

# Chinese Path to Modernization: An Analysis of the Similarities and Differences in the Modernization of World Civilizations

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## ABSTRACT

Since the mid-18th century, when the West began its modernization, countries around the world have progressively engaged in their own modernization processes, influenced by this historical trend. After more than 250 years of exploration and adaptation, Western nations have largely completed their modernization. In contrast, many non-Western countries, hindered by colonial oppression and the disintegration of their existing economic structures, have hastily sought solutions by blindly adopting the Western development model, resulting in significant social unrest. This situation serves as a reminder for China that, in the process of modernization, it must carefully analyze specific challenges based on its own national conditions while drawing on both the successful and failed experiences of modernization from other countries. Consequently, China's path to modernization should embody the common characteristics of modernization shared by all nations while also reflecting the unique aspects of its own national context. The purpose of this study is to summarize the common features, as well as the respective advantages and disadvantages, of the modernization paths of the world's major civilized regions, with the aim of providing valuable insights for China's modernization journey. This paper will employ desk research methods to gather information from various media sources and analyze the Chinese path to modernization accordingly.

## KEYWORDS

Specific National Conditions; Common Characteristics; Community with a Shared Future for Mankind; Consensus; Common Prosperity; Peace and Unity.

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

The world is undergoing a profound transformation not witnessed in a century, as major civilizations increasingly embrace modernization propelled by the forces of globalization. The Chinese people and Chinese civilization are not only essential members of the global community and world civilization but also active participants and contributors to global modernization. The significance of exploring the path of Chinese modernization lies in our commitment to establishing China as a powerful socialist modern nation while encouraging all countries and civilizations to address their practical challenges and pursue their own ideal paths to modernization.

## 2. THE MODERNIZATION OF HUMAN CIVILIZATION

Throughout history, human civilizations across diverse continents and climate zones have undergone over 5,000 years of development. At this pivotal moment in the 21st century, these civilizations have participated in comprehensive, multi-faceted exchanges and discussions, gradually establishing a

community with a shared future for humanity that progresses economically, politically, culturally, socially, and ecologically.

Generally speaking, modernization began with the Industrial Revolution in mid-18th century England and the Political Revolution in France, subsequently spreading globally from the West. Following a period of exploitation and colonization by Western powers after the Age of Discovery, many non-Western civilizations in Asia, Africa, and Latin America underwent the process of modernization, either actively or passively, while being compelled to serve as markets for raw materials and colonies for these dominant powers. Notable examples include China's Westernization Movement, the Reform Movement of 1898, and Japan's Meiji Restoration.

After three industrial revolutions and two world wars, Western colonial empires gradually disintegrated, prompting countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America to embark on a journey toward independence and self-reliance. Scholars from various disciplines, including those in the West, have begun to reflect critically on the challenges associated with the Western model of modernization and how to establish their own civilizations along a similar trajectory. Following an extended period of adjustments, a global consensus has emerged regarding the standards of modernization, which encompass the scientific advancement of academic knowledge, the democratization of law and politics, the industrialization of the economy, the diversification of ideological perspectives, the individualization of life and culture, and the secularization of religion.

### **3. MODERNIZATION OF DIVERSE CULTURAL REGIONS**

According to Samuel Huntington's theory of the clash of civilizations, the world is divided into nine major cultural regions. The early stages and levels of modernization are primarily influenced by Western and Eastern civilizations, followed by Japanese civilization, and subsequently by other civilizations, including Indian, Latin American, and Chinese cultures.

After the Renaissance, Western civilization embarked on a path of modernization. The bourgeois revolution, the industrial revolution, and colonial expansion collectively shaped the evolution of Western capitalism, which is characterized by capitalist private ownership, a free market, and decentralized modern state institutions[1].

In its efforts to promote modernization theory globally, Western civilization consistently advocates the idea that "modernization equals Westernization. by an ideological bias favoring Western centrism, a commitment to a singular progressive narrative in historical interpretation, and an emphasis on instrumental rationality at the expense of value rationality within the context of modernization[2].

However, other civilizations have gradually embarked on a path of modernization, each characterized by its unique attributes, through active learning and compelled acceptance. For instance, Russia, as part of the Eastern Orthodox civilization, has pursued a Soviet-style socialist modernization path defined by a highly centralized planned economy and a centralized political system. In contrast, developing countries from the Global South, represented by Indian, Islamic, and Latin American civilizations, have adopted a mixed approach to modernization. This approach is characterized by a combination of mixed ownership, markets that are either free or subject to government intervention, and modern state institutions that may be either centralized or decentralized[1].

This clearly demonstrates that Western modernization theory, as a theoretical framework developed within the social context of Western countries, primarily reflects the subjective perspectives of Western theorists. It lacks universality and exhibits significant biases and limitations[2].

Wise individuals in the West have begun to engage in profound reflection on various issues arising from the modernization of Western civilization, as well as the imposition of development models and values on other regions. The "Civilization Interaction Theory, proposed by William McNeill and Jerry Bentley, posits that different civilizations, through their interactions, not only enhance their survival

skills through mutual learning and adaptation but also stimulate developmental motivation through competitive survival, ultimately fostering the progress of human society[3].

For instance, Western Marxism, rooted in a comprehensive critique of contemporary capitalist society, highlights both economic rationality and instrumental rationality. It also provides an in-depth analytical critique of modern capitalism, exploring various dimensions such as labor, work, technology, healthcare, education, consumption, ecology, the state, and culture within the economic context[4].

The introduction of these viewpoints provides a comprehensive update on the understanding of modernization. It emphasizes that modernization is not synonymous with westernization; rather, it is a process and outcome of adjustments made by various countries and regions based on their own levels of social development and the insights gained from interactions with the outside world. This perspective highlights the importance of analyzing, clarifying, and critiquing the ideologies present in Western modernization theory while distinguishing them from scientific understanding. Furthermore, it calls for more in-depth research into the genuine experiences of Western modernization, the valuable aspects of Western culture, the accumulated wisdom of the West throughout its development, the research methodologies of relevant theories, and the profound insights offered by certain scholars[5].

#### **4. THE CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION**

The Chinese people are well-acquainted with the concept and process of The term first appeared in the 1922 issue of *Oriental Magazine*, which praised Afghanistan's emulation of Japan's Meiji Restoration as a comprehensive plan that integrated political, economic, taxation, and educational reforms.[6]. As a pioneer in saving the nation and revitalizing China, Sun Yat-sen was one of the earliest awakened revolutionaries. He proposed the goal of revitalizing China, explicitly advocating for the need to catch up with Europe and America by learning from "modern civilization. He once stated, "Therefore, as a nation of 400 million people with an excellent civilization, possessing the most beautiful land and abundant resources in the world, if we unite in our pursuit of prosperity and strength, I firmly believe that in ten years, we will be able to surpass Europe and America[7]. This represents the earliest and most fundamental understanding and pursuit of modernization by the Chinese people.

In retrospect, China's path to modernization has roughly gone through four stages. The first stage spans from the Opium War to the May Fourth Movement. During this historical period, China was compelled to open its doors, leading to the gradual disintegration of its self-sufficient, small-scale agricultural economy. Society transitioned from an agricultural structure to a semi-colonial and semi-feudal system. Concurrently, China began to learn from and understand the West, actively pursuing modernization. The second stage extends from the May Fourth Movement to the establishment of New China. After gaining a certain degree of understanding of Western ideologies, China adopted Marxism-Leninism, turned its focus to studying the Soviet Union, and identified industrialization as the first step toward achieving modernization. The third stage covers the period from the founding of New China to the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Following the Sino-Soviet hostility and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the members of the Communist Party of China (CPC) recognized that they could not dogmatically replicate the Soviet model of socialist construction while disregarding its shortcomings and aspects unsuitable for China's national conditions. The path to modernization for China involves addressing practical issues through the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism, grounded in a comprehensive understanding of China's unique circumstances. The fourth stage extends from the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China to the present. At the beginning of the 21st century, the world is undergoing unprecedented changes, with people from diverse civilizations gradually integrating while preserving their cultural identities. This indicates that the modernization path of each sovereign state should align

with the overarching theme of human civilization's development, which emphasizes "beauty and unity, harmony in diversity"[1].

While drawing extensively on the shared experiences of modernization globally, China's approach to modernization also fully respects its unique national conditions. It has embarked on a distinct path toward common prosperity for all, emphasizing the coordination of material and spiritual civilization, the harmonious coexistence of humanity and nature, and fostering peace and solidarity with people around the world.

## 5. CONCLUSION

Modernization is an inevitable trend in history that must be embraced rather than resisted. Throughout the process of global modernization, a sequence of events naturally unfolds. First, countries and regions that have achieved modernization should not only value their own intellectual accomplishments but also assume the responsibilities of great powers by assisting developing nations and regions in their pursuit of modernization. Conversely, countries and regions that have not yet completed their modernization journey should address their own economic and social challenges while learning from the advanced experiences of developed nations to accelerate their progress. By thoroughly analyzing its own national conditions, China's path to modernization has incorporated the successful practices of Western developed countries while simultaneously respecting and supporting the diverse modernization paths and methods of other nations and regions. This approach has provided valuable insights from China for humanity to collectively explore various social systems.

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