

The Meaning of a Better Life for a New Era

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Abstract: The essence of a better life is a state of life with common values satisfying itself, which has been vividly explained by ancient sages at home or abroad. A better life in the new era should be people-oriented, comprehensive, qualitative, shared, and developmental. A better life in the new era aims to enable the people to live a better life and achieve common prosperity, social fairness and justice for all. The Communist Party of China ought to stay true to its founding mission, keep its mission firmly in mind, and to insist on meeting the people's needs for a better life. "As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the principal contradiction facing Chinese society has become the one between unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life." [1] What is a better life is an important topic of The Times worth discussing. To understand the essence of the better life, we must first define the meaning of "better". "Mei" means "an image found and created by people in nature, society, material and spirit, which reflects the essential power of human beings, and which is pleasing or desirable". "Hao" means "beautiful", "Good" meaning. [2] The word "beautiful" is often used to describe abstract things like life and aspirations. Through presenting the discussion and definition of the better life by scholars at home and abroad, this paper explores the essential connotation of the better life, so as to explore the profound implication of the better life in the new era and lay a theoretical foundation for the further creation of a better life.

1. The Interpretation and Definition of the Better Life by Ancient Sages

Ancient Chinese sages had many aspirations for a better life. The Confucian Book of Rites and Great Harmony describes the ideal world of Confucius, in which there is no war and everyone lives in harmony, with ample food and clothing, but it is difficult to achieve when everyone is selfish. Tao Yuanming, a pastoral poet, described a peaceful, happy, free and equal life in the Peach Blossoms Land in his novel *The Peach Blossoms Land*, which connected reality with ideal state and expressed the author's ideal of pursuing a better life and dissatisfaction with the real life. The Tang and Song poems also richly depict the beautiful scenes of countryside and nature, expressing the lofty feelings of the ancients, the pursuit of ideals and the unrestrained attitude towards life.

Ancient Western sages also had a different understanding of the better life. The ancient Greek philosopher Socrates regards "perfection" as his lifelong idea and highest requirement. His student Plato systematically expounded the concept of justice in *The Republic*, designed and looked forward to the blueprint of the ideal country in his heart, and proposed that justice could be truly realized in the Republic. Aristotle's "supreme good" elaborated the ideal state form, which became the model for the state system and political rule in later generations. Utopia proposed by Thomas More is the best society in human consciousness. Humanistic psychologist Carl Rogers thought, "a man in completely free state can follow one's inclinations, let your entire body and mind to select a development direction of life, which is a way to improve the life, and he was able to freely walk along this direction, walk on the path he has chosen. When people are in the life processes of this, his life is good life" [3]. Utilitarianism regards interests as the principle and measure to measure a better life. Bentham believes that "when we approve or disapprove any kind of behavior, we should depend on whether the behavior increases or decreases the happiness of the person concerned" [4].

The "view of life" of Marx and Engels is based on dialectical materialism and historical

materialism and it is understood through man. In his early work, *Manuscript of Economics and Philosophy* in 1844, Marx discussed the great significance of labor to the progress and development of human civilization. “The whole so-called world history is nothing but the birth process of man through man's labor” [5], and man creates wealth and all social life through labor. It also explains that human nature is a free and conscious activity, namely labor. Therefore, labor lays the realistic foundation for the realization of a better life. Only in labor can human nature be realized, and only in labor can a better life be realized. Published in 1848, the communist manifesto, Marx and Engels put forward people's free all-round development theory. The theory says “the free development of everyone is the condition of all people's free development” [6], pointing out the realistic conditions of a better life and from the angle of the social development and progress, defining happiness as that Truth is “person's behavior with his or her psychological state, including the real things, human nature, the lives of others, and even the lives of animals and so on, which is a kind of one state when the psychological desire is satisfied, and is a long time of life satisfaction and happy mood, feeling life has great fun and hoping this feeling will last forever” [7]. Based on the previous criticism of human society, Marx and Engels depicts the communist society blueprint in the better life: “in the communist society, nobody has the special scope of activity, but can develop themselves in any department. The society regulates the whole production; therefore we can do things as we like. We can follow one interest today, and do another tomorrow. For example, we can go hunting in the morning, and go fishing in the afternoon, engaged in caring for animal in the evening, and engaged in critical thing after supper. Such a way of life makes me not always a hunter, fisherman, the shepherd or critics.” [8] The “view of life” from Marx and Engels lays the foundation for the understanding of our better life.

2. The True Meaning of the Better Life

It is the realistic premise of the all-round development of human beings to create the environment for survival and development. The construction of a better life is a way of life consistent with the nature of human beings. It meets the needs of human beings through the continuous development of production and reflects a better living state. From the individual point of view, there are one thousand Hamlets. Because in one thousand readers' eyes, people's understanding of the better life will be based on their different backgrounds, levels of education, and expectations and ideals of personal lives, it is difficult to set up a unified standard, which both contain material abundance and spiritual richness. The better life is based on the understanding of the word "beautiful", which not only includes each person's personality with different understanding of “beautiful”, but also contains basic commonalities. Whether it is the Utopia in Plato's mind, the Great Harmony in Confucius's eyes, or the Xanadu in Tao Yuanming's eyes, all of them cannot be separated from the vision of national stability, social harmony, and peaceful life and work for people, as well as the pursuit of justice, fairness, equality and freedom. At the same time, "the essence of human is not an abstract thing inherent in a single person, but is the total sum of all social relations in the reality” [9]. Therefore, it is unavoidably biased that one limits the definition of a better life only to the perspective of individuals. An individual's better life cannot be separated from the overall environment of the country and society. Without national unity, social stability, fair distribution and equal rights, an individual's better life cannot be reflected. Therefore, it is necessary to define the better life from the perspective of community. To sum up, the better life is a kind of value recognition from the main body (including individual and community, especially the community). For the individual, the better life is a life condition that the main body keeps pursuing a satisfaction of its own life; for the community, the better life is a life condition that the value sharing of common life is satisfied.

3. The Meaning of the Better Life of A New Era

With the arrival of the new era, the people are full of expectations for a better life, which reflects their common pursuit of values and expectations for life and has a series of common features.

First, the commonality of people. “The people's aspiration for a better life is what we are striving for.” [10] The better life is the better life of the whole people, not limited to the better life of separate individuals. The better life should be understood from the perspective of people as a whole. However, this does not mean that the individual's better life is not important. It is the part that constitutes the people's better life, and it is the individual's better life fragments that constitute and sublimate the people's better life. The people's better life is the common value that individuals pursue for the better life. The character of the people also embodies the people-centered idea, that is, the creation process of a better life should always be based on the needs of the people as the starting point and ending point.

Second, the commonality of comprehensiveness. At its 18th National Congress of Chinese Communist Party, a five-pronged overall plan for advancing the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics is formulated. This is a scientific answer to the important questions such as what kind of development we will achieve and how we will achieve it. The starting point and the ultimate goal of “what kind of development we should achieve and how we should achieve it” are to meet the needs of the people for a better life. Therefore, a better life should be reflected in five dimensions, namely, the all-round development of economy, politics, culture, society and ecological civilization. From an economic point of view, a better life should first of all be based on abundant material conditions. Of course, the abundance of material life is only one part of whole process during the pursuit of happy life. The problems of whether the life is full, spiritual world is rich or personal value is realized and so on are also the components of a better life. From a political point of view, a better life requires good social institutions and a sound legal system to ensure the realization of people's rights. From the cultural point of view, a rich and colorful cultural life is indispensable too. From a social perspective, social fairness, justice and healthy development have a direct impact on the realization of a better life. From the ecological point of view, the concept of “clear water and green mountains are gold and silver mountains” has been deeply rooted in people's hearts, and the quality of ecological environment directly affects people's quality of life.

The third commonality is quality. The reason why better life is wonderful is its feature of high quality. “Our people have an ardent love for life. They wish to have better education, more stable jobs, more satisfying incomes, more reliable social security, better medical and health services, more comfortable housing conditions and a more beautiful environment. They want their children to grow up better, work better and live better.” [10] Having a better life is different from having better material conditions. It is not limited to meeting the needs of people's food and clothing. It refers to more satisfying living conditions, more diverse lifestyles, more valuable life aspirations, and a richer spiritual world. On the one hand, at present, China's economy has been developed from rapid growth to quality growth; development mode and economic structure have been transformed. The ultimate goal of promoting the supply side's structural reform, carrying out new development concept and building the new development pattern is to liberate and develop the productive forces, to activate all social creativity and development, to achieve a higher quality, more efficient, more fair, more sustainable development, to accomplish high quality of the material living conditions, and to meet people's better life yearning. On the other hand, by carrying forward the fine traditional Chinese culture, inheriting the revolutionary culture, and promoting the development of advanced socialist culture, we strive to build the spiritual home of the Chinese nation. The fulfillment of the people's spiritual world is also an essential value element for a better life and reflects the high quality of a better life.

Fourth, the commonality of sharing. A better life is one shared by the people. It is an ideal life jointly built and shared by people with certain regional characteristics and values. The ideal life shared by all Chinese people within the scope of the Chinese nation is not the better life of individual people or regions, but the socialist essence of “common prosperity.” It is reflected in the world, that is, the ideal life pursued and shared by a community with a shared future for mankind with common development interests. Sharing means addressing issues of fairness and justice in a scientific and rational way, promoting fairness in distribution, diminishing the income difference, and narrowing the gap between urban and rural areas and regions. In this way, can the benefits of

economic and social development be shared by the people. Sharing is the premise of building, of course, any behavior such as “profiting by other people’s toil” or “reaping where one has not sown” backfires on the all-round development of human beings, not to mention sharing a better life. Only using the method of “teaching people how to achieve what they strive for” and fully exploring the people’s enthusiasm, initiative and creativity could “make the pie bigger”, “realize reasonable sharing of the pie” and finally meeting people's happy life yearning.

The fifth commonality is development. The better life is an evolving one, not a static one. In terms of time, the standard of a better life is different in every era. At present, great historic achievements have been made in completing the building of a moderately prosperous society in all respects, and victory has been won in the battle against poverty. However, the standard of a better life cannot stop there. From the standard point of view, the standard of “better life” is a dynamic process, changing with time, region, social development level, population quality and other factors. It should be viewed from the perspective of development. The evaluation of a better life should, in the long run, also be carried out according to the various needs of different time. The People's Republic of China has been founded for 70 years, and has been implementing reform and opening up policy for 40 years, during which China's economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological civilization get all-round development, but the needs of the people has not been completely filled by the development of productive forces. The development of the social progress prompted the arising of new contradiction, and the new contradiction is a result of people's “a better life consciousness awakening” brought by productivity development. How to solve the contradiction and how to achieve a better life are an important issue given to us by the era.

Since 1921, the Communist Party of China has led the Chinese people in their pursuit of a better life. In the course of its century-long struggle, the Party has always remained true to its original aspiration and kept its mission firmly in mind, integrated the basic tenets of Marxist theory with the realities of China's revolution and development, and worked hard for a better life. As socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, the Communist Party of China continues to lead the people to unswervingly follow the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics and to meet the people's needs for a better life. The meaning of a better life in the new era is to enable the people to live a better life, achieve common prosperity for all, and achieve social equity and justice. Since the opening of the 18th National Congress of CPC, General Secretary Xi Jinping has put forward the important proposition of “enabling the people to live a better life”, which is specifically about the fundamental purpose of serving the people and directly about “the people’s aspiration for a better life”. Common prosperity is the essence of socialism, the fundamental value of socialism, and the actual condition for the people to live a better life. Marxism is committed to the all-round development of every human being; the socialist system provides political and institutional guarantees for the development of everyone; and everyone enjoys the rights and opportunities to grow up with the country and era together. In the common pursuit of the Chinese dream for the great renewal of the Chinese nation, all Chinese people need to realize social equity and justice. To this end, the Communist Party of China will stay true to its original aspiration, keep its mission firmly in mind, promote all-round human development and social progress, strive for common prosperity for all the people, and meet the people's ever-growing needs for a better life. The new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics will be “an era in which the people of all our ethnic groups work together to create a better life and gradually achieve common prosperity for all.” [1]

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