

Upholding a people-centered approach, the rule of law safeguards people's livelihoods

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Abstract

The Thought on the Rule of Law signifies the latest development in the Sinitization of Marxist legal theory, serving as the fundamental guideline and action plan for comprehensively advancing law-based governance. Its core tenet emphasizes a people-centered approach, ensuring the rule of law serves the populace. Consequently, the construction of the rule of law must be guided by the practical imperative of safeguarding and improving people's livelihoods. These two aspects achieve synergistic development through institutional interaction: the rule of law provides the normative foundation for ensuring people's well-being, while the demands of the people drive the improvement of the legal system. Currently, China's system for ensuring people's well-being still faces certain structural contradictions, highlighting the institutional tension between policy supply and implementation effectiveness. The absence of adequate safeguards for people's well-being not only undermines social fairness and justice but also weakens the authority of the rule of law and the foundation of governance. Therefore, it is imperative to construct a closed-loop mechanism of "needs identification - institutional optimization - effectiveness enhancement": optimizing institutional design through the precise identification of people's needs, enhancing policy implementation effectiveness through legal means, and ultimately achieving good governance through the rule of law in the realm of people's well-being. Upholding a people-centered approach, the rule of law safeguards people's livelihoods.

Keywords

Thought on the Rule of Law; People-centered; People's Livelihood Security

1. Introduction

In the process of reforming the national governance framework and enhancing administrative capacity, the rule of law assumes a pivotal function. Its fundamental philosophy consistently emphasizes a people-centered approach, safeguarding societal well-being through legal instruments. As socialism with Chinese characteristics enters a new developmental phase, the ongoing advancement of comprehensive legal governance has elevated standards for social welfare policies and public service delivery. Within this context, utilizing legal mechanisms to resolve structural con-

licts within the social welfare system and facilitating a shift from procedural to substantive justice have become central themes in contemporary legal scholarship and practice.

The academic community has accumulated substantial research on the relationship between the rule of law and people's livelihoods. Early studies primarily focused on the institutional construction of social security systems, such as the 1982 Constitution's affirmation of citizens' fundamental rights and the enactment and implementation of laws like the Social Insurance Law and the Compulsory Education Law, which laid the foundation for the modern social welfare framework. In recent years, scholars have begun to examine the practical effects of the rule of law in the realm of livelihood, for example, Li Wenjia (2023) analyzed the legal connotations of the "people-centered" philosophy from the perspective of Xi Jinping's thought on the rule of law; Li Lin (2018) explored the pathways and challenges in building a rule-of-law society; Zhong Zhouming (2025) emphasized the central role of fairness and justice within the rule of law. These studies provide important theoretical support for understanding the interactive dynamics between the rule of law and livelihoods. However, existing research still exhibits notable deficiencies. In addressing the identified research gap, this study seeks to examine strategies for strengthening the social security framework and elevating public service quality through the implementation of rule of law principles and legal governance mechanisms.

This thesis is divided into three sections. The first section discusses the fundamental stance of people-centeredness as the cornerstone of our legal system development, and reviews the evolution of social welfare and public service provision in China, analyzing their synergistic relationship with the rule of law. The second section primarily reveals the main challenges and root causes faced by current social legal protections, and examines the potential risks and hazards arising from the legal vacuum in the social welfare system. Finally, the paper proposes legal pathways for improving the social welfare framework from legislative, enforcement, and legal awareness perspectives, and, this paper advocates for the legal system to safeguard social well-being as a contemporary mission and explores future development directions. This thesis aims to provide intellectual support for the advancement of a "people-centered" rule of law paradigm, fostering increased public well-being, satisfaction, and security.

2. Theoretical Foundations and Historical Development of the Rule of Law and People's Livelihood

2.1. The Fundamental Stance on the Rule of Law Development

The people-centered approach constitutes the fundamental stance for upholding and advancing Socialism with Chinese Characteristics in the new era, permeating the entire process of comprehensively implement the rule of law. General Secretary Xi Jinping has explicitly stated that the broadest and most profound foundation for

comprehensively governing the country according to law lies with the people, and that the construction of the rule of law must "be for the people, rely on the people, benefit the people, and protect the people." The rule of law serves as a crucial safeguard for Chinese-style modernization, with the enhancement of people's livelihood and the improvement of public services representing the vivid application of the rule-of-law spirit in real-world social governance.

The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China proposed a goal of establishing a rule-of-law nation, government, and society by 2035. Achieving this objective hinges on the deep integration of the rule of law with people's welfare. Additionally, the 20th National Congress incorporated the concept of common prosperity into the national development strategy, underscoring the vital importance of legal governance in effectively addressing livelihood concerns, reducing social disparities, and promoting social equity. The Central Conference on Comprehensively Advancing the Rule of Law further clarified the legal philosophy of "putting the people first." Within this context, strengthening the protection of people's well-being and elevating the standard of public services are not only essential requirements for the construction of the rule of law but also the concrete implementation of the development philosophy centered on the people at the practical level.

2.2.The Historical Evolution of Social Livelihood and the Rule of Law

The evolution of public services and social security within our nation has consistently deepened, operating under the framework of the rule of law and guided by the core principle of "people-centered development."

This trajectory began in the early stages of Reform and Opening, marked by the 1982 Constitution's affirmation of citizens' fundamental rights. This period saw the initial restructuring of the social security system, alongside the successive establishment of key legislative acts such as the Compulsory Education Law and the unemployment insurance system, collectively forming the foundational structure of a Modern People's Livelihood Security System. The subsequent development of the market economy further accelerated the institutionalization of social security, underpinned by the strategic imperative of governing the country by law. Significant expansions in the scope of public services were achieved through innovations like the Social Insurance Law and the New Rural Cooperative Medical Scheme. Entering the new era, the legal concept of "people-centered development" has propelled social security to achieve a historic leap. The decisive victory in the Tough Battle against Poverty, coupled with the scheduled realization of the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, underscores this progress. The 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China prioritized targeted poverty alleviation and eradication as one of the three major critical battles, thereby consolidating the achievements in poverty alleviation. Furthermore, the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China made systematic arrangements in the areas of income distribution, employment, and social security, with a specific focus

on the objective of Common Prosperity.

Currently, the legislative process for social assistance is accelerating, and the deep application of smart government affairs is underway, contributing to the formation of a more comprehensive and higher-quality social security system. This historical process unequivocally demonstrates the mutually reinforcing relationship between the construction of the rule of law and the enhancement of people's livelihood, jointly driving the continuous improvement of the people's sense of gain, happiness, and security.

3. The Current Practical Challenges and Detrimental Impacts of Social Livelihood Legal Protections

3.1. The Practical Deficiencies in Social Welfare Systems and the Enforcement of the Rule of Law

Currently, the construction of China's social security and public services system is undergoing a critical period of transformation and upgrading. General Secretary Xi Jinping underscores that the embodiment of the people's interests, the reflection of the people's wishes, the safeguarding of the people's rights and interests, and the enhancement of the people's well-being must be implemented throughout all areas and the entire process of comprehensive law-based governance. However, with the shift in the principal social contradiction, the populace's demands for democracy, law, fairness, justice, and security are escalating. How to truly translate the "people-centered" concept into operational and implementable institutional arrangements still faces many practical challenges.

Nowadays, China's legal system for safeguarding people's livelihoods still exhibits structural deficiencies. The legal framework pertaining to essential aspects of public welfare remains underdeveloped, with critical sectors like healthcare insurance and housing security primarily governed by departmental regulations, thereby lacking the authority of superior legal statutes. Moreover, the enforcement of certain policies aimed at enhancing the populace's well-being is often deficient, characterized by formalism, inadequate implementation, and insufficient inter-agency coordination. In reality, various complex issues such as the presence of bottlenecks in the "last mile" of resource allocation, gaps in institutional coverage affecting the "sandwich class," the "temperature difference effect" observed in regional service delivery, and the imbalance between urban and rural development as well as regional disparities, all serve to expose deep-rooted structural contradictions within the social system. The essence of law and governance is rooted in practical application, and these challenges underscore the significant gap that exists between the design of institutional frameworks and the actual effectiveness of their implementation. Traditional models of social security and public service provision are increasingly inadequate to satisfy the expanding and evolving needs of the population seeking a higher quality of life. Consequently, there is an urgent necessity to accelerate the development and

construction of a new, more comprehensive social security system that can better address these issues and ensure more equitable and efficient social support for all citizens.

3.2. The Dangers and Risks of Legal Gaps in the Social Security System

The deficiencies and practical inadequacies within the system of safeguarding people's well-being will engender far-reaching negative consequences. This not only contravenes the fundamental legal tenet that "the people are the foundation of the state; with a solid foundation, the state will be secure," but also fundamentally undermines the developmental paradigm of "people-centered development." As articulated, "The law is for punishing the unrighteous and rectifying the unequal." Fairness and justice constitute the bedrock of the rule of law and represent the paramount value objectives of the Communist Party of China, as well as the inherent requirements of the rule of law under socialism with Chinese characteristics. When essential public services, such as healthcare and education, suffer from systemic deficiencies, it not only renders equality before the law a mere formality, but also precipitates a complete absence of substantive fairness.

The authority of law derives from the people's intrinsic support and genuine conviction. When policies for safeguarding people's well-being become "paper welfare" and fail to be effectively implemented, it not only erodes governmental credibility but also directly impacts social stability and long-term peace and order. This situation, in essence, deviates from the "people-centered" legal philosophy. Therefore, perfecting the system of safeguarding people's well-being and ensuring its effective implementation is not only pertinent to the resolution of specific livelihood issues but is also critical to upholding the spirit of socialist rule of law and consolidating the foundation of the Party's governance.

4. Enhancing the Legal Safeguards for Social Security System

4.1. Explore the Law-based Reform Path to Solve the Predicament of People's Livelihood Security

From the founding of the Communist Party of China a century ago, through the tremendous establishment of the People's Republic of China, and then to the profound shifts catalyzed by Reform and Opening, particularly the epochal advancements in the Party and national endeavors since the 18th Party Congress, the core impetus resides in the Party's steadfast dedication to securing the well-being of the Chinese people and the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Addressing contemporary predicament in the domain of people's livelihood security and public services, it is necessary to commit to the legal principles and systemic approach of "people-centered development", and comprehensively advance legal reforms. To effectively address current challenges in safeguarding people's livelihoods and enhancing public services, it is essential to steadfastly adhere to a "peo-

ple-centered" philosophy. This requires integrating legal thought with a systemic perspective to comprehensively advance legal reforms. These reforms must prioritize the protection of the people's rights, address their concerns, and reflect their will. The reforms must emphasize the people's central role, ensuring that legislative and reform decisions are unified and aligned. This approach guarantees that the achievements of reform are based on law, promptly codified into law, thereby enhancing the legitimacy and stability of the reforms.

Furthermore, the fundamental goal of strengthening the rule of law is to protect the rights of the people and achieve social justice. It is imperative to accelerate the improvement of legal systems that embody fairness in rights, opportunities, and rules. This includes strengthening the basic public service systems that ensure care for the young, education for student, fair compensation for labor, medical care for patients, support for the elderly, adequate housing for people, and assistance for the vulnerable. Allowing the people to feel the value goals of fairness and justice in the rule of law, and ensuring that the people have a stronger sense of gain, sustainable happiness, and a greater sense of security. In the course of reform, it is imperative to prioritize the application of legal thought and methodologies, ensuring that the reform process is standardized and scientific, thereby achieving a synergistic advancement of reform and the rule of law.

The law must be upheld, otherwise, it becomes ineffective. Consequently, promoting the spirit of the rule of law and enhancing the legal literacy of the entire population are paramount for the advancement of rule of law-based reforms. Through legal education, the legal literacy and capacity for independent judgment of the citizenry must be elevated, cultivating a societal ethos that respects, trusts, adheres to, utilizes, and safeguards the law. Simultaneously, it is essential to cultivate the people's sense of agency and awareness of rights, leveraging their supervisory role in governing the country according to law, and thus propelling the construction of a rule of law-based society.

4.2. The Era Mission of Safeguarding People's Livelihood through the Rule of Law

Upholding the fundamental status of the people as the core of governance and consistently considering issues from their perspective is essential. This approach involves not only refining and improving institutional frameworks to effectively address existing deficiencies in social security systems and provisions but also innovating and reforming systems and mechanisms to eliminate obstacles and barriers that hinder equitable resource allocation and distribution. Moreover, it is critically important to strengthen and enhance legal enforcement efforts to ensure the effective and efficient implementation of policies and regulations. This comprehensive process must prioritize the protection and safeguarding of the rights and interests of vulnerable groups within society, ensuring that their needs are adequately ad-

dressed. It also requires balancing the interests of all stakeholders involved through the application of appropriate legal instruments and mechanisms. Additionally, constructing a socialist rule of law value system that is centered around people and that actively promotes social equity and justice is fundamental. This approach signifies a crucial step in moving from a focus on formal fairness—merely adhering to procedural correctness—to substantive fairness, which emphasizes genuine justice and equality in practice. It also represents a precise articulation of the intrinsic characteristics and the contemporary spirit embedded within the rule of law under socialism with Chinese characteristics, reflecting the evolving nature of legal governance in the context of socialist modernization.

General Secretary Xi Jinping has underscored that the fundamental objective of advancing comprehensive law-based governance is to safeguard the rights and interests of the people in accordance with the law. Strengthening people's livelihood security and elevating the standard of public services, while simultaneously upholding the protection of people's rights and interests through the rule of law, continuously enhances the people's sense of fulfillment, happiness, and security. This ensures that all citizens become staunch supporters, conscious observers, and resolute defenders of the construction of the socialist rule of law, thereby establishing a robust social foundation for comprehensive law-based governance

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