

An Analysis of the Value Enlightenment of Chinese Modernization to African Nations

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Abstract: *Modernization, originating from Western nations, refers to the profound societal transformations that humanity has experienced since the Industrial Revolution. Attaining modernization has been an aspiration for generations of people in developing countries, as it is viewed as an essential pathway towards development and progress. In 2022, China officially introduced the concept of "Chinese-style Modernization" in its 20th National Congress. This concept not only challenges the Western dominance over the discourse of modernization but also provides valuable experiences for developing countries to forge their own unique paths towards modernization, resulting in the creation of a new form of human civilization. This article primarily explores the fundamental essence of Chinese-style Modernization and summarizes its key characteristics. Lastly, it conducts a detailed analysis of the value insights that Chinese-style Modernization offers for African nations, with the aim of fostering their development and prosperity in the context of the contemporary era.*

Keywords: *Modernization, Chinese-style Modernization, African nations, Value insights*

1. Introduction

Modernization is an inevitable path for the development of human society. However, since its inception in the Western context, the term "modernization" has been implicitly assumed to be exclusive to the West. Most people believe that only Western modernization can be deemed as "modern," while non-Western modernization is regarded as subordinate to the Western model. This perception was challenged when China introduced the concept of Chinese-style modernization in its 20th National Congress. The advancement of Chinese-style modernization not only strengthens national confidence and enriches modernization theories but also provides valuable experiences for developing countries to pursue a modernization path that aligns with their own national conditions. Embarking on the path of Chinese-style modernization holds significant importance for comprehensively promoting the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation and meeting the aspirations of the people for a better life.

2. The Fundamental Essence of Chinese-style Modernization

From a historical perspective, Chinese-style modernization is a product of long-term development across various historical periods, each characterized by its distinct features. The concept of Chinese-style modernization was officially proposed based on China's current national conditions during a central Politburo meeting in 1979. The historical starting point of the Chinese-style modernization path can be traced back to the Self-Strengthening Movement of the 1860s, which advocated "self-strengthening" and "seeking wealth." The Self-Strengthening Movement marked a significant shift from passive development to active exploration in the trajectory of Chinese-style modernization. Furthermore, Chinese-style modernization shares common features with modernization in other countries, such as industrialization, informatization, talent development, and technological progress. However, it also exhibits distinctive characteristics that are in line with China's specific national conditions.^[1]

3. The basic characteristics of Chinese modernization

To sum up, the basic features of Chinese-style modernization mainly cover such important aspects as the modernization with the largest population in the world, the modernization of promoting common prosperity for all the people, the modernization of adhering to the coordination of material and spiritual

civilization, and the modernization of following the path of peaceful development.

3.1. Chinese-Style Modernization is the Largest Modernization Effort in the World in Terms of Population

China's unique national conditions include a large population, limited arable land, and a massive scale. In the context of modernization, people are the driving force behind social development and a significant power for promoting modernization. According to the data from the 7th National Population Census of China in 2022, the total population has reached 1.412 billion, accounting for one-fifth of the world's population. China remains the country with the largest population in the world, followed by India with a population of 1.408 billion and the United States with a population of 331 million, as shown in Figure 1. However, according to the statistics of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) as of 2019, the 35 developed economies that have achieved modernization worldwide have a total population of less than one billion. The enormous population size poses various challenges for China. For example, how to ensure that the development and interests of the majority, or even all, of the people can be realized in the context of such a large population is a new problem. In this reality of a massive population, China has put forward a Chinese-style modernization plan with Chinese characteristics.

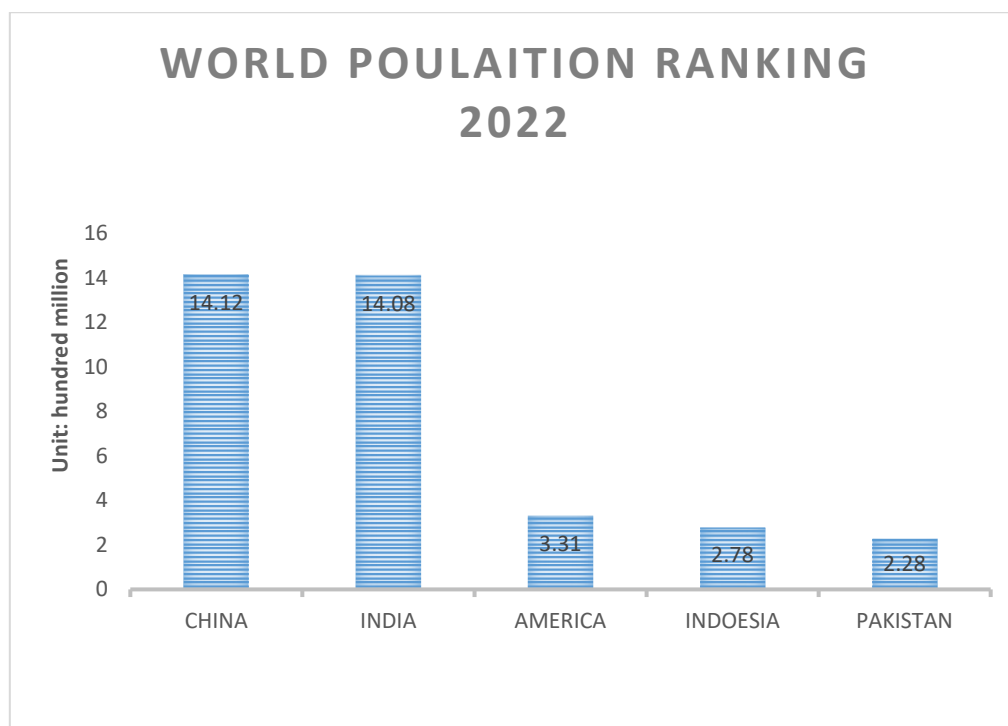


Figure 1: World Population ranking 2022.

3.2. Chinese-Style Modernization Aims to Achieve Common Prosperity for All People

Common prosperity is not only an essential requirement of socialism but also a significant characteristic of Chinese-style modernization, reflecting the people's aspirations for a better life. Since the early 1980s when the concept of a "XiaoKang society" (moderately prosperous society) was proposed, the goal of building a "XiaoKang society" has been formally emphasized in the reports of the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. In 2020, China achieved comprehensive XiaoKang society status and lifted nearly 100 million rural poor out of poverty. China is steadily moving towards common prosperity for all.

The comprehensiveness, inclusiveness, co-creation, and sharing of common prosperity are the collective pursuit and aspiration of all Chinese people.^[2] Chinese-style modernization aims to promote common prosperity for all. The comprehensiveness refers to achieving common prosperity in various aspects, including social, economic, cultural, and political aspects. The inclusiveness means that in the process of achieving common prosperity and reaching the goal, no one should be left behind. Co-creation and sharing mean that the process of achieving common prosperity is a collective effort and the outcome is enjoyed by all. To achieve common prosperity, it is necessary to develop productive

forces because liberating and developing productive forces is an important means to achieve common prosperity. Additionally, it is important to promote balanced and sufficient development. If the development remains imbalanced and the wealth gap continues to widen, both between urban and rural areas and among the people, it will be difficult to satisfy the people's hearts. Currently, the rural areas are the main areas where China faces challenges in socio-economic development, and addressing these challenges is an urgent task. Therefore, many scholars have explored the logic and paths of combining common prosperity with rural revitalization.

3.3. Chinese-Style Modernization Seeks the Coordinated Development of Material and Spiritual Civilization

Chinese-style modernization emphasizes the coordinated development of material and spiritual civilization. Material civilization generally refers to the satisfaction and progress of people's material lives. Material civilization is dynamic and changes with social development and progress. Spiritual civilization, to some extent, is equivalent to spiritual enrichment, representing the pursuit of higher-level needs. With economic and social development, people's material needs have been met to a certain extent, and the days of "insufficient food and clothing" before the reform and opening-up era have disappeared. Marx and Engels once put forward the idea that the economic base determines the superstructure. Only when people's material needs are satisfied will they pursue spiritual abundance. Therefore, material civilization serves as the foundation of spiritual civilization. To achieve the abundance of material and spiritual civilization, China has formulated numerous measures that are compatible with the reality of its society. Previous measures were mainly reflected in China's distribution system. In 2018, China proposed the rural revitalization strategy, which defined the tasks and main objectives of rural revitalization. In 2020, China announced that it had entered a comprehensive XiaoKang society, gradually enabling the people to live a moderately prosperous life with sufficient food and clothing. These constructive achievements have laid a solid foundation for common prosperity. In the same year, the national digital rural pilot program was announced, proposing the empowerment of rural development through digital technology, the completion of the digital transformation of agriculture and rural areas, and the development of digital agriculture. This has liberated the hands of the people and satisfied their desire for leisure through the development of digital tourism. These policies indicate that while China focuses on material civilization, it also strives to enrich spiritual civilization, aiming to achieve the coordinated development of both.

3.4. Chinese-Style Modernization Advocates Peaceful Development

Modernization should prioritize a peaceful modernization that upholds common human values rather than a self-centered modernization characterized by violence, plunder, and power. China has adhered to the concept of "peace" since ancient times and pursued a path of peaceful development, avoiding unilateralism and extremism. As early as 1985, Chinese national leaders summarized the global strategic issue as the coexistence of peace and development. China's concept of peaceful development is not a recent development but a continuation of thousands of years of historical heritage. The peace genes inherited from the period of agrarian civilization have made the Chinese people deeply patriotic, and the concepts of "peace under heaven" and "universal harmony" have been advocated since ancient times. In modern times, China has also experienced external aggression, such as the Sino-Japanese War, the Opium War, and the First Sino-Japanese War. These experiences have allowed the Chinese people to personally experience the pain of war and have a clearer understanding of the value and importance of peace. However, when looking at the history of global modernization, Chinese-style modernization stands out by neither achieving capital primitive accumulation through colonial wars nor exploiting the surplus value of its people internally. The commitment to peaceful development is a distinctive feature of Chinese-style modernization, and it genuinely promotes world peace through its own development.

4. The value of Chinese modernization for African countries

Based on the current new era background, the value inspiration of Chinese modernization for African countries mainly focuses on the important aspects such as adhering to the road of peaceful development, adhering to the road suited to their national conditions, adhering to the road of harmonious coexistence with nature, and adhering to the people-centered thinking.

4.1. Upholding the Path of Peaceful Development

The path of Western modernization has often been associated with expansionism, while China has charted a path of modernization that upholds peaceful development and promotes win-win cooperation. China has demonstrated through practical experience that steadfastly pursuing the path of peaceful development not only works but can also lead to success. China also hopes that countries worldwide can jointly embark on the path of peaceful development. Since modern times, African people have engaged in long-term armed struggles against foreign aggressors. Major countries that invaded Africa included Portugal, France, and Britain. For a considerable period, almost all territories were occupied, and before World War II, only Egypt, Ethiopia, and Liberia remained independent. The independence of Namibia in 1990 and the collapse of white supremacist rule in South Africa in 1994 marked the liberation of all African countries from "shackles." After experiencing periods of conflict and inequality, African nations should recognize the importance of peace for their own people and for people worldwide. Therefore, African countries should adhere to the path of peaceful development.^[3]

4.2. Pursuing a Path Suitable for National Conditions

Chinese-style modernization is not a mere copy of Western developed countries' modernization; rather, it is a modernization tailored to China's own national conditions. Currently, many African countries are in a crucial stage of transition and face important tasks in promoting economic and social development. They also urgently need to draw lessons from the experiences of developing countries. If a country wants to choose a development path suitable for itself, it must take into account its own national conditions and the current reality. China-Africa cooperation has a long history, ranging from the promotion of early industrialization and agricultural development to the Belt and Road Initiative, and more recently, measures to bridge the digital divide through initiatives such as smart agriculture and e-commerce. These efforts have deepened the friendship between China and Africa and fostered a closer China-Africa community with a shared future. Furthermore, both China and Africa are developing countries with large populations but limited arable land, sharing similar historical experiences. In this regard, African countries can draw on China's successful experiences of the past few decades and shape their own "African model" that is suitable for their national conditions.

4.3. Pursuing a Path of Harmonious Coexistence between Humans and Nature

China's 5,000 years of traditional civilization emphasize concepts such as "unity of heaven and humanity," "harmony between man and nature," and "all things have spirit." The relationship between humans and nature is a dialectical relationship of mutual dependence. Both exist within the natural environment, and neither can be separated. Western developed countries, on the other hand, have caused major environmental disasters in the past. Destruction of the natural environment will inevitably incur retaliation from nature. Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, China has attached great importance to the principle of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The Chinese-style modernization path emphasizes the mutual benefits of humans and nature, strives to strike a balance between economic development and ecological construction, and consistently pursues an eco-prioritized and green development path. Although Africa has the fewest number of islands among all continents, it boasts vast highland areas, earning the nickname "the plateau continent." African countries should shoulder the responsibility of protecting the natural environment, establish a firm ecological civilization concept, and pursue a path of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature.^[4]

4.4. Placing the People at the Center of Development

The people are the creators of history and the main driving force behind modernization construction. In every significant historical event, it is the people who have propelled historical development. Throughout the long process of economic construction and development, China has always placed the people at the center. The concept of placing the people at the center is also one of the five fundamental principles highlighted in the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China. Western developed countries prioritize capital as the central focus of their modernization, while Chinese-style modernization places the people at the center. Moreover, China's development path adheres to the idea of development for the people and involves the people in the benefits gained from development. It emphasizes the initiative and creativity of individuals and gives people an active role. Furthermore, the achievements of modernization are shared with the people. It is evident that African countries can also

uphold the idea of placing the people at the center in their development process and focus on the development of the people as the main subject.

5. Conclusion

Chinese-style modernization effectively breaks the notion that "modernization equals Westernization" and provides valuable references and opportunities for developing countries, including Africa. It also enriches the theory of Marxist modernization. The century-long journey of Chinese-style modernization demonstrates that there is not just one path to achieving modernization—Western-style modernization. Each country can find its own path of modernization that suits its national conditions. China's successful Chinese-style modernization is significant in terms of national identity, civilization, and path, and it has practical implications. It has laid a solid foundation for building a modernized and powerful nation.

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