

Theoretical and methodological principles of research of social modernization in South – East Asia

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Abstract

In the article the methodological principles of research of the general and specific aspects of social modernization in South-East Asia have been considered. The author analyzed the evolution of scientific schools, provided assessment of existing theories of modernization and formulated the general paradigm of modernization based on existing theoretical approaches.

Key-words: *Methodology, modernization, socio-economic development, Westernization, solidarity, parliamentary democracy, authoritarianism, regionalism, corruption, nationalism*

Today one of the more relevant research categories on the theoretical and methodological levels is „social modernization“. The term „modernisation“ itself originates from French word „modern“ – modern, new. Therefore, „social modernisation“ is a process of rejuvenation of old social systems, formations, civilizations with the aid of modern scientific and economic developments and evolution of international interaction. Social modernisation made it possible for South-Eastern Asian (SEA) countries to reach a new level of accelerated development, to overcome obsolescence, poverty and to become new industrialized countries with characteristics of post-industrialized society.

Modernisation policy of the SEA countries has different requirements for the functioning of the whole social system and envisions all-round rejuvenation of society, aimed at accelerated development of social relations. One of the important parts of this process is modernisation of social interaction with the aid of modern technological breakthroughs.

Paradigm of Modernisation was firstly defined in the mid-20th century at the time of the dissolution of the classic European colonial empires and creation of large number of new nations in Africa, Asia and Latin America. Those new nations had to choose their path of development. In this case, social modernization allowed for quick transition from traditional society to a modern one. This concept was proposed by American and European politicians and scientists as an alternative to the communism. During the 1950s-1960s different analytical theoretical views were united in a joint “interdisciplinary comparative outlook”, meaning that they were unified into a single modernisation paradigm based on many different theoretical views. Social modernisation turned out to be an effective instrument of solving developmental problems and for providing strong impetus to the evolution of the third-world countries (of which SEA countries were part). The second half of the 20th century in the framework of modernisation paradigm provided the much-needed experience boost and knowledge in all the spheres of societal transition from traditional to modern industrial form. At the same time, modernization paradigm went through many years of evolutionary and functional improvement itself. Modernisation perspective – is an example of a successful theory, which was shaped and refined by practical application, real world feedback and events [1].

Overall, several separate stages of evolution of the modernisation school can be defined:

- second half of 1950s – first half of 1960s – the birth and initial popularization of modernization research in its classic form;
- late 1960s – 1970s – critical period in this theory's development when it was being criticized and clashed with other competing development theories: dependency theory, world-systems theory, neo-Marxism;
- 1980s – post critical period of return to popularity of modernisation research, during which specific schools started to emerge because of merging of some modernisation and world-systems theories;
- Late 1980s – 1990s – emergence of neo-modernism and postmodernism analysis because of socioeconomic transformations in Central and Eastern Europe [2].

Generally, social modernisation is defined as: a set of economic, demographic, psychological and political changes experienced by the traditionalist society as a result of transformation into a modern society. Differences between traditional and modern societies were analyzed by a French sociologist Emile Durkheim in his work „On the division of social labor” [3]. Durkheim selected the following criterium to differentiate the two - „solidarity”. Traditional societies are characterized by „mechanical” solidarity or „solidarity with 58 resemblances”, which involve the construction of a society through independently organized unions – „clans”. Modern society is built fundamentally differently as a result of its inherent „organic solidarity”, in which each element plays its specific parts. The process of separation of functions (social division of labor) transmits internal dynamics modern society, which is essentially devoid of traditional society [4]. Sociology defines modernization as evolution from traditional agrarian society into city centric industrial society. But in general modernization usually goes beyond simple industrialized society and conception of capitalism. The essence of modernization of traditional societies lies in formation of an „independent individual” [5].

As such, at the heart of modernization of society lies industrialization. Historically emergence of modern society is closely associated with emergence of industry and technological development. Industrialization in itself does not simply bring about creation of modern technology and manufacturing process but brings about great changes in the structure of society itself [6].

Primary social modernization process begun during the time of first industrial revolution and with movement for equal rights. Primary modernization arises as a response to emergence of capitalism. Secondary modernization covers countries lagging behind in their development and tries to mimic societal evolution of local developed countries. Therefore, the process of social modernization in developed countries has a defining effect on social modernization in developing countries. As such there is no technical impetus to kickstart social modernization in those countries, what makes their government a leading force in determining the direction and flow of this process. These governments can decide what model of social development their nation will follow [7].

Barrington Moore made a great effort to research different causes behind the emergence of modern industrialized societies. He theorized that modernization was a driving force behind successful formation of many new political movements of the early 20th century – parliament democracies, fascism and communism. Division into distinct social groups (farmers, workers etc.) and growing divide between

them as well as a shift in their economic expediency for a modern nation (and as a result their dissatisfaction with new social structure) became a cause of regressive developments in capitalistic systems and led to the formation of totalitarian regimes [8].

Mr. Moore recognized two methods of emergence of modern societies. First method, which united capitalism and parliamentary democracy, came as a result of bourgeoisie revolutions (such as English, French and American civil wars) around the world. Parliament was supposed to give control over the country back to the people. Second method was fascism, which came as a result of reactionary development of capitalist societies [9]. The underlying cause for that is the unsuccessful attempts at forced social reforms when government support is less than satisfactory as a result of underlying socio-economic causes. This is also true for communist regimes, when social transformation being attempted in completely socially undeveloped and unindustrialized countries with prevailing working class that has a weak grasp of how capitalistic and democratic systems work [10].

On the other hand, renown sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt believes that tradition might be a decisive force in formation of modern societies serving as a counterbalance to the too rapid social modernization and essentially fueling protest movements that eventually grew into revolutions [11, 12].

Professor Neil Smelser singles out six social spheres that change during industrialization and modernization: economy, politics, education, religion, social stratification, family. In this sense modernization is a form of evolution of society. In a case of self-modernization – it comes as an answer to internal societal struggles. The lagging modernization comes a result of undeveloped states trying to follow example of the developed states. Formational modernization comes as a result of gradual changes in social structures – formation of a new society. Civilizational modernization comes a result of emergence of a new civilizational lead and direction [6].

The relationship between social modernization and quality of life is not always an upward trend. To determine what effect modernization will have on quality of life of society a sociological analysis that would determine the type and structure of modernization should be performed. As such this will be determined by analyzing the interaction of social constructs within the ongoing process of modernization [14].

Taking into the account all of the above, modernization cannot be looked upon as an action of society to improve quality of life and wellbeing. Modernization is a complicated process that aims to solve a problem, that is not always of a „selfish” quality. Modernization tends to follow a set of rules that are usually common for the industrialized societies: high level of industrialization urbanization, professional specialization, scientific development, bureaucracy, social mobility, importance of education and elevated wellbeing of the population [15].

South-East Asian Countries provide an example of extremely successful application of theoretical societal modernization in a way that is unique to the region. It comes as a result of the rapid industrialization that clashed with values of traditionalist society resulting in highly authoritarian governments but with all the symptoms of modern society. As a result, this type of modernisation is known as authoritarian modernization [7, 8].

Another negative effect such modernization had, beside authoritarian currents, is high level of corruption. Elevated role of government in modernization process caused growth in corruption in SEA

countries. Political scientist Samuel P. Huntington differentiates three methods by which modernization causes growth in corruption. Firstly, modernization causes changes in societal values by forcing adoption of universal norms aimed at increased obedience to local governments and individual identification with a nation. This process is gradual which causes shift in society where old ways of life clash with new norms [9]. New standards of good and evil, while not widely accepted, put in question old traditional standards and as such all standards of what is legitimate or not as a whole and as such causes local individuals to define their own laws of behavior. Therefore, corruption arises as a result of a rift between societal norms and personal interest [10].

With growth of urbanization role of the city is more important in the process of modernization and is the reason behind accelerated conservatism of the society. Political structures grow more dependent on cities for political support. As such this causes unrest in rural areas that see their influence diminished. Society once held together by agrarian culture is being reformed around a city. This is how revolutionary movement becomes dependent on the outside classes like farmers and underdeveloped middle-class (which cannot compete with established higher levels of society). And as such revolution becomes impossible if either urban or middle-class societies become conservative as well [11].

Analyzing processes of social modernisation in SEA countries it is worth remembering that these processes happen in highly unbalanced societies with wide rifts between different social layers. Modernization in this case is borrowed modernization from the western countries. Both these things cause a wide array of problems for these societies. But as a result of overcoming them a unique synthesis of traditionalism and modernism was achieved that resulted in improved economic growth, less poverty, and fostered self-reliance for further modernization [12].

With advent of new communication technologies, the process of modernization continues in Asian countries. Demographic boom somewhat complicated the task of social modernization in the region and diminished its effect on social wellbeing. An issue of food supply needed to be and was eventually overcome with the advent of green technologies. Still the population growth was stunted. In the second half of 20th century food production in Asia has grown 4,8 times while population grew 2,6 times, which allowed these countries to satisfy internal demand in food supply as well as to trade on international food marketplace. In the 21st century the speed of growth of food supply is way above population growth. With this issue out of the way, solving unemployment is one of the main tasks for Asian governments [13].

Modern international development focuses on innovation as a mean of further social development. As a result of this focus many developed countries were able to reach high standards of social development and ensured leading positions on world's high-tech market, which provides high levels of income. Innovation marketplace also became a target for developing countries as well, as it provides boost to the modernization and industrialization process and allows to shorten the rift between developed and developing countries. Especially active in this field are SEA countries like Singapore, Philippines and Malaysia, all of which reached high export values in the field of high-tech products. This was fostered by growth of FDIs, which in turn foster formation of new branches of economy. Another thing that gave boost for such growth is cooperation within the framework of ASEAN, especially growth and stockpiling of the innovation knowhow resource [14].

In recent years innovation vectors of development began to form in less developed ASEAN countries, such as Vietnam. To achieve this Vietnam focuses on development of specific branches of economy and industry, widening of international cooperation and strengthening of education and training of the human resource pool. But developing countries of ASEAN are not the only ones that focus on high-tech development. Success of ASEAN countries lies in their understanding of global economic trends, importance of choosing vacant niche on the global marketplace and the importance of attracting foreign investments and fostering international cooperation and exchange, which allows them to secure great amounts of financial resources, modern technologies, equipment, knowhow that is needed to transfer to the high-tech route of development. At the same time ASEAN countries also effectively utilize their cultural specifics: hardworking, disciplined and cheap labor, rich natural resources and geographical location. Today ASEAN region is the most attractive region for FDIs which makes this region a leader in this regard [23].

In ASEAN countries innovation route has been chosen and fostered by local governments of involved countries. As such, governments play a decisive role in the modernization processes in the region. This is reflected in government support programs aimed at fostering innovation. Implementation of these programs is being carried out through government funding support as well as through partnership between private and public sector. ASEAN countries are constantly working to amass their scientific potential through increased spending in those areas. Education and training of personnel is also another important focus of those countries, which allowed them to use their own cheap labor in the new high-tech industries. Percentage of GDP spent on education in ASEAN countries recently overtook that of local developed countries like South Korea, Japan and China. Additional great attention is being paid to the creation of innovation infrastructure and establishment of high-tech business parks and free trade zones [24].

Another important contribution to the development of the social modernization theory was made by a British scientist Anthony Giddens. He developed a theory of reflexive modernization of the post-traditionalist society. Especially he wanted to understand what means to be „modern”. At the start of 1980s he developed the structuration theory and then moved on to further develop the reflexive modernization theory [25]. He believes that modern society lives in a time of radical modernization that is came as a result of growth of information technologies [26].

In post-traditionalist society, due to rapid technological development, modernization of a said society allows for more economic and professional choices for its participants, which, in fact, may not lie within confines of one's country. This allowed businesses to move across borders and for SEA countries to absorb them into their socio-economic bubble. As a result, SEA countries are producing a third of world's manufacturing output and trade turnover. In this new modernization trend terms like „regionalism” and „neo-regionalism” play an important role. During cold war „regionalism” of SEA countries formed due to their strife to remain neutral. Regionalism of these countries further solidified as a response to creation of various political and economic blocs like European Union. This in turn created a feeling of uniqueness within the countries and sense of belonging in the region [27].

Russian school of thought defines three different approaches to Asian regionalism that emerged in 90s as a result of Asian financial crisis. First sees regionalism as a local financial and economic regional

integration as response to American and ex-colonial European economic domination in the area. Economic dependence of Asian economies on western countries pushed SEA countries to develop a more closely knit local economic are. Second approach is simply independent unification as a result of local nationalism born out of regional uniqueness feel. In a sense, it tries to mimic NAFTA and EEA, because it increases competitiveness on the world market. This idea centers around creation of local alternative to the IMF – Asian Monetary Fund. Currently China has been trying to hijack this idea through creation of AIIB.

Third approach sees regionalism as a logical evolutionary step emerging as a logical response to global power transfer [28]. As a result of the Asian economic crisis prevented ASEAN countries from capitalizing on their economic and developmental lead, but at the same time caused economic equalization in the region bringing them together. The binding force that can actually bring this region into a more unified formation could be closer economic cooperation between Japan and South Korea. A decisive impetus to this idea was given when two countries agreed to expand cooperation in 1999. Although recently China has been trying to capitalize on its dominance in the region to unify these countries under its own flag [29, 30].

Today SEA regionalism faces two problems. First is how to combine personal interest and integrational requirements with undoubtedly essential cooperation with United States. And secondly how to not loose national identity and independence within the confines of this new regional formation. At the end of 20th century an unexpected effect of globalization was the emergence of global regionalization trends. Many countries showed interest in unification into economic blocs, especially in a fractured Asian region. But this process is possible only under strict supervision of local governments aimed at conducting reforms and introducing laws to support creation of local trade unions.

Experts define four possible paths for Asian regionalization. Firstly, it's development and institutionalization of APEC. This depends on the ability of APEC to play the role similar to that of EU. Second possible path of unification is based on already existing regional organizations like ASEAN and ANZ CERTA. But this will be possible if the leaderless ASEAN will actually be able to function as a unified regional economy. Third path is creation of local economic union around specific countries or their unions (like Japan, ROK or PRC). This is the most discussed version of regional unification as it has a lot of vested interest from countries that plan on leading such union. And lastly, fourth method envisions other means of economic unification of the Pacific Rim countries, that wasn't described within previous three methods.

All these paths are representative of Asian nationalism and individualism within SEA countries and their strife to establish local economic enclave. Further growth of Asian region requires further integration of the involved countries. And in today's globalized world it is something that these countries will have to do in order to survive. And so, the dialog on regional integration remains relevant to this day, but yet no definitive model has been decided on.

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