

## Introducing the Concept of Modernization in China in the 20th Century

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### Abstract

This paper is devoted to the complex issues of introduction of modernization theory in modern social science of the People's Republic of China. Based on the systems approach, the historical-comparative and historical-genetic method, the influence of the theories by K. Marx, M. Weber, T. Parsons and I. Wallerstein on modern Chinese social thought is analyzed. The theory of modernization is recognized as synthetic, but basically correlating with Westernization. It is concluded that in modern Chinese social science the direct comparison of primary modernization in Europe with secondary processes launched in the regions of Asia as a result of colonial expansion is incorrect. The materials of the paper are of interest to the researchers of China's social thought, the theory of modernization.

**Keywords:** Modernization; Postmodernism; Sustainable development; Modern history; Contemporary history; T. Parsons; I. Wallerstein; K. Marx; M. Weber; Sociology; People's republic of China.



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### 1. Introduction

The concept of "modernization" directly correlates with the term "Westernization", as it denotes the modern social and economic system associated with the victory of industrialism in the West. The founder of the modern conceptual interpretation of modernization in the West in the middle of the last century was T. Parsons. Chinese researcher Luo Rongqu (罗荣渠) drew attention to the terminological mismatch of the concept of modernization in English and Chinese. This historical discrepancy partially has a historical foundation: "modern times" are defined as the period after 1500, i.e. include the Middle Ages, New and Newest Time. In Chinese historiography there is no concept of the Middle Ages, and New time has its own specifics. Actually, the term "new" (xinde 新的) is not included in the concept of "New Time" (jindai 近代), since it refers to the era from the beginning of industrialization to the October Revolution of 1917. The newest era when modernization was actually carried out is designated in Chinese as xiandai (现代) (Gu, 1999).

### 2. Methods

Regardless of the research methods and ideological preferences serving as the basis for the theory, the key place in understanding the processes in the modern world is occupied by the economy. The concept of "productive forces" was introduced in Marxist theory, but shared by almost all modern researchers. The influence of the factor of the productive forces is not absolutized, and the main discussions are conducted around the degree that determines the development of society.

This paper uses historical-comparative and historical-genetic methods, as well as a systematic approach.

### 3. Results

The explanatory dictionaries explain the English concept of "modernization" as "to make modern". Despite the fact that the term was introduced only in 1950, in recent studies, the origins of modernization are sought in the Renaissance, the existence of an analogue of which in Chinese history is highly debatable. The basis for understanding modernization is the theory by T. Parsons, the representative and head of the school of structural functionalism. According to him, modernization is a functionally conditioned and interrelated change in social development. In the exposition of the Chinese researcher Pang Shaotang (庞绍堂), the classical theory of modernization comes down to three aspects: 1) the contrasting of tradition and modernity, i.e. tradition breaks down under the pressure of modernization; 2) the convergence of cultures and civilizations, i.e. in the process of modernization, countries that refer to fundamentally different cultures are developing in a similar way; 3) modernization is considered as a global process (China, 1979–1989):

Following the logic of the classical theory by Parsons, it is possible to single out subject areas translating modernization into concrete forms.

Political sphere: democratization, bureaucratization, legitimization.

Economics: industrialization, sectoral specialization of countries, globalism.

Society: urbanization, consumer society, border transparency, information communication.

Culture: rationalization, the primacy of the economy, universal secondary education, secularization of society.

Personality: openness, independence, equality.

The classical theory of modernization was flourishing in the 1960s, but as the modernization process deepened in a global context, the shortcomings of the classical theory became apparent. Practical needs gave rise to the theories of neocolonialism, world-system analysis, postmodern theories. Structural functionalism failed to predict the crisis of the 1970s, and especially its weak point was the difficulty in describing the processes occurring in non-Western countries.

The disadvantages of the classical theory are:

1. Eurocentrism, i.e. Europe serves not only as a benchmark for comparison, but Western civilization is also implicitly assumed as a model of global development.

2. The classical theory is based on an unverifiable belief that the laws of social development are one and all cultures are required to undergo the same stages of development but at different rates.

3. Simplified separation and opposition of tradition and modernity.

4. Excessive fascination with internal factors of development and ignoring the external.

Neo-colonialism and the world-system analysis by I. Wallerstein proceed from another explanation of the development of the Western and the underdevelopment of non-Western countries. The main reason for this is the unequal position between the center of world development - the West and the "periphery". In other words, the regions of the "periphery" are poorer as a result of the fact that their human and material capitals go to the rich "central" countries. This approach involves the classification of forms of dependence and the development path of peripheral countries, depending on their position in the hierarchy. Further development of this idea was presented in the works by Immanuel Wallerstein. He had to explain why at the same time, East Asian countries such as Japan, the Republic of Korea (South Korea), Hong Kong and Taiwan were not only distinguished by high rates of economic growth, but also implemented a comprehensive modernization of all structures of society, while developed countries entered a period of economic stagnation. In the 1980s it was realized that a single theory is not able to describe all the essential features of world development and won the system-functional approach, which allows us to use elements of various theories as applied to specific problems.

The founder of the postmodern approach to the theory of modernization was the American scientist Ronald Inglehart. His approach is not based on the growth rates of macroeconomic indicators, but on increasing the quality of life indicators and the happiness experienced by each individual, which is directly related to the standard of living. Such representations introduce a certain turmoil into periodization. If most of the regions of the planet are still in the "modern times", then where are the boundaries of the "Postmodernization" countdown? The spread of opinions in this issue is relatively wide, and in line with these opinions "Postmodernization" begins after World War II or after the 1970s in developed countries. At the same time, Cyril E. Black in his work "Comparative Modernization" defines "postmodern" only as the highest level of industrial modernization in the most developed countries.

Chinese researchers, based on the specifics of China's development after the 1970s, tried in their own way to respond to the challenges of classical and non-classical

modernization theories. Chinese scientist He Chuanqi (何传启), for example, proposed the concept of "secondary modernization" (He, 2012; Xiaomei, 2014). It is noteworthy that He Chuanqi creatively reinterpreted the "Rostovian take off mode", proposed back in 1960, and caused a lot of criticism. He Chuanqi proposed the following periodization of the stages of development of human society:

1. "Instrumental epoch": from the appearance of man until the Neolithic revolution (2,000,000 years ago - 6000 BC).

2. Agrarian era - from the birth of civilization until the industrial revolution (4000 BC - 1760s AD).

3. Industrial era – the first modernization (1770 - 1970's.).

4. Information age – the second modernization (after the 1970s, until about 2100).

Each epoch is divided into 4 periods: initial, development, maturity, transitional. According to He Chuanqi, the development of human civilization is objective, while the level of development of the economy and social structures, productive forces and quality of life is gradually increasing. In the course of this development, three capital transitions took place, which also shaped four epochs in the development of mankind. Modernization is a profound change in human civilization, parallel to the industrial revolution of the 18th century. It is characterized as the process of creating a modern civilization through global interaction, and at the same time profound international contradictions.

The first modernization involves two phases: the transition from an agrarian society to an industrial one and the transition from industrialism to the information age. The second modernization also does not mean the completion of the development of mankind, but it is not yet possible to predict the way the further progress will lead. According to He Chuanqi, modernization is not a complex phenomenon, since different peoples and countries have their own peculiarities and patterns of development, whereas big eras have common properties inherent in the entire human civilization.

These properties are not pre-defined and can be changed.

## 4. Discussion

In the modern historiography of modernization, researchers primarily try to determine the nature of the modernization process in order to find its logic and laws. The initial idea of modernization was relatively simple: this process was considered a synonym for industrialization and only later it became realized that a complex change greatly changes human nature. The simultaneous complexity and diversity of the forms of the development of the modern world makes it impossible to create a kind of "general theory of everything," but at the same time, the realization of Chinese modernization requires a return to the sources and primary impulses of modernization in its classical understanding (Bakhyt *et al.*, 2018).

Chinese scientist Xiao Gongqin (萧功秦) in his study (Smith and Nelson, 1985), proposed the classification of various models of modernization. Xiao Gongqin recognized that Europe is the birthplace of modernization. Such countries as England and France he calls a model of "natural modernization", because the factors of their primary modernization were within these societies. The United States and Canada represent a different model where the factors of modernization were introduced by European colonizers – the so-called "secondary modernization" model. Its version is the colonial model, represented by the Latin American countries.

Xiao Gongqin singled out a separate model of the eastern modernization, characterized as "induction". He considers it using the material of China, Japan, Ottoman Turkey and Iran. All the countries listed had an ancient autochthonous tradition, i.e. Western values and methods were "external stress and stimulus". In view of the internal cultural differences, the answers to the challenge of the West were different (Chen, 2017).

A quite complex and sensitive issue is the following: since the primary modernization was the product of European civilization with its long history and its own tradition, why did the industrial revolution begin in Europe, and not in another highly developed region? Accordingly, are the modernization and progress of science directly related, as well as the creation of a democratic society? The Chinese material allows us to make a few noteworthy observations.

Within the framework of the classical theory, the development of trade led to the emergence of a new social class - the bourgeoisie, which was the main force of the modernization process, both according to Marx and M. Weber. However, China of the Song era (宋代, 960 - 1279) had an extremely highly developed economy, and metal production roughly corresponded to the level of the UK before the beginning of the industrial era. Trade was also highly developed, but this led neither to the formation of a layer of industrialists or the formation of a bourgeois class, nor to the appearance of modernization factors. Apparently, this shows that it is impossible to reduce modernization and its causes to a single or a small set of elements. Modernization is the addition of many synthetic factors; respectively, the identical factors in different historical contexts and situations lead to different results.

Human activity is largely determined by the ideological system that determines the style of thinking, philosophical preferences and moral coordinates. Therefore, the issue of culture and tradition in the context of modernization is paramount. Max Weber (1864 - 1920) brought it to the modern scientific level and constructed a classical model of the influence of thinking on the economic behavior of man in his treatise "Protestant ethics and the spirit of capitalism". It is noteworthy, however, that Weber did not build a one-dimensional model, and used for the connection between ethics and capitalism the term of that time – "elective affinity". Weber, however, considered the religious factor determinant for the rapid progress of the West. If we examine his place among the creators of modern sociology - along with Emile Durkheim and Karl Marx - it turns out that Weber chose the methodology of anti-positivism, emphasizing the radical difference between the social sciences and the natural sciences. Max Weber tried to apply his method to the material of non-European civilizations, creating a series of studies: "The Religion of China: Confucianism and Taoism", "The Religion of India: The Sociology of Hinduism and Buddhism", and "Ancient Judaism". His most important conclusion was that the West differed from the East in rationality and in the creation of modern science (Barbalet and Barbalet, 2017; Jervis, 1998; Peter and Krauß, 2011; Xiao, 2011).

## 5. Summary

Any attempt to reflect the origin of civilization in the final analysis will lead to a dialectical paradox: the specificity of culture is determined by natural objectivities, but after its formalization, a person perceives objective reality through the prism of culture. This was first realized by K. Marx in the sociological dimension: social being determines the creation of man, but history here is just human history, and people are the subjects of both production relations and the historical process.

One of the most important productive forces is cognition and its highest degree of development - science. Science is currently the most effective way of knowing and reconstructing the world around us. The question of why modern science originated in Europe and did not in China under equal conditions, was posed by M. Weber and detailed by the British scientist and embryologist Joseph Needham (1900-1995) in the fundamental work "Science and Civilization in China".

## 6. Conclusions

The theory of modernization implies a conceptual belief in the cognizability of the world and the fundamental unity of human nature. Modern Chinese researchers of modernization theory note that all the creators of the basic social teachings talked about the welfare of man. From the Plato's "Republic" and the Confucius' Great Unity (Datong) to modern globalization nothing has changed. Moreover, we can distinguish at

least six points of contact between the antique, ancient Chinese and modern global project of social development:

1. Equitable public order;
2. The standard of living sufficient for the comfort and well-being of each member of society (see also point 5);
3. A unified system of values ensuring public morality;
4. Social system that ensures the implementation of the abilities of each member of society and the observance of equal rights to property and equitable distribution of benefits;
5. Every member of society should feel happy and feel the need for self-development and his/her own contribution to the reconstruction of the world; every succeeding generation must exceed the previous one in education and morality;
6. The implementation of the five above points will ensure general harmonious development.

The specific details of the future ideal, however, will be extremely different and will depend on the historical era, culture and country. This makes the comparison of the ideals of development meaningless and the only functionalist paradigm applicable. Arguing about the ultimate goals of modernization, one should keep in mind two factors:

1. This stage in the development of human civilization, quite possibly, already contains the potentialities of the future stage of development with the results being still far off.
2. Mankind has become a truly global community, which (at least in theory) has the opportunity for successful joint development with the rational use of the best achievements of tradition and the elimination of obstacles to successful development.

In this regard, the study of the specifics of national cultures and civilizations of the past will remain forever relevant. Any theory and doctrine is an attempt to implement a model of general development. Technological modernization has created the foundation of world unity, especially in the field of global communication. At the same time, it should be borne

in mind that the key concepts for the modernization of "science" and "democracy" are a specific product of European civilization, and the model of democracy was tested in practice even in antique times.

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