Comparing Social Quality and Social Harmony from a Governance Perspective

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This article compares the concept of social quality with the concept of social harmony from a governance perspective. It confines the comparative analysis on the concept of social quality to the one initiated by scholars associated with the European Foundation of Social Quality and the concept of social harmony on the official discourse by the present political leaders on mainland China. The article has two major parts; the first part looks at the conceptualization and underlying meanings of both concepts against their different contextual, institutional backgrounds and societal developmental stages. The second part explores how Europe and China can learn from each other on the basis of four common themes — developmental, theoretical coherence, social responsibility, and measurement.

Keywords: *Social Quality, Social Harmony, Governance, Comparative Social Policy, Welfare Development*

Introduction

This article takes a governance perspective to compare the concepts of social quality and social harmony. European social policy scholars have recently begun to find social quality an appealing concept for the European social model. Their interest arises out of concern for the unequal relationship between social policy and economic policy, i.e., that social policy is subordinate to economic policy (Walker, 2005: 12; Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2008) and, if unchanged, the current course of the European social model will aspire, at best, to minimum social standards (Walker, 2005: 17). These are European concerns, at least on the part of social quality scholars, but not those societies in general where the predominant idea is economic and social policy is synonymous with the pursuit of economic growth (Holliday, 2000; Walker and Wong, 2009).

In contrast, the concept of social harmony that emerges in the East, particularly in the Chinese context, is essentially about how conflicts and contradictions among people and government, classes, ethnic groups, and cultures can be settled peacefully (Ai, 2008; Gulsen, 2001; Lai, Wang and Tok, 2007; Lekagul, 2006; Tamthai, 2006; UNESCO, 2004). These are essentially a governance issue. For example, China is worried about increasing the income gap, uneven development, and growing tensions between government and its people due to rampant corruption among its lower-level cadres (Ai, 2008: 144; Lai, Wang and Tok, 2007: 6-7; Saich, 2007); Thailand is concerned about ethnic and religious conflicts (Lekagul, 2006), and Turkey about the tension between government and the people (Gulsen, 2001). In other words, management of social conflicts is about life-threatening issues and basic governance of a society; in one author's words, it is about establishing "built-in mechanisms to deal with conflicts" and letting people "feel in control of their destiny and so are more willing to work with each other…" (Tamthai, 2006: 10). Hence, the concept of social harmony reflects a basic concern in any society — how can a society function normally without interruption by conflicts and contradictions? This is fundamentally different from the concerns underlying the concept of social quality, which is not about the normal operation of a society, but how good a society is.

Moreover, unlike the concern underlying social quality, the concept of social harmony does not explicitly or directly imply anything about the quality of the standard of a society other than relational. In the case of China today, social harmony is also associated with a *xiaokang* society, literally meaning a small welfare or moderately well-off society in which the living standard is

barely of survival but not wealthy (He, 2003; Wong, 2009). In other words, China's aim is not about establishing a good society with quality social and economic life but on making its people live in cooperation with mutual trust; a better life implies, in the case of a *xiaokang* society, a simple life that satisfies basic survival needs, a humble goal to aspire to. The best of such a society is perhaps social minimum standards, which is not a goal aspired to in the concept of social quality, as mentioned earlier.

This, of course, does not mean that European countries do not need to concern themselves with governance. The European Commission (2001) published a White Paper on European Governance, but that is more about good governance based on the five principles of openness, participation, accountability, effectiveness, and coherence. Similar good governance principles are now propagated by supranational organizations such as the World Bank and the United Nations Development Programme (Abdellatif, 2003; UNDP, 1997; Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2008). Underlying these good principles are the Western-style political institutions of democracy, clean government, and the rule of law as well as other modern institutions for managing social and economic affairs. Unfortunately, developing countries in the East such as China have yet to fully develop similar modern institutions that reflect the practice of good governance principles.

In the Chinese case, the national goal of "Four Modernizations" — modernization of industry, agriculture, defense, science, and technology do not include these good governance principles that underpin modern institutions. China's development goal, apparently, is something more tangible, not intangible social infrastructure such as good governance. According to the World Governance Indicators of the World Bank, China scored 5.8 on voice and accountability, 42.4 on rule of law, and 30.9 on control of corruption on a 0-100 scale on good governance measures in 2007 (see Table 1); apparently, these are poor scores, well below the average of 50.

The essence of governance is about the establishment of complex mechanisms, processes, relationships, and institutions through which citizens and groups become involved to negotiate their differences (UNDP, 1997: 9). The crux of the matter is that processes and outcomes of these mechanisms, relationships, and institutions are regarded as fair and just. The good principles of governance such as accountability, participation, and openness are modern ideas; these principles apparently do not belong to the Chinese Confucian tradition in which a society is governed by man and not by laws, with the emperor and his officials acting as models of virtue for the people (Leung and Nann, 1995: 6).

According to Confucius, social harmony — that is, a state of cooperation and the absence of social conflict — can be theoretically achieved primarily through two methods. First is self-cultivation of individual moral character; second is both leaders and subject behaving with propriety and conducting their relationships in conformity with social rules and without coercion (King and Bond, 1985: 30-32; Sung and Hahn, 1985: 22-23). In other words, the traditional state of social harmony for good governance is reliance on the people, both leader and subject, in self-realizing the best of their moral characters and in exercising propriety in performing one's role even in a hierarchical social and economic order. As reminded by a Western expert on China's current official discourse on social harmony, in Imperial China, the "self-serving dynastic rulers adopted social harmony as their official *ideologie d'etat*, using it to impose a paternalistic, ritualistic ethos of political consensus and conformity upon a voiceless, powerless peasantry" (Baum, 2005). In other words, the modern idea of good governance practice, as mentioned above, by using fair, open, and just processes as well as institutional mechanisms to settle differences is not part of traditional Chinese wisdom, either theoretically or practically.

In general, the European concept of social quality is founded upon a higher level of economic development and modern institutional arrangements, including political democracy for negotiating differences in social and economic affairs; the Chinese concept of social harmony may reflect concern on governance for settling social conflicts due to China's low economic standards and seemingly incompetent institutional arrangements as illustrated by its low governance scores. How far are these accurate descriptions of Europe in the West and China in the East? In the following, this article examines the meaning of both concepts before discussing how Europe and China can learn from each other. It is necessary to note that this short paper primarily looks at the official concept and initiative of social harmony; the cultural concept of social harmony in the Chinese tradition is a richer concept. On social quality, it refers to the concept and initiative proposed primarily by scholars of the European Foundation of Social Quality.

Social Quality and Social Harmony: Conceptualization and Underlying Meaning

Social quality is defined as "the extent to which people are able to participate in the social and economic life of their communities under

conditions which enhance their well-being and individual potential (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 1997: 305). It was first proposed "as a standard by which to measure the extent to which the quality of the daily lives of citizens has attained an acceptable European level" (Walker, 2005: 13). It seems clear that the European reference point is the extent to which the quality of social relations promotes both participation and personal development; this reference point is typically standards above basic needs.

The concept of quality of life is not used to measure the standard of quality because it does not have strong theoretical coherence (ibid.). For example, social quality is a feature of a society and its institutions despite its assessment being measured by its impact on people. Therefore, it has to incorporate both structural- and individual-level factors in order to maintain a delicate balance between collective and individual responsibility (Walker, 2005: 13). The theoretical coherence of social quality is also underpinned by the conceptualization of the social; the social is referred to as the "configurations of interacting people as social beings" (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2001: 312). It will be realized in the interdependencies between self-realization of individual people as social beings and the formation of collective identities (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2001: 313). In this light, individual people are not conceptualized as atomized economic agents but as interacting social beings; this opens the way for the need to establish quality of social relations that promotes both participation and personal development.

Four hypothetical conditions are assumed to enable the participation of individual people in the social and economic aspects of their communities to enhance their well-being and individual potential (i.e., social quality): socio-economic security, social inclusion, social cohesion, and empowerment (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 1997: 317-325). These four conditional factors are later also regarded as the outcome measures of social quality (Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2005) with the ideological inclination in the idea of promoting human dignity (Walker, 2005: 16).

With the benefits of mature welfare regimes, full political democracy, and a highly developed economy, Europe in general is advantaged in terms of providing its citizens with the opportunity of the four conditional factors for enhancing social quality. In other words, self-realization of individual people as social beings is conditional against a larger institutional, political, and economic context. Apparently, these larger contextual factors are inadequate in the case of China in the East.

It seems clear that China is a developing country still striving for modernization. In terms of a political system, it is a one-party communist state,

without a Western-style political democracy. The one-party communist state has loosened its controls on the economic sector since economic reform was introduced in 1978.

China has moved closer to a market-oriented economy today. In an economic sense, it is doing fine; recent annual GDP real growth rates were 10.1% in 2004, 9.9% in 2005, and 11.1% in 2006 (Bank of China International, 2007). In aggregate terms, either GDP or other measures such as national foreign reserves are in the forefront in many international league tables. But if the aggregate GDP is divided by 1.3 billion people, China is evidently a developing country. China's economically developing status is characterized by its relatively low economic standard of living. A low value of poverty measure is a case in point.

Recently, in 2008, the State Council planned to raise the poverty line from an annual individual disposal income of ¥1,000 to ¥1,300 (approximately ¥6.8=US$1.00 in September 2008). This initiative appears aggressive as the size of the poor would be doubled from forty million to eighty million (*Chinagate.com.cn*, 2008), hence increasing financial responsibility of the government in terms of poverty relief. Nevertheless, with an international benchmarking by the World Bank's one US dollar a day poverty line, the new poverty threshold, is still far below this lowest level of income poverty proxy by international comparison. China ranked 81 out of 177 countries in 2005 even in terms of the human development index and more favorable measures to China that include social development indicators of life expectancy and education; and it was classified as a medium human development country (UNDP, 2007:Table 2). This is the rationale underlying China's use of a *xiaokang* society instead of social quality to indicate its modest societal goal.

Social quality is too remote an ideal for the Chinese in terms of allocation of social resources for redistribution. China spent 833.6 billion¥ or equivalent to 3.38% of its 24,662 billion¥ GDP on culture, education, health care, and social security in 2007 (National Bureau of Statistics of China, 2008: 264), whereas the gross public social expenditure as a percentage of GDP was 33.1% in France, 30.5% in Germany, and 23.2% in the Netherlands in 2003 (OECD, 2007). Evidently, China lags far behind Europe's mature welfare regimes. The comparatively low level of social spending in the case of China also reflects the legacy of the growth-first model embraced by earlier Chinese leadership before the present leader Hu Jintao came to power in late 2002. The "growth-first" model assumes that growth dividends will trickle down to the lower-level echelons and benefit the poor in due course. It has resulted in inadequate redistribution and tense relations between lower-level cadres and the people.

Hu Jintao first put forward the official goal of building a harmonious society in the 4th Plenum of the 16th Central Committee of the Chinese Communist Party in September 2004 (Central Committee, CPC, 2004). The six essential components of the concept of social harmony were first elaborated by Hu himself in a speech to the party's high-level cadres on February 19, 2005 (Hu, 2005). They are "democracy and rule of law," "fairness and justice," "honesty and friendly affection," "vitality," "stability and orderliness," and "harmonious co-existence of man and nature." According to Hu (2005), "democracy and rule of law" means a substantial realization of a socialist democracy and governing of the country according to law; "fairness and justice" implies reconciliation of the interests and relations of all concerned parties, under which people's internal and other social conflicts are properly settled, and social equity and justice are implemented; "honesty and friendly affection" means mutual help in society, honesty and trust, equality, and friendly and harmonious relations; "vitality" is that ideas, activities, talents, and output of creativity are respected as such; "stability and orderliness" means that there are good social organizations and systems, social management, social order, that people enjoy their life and work, and that society is stable and solid; and "harmonious co-existence of man and nature" implies production is promoted and a wealthy life and healthy ecology are secured.

In the October 5th Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPC, "building a harmonious society" was formally endorsed as the guiding principle of China's 11th Five-Year Plan (Central Committee, CPC, 2005a); a shift from the "growth-first" development model to a more balanced, equitable, and environmentally friendly development model was also proclaimed (Lai, Wang and Tok, 2007:5). In the 6th Plenum of the Central Committee of the CPC in October 2006, "building of a harmonious socialist society" was put forward by the Chinese Communist Party as "an important strategic task" (Central Committee, CPC, 2006). In the 17th Party Congress of the CPC, building a harmonious socialist society was written into the General Program (i.e., Preamble) of the amended Constitution of the Communist Party of China (CPC, 2007).

What is new about the discourse of social harmony by the new Chinese leadership under Hu Jintao? Similar to the concern on subordination of social policy to economic policy in Europe, China has begun to talk about a better coordination between economic development and social development. In October 2003, the idea of "Scientific Concept of Development" was presented to the 3rd Plenum of the 16th Central Committee of CPC by Hu Jintao (Central Committee, CPC, 2003); it includes rectification of the earlier development bias toward economic development by the global concept of "Five Co-ordinations"

— coordination of rural and urban development, coordination of regional development, coordination of economic development and social development, coordination of humans and nature, and coordination of internal national development and the need to open China's doors to the outside world. In other words, the earlier "growth-first" model by the "get-rich-first" slogan as advocated by the late Patriarch, Deng Xiaoping, was replaced by the present slogan of "both-rich" (Central Committee, CPC, 2005a). Underneath all these "Five Co-ordinations" is the idea that in building a harmonious society — if these five assumingly contradictory forces can be better harmonized, the disrupting factors of social harmony such as regional disparity and the widening income gap can be overcome.

Despite Europe and China having different economic, structural, and institutional contexts, the same preference for social quality and social harmony is founded upon disapproval of social policy being subordinate to economic policy, as indicated by the shift from the "growth-first" model to a balanced development in the case of China.

Apart from the different economic levels, China seems to be a laggard compared to Europe in terms of modern institutions underlying good governance principles. The inclusion of "democracy and rule of law" and "fairness and justice" into the concept of social harmony is a step forward toward building modern institutions which are essential for good governance practice. As mentioned above, good governance practice is about the establishment of complex mechanisms, processes, relationships, and institutions through which citizens and groups are involved to negotiate their differences (UNDP, 1997: 9). Special note must be made about the component of "fairness and justice" as a way to establish a socially equitable security system in terms of rights, opportunities, rules, and distribution, according to Hu Jintao (2005). This reflects the efforts made by the present leadership to establish a fair distribution system of harmonizing the interests of different groups and parties for the prevention of social conflicts from occurring in the first place. In other words, a fair distribution system is part of the good governance practice.

Apparently, "democracy and rule of law" and "fairness and justice" are not Confucian in any cultural or ideological sense. The Confucian ideas of social harmony are about self-realization of personal moral character and observation of propriety, rules, and principles. Hence, for example, underneath the element of "democracy and rule of law" is the idea of an equally intrinsic value of every individual; it is evidently clear that a subject in a hierarchical social order does not have equal social value as the ruler (Wong, Wong and Lam, 2006). Therefore, conflict in such a social order is managed by letting the subjects

believe in their proper role according to propriety, rules, and principles. In contrast, modern arrangements of political democracy and rule of law are institutional — put to the extreme, individual citizens can pursue individual self-interest according to prevalent rules and regulations, regardless of the interests of others in exercising their political and civil rights, or that the implementation of the modern institutions of democracy and rule of law demands any self-cultivation of the moral character on the part of the common people.

However, it is note-worthy to emphasize that the conception and practice of democracy and rule of law are different from those in the West — democracy is meant as a socialist democratic system led by the CPC; and rule of law is not meant as an independent legal system but rather that the government needs to be based on the socialist legal system to govern the country fairly and be accountable to the people (Central Committee, CPC, 2005b).

How can Europe and China Learn from Each Other?

On the basis of the brief discussion above on the conceptualization of social quality and social harmony from a governance perspective, we are able to identify four common themes for analysis: developmental, theoretical coherence, social responsibility, and measurement. Despite the different economic, structural, and institutional contexts, Europe and China can still learn from each other about their different conceptions and practices in social quality and social harmony. The four themes are discussed one by one below.

Developmental

In essence, social quality in European standards is about aspiring for a good society with quality social and economic life and the full participation of its citizens to enhance their well-being and individual potential. Hence, Europe's advantageous position in terms of matured welfare regimes, high level of economic development, and other matured institutional arrangements for settling differences are obvious in governance terms. In contrast, China is still a developing country in all measures of the statistical data if the aggregate data is divided by its vast population size of 1.3 billion. So, as a vast country, in both population and geography, the "growth-first" model by allowing a small group of people and the eastern coastal regions to get rich first should be viewed with sympathy — it allows for the accumulation of sufficient resources for later-stage

development. However, the litmus test is whether such a stage-development approach will follow suit when China reaches a higher stage. In this regard, the pursuit of a moderately well-off or *xiaokang* society offers some insight.

When Deng Xiaoping first raised this societal goal in 1979 during his meeting with the visiting Japanese Prime Minister Ohira Masayoshi, he remarked that China's Four Modernizations aimed at a *xiaokang* living standard for the people. He also set the target of attaining a *xiaokang* society by one economic threshold of GNP per capita of US$1,000 by the end of the 20th century. Indeed, *xiaokang* is a humble societal goal; it was reached in 2000. The foresight of Deng was that he also envisaged, once China was such a society, that China would have the resources to tackle the rich-poor gap and regional disparities created by the first stage of "growth-first" development. In fact, the 16th Party Congress of the CPC in 2002 modified the building of a *xiaokang* society to that of a *comprehensive xiaokang* society, in which not only a higher level of economic development was targeted, but also other non-economic indicators such as democracy, culture, science, education, and social harmony were set (Jiang, 2002). It is against the background of the earlier stage of the "growth first" model of development that Hu Jintao put forward the concept of social harmony in 2003; it was later enriched with modern institutional components of "democracy and rule of law" and "fair and justice" as mentioned in above.

It seems that a developmental perspective is in order to understand the different stages of societal development between Europe and China. The governance perspective helps recognize that the issues challenging China nowadays are fundamentally managed well in Europe due to Europe's matured and modern institutions underlying good governance practices. Table 1 compares China's scores in good governance practices with those of select representative European countries according to the six World Governance Indicators of the World Bank. Eastern European countries are deliberately excluded because of their former socialist political and economic background. China was far below the selected European performances, especially in "voice and accountability" — the biggest gap was 57.2 on a 0-100 scale between China's score of 5.8 and the lowest one, i.e., 63.0 of the Netherlands; and the narrowest gap was 13.0 between China's 32.2 and Spain's 45.2 on political stability. In sum, governance is essentially a non-issue for the countries in the European Union but not in China.

Of course, social quality should be an ideal for the Chinese to aspire to when they are able to move beyond a comprehensive *xiaokang* society. But a developmental perspective helps avoid being ethnocentric; a brief comparison

Table 1. Good Governance Practice: China and Select European Countries (2007)

(0-100 scale)

Country	Voice and Accountability	Political Stability	Government Effectiveness	Regulatory Quality	Rule of Law	Control of Corruption
China	5.8	32.2	61.1	45.6	42.4	30.9
France	91.3	64.9	88.6	85.9	89.5	89.4
Germany	94.7	81.3	92.4	92.7	94.3	93.2
Netherlands	63.0	90.4	75.4	76.2	77.6	86.0
Portugal	90.4	73.1	79.6	83.0	82.4	83.6
Spain	83.2	45.2	80.6	85.4	84.8	84.1
United Kingdom	93.8	66.3	93.8	98.1	92.9	93.7

Source: Kaufmann, Kraay and Mastruzzi, 2008.

in terms of the conceptualization of social quality and social harmony indicates different contextual factors in societal development.

Theoretical Coherence

Coherence is always important to any concept, both political and theoretical. Even to a political concept like social harmony, if it is not coherent, it will be less appealing to followers and finds itself with problems in its operation.

The concept and initiative of social quality is advocated by social policy scholars clustered around the European Foundation of Social Quality, as "a grounded theoretical concept and not as a metaphor for a 'good society'" (Hermann and Maesen v.d., 2008). The emphasis here is "a grounded theoretical concept," about its methodological strength and theoretical validity; that does not mean that the social quality initiative is not about "a good society" — respect for human dignity embedded in the four quadrants of social quality, i.e., socio-economic security indicates social justice, and empowerment points to equity in life chances (Walker, 2005: 16) clearly illustrates the ideological preference of social quality.

Underlying the social quality initiative is concern over the subordinate role of social policy to economic policy in the context of globalization. Therefore, theorization of *the social* is most essential to social quality. In the second book on social quality, Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker (2001: 313) refer the social to "configurations of interacting people as social beings"; this conceptualization is underpinned by three theses. This article does not intend to go into the detail of individual theses, but one thing that seems to be clear is that the theorization of

the social lays a strong theoretical foundation which links conditional factors, constitutive factors, and normative factors of social quality together into a coherent theoretical concept (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2001).

In contrast, the official concept of social harmony or the building of a harmonious society and its six components, as presented by Hu Jintao in 2005, is not completely coherent theoretically.

First, it is probably a purely political concept, used to mark Hu Jintao's leadership, alike his precedents, Jiang Jimin's "Three Represents" thought, and Deng Xiaoping's theory on the "growth-first" model. In his speech to high-level party cadres, Hu Jintao searches for the cultural and ideological origins of a harmonious society (2005). In the cultural domain, he identifies the ideas of Confucius and Mencius such as "the cardinal value of harmony" and "the way of heaven is for the public," and even mentions the leader of the Tai Ping Rebellion (1850-1864) in the late Qing dynasty for their pledge of an egalitarian society. In the ideological domain, Hu sees building a harmonious society — in the CPC's case, it always means a "socialist" harmonious society — as a continuous effort of the preceding socialist forerunners, tracing back to the European "Utopian Socialists" Marx, Engels, and Lenin in the West, and Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, and Jiang Jimin in contemporary CPC history. It seems that building a socialist harmonious society is a communist legacy of de-emphasizing the class-conflict doctrine of Marxism.

Second, social harmony is a traditional concept that can be traced back to the writings of China's wise men such as Confucius and Lao-tzu (Ai, 2008: 148). Their writings contain a seeming ideal of a good society — absence of conflict and people cooperating with each other. In practice, the traditional concept of social harmony is used, as Baum suggests (2005), by self-serving dynastic rulers for legitimizing their paternalistic rule. Perhaps Hu Jintao is right in commenting that the ideal of harmonious society as taught by the wise men of China is unrealistic because there was class repression and exploitation in the old system (Hu, 2005). The theoretical question of whether or not a harmonious society is free from class repression and exploitation remains ambiguous in official documents. The admission of capitalists to CPC is a case in point: CPC was opened as a result of Jiang Jimin's "Three-Represents" — CPC represents all people, including the formerly exploitative capitalist class. This has theoretical implications; the theoretical foundation of welfare capitalism is the use of the welfare state to rectify social inequalities created by a capitalist market economy. According to Marshall's citizenship theory (1950), it is social citizenship that makes capitalist societies civilized and citizens socially equal, at least in terms of entitlement status.

Third, how can the six components be explained in their relevance to social harmony? For example, how do the new institutional components of "democracy and rule of law" and "fairness and justice" make sense in relation to social harmony? How are they congruent with the rest? In official documents, they seem to be self-evident, as can be seen in Hu Jintao's speech on February 19, 2005, for example, where the six components of social harmony were first declared. It is also the case of the component of vitality which is seemingly conceptually unrelated to social harmony? The other components also need justification for their respective positions. In terms of theoretical coherence, social quality is exemplary. It is conceptualized in a quadrant composed of four components, namely socio-economic security, social inclusion, social cohesion, and social empowerment, with the vertical axis representing the tension between micro and macro relations and the horizontal axis representing the tension between institutions and organizations on the one hand and communities, groups, and citizens on the other. So, the social quality quadrant could become a practical tool, with strong theoretical coherence for policy makers and policy analysts (Walker, 2005: 14).

If social harmony is more than a political concept, what constitutes the theorization of the social and harmony, as indicated by the theorization of the social in social quality, as significant? It seems that the Chinese leadership needs to pay more tribute to its cultural roots; indeed, in Confucian social theory, the individual is never conceived of as an isolated, separately constitutive entity; the individual is ever a socially interactive being (King and Bond, 1985: 31; Moore, 1967: 5). This theorization of the *social* is very similar to the concept of social quality. However, there is no society in today's world that does not breed conflicts and contradictions (Bonta, 2001; Sung and Hahn, 1985). Therefore, social harmony should have a renewed theorization: it should not be understood as the harmonious unity and coordination of different parts into a seamless whole, but conflicts and differences between different parts can be settled in civilized ways through established processes, mechanisms, and institutions. For instance, social citizenship as an institution of the welfare state for tackling class rivalry in capitalism is such a case in point for rectifying social and economic inequalities created by the market economy. In short, social harmony should be conceptualized as a state of society where the main parts function in such a way as to create a tendency toward unity and coordination and the conflicts and differences do not destabilize the orderly operation of society in general.

Social Responsibility

From a theoretical vantage point, both concepts of social quality and social harmony recognize the interdependence of people as interacting social beings; hence, interacting social beings need to reciprocate their responsibility toward society for the benefits of citizenship rights. However, the primary conceptual focus of social quality, as suggested by its definition, is significantly influenced by the enhancement of people's "well-being and individual potential" (Beck, Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2001: 7). Of course, the interdependence of individuals as interacting social beings differentiates social quality from a distinct individualistic concept so that the individual and the social are a fundamentally inseparable constitutive entity in social quality (Hermann, 2006: 28). The inseparable constitutive entity of social quality is clearly expressed in the four domains of socio-economic security, social inclusion, social empowerment, and social cohesion. They are essentially the material base for people to reciprocate their responsibility toward society. But the financial aspect of the material base as an expression of social responsibility for the realization of the four domains is taken for granted; apparently, this has to do with Europe's matured economy and welfare regime. For instance, the proportion of "people who are able to keep their homes" is a neutral socio-economic security indicator; who should be responsible for "keeping the home" is a non-issue. There are some explicit indicators in the domain of social cohesion in which the issue of social responsibility comes in — in the expression of social contract; they are indicated by "willingness to pay more taxes," a commitment toward intergenerational equity, and a commitment to community services (Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2005: Table 2).

In contrast, the traditional concept and practice of social harmony demands responsible individuals to sacrifice for social harmony — in theory, it is expressed in their self-cultivation of individual moral characters for the larger moral order and the fulfillment of their roles according to the prevalent rules and principles on propriety; in practice, it is submission to the patriarchal rule of self-serving dynastic rulers without any of the "citizen" rights in return. It is due to this overwhelming demand on the responsible "subject" that the new Chinese leadership includes the institutional components of "democracy and rule of law" and "fairness and justice" to pave the way for a balanced view of citizenship in China. In the particular income policy domain, for example, it means that there should be a fair primary and secondary income distribution, according to the report of the 17th Congress of the CPC (Hu, 2007); in

particular, the share of household income to national income should be increased, and the share of compensation to labor and the lower income people should be increased. This means that more national income should be allocated to the common people instead of going to the state and the state-owned enterprises on the one hand, and on the part of allocating more to the common people, a greater share should go to labor and to the lower class. This reflects the unbalanced distribution in the previous era where citizenship rights were substantially neglected.

In sum, both the concepts of social quality and social harmony recognize the inseparable, interdependent nature of the individual and society. However, in terms of social responsibility, social harmony demands more from individual people as responsible "citizens," for instance, they need to be more self-cultivated in the traditional sense, and even in the perspective of the new Chinese leadership, a balanced view of citizenship is always prevalent. In contrast, social responsibility is not an explicit major concern of social quality; perhaps Europe is affluent and citizenship has a strong tradition there.

Measurement

Social quality is not only a concept, it is an initiative that advocates a new social Europe — a vision of a good society where human dignity is honored and promoted. In this light, it is pertinent to develop a methodology for measuring the extent of social quality practiced as indicating the consequences of national and local government policies. In 2001, the Network Indicators of Social Quality started the process of creating social quality indicators (Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2005: 8) around the four dimensions of social quality. Despite conceptual and practical difficulties encountered in any comparative research, the Network has made great progress in establishing an empirical framework as a point of departure for future comparative studies in social quality (Gordon, 2005: 6; Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2005).

However, a review of official documents and a search on the internet on social harmony indicators reflects the lack of effort in CPC at the level of the national government to measure the extent of social harmony that has been practiced in China since 2005 when Hu spoke on the components of social harmony. There was a talk by a mid-level official at the Ministry of Civil Affairs (*People.com.cn*, 2007) on establishing a set of social harmony measures for harmonious community. There are also local government efforts in cities like Beijing (*People.com.cn*, 2006), Shenzhen (*China.com.cn*, 2006), Nanjing (Nanjing Bureau of Statistics, 2005), and Tianjin (Tianjin Bureau of Statistics,

2007) on measuring the extent of social harmony in their respective cities. For example, Beijing used three sets of indicators to measure the extent of social harmony in 2001 — objective indicators of social conflict, subjective indicators of social grievances, and indicators on the effects of conflict resolution mechanisms (*People.com.cn*, 2006). This set of indicators seems to be based on the governance perspective. But Tianjin used a different set of indicators; its system of social harmony indicators has four major domains: political, economic, cultural, and social (Tianjin Bureau of Statistics, 2007), and they seemingly have a different rationale.

Due to the lack of a concerted effort at the national level, it is not yet known how social harmony should be measured and what the extent of social harmony and its individual components are, including nationwide and local variations. Perhaps this reflects the challenge China is facing today — it is still a developing country; it scores poorly on good governance practice in comparison to select European countries (Table 1). In case indicators of social harmony are established on the national and local government levels, they would become points of departure for public accountability. This may explain the cautious approach of the present Chinese leadership toward a centralized methodology.

Conclusion

This article compares the conceptualization of social quality and social harmony from a governance perspective. Such a comparison helps focus on the different stages of societal development — Europe in general is highly developed, with matured modern institutions for negotiating differences in social and economic affairs, whereas China in the East is a developing country. Now China moves to build modern institutions for good governance as exemplified by the inclusion of the components of "democracy and rule of law" and "fairness and justice" so as to modernize the traditional concept of social harmony. In other words, Europe and China are not on the same contextual and institutional backgrounds.

In my view, social quality is a theoretically coherent concept whilst the official concept of social quality, in terms of its six components, may indicate the rhetoric of a political discourse for responding to practical governance issues. However, the Chinese cultural heritage has much to offer: social harmony is inherently a social concept, embedded in social interactions, and as such, the responsible "subject" under traditional dynastic rule has greater potential to

support a more balanced theory and practice of responsible citizenship in the modern context than social quality which is built on the European social model where the state is primarily responsible for the welfare of citizens and not the responsibility of citizens themselves.

However, a governance perspective has its drawback — it does not incorporate an ecological perspective; its primary concern is how citizens and groups are involved to negotiate their differences. The official concept of social harmony has an ecological dimension, although it may not be theoretically coherent. But that offers greater potential for tackling the increasingly significant question of peaceful coexistence between man and nature. This ecological challenge is also recognized by social quality scholars in their most up-dated publication (Maesen v.d. and Walker, 2008).

At last, it is worthy to note that harmony is the cardinal value and the most treasured value of Chinese culture (Bodde, 1953; Chen and Starosta, 1997). But a governance perspective, as illustrated in this article, reveals a lower stage in societal development on the part of social harmony than social quality. This may not be a fair assessment due to the fact that this article only looks at social harmony from the official concept and initiative. The cultural concept of harmony in general and social harmony in particular should offer a new insight into tackling contemporary issues, albeit the distinct lack of a modern institutional perspective.

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