

# The Historical Evolution of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization

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**Abstract:** During the process of human modernization, all countries have pursued value goals such as rationalization, industrialization, marketization, urbanization, democratization, and rule of law. The "Western model" and "Soviet model" have provided important modernization programs for the two camps of countries in the world. As a new modernization program, the "Chinese model" offers new ideas for global governance and developing countries. The concept of "the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization" was first introduced by Deng Xiaoping in response to the question of what type of socialism to establish. It is akin to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics. In the new era, the Chinese Communists, led by Xi Jinping, have comprehensively summarized and systematized the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics as the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization. Moreover, they have further innovated and developed it in theory and practice, signifying the maturity of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization.

**Keywords:** The new and uniquely Chinese path to modernization; Socialist road with Chinese characteristics; Historical evolution

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After the Opium War, modern China gradually transitioned into a semi-colonial and semi-feudal society. To combat this, knowledgeable figures such as Yixin, Lin Zexu, and Wei Yuan shifted their focus to overseas and began exploring the road to modernization by learning Western technology and introducing Western equipment. Later, the Hundred Days Reform, the Xinhai Revolution, and the New Culture Movement followed, with an emphasis on learning and emulating the Western political system, promoting Western democracy and science. However, this westernized path towards modernization proved to be ineffective in changing China's colonized and divided national fate, preserving the trampled dignity of the Chinese nation, and eradicating poverty and hunger. With the victory of the October Revolution in Russia in 1917 and the introduction of Marxism into China, a theoretical foundation was laid for the birth of the Chinese Communist Party. Under its strong leadership, the Party achieved victory in the New Democratic Revolution after 28 years of bloody struggle. After securing a peaceful and stable development environment, the Chinese Communists formally opened the road to exploring modernization. They went through three stages of development, starting from taking their own road, then transitioning to the road of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and ultimately embarking on the new road of Chinese-style modernization:

## (1) 1949-1976: Autonomous Exploration of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization

From 1949 to 1955, Mao's understanding of modernization was largely limited to industrialization due to a lack of comprehensive understanding and objective constraints <sup>[1]</sup>. As a result, during the construction of the First Five-Year Plan, China predominantly followed the Soviet model and prioritized the development of heavy industry, which played a crucial role in China's initial modernization efforts. However, as the shortcomings of the Soviet model became increasingly apparent, it became clear that it was not fully adapted to China's modernization needs. After extensive investigation and research, Mao Zedong elaborated on the "On the Ten Relations" during the enlarged meeting of the Politburo of the Central Committee in April 1956 and at the Supreme State Council in May, where he explicitly pointed out that "the Soviet Union has recently exposed some of their shortcomings and mistakes in the process of building socialism, which should serve as a warning <sup>[2]</sup>." In his subsequent talks, Mao repeatedly emphasized that China's national conditions were distinct from those of the Soviet Union, and that China should learn from only those things that were suitable for its situation. This reflects Mao's reflection on the "Soviet model" and the reshaping or transformation of the logical starting point of the new Chinese socialist modernization path, which is to independently explore a new modernization path suitable for China's own conditions.

From 1956 to 1959, Mao Zedong carefully reviewed and analyzed the experiences and lessons learned from socialist modernization in both China and the Soviet Union. He proposed valuable guiding ideas for exploring a new path of Chinese-style modernization. First,

he suggested the order of economic construction to be "agriculture, light industry, and heavy industry." Second, he proposed the decentralization of power, with the separation of powers between the central and local governments, and an expansion of autonomy for local governments and enterprises. Third, he opposed the abolition of the commodity economy and advocated for the development of socialist commodity production, utilizing the law of value to its full potential. During this period, Mao Zedong, along with other leaders such as Zhou Enlai, gradually established the goal of modernization as "industrial modernization, agricultural modernization, scientific and cultural modernization, and national defense modernization," which later became known as the "four modernizations."

### (2) 1978-2012: The Innovative Development of a New Path of Chinese-Style Modernization

In December 1978, the Third Plenary Session of the Eleventh Central Committee, led by the second generation of Central Leadership represented by Deng Xiaoping, marked a turning point for the Party's work after the removal of the "Gang of Four". The meeting corrected the Party's ideological, political, and organizational lines and redirected its focus towards socialist modernization.

Deng Xiaoping's approach to building socialism combined Marxism-Leninism with China's national conditions, drawing on the experience of socialist construction during the early years of the country's founding and elements of Chinese traditional culture. At the Politburo meeting in March 1979, he formally proposed the concept of "Chinese Modernization"<sup>[1]</sup>. Deng expanded the connotation of socialist modernization beyond the "four modernizations" to encompass legal modernization, education modernization, political modernization, social modernization, and human modernization <sup>[2]</sup>. He established the goal of modernization as the modernization of the legal system, education, politics, society, and human beings, with the ultimate aim of building China into a rich, strong, democratic, and civilized socialist modern country and achieving a moderately prosperous society. To achieve this goal, Deng put forward "one center and two basic points" as the basic line, with the "development of socialist market economy" as the practical path and the "three-step strategy" as a means to implement it. In practice, this involved major reforms across various aspects of the economic and political systems. This marked the formal exploration of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization, namely, the road of socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics.

The success of the reform and opening up has demonstrated the suitability and scientific soundness of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization, which represents a comprehensive departure from the Soviet model and is well-suited to China's national conditions. However, it is also important to acknowledge that in the new period of reform and opening up, the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization is still in the stage of "crossing the river by feeling for stones". As a result, a systematic theoretical system and a mature institutional framework have yet to be fully developed.

### (3) 2012-Present: The Maturation of a New Path of Chinese-Style Modernization

As a process of transforming from tradition to modernity, modernization encompasses multiple layers that permeate all aspects of society, including the economy, politics, culture, and thought <sup>[1]</sup>. The development of modernization is a complex, systematic, long-term process, and its path is never fixed by the establishment of a particular system. Rather, it involves continuous exploration and improvement of practical actions, ideas, and theories, leading to gradual maturation.

After more than 40 years of continuous development through reform and opening up, China has entered a new stage of development. The new road of Chinese-style modernization in the new era has seen advancements in both theory and practice. The pressing question of "what kind of socialism with Chinese characteristics to adhere to and develop in the new era, and how to adhere to and develop socialism with Chinese characteristics" has given rise to Xi Jinping's thought on socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. This latest achievement of Marxism Chineseization has resolved the fundamental issue of adhering to and developing socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era. It also provides an answer to the contemporary question of "what kind of socialist modernization power to build and how to build a socialist modernization power." In recent years, the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization has been enriched and developed further in theory. The practice of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization has undergone two five-year development periods based on the exploration of the new period. Following the 18th Party Congress, the Party has comprehensively promoted the "four comprehensive" strategic layout and the "five-in-one" overall layout, achieving historic milestones in socialist modernization. In the five years since the 19th CPC National Congress, the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization has continued to deepen its pursuit of the "Five-in-One" overall layout and the "Four-comprehensive" strategic layout. A series of strategic initiatives and transformative practices have been systematically arranged in terms of themes, goals, tasks, steps, guarantees, motivations, and ideological approaches. These efforts have greatly enriched the practical development of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization. As a result of this exploration, the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization has matured in a comprehensive,

deep, and systematic manner.

The New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization originated during the period of socialist construction in New China, was further explored during the era of reform and opening up, and has now matured under the new era of socialism. This socialist path, characterized by its people-centeredness, comprehensiveness, harmony, and innovative development, has been continuously developed under the guidance of the Communist Party of China. It represents a positive direction for human modernization, and its successful implementation has provided China with unique solutions and valuable insights that can benefit other countries around the world. Moreover, the theoretical and practical innovations of the New and Uniquely Chinese Path to Modernization have surpassed and developed classical Marxist theories on socialist modernization construction. As Chairman Mao once said, "To be inferior to Marx is not a Marxist; to be equal to Marx is not a Marxist; to surpass Marx is to be a true Marxist." In this regard, Chinese Communists can be considered true Marxists, who have been able to innovate and adapt Marxism to their unique national conditions, and develop a socialist path that is best suited to their country's needs.

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