

The Human-Centered Narrative of Chinese Path to Modernization

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ABSTRACT

Human beings are the subject of Chinese path to modernization, the emergence and development of which are oriented toward satisfying the diverse needs of the people and realizing their free and comprehensive development. Chinese path to modernization is characterized by rich theoretical connotations and a sound practical pathway, and distinctly embodies a human-centered feature: a vast population highlights subjectivity; common prosperity underscores sociality; coordination of material and spiritual civilization demonstrates comprehensiveness; harmonious coexistence between humanity and nature reflects ecological consciousness; and peaceful development manifests cosmopolitanism. To articulate the people-centered narrative within the discourse system of Chinese path to modernization, it is essential to present China's story from the perspective of the shared values of all humanity, thereby offering an effective pathway for the world to understand China.

KEYWORDS

Chinese Path to Modernization; Human-centered Narrative; Comprehensive Development of the Human Being.

1. INTRODUCTION

The human-centered narrative takes “the human being” as its starting point and adheres to the people-oriented philosophy. The report summarizes the Chinese characteristics of Chinese path to modernization from five aspects, with the overarching theme of “putting the people at the center” running through all its theory and practice. “The essence of modernization is the modernization of the human being.”[1] Its theoretical foundations rest upon the Marxist concept of humanism, the people-oriented tradition in Chinese culture, and the people-first value commitment of the Communist Party of China. The modernization of the human being, as the cultural dimension of modernization development, constitutes the concrete practice through which we achieve comprehensive development.

2. THE LOGICAL STARTING POINT OF THE HUMAN-CENTERED NARRATIVE OF CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION

The human being is the starting point and core of modernization. Chinese path to modernization serves as the vehicle for realizing comprehensive human development, following the narrative logic of “development for the people, by the people, and with its fruits shared among the people.”[2]

2.1 Taking the “Needs of the People” as the Point of Departure

Human needs are the premise of Chinese path to modernization. Throughout history, human needs have evolved through the forms of “dependence on persons,” “dependence on things,” and ultimately “free individuality.” [3] Chinese path to modernization squarely addresses the needs of the people, highlighting the unique value of being human. Its core essence lies in adhering to the people-centered development philosophy, prioritizing the people's needs, and ensuring that development benefits are enjoyed by all. As the ancient adage goes, “Governance has its constant principles, and benefiting the people is the foundation.” In the practice of national governance, policy-making and development planning consistently place the people's interests above all else. Unlike the capital logic of Western modernization, Chinese path to modernization is distinctly people-oriented, representing a modernization that realizes the people's aspiration for a better life.

2.2 Taking the “Practice of the People” as the Standpoint

Historical materialism reveals that practice is the social and historical activity of the masses. The historical driving force of practice is the life activity through which real human beings criticize and transform the existing order and social institutions, so as to develop their essential powers. [4] Marx and Engels profoundly recognized the central role of the masses in historical development. The construction of Chinese path to modernization is firmly grounded in the practice of the people and constitutes a process of broad public participation. “The people are the creators of history and the fundamental force determining the destiny of the Party and the country.” The Communist Party of China unswervingly adheres to the mass line, endowing the people with a supreme historical subject status. The achievements of modernization have been “accomplished through the diligence, wisdom, and courage of the people.” [5] The creative practice of the people has not only driven profound transformations in values and ways of thinking but also injected strong endogenous momentum into national modernization, serving as a vivid presentation of the narrative of Chinese path to modernization.

2.3 Taking the “Comprehensive Development of the People” as the Ultimate Goal

In his critique of capitalist modernization, Marx envisioned the possibility of transforming the “independence of capital” into the “free and comprehensive development of the human being,” whereby the individual should “appropriate their comprehensive essence in a comprehensive manner.” [6] Chinese path to modernization scientifically grasps the principal role of the people and consciously advances the modernization of the human being in the process of socialist modernization. Realizing the comprehensive development of the human being is the value goal it pursues, ensuring that development outcomes benefit all people more equitably and achieving an organic unity between individual development and social progress. In this way, Chinese path to modernization achieves a historic transcendence from the “logic of capital” to the “logic of human-centered development.”

3. PRACTICAL GUIDELINES FOR THE HUMAN-CENTERED NARRATIVE OF CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION

The report elaborates on the basic characteristics of Chinese path to modernization from five dimensions, in which human-centered values are comprehensively manifested, and the subjectivity of the people and human-centered values are mutually constituted in the course of China's social and historical progress.

3.1 Modernization of a Vast Population Highlights Human Subjectivity

Human subjectivity is the “principle of modernity.”[7] From the perspective of historical materialism, human beings, as the subjects of social activities, create history and constitute the most dynamic factor in the productive forces. A vast population is a distinctive feature of Chinese path to modernization. “Different population sizes entail different modernization tasks, and consequently, different degrees of difficulty and complexity.” Whether a population of over 1.4 billion constitutes a resource or a burden depends on the extent to which human subjectivity is established.[8] Chinese path to modernization fully respects and mobilizes human subjectivity. The fact that “China has won the largest-scale battle against poverty in human history, lifting all 832 impoverished counties and nearly 100 million rural poor out of poverty” stands as the most compelling testament to this. [2] History demonstrates that only by adhering to a people-centered approach and respecting the subjectivity and creativity of the people can the distinctive advantages of a vast population be fully realized. Unlike Western modernization, which treats human beings as mere instruments of labor for generating surplus value, Chinese path to modernization upholds the principal position of the people, develops whole-process people's democracy, ensures that the people are the masters of the country, and takes the people's aspiration for a better life as the starting point of modernization endeavors.

3.2 Modernization of Common Prosperity for All Highlights Human Sociality

Marx asserted that “the essence of the human being is not an abstraction inherent in each single individual. In its reality, it is the ensemble of all social relations.” [6] As practical subjects, human beings both construct social relations according to their own capacities and are constrained by those relations. Common prosperity is proposed on the basis of the common practical needs of 1.4 billion people. Proceeding from the human need for free and conscious labor and for social relations, it addresses not only material abundance but also the advancement of human development. At present, promoting high-quality development to make the “cake” bigger and distribute it fairly, addressing livelihood issues such as employment, education, healthcare, and elderly care, and establishing an institutional system with coordinated arrangements for primary, secondary, and tertiary distribution are all aimed at ensuring that the fruits of modernization benefit all people more equitably. At the same time, it must be clearly recognized that disparities are inevitable in the primary stage of socialism, and promoting common prosperity “is a long-term task that requires sustained efforts over time.” Capitalist modernization has never been able to bridge the chasm of wealth disparity. Marx's Capital precisely undertakes a critique of modernity from the standpoint of real, concrete human beings against capital. Chinese path to modernization resolutely prevents polarization, profoundly manifesting human sociality.

3.3 Modernization of Material and Spiritual Civilization Coordination Highlights Human Comprehensiveness

Marx held that human self-perfection requires the simultaneous cultivation of both material and spiritual dimensions, and so too does social progress. Social modernization primarily satisfies the material needs of the people while also devoting efforts to fulfilling their diverse spiritual pursuits. Throughout Western modernization, the expansion of capital power has resulted in the coexistence of material affluence and spiritual impoverishment, reducing human beings to “one-dimensional beings.” Chinese path to modernization adheres to the principle of “attaching equal importance to both material and spiritual civilization” - “both hands must be grasped, and both must be made strong.” It not only pursues innovation-driven high-quality economic development but also places great emphasis on strengthening the development of a socialist spiritual civilization. Through upholding the guiding position of Marxism in the ideological domain, promoting fine traditional Chinese culture and the core socialist values, advancing cultural undertakings and cultural industries, and enhancing civic moral education, China continuously improves the quality of its citizens and the level of social

civilization. Moreover, by actively increasing the supply of high-quality spiritual and cultural resources, it enriches the spiritual life of the people, fully demonstrating human comprehensiveness.

3.4 Modernization of Harmonious Coexistence between Humanity and Nature Highlights Human Ecological Consciousness

Humanity and nature share a primordial unity, and harmonious coexistence vividly manifests human ecological consciousness.[7] In free and conscious labor, human beings obtain the means of subsistence from nature; yet nature, in turn, retaliates against humanity's unrestrained plunder in its own ways. Against the backdrop of frequent ecological crises such as extreme weather events and species extinction worldwide, capitalism, driven by the logic of capital, remains fundamentally incapable of altering its development model at the expense of the environment. Chinese path to modernization upholds the principle that “lucid waters and lush mountains are invaluable assets,” adheres to the holistic conservation and systematic governance of mountains, waters, forests, farmlands, grasslands, and deserts, promotes an ecological-first, green, and low-carbon development path, and advances the goals of carbon peaking and carbon neutrality in a proactive and prudent manner. This does not signify a rejection of industrial civilization; rather, it integrates the natural ecology into the people's needs for a better life, advancing the free and comprehensive development of the human being through harmonious coexistence with nature, representing the correct direction for the progress of human society.

3.5 Modernization of Peaceful Development Highlights Human Cosmopolitanism

As history transforms into world history, Marx and Engels elucidated in their conception of “world history” that the liberation of the individual is consistent with the emergence of world history, and that the foundation of comprehensive human development lies in “the comprehensiveness of his real relations and his spiritual relations.” Western modernization, characterized by brutal accumulation at home and plunder of resources abroad, has inflicted profound suffering on developing countries. Over a century of aggression and humiliation in modern times has strengthened the Chinese people's determination to safeguard world peace.[9] In today's world, where instability and uncertainty are on the rise, the path of “peaceful development” embodies a consensus on human development. China consistently adheres to the principle of mutual benefit and win-win cooperation in building a new international order, advocates for the construction of a community with a shared future for mankind, promotes the development of countries along the Belt and Road and through the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and actively contributes to the development of Africa through the China-Africa community with a shared future. This approach overcomes the logic of unchecked expansion of capital globalization, scientifically addresses the questions of “where the world is heading” and “what humanity should do,” and embodies the shared values of all humanity. China's “parallel” path to modernization aims to replace the “material-centered modernization” with a “human-centered modernization,” reflecting both a pathway innovation and the construction of a new narrative framework.

4. IMPLEMENTATION STRATEGIES FOR THE HUMAN-CENTERED NARRATIVE OF CHINESE PATH TO MODERNIZATION

The human-centered narrative of Chinese path to modernization aims to reveal the fundamental differences between Chinese and Western modernization and to deepen international understanding. To this end, it is essential to properly grasp the dialectical relationship between cultural self-awareness and mutual learning among civilizations.

4.1 Disseminating the Human-Centered Concept

To realize the human-centered narrative, it is first necessary to foreground the core concept of “the modernization of the human being” and to gain an in-depth understanding of how the individual-centered approach unfolds in social life. The human-centered narrative, proceeding from the perspective of human beings, guides the audience to apprehend “the modernization of the human being,” thereby providing ample space for the construction of narrative frameworks. Specifically, first, attention should be given to the stories of ordinary people, showcasing the transformations in the lives of the Chinese people, their spirit of struggle, and their innovation and creativity, so that the international community can witness the happy lives and developmental achievements of the Chinese people. Second, it is necessary to construct a narrative system that coordinates material and spiritual civilization-narrating not only the stories of China's developmental accomplishments and industrial construction but also accurately conveying the intellectual and spiritual power of Chinese civilization. Through plain yet moving Chinese stories, the logic of “a better life” and the practical spirit of “putting the people at the center” can be elaborated, shaping a true, multi-dimensional, and comprehensive image of China.[10]

4.2 Promoting Cultural Exchange and Mutual Learning

The human-centered narrative of Chinese path to modernization must face the world and achieve discursive construction through the interplay of “being shaped by others” and “self-shaping.” It should not only ground itself in local expressions, manifesting cultural self-awareness in the course of practical development, but also attend to the comprehensive development of the human being in the context of global civilizational exchange and mutual learning, reflecting the distinctive Chinese conception of life and view of existence. By showcasing the achievements of Chinese path to modernization, the international community's understanding of its connotations and values can be enhanced, deepening their knowledge of Chinese culture and social institutions, and strengthening China's cultural soft power and international influence. The new form of human civilization pioneered by China dialectically grasps the universality and particularity of different civilizations, “enabling different forms of civilization to move from self-recognition to mutual recognition and then to innovative development within an open and inclusive civilizational field.”[11] By telling the life stories of people from diverse cultural backgrounds, showcasing the charm of cultural diversity, emphasizing cultural commonalities, and promoting cultural integration, it provides a profound answer to the contemporary question of how different civilizations can coexist and advance together.

4.3 Innovating Narrative Modes and Communication Channels

The significance of the narrative of Chinese path to modernization is not limited to China alone; it also offers methodological guidance for human development. In promoting the story of Chinese path to modernization, it is not enough to merely present developmental data and outcomes. More importantly, through a humanized narrative perspective-taking human needs and development as the starting point-content that embodies the core tenets of the theory and the shared values of all humanity should be selected for focused communication. While articulating China's distinctive characteristics, it is essential to integrate Chinese and foreign perspectives, adapt to foreign audiences, and establish cultural connections. In terms of communication channels, in addition to traditional media, new media forms such as social media, short videos, and live streaming should be utilized to enhance communication efficiency and coverage. Emphasis should also be placed on content quality and depth, producing works of ideological, artistic, and aesthetic excellence. Cooperation and exchanges with international media and institutions should be strengthened to expand global influence. The human-centered narrative of Chinese path to modernization, grounded in the fundamental rationale of “people-centeredness” respects civilizational diversity, integrates the strengths of different

civilizations, and holds significant value for the construction of an international communication discourse system.

5. CONCLUSION

The essence of modernization is the modernization of the human being. Chinese path to modernization, based on a critical transcendence of capitalist civilization, has inaugurated a practical pathway toward a new form of human civilization, aiming to replace “material-centered modernization” with “human-centered modernization.” Taking “the human being” as both its starting point and ultimate goal, it focuses on the multidimensional needs and comprehensive development of the people, exploring a new path for human emancipation and free and comprehensive development. In the course of the 21st century, advancing the construction and narration of the human-centered value of Chinese path to modernization remains an unfinished endeavor, requiring persistent and sustained efforts over time.

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