Western Modernity: The Origin, Development and the Limitation

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Abstract: The paper attempts to investigate the historical origin, development and the limitation of the western modernity. It pursues why and how the western modernity was developed from eighteen centuries to twenties centuries. While discussing early chronological, sociological and political developments of the western modernity it requires the separation of the state from the religious autocracy and the establishment of technology based industrial society. The early modernity shaped western countries from traditional society to industrialization made surplus of products that tended them to establish colonialism in Asia, Africa and Latin American countries. However, the changing structural politico-economic system provide classical theories of modernity which installed US hegemony in East Asian and East European countries as colonization was established in non-western countries. On the other hand, the proponent of post-colonial theory of modernity negates the colonial theory as it is being forcibly imposed by the western colonizers upon the non-western people. But all are the theories of the modernity: pro-western, post-colonial, post-modernist and environmental approach are the expressions of their ideological structures but have the limitations within the structure. The article identified all the theories of modernity failed to suggest a realistic solution to the global problems.

Keywords: Modernity, Theories, Western Europe, U.S., Post Modernity, Criticism

1. Introduction

Modernity is a wide-ranging concept which is derived from the normative European philosophy. Probably modernity is one of the most influential concepts in the human history which profoundly influence the human society and state. Broadly, it can be generalized on the basis of human progress that denies all traditional constructions. However, modernity has no distinct definition because of the ideological differences of the humans. We can provide an extend definition which covers all major criteria of modernity.

"Modern is commonly used to indicate a more or less recent phase of time, modern is also one of the most politically charged keywords circulating across languages in modern world. Closely associated since the IC18 with the notions of "progress" and "development" attributed to the west, the attribute "modern" describes a wide range of historical phenomena characterized by continuous growth and change: in particular, science, technology, industry, secular government, bureaucracy, social mobility, city life

and an "experimental" or modernist approach in culture and arts." [1]

Agnes Heller defined modernity in a broad sense. She believes modernity means where everything is open for judgment. According to her, modernity means "everything is open to query and to testing; everything is subject to rational scrutiny and refuted by argument." [2] So, modernity is a great historical project which denotes "reform" or a "revolutionary change" in accordance with that standard.

However, modernity generated new hopes and inspirations against medieval irrational religious autocracy. Emancipation from religious influence meant formation of secular government along with technology based society. They became the core objectives in the early classical modernity theory. The antiquity of the modernity theories was turned into multi-dimensional while the European rulers were devoted to colonizing the non-western countries; the large part of the world, Asia, Africa and Latin America. These areas became westernized in the age of colonialism. In the course of colonialism western modernity became popular in

non-western countries following European superiority. After the Second World War, European superiority and modernity have changed and they were replaced by the US form of modernity through the modernization projects in East Asia, East Europe and in Latin American countries. The emergence of post-modernism in the 1970s and 1980s denies western superiority in making modernity claiming that the scholarship of modernity is for non-western countries. This study tries to identify why and how western modernity was developed and what were the major limitations of the western modernity.

2. Historical Phases of Origin and Development of Modernity

The word modernity came into English from *Late Latin* adjective *modernus* derived from *modo meaning* "just now" In 6th century. [1] For Raymond Williams, till mid19[th] century it was defined as the "contemporary" or "co-contemporary" or "existing in the society". [3] Following the meaning "modern" "modernism" and "modernity" were frequently used tool. By late 17th century, the word entered into an academic debate in French literary circle, raised a question which culture was best, Roman or Greek. In this context the modernist emphasized that "modern" culture was far better than classical Greco-Roman culture. [4] In late 18th century, "modernity" was developed as an affirmative sense after French Revolution (1789) and American War of Independence (1776). [4] Predominantly the West European movements of renaissance (14th-16th centuries), religious reformation (16th-17th centuries), scientific Revolution (16th-17th centuries) and the enlightenment of 18th century implanted some pivotal ideas: Humanism, individualism, reason and rationality, freedom, and secularism challenged medieval European traditional constructions. During that period Catholic Church was the most powerful institution and controlled temporal and spiritual lives of the people. Edward Gibbon defined medieval church-based autocracy as "barbarism and religion" in which rational way of thinking was absolutely absent. [5] The new humanist construction revealed that man could do anything. However, after French Revolution two major changes appeared in the western European politics and economic sectors. Politically, the idea of liberty, equality, democracy, nationalism, flourished speedily in the western societies. Consequently, traditional monarchy system was going to decline and democratic system becoming pretty popular. Economically, it was after Industrial Revolution where modern political components attached with rapid growth of economic development resulted in mass urbanization. The new industrial society's surplus products and extensive demand for raw materials led to colonialism. However, it is a western construction that modernity was globalized by colonialism.

Colonialism is a policy of domination by exploiting economic, political and cultural system of a colonized country. Roughly modern colonialism was incepted in 16th century by western European countries to non-western countries following discoveries of sea routes in southern coast of Africa (1488) and in America (1498). [6] The civilizing mission of 15th to 20th century was legalized by the western European countries: France, Portugal, Holland, Britain and Germany colonized most of the parts of the Africa, Asia, Oceania and America colonized Philippines. [7] Among the colonial powers the Britain had a big number of colonies in the world. Bengal and then India were most fabulous and large colony of British Empire. Following the Act of XXIX 1837, instead of Persian language, the British set up English as the official language of Bengal presidency in 1837. [8] Likewise, the French imposed their language on their colonies. [9] Not only imposing language, the colonial powers daunted local culture and established their modernity by force to the local people. [10]

In 1864, French poet Baudelaire used "modernity" in an advanced socio-cultural context. He wrote, "By modernity I mean the transitory, the fugitive, and the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable." [11] Baudelaire's modernity presented modern cosmopolitan life. [12] However, Modernity is a high level of intellectual movements which dipped in rational way of thinking along with modern technologies. Marshall Berman categorized modernity into three major phases: [13]

Firstly: 15th century to 1789, a period of early modernity where people have little curiousness about modern life.

Secondly: 1789-1900, development of modern life with modern technologies such as steam engine, railroads, industrial zone along with development of mass media.

Thirdly: 20th century is the final phase of modernity where modernization explored in the entire world. He believed during the period "world culture" achieved a great victory in "arts" and "thoughts". [14]

Basically, 20th century modernity was totally different from 18th and 19th centures in terms of institutional changes along with socio-cultural and economic development. During this period western institutions developed on the basis of modernization theory and in mid-20th century it identified retrograde countries to modernize in their formation. [15]

According to the chart the early classical modernity depended on two major characters: emancipation from religion and use of technology that led to industrial society. It is worth noting that for the first time Marx defined modern society from economic perspective. Marx believed that the development of capitalism would make modern society and defined it as the "genuine progress". [16] But he criticized the bourgeois systems in which labors are exploited by the capitalist. According to him said capital was not a personal property but a social power which could not be converted into personal property. [17] In a way, Marxist modernization theory stresses on the formation of communist form of government for eliminating private property, exploitation and social inequality. As a result, a country turns out to be a modern industrialized country. [18]

Table 1. Early modernity in Sociology 18th and 19th century.

Theorists	Traditional Society	Modern Society
Aguste Comte (1798-1857)	Religion based society	Scientific stage in which social problems could be found out by positivist approach.
Karl Marx (1818-1883)	Slave Society	Capitalist society
Herbert Spencer (1820-1903)	Militant type of society	Industrial society which is based on social Darwinism- "survival of the fittest".
Emile Durkheim (1858-1917)	Mechanical solidarity-Highly Religious and solidarity is Based on family network.	Organic solidarity- industrial advanced Society depends on greater division of labor.
Max Weber (1864-1920)	Agrarian society where religion provides strong role	Rationalism based society where Intuitionally practiced rationalism.

3. Modernity in Politics

Modernity in politics can be traced roughly from Machiavellian tradition of state formation. Niccolo` Machiavelli (1469-1527) rejected medieval and influential Aristotelian forms of politics by following realism. In *The Prince* (1532) he openly rejected traditionally practiced knowledge of theology, metaphysics and required practical truth. [19] He emphasized the separation of church from the state. He stated that the Popes and his officials must have to be removed from the office. [20] Basically Machiavelli tried his best to liberate politics from the religion and conventional moral philosophy in making modern state. Machiavellian tradition is defined as the foundation of early modernity in political philosophy. Later more or less all political philosophers were influenced by Machiavelli's secular ideology.

Tomas Hobbes (1588-1679) one of the most influential British political philosopher, underscored the importance of legitimate authoritarian government for establishing peace in the state. In *Leviathan* (1651) he described that life in the primitive society was "solitary, poor, nasty, brutish and short". [21] On the contrary, he advocated for allegiance to an absolute sovereign. Thus society and state would be secured. From an emic perspective his moral political philosophy may look like authoritarian but it was liberal because it claimed allegiance of his subjects.

John Locke (1632-1704) is known as the founder of empiricism and father of liberalism. His theory of limited government system was propounded in *Two Treaties of Government (1689)*. He believed in natural state everyone is independent and equal. Here every person had the natural right to protect his life, health and liberty. So the character of the nature state was "state of perfect freedom". Government had the obligation to protect its subjects' rights because government was established for protecting individual's right, liberty and property. [22] Basically it was a mutual contract that was transformed into "social Contract" between the authority and its subjects. When government breached the contract and invaded into its subjects' rights, the government would be dissolved. [23]

Montesquieu's (1689-1755) idea of "separation of power" was known as distribution of power. His distribution of power theory was against traditional dictatorship in Western Europe. It was characterized as modern form of government. In *The Spirit of Laws (1748),* he recommended that powers of government should be distributed into three branches: legislature, executive and judiciary and each branch should be free to exercise its power. [24] US Supreme Court Justice Anthony Kennedy said, "Separations of Powers was designated to implement a fundamental insight: Concentration of power in the hand of a single branch is a threat to liberty." [25]

Jean Jacque Rousseau (1712-1778) was another political philosopher of enlightenment era. Scholars claimed that prior to French and American Revolutions Rousseau first used the word "Modernist" in an progressive political context that became the source of inspiration for 19th and 20th centuries' participatory democracy in western Europe. [26] He coined the word modernity that flourished in the entire world. In *The Social Contract* (1762) he deliberated, "Man is born free; and everywhere he is in chains. He who believes himself the master of others does not escape being more a slave than they." [27] He affirmed that rejecting one's freedom is rejecting ones dignity, humanity and duties. [28] His scholarly writings were the sources of liberty, communitarian ideas and participatory democracy. [29] Later, his philosophy made a cavernous influence on Immanuel Kant (1724-1804) and Edmond Burke's (1719-1797) moral and political philosophy. G. W. F. Hegel's (1770-1831) *The Phenomenology of Spirit (1807)* also referred to Rousseau's views in discussing critical dialectical view. [30] However, classical political modernity stood for liberalism, democracy, individual rights, and nationalism. These are the real pillars on which to establish modern state.

4. Modernization Theories

In general modernization is a process of transformation from traditional societies to modern society. It has several perspectives: socio-economic and political. Chinese scholar Chuanqi He divides modernization theories into three phases: [31]:

1. Classical Modernization (1950s-1960s).
2. Post Modernization (1970-1980s).
3. New Modernization (1980s-1990s).

The classical modernization theories in politics came from mostly American political scientists in 1950s and 1960s. Those theories are *The Political System* (Easton 1953), *The Politics of Developing Areas* (Almond, Coleman 1960), *Political Modernization in Japan and Turkey* (War, Rustow 1964), *The Politics of Modernization* (Apter 1965), *Social Origins of Democracy and Dictatorship* (More 1966), and

Political Order in Changing Society (Huntington 1968). [33] The theories were devoted to modern political structures in the government including effective democracy, bureaucratic system, rule of law, political participation and institutionalization. In the cultural sector it called for rationality, secularism and mass media. [33] Classical modernization paved a way for the modernization of East Asia, East Europe and Latin America but it was criticized extensively for the dependency theory and world system theory. [34] It is claimed that the developed countries of Western Europe and North America provided several modernity recipes to modernize former colonies and non-industrial countries of East Asia and Latin America. The developed countries connected the periphery and poor periphery countries in terms of investment, technology, expert and they try to integrate them to world market. But the peripheral and poor peripheral countries cannot compete with them in the world market for lack of capital, technology, expert, skilled bureaucratic system and overall institutional development. On the other hand, the wealthy classes of core countries try to exist world system. As a result, rich countries become richer and poor countries poorer. Marxist scholars defined dependency system as the continuation of colonialism currently known as neo-colonialism. [35] H. F. Cardoso first introduced "neo-dependency" term by which he explained US economic and political dominations in Latin America. [35] So dependency system is not related to dominate economic sector only but also it dominates political, social and cultural patterns of the underdeveloped and developing countries.

5. Post Modernization (1970-1980s)

Second wave of modernization or post modernization theory appeared in the 1970s and 1980s. Post modernization theories emerged out of the limitations of the classical modernization theories, which provided for further development of highly industrialized countries. Ronlad Inglehart, one of the foremost postmodern theorists of our time, classified post modernization theories into three schools: [36]

1. Rejection of the westernization.
2. Revalorization tradition.
3. New values and life styles.

In the three broad schools post-modernists profoundly criticizes classical modernity theories. First school rejected Western instrumental rationality, authority, technology and science. [37] The western imperialism was one of the major components of the western modernization but it has been bitterly criticized by the post-modernist. They define colonialism as the "Brutality" in the human history that was imposed by the western countries upon non-western countries. [38] However, colonial aspect of modernism is broad issue that demands more clarification. Lyotard and Derrida belonging to post-modernist scholars compared western imperialism with bloody imperialism in which colonial powers became rich by exploiting the colonies.

[39] Once India was a largest colony of the Great Britain. The Indians still carry the colonial scar. Depesh Chakraborty, one of the foremost post-colonial Indian scholars of our time writes "colonialism stopped us from being fully modern." [40] post-modernist theorists claimed that western modernity was profit oriented modernity where there was no humanity and rationality. On the contrary, post-modernist scholars bestowed modernity credit to non-western countries.

Revalorizationtradition school demands positive value in a selective way. [41] Finally, new values and life styles promote pluralistic agenda as Inglehart demarcates, "Post modernism is the rise of new values and life styles, with greater tolerance for ethnic, cultural, and sexual diversity and individual choice concerning the kind of life one wants to lead." [42] Moreover, it is a human self-reliance and multiplicity against modern centrality. However, Chuanqi He argues that postmodernist modernization theory is not a complete theory, it is an amalgamation of post-modernist thoughts. [43] On the other hand, it is an ambiguous concept in which post-modernists do not provide any crystal-clear knowledge of economy along with the changes in the future. [44]
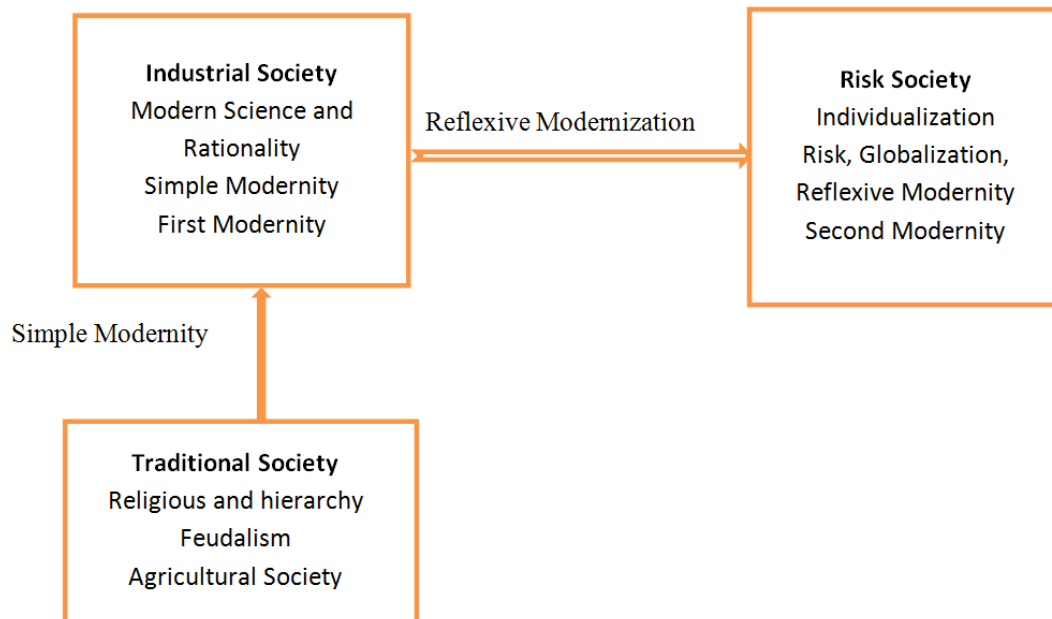
6. New Modernization (1980s-1990s)

New modernization research chiefly included ecological modernization, reflexive modernization and multiple modernities. [45] These theories emphasized the social impact of natural sciences. [45] In the early 1980s a group of German scholars developed ecological modernization theory. Spaagaren and Mol defined "ecological modernization as the possibility to overcome the environmental crisis without leaving the path of modernization." [46] The theory criticized structural political economy that had ignored "environmental innovation" in the last two decades. [47] It demands structural changes in the institutions therefore socio-ecological and economic developments would be possible. [48] The major limitation of the theory is that in real life it is not possible to implement.

Reflexive modernization is related with ecological modernization in terms of technological and economic precondition. The founding father of the theory German scholar Ulrich Beck revealed the theory in his book *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1992). He provided two major theories: risk society and reflexive modernization. [49] According to Beck, reflexive modernity is "the new stage, in which the new stage progress can turn into self-destruction, in which one kind of modernization undercuts and changed another, is what I call the stage of reflexive modernization." [50] However, it denotes the twofold eccentrics of the technology: social progress and its negative effects. [51] Beck said reflexive modernity claims we are not in post modernity but in "more modernity" because reflexive modernity is a core principle of modernity that we are facing in the society. [52]

7. Self-Destructive Process of Reflexive Modernization [53]

Another pivotal modernity in the third wave of new modernization research is multiple modernities research. The theory argues against the thesis of Fukuyama's "end of history" and Huntington's "clash of civilizations" and recognizes that modernity is not unique. [54] It is a "story of continual constitution and reconstitution of multiplicity of cultural programs and cultural pattern of modernity." [55] According to Shamuel Noah Eisenstadt, modernity cannot be confined into a single society or state. It is a cultural process. It can be developed in sundry nation states, ethnic groups and in cultural groups in the entire world. The core center of the "multiple modernities" is westernization and modernity are not similar and western form of modernity is not the only authentic modernity in the world. [55] Moreover, the theory denies classical European superiority of modernity construction. The theory is also criticized by the scholars. The major critique of the multiple modernities is that it is so difficult to identify which one is homogeneous or heterogeneous. [56]

Figure 1. *Process of Reflexive Modernization.*

8. Conclusion

Modernity as an idea derived from normative European philosophy. Initially modernity was meant by the emancipation of mental faculty of European people from the all-pervading influence of Roman Catholicism. However, subsequently, because of the influence of Enlightenment, Industrial Revolution, and French Revolution, the concept underwent a significant change, connecting it with social, economic and cultural lives of the people. Again, following the colonization policy of Western Europe, a new dimension was added to the concept. Then modernity became synonymous with westernization of the colonized countries by the western powers. It was through colonialism that western modernity spread all over the world. A number theories on modernity emerged primarily to criticize and counter-criticize the social, political and economic structures of Western Europe. The focus of all these theories of modernity, from classical to multiple theories, was on western civilization, its merits or deficiencies. But these theories failed to suggest a realistic solution to the global problem.

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