

## FOUNDATIONS OF POLITICAL MODERNIZATION IN CHINA

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**Abstract.** *The article analyzes the theoretical foundations of the concept of political modernization and the main approaches to its study using the experience of the People's Republic of China as a case study. It is scientifically substantiated that the processes of political modernization in China have developed in close interconnection with economic reforms, ideological stability, and a centralized model of state governance. In addition, the differences between Western models of political modernization and China's distinctive development path are identified, and the theoretical and practical significance of the concept of "Chinese modernization" is assessed.*

**Keywords:** *political modernization, Chinese experience, state governance, political institutions, Communist Party of China, models of modernization, "Chinese modernization".*

The theoretical and conceptual foundations for the study of states' political modernization constitute a dynamic field that is continuously evolving. An integrated methodological framework is required to examine the mechanisms of China's modernization model, one that takes into account classical theories, contemporary conceptual approaches, and China's distinctive historical and cultural context. Scholars should interpret political modernization not merely as "Westernization" or "democratic transformation," but rather as a complex process of institutional, social, and cultural transformation shaped within a specific cultural and historical setting. The study of the Chinese model represents a significant scholarly opportunity to enrich political modernization theory and to develop new conceptual approaches.

The outcomes of political modernization determine the social, economic, and political development of states. Political modernization contributes to the development of democratic institutions and the protection of citizens' political rights. The consolidation of social structures facilitates social stability and the promotion of social justice. Economic development, in turn, leads to more effective management of state resources and an improvement in overall social welfare.

The experience of the People's Republic of China has elevated political modernization theory to a new stage. As a result of the policy of reform and opening-up initiated in 1978, China has developed a distinctive model of modernization. The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics, formulated by Deng Xiaoping, fundamentally differs from Western concepts of modernization. By creatively

applying Marxism Leninism to China's specific conditions, this theory has established a new theoretical paradigm.

In December 1978, the Third Plenum of the 11th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China abandoned the slogan of class struggle, shifted the central task toward modernization and economic development, and adopted the strategy of reform and opening-up as the principal policy orientation. These decisions were significant in that they generated the political will and strategic consensus necessary for long-term institutional transformation and the enhancement of state capacity.

Following the defeat of the "Gang of Four" in October 1976, the decade-long Cultural Revolution came to an end amid a profound institutional and moral crisis. The country was confronted with the urgent need to redefine its political course and to "normalize" state governance. Under these conditions, a development-oriented political agenda began to take shape under the leadership of Deng Xiaoping, in which economic growth, social stability, and the strengthening of governance capacity were articulated as the practical benchmarks of modernization.

Analyzing China's modernization from the perspective of political realism is of particular significance. Political realism, as one of the principal schools of international relations theory, seeks to explain state behavior through the logic of power maximization and the pursuit of security. According to the classical realist tradition, states embark on modernization in order to consolidate their position within the international system and to protect themselves from external threats.

A centralized system of state governance is also regarded as a crucial factor within realist theory. The leading role of the Communist Party of China has enabled the concentration of state power and the effective implementation of strategic planning. Since the 1980s, reforms in cadre policy and party-state relations—such as the rejuvenation of leadership personnel, increased professionalization, the introduction of fixed terms of office, and stricter qualification requirements—have been aimed at enhancing bureaucratic capacity.

In the realm of legal modernization, liberal theory emphasizes the rule of law and the protection of individual rights. In China, the principle of governing the state according to law was officially proclaimed in 1997, while the modernization of the legal system began in 1978. The legalization of governance is evaluated as a necessary condition for institutional effectiveness and the fight against corruption.

The concept of civil society occupies a central place within liberal modernization theory. Civil society in China has distinct characteristics, which Chinese scholars often describe as a model of state-society cooperation. The expansion of political participation in China has not been achieved through classical multiparty competition but rather through consultative and deliberative institutions. The system of people's

congresses and political consultative conferences serves as the main channels for citizen participation.

The phased nature of China's modernization is particularly noteworthy in the context of contemporary theory. Deng Xiaoping's three-step development strategy outlined a practical path for modernization. The first step, achieving basic provision of food and clothing for the population, was accomplished by the late 1980s. The second step, reaching a moderately prosperous society (xiaokang), was scheduled to be achieved by the end of the twentieth century. The third step, attaining the level of a moderately developed country, is projected for the middle of the twenty-first century.

Technological development is also a significant object of study within modernization theory. China has achieved substantial success in technological modernization. In areas such as artificial intelligence and 5G technologies, China has become one of the world's leaders. The thesis that scientific and technological progress constitutes the primary productive force is being practically implemented. Within the framework of a networked society, China is rapidly developing its digital economy and e-government systems.

Legitimacy occupies a central position in the theory of political modernization. The legitimacy of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is multi-faceted. First, historical legitimacy stems from the Party's role in rescuing China from colonial domination and internal conflicts. Second, ideological legitimacy is grounded in Marxism–Leninism and the theories of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Third, economic legitimacy is derived from sustained high economic growth and improvements in the population's standard of living.

The anti-corruption policy holds a dual significance in the modernization process. Corruption undermines state capacity, impedes the targeted allocation of resources, and can erode social trust. Consequently, as part of institutional modernization, oversight and accountability mechanisms are strengthened. The establishment of the National Supervisory Commission in 2018 reinforced the institutional framework for combating corruption.

Changes in social policy constitute an important aspect of modernization. In China, the social security system is being developed gradually, and the concept of common prosperity is being actively promoted. Reforms in the education system have become one of the priority areas of modernization. China has achieved significant success in poverty alleviation, culminating in the official declaration of the elimination of absolute poverty in 2021.

Environmental modernization has become an increasingly important issue in the contemporary world. The Chinese government has promoted the concept of "ecological civilization," designating ecological modernization as a priority direction. Green technologies, clean energy sources, and the strengthening of environmental



standards are becoming integral components of the modern modernization paradigm. This development underscores the need to reconsider classical modernization theories.

International aspects play a crucial role in shaping the modernization process. China's accession to the World Trade Organization in 2001 accelerated its external economic integration. The Belt and Road Initiative reflects China's emerging international role. The concept of a shared future for humanity provides an ideological foundation for China's participation in the formation of a new international order.

Cultural modernization also requires particular attention. The Chinese government has advanced the concept of cultural confidence, striving to promote national culture. A framework of core socialist values has been developed. According to the concept of building a spiritual civilization, modernization encompasses not only the creation of material wealth but also the development of high moral and cultural values. Integrating traditional Confucian values with the demands of contemporary modernization represents a pressing task for China.

The Chinese experience has made a significant contribution to the theory of political modernization. The theory of socialism with Chinese characteristics demonstrated that modernization can be implemented while taking national specificities into account. Modernization should be analyzed not merely as a normative ideal regime, but as an interconnected system encompassing institutional capacity, functional forms of participation, rule of law, state capacity, and legitimacy resources.

Future research should focus on the effectiveness of various models of political modernization, their sustainability, adaptability to changing conditions, as well as their interactions and processes of transformation. The future development of political modernization theory largely depends on broader comparative studies, where diverse national experiences are objectively and scientifically evaluated to further enrich the theoretical framework.

In conclusion, it should be noted that the Chinese experience challenges the teleological "one-size-fits-all" models of modernization and empirically reinforces the logic of "multiple modernities": while foreign experiences have been studied, institutions have been localized to national conditions, and the operational rules of the political system have been redesigned within this context.

Gradual reforms and institutional experimentalism (special economic zones, local pilot programs) are characterized as mechanisms that enhance the practical effectiveness of modernization by allowing for the study of policies and minimizing implementation errors.

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