

Original Paper

Achievements, Experience and Implications of China's Poverty Governance

Xiangjun Su¹

¹ School of International Education, Zuni Medical University, 563006, China

Correspondence: Xiangjun Su, School of International Education, Zuni Medical University, No. 6 West Xuefu Rd., Xinpu New District, Zunyi 563006, China

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Abstract

Poverty is one of the challenges faced by the world, and poverty alleviation is the shared responsibility for humanity. As an active advocate and strong promoter of global poverty alleviation, China has taken the lead in completely eradicating absolute poverty, contributing China model of global poverty governance. This paper summarizes the great historic achievements and landmark significance of China's poverty alleviation, and analyzes the successful experience of China's poverty governance, pointing out that the poverty reduction path with Chinese characteristics is a new path for human anti-poverty cause, and the experience and wisdom of China's poverty governance is the common wealth for mankind, of which attaching great importance to poverty alleviation, adhering to the development-oriented poverty alleviation approach, implementing targeted poverty alleviation strategy and strengthening all-round effective supervision are not only the magic weapons for China's success in poverty reduction, but also an important reference for the global poverty governance.

Keywords

China's poverty governance, Poverty alleviation, China experience, global implications

1. Introduction

Poverty is a chronic disease for mankind, and fighting poverty is a common mission of the world. According to the World Bank, at present, there are about 800 million people still living in absolute poverty in the world, who are living on less \$1.90 per person a day and most of whom are found in developing countries in Africa, South Asia, East Asia and the Pacific area. Furthermore, in some developed countries, like the U.S., a certain number of people are also living in poverty. Poverty reduction has become the common cause for all countries, especially developing countries. In 2015, it

was put on the top of the 17 global sustainable development goals by the United Nations. Meanwhile, the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development explicitly states that extreme poverty for all people everywhere should be eradicated by 2030 (The Ministry of Commerce of the People's Republic of China, Transforming our world: The 2030 agenda for sustainable development, 2016). At the end of 2020, China, as the largest developing country in the world, becomes the first country that has completely eliminated absolute poverty, reaching the UN poverty alleviation goal by 10 years ahead of schedule. China's remarkable achievements and valuable experience in fighting poverty contributes a frame of reference to the great cause of global poverty alleviation governance.

2. Achievements and Significance of China's Fight against Poverty

First, China has brought about a historic resolution to the problem of absolute poverty, making a crucial step forward on the journey of Chinese national rejuvenation. Poverty is a worldwide issue, especially absolute poverty (also known as extreme poverty), which has long hindered the development of the Chinese nation and the state governance. It has always been the aspiration for a better life of the Chinese people and the original aspiration and mission of the Communist Party of China (CPC) to end poverty, improve people's livelihood and achieve common prosperity. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China in 1949, China's fight against poverty has evolved from the extensive poverty relief of providing assistance to the poor into the targeted poverty alleviation focusing on sustainable development over the past 70 years plus. With the theory and practice of poverty governance deepening, the number of the people living in poverty declined by a large margin. The pace of China's poverty alleviation constantly quickened since the early 1980s, when China started to reform and open up. In particular, after the 18th CPC National Congress in 2012, under the strong leadership of the CPC Central Committee with Xi Jinping at its core, an overwhelming anti-poverty campaign was launched to address the extreme poverty in the sprawling rural areas in China, which is widely known as "Tuo Pin Gong Jian Zhan (Fight Against Extreme Poverty)" in China. Through eight years of arduous and unremitting efforts, the CPC Central Committee won the battle against absolute poverty completely at the end of 2020, and successfully controlled the spread of the COVID-19 epidemic at the same time. The great victory over the fight against extreme poverty made a landmark contribution to attaining the goal of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects in China as scheduled. Chinese President Xi Jinping, also general secretary of the CPC central committee, solemnly declared at the National Conference to Review the Fight against Poverty and Commend Individuals and Groups Involved on February 25, 2021, "China has secured a complete victory in its fight against poverty. All of the 98.99 million rural residents, 832 counties, and 128,000 villages that fell below the current poverty line have now been lifted out of poverty. Regional poverty has been eliminated on the whole, and the arduous task of eradicating absolute poverty has been completed, representing yet another miraculous achievement" (Xi, 2021). Lifting the rural poor people out of poverty as scheduled means that the fruits of reform and opening-up benefit more people and the Chinese people have taken a solid

step forward on the road to common prosperity.

Second, the areas in which people have been lifted out of poverty have taken on a brand-new look, creating favorable conditions for the sustainable development of the Chinese society. The general outlooks of the poverty-stricken areas and their people have undergone historic changes: The economic and social development of the impoverished areas has caught up with or overtaken that in the developed areas; the infrastructure conditions in poor areas have greatly improved; and most pressing difficulties of great concern to the poor population in rural areas, such as travel, education and healthcare, have been solved. Most importantly, the spiritual outlook of the people who have been lifted out of poverty has gone through a profound change from the inside out, and the values of striving to do good are greatly promoted and social positive energy are widely spread. The areas that have shaken off poverty and the people who have changed their fate have built up their confidence and courage to create a better life, bringing about favorable conditions for them to embark on a new journey and make achievements in the new era. Guizhou province, for example, as a key battlefield in fighting poverty in China, has realized the leapfrog economic and social development, torn off the centuries-old absolute poverty label, and shown a picture of the imposing landscape of “wealthy people and ecological beauty”, a bright future for colorful Guizhou, which was hailed by President Xi Jinping as “an epitome of the cause for the Party and the country in the course of making a big stride toward prosperity and development since the 18th CPC National Congress held in 2012”.

Third, the entire society is more determined to forge ahead together, the foundation of the Party’s governance is more solid, and the idea of putting the people first has gained greater popularity. On the battlefield of poverty alleviation, party members, officials and the general public trusted each other, shouldered the common mission, shared the joys and sorrows, and further strengthened the relationship among party members, cadres and the masses in the fight against poverty. A great number of the CPC members bravely dedicated themselves to the campaign for helping the poor population shake off poverty in response to the call of the CPC central committee. Thousands of cadres devoted to the battle against poverty, leading the poor people to live a better life by ending poverty with all means. Millions of poverty-stricken people wear a sincere smile on the face after they have been lifted out of poverty. The people’s belief in “listening to the Party, feeling the party’s favor, and following the Party” has become even firmer. Through various tests in the fight against poverty, the Party’s grassroots governance capacity has improved markedly, the people-centered governance philosophy has gained greater popularity among the people, and the whole society has formed a good atmosphere of striving for a happy life.

Fourth, China has created a workable plan in addressing the problem of poverty and its success in poverty relief has given a strong impetus to the global cause of fighting poverty. Poverty alleviation is a major challenge to the development and governance of all countries around the world. For more than forty years of reform and opening up, China has been focusing on the economic and social development and has lifted about 800 million people out of poverty. In recent eight years, in particular,

the global poverty reduction situation remains grim, due to the great negative impacts of global economic recession and the once-in-a-century Covid-19 pandemic. Under this background, China pressed ahead and has lifted itself out of poverty at an average annual rate of more than 10 million people (equivalent to the population of a medium-sized country), becoming the first country in the world to achieve the international poverty reduction target 10 years ahead of schedule, which has injected confidence and impetus to the global cause of fighting poverty, and provided a China model of poverty alleviation for those countries that want to accelerate their own development.

In addition to speeding up its own efforts in fighting poverty, China has actively carried out international anti-poverty co-operations and helped other developing countries in need within its capacity through various means, such as providing aids, relieving debts and expanding imports. China will actively promote the Belt and Road Initiative and strive to realize common development and prosperity with other countries in the world. According to a World Bank report, the Belt and Road Initiative will lift 7.6 million people out of absolute poverty and 32 million out of moderate poverty (The State Council Information Office of the People's Republic of China, White Paper on Human Poverty Reduction in China, 2021). China's successful experience in poverty alleviation has made an important contribution to building a community with a shared future for mankind.

3. China's Experience and Wisdom in Poverty Alleviation

Since the launch of reform and opening-up in 1978, nearly 800 million Chinese people have been lifted out of poverty, accounting for more than 70% of global poverty reduction during the same period. This has greatly reduced the size of poor population in the world, and made China the first country to reach the UN Millennium Development Goal of eliminating absolute poverty, creating a miracle in the history of poverty alleviation (Jiang & Zhang, 2020). China's great historic achievements in fighting poverty and its path of poverty relief with Chinese characteristics have a far-reaching significance and deserve learning and reference.

Firstly, the strong leadership of the CPC is the fundamental guarantee for the success of China's poverty reduction efforts. The strong leadership of the CPC is a guarantee for the success of the great cause of socialist modernization and the fundamental reason for China's remarkable progress in poverty alleviation, especially for the victory in the battle against poverty. The CPC faithfully represents the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. It has always been committed to serving the public and exercising power for the people. It is a people's party that serves the people wholeheartedly and has unparalleled leadership, organization and execution capabilities. With more than 95 million members, the CPC, the largest party in the world that has grown from a small fishing boat on Nanhu lake in Jiaxing into a huge ship named "China", has united and led the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in their commitment to economic and social development of this country over the past century. With "people's aspiration for a better life" as its goal, it has overcome difficulties of all sorts and won victory after victory, making two large miracles: economic prosperity

and social stability, and earning the trust and praise of both the Chinese people and the international community.

The CPC has always put shaking off poverty and becoming rich on the top of its agenda in state governance. Based on China's national conditions and the law of poverty alleviation, it has effectively mobilized all social forces and waged an arduous people's war against poverty. In the fight against poverty since 2013, 255,000 resident working teams and more than 3 million first Party secretaries and village officials have been dispatched to work on the frontline of poverty alleviation, fighting together with nearly 2 million township officials and millions of village officials, and more than 1,800 people have laid down their lives on their posts (Xi, 2021). On the road of poverty alleviation, the bright red Party flag always flies high. Facts have proved that the Party is the fundamental guarantee for overcoming all difficulties and obstacles, and it is the Party that holds the key to achieving great success in poverty alleviation.

Secondly, following a people-centered development philosophy, the CPC consistently sticks to its ultimate goal of improving people's wellbeing and achieving common prosperity by strengthening the internal driving force of the poor people to lift themselves out of poverty.

As an old Chinese saying goes, "The success of state governance lies in making the people become rich". The founding mission of the Communist Party of China is to pursue happiness for the people of China and rejuvenation of Chinese nation. Focusing on improving people's livelihood, narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor, and addressing unbalanced and inadequate development, all the leaderships of the CPC Central Committee have united and led the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in launching a series of campaigns against poverty, reducing the number of poor people, expanding the thriving areas, and making solid progress in achieving common prosperity.

Upholding the principle of development for the people and by the people, the CPC has brought the people's initiative and vitality in working and doing business into full play, especially motivating the internal driving force of the poverty-stricken areas and the poor people. In the battle against extreme poverty, the Party mobilized all the resources of the whole country, made great efforts to lift the rural poor population out of absolute poverty as scheduled, and delivered its solemn commitment to putting the people first.

Thirdly, the political superiority of the socialist system has been given full play to, unifying the people's thought, will and action, and pooling all resources to accomplish major missions and difficult tasks. The socialist system under the leadership of the CPC is the fundamental guarantee for uniting the people and pooling strengths, which provides a powerful institutional support for China's constant victory on the road of poverty alleviation. According to the Marxist anti-poverty theory, a social system leads to poverty, likewise a social system also eliminates poverty, the key lies in what kind of social system it is, whether it is capitalist system or socialist system (Ai, 2021). Ending poverty and realizing common prosperity are the distinctive features of the socialist system. The Chinese socialist system has inherent advantages in integrating all resources of the whole society, coordinating various complex

relationships and promoting social harmony. On the way to poverty eradication, the Chinese socialist system has the political advantages of holding on to the established objectives, making unremitting efforts, cooperating between the developed areas in the east and the poor areas in the west, uniting and mobilizing all sectors of the society. This has generated an invincible force and created a pattern of poverty alleviation with Chinese characteristics. According to statistics, since 2012, the CPC Central Committee and the State Council have issued five documents concerning poverty alleviation, the General Office of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China and the State Council General Office have issued 20 documents on poverty reduction, the central and local authorities have made 256 relevant policies, documents or work plans, all these constitutes the top-level design system and local execution system on poverty alleviation in the new period, involving responsibilities, policies, investments, supervision and assessment of poverty alleviation (Jintai Information, Highlighting the socialist system with Chinese characteristics in poverty alleviation, 2020). In the battle against poverty, the Chinese socialist system has the advantage of concentrating resources to accomplish major tasks because it is people-oriented and serves the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the people. It can effectively boost the morale of the people and reach the broadest social consensus. Poverty is not socialism. The socialist system itself demands the rapid development of productive forces. Poverty alleviation is the adjustment and improvement of social relations of production, and is the concrete embodiment of transforming the advantages of the socialist system into governance efficiency. The leadership of the Communist Party of China is the defining feature of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and constitutes the internal motivation and driving force for the emergence, improvement and development of the socialist system. In short, China's huge success in poverty reduction has once again tested and demonstrated the strength of the socialist system under the leadership of the CPC, creating favorable conditions for the Chinese society to march confidently on the new journey toward the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

Fourthly, taking the development-oriented path of poverty alleviation, China committed itself to rooting out poverty by enhancing the capacity of the poor for sustainable development. President Xi Jinping pointed out in his speech that development-oriented poverty alleviation is a distinctive feature of the poverty reduction path with Chinese characteristics. In fact, adhering to the policy of development-oriented poverty alleviation is a basic experience gained in China's poverty governance. The development-oriented poverty alleviation policy lays emphasis on strengthening the ability of the poverty-stricken areas and the poor households to relieve poverty through assistance from the government, boosting economic development on the basis of the reality and local conditions, and getting rid of the poor people's lazy thought of "waiting for relief". Unlike the early poverty relief focusing on assistance with money and necessities, in essence, the ongoing development-oriented poverty alleviation approach regards development as the basic way to solve poverty, focusing on improving development conditions and enhancing the development ability, to eliminate poverty and create a happy life by means of development. Different from the early poverty alleviation, this kind of

“hematopoietic poverty alleviation” is a great pioneering work in the history of poverty reduction in China. The Chinese government has always incorporated poverty alleviation into its national development strategy, adhering to the basic principle of “development is the absolute principle”, being committed to addressing the principal contradiction of the society in different stages of development, and constantly boosting poverty alleviation in synch with economic reform. Poverty alleviation by developing industries has enabled the poor population to develop the capacity for sustainable development, especially by developing education, a key move to fight poverty. Education, including compulsory education and vocational education, is the best way to stop intergenerational transmission of poverty.

Fifthly, the targeted poverty alleviation strategy has been implemented so as to truly lift the real poor population out poverty. “Targeted poverty alleviation”, put forward by President Xi Jinping during his inspection and guidance of poverty alleviation work in Shibadong village, an impoverished village in Hunan province, in November 2013, is an important thought in poverty governance, which has become the key guideline for winning the tough battle against poverty. The important idea “targeted poverty alleviation” fits in with China’s national conditions, such as the huge poor population and the vast poverty-stricken area. It focuses on the major problems or main aspects of China’s poverty alleviation, and gives systematic and in-depth thinking and responses to a series of primary issues about the results of poverty alleviation, such as “to whom help and support will be offered”, “who will offer the help and support” and “how to offer the help and support”, stressing precision in poverty alleviation to ensure ending real poverty. To achieve the goal of “two assurances and three guarantees” in poverty alleviation, which refers to assuring the rural poor population that their food and clothing needs will be met and guaranteeing that they have access to compulsory education, basic medical services and safe housing, first the poor households have been accurately identified, then the root cause of poverty for each household was found, after that poverty registration was conducted, and finally targeted measures were taken. In practice, Guizhou created the “four looks” work method: first, look at the house; second, look at the grain; third, look at whether the labor force is strong or not; fourth, look at whether there is a student in the family, which can be used as the criteria for identifying a poor family. Secondly, the Chinese governments at all levels have assumed the responsibility for poverty alleviation: the central government makes overall plans; provincial authorities shoulder overall responsibilities; city- and country-level governments take actions to implement the policies. A comprehensive and efficient poverty alleviation work system was established by strengthening the responsibility of the principal leader of the Party and government in poverty alleviation, boosting poverty alleviation through Party building under Party secretaries at five levels (the CPC Central committee, provincial committee, municipal committee, county-level committee, and village committee), and enforcing all-round supervision and accountability, to ensure that the targets and tasks of poverty alleviation are achieved as scheduled. Thirdly, in poverty alleviation working strategies and methods, the “Six Precisions” in poverty alleviation were pursued, including precision of target, measures to the household, use of funds,

stationing of first village secretary, and effect of poverty alleviation, and the “Five-pronged Poverty Alleviation Measures” were carried out, including developing production, relocation, ecological compensation, development of education, securing basic needs through social security. The idea of targeted poverty alleviation is a valuable experience created in China’s poverty alleviation work and it proves to be a magic weapon for winning the tough battle against poverty with high quality.

4. Global Implications of China’s Poverty Governance

The valuable experience of China’s successful poverty alleviation has become an important part of China’s efforts to create a new model for human advancement. China’s anti-poverty experience has offered a new option for countries and nations who want to accelerate development while preserving their independence. Although the path of social development of each country is determined by its history, culture and national conditions, China’s experience and wisdom in poverty governance are still worth learning. Actually, poverty alleviation is a systematic project for people’s livelihood, involving political, economic, cultural, social and ecological aspects. China’s great achievements in the fight against poverty are a testament to the remarkable enhancement of China’s capacity for comprehensive governance. On the road to achieve common prosperity, China has contributed much valuable experience to the world in addressing the problem of poverty, particularly the following important experience:

4.1 Attaching Great Importance to Poverty Alleviation

All social forces and sources are pooled to address the issue of poverty which is put on the top agenda of the state governance. China’s remarkable achievements in poverty relief are the result of the concerted efforts of the entire Chinese people, and are inseparable from the great attention paid by the leadership of the Party and the country. On the way to strive for common prosperity, Chinese leaders such as Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping and others relay the struggle one generation after another, especially ever since 2012, President Xi Jinping, united and led the Chinese people of all ethnic groups, launched a series of campaigns against poverty across the country, and won the battle against absolute poverty, a hardest nut to crack in poverty alleviation. Following the people-centered approach, President Xi delivered his solemn promise that China should become a moderately prosperous society by 2021 when the CPC celebrates its 100th anniversary for founding. Over the past eight years, President Xi has presided over seven central conferences on poverty alleviation, carried out more than 50 inspection tours on poverty alleviation work, visited 14 regions where extreme poverty is concentrated in contiguous areas, and has been to more than 20 poor villages (Xi, 2021). Concern from the top leader of the country and aspirations for a better life of the society are combined to motivate the whole nation to assure all policies and measures against poverty have been successfully implemented. Only in this way, can the common goal for prosperity be achieved as expected. Simply put, poverty alleviation should be viewed as the first priority in state governance.

4.2 Taking a Sustainable Development Approach to Anti-poverty

Development-oriented poverty alleviation is the general strategy of China's poverty alleviation work and an effective way to solve the poverty problem in developing countries. Poverty eradication and prosperous development are the common aspiration and responsibility of all countries in the world. The fundamental solution to poverty and unbalanced and inadequate social development is to take the development-oriented path of poverty alleviation and enhance the sustainable development capacity of the poor areas and the masses. Only by paying more attention to the cultivation of the ability of the poor to lift themselves out of poverty can we truly achieve the goal of "real poverty alleviation, truly helping the real poor people and lifting them out of poverty". China's experience has shown that China's poverty alleviation work pays more attention to teaching them how to fish than to giving them fish, and eliminating poverty through the industry support and job skills training. Furthermore, the people-oriented and development-centered poverty alleviation can effectively prevent the poverty from recurring and ensure the sustainability of poverty reduction. Hence, the China's experience is a long-term solution to addressing poverty for developing countries.

4.3 Implementing Targeted Poverty Alleviation Strategy

Targeted poverty alleviation is the wisdom and the experience acquired in China's poverty reduction practice. It is a key to achieving practical results in poverty alleviation, and is regarded by the international community as the epistemology and methodology of China's poverty alleviation. China's targeted poverty alleviation philosophy is rich and profound. It is a reflection of dialectical materialism, seeking truth from facts from the actual situation. This philosophy emphasizes rooting out poverty by identifying the real poor household and addressing the poverty problem, focuses on taking one-to-one measures against poverty, stresses shaking off spiritual poverty, mobilizes the internal driving force for poverty alleviation, regards poverty alleviation through education as the knack to stop poverty from intergenerational transmission, and the "Six Precisions" and the "Five-pronged Poverty Alleviation Measures" are implemented. The theory of targeted poverty alleviation created by China has provided a scientific guidance for the great practice of poverty reduction around the world and is a magic weapon to win the fight against poverty.

4.4 Enforcing All-round Supervision and Accountability

In order to prevent embezzlement and corruption, the responsibility of the officials and the work team personnel for poverty alleviation were strengthened and the funds for poverty alleviation were supervised through an all-round supervision and accountability work mechanism, including poverty alleviation work inspection, the Party self-supervision, government auditing, legislative supervision, as well as clean government and anti-corruption warning education and so on. The all-directional and whole-process oversight system was set up to ensure that poverty alleviation work teams are loyal, clean and responsible, and that every penny of poverty alleviation funds is spent where it accounts.

5. Concluding Remarks

The great historic achievements of China's poverty governance significantly strengthened the Chinese people's self-confidence in the Chinese path, theory, social system and culture, which not only laid a solid foundation for realizing the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but also greatly inspired the people and the countries in the world that longed for ending poverty and having a better life. It adds a strong impetus to the joint efforts to build a community with a shared future for mankind without poverty and common development. China has not only made significant contributions to poverty eradication, but also shared its solutions with the rest of the world to tackle poverty.

Poverty alleviation is a long-term struggle. Having built a moderately prosperous society in all respects, China remains the largest developing country in the world and is still faced with the huge challenges of consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and continuously promoting common prosperity. On the way to seek a better life for mankind, China has always been a determined and powerful promoter and contributor to the international cause of poverty reduction, and will continue to shine light on the way forward for the world with its experience and wisdom.

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