had decreased to 0.6 percent by 2019.¹⁰ This is not only a statistically significant decline in the incidence of poverty; more importantly, this massive social project explored and established diversified mechanisms of poverty alleviation to root out the natural and social causes of poverty reproduction.

Massive social projects are usually carried out by the state. Throughout history, various efforts have been made to alleviate poverty, but their effect has been limited. First, the scattered efforts of some individuals or a minority of people may alter the destiny of those involved, but can hardly affect all the poor. In particular, in the course of modernization, peasants, as the principal part of the poor population, have relatively backward productivity, which makes it hard for them to change their destiny by themselves. They have to turn to an external force to rid themselves of poverty. Second, market mechanisms play an important role in stimulating initiative, enthusiasm, and creativity, and are thus favorable to productivity

7 The State Council Information Office of the PRC, *Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution*, p. 1.

8 See Hu Angang, ed., *China Study*, vol. 17, p. 180.

9 Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4, p. 1430.

10 See Xie Yue, "The Political Logic of China's Poverty Governance: With an Analysis of How It Surpasses Western Welfare State Theory."

growth and poverty reduction. However, market logic tends to distribute resources to areas where the best returns are available. The development of a market economy will inevitably go hand in hand with social differentiation; it does not and is unlikely to automatically eradicate poverty. To eradicate poverty for everyone, and especially to eradicate its natural and social causes, we can only rely on organized state actions.

The massive social project of poverty eradication in China is a process by which the state is changing the poverty situation with purposeful and planned efforts, as well as a process of changing the natural and societal causes of poverty with explicit goals and solid measures. This project, initiated after 1949, had achieved great success and accomplished the expected goals by 2012. “Since reform and opening up, more than 770 million of China’s rural population living below the current poverty line have been raised from poverty, accounting for more than 70 percent of the global total over the same period according to the World Bank’s international poverty standard.”¹¹ This has greatly accelerated global poverty alleviation, and inscribed a magnificent chapter in the history of the fight against poverty.

II. The National Capacity for Good Governance Makes Massive Social Projects Possible

In the course of modernization, it is not uncommon to see social projects that use state power to alleviate poverty, but it is rare for them to succeed. Having eliminated absolute poverty by 2020, China is well on its way to eradicate relative poverty and achieve common prosperity. An important reason for the success of this massive social project is China’s strong national capacity for good governance.

The national capacity for good governance is the capacity of the state to take appropriate measures to conduct effective governance and achieve set goals for the purpose of satisfying the people’s desire for a better life. It consists of three interlinked dimensions: the will to improve human conditions, the appropriate means to do so, and the achievement of results that enhance human welfare. Poverty eradication undoubtedly represents one of the noblest desires of human society, but various means are required to make effective poverty governance possible. On the basis of the noble desire to eradicate poverty, accompanied by the corresponding capabilities for effective poverty governance outcomes, a national capacity for good governance can be established. This includes the following five specific capabilities:

1. National mobilization capacity

The national mobilization capacity is the ability to mobilize all resources to the maximum extent possible to change the poverty situation. Any action needs the necessary resources to be successful. The greater the resources, the greater the likelihood of achieving the objective. But resources are always dispersed, so they need to be mobilized and pooled for particular

11 The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *Poverty Alleviation: China’s Experience and Contribution*, p. 59.

purposes. The state is a public authority; no other organization in a country can mobilize and pool resources as the state system does. The huge social project of poverty eradication can only be implemented by the state through extensive and intensive mobilization to concentrate the necessary resources.

First and foremost, the national mobilization capacity involves the decision-making intentions and ability of national leaders. This determines the breadth and depth of mobilization, as well as the degree and direction of resource gathering. Starting from 1949, China started to construct modernization, but at the same time it was challenged by the handling of relations between various domains. The initial industrial accumulation of late-comers to modernization tend to derive from agriculture. The early days of the PRC saw a guideline laid down that gave priority to industry, with agriculture as the foundation. While priority was given to industry, agriculture remained an important sector, and a policy of accelerating agricultural development was proposed. Under this policy, even when faced with a severe scarcity of resources, China did its best to provide necessary resources to the rural areas and consolidate agriculture as the foundation of the economy through extensive mobilization. This avoided sacrificing agriculture to development and the ensuing overall disaster of mass poverty for the peasants.

For mass poverty to be eradicated in the context of low-level industrialization is inconceivable. However, poverty eradication has always been an important goal in China's policy-making. In 1978, Chinese reform was started in countryside with the major objective of eradicating poverty. Deng Xiaoping stated that "We introduced the reform and opening up policy first in the economic sphere, beginning with the countryside. Why did we start there? Because that is where 80 percent of China's population lives. An unstable situation in the countryside would lead to an unstable political situation throughout the country. If the peasants did not shake off poverty, it would mean that China remained poor."¹² Guided by this thinking, China implemented a number of policies conducive to the development of agriculture and rural areas. In the course of the rapid development of industrialization and urbanization, a top priority was assigned to issues related to agriculture, rural people and rural areas (*sannong*), and these have also been major concerns of the No. 1 Central Document of the Communist Party Central Committee in many years.

In step with reform and opening up, rapid modernization did not cause an extensive decline in rural areas and the numbers of the rural poor was significantly reduced. However, due to an imbalance in natural conditions and regional development, even by the time of the 18th National Congress of Communist Party of China in 2012, according to the new poverty alleviation standards China still had 122 million people living in poverty.¹³ Given this situation, the Party Central Committee set new goals and tasks for the fight against

12 Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3, p. 237.

13 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution*, p. 9.

poverty, emphasizing the need to “mobilize all the forces of the Party and the nation to win the battle against poverty.”¹⁴ The 19th National Congress of Communist Party of China, in 2017, then took comprehensive deployment of targeted poverty alleviation as a major battle; it focused on the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, concentrated resources on the elimination of deep poverty, and dedicated itself to winning the war on poverty. Thanks to this extensive and intensive mobilization, China has achieved poverty eradication on time.

2. National organizational capacity

This is the capacity of a state to organize dispersed efforts in order to target poverty governance. An organization is a social entity with a clear goal orientation and structural design and a consciously coordinated system of activities. Any social project has to be carried out through the power of organizations. The stronger the organization, the greater the likelihood that the social project will achieve its goal. The state is the largest and strongest of all organizational units. A high level of societal organization makes possible the concentration of effort via the state to achieve the desired goals. In China, the success of the massive social project of poverty eradication has depended to a large extent on the strong organizational capacity of the state.

The Communist Party of China (CPC) has made the organization of workers and peasants one of its major missions, and has placed great emphasis on eliminating poverty through organizational measures. In 1943 in his essay “Get Organized!” Mao Zedong commented that “Among the peasant masses a system of individual economy has prevailed for thousands of years, with each family or household forming a productive unit. This scattered, individual form of production is the economic foundation of feudal rule and keeps the peasants in perpetual poverty”; and “We can organize all the forces of the people into a great army of labour. This is the only road to liberation for the people, the only road from poverty to prosperity.”¹⁵ Since 1949, the CPC has organized the scattered peasants, helped poor peasants overcome difficulties and ensured their basic survival through the efforts of collective organizations. For example, the “five-guarantee household” system was implemented in collective organizations, so that those who lacked the ability to work could enjoy some livelihood protection.

Specialized government organizations have been established to target poverty eradication. In 1986, the State Council Leading Group for the Economic Development of Poverty-stricken Areas was formed; this was subsequently renamed the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development in 1993. Under this leading group, Leading Group Offices of Poverty Alleviation and Development (the “Poverty Alleviation Offices”) were set up by the people’s governments from the county level up, where they were in charge of poverty alleviation-related policy formulation, planning and implementation.

14 Xi Jinping, *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, vol. II, p. 83.

15 Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 3, pp. 931, 932.

Poverty eradication thus became the responsibility of specialized government organizations. The establishment of these offices played a significant role in the targeted reduction and elimination of poverty. When absolute poverty was eliminated, the Poverty Alleviation Offices were renamed the Rural Revitalization Administration, with the aim of consolidating the achievements of poverty eradication.

3. National transformation capacity

This is the capacity of the state to transform natural and social conditions to root out the reproduction of deep-seated poverty. In a sense, human history is the history of the fight against poverty, but its success has been slow and limited. An important reason is that only the poverty situation has been targeted, with no massive eradication of the root causes of poverty. Only by fundamentally changing the natural and social conditions that cause poverty can we eliminate poverty and at the same time avoid its reproduction. Eliminating the root causes of poverty requires the fundamental transformation of the natural and social conditions through the power of the state. It is precisely its remarkable national transformation capacity that has enabled China to achieve its great success in the massive social project of eliminating the causes of poverty.

One of the main causes of human poverty lies in natural conditions. Since 1949, the state has led the farming population to transform their natural conditions in order to get rid of poverty. Water conservancy is the lifeblood of agriculture. During the unified collective management period, peasant farmers worked on farms during the busy season and built water conservancy projects during the slack season, thus greatly improving the conditions of agricultural production. When the state's economic power was still weak, it advocated self-reliance and hard work and encouraged and organized farmers to transform their natural conditions. Many nature-transforming model projects, such as the Red Flag Canal and Dazhai, were thus completed. Once national strength was enhanced, China encouraged large-scale infrastructure construction, especially road transport. China's poor are concentrated in the western region, especially in mountainous areas. One of the major causes of their poverty is the lack of convenient transportation, hence the saying that "If you want to get rich, first build a road." Through the implementation of the Western Development Strategy and the Connections to Every Village Project (Extending Radio and TV Broadcasting Coverage to Every Village), China has greatly improved the transportation conditions in poor areas since 2000.

Poverty refers to the lack of the means of subsistence, the access to which depends on the means of production. Differences in possession of the means of production leads to a gap between rich and poor, thus creating societal poverty, which can only be solved by transforming social conditions. In agricultural societies, land is the basic means of production, and it was different degrees of possession of land that created rich and poor peasants. Countries that have crossed the threshold of modernization face the task of reducing poverty through land reform. As early as the revolutionary period, the

CPC, realizing the vital importance of the land issue, launched a land revolution in the countryside. After assuming power, it initiated large-scale land reform, which assigned the long-desired land to the vast number of peasant farmers who had little or no land. Making sources of livelihood available for them eliminated the main cause of peasant poverty. After 1949, the state carried out socialist transformation of agriculture and established the collective ownership of the means of production, which became the basic system in rural China. The system ensures that all peasant farmers can be masters of their land, thus providing a basic institutional guarantee that avoids the poverty into which the landless have been plunged throughout history.

Since 1978, China has continued to innovate its system through rural reform to stimulate the initiative, enthusiasm and creativity of farmers for the creation of their own happiness, thus generating a strong inherent impetus for poverty eradication. It is rural reform that has broken through the long-standing institutional barriers of the urban-rural dual structure, enabling farmers to engage in non-agricultural industries. This has not only provided abundant human resources for industrialization, but also created important conditions for rural poverty eradication. Since reform and opening up, more than half of Chinese farmers' income has come from non-agricultural industries.

4. National development capacity

This is the ability of a state to alleviate poverty in a sustainable way by promoting economic and social development. Poverty is a dynamic process. In addition to subsistence poverty, which is caused by temporary difficulties, there is also developmental poverty, which is caused by insufficient economic development. Regardless of the kind of poverty, its eventual alleviation can only come by creating more wealth through economic development; economic development thus becomes the basis for poverty eradication and the most important foundation for this massive social project, whose implementation can only be promoted through the large-scale promotion of economic development by the state.

Even before it took power, the CPC had put forward the idea of shifting the focus of work to economic construction. The most important objective of rural reform was to mobilize farmers to rapidly develop production so as to reduce and eliminate poverty. China's poverty incidence has declined dramatically and continuously, largely thanks to the state's promotion of economic development, which allowed farmers to become economic agents in the task of "reducing and eliminating poverty" in the course of economic development.

5. National integration capacity

This represents the ability of the state to continuously narrow the gap between rich and poor through various policy initiatives to achieve integrated development. While people begin from the same historical starting point, variations in the pace of the development of productivity have inevitably brought about social differentiation, thus leading to the difference between rich and poor. Social differentiation is a dynamic process that results in both absolute and relative poverty. As a historical product, poverty has to be eliminated

through historical processes. However, history does not and cannot eradicate poverty naturally. The achievement of integrated development requires the integration of resources by state power and the adoption of various initiatives to reduce the gap between rich and poor. Thus national integration capacity is even more crucial to the massive social project of poverty eradication.

When the PRC was first founded, the CPC launched large-scale land reform throughout the country to ensure “land to the tillers” so that everyone could eat. Soon after the completion of the land reform, it started the socialist transformation of the means of agricultural production, with the important purpose of preventing some people from falling back into poverty due to individual ownership of the means of production. In the course of the collectivization of agriculture, agricultural production units continuously expanded with the aim of preventing the rich-poor gap through unified distribution on a larger scale. However, the excessive size of these agricultural production organizations inhibited farmers’ production incentives and resulted in everyone being equally poor. It was against this background that at the outset of reform and opening up, The CPC and the state put forward the policy of letting some people and regions get rich first. In the meantime, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly stressed that common prosperity was the ultimate goal. With the development of the economy, especially the social differentiation endogenous to the market economy, a gap has emerged between the rich and the poor, and the urban-rural disparity has also widened. Given this situation, the state has adopted various measures to narrow the gap between regions, between urban and rural areas, and between rich and poor members of society, and to gradually realize common prosperity through redistribution by the state and promotion of the third distribution. On entering the new era, China took a series of policy measures to fight against poverty, focusing on meeting the basic livelihood demands of the poor. “We would rather cut down on the number of major projects in favor of investment in poverty elimination; we would rather penalize short-term, partial or local interests to ensure the cause is well served and guaranteed; and we would rather slow the pace of economic growth to ensure the task of poverty alleviation is accomplished on schedule.”¹⁶ As the world’s largest developing country, China has taken a modernization path that ensures both rapid development and large-scale poverty reduction and both economic transformation and the elimination of absolute poverty. The massive social project of poverty eradication is entering a new stage on the way to common prosperity.

III. The Endogenous Growth of National Capacity for Good Governance

Good governance consists of two dimensions: one is good intentions, and the other is being good at governance. Historically, some large-scale projects can be found that were

16 The State Council Information Office of the People’s Republic of China, *Poverty Alleviation: China’s Experience and Contribution*, p. 48.

implemented through state power. However, they were not undertaken for the benefit of the masses, and were a sheer waste of manpower and money. The capacity that made such projects possible was not the capacity for good governance, nor was it sustainable; it could even result in the decline of the state and the impoverishment of the people. One example from Chinese history is the large edifices built for the emperor's personal use. At the same time, in modern times, many massive social projects based on good intentions have failed and even had disastrous consequences because of poor governance and the absence of proper leadership and institutional guarantees. The success of China's massive social project of poverty eradication lies both in its good intentions and being good at governance, which together give rise to a huge capacity for good governance. This capacity does not arise from nowhere, nor is it unknowable magic. Instead, it is an endogenous force deeply embedded in the political and social system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and a concrete manifestation of China's institutional strengths.

1. China's national capacity for good governance is internally defined by the socialist system

China's long history is imbued with the pursuit of poverty alleviation and with the development of a culture of helping the poor and needy. However, until 1949, the realization of this dream was rather limited, not least because of the system at the time. From the mid-nineteenth century, China was forced into a modernization process and faced with multiple choices. History chose socialism over all others, fundamentally because it reflects the desire of the Chinese people to eliminate poverty and live a happy life. Deng Xiaoping once pointed out that "Poverty is not socialism," "Socialism is about liberating the economy from its straitjacket, raising productivity, eliminating exploitation and economic polarization, and building common prosperity."¹⁷

Reform and opening up represents a great liberation of China's productive forces, leading to the rapid development of the national economy and the rapid alleviation of poverty. More importantly, when emphasizing economic development, China has attached great importance to preventing polarization and reducing the rich-poor gap. The massive social project of poverty eradication has two aspects: reducing poverty and moving towards common prosperity. The success of this project can only be possible under the socialist system. "If impoverished areas had remained poor and unchanged over the long term with no noticeable improvement of living standards, then China's socialist system would have no strength to speak of. This, too, would be contrary to socialism."¹⁸ The tremendous national capacity for good governance, as shown in the massive social project of poverty eradication, is endowed by and endogenous to the socialist system. The quality of this good governance is determined by the socialist system.

17 Deng Xiaoping, *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping*, vol. 3, p. 373.

18 Xi Jinping, "Speech at the Gathering to Mark China's Poverty Alleviation Accomplishments and Honor Model Poverty Fighters," p. 4.

2. *China's national capacity for good governance is vested in the "sacred mission" of the Communist Party of China*

No system comes into being naturally. It embodies the will of its human subjects. The Chinese people have chosen the socialist system, and the CPC represents the will of all the people. In this sense, the leadership of the CPC reflects the essential characteristics of socialism. Eliminating poverty is the "sacred mission" of the Party, one that provides an inexhaustible source of the national capacity for good governance.

The CPC is a political party guided by Marxism. While Marxism affirms that capitalism has created great wealth, it is sharply critical of the polarization caused by the capitalist system. Under the guidance of Marxism, the CPC has always remained true to its original aspiration and mission of seeking happiness for the Chinese people and rejuvenation of the Chinese nation. Since the PRC was set up, the CPC's painstaking exploration has paved a broad road of socialism with Chinese characteristics. The essence of this road is manifested in two dimensions: development of productivity and promotion of common prosperity. Such a road lays the foundation for the success of the massive social project of poverty eradication. The former prepares the material conditions for poverty eradication, while the latter sets the goal of moving towards common prosperity. The road of socialism with Chinese characteristics developed under leadership of the CPC is the way towards continuous poverty alleviation and common prosperity.

The will of the CPC is fully reflected through the state, and its leadership provides a fundamental source of China's national capacity for good governance. "The Communist Party of China has always regarded poverty alleviation as an important task for ensuring national peace and stability. It has highlighted poverty alleviation at the national level when setting its guidelines, principles and policies, and when formulating national plans for medium- and long-term development. The Party has pooled national resources to advance this cause."¹⁹ It is under the Party leadership that the national capacity has been endowed with good intentions with regard to eliminating poverty, and that it has been possible to promote the implementation of the poverty alleviation project and to achieve success.

3. *The leadership of the Communist Party of China provides the basic institutional guarantee for acquiring tremendous national capacity for good governance*

The massive social project of poverty eradication requires tremendous and sustainable national capacity for good governance. Such capacity needs to belong to an overarching force, and to be guaranteed by institutions and operational mechanisms with explicit goals. The CPC, which embodies the essential characteristics of socialism, is such an overarching force. Under its unified leadership, and through overall planning, powerful promotion and continuous perseverance, various forces have been brought together to produce strong national capacity for good governance, thus facilitating the implementation of the massive

19 The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, *Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution*, p. 49.

poverty eradication project.

The strong mobilization capacity is possible only under the leadership of the CPC. The Party won the victory of the revolution through extensive and intensive mobilization. Thereafter, it continued to attach great importance to mobilization. As the leading core and enduring governing party in China, the CPC can mobilize the people even more fully and effectively. It is because of this tremendous national capacity for mobilization that China's massive social project for poverty eradication has been successful. This capacity could only have been developed under the long-term unified leadership of the CPC. Since the founding of the PRC, the Party has been committed to eradicating poverty, and has mobilized the greatest possible efforts to achieve this goal. Especially at the critical moment of the fight against poverty, the most capable forces in the country were gathered together, committed to struggle and to win. The fact that under the leadership of one political party, formidable forces across a country were mobilized and concentrated to root out poverty within a limited period was an event unprecedented in human history. Underlying this success was the tremendous national capacity for good governance acquired through the CPC's leadership and mobilization mechanisms.

The CPC is highly organized, in terms of not only its own organization, but more importantly, its organization of society. “‘Mobilization’ and ‘organization,’ those twin slogans of Communist political action, define precisely the route to Party strength.”²⁰ It was through its greater organizational strength that the CPC achieved revolutionary success. After the founding of the PRC, the CPC, as the leading core of the Chinese people, acquired even greater organizational strength through its state power, and developed extraordinary national organizational capacity. It is thanks to this mighty national organizational capacity that the massive social project of poverty eradication has been successful. In the critical period of poverty eradication, in particular, the Party provided a strong guarantee for the organizational capacity of the state. As pointed out by General Secretary Xi Jinping, “We have upheld the centralized, unified leadership of the Central Committee over the fight against poverty, and planned and promoted related initiatives as part of the Five-sphere Integrated Plan and the Four-pronged Comprehensive Strategy. We have strengthened the working mechanism under which the central leadership makes overarching plans, provincial authorities assume overall responsibility, and city (prefecture) and county authorities take charge of implementation. We have worked to ensure that Party secretaries at the provincial, prefecture, county, township, and village levels tackled poverty alleviation as a major priority, and that all Party members have been mobilized in the fight. We have put in place a system whereby heads of Party and government bodies have taken full responsibility for the fight against poverty, with the heads of 22 provincial-level administrative units in the central and western regions signing pledges to the central authorities that they

20 Samuel P. Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*, p. 336.

would complete their objectives. Furthermore, we saw that Party and government chiefs of impoverished counties remained in the same posts while poverty eradication efforts were ongoing in their respective areas. We have worked to build up village organizations around the core role of village Party organizations, and to strengthen primary-level Party organizations so that they could more effectively lead the people in shaking off poverty. We have concentrated capable personnel on the main battlefields of the fight against poverty, assigning 255,000 work teams and more than three million first secretaries and officials to villages nationwide, where they work on the front lines alongside nearly two million township officials and millions of village officials.”²¹ This tremendous organizational capacity would be impossible without the leadership of the CPC.

Mao Zedong once commented that “We are not only good at destroying the old world, we are also good at building the new.”²² It is in the historical process of destroying the old world and building a new one that the Party acquired a strong capacity for national transformation. Unlike other political forces, the CPC’s destruction of the old world of humiliation and poverty was only done to prepare conditions for the realization of its goal of building a new world where the people could live happy lives. To build a new world, it is necessary to use state power to transform natural and social conditions, thus leading to a strong national transformation capacity. In areas where natural conditions are very harsh and unsuitable for human habitation, it is unimaginable that poverty could have been eliminated in a relatively short period of time without the intervention of the state. Without such state-led large-scale socialist transformation, it would have been difficult to establish a guaranteed and sustainable basic system for the survival of the Chinese people. China underwent acute economic hardships and tortuous progress for a period after the founding of the PRC and peasant farmers then lived in poverty. Nevertheless, this poverty was caused by policies rather than being institutional. Policy-related poverty, as the result of policy deviations, can be alleviated through policy adjustments, whereas institution-related poverty is caused by unreasonable systems. The socialist system provided the basic institutional guarantee for promoting the massive social project of poverty eradication.

Only under the leadership of the CPC can strong national development capacity be developed. The problem of poverty is fundamentally caused by inadequate development of productivity. It is only through continuous development of productivity that it is possible to create the basic conditions for poverty eradication. After the founding of the PRC, the country met with problems of economic development. Fortunately, the CPC in time shifted its focus to economic construction, and took on two characteristics in its economic development: one was giving full respect to the laws of economic development and valuing the people’s spirit of initiative and enthusiasm in order to promote economic development;

21 Xi Jinping, “Speech at the Gathering to Mark China’s Poverty Alleviation Accomplishments and Honor Model Poverty Fighters,” p. 12.

22 Mao Zedong, *Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, vol. 4, p. 1439.

the other was giving full play to the state's role in macro-guidance and regulation in leading economic growth. Since reform and opening up, China has gradually implemented the socialist market economy. The market economy has a unique role to play in resource distribution, but it also has some inherent deficiencies. These include the rich-poor gap caused by social differentiation, a gap that can only be effectively remedied through state power. Therefore, the market and the state can go hand in hand to generate strong national development capacity and facilitate the implementation of the massive social project of poverty eradication. China's remarkable national development capacity featuring the collaboration of the market and the state has been possible under the leadership of the CPC, which fully recognizes not only the great power of the market, but also the indispensable role of the government in the development of the market economy. This understanding comes from the fact that by facilitating economic development, the CPC aims at eliminating poverty and benefiting all the people.

This strong national integration capacity is only possible under the leadership of the CPC. Poverty has both absolute and relative dimensions. During the transformation from a traditional agrarian society to a modern industrial society, absolute and relative poverty overlap, with the urban-rural disparity being a striking problem. Because of the economic backwardness of the countryside, the poor tend to be concentrated in traditional rural areas; this is a common problem modern societies have to address. Political measures go beyond those of the market and society; they represent an integration capacity solely owned by the state. That is, the state adopts various measures to integrate a divided society in order to narrow the urban-rural gap, reduce and eliminate poverty, and reestablish social unity. Generally, the modernization process starts with economic development, and when the ensuing social differentiation results in the eruption of social consequences, national integration comes to the fore. It was because of the grave economic crisis of capitalism in the 1930s that the capitalist countries began to introduce massive welfare policies and develop the capacity for national integration. At the time of its rapid economic development stage, China already attached great importance to national integration. In the course of industrialization and urbanization, the issues of agriculture, the farmers and rural areas have become a top priority for the CPC and the state, which have therefore taken active measures to close the gap between urban and rural areas and to reduce and eliminate poverty, thus creating a huge capacity for national integration. This integration capacity comes from the leadership of the Party. As was explicitly put forward in the Report to 19th National Congress of the CPC, what China now faces is the contradiction between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. This unbalanced development involves both the imbalance in urban and rural development and the gap between rich and poor members of society. With the completion of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, China has embarked on a new journey of constructing a modern socialist country. Correspondingly, the implementation of the

massive social project of poverty eradication has also entered a new stage.

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