

Chapter 2

People-Centered Comprehensive Modernization



The people-centered development philosophy is not an abstract, abstruse concept. We will not restrict ourselves to lip service or idle reflection, but put it into practice in all areas of social and economic development.

Xi Jinping (2015).

Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China Vol. II*, p. 235.

In nature, the philosophy of shared development represents the idea of people-centered development. It reflects the demand of achieving shared prosperity in stages. Shared prosperity is a primary goal of Marxism; it has also been a basic ideal of the Chinese people.

Xi Jinping (2016).

Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China Vol. II*, p. 236.

Committing to a people-centered approach. The people are the creators of history; they are the fundamental force that determines our Party and country's future. We must ensure the principal status of the people, and adhere to the Party's commitment to serving the public good and exercising power in the interests of the people. We must observe the Party's fundamental purpose of wholeheartedly serving the people, and put into practice the Party's mass line in all aspects of governance. We must regard as our goal the people's aspirations to live a better life, and rely on the people to move history forward.

Xi Jinping (2017)

Report adopted at the 19th Congress of the Communist Party of China

The socialist modernization of China is not simply a matter of catching up with developed countries to attain their level of modernization. More importantly, it involves innovation, to achieve a form of modernization that is different from and superior to traditional Western capitalist modernization.

The modernization of China is socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics, and is essentially people-centered. As mentioned in the first chapter, this process is built upon five fundamental factors, namely modernization, socialism, Chinese culture, a green factor, and the leadership of the Communist Party of China, which work together to promote people-centered modernization.

Comrade Xi Jinping's concept of people-centered development is multi-faceted, where the most prominent aspects are: (1) free and well-rounded human development,

which is the objective pursued by Marxism; (2) material modernization; (3) the key role of the people in driving and promoting the modernization process, which in turn implies (4) the importance of mobilizing the enthusiasm and creativity of the people, believing in and relying upon the people to jointly create socialist modernization; and (5) development achievements are shared by all the people. These five aspects are the ideological soul and theoretical basis for realizing socialist modernization.

Hence, the socialist modernization of China is essentially the modernization of well-rounded human development, as defined in the Constitution of the Communist Party of China.¹ It includes modernization at individual, social, national, and global levels. At the individual level, such modernization fully reflects the Marxist concept of free and well-rounded human development,² while at the social level, the intent is to build a developed society of shared prosperity. Nationally, the aim is to complete the building of a great modern socialist country, while at the global level it is to hold high the banner of peace, development, cooperation, and win-win outcomes; and to become an advocate, practitioner, and torchbearer of a global community with a shared future. A modern, socialist China will continue its efforts to safeguard world peace, contribute to global development, and uphold international order.³

2.1 Transition from Economic-Centered Modernization to People-Centered Modernization

Progress within socialist modernization with Chinese characteristics must be accompanied by a development or transition of Party theory. One such transition is reflected in the shift from economic modernization to the modernization of the people. As Mao Zedong explained: “Man’s knowledge makes another leap through the test of practice. This leap is more important than the previous one.”⁴

Socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era. China is now in a stage of middle to high incomes and of high human development. Currently, efforts are focused upon reaching the stage of high income and very high human development. Meanwhile, the theoretical innovation required to meet these goals is prominently reflected in the transition from a strategy that is “economic-centered” to one that is “people-centered,” as envisioned by Comrade Xi Jinping.

¹The Constitution of the Communist Party of China (partially modified at the 18th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Nov. 14, 2012) highlights the need to constantly meet the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the people and to promote well-rounded human development on the basis of production development and the growth of social wealth.

²Marx and Engels stated in the *Communist Manifesto* that the new society “will be such a complex, where each person’s free development is the condition of all people’s free development.” *Collected Works of Marx and Engels*, Vol. 2, People’s Publishing House, 2009 edition, p. 53.

³Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 18, 2017.

⁴Mao (1963).

In fact, the people-centered concept is the core of Party governance, influenced and designed by Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. Over the years it has undergone significant improvement via continuous exploration. With his assertion that people are the creators of history, Comrade Mao Zedong defined the purpose of the Party and armed forces to serve the people. Indeed, the mass line is one of the three basic aspects of the living soul in Mao Zedong's line of thought.⁵

In 1956, the 8th Party Congress proposed that the main task of the Chinese people was to focus efforts to develop the productive forces, realize national industrialization, and gradually meet the ever-growing material and cultural needs of the nation. However, history advances with twists and turns. Later, the policies of the 8th National Congress were rejected and replaced with the concept of the "class struggle." That phase was to last for ten years.

The 3rd Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee, which took place in 1978, made the decision to stop using the term "class struggle," as it was deemed unsuitable as the slogan of a socialist society. Henceforth, the focus would be on socialist modernization.⁶ Later, the Party's basic line was summarized as an "economic centered strategy." According to the general program of the Party Constitution, formulated in 1982, the central task of the Party is to lead the Chinese people of all ethnic groups in a concerted effort to carry out socialist modernization and economic construction. A further objective is to gradually improve the living standards in urban and rural areas through production development and social wealth growth.⁷ These all reflect the people-centered ideology.

This decision to stop using the term "class struggle" was a major turning point in history, and was the start of China's unique socialist modernization. From a historical perspective, the economic centered strategy was an essential first stage, reflecting the need for economic and material modernization. In 1978 the rural poverty rate was as high as 97.5%, and as Deng Xiaoping realized, if socialist modernization were to be achieved, the primary task was to "grow rich." Otherwise, it would be impossible for China to break through the poverty trap, let alone provide ample food and clothing.

In 2000 Comrade Jiang Zemin proposed the theory of "three represents," according to which the Party must always represent the development trends of advanced productive forces, the orientations of an advanced culture, and the fundamental interests of the vast majority of the Chinese people, who are the fundamental starting point and objective of socialist modernization. The overriding aim is to meet the material and spiritual needs of the broad mass of people.

In 2003 Comrade Hu Jintao proposed a "people-oriented" scientific outlook on development. This approach officially placed the people at the core of development, and clearly stated that development is for the people, relies on the people, and leads to

⁵*Decision on a Number of Historical Issues of the Party since the Founding of New China*. Unanimously approved at the 6th Plenary Session of the 11th CPC Central Committee on Jun. 27, 1981.

⁶*Ibid.*

⁷*Constitution of the Communist Party of China*. Approved at the 12th National Congress of the Communist Party of China on Sep. 6, 1982.

achievements that are to be shared by the people. Such comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development seeks to realize the well-rounded development of all China's people.

As mentioned in the ancient Chinese classics, "there are some fixed principles in governing a state, among which benefiting the people should be the root."⁸ Scientific socialism is the jewel in the crown of all human civilization mainly because it emphasizes the role of the people, systematically applying to all theories and practices the principle that people are the creators of history. Furthermore, under scientific socialism the objective of all theory and social development is the well-being of the people.

The concept of people-centered development was first introduced by Comrade Xi Jinping. As he pointed out, the people are the creators of history; they are the fundamental force that determines the future of our Party and our country. We must ensure the principal status of the people, and adhere to the Party's commitment to serve the public good and exercise power in the interests of the people. We must observe the Party's fundamental purpose to wholeheartedly serve the people, and put into practice the Party's mass line in all aspects of governance. Our goal must be achievement of the people's aspirations to live a better life, and we must rely on the people to move history forward.⁹ This reflects the idea that modernization serves the development of humankind.

2.2 People-Centered Socialist Modernization

In proposing the concept of people-centered development, Comrade Xi Jinping defined what had always been the essence of the Party's ideology and governance. The concept represents the fundamental purpose of socialist modernization, and includes five key features:

1. **The purpose of socialist modernization is to achieve well-rounded human development.** Marx pointed out that revolutionary movements are carried out by the proletariat to break their shackles and realize human liberation. The difference between the Communist Party of China and other parties is that socialist modernization aims at "well-rounded human development." This includes not only economic, social, cultural, and political development, and the achievement of ecological civilization, but also free development and the well-rounded development of each individual person. China's development plan, which comprises five-year plans and medium- and long-term plans, is a combination of macro and individual development. It is essentially a plan for common development for

⁸Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China II*, p. 235.

⁹Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 18, 2017.

everyone. Human comprehensive development is a state in which “man appropriates his total essence in a total manner, that is to say, as a whole man.”¹⁰ As such, unlike developmental economics, which uses material accumulation or a single index as the base unit of analysis, comprehensive development takes into account the whole human life cycle. The Party has inserted this idea in specific national plans, thus moving from abstract people to specific persons.

2. **Socialist modernization extends beyond economic aspects to holistic human development.** The purpose of socialist modernization is to realize well-rounded human development, and its essence must be modernization in human terms. Individual modernity is essentially an enhancement of the human capital of the 1.37 billion people living in China. That is, it promotes well-rounded human and social development by investing in people in different stages of their lives. This requires attention not only to material aspects, but also to the people’s spiritual, social, cultural and ecological development, and security, throughout their whole lives. Therefore, in the developmental process we promote the coordinated development of the economy, spiritual well-being, society, culture, and ecological civilization.
3. **People play the principal role in socialist modernization.** Dialectical and historical materialism holds that people create history,¹¹ and that they are the subjects for creating social wealth.¹² The essence of socialist modernization is the development from a “realm of necessity” to a “realm of freedom.” In this process, not only does everyone rely on others, but also, the development of each individual has a spillover effect on the development of others, thus forming a complementary and correlated development process among individuals. Therefore, development is not only the free and well-rounded development of individuals, but also an interactive, sharing and common development with others. This community of development is not only a community of interests consisting of 1.37 billion Chinese people, but extends across borders to create a global human community with a shared future. “Only in community [has each] individual the means of cultivating his gifts in all directions,”¹³ and only in such a community will “the conditions of the free development and movement of individuals [be] under their control.”¹⁴
4. **The driving forces of socialist modernization are enthusiasm and creativity.** The ultimate objectives of national modernization are to constantly mobilize people’s enthusiasm, and to constantly emancipate the productive forces of the

¹⁰Karl Marx, *Economic & Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, Progress Publishers, Moscow 1959. See: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/download/pdf/Economic-Philosophic-Manuscripts-1844.pdf>.

¹¹*Selected Works of Mao Zedong*, Vol. 5, People’s Publishing House, 1977 edition, p. 253.

¹²*Collected Works of Mao Zedong since the Founding of New China*, Vol. 5. Central Party Literature Press, 1991 edition, p. 490.

¹³*The German Ideology*. Marxists.Org, 2019. Available at: <https://www.marxists.org/archive/marx/works/1845/german-ideology/ch01d.htm>.

¹⁴*Ibid.*

people. The modernization of national governance and the comprehensive deepening of reform aim to combine the people's objectives with national objectives, and the people's interests with national interests. Since the 18th Party Congress, a series of institutional reforms have been designed to closely focus on the "people," and to fully mobilize their enthusiasm and creativity. These reforms also aim to unify the thoughts and actions of the people, and different regions and departments, around the concept of people-centered development, so as to realize compatible ideas, objectives, motives, actions, and results.

5. **Socialist modernization promotes all-round social progress and guarantees well-rounded human development.** The principal contradiction currently facing Chinese society is that between unbalanced and inadequate development on one side, and the people's ever-growing need for a better life on the other. Full development of human beings is dependent on all-around social progress. As Xi Jinping has stated, this requires that "we must devote a great amount of energy to addressing developmental imbalances and inadequacies, and to push hard to improve the quality and effect of development. With this, we will be better placed to meet the ever-growing economic, political, cultural, social, and ecological needs of our people, and to promote well-rounded human development and all-round social progress."¹⁵

Since its foundation, the Party has always made the people-centered concept the basis for its own growth and governance. This focus emerged not just because it is an essential requirement of the Party as a proletarian party, but because China has a large population, developmental differences, and conflicts between individual interests, short-term interests, and local interests. As the largest developing country in the world, China needs to have a powerful party that represents the overall, fundamental, and long-term interests of all the people to first catch up with and then overtake other countries in terms of development. Only in this way can the interests of the Party, the state, and the people be unified in a novel and significant way, thus transcending the erroneous theory of binary opposition between the state and society and between the state and the people. This is the Party's historical experience of success, and the foundation of its legitimacy.

People-centered socialist modernization is built upon, and further develops, the theories of Marxism-Leninism, Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, the "Three Represents," and the scientific outlook on development. It is both a comprehensive expression of, and an innovation stemming from, an ideological system. China's own unique mode of socialist modernization can solve prominent problems with a view to the overall situation and long-term interests, and it also represents the valuable theoretical and ideological wealth of the Party.

The people-centered concept clarifies the principal status of the people in China's socialist modernization, thus reflecting the objective of the Party's governance and the purpose of national development. Guided by this concept, the Party will continue

¹⁵Xi Jinping, *Secure a Decisive Victory in Building a Moderately Prosperous Society in All Respects and Strive for the Great Success of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era*. Delivered at the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 18, 2017.

to address prominent problems and challenges in the development of China. Indeed, the people-centered strategy is itself an important innovation leading the way towards China's future, and a significant reform related to the overall development of China and the world.

2.3 Transition from “Development Is the Absolute Principle” to “Six Major Ideas of Development”

The earliest and most important consensus of the socialist modernization of China is “development is the absolute principle.”¹⁶ The fundamental objectives of socialist modernization are to emancipate and develop the productive forces, eliminate exploitation and polarization, and achieve common prosperity. Indeed, socialist modernization could not be achieved without the emancipation and development of productive forces.

For whom, then, will the productive forces be developed, and how? These are core questions that must be carefully explored and answered.

Different development stages require different tasks guided by different development concepts. In practice, the concept is constantly evolving, advancing and updating with the times, constantly guiding practice with more scientific theories, and pushing China to keep on growing and developing.

Comrades Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin emphasized that we need to seize available opportunities and accelerate development around the center of economic construction.¹⁷ This development strategy was formulated based on China's national conditions, with its large population, relatively small amount of arable land, weak foundation and per capita GNP at the bottom of world rankings.

Comrade Hu Jintao's emphasis on scientific development was a response to China's national conditions in relation to foreign development experiences, and an analysis of the characteristics of China's situation in the low- and middle-income stage of development at the start of the twenty-first century. The scientific outlook has development as its first priority, with the people-oriented principle at its core; the basic requirement is comprehensive, coordinated, and sustainable development, and the fundamental method is a holistic consideration of all aspects.¹⁸

In the new era, looking forward to 2050, the simple truth that “development is the absolute principle” will be bound to develop in a more profound and more comprehensive way. Reflecting this fact, the 5th Plenary Session of the 18th CPC Central

¹⁶Deng Xiaoping, Talking Points in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai, Shanghai, etc., *People's Daily*, 6th November, 1993.

¹⁷Jiang Zemin, *Accelerate the pace of reform and opening up and modernization, win a greater victory of the socialist cause with Chinese characteristics*. Report at the 14th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 12, 1992.

¹⁸Hu Jintao, *Hold High the Great Banner of the Socialism with Chinese Characteristics, struggle to win a new victory of building a moderately prosperous society in all respects*. Report at the 17th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, Oct. 15, 1997.

Committee stressed the need to implement innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development for everyone. Such an approach builds on existing development philosophy and China's valuable experience, while also considering new trends. By following this path we can realize the development objective during the period of the 13th Five-Year Plan. We will also solve China's development problems and strengthen our development advantages.

Furthermore, Comrade Xi Jinping has reframed the relationship between security and development and insisted upon the need for national security with Chinese characteristics. In his view, there is a dialectical relationship, where "security and development are like the two wings of a bird, or the two wheels of a bicycle. Security ensures development, and development is what security is aimed at."¹⁹ This idea reflects the new requirements for change and development, and further enriches and expands the five major development concepts of innovation, coordination, ecological (green) considerations, openness, and sharing. Therefore, it is reasonable to add security to this list, as the sixth major concept of development.

The six major ideas of development form a rigorous and pragmatic development framework and logic. They relate to, promote, and support each other, exemplify development and make it more instructive, targeted, and operable.

China will continue with its innovative development, making innovation the driving force of development so as to maintain a medium- to high-speed economic growth rate. We will also adhere to the path of coordinated and holistic development, paying particular attention to existing imbalances. We will endeavor to make China's development green, so as to maintain harmony between humankind and nature, to build a beautiful China with blue sky, green land, and clean water. We want open development, and will maintain internal and external linkages to further improve the level of openness of the economy. China continues to strive for development for everyone, and will address issues of social equity and justice, while constantly working to improve the well-being of the people. We will continue to deliver better results of economic and social development, while also seeking security development and providing guarantees by tackling existing areas of insecurity.

The six major developments areas are not independent concepts, but are compatible with, promote, and supplement each other with a unified objective and self-consistent logic. Innovation is the driving force of development, while coordination is the art, ecological concern the mode, and openness the necessary assistant of development. The objective is development for everyone, and the guarantee of that development is security. The core and purpose of the six major developments is to realize the full development of human beings. This concept is consistent with the Party Constitution, and is the ultimate objective.

The transition from "development is the absolute principle" to the six major ideas of development reflects China's modernization, which is significantly different from that of the West. The aim is that it should be achieved by 2050, thus not only narrowing

¹⁹Xi Jinping, *Speech delivered at the 2nd World Internet Conference*, Dec. 16, 2015.

the gap between China and most developed countries in terms of material modernization, but more importantly, realizing people-centered socialist modernization, a new type of modernization in human terms for the twenty-first century.

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