



## THEORY AND PRACTICE OF MODERNIZATION IN THE CHINESE STYLE

## TEORÍA Y PRÁCTICA DE LA MODERNIZACIÓN AL ESTILO CHINO

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### Abstract

The aim of this article is to present the theory and practice of modernization in the Chinese style, a fundamental achievement of the people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China after a century of exploration. It represents the culmination of innovations in adapting scientific socialism to Chinese reality and the contemporary era. Its historical logic lies in being an original path of modernization forged on the basis of the practical and theoretical explorations of the New Democratic Revolution, the socialist revolution and construction, reform and opening up, and the new era. This model follows the general laws of modernization but is deeply rooted in the tradition of Chinese civilization and specific national conditions, characterized by five distinctive features: a vast population, common prosperity for all the people, coordination between material and spiritual civilization, harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, and adherence to the path of peaceful development.

**Keywords:** modernization, Chinese-style modernization, innovations, socialism, new era.



## Resumen

El objetivo del artículo es mostrar la teoría y práctica de la modernización al estilo chino, el que constituye un logro fundamental obtenido por el pueblo bajo el liderazgo del Partido Comunista de China tras un siglo de exploración y representa la cristalización de innovaciones en la adaptación del socialismo científico a la realidad china en la era contemporánea. Su lógica histórica de gestación radica en ser una vía de modernización original forjada sobre la base de las exploraciones prácticas y teóricas de la revolución de nueva democracia, la revolución y construcción socialistas, la reforma y apertura y la nueva era. Este modelo sigue las leyes generales de la modernización, pero se arraiga profundamente en la tradición de la civilización china y las condiciones nacionales específicas, caracterizándose por cinco particularidades: una población gigantesca, la prosperidad común para todo el pueblo, la coordinación entre la civilización material y espiritual, la coexistencia armoniosa entre el ser humano y la naturaleza, y la adhesión al camino de desarrollo pacífico.

**Palabras clave:** modernización, modernización al estilo chino, innovaciones, socialismo, nueva era.

## Introduction

The development of human society has followed a winding and fluctuating course, and the search for paths to modernization by different countries has been fraught with difficulties. The Communist Party of China, uniting and leading the Chinese people, has forged a path of modernization in the Chinese style, suited to China's national conditions, overcoming countless hardships and paying a tremendous price.

The concise formulation and in-depth exposition of the theory of modernization in the Chinese style constitute a major theoretical innovation of the 20th Party Congress and represent the most recent and significant achievement of scientific socialism. There is no intention, nor is there any desire, to export modernization in the Chinese style or the "Chinese model." However, this modernization theory has set an example for developing countries seeking to advance modernization independently and autonomously, offering them a new option.

The essential requirements, fundamental principles, and key relationships to master address fundamental questions about what modernization in the Chinese style should achieve and how to implement it. This model has shattered the myth that "modernization equals Westernization," not only by undertaking the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation, but also by promoting the building of a community with a shared future for humanity and creating a new form of civilization. It thus offers an innovative alternative for developing countries to autonomously explore paths of modernization and contributes new paradigms, values, and civilizational meanings to global modernization.

This article addresses the proposal for modernization the Chinese way, which constitutes a fundamental achievement of the people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China after a century of exploration and the crystallization of theoretical and practical innovations in adapting scientific socialism to Chinese reality and the contemporary era. It is structured in three parts: the first, defining the meaning of modernization the Chinese way as a fundamental achievement of the people under the leadership of the Communist Party of China; the second, outlining the characteristics of modernization the Chinese

way; and the third, presenting the essential requirements, fundamental principles, and key relationships of modernization the Chinese way.

### **Modernization in the Chinese style is a fundamental achievement of the people's long process of exploration and practice under the leadership of the Communist Party of China.**

Building a modern socialist country and achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation represent the supreme and fundamental interests of the nation. The history of the Communist Party of China uniting and guiding the people in the pursuit of national rejuvenation is also the history of a ceaseless exploration of the path to modernization.

General Secretary Xi Jinping, reflecting on the study and implementation of the spirit of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, emphasized the correct understanding and vigorous promotion of modernization in the Chinese style, stating: "Modernization in the Chinese style is our answer to the important historical question of how to awaken the 'sleeping lion' and achieve national rejuvenation."<sup>1</sup> Modernization in the Chinese style is viable and stable, constituting the only correct path for building a great power and rejuvenating the nation.

The Chinese nation is a great people who created a splendid civilization and for a long time in history remained at the forefront of the world. Among the four great ancient civilizations of the world, only the Chinese civilization has endured to this day, maintaining its state form. From the late Ming Dynasty period, China implemented a policy of isolation and subsequently missed the opportunities of the scientific and industrial revolution. Under the impact of internal contradictions stemming from the wave of Western modernization, China gradually declined.

After the Opium War, due to the invasion of Western powers and the decline of feudal rule, China gradually became a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society, suffering national humiliation, popular calamities, and the obscuring of its civilization. The Chinese nation experienced an unprecedented calamity. From then on, achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation became the greatest dream of the Chinese people.

To realize this grand dream, the Chinese people rose up in resistance, while progressive thinkers tirelessly sought paths to national rejuvenation. Various attempts were made: the Self-Strengthening Movement sought to "learn the techniques" foreigners to counter foreigners." The Hundred Days' Reform attempted to strengthen the country through moderate reforms, and Dr. Sun Yat-sen led the Xinhai Revolution with the aim of modernizing China through a bourgeois republic and industrial development. However, all these efforts ended in failure. The historic mission of exploring a path to Chinese modernization ultimately fell to the Communist Party of China.

During the period of the New Democratic Revolution, it was impossible to achieve modernization in a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. Mao Zedong noted: "In a semi-colonial, semi-feudal, and divided China, many people dreamed for years of developing industry, building national defense, benefiting the people, and achieving national prosperity, but all their dreams faded away."<sup>2</sup> Under the leadership of the Communist Party, the people overthrew the three great mountains of imperialism, feudalism, and bureaucratic capitalism, established the People's Republic of China where the people are masters of their own destiny, and achieved national independence and liberation from the The people, creating the

fundamental social conditions for modernization and formally initiating the historical process of Chinese modernization, which has gone through several periods.

1. **The Revolutionary and Socialist Construction Period.** Following the founding of the People's Republic of China, and based on healing the wounds of war and rebuilding the national economy, the Communist Party of China promptly promoted the transition from new democracy to socialism, carried out the socialist transformation, eliminated the feudal system that had persisted for thousands of years in China, established the fundamental socialist system, achieved the most extensive and profound social transformation in the history of the Chinese nation, and laid the fundamental political premises and institutional foundations for modernization. On this basis, the Communist Party of China resolved to strive to make China a socialist power with modern agriculture, industry, national defense, and science and technology. Through the implementation of several five-year plans, an independent and relatively complete national industrial and economic system was established, especially with cutting-edge technological advancements in defense, such as the program known as the "Two-Year Plan." bombs and a satellite," providing valuable experience, theoretical preparation, and a material basis for modernization.<sup>3</sup>
2. **New Period of Reform, Opening Up, and Building Socialist Modernization.** After the conclusion of the "Cultural Revolution," the Communist Party of China made the historic decision to shift the focus of the Party and the State's work to economic development and implement reform and opening up, vigorously promoting theoretical innovation based on practice, in institutions, in culture, and in all other spheres, establishing and implementing a socialist market economy system, and carrying out economic, political, cultural, and social construction. This achieved a historic breakthrough, transforming the economy from one of relative backwardness in productive forces to the second largest in the world. It brought about a historic leap in the people's standard of living, moving from food and clothing shortages to a generally moderately prosperous society, progressing toward a moderately prosperous society in all respects, providing institutional guarantees full of new vitality and rapidly developing material conditions for the Modernization in the Chinese Style.
3. **The New Era of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics.** Since the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, the Communist Party of China has successfully promoted and expanded modernization in the Chinese style. During this decade, it has continuously deepened its understanding, creating Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, achieving a new breakthrough in adapting Marxism to Chinese reality and the contemporary era, and providing a fundamental guide for modernization in the Chinese style. It has constantly refined its strategies, establishing the "two-step" strategic arrangement to transform China by the middle of this century into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful. It has defined the "five-in-one" overall design and the "four comprehensives" strategic arrangement, and thoroughly implemented the strategy of revitalizing the country through science and education, the strategy of strengthening the nation through human talent, the strategy of rural revitalization, and a series of other important strategies, providing solid strategic support for the Modernization in the Chinese style. Practice has been constantly enriched, promoting a series of transformative practices, achieving pioneering breakthroughs, and obtaining landmark results, especially in the eradication of absolute poverty, the comprehensive building of a moderately prosperous society, driving historic achievements and transformative changes in the cause of the

Party and the State, providing more comprehensive institutional guarantees, a more solid material base, and a more proactive spiritual force for modernization in the Chinese style.

4. The realization of the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation is a continuous historical process. Since the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after reform and opening up, the industrialization process that took developed Western countries hundreds of years has been completed in a few decades, creating the miracle of rapid economic development and prolonged social stability, thus opening broad prospects for the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party established the central task of comprehensively promoting great power building and the great cause of national rejuvenation through modernization in the Chinese style, outlining a grand plan for comprehensively building a modern socialist country.

The overall strategic plan for completing the construction of a great modern socialist country is divided into two stages: the first stage is to achieve socialist modernization by 2035; the second stage is to transform China by the middle of this century into a great modern socialist country that is prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful. By then, China, as a nation with a millennial history of over 5,000 years, will display unprecedented vigor and vitality, and the Chinese nation will stand tall among the nations of the world, making a greater contribution to the progress of human civilization.

### **The Chinese Characteristics of Modernization**

A country's path to modernization must not only follow the general laws of modernization but also adapt to its own realities and possess distinctive national characteristics. Modernization in the Chinese style shares common features with the modernization of other countries, but it has distinctive characteristics based on its own national conditions.

In his keynote address at the High-Level Dialogue between the Communist Party of China and the Political Parties of the World on March 15, 2023, General Secretary Xi Jinping remarked: “The modernization process of human society has once again reached a historical crossroads. Polarization or common prosperity? Material supremacy or coordinated development of the material and the spiritual? Resource depletion or harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature? Zero-sum games or win-win cooperation? Mechanically copying foreign models or developing independently based on national conditions? What kind of modernization do we really need? How can we achieve modernization? Faced with this series of questions about modernization, political parties, as the major force leading and driving the modernization process, have the responsibility to provide answers.”<sup>4</sup>

The Chinese Communists have given a brilliant Chinese answer: modernization the Chinese way. The report of the 20th National Party Congress clearly summarizes the five Chinese characteristics of modernization, profoundly revealing the scientific content of modernization and primarily answering the question of "what is" modernization. Chinese-style modernization, which can be summarized in five aspects.

1. Modernizing a Gigantic Population. Modernizing a massive population is a defining characteristic of Chinese-style modernization. Currently, only about 20 countries in the world have achieved modernization, with a total population of approximately 1000 millions person's. The entry of more

than 1400 millions of Chinese into modernization, surpassing the combined population of existing developed countries, will significantly alter the global landscape of modernization. This is the largest-scale modernization in human history, and also the most challenging. A gigantic population not only provides abundant human resources and an extraordinary market, but also presents a series of complex challenges. When considering problems, making decisions, and implementing actions, the population base and the significant disparities in urban-rural and regional development in China must be taken into account. There should be no impatience for instant success, nor should we cling to outdated conventions. It is necessary to maintain historical patience, advance steadily on a stable foundation, progress step by step, and continuously promote the process.

2. **Modernization for the Common Prosperity of the Entire Population.** Modernization that seeks the common prosperity of the entire population is an essential feature of modernization in the Chinese style and a distinguishing characteristic that differentiates it from Western modernization. The major deficiency of Western modernization lies in its focus on capital—not people—and its pursuit of maximizing capital gains rather than serving the interests of the vast majority, resulting in extreme wealth inequality and severe polarization. Some developing countries, during their modernization process, came close to reaching the development threshold but fell into the "middle-income trap," stagnating for extended periods or even suffering serious setbacks, largely due to a lack of effective solutions to problems such as polarization and class rigidity. Since the 18th Party Congress, a comprehensive set of concepts, institutional frameworks, and policy measures has been developed to promote the common prosperity of the entire population. It is imperative, while promoting high-quality development and expanding the economic pie for more equitable distribution, to resolutely address the challenges of employment, income distribution, education, healthcare, housing, pensions, and childcare. A coordinated institutional system must be built that articulates the three dimensions of distribution (primary, secondary, and tertiary), ensuring that the fruits of modernization benefit the entire population more broadly and fairly, firmly preventing social division and polarization.
3. **Modernization that coordinates material and spiritual civilization.** Achieving both material abundance and spiritual wealth is a lofty aspiration of modernization in the Chinese style. Material poverty is not socialism, nor is spiritual destitution. Early Western modernization was characterized, on the one hand, by the accumulation of material wealth and the loss of spiritual faith, and on the other hand, by rampant materialism. Modernization in the Chinese style, on the other hand, adheres to the principle of working simultaneously and with equal determination on the spiritual and material fronts, promoting coordination and mutual reinforcement between material and spiritual civilization. It is necessary to respond to the people's growing cultural and spiritual needs by building a socialist ideology with great cohesive power and leadership. Education on ideals and convictions must be strengthened, as well as the dissemination of education on the so-called "Four Histories" (the history of the Party, of New China, of reform and opening up, and of socialist development), cultivating and promoting fundamental socialist values. Furthermore, an advanced socialist culture must be developed, more literary and artistic works of excellence must be produced, the people's spiritual world must be continuously enriched, the level of civilization of the entire society must be raised, and the comprehensive development of humankind must be promoted.
4. **Modernization of Harmonious Coexistence Between Humans and Nature.** Respecting, adapting to, and protecting nature, while promoting harmonious coexistence between humanity and the environment, is a distinctive feature of modernization in the Chinese style. Most modernization

processes in Western countries have gone through phases of indiscriminate exploitation of natural resources and severe ecological degradation. While generating enormous material wealth, they have caused severe problems such as environmental pollution and resource depletion. Modernization in the Chinese style adheres to sustainable development, prioritizing resource conservation and environmental protection, with an emphasis on natural restoration. It resolutely advances along a path of civilized development that integrates prosperous production, a comfortable life, and a healthy environment, thus opening broad prospects for the perpetual development of the Chinese nation. China has established an "international model of ecological governance," focusing not only on a beautiful China but also on the common home of humanity.

5. **Modernization Following the Path of Peaceful Development.** Modernization in the Chinese style maintains independence and self-reliance, developing and strengthening through the hard work and innovation of the entire nation. It achieves national development by combining endogenous drive with the peaceful utilization of external resources, without oppressing other nations or plundering their resources and wealth, but rather offering support and assistance to developing countries within its capabilities. The banners of peace, development, cooperation, and mutual benefit are always raised; a win-win opening-up strategy is implemented; China actively participates in the reform and construction of the global governance system; genuine multilateralism is practiced; the common values of humanity are promoted; the implementation of the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative is advanced; and efforts are made to make greater contributions to peace and development for humanity.

### **Essential Requirements, Fundamental Principles, and Key Relationships of Modernization the Chinese Style**

Modernization the Chinese style is the theoretical and ideological product of the Communist Party of China, formed after deeply synthesizing the historical experience of modernization in China and other countries around the world. It represents the progressive maturation in understanding, strategy, and practice of how to accelerate modernization in a major Eastern nation like China, addressing fundamental questions such as the goals and methods of modernization the Chinese style.

#### 1. Essential Requirements of Modernization the Chinese Style.

The 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China<sup>5</sup> scientifically summarized the essential requirements of modernization in the Chinese style: upholding the leadership of the Communist Party of China, adhering to socialism with Chinese characteristics, achieving high-quality development, developing people's democracy throughout the process, enriching the people's spiritual world, achieving common prosperity for all people, promoting harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature, advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, and creating a new form of human civilization. These nine essential aspects fundamentally answer the question of "what should modernization in the Chinese style achieve?"

Adherence to the leadership of the Communist Party of China and to socialism with Chinese characteristics constitutes the fundamental requirement that defines the nature and direction of modernization in the Chinese style, reflecting the advantages of its leadership and system. Achieving high-quality development, developing comprehensive people's democracy, enriching the people's

spiritual world, attaining common prosperity for all, and promoting harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature are intrinsic requirements formulated for building a prosperous, democratic, civilized, harmonious, and beautiful modern socialist country, emphasizing the comprehensiveness, systematicity, and sustainability of socialist modernization. Promoting the building of a community with a shared future for mankind and creating a new form of human civilization are unavoidable requirements for Chinese-style modernization to not only develop China but also benefit the world.

## 2. Fundamental Principles of Chinese-Style Modernization.

The comprehensive building of a modern socialist country is a grand but arduous undertaking, with a bright future but a path fraught with challenges. China's development has entered a period where strategic opportunities and risks coexist, with increasing uncertainty and unpredictability.

Black swan and gray rhino events can occur at any time. We must strengthen our awareness of adversity, maintain baseline thinking, remain vigilant in times of peace, and prepare for the unexpected, ready to face significant trials like those we must endure against turbulent waters and raging tides.

On the path forward, we must firmly uphold the following fundamental principles: adhere to and strengthen the Party's comprehensive leadership, persist in the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics, uphold people-centered development thinking, insist on deepening reform and opening up,<sup>6-8</sup> and persevere in promoting the fighting spirit. These five fundamental principles crucially answer the question of "how to implement" modernization in the Chinese style.<sup>9</sup>

## 3. Key Relationships of Modernization in the Chinese Style.

Major relationships must be properly managed to advance modernization in the Chinese style. "The flight of the great bird Peng is not sustained by a single light feather; nor does the speed of the steed QiJi depend on the strength of a single leg." General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized that promoting modernization in the Chinese style is a systemic project requiring comprehensive planning, balanced coordination, and unified progress, correctly managing six crucial relationships: the relationship between high-level design and practical exploration, between strategy and tactics, between maintaining what is right and innovating, between efficiency and equity, between vitality and order, and the relationship between self-reliance and openness to the outside world.<sup>10</sup>

## Conclusions

Modernization in the Chinese style has shattered the myth that "modernization equals Westernization," revealing a new landscape distinct from the Western model of modernization. It offers a new option for developing countries to pursue modernization independently and autonomously, exploring diverse paths to modernization and thus creating a new form of human civilization.

As a new form of human civilization, it does not seek modernization that benefits only China, but rather aspires to achieve modernization together with all countries, including developing nations.

The modernization of human society that is being promoted and pursued must adhere to the principle of people-first, emphasize the people-centered nature of the modernization process, uphold the principle of

independence and self-determination, explore diverse paths in modernization, cultivate an awareness of preserving what is right while innovating, maintain the sustainability of the modernization process, promote the spirit of personal fulfillment and mutual benefit, enhance the inclusiveness of the fruits of modernization, maintain an attitude of determination and action, and ensure the firmness of the modernization leadership.

The Communist Party of China will continue, with its broad-mindedness and sense of responsibility, to constantly inject confidence and dynamism to drive forward the modernization process of human society.

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### Conflicts of interest:

The author has no conflicts of interest..