

Modernization Diversity and the Chinese Path: A Review and Insight into Luo Rongqu's *New Theory of Modernization*

Wenzun Xuan*

College of Chinese Languages, Zhejiang Normal University, Zhejiang, China

* Corresponding author: Wenzun Xuan (Email: 2972443183@qq.com)

Abstract: Mr. Luo Rongqu's *New Theory of Modernization* is a significant work for understanding the modernization processes of countries worldwide, particularly China. He offers a new perspective on modernization, providing profound insights, especially in analyzing the diversity of modernization paths across different nations. This article aims to delve into Luo Rongqu's main arguments and assess the value of his theory in understanding global and Chinese modernization. Furthermore, it explores the implications of his theories in the current social context.

Keywords: Modernization; Unified and Multi-line Historical Development View; Globalization; Chinese Characteristics.

1. Introduction

Since the report of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China systematically expounded on the theory of "Chinese-style modernization," a new wave of academic interest in "modernization studies" has emerged. This naturally brings to mind Mr. Luo Rongqu's *New Theory of Modernization* published three decades ago. In the academic context of the time, the comparative study of modernization processes across various countries, especially in relation to China, had significant practical relevance. In this work, Luo Rongqu, starting from a Marxist perspective, not only thoroughly analyzes the modernization processes globally but also emphasizes the unique path of China's modernization. He systematically articulates a theory of modernization with Chinese characteristics.

New Theory of Modernization is not only an academic work but also offers a fresh perspective for understanding modernization in both the world and China. In particular, his theoretical contributions offer significant insights into the diversity and complexity of modernization paths in various countries, providing a framework for a deeper understanding of the global modernization process in the context of globalization.

2. Author Background and Overview of the Work

2.1. Author Background

Mr. Luo Rongqu is a distinguished historian, long serving as a professor in the History Department of Peking University. His academic research spans a wide range, with notable achievements in the history of modern and contemporary China as well as world history. Luo is not only a renowned historian but also a faithful practitioner of Marxist theory. Through deep historical and sociological analysis, he has advanced innovative theories in Chinese modernization. Throughout his academic career, Luo has given considerable thought to China's special position within the global tide of modernization, and this thinking gave rise to *New Theory of Modernization*, a work of far-reaching influence.

As a historian, Luo's academic background allows him to examine the modernization process from a historical perspective. He believes that no modernization path exists in isolation but is closely intertwined with factors such as historical culture, social structure, and economic development. Therefore, in *New Theory of Modernization*, Luo adopts a multi-disciplinary approach, combining theories and methods from history, sociology, economics, and other fields to offer a new research framework for modernization.

2.2. Overview of the Work

New Theory of Modernization is Luo Rongqu's in-depth research and systematic summary of the modernization processes of both the world and China. The book is rich in content and divided into three parts:

(a). *The Theory and Methods of Modernization*: This part discusses the theoretical foundations of modernization and the methodologies used to study it.

(b). *The Modernization Processes of Various Countries*: This section analyzes the modernization paths of different countries, with a particular focus on the Western model.

(c). *China's Modernization Path*: The final section studies China's modernization, especially its historical and developmental trajectory in the context of globalization.

In the book, Luo challenges traditional linear models of modernization and proposes a unified and multi-line view of historical development. He emphasizes that the modernization processes of different countries are shaped by their unique historical, cultural, social, and political factors, and that modernization should not be viewed as a single, linear path but rather as a complex, multifactorial process.

3. Summary of Book Content

3.1. The Diversity of Modernization: Beyond the Western Model

In *New Theory of Modernization*, Luo begins by reflecting on traditional modernization theories, particularly the "modernization theory" put forward by Western scholars. Western modernization is often described through dimensions such as industrialization, urbanization, and democratization.

However, Luo argues that the modernization process of Western countries represents only one historical path and does not imply it is the only valid model of modernization. He stresses that the modernization processes of different countries are diverse, and that factors such as historical context, social structure, cultural traditions, and political systems profoundly influence the specific path each nation takes. Hence, Luo advocates for a "theory of the diversity of modernization," arguing that modernization is not a singular linear process but a series of complex historical developments.

Luo provides examples from multiple countries to illustrate how each nation adjusts and selects its own modernization path according to its historical background, cultural traditions, and international environment. For example, China's traditional agrarian economy and the historical legacy of feudalism have profoundly influenced its modernization path, which is starkly different from that of Western countries. Luo argues that Western models of modernization cannot simply be replicated in China; instead, China must chart a course of modernization that accounts for its unique national conditions.

3.2. The Uniqueness and Independence of China's Modernization

In analyzing China's modernization, Luo emphasizes its distinctiveness. He points out that China's modernization is not solely about economic and technological advancement, but also about modernizing social structures and cultural norms. Given the centuries of oppression under feudalism, China's modernization inevitably manifests in ways that differ from the Western experience. Luo further argues that China's modernization process is not a mere imitation of the Western model but is characterized by autonomy and independence.

Despite the large-scale Western invasion and cultural infiltration China experienced during its modern history, the country has managed to maintain its cultural independence in the face of modernization. Luo believes that China's journey toward modernization represents a complex contradiction between historical continuity and rupture. Chinese traditional culture has not disappeared but has integrated with modern civilization, forming a modernization path with Chinese characteristics.

3.3. The Three Waves of Global Modernization and the Challenges of the Third World

Luo also offers a profound historical overview of global modernization. He identifies three major waves of modernization since the 19th century. The first wave was the modernization of Western countries following the Industrial Revolution; the second wave occurred in the early 20th century, marked by the expansion of the capitalist world system and the intensification of globalization; and the third wave, at the end of the 20th century, was marked by a new phase of globalization, with the rise of Third World countries.

Luo pays particular attention to the modernization processes in Third World countries. He argues that these nations face multifaceted challenges, including the unequal impact of the global capitalist system, as well as the heavy political, economic, and cultural burdens inherited from history. As a result, the modernization processes of Third World countries often unfold under intense internal and external pressures, with significant diversity and complexity.

4. Detailed Overview of the Content

The entire book is divided into three parts, which can also be described as a three-tiered structure:

4.1. A New Historical View for the Age of Major Transformations

This section primarily explores the connotation of the modernization process from a historical perspective and proposes a theoretical framework for a new development concept centered around productivity as the main axis of development.

The author first innovates methodologically by reflecting on and criticizing Western modernization theories, then introduces a macro, comprehensive analytical framework, which can be summarized as "two ruptures and one establishment" - the rupture with the "Western-centric" arrogance, the rupture with the single-line development model in Soviet textbooks, and the establishment of a Marxist standpoint-based, unified, multi-line historical analysis framework.

4.2. General Trends in the Development of the Modern World

This part applies the new development perspective to sketch a general outline and main thread of global modernization trends over the past two centuries.

In this section, the author first defines different forms of social change and modernization processes, then analyzes the three major waves of modernization in the world's history. From this, the general trend of modernization processes is summarized. Subsequently, the author focuses on analyzing the modernization process in Third World countries. Finally, from the perspective of cultural factors, the author discusses the new experiences arising from East Asia's rise.

4.3. The Development Trends of China during the Transformation Period (Pre-1949)

This section looks at China from a global perspective, using it as a case study of the modernization process. The author examines the interaction of numerous internal and external factors and identifies four major trends in China's transformation: decadence, semi-marginalization, revolutionization, and modernization, which form the basic framework for understanding China's modern changes. This part also includes a thematic study of the evolution of China's modernizing ideas over the past century.

After reflecting on China's modernization process over the last hundred years, the author provides a summary of China's modernization process from a macro-comparative historical perspective: (a) China's modernization took place in a vast, populous, and economically underdeveloped agricultural country; (b) China's modernization unfolded in an unusually challenging internal and external environment; (c) China's modernization process is characterized by a deep contradiction between historical continuity and rupture; (d) China's path to modernization has been a process of continually choosing and adapting development models in response to the waves of global modernization.

Finally, the author briefly reviews the evolution of modernization thought in China and raises four important questions for reflection: (a) A major feature of China's modernization movement is that it has always explored China's future from a cultural perspective; (b) Over the past

century, China's modernization has been a process of moving from passively adapting to global modernization challenges to actively embracing them; (c) The contradiction between tradition and modernity is an inevitable conflict in China's modernization movement; (d) Summarizing historical lessons and actively exploring a modernization path with Chinese characteristics. Therefore, while reviewing history and recognizing the distinctive traits of Chinese traditional culture, China must still combine its socialist characteristics with the practical realities of the country to explore its own modernization path.

5. Key Concept Interpretations

5.1. The Standard of Productivity and Modernization Theory

The author summarizes the existing interpretations of the meaning of modernization, which can be classified into four main types:

First interpretation: This view is based on the political stance of Chinese party and government leaders, who argue that modernization is the historical process through which underdeveloped countries catch up with the world's advanced levels in economy and technology.

Second interpretation: From the perspective of development economics, modernization is equated with industrialization.

Third interpretation: Represented by the structural-functional school, this view sees modernization as the dramatic process of change that humanity has undergone since the scientific revolution, manifesting in various aspects such as industrial development, knowledge growth, social mobilization, and psychological adaptation.

Fourth interpretation: This perspective views modernization as a "form of civilization," emphasizing that it is a process of changes in psychological attitudes, values, and lifestyles.

On this basis, the author provides a definition of "modernization" from a historical perspective:

Broadly speaking, modernization, as a global historical process, refers to the profound transformation that human society has experienced since the Industrial Revolution. This transformation, driven by industrialization, marks the global shift from traditional agricultural societies to modern industrial societies. It permeates all fields—economics, politics, culture, and thought—and leads to profound corresponding changes.

Narrowly speaking, modernization is not a natural social evolutionary process. It refers to the process in which underdeveloped countries adopt efficient approaches to rapidly catch up with advanced industrial nations by implementing planned economic and technological reforms and learning from global advancements, while also driving widespread social reform to adapt to the modern world environment.

5.2. A Unified, Multi-Line View of Historical Development

The author clearly states that the new theory of modernization will be built upon a Marxist framework. However, before establishing this new theory, it is necessary to reexamine Marx's historical development view. In Soviet textbooks, five types of production relations—"primitive communism," "slave ownership," "feudalism," "capitalism,"

and "socialism"—replaced the five modes of production, and the single-line development model of these modes was used to explain the laws of world historical evolution. The problem with this single-line development theory is that it assumes each social-economic formation has only one mode of production and that each form of productive force can only be paired with one type of production relation throughout history.

In reality, however, no social formation is unidimensional or static. Even within the same social-economic formation, there can be multiple varied manifestations.

The author then proposes a macro-framework for a unified, multi-line historical development view.

Unified: Human historical development ultimately revolves around economic development, with the advancement of productive forces as its central axis.

Multi-line: This rejects the single-line model of societal development based solely on the five forms of production relations. The single-line model tends to create a teleological approach in which productive forces are made to fit production relations according to the will of those in power. Instead, the new model emphasizes the importance of production methods—including labor methods, technological approaches, and other forms of production—in driving social development.

This shift from a linear and deterministic view of history to one that embraces complexity and multiple pathways reflects a more nuanced understanding of the dynamics of historical change.

6. Personal Reflections

Modernization Theory Revisited is a profound reflection and theoretical summary by Luo Rongqu on the global process of modernization. It offers a new perspective for understanding the diversity and complexity of modernization paths in different countries. As a reader, I find many of the theories proposed by Luo Rongqu in this book highly compelling, especially his viewpoint that "modernization should not follow a single path." He clearly asserts that, in the context of globalization, modernization needs to be adjusted according to the specific conditions of each country. This theory is forward-thinking, particularly in the era of globalization and information technology, when many countries' modernization processes are no longer merely about emulating the Western model. Instead, they exhibit more localized and diversified characteristics.

However, Luo Rongqu's theory is not without its shortcomings. While he emphasizes the importance of social, cultural, and historical factors, his theory may overlook the profound impact of international politics, economic environments, and the global system on a country's modernization process. In particular, his analysis lacks depth regarding the competition between major powers, changes in international markets, and challenges in global governance. These areas remain underexplored, and the theory would benefit from a more detailed examination of the interactions between countries in the globalized context.

Additionally, although he advocates for "diversified" paths to modernization, the book's analysis of specific country cases is relatively brief. It does not provide a comprehensive exploration of the diversity and complexity of modernization paths in non-Western countries. In this regard, further case studies could enhance the book, especially a more detailed background and causal analysis of the modernization dilemmas faced by Third World countries. This would help

refine and strengthen his theory.

Nevertheless, these shortcomings do not diminish the status of *Modernization Theory Revisited* as a theoretically profound and wide-ranging academic work. Luo Rongqu has created a new theoretical framework for understanding modernization and provides deep academic support for both global and Chinese modernization processes. His ideas remind us that modernization is not a process exclusive to the Western world, but a diversified path toward modernity that countries and regions around the world undertake according to their own histories, cultures, and real-world conditions.

7. Conclusion and Outlook

"New Theories of Modernization" is a monumental academic work by Luo Rongqu, providing a profound theoretical framework for understanding modernization. This framework has far-reaching implications for future modernization studies. In today's globalized world, the paths to modernization are no longer singular. Countries around the world have forged their own paths based on their unique historical, cultural, and social contexts. China's rise in the global modernization process represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The critical question remains: how can China, amidst the tides of globalization, chart a modernization path that is uniquely suited to its own characteristics?

Luo Rongqu's theory of the "One Core and Multiple

Trajectories" in historical development not only deepens our understanding of modernization but also provides fresh perspectives on the modernization paths of China and the world at large. Going forward, the academic community should continue to explore the complexities and diversities of the modernization process, particularly in areas such as responding to global challenges, adjusting development models, and improving national governance systems.

Luo Rongqu's academic achievements undoubtedly provide us with vital theoretical tools. These tools help us gain a deeper understanding of both global modernization and China's unique path of modernization, offering invaluable insights into the practical implementation of these concepts.

References

- [1] Luo,R,Q.(2004). *New Theory of Modernization: The Process of Modernization in the World and China*. Beijing:The Commercial Press.
- [2] Duan,G,Z.(1998). A monumental work of history that looks at the world and serves China--Mr. Luo Rongqu's *New Theory of Modernization* and its sequel. *Journal of Zhangye Teachers College(Comprehensive Edition)*(01).
- [3] Niu,D,Y.(2019).Strict Teacher, Benefactor and Good Teacher--In Memory of Mr. Luo Rongqu.*Tribune of Social Sciences*. 147-152.