
2a. Reflecting on Our Goal at the Age of Development

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On April 21, 2001, Zhang Jun and fourteen others in his gang were sentenced to death. From June 1991 to September 2000, operating mainly in the big areas of western and mid-southern China's Chongqing and Hunan provinces, he and his gangsters, in a series of actions, killed 28, seriously wounded 20, and robbed an amount of more than five million RMB worth of cash and other valuables. Through the years they robbed self-run tobacco shops, jewelry sections of shopping centers, and cash cars of banks. The people they killed included peasants, self-employed restaurant owners, taxi drivers, bank clerks, and police officers. The list of offended in the legal document runs five pages long.

On September 11, 2001, Mohamed Atta, a 33-year-old Egyptian man who is believed to have hijacked American Airline Flight 11, crashed the north tower of the World Trade Center with the plane he was controlling¹. The direct result of his and other related attacks on America was about 4,000 deaths in New York alone.

We live in an age of development, of growing human capacity, of realizing once unthinkable dreams. New goals are being set, and reached. Yet, why are we still living in a world full of violence and terror? With pain, one wonders. In this short essay, I try to explain why modernization and socioeconomic changes may produce socially alienated groups and individuals. It is our ideal that socioeconomic development will generate material wealth, expand literacy, improve cultural diversity, and make more choices accessible to individuals. In a word, socioeconomic development will drive a society to move from traditional to modern. In a modernized society, people will enjoy a lifestyle of much higher quality than in the old times. Nonetheless, modernization is a complex process. It is always accompanied by social dislocations, destruction of the older social orders, and displacement of many social groups. During the British industrialization, the increase of national wealth was overshadowed by the extraordinary scale of human sufferings. Today, as modernization is hitting full speed in China and many other developing countries, it is critical that we keep this in mind.

This essay reviews the political science literature on the repercussive effect of modernization. Through this, I hope to outline the possible pitfalls a society may encounter in the process of modernization. On the other hand, I will also review literature that points to a much brighter picture of the world achieved through modernization, a world of harmony, tolerance, and openness. At the last part I contend the importance of striving for a social goal that can lead us closer to the brighter one of the two pictures of socioeconomic development and modernization.

¹ See "*Nowhere Man*" by Fouad Ajami, published in New York Times, October 7, 2001.

The Root of Resentment: Disparities, Frustration, and Alienation

The very fact that our society is producing terror and violence simply tells us that we are far away from the harmony of humanity. What is featured in today's world is a wide range of disparities: economic, social, and political. Economically, it is a time when some people are able to pay to ride a space shuttle, while millions of others are suffering from lack of substance in living. Socially, it is a time when some people are tracing the latest fashions of Hollywood and Paris, while others are panicking as modernization is taking away their accustomed way of life. Politically, it is a time when some people can affect other people's lives easily without justice; some others are reduced to powerlessness by their low status in human society.

Alienation in a Modernizing Society: The Case of Zhang Jun

Take the case of Zhang Jun for example. Born into a poor family in rural China with seven children, he never had enough food as he grew up. Lacking the money to get medical treatment, his mother died of cancer when he was twelve. All through the years his father suffered from TB, also lacking money for medical treatment. When he saw that other people, especially people in the cities, were living a better life, he wanted to get rich. But as he saw the world was not supporting him to realize his aspiration, he was frustrated. Worse still, when he was seventeen, he was involved in a petty group fight with several jobless young people. Caught by the police, he was sentenced to three years in a labor camp. This caused his distrust of society. He believed things were set up against him as a poor rural young boy. He became resentful. Extreme actions became his choice.

It is true in a sense that Zhang Jun's crime is caused by a society that is modernizing rapidly. This society has promises for everyone that he or she will get a better life in due course. The society fails Zhang Jun. He is marginalized in this society while many others who take the ride of development are getting materially fulfilled.

But there are more Zhang Juns being produced just as I write. In places such as China, where fast economic growth is increasing the gap between the haves and the have-nots, social inequity abounds. Inequity between people's access to material and social goods, if it remains long, will generate a sense of social injustice. The disadvantaged, realizing that they are not able to gain the goods other people are enjoying, may choose to turn to hatred and revenge. If there is no social mechanism through which the losers are compensated, violent rebellions may be the outcome.

Alienation in a Modernizing World: The Case of Atta

While Zhang Jun's story is telling about how destructive the social disparity *within* a society can be, such issues are not confined inside a single country. Internationally, cross-country disparities, frustration, and alienation are also destabilizing the world. Terrorism is a good illustration. The unbalanced development between the West and the

rest of the world has reached a point where the disparities between nations are generating perceived or real hegemony and global injustice. As a result, some groups in the disadvantaged camp have chosen to seek revenge.

Take Atta as an example. Born into a well-off middle class family in Cairo, Egypt, he grew up in a society where national heritage and great traditions are cherished. The coming of the West, however, threw him and his nation into disarray. Their way of life, which was kept intact for a long period of time, is facing aggressive challenges from the West. Not only this. The challenges are in every aspect: economic, technological, political, and cultural. In sum, there are great dislocations his society has to face. The process of adapting to a modern and modernizing world is painful.

Not many are successful in this process. In fact, for many middle class youth in Islamic countries, including Atta, this process is even more painful. Unlike the economically insecure, who struggle for mere survival, these middle class youth are able to examine the relevance between the social changes and the pressure they bear. Most of the pressure is, as they see it, from the West. While the old ways may be losing their appeals, they cannot find a new place they truly belong. Lacking a sense of certainty, of eventual destiny, they become “nowhere men”. Believing that the culturally aggressive and technologically overwhelming West is the cause of all the miseries of their civilization, they naturally direct their resentfulness toward it. Modernization has produced alienation in many places, not just in the Islamic world.

To sum up, today the world is haunted by uneven development. And this is true at the individual level, the group level, and the nation-state level. Up until now our goal of development has led to a divided world.

Development and Modernization: Two Pictures and Two Worlds

There are two books that were published thirty years apart from each other. Put together, they cannot serve a better purpose than to enlighten us on how much promise and, simultaneously, disappointment development and modernization carry for human society.

Inglehart: A World of Affluence, Trust, Tolerance, and Harmony

In the book *Modernization and Postmodernization* by Professor Ronald Inglehart (1997) of University of Michigan, what we see is a wonderful picture of the world. As economic growth brings material security to the society, people’s life and minds change dramatically. Through more than 30 years’ tracking and research, it is found that when material security is guaranteed, people move from a materialist value orientation to a postmaterialist value orientation. In general, people with a *postmaterialist* value orientation, compared to those with a *materialist* orientation, are more trusting, more open-minded, more tolerant to different groups (such as homosexual and minorities), more environmentalist, more pacifist, more willing to communicate, to comprise, and to negotiate if conflicts emerge, and less likely to adopt extremist and revolutionary ideologies.

These two sets of value orientation, materialist and postmaterialist, are clearly separated in their orientations to politics, economy, sexual/family norms, and socio cultural elements. Some of these differences are shown in the following table².

<i>Materialist/Traditional</i>	<i>Postmaterialist/Modern & Postmodern</i>
Lack of material security Survival is not secure	Material security achieved Survival is secure
<u>Political orientation</u>	
Need for strong leaders Emphasis on order	De-emphasis on political authority Self-expression, participation more important than order
Xenophobia/fundamentalism	Exotic/new are stimulating
<u>Economic orientation</u>	
Priority of economic growth Achievement motivation	Quality of life has top priority Subjective well-being
<u>Sexual/Family Norms</u>	
Maximize reproduction—but only in two-parent heterosexual family	Individual sexual gratification Individual self-expression Single-parent family all right
<u>Social/cultural orientation</u>	
Little concern of environment Homosexual, prostitution, pre-marriage sex not accepted Male-centered order	Environmentalist More open to different life styles and value systems Equal women's rights important

One can imagine that if more people in the world adopt a postmaterialist value orientation, then the world will be a place with much less violence and terror. People from different social groups and nationalities will be more willing to communicate with each other, understand and tolerate each other's interests and beliefs, even if they are very different. In general, a modernized, affluent society is featured by moderate political orientation, high level of interpersonal trust, and high tolerance between different groups. Such societies are more harmonious, more humane, and have low occurrences of violence. This is the call of modernity and civility. How can one not dream of a world like this?

Huntington: A World of Dislocation, Frustration, Alienation, and Violence

Another political scientist, however, presents a fundamentally more pessimistic picture of the world concerning the social outcomes of development. Samuel Huntington of Harvard University published *Political Order in Changing Societies* in 1968. In this still

² This table is largely adapted from Table 1.1 (p. 43) and other parts of Ronald Inglehart, *Modernization and Postmodernization*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. 1997.

most widely read political science book, he also argues that economic growth and modernization will bring changes to people's lives. But, these changes are not as plausible as those presented by Inglehart. Inglehart's thesis may be found more convincing in advanced industrial countries such as Europe and the US, as well as other countries where modernization is about to be achieved, such as the newly industrialized countries in East Asia. Huntington, on the other hand, gives more concern to the impact of economic growth on developing countries such as China, India, Middle East, and many Latin American countries that are still striving to modernize:

Rapid economic growth, it has been said:

- Disrupts traditional social groupings (family, class, caste), and thus increases “the number of individuals who are déclassé ... and who are thus in circumstances conducive to revolutionary protest;”
- Increases geographical mobility, which again undermines social ties, and in particular, encourages rapid migration from rural areas to cities, which produces alienation and political extremism;
- Increases the number of people whose standard of living is falling, and thus may widen the gap between rich and poor;
- Increases the incomes of some people absolutely but not relatively and hence increase their dissatisfaction with the existing order;
- Increases literacy, education, and exposure to mass media, which increase aspirations beyond levels where they can be satisfied;
- Aggravates regional and ethnic conflicts over the distribution of investment and consumption;
- Increases capacities for group organization and consequently the strength of group demands on government, which the government is unable to satisfy.³

In general, here one sees in development a whole series of destabilizing factors that may cause social disruptions and repercussions. The older social order is knocked down into parts, while a new order is far from being formed. Large-scale social regrouping and social mobility are the key features.

Huntington's thesis explains quite convincingly the social dislocations and instabilities in the third-world countries, such as the case of Zhang Jun. His thesis is also relevant to our discussion of international terrorism, as terrorists find it very easy to recruit members from unstable societies where modernization has produced a whole range of individuals alienated from the previously integrated and secure society. As the joke goes—not with a hint of bitter truth—the real and good way to prevent terrorism is to make the terrorists' countries of origin wealthier, because, at this time, joining the terrorists may be the only way a person can make a living there. Earnings issue aside, it may be the only way a person can get a sense of mission, of the meaning of life.

³ Adopted from Samuel Huntington, *Political Order in Changing Societies*. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. 1968. Pages 49-50.

Social Cohesion and Global Justice: Our Goal at the Age of Uneven Development

By now, mass media is filled with images of human sufferings resulting from social dislocations. At this time of large-scale social transformation, many social groups are left out. Immigrant workers, layoffs from State Owned Enterprises, rural children deprived of schooling opportunities, bar girls making a living by prostitution—the list goes on. These are the people that are not able to share the affluence and benefits of socioeconomic developments. Worse still, many of them are reduced to miserable conditions.

Fortunately, more and more people have realized that social justice and social cohesion should be included with the most important goals of our development policymaking. In China today, despite the fact that everyone is struggling for themselves, there are a large number of people who are willing to help, and may in fact be able to offer help. Life is hard. But people realize that there are those who are needier than us. Nonetheless, in a country such as China that is currently obsessed with high economic growth rate, it is difficult for policy makers to pay attention to social goals other than economically measurable ones. Pursuing social goals very often contradicts government officials' mandates, which they receive from upper-level government agents.

I have tried to lay out the inherent dilemma of economic development, social modernization, and social alienation. The goal of this essay has been to scrutinize the social processes that produce the alienation, and present a picture of a modernized world that should be our goal of development. In conclusion, social justice and cohesion should be assertively articulated and assiduously pursued in this age of uneven development. This is the only way we can make the world a better place for everybody, not just for a few. This is the only way we can make the world a more harmonious place, free from hatred, revenge, and wars. And this is the job of every one of us, the citizens of the global community in the 21st century.

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