

THE ROLE AND PLACE OF THE CONFUCIAN CONCEPT OF “XIAOKANG” IN CHINA'S CONTEMPORARY DEVELOPMENT



<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.7335664>

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***Annotation.** The PRC's modern conception of governance draws on the ideals of ancient Chinese thinkers, but it is Confucianist thought that the party's leaders have most recourse to. Perhaps this appeal to the past has united the nation and resolved the contradictions accumulated during the PRC's years of growth. “Xiaokang” is an important concept in the socio-political aspect of Confucian teaching. The current ideology takes the position that the “xiaokang” is primarily a definite programme to improve the welfare of society, a political tool, but the concept itself implies quite a large number of interpretations and may have different meanings. The meaning of the “xiaokang” has been adjusted to external circumstances and has been defined more than once. The original utopian formulation has materialised over the years and has finally risen to become an important part of the PRC's modernisation paradigm. The purpose of this article is to try to identify its role in the socio-political development of China at the present stage through the evolution of the concept of “xiaokang”.*

***Key words:** tradition, Confucianism, Xiaokang society, CCP, modernisation, China, development, goal.*

РОЛЬ И МЕСТО КОНФУЦИАНСКОГО КОНЦЕПТА «СЯОКАН» В СОВРЕМЕННОМ РАЗВИТИИ КИТАЯ

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***Аннотация.** В современной концепции управления КНР используются идеалы древнекитайских мыслителей, но больше всего руководители партии прибегают к конфуцианской мысли. Возможно, это обращение к прошлому позволило сплотить нацию и разрешит противоречия, накопленные за годы роста КНР. “Сяокан” — важное понятие социально-политического аспекта конфуцианского учения. Нынешняя идеология придерживается той позиции, что “сяокан” — это, прежде всего, определённая программа по улучшению благосостояния общества, политический инструмент, однако само понятие подразумевает достаточно большое количество трактовок и может иметь различное смысловое наполнение. Значение “сяокан” корректировалось в зависимости от внешних обстоятельств и определялось уже не один раз. Изначальная утопическая формулировка с годами обрела материальное воплощение и наконец, поднялась до уровня важной составной части парадигмы модернизации КНР. Цель статьи заключается в попытке через эволюцию понятия “сяокан” выявить ее роль в социально-политическом развитии Китая на современном этапе.*

***Ключевые слова:** традиция, конфуцианство, общество сяокан, КПК, модернизация, Китай, развитие, цель.*

As a philosophy of ethics and politics, Confucianism is complex. Founded by Confucius (551–479 B.C.), the doctrine promotes unity in the family, society, and state. Chinese defines the term "state" (国家 guojia) using the root "family" (家 jia). Over the course of history, Chinese emperors have been guided by the idea of unifying the state and the people. Chinese modernization policy is also based on this idea.

The primary axis around which China's contemporary model of social and state organization is constructed has always been the socio-political principles of Confucianism. Confucianism serves as both the foundation of Chinese culture and the country's political compass. At the moment, China is not emulating Western concepts to modernize society. Based on a unique understanding of Confucian traditions, it is traveling its own route.

Confucianism has a direct impact on Chinese statehood, which currently has its own development principles. The ideas of “xiaokang” (moderate prosperous) and “datong”(great unity) are found in the well-known Confucian text “Liji”(Book of Rituals). The creation of strategic plans for the political, economic, and cultural modernization of Chinese society is based on these ideas. Forming a “xiaokang” society, which should eventually lead to the implementation of the ideal of a “datong” society, is the most crucial objective of contemporary Chinese state policy for the period up until the middle of the twenty-first century [Hu J., 2007].

It is generally accepted that “Xiaokang” and “Datong” are the two ideal models of society conceived by Confucius. “Datong” society is the advanced stage of the Confucian ideal society, the ideal realm of human society, and “Xiaokang” society is the initial stage of the ideal society. Without a doubt, Confucius placed a high value on “Datong” when he developed his social ideal. He admired the spirit of “Datong”, but at the same time Confucius also valued “Xiaokang”. Because of the extreme realism of his ideas, Confucius believed that “Great unity”, although beautiful, but it is already in the past, that is, “the Great Way was hidden”. As a realistic goal, people should therefore strive for a society of “moderate prosperity”. “Xiaokang” was essentially Confucius' vision of a way to transform the chaos of the Spring and Autumn period. He wanted to establish a normal social order in accordance with the rituals, so that society could live in peace and happiness.

Confucianism has a more direct practical relationship with China's historic economic and social traditions than do other philosophical schools. Since it is firmly rooted in the patriarchal kinship system and not just pure idealism and metaphysical imagination, it can maintain the weight of reality and the legitimacy of tradition in a society where small-scale family farming serves as the economic backbone. Confucius' idea of a “xiaokang” society was thus acceptable to both feudal rulers and ordinary people living in extreme poverty.

The enrichment and development of the connotation “xiaokang” is a long process that has lasted for many centuries. Initially, Confucius' concept of “moderate prosperity” was only a general framework and prototype. The concept of a “xiaokang” society was continuously expanded upon, developed, and improved upon by later Confucianists during the lengthy feudal civilization. Among them, Menzi made an important contribution to refining the connotation of a “xiaokang” society. In comparison to Confucius, he developed a more “benevolent” and “regal” society.

Menzi's description of “xiaokang” society, especially his description of small peasant farming and social life, enriched and refined the connotation of an “moderate prosperous” society, giving the concept of “xiaokang” a more economic connotation in addition to relative social stability, becoming a life free from poverty and, although not rich, relatively well-off and able to live in peace [Lisevich I., 2007: 112].

In the modern era, Kang Youwei significantly transformed and played with the Confucian ideal of “xiaokang” society to reform the ancient system in order to carry out the reform and modernization of the country. He was a thinker who pondered the relationship between the

Confucian social ideal and the model of modern society. He interpreted the development of society in terms of “Three eras”: the era of chaos, the era of becoming equilibrium and the era of great unity. “Xiaokang” and “Datong” are identified by Kang Youwei as the second and third periods, respectively named eras. Kang Youwei used bourgeois ideas to develop his view of social development, thus transforming the ancient idea of “xiaokang” society. He compares “Datong” society to socialism (communism), where everyone is equal and coexists soul to soul, and compares “Xiaokang” to capitalism with its richness of material existence [Men Y., 2022:299]. But whether it was the ancient Confucian idea of the “xiaokang society” or the new project of the “xiaokang society” developed by modern reformers, they were all nothing more than fantasies the Chinese people could only dream of.

During the New China period, the revival of the concept of “xiaokang” is associated with the name of the great reformer Deng Xiaoping. After the Third Plenary Session of the 11th Party Central Committee (1978), Deng Xiaoping proposed the idea of the “xiaokang society” as a means of defining China's modernisation process. It was based on objective and realistic national conditions, inherited the heritage of traditional thought, reflected historical experience and lessons learned, looked at the global trend of modernization and development, and combined the dream of national rebirth with the aspiration of people to exist and be happy. Summing up all his reflections on the future development of China, Deng Xiaoping declared that China will build a society based on the Confucian principle of “xiaokang”.

Deng Xiaoping's introduction of the new concept of “moderately prosperous society” was a flexible and creative use of the heritage of traditional Chinese thought and culture, which enabled the Chinese Communist Party to put forward a new concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics. Deng Xiaoping established Xiaokang society as the new goal of China's modern development at the end of the century and gave it a Marxist scientific connotation. He developed a series of basic principles and policies to build socialism with Chinese characteristics around this goal, forming a relatively systematic idea of moderately prosperous society.

After entering a moderately prosperous society, people's living standards will continue to rise on the basis of subsistence and gradually become affluent. Deng Xiaoping directly used the terms “poverty” (贫困 pinkun), “warm and full” (温饱 wenbao), “well-off” (小康) and “affluent” (富裕 fuyu) to mark and measure the various stages of the China's modernisation process. This shows that he considered the entire modernisation process in terms of the improvement of people's living standards. He described the living standard of the people when they first entered a “xiaokang society” as “not poor, not rich, but relatively well-off” and “not rich, but better off” [Deng X., 1994: 164].

The concept of “xiaokang” was introduced as a new orientation of China's modernisation goal towards the end of the 20th century, so the concept itself was closely related to such concepts as “four modernisations” and “Chinese-style modernization”. Stressing the need to achieve “four modernizations” (agriculture, industry, defense, and science and technology) in the context of comprehensive upgrading and in the context of the overall political situation, Deng Xiaoping also repeatedly detailed this development goal in a way that was more in line with Chinese reality, elaborating the concept of future development of Chinese society. If the “Four Modernisations” were a plan for China's modernisation, the “Chinese-style modernization” was a choice of path and guiding principles for the implementation of this grandiose plan. All these three concepts were the general guiding principles of socialist modernisation of China.

As a new concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the notion of “xiaokang society” put forward by Deng Xiaoping has the dual meaning of prosperous life and well-off society, and is inherently prescriptive in both respects. As a well-off life, it is a relatively prosperous state of life between subsistence and affluence enjoyed by the masses in China, and as a well-off society, it is a

stage of social development in socialist modernisation in China, a late stage of development in the primary stage of socialism in China, from achieving the second strategic goal in late 2000 to the main implementation of modernisation. In the history of socialism with Chinese specifics, it can be said that the concept of “xiaokang” has become the mainstay of the idea of creating a “rich socialism” – the main goal of socialist modernization in the country.

After Deng Xiaoping identified “xiaokang” as an important stage in the development of Chinese-style modernization, “xiaokang society” was included in the agenda of high-level meetings of the Central Committee of the Communist Party. In September 1982, at the 12th Party Congress, the concept of “xiaokang society” was used for the first time and was recognized as an important indicator of economic and social development of the country. In 1987, at the 13th Party Congress, the “three-step” development strategy was adopted as an official concept. Based on this strategy, in the first step, it was necessary to double the GDP compared to 1980 and solve the problem of providing the population with food and clothing; in the second step, set for the end of the 20th century, to double the GDP and bring people's lives to the level of “xiaokang”, i.e. moderately prosperous; In the third step, set for the middle of the XXI century, the country should be fully modernized, China's GDP per capita should reach the level of moderately developed countries, and its citizens should live in luxury [Deng X., 1994: 247-248]. As we can see, the “Xiaokang Society” is defined in this strategy as the goal of the second step of development. Thus, the concept of “xiaokang” has fully entered the political discourse of China as an indicator of socio-economic development [Assyl M, Dauyen D., 2021:116].

China has pursued the dream of “Xiaokang” and for 40 years has tried to develop the country's economy dynamically, which has brought many achievements to Chinese society. The Chinese Communist Party has eliminated absolute poverty in the country and is now meeting the basic needs of the people. It has moved from achieving moderate prosperity to building a society of moderate prosperity in all respects and has completed this process within the stated time frame with great achievements. In 2019, China's share in the world economy was 16%. The country's total GDP has surpassed 100 trillion yuan (further narrowing the gap between China and the US, which has the world's highest GDP); and even as China's total population has increased from 1.36 billion in 2012 to 1.41 billion in 2020, average GDP per capita has exceeded the historic level of 70,000 yuan [Lu, D., 2020].

The traditional values of Confucianism are harmoniously combined with the principles of socialism to form its concept, taking into account the Chinese specificity. China's social and cultural values inspired by Confucianism became the positive factors to the modernization in China in the late 20th century. Deng Xiaoping's theory of the “xiaokang” society has gained historical and practical significance for China's development and the experience of Party rule. The most important role of the “xiaokang” concept in China's socio-economic development is that it is the main source of people's confidence in a better life. The creation of the “xiaokang society” was a motivational slogan that called on the masses of the people to work hard together for the development of the country. As a result of the reforms, it will be easier for the people to accept and implement the social system that they are trying to create. Realizing this in a difficult period for the people, Deng Xiaoping was able to take the concept of “xiaokang” from the source of national philosophy, fill it with modern meaning and turn it into a powerful ideological weapon for Social Development.

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