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Equality Principle and Sharing Principle – G.A. Cohen's Principles of Justice

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Abstract. The release of *A Theory of Justice* by Rawls turned justice into a heated topic in contemporary political philosophy. Based on Marxist viewpoints, G. A. Cohen pointed out that Rawls' principles of justice tolerate inequality and degrade the basic standards of justice. Cohen put forward his own justice standards made up of the equality principle and the community sharing principle, with "equality of access to advantage" as the core idea. He held that society should eliminate involuntary disadvantages for all individuals, and make up for the limits of the equality principle through the reciprocal community sharing rule. Meanwhile, he stressed the vital role of a just social ethos in realizing true justice. Cohen's justice standards are essentially a further development of Rawls' theory of justice. Even so, they break away from the core logic of historical materialism, discuss distributive justice in an abstract way without linking to real historical and social relations, and thus carry fundamental defects. Still, Cohen's principles of justice offer important theoretical references for building fairness and justice under socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, and bring positive value for promoting social equity across the whole society.

Keywords: G. A. Cohen, distributive justice, principles of justice, Rawls

1. Introduction

Justice is a value pursued by all human beings since ancient times. Social fairness and justice are necessary conditions to realize common prosperity, and also an essential part of socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. To keep social fairness and justice, people need guidance from clear principles of justice. To set proper justice standards that fit socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era, we must learn from valuable research results on justice principles from both ancient and modern times, China and foreign countries.

Since John Rawls published *A Theory of Justice* in the 1970s, the study of justice has become a central subject in contemporary political philosophy. The justice standards raised by Rawls have triggered heated debates among scholars holding new liberalism, Marxism and many other ideological standpoints. G. A. Cohen (referred to as Cohen below) adopted the perspective of analytical Marxism and launched fundamental criticism toward Rawls' justice principles. Taking Rawls' theory as his debating target, Cohen created a set of justice standards that he believed fit socialist society. This theoretical system provides important references for us to further discuss the proper justice principles for socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

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2. "Rescuing justice and equality": the theoretical background of Cohen's justice principles

Cohen's justice standards came into being as a critical response to Rawls' justice theory.

Rawls built his justice view on the social contract theory, and stated: "All social values ... are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone's advantage" [1]. This general idea can be split into two specific principles. The first one is the equal liberty principle. The second one combines the fair equality of opportunity principle and the difference principle. The equal liberty principle mainly deals with political rights and related issues. It requires that "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive scheme of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar scheme of liberties for others" [1]. Social institutions should guarantee citizens the widest range of basic freedoms, and every person shares the same limit on personal freedom within this range. The second principle covers the distribution of social wealth. It demands that social and economic inequalities must meet two rules: first, such inequalities work for the greatest benefit of the least advantaged people; second, all positions and jobs stay open to everyone under the condition of fair equality of opportunity [1]. The first rule here is the difference principle, which focuses on the interests of the least advantaged groups and mainly applies to social and economic fields. The second rule is the fair equality of opportunity principle, which ensures that all posts and social ranks remain accessible to all people.

Rawls' justice principles stand as the goal that the social contract aims to reach. To form such a contract, people need to enter a specific hypothetical state called the original position, which contains four key parts. First, people live in a world with moderate scarcity of resources. They need social cooperation to gain maximum benefits, yet they do not plan to seize interests from others by force. Second, to divide these shared gains, people need public and fair justice standards. These rules must be general and suitable for all people, and they set clear orders for different interest demands. The final distribution results are produced under the guidance of this set of principles. Third, the veil of ignorance hides all personal information, information about other people and information across generations. People only keep general facts about human society, so they can divide primary goods in a rational and reasonable way. Fourth, all people in the original position act as rational individuals. They will make consistent choices before and after the veil of ignorance is lifted, strictly follow the rules of the contract, and never harm or increase the benefits of other people without proper reasons.

Rawls' two justice principles finally aim to realize liberty, equality and fraternity. He gave three interpretations to explain the meaning of the difference principle. First, the difference principle is not a compensation rule. It does not ask society to remove all gaps between people caused by natural talent or social status. Even so, it can produce compensation effects in practice. The favorable natural conditions of better-off people are treated as shared public assets, and the difference principle arranges these advantages to create more benefits for the least advantaged groups. Second, the difference principle carries reciprocal value. It helps build a stable social cooperation system: on one hand, every person's well-being is closely connected to the whole cooperation system; on the other hand, people can only cooperate with each other when this system satisfies reasonable standards. Under such cooperation, better-off people gain personal benefits while improving the living conditions of disadvantaged groups at the same time. Third, the difference principle matches the idea of fraternity. It can be explained as a clear statement: "We do not wish to have greater advantages unless this works for the good of those who are less well off" [1]. This meaning corresponds to the natural understanding of fraternity. When members of society pursue their own

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legal interests, they will naturally care for weaker groups. In this way, Rawls' two justice principles correspond to the three core values: liberty, equality and fraternity.

Rawls' two justice principles are not parallel to each other. They follow a lexical order. Rawls put forward two priority rules to explain this order. The first priority rule sets liberty as the highest value: "Liberty can only be restricted for the sake of liberty itself" [1]. This rule covers two situations. For one thing, any restriction on personal freedom must strengthen the overall system of liberties. For another, if some citizens hold less freedom than others, such unequal freedom must be agreed by these citizens themselves. The first principle can only be limited by its own standards. Unequal freedom can only be used to improve the situation of citizens who enjoy fewer liberties. The second priority rule confirms that justice comes before efficiency and welfare. It also includes two cases. First, any inequality in opportunity must bring more chances to disadvantaged groups. Second, if society sets an extremely high wealth storage rate for future generations, it will create heavy burdens for current people. Therefore, the design of such a storage rate must take measures to reduce these burdens. In short, the two justice principles follow a strict lexical order: the first principle always takes priority over the second one. Within the second principle, the fair equality of opportunity principle ranks higher than the difference principle.

The justice principles finally work on the basic structure of society through four continuous stages. The first stage is to confirm the core justice standards. The second stage is constitutional design. Rawls wrote that "a just constitution is a just procedure intended to produce just outcomes" [1]. The political process controlled by the constitution acts as this procedure, and the justice principles serve as the standard to design the procedure and set the best institutional arrangements. The third stage is legislation. All laws, regulations and social policies must not only satisfy the justice principles, but also meet all limits written in the constitution. The fourth stage is practical enforcement. Judges and administrative staff apply the written rules to specific cases, and all citizens follow these rules in daily life. These four ordered stages describe the whole process through which justice principles play their social roles.

Cohen argued that Rawls' difference principle actually permits social inequality, and Rawls' constructivist research path weakens the core status of justice. Cohen intended to "rescue" justice and equality by solving these two critical defects.

As mentioned above, Rawls agreed that better-off people do not deserve their natural advantages and social status. Cohen named this idea the moral arbitrariness claim. A person's family background and natural talent come from random luck, and people should not gain extra benefits based on such accidental factors. However, the wording of Rawls' difference principle creates incentives for privileged groups. The rule states that people should maximize the welfare of the most advantaged representative person, on the condition that the welfare of all previous N-1 representative people stays equal [1]. This rule allows better-off people to make extra profits from their natural advantages, which directly breaks the moral arbitrariness claim raised by Rawls himself.

Cohen also pointed out that the constructivist path used by Rawls lowers the position of justice. On one side, this theoretical method turns justice principles into regulatory rules rather than basic standards. Rawls' constructivism builds and proves justice standards through procedural practical rational reasoning, without relying on metaphysics or moral realism. This research method pays more attention to practical results than the essential nature of justice. As a result, its justice principles act as adjustable social rules instead of fundamental moral standards. On the other side, this theory makes justice sensitive to factual conditions. It requires justice to meet three extra standards: Pareto optimality, publicity and stability. These extra values put unnecessary limits on justice, which has no natural connection with them. First, the Pareto improvement made by

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constructivism on equal distribution reduces the fairness of resource allocation. People make decisions based on personal interests instead of pure justice. Second, constructivism demands justice to be clearly seen and fully recognized by the public to satisfy the publicity standard. However, some just acts exist outside public observation, such as legally punishing guilty criminals. Third, stability is an expected goal of regulatory rules, not an essential requirement of justice itself.

Based on these two fundamental flaws, Cohen believed Rawls' justice principles damage the core meaning of justice and cannot be called real fundamental principles. He argued that justice should be separated from regulatory rules to recover its status as a basic moral standard, and equality should receive more attention in theoretical research.

3. The equality principle and the community sharing principle — Cohen's standards of justice

Cohen stated that Rawls' justice principles are merely regulatory rules instead of basic justice standards. There exist essential differences between these two types of rules [2]. First, basic standards answer the philosophical question: what kind of regulatory rules should govern society? Regulatory rules answer the sociological question: what rules actually control social operation? Second, people recognize basic standards through moral intuition, and these standards cannot be derived from other rules. People cannot judge whether to adopt a basic standard based on its practical results. Regulatory rules come from national legal orders or social customs, and people choose to accept them because of their real social effects. Basic justice standards only focus on the pure definition of justice, while regulatory justice rules form when basic standards interact with specific social facts. Rawls' constructivist approach mixes up basic standards and regulatory rules without clear distinction.

With this judgment in mind, Cohen tried to form a set of justice theories that fully value equality and fit people's moral intuition. After studying three influential equalitarian theories — Dworkin's equality of resources, Arneson's equality of opportunity for welfare and Sen's capability equality — Cohen put forward the core idea of "equality of access to advantage" [3]. The term "advantage" refers to a broad mixed set of positive states, wider than resources or personal welfare. It covers material resources, personal happiness, satisfied needs and all other desirable living conditions [4]. When a person gains more advantages, their real life conditions improve, and this improvement does not depend on comparison with other people. The word "access" describes the real possession of desirable states. It includes not only opportunities people strive for through personal efforts, but also favorable conditions provided directly by the outside world without personal work, such as staying free from illness. "Equality of access to advantage" is the same idea as eliminating involuntary disadvantages. From this perspective, Cohen claimed that the core goal of justice is to remove all involuntary disadvantages faced by individuals.

Based on the idea of equality of access to advantage, Cohen created his own justice principles, taking Rawls' theory as his debating opponent.

Rawls set the abstract original position as the starting point of his justice principles. In contrast, Cohen focused on people's real social life and used the hypothetical scene of a camping trip as a miniature of society. He used his justice standards to solve possible conflicts inside this small group.

All people joining the camping trip carry their own personal goods, and no social ranks exist between them. Their cooperation rests on a shared agreement: every person gets roughly equal chances to show their talents or take a rest, while everyone makes contributions matching their own abilities. Cohen thought people in this scene would prefer to take collective control over all personal goods and divide work freely based on group needs, mainly for high efficiency and friendly partnership. Besides, people in this group would reject a camping trip ruled by market exchange and

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strict private ownership. Four typical unfair situations may appear under such a system. First, a person with outstanding skills gains more supplies than others, and demands extra goods as a reward for their talents. Second, someone accidentally finds valuable resources, claims full private ownership of these resources, and asks to reduce their work time or receive more supplies. Third, a person holding special knowledge gains access to rare resources, and charges other group members fees to share their knowledge. Fourth, people who inherit resources from previous generations enjoy much better experiences than others without extra personal efforts.

To solve these possible conflicts, Cohen designed the equality principle to guarantee equal opportunities for all people. This principle aims to "remove obstacles to opportunity that some people face and others do not, and sometimes obstacles created by the expanded opportunities enjoyed by more privileged people" [5].

Cohen divided the idea of equality of opportunity into three different forms. The first form is bourgeois equality of opportunity. It only removes limits caused by social status. These limits include formal status barriers created by unequal rights distribution, and informal barriers from social prejudice and harmful cultural ideas. The second form is left-liberal equality of opportunity. On the basis of the first form, it fights against unequal results caused by people's social backgrounds. This standard removes influences from family environment, so people's life outcomes only depend on their natural talent and personal choices. The third form is socialist equality of opportunity. It corrects disadvantages caused by natural talent and eliminates all involuntary disadvantages for every individual. After realizing socialist equality of opportunity, all gaps between people no longer come from natural talent, social power or family background, but only from different personal hobbies and voluntary choices. Cohen argued that only socialist equality of opportunity counts as the equality standard recognized by real justice.

Even socialist equality of opportunity still allows certain types of inequality. The most problematic type comes from random luck. Cohen used voluntary gambling to explain this inequality. If two people make a bet, the winner takes the loser's money, and society does not make up for the loser's losses. "Market gambling" shares similar logic with ordinary gambling. When people invest money or labor in different market fields, their gains or losses largely depend on random luck. People can choose to avoid personal gambling, yet market activities cannot be fully avoided, so market gambling also exists widely. When this luck-based inequality spreads to a serious degree, it will arouse public dissatisfaction and bring negative social effects. For this reason, Cohen created the community sharing principle to make up for the limits of the equality principle.

The community sharing principle contains two modes of mutual care. The first mode requires lucky people to avoid unreasonable complaints. If better-off people fall into the same difficult situation as disadvantaged groups due to accidental factors (such as family background or personal talent), they should not express dissatisfaction with the equal arrangement. The second mode is mutual reciprocity among the whole community. This idea stands in sharp contrast to market reciprocity. Market reciprocity builds on cash rewards, while community reciprocity rests on mutual needs between people and rejects market logic entirely. Cohen wrote: "I serve you not because I will receive some payment in return, but because you need or want my service, and you serve me for exactly the same reason" [5]. Mutual community reciprocity connects all members of society as a unified group.

Cohen believed his justice principles are both desirable and workable. They are desirable because under these standards, people coordinate with each other while keeping the right to make diverse personal choices. Besides, community sharing creates social friendship. It is not an all-or-nothing state, so people can reasonably expect to realize this value in society. The principles are workable

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for two reasons. First, human nature is not purely self-interested. People tend to act generously when interacting with other community members. Second, proper institutional design can support the practice of these principles. However, Cohen admitted that he failed to put forward specific institutional plans to carry out his ideas. He himself wrote: "The most important problem facing the socialist ideal is that we do not know how to design mechanisms that can make it operate" [5].

Though Cohen did not complete specific institutional designs, he added an important dimension ignored by Rawls: justice requires a social ethos that guides people's daily personal choices. If justice only works through the basic social structure and excludes personal decision-making, the justice standards will not restrict individual behavior inside this institutional system. People can act out of selfish motives, and privileged groups will chase private interests without limits, widening the gap between rich and poor groups further. Therefore, realizing justice needs a set of moral attitudes that control individual choices. Cohen defined a society's social ethos as a collection of shared feelings and attitudes [6]. On one hand, the social ethos forms moral rules that restrict all people's actions. Popular shared feelings and attitudes create moral cohesion, turning individual personal habits into common social customs, and personal moral pressure into public social pressure. On the other hand, the social ethos helps people form inner moral motivation to pursue justice, an effect that formal rules cannot achieve. A positive social ethos creates moral binding force and forms stable behavioral norms, guiding people's decision-making tendencies and final choices. Individuals who keep moral self-discipline will also strengthen the positive social ethos in return.

By criticizing and reflecting on Rawls' justice principles, Cohen built his own justice standards made up of the equality principle and the community sharing principle. This theory restores the core status of basic justice standards, expands the boundary of equal treatment, and adds the dimension of social ethos to make up for the limitations of relying only on social basic structures to realize justice. This theoretical exploration carries positive value and acts as a further development of Rawls' justice theory, yet it still contains obvious limitations.

4. Cohen's justice principles: a further development of Rawls' justice theory

Cohen launched deep criticism against Rawls and created justice principles with different standpoints and theoretical contents. These differences seem to separate the two theories completely, but they actually show close inner connections: Cohen's justice standards are a further development of Rawls' theory.

First, both Cohen's and Rawls' justice principles focus on the theme of distributive justice. Rawls' theory is a typical research on distributive justice. Cohen's attention to distributive justice came from his reflection on traditional Marxist theories. Traditional Marxist scholars paid more attention to class conflicts rather than distributive justice. They believed two irreversible historical trends would appear. First, the number of disadvantaged working-class people would keep growing, and their poor living conditions would worsen continuously, uniting workers into a powerful revolutionary force. Second, social productive forces would develop rapidly, and people could obtain all necessary materials directly from public supplies. Cohen argued that neither of these two trends had come true. On one hand, capitalism uses various methods to weaken the unity of the working class. On the other hand, uneven development of knowledge and technology plus global resource shortages prevent the arrival of a society with abundant supplies for all. Cohen tried to defend Marxist theories from a moral perspective, making the distribution of social benefits and burdens his core research subject. His whole set of justice principles revolves around distributive justice.

Second, Cohen's justice standards fix the defects of Rawls' theory and achieve theoretical progress on its foundation. The goal of "rescuing justice and equality" stands as the starting point of

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Cohen's research on justice. Rawls' constructivist research path turns justice principles into factual-sensitive regulatory rules, lowering their status as basic moral standards. Cohen held that people confirm basic justice standards through normative judgments on real social practice. Only by perfecting moral intuition about distributive justice can people reach the most fundamental definition of justice. Based on this logic, Cohen put forward the idea of equality of access to advantage and developed it into complete justice standards, recovering the position of justice as a basic moral standard. Besides, Rawls' justice principles permit certain social inequality and only realize left-liberal equality of opportunity. Cohen's theory aims to achieve socialist equality of opportunity, which reaches a deeper theoretical level and a higher degree of equal treatment. It forms a logical advancement beyond left-liberal equality of opportunity.

Third, Cohen's supplement on how justice principles take effect creates a more complete path to realize justice. Rawls' justice theory starts and ends with the basic social structure, which mainly refers to mandatory systems and laws. Rawls believed that under institutional structures guided by justice principles, people would naturally act in accordance with justice rules. Cohen thought this connection was not inevitable. Rawls' theory never sets moral requirements for people's inner motives. Cohen admitted the importance of mandatory formal rules, yet he pointed out that "apart from the usual habit of obeying its mandatory rules, the pressures that sustain informal structures lack coercive power" [6]. In many cases, the basic social structure depends more on unwritten customs and social norms connected closely with personal choices. This is why Cohen emphasized the importance of moral social ethos. A positive social ethos helps people form inner motivation to pursue justice and creates effective restrictions on individual daily behavior. This theoretical supplement fixes the defects of relying only on formal justice systems, allowing justice principles to work through both mandatory institutional structures and non-mandatory social norms. Even so, Cohen did not design matching institutional systems for his own justice principles.

Although Cohen tried to improve distributive justice standards from a Marxist perspective, he failed to stick to the core logic and basic viewpoints of historical materialism. This forms the fundamental limitation of his theory. He ignored the social and historical nature of justice, simplified real social relations into abstract concepts, and discussed distribution without linking to social production.

First, justice develops with historical progress. In *The German Ideology*, Marx pointed out that dominant ideas in society belong to the ruling class. The research on distributive justice itself appeared in the capitalist age, and it essentially serves the interests of the bourgeoisie. When criticizing Gilbert's natural justice theory, Marx explained the true meaning of justice: "The justice of transactions which go on between agents of production rests on the fact that these transactions arise as natural consequences from the relations of production." He also wrote: "They are just whenever they correspond to the mode of production and are adequate to it; they are unjust whenever they contradict it" [7]. For example, slavery is unjust under the capitalist mode of production, and cheating customers with fake goods also counts as unjust [8]. In short, justice is a product of historical development, and it matches the mode of production in a specific historical stage. This does not mean the capitalist mode of production and its distribution system hold eternal justice. Their justice depends on the historical legitimacy of capitalism itself. A distribution system matching a mode of production is only just when that mode of production stays in its rising historical stage and keeps historical legitimacy [9]. Once a mode of production declines and loses its historical rationality, its matching distribution system also becomes unjust.

Second, discussions on justice must start from real social relations. Marx wrote that human nature, in its realistic meaning, "is the ensemble of all social relations" [7]. Human beings are not

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abstract, isolated individuals. People have inseparable natural connections with each other and the whole society. Cohen used the camping trip as a miniature of real social life, hoping to find the core unequal gaps and socialist solutions through this scene. However, this hypothetical scene differs greatly from real society. It replaces rich and complex social relations with simplified interaction modes, making the connections between people one-sided. The camping trip model can only work in small groups, and Cohen himself could not figure out how to practice personal free choice together with equality and community sharing in a large-scale society. The partial social relations shown in this hypothetical scene cannot be extended to human society as a whole.

Third, distribution is only one part of the whole social production process. Discussing distribution without analyzing production is a one-sided approach. In the *Grundrisse (1857–1858)*, Marx explained that social production includes four connected links: production, consumption, distribution and exchange. Production acts as the logical starting point to discuss consumption, distribution and exchange, and the production mode of a specific historical period forms the historical starting point for all research on that age. Distribution is only one step of the whole production cycle. Marx wrote that "relations of distribution and modes of distribution are merely the reverse side of relations of production." "The structure of distribution is entirely determined by the structure of production, and distribution itself is a product of production." Besides, the distribution of production tools and the allocation of people into different production sectors "are contained within the production process itself and determine its structure. The distribution of products is obviously only a result of this primary distribution" [10]. For this reason, Marx clearly pointed out in *Critique of the Gotha Programme*: "It is also fundamentally wrong to make a great fuss about distribution and to put the main stress on it" [11].

In summary, Cohen's justice principles are a further development of Rawls' theory. They fix many defects of Rawls' standards, including the lowered status of basic justice principles, insufficient equal treatment and limited working channels of justice rules. Even so, Cohen's theory still discusses distribution and justice in an abstract way without linking to real production and historical development.

5. Contemporary enlightenment brought by Cohen's justice principles

Despite its various limitations, Cohen's research on justice principles still produces valuable theoretical achievements. Both its advantages and defects provide important enlightenment for us to explore proper fairness and justice standards fitting socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

First, we must study fairness and justice based on historical materialism, focusing on real human beings and real social relations. Cohen's fundamental defect lies in his departure from the core viewpoints of historical materialism. This reminds us that we cannot analyze justice without the perspective of historical materialism. From the view of historical materialism, the production of ideological concepts mixes with people's material practice. All thinking and spiritual communication come from people's material activities, including spiritual production in political and legal fields. Marx wrote that "we do not set out from what men say, imagine, conceive, nor from men as narrated, thought of, imagined, conceived, in order to arrive at men in the flesh; we set out from real, active men, and on the basis of their real life-process we demonstrate the development of the ideological reflexes and echoes of this life-process" [7]. Justice itself is a type of ideological concept built on people's material practice. No abstract or eternal justice exists outside specific historical backgrounds. Besides, all justice standards must take real people as the starting point and rest on social relations formed in practical activities. The theoretical premise of Marxist philosophy is "real

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individuals", people who live in real observable conditions and keep developing in specific historical environments [7], not abstract one-sided people existing only in imagination. Analyzing interactions between two abstract people and building justice principles on such a foundation without considering real life creates "the aesthetic illusion of Robinson Crusoe stories of all sizes" [10].

Second, realizing fairness and justice relies on the real foundation of economic development. Cohen originally wanted to break away from the so-called economic determinism in traditional Marxist theories and provide new ideas to solve social conflicts. However, his theoretical approach went too far to the opposite direction and broke away from core Marxist viewpoints. The contradictory movement between productive forces and relations of production forms the fundamental driving force of historical development. As an ideological concept, justice is restricted by this movement. Marx wrote that "men, developing their material production and their material intercourse, alter, along with this their real existence, their thinking and the products of their thinking" [7]. Realizing fair distribution and complete social justice cannot be finished in a short time. It must match the level of material production and communication, and go through different historical stages. Marx divided communist society into two stages with different distribution rules. In the first stage of communism, labor serves as the unified measuring standard for distribution. In the advanced stage of communism, labor becomes not only a necessary condition for production, but also people's primary personal need. The free and full development of every person creates conditions for the free and full development of all people, so distribution follows the rule "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs". China remains in the primary stage of socialism at present. Realizing social fairness and justice is decided by many factors, among which the level of economic and social development is the most important. Many unfair social phenomena in current China come from problems appearing during the development process [12]. Therefore, realizing fairness and justice cannot separate from economic growth. Without economic development, fair distribution becomes water without a source and a tree without roots [12]. Emphasizing economic development does not equal supporting economic determinism. We only stress that economic development plays a decisive role in the final analysis. While developing the economy, we also need to "speed up the formation of relations of production that better match new quality productive forces" [13].

Third, "eliminating involuntary disadvantages" acts as a standard basis and practical path to realize social fairness and justice. As Cohen pointed out, people cannot avoid disadvantages caused by family background, birth conditions, natural talent and random luck. These unequal conditions greatly damage equal relations between people, and true justice cannot tolerate such gaps. The equal idea of removing all involuntary disadvantages put forward by Cohen provides a clear standard to realize justice, which is worthy of learning. In modern China, unequal conditions from the above factors still exist due to the limits of overall development levels. We can fully absorb Cohen's idea of eliminating involuntary disadvantages and use it to guide real social practice, forming a feasible path to achieve fairness and justice. This standard can be applied to all fields including politics, economy, society, culture, ecology and education. Removing all disadvantages that block people's participation in social life forms an inner requirement of social fairness and justice. Eliminating involuntary disadvantages also helps "guarantee people's equal rights to participate in social life and equal chances for development." Based on this standard, we can keep making progress in providing education, stable jobs, medical care, elderly care and housing for all people, continuously safeguard and develop the fundamental interests of all people, and let the fruits of development benefit all citizens more equally [12].

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Fourth, the basic institutional structure of justice and the social ethos of justice are two necessary parts to realize fairness and justice. Both just institutions and a just social ethos work as effective guarantees for real justice. On one hand, both institutions and social ethos form social norms and restrict people's behavior. Formal just institutions directly set clear rules for people's actions and create objective binding force. A just social ethos changes people's value judgments of different behaviors, guiding individuals to follow social norms and forming subjective moral restrictions. On the other hand, both institutions and social ethos guide people's actions toward just outcomes. Formal just institutions encourage just behavior and punish unfair conduct, screening and filtering people's daily choices. A positive just social ethos helps people form good inner motives for moral action, laying a solid foundation for the realization of full social justice. For these reasons, realizing true fairness and justice requires the organic combination of just institutional systems and a just social ethos.

6. Conclusion

Marx scientifically predicted the inevitable victory of communist society, yet he did not elaborate on detailed and specific paths to reach this goal. Scholars at home and abroad stand on Marxist viewpoints and study the problems Marx did not fully explain from different perspectives. The research on justice is one of these important topics. G. A. Cohen is one such scholar. He tried to build a set of justice principles based on what he considered Marxist standpoints. However, Cohen broke away from the core logic of historical materialism. This reminds us to analyze justice based on historical development and the contradictory movement between productive forces and relations of production. Even with its obvious limitations, Cohen's justice principles still carry constructive value. His idea of eliminating involuntary disadvantages provides a clear anchor point to settle disputes over justice. His advocacy of a united and sharing moral ethos creates a suitable social environment for people to make just personal choices. These thoughts bring positive reference value to solve the main social contradiction in modern China — the contradiction between people's ever-growing needs for a better life and unbalanced and inadequate development [14]. As for the ideal institutional design that Cohen failed to complete, further research and exploration are still needed in academic circles.

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