This is my first time in America and it is also the first time for me to think about "social justice" using the English language. So, before exploring Michael Novak's article "Define Social Justice", I want to have a general retrospection about what I have learned about "social justice" or "She Hui Zheng Yi" when I was in China.

The most common translation of "Social Justice" in Chinese is "She Hui Zheng Yi"(社会正义/社會正義). "She Hui" is quite a semantic equivalence to "social", however, "Zheng Yi" in Chinese is a little bit more complicated and might be a little different from what it means in English. According to Xinhua Zidian, one of the most authoritative modern Chinese dictionaries, "Zheng Yi' has three meanings:

1）[noun] principles that are beneficial to people or general public

2) [adjective] impartial and upright

3) [noun] correct, proper or rational meaning (of words or a sentence )

This word in Chinese is very abstract. It is about **principles** that are **beneficial**, **impartial** and **upright**.

Actually, there is a word in Chinese that goes constantly together with "Zhen Yi"(Justice), and that is "Gong Ping"(Equality or Fairness). To answer a journalist's question in the press conference concluding the annual sessions of the national legislature and political advisory body on March 14th 2010, Wen Jiabao, the former premier of China, said:

“In pursuing development, we will not only accomplish all our tasks set out in the economic sector, it is also important for us to promote social equity and justice and promote the all-round development for our people in a free environment. We should give equal importance to all these three above mentioned tasks. We concentrate our energy and efforts on economic development to serve the fundamental purpose of satisfying the increasing  material and cultural needs of our people. At the same time, I believe social equity and justice form the basis of social stability.***And social equity and justice can shine even brighter than the sun.”***

Immediately after the press conference, the last sentence in the quote above became a catch phrase in China and turned out to be the most-quoted line in domestic media for quite a long time.

There is even a set phrase in Chinese for "social equality and justice", which combines "social equality" and "social justice" together, as "She Hui Gong Zheng" (or a longer form "She Hui Gong Ping yu Zheng Yi")，which is used far more frequently than "She Hui Gong ping"(Social Equality) and "She Hui Zheng Yi(Social Justice)" themselves.

On baike.baidu.com, a somewhat mainland China's equivalent to Wikipedia, "She Hui Zheng Yi"(Social Justice) only has one page of explanation with about only 200 Chinese Characters (see: [She Hui Zheng Yi [Social Justice] on baike.baidu.com](http://baike.baidu.com/view/1574713.htm)), whereas "She Hui Gong Ping yu Zheng Yi" has about eight pages of explanation with about 12,900 Chinese Characters (see: [She Hui Gong Ping yu Zheng Yi [Social Equality & Justice] on ba...](http://baike.baidu.com/view/3069841.htm)). So, a very brief and initial conclusion that I could draw here is that within the Mainland China context, social equality and social justice are far more often mentioned together as a whole, integral and inseparable concept, than viewed and discussed individually. I have to add the boundary "within the Mainland China" here because the society of Mainland China is quite different from that in Taiwan, Hong Kong and Macau, in a great many aspects.

Then, what is "social equality and justice" within Mainland China context? The general definition of "She Hui Gong Ping yu Zheng Yi"(Social equality and justice) from baike.baidu.com goes like this:

[Translation]"Social equality & justice is the basic***requirement***and***goal***of the harmonious development of society, and it is also a***symbol***of civilization and progress of a society. It was pointed out very clearly by the former president Hu Jintao, from the perspective of the actual practice of the great socialist cause with distinctive Chinese feature, that social equality & justice should be substantially maintained and realized during the process of constructing the socialist harmonious society. It was pointed out at The Sixth Plenary Session of the 16th Central Committee of CPC, that***institution*** is the fundamental guarantee for social equality & justice."[excerpt]

To put it in simple words, social equality & justice is a***requirement***, a***goal***, a***symbol***, and should be realized by***institution***.

This general definition on baike.baidu.com is obviously formulated according to the official documents of the government. Here, I am not going to give my comment on the "official documents", I just want to re-visit and re-examine the set phrase combing social equality and justice. Do the two really have to go together within the context of Mainland China? Why the two always go together in Mainland China, especially in political discourses?

Although the gap between China’s rich and poor has been growing, the Chinese government has indeed implemented a number of measures to improve social equality. For example, many provincial and municipal governments have set up the minimum wage standards; individual income tax threshold has been raised to ease the burden of medium and low income earners amid price increase; state-owned enterprises are required to pay higher taxes to support social welfare programs; the vast majority of Chinese have gotten richer over the past 30 years, although of course improvement has come faster for the rich than for the poor.

Chinese people have the long tradition of respecting those getting rich through hardworking and diligence, and therefore, interestingly, Chinese people's unhappiness is triggered more by inequalities of power than by gaps of income. That is why the general public in China is very intolerant to official corruption and procedural injustices, which definitely generate illegal economic benefits. But the root is on the power inequalities. So we can see here that the social equality issue soon merges with social justice issue. Social injustice can cause severe social inequality, and social inequality, in its turn, aggravates the social injustice. That might be one the reasons that Social equality and social justice in the Chinese language seldom separate from each other.