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(review): **J. Golinowski**

***In the Sphere of Political Modernization:
Progress or Regression?***

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Progress has always been a fundamental aspect of human existence, acting both as an aspiration and a source of fear. We pursue change with the belief that it will enhance our quality of life, resolve current challenges, and unlock new opportunities. Technological innovations, scientific progress, and social transformations are often viewed as pathways to a better future. Yet, this drive for change is often accompanied by apprehension – fear of losing stability, disrupting established orders, and the need to adjust to unfamiliar realities. It is therefore no surprise that many scholarly works focus on the processes of modernization, which are inherently linked to the broader pursuit of progress. A deeper examination of these phenomena is crucial for deliberately shaping the future.

Modernization is a term frequently used in everyday language, typically in reference to specific areas of human activity such as modern technologies or, more broadly, to improvements in the functioning of a system. It is often employed as a synonym for development, implying progress and the enhancement of living conditions. In political science, however, the term is more nuanced and challenging to define precisely – it most commonly refers to the process of state modernization and the development of social life, encompassing structural,

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institutional, and cultural changes (Przeworski & Limongi, 1997). In an era of rapid technological advancement, the importance of analyzing political modernization is growing. However, it is increasingly necessary to expand these analyses to include new research areas that account for the impact of technological innovations on social structures, political processes, and the functioning of states.

A notable example of this comprehensive research approach is the recently published monograph *W kręgu modernizacji politycznej. Postęp czy regres? (In the sphere of political modernization: progress or regression?)*, which offers a thorough analysis of the modernization processes that shape contemporary social, economic, and cultural structures. The author, Janusz Golinowski, underscores the complexity of these processes, examining them over a wide historical span and integrating modernization theory. He explores both historical and current examples from various regions around the world, with a particular focus on the roles of the state, the market, and technology. Notably, Golinowski also addresses the challenges and controversies tied to modernization, including rising social inequalities and resistance to change (Golinowski, 2023).

The publication is structured into five chapters that systematically lead the reader through key topics related to political modernization, offering a cohesive analysis within both socio-economic and political frameworks. Notably, the book's structure integrates both the theoretical underpinnings of these processes and their practical implications, enabling the reader to progressively enhance their understanding while equipping them with specific analytical tools. This results in a comprehensive exploration of political modernization, enriched by empirical examples.

The opening of the monograph focuses on the analysis of various aspects and drivers of modernization. The author explores how historical, cultural, economic, and political contexts influence the pathways of modernization, considering both global and local development dynamics. J. Golinowski emphasizes that modernization is not a uniform process and may take different forms in various regions of the world, depending on specific circumstances. He also draws attention to the interplay between traditional structures and modernity, examining how societies adapt to the challenges and opportunities presented by the dynamics of the contemporary world. This section places particular emphasis on the role of institutions, technology, and social and cultural capital in shaping the course of change.

A notable strength of the first chapter is its numerous references to social constructivism. The author highlights the instrumental nature of knowledge, which has been harnessed in the competition for influence and power. He does not shy away from critiquing new technologies, which continuously amplify the hegemony of select entities over users without addressing their underlying problems. Moreover, this influence is silent – less visible, yet no less dangerous. According to the researcher's reflections, dispersed network cultures do not promote social emancipation; rather, they alienate individuals, reducing them to mere “productive factors” driving economic growth (Golinowski, 2023), thus objectifying them. The primary resource, in this context, has become information, which is continuously subjected to processes of diffusion and absorption.

The text draws clear inspiration from the strong program in the sociology of knowledge, which posits that all accepted assumptions, theories, and facts are inherently linked to human activity – driven by manipulation and efforts to gain control – and thus are used instrumentally to serve the interests of specific social groups (Barnes & Bloor, 1993). As a result, knowledge is always subject to being questioned and redefined. However, the author's following statement seems to depart from this view: “If we accept that the boundaries of the market are blurred and cannot be objectively defined, it allows us to understand that economics is not a science like physics or chemistry, but a political practice” (Golinowski, p. 77). This principle, it seems, could also be applied to the natural sciences, which, contrary to popular belief, are far from objective and subject to change. From the perspective of the Edinburgh School, physics and chemistry are not fundamentally different from economics in this respect – all are forms of social practice.

The chapter *Between mythos and logos in modernization processes* delves into the dualism inherent in implementing systemic changes. The author explores how myths, traditions, and irrational beliefs (mythos) coexist and interact with the rational, scientific, and technocratic elements of modernization (logos). This juxtaposition reveals that, despite technological and scientific advancements, societies remain deeply anchored in their cultural and historical narratives, which shape their attitudes toward change and innovation. In other words, societal visions of progress have practical significance as they influence how people think, form intentions, and act. The adoption of certain illusions and interpretations of reality helps to ease tensions that arise from adapting systems to shifting conditions. The analysis highlights how these two dimensions – irrational and rational – interact, along with the challenges and opportunities they create for

contemporary modernization processes. Grasping this dichotomy is essential for a more nuanced understanding of social transformation dynamics and for effectively managing change.

J. Golinowski argues that neoliberalism is the dominant ideology driving contemporary social and economic transformations, promoting individualism and social atomization. He describes it as a utopia, highlighting its unrealistic assumptions about free markets and the minimal role of the state. In this framework, individuals are reduced to mere resources, while social solidarity steadily diminishes in importance. The spread of this liberal vision has profound consequences for the global order, including the dominance of global capital, structural asymmetries and inequalities, technological hegemony, and economic instability. Thus, it can be said that neoliberalism has not only failed to address humanity's most pressing issues but has, in fact, significantly exacerbated them.

The author addresses the concept of mobile capital, referring to the capacity of resources to swiftly move across the globe, a result of financial market deregulation and technological advancements. While this drives economic globalization, it simultaneously undermines the social policies of individual nations. In the context of global competition and the dominance of neoliberal logic, support for the marginalized is gradually eroded, further exacerbating social inequalities. Mobile capital fosters flexibility and competitiveness, but at the cost of security, destabilizing traditional economic and social structures. Moreover, the cross-border flow of capital often imposes policies aligned with the interests of global financial actors, which may clash with the needs of local communities.

It is important to note that these processes offer not only risks but also opportunities, a point emphasized in the reviewed monograph. However, the author's critical stance on neoliberalism is clear, particularly in his focus on the negative impacts of market globalization.

The views presented in the publication bear a strong resemblance to George Ritzer's work, which critiques the Western world's pursuit of formal rationalization, aimed at creating ever more efficient socio-economic systems through the application of four principles: efficiency, calculability, predictability, and control. While these principles have undeniably resulted in greater access to goods and services and the rapid fulfillment of needs, Ritzer noted that excessive control and relentless focus on efficiency inevitably lead to outcomes that are irrational and counterproductive to the original goals (Ritzer, 1997).

J. Golinowski's arguments in the monograph also closely align with George Soros' critiques of the instability within the global free market system, which fails

to account for social needs and undermines political institutions (Soros, 1999). Both scholars would likely concur that the absence of state oversight in these matters represents one of the key challenges of the contemporary world.

The next section of the monograph focuses on the complex interaction between the role of the state and the functioning of the market in the context of modernization. J. Golinowski examines how these two key elements influence one another, shaping the trajectories of economic and social development. More specifically, the third chapter presents various models of state-market cooperation, ranging from interventionist to liberal (highlighting the growing significance of market mechanisms in international relations) and their impact on the efficiency and fairness of modernization processes. The balance between the state and the market is portrayed as a dynamic phenomenon, dependent on the specific historical and cultural conditions of a given society. According to the author, the political transformation of the 20th century focused on reducing the formal power of the state in favor of market competition, which was intended to liberate individuals and enrich societies. The researcher also notes “one of the greatest paradoxes of the modern era, namely the growing gap between the opportunities offered by the current stage of the scientific, technological, and communication revolution, and the limitations in the sustainable allocation of resources across the global market” (Golinowski, 2023, p. 167).

The monograph also introduces the reader to the challenges related to the transformation of the traditional roles of the state and the market, particularly in the context of new management and regulatory strategies. It focuses on the redefinition of traditional boundaries of sovereignty, as states face the necessity of adapting to new realities. This involves restructuring institutions and frameworks to better respond to the demands of global competition. Faced with pressure from international corporations and financialization, balancing self-determination and independence with adaptation to global standards presents a significant challenge. According to the argument presented, tools of “structural adjustment” include austerity and deregulation policies aimed at “liberating” the market by reducing the role of the state.

The author rightly observes that such measures often lead to the destruction of local economies and increased inequalities between and within states, as financial capital is favored over socio-economic stability. This polarization is particularly evident in the creation of complex global value chains, where production is often based in developing countries while consumption occurs in developed nations.

An intriguing thread in the author's reflections concerns the future of globalization, particularly its crises and contradictions. He highlights the rise of authoritarianism, alongside nationalist and protectionist trends, which stand in stark contrast to the previously championed ideals of openness and international cooperation. J. Golinowski explores potential new frameworks for global order, emphasizing the critical role of the state as a regulator that must intervene to ensure stability and social justice. He also points to emerging forms of international collaboration that could assist in addressing global challenges.

A key factor for a nation's competitiveness, Golinowski argues, lies in the advancement of science and technology. Yet, he questions whether this focus might, in the end, lead to an even greater objectification of individuals.

From the perspective of the modernization processes that form the essence of the reviewed book, the chapter *Modern technologies as universal tools for capital expansion* is particularly significant. It focuses on the role that contemporary advancements in technoscience play in capital accumulation and expansion. The author explores how technological innovations, especially in areas such as information technology, communication, and biotechnology, enhance productivity, open new markets, and create new forms of economic value. The chapter reveals that these technologies not only fuel economic growth but also reshape social structures and power relations, deepening inequalities and influencing the dynamics of globalization. Understanding these mechanisms is essential for analyzing contemporary modernization processes and for crafting policies that mitigate their negative consequences.

Particularly noteworthy is the breadth of issues surrounding modern technologies highlighted in the text. The author offers a succinct analysis of the key tools and mechanisms driving the global flow of information, capital, and labor. Through an in-depth examination of algorithms, information bubbles, user-tracking techniques, and artificial intelligence, the fourth chapter clearly demonstrates how the internet and digital platforms have become central to the processes of globalization and the information revolution. These technologies, however, primarily serve the interests of multinational corporations, which exploit them to maximize profits, often beyond the reach of state regulation.

According to J. Golinowski, the digital revolution has fundamentally reshaped the global economy, creating new opportunities for expansion by tech giants like Facebook, Apple, and Twitter. Yet, this shift also carries potentially harmful effects, including market monopolization, heightened user surveillance, and the erosion of democratic institutions.

The argument that technologies bring not only progress but also the risk of digital despotism is compelling – an idea the author supports by citing the example of China, which has pursued a different developmental path from Western nations. It is important to remember that China's modernization strategy is marked by strong state interventionism, in stark contrast to neoliberal models of development. The country's strength lies in its ability to seamlessly integrate traditional cultural elements with modern technologies, suggesting that there are multiple paths to modernity, not all of which must rely on free-market principles. J. Golinowski astutely notes that China's approach is not solely about achieving technological superiority over the West, but also about altering the rules of international competition. This observation fits seamlessly into the broader debate on China's rising global influence, which is poised to become a defining factor in shaping the global order in the coming decades.

The concluding chapter, *History has come full circle*, expresses the author's skepticism about the future of modernization processes, arguing that they are neither as effective nor as universal as they may seem. The researcher examines developmental changes through the lens of recurring historical patterns, suggesting that many contemporary socio-economic and political issues have parallels in the past. The central thesis is that history continuously repeats itself, albeit in different forms. Despite technological advancements and economic globalization, the modern world is revisiting old problems and challenges that modernization was expected to resolve. This prompts a critical question: if the world repeatedly faces the same difficulties, reenacting past patterns while generating new challenges it cannot adequately address, could modernization itself be an illusion?

J. Golinowski asserts unequivocally that the supposed universality of Western values, rooted in liberal doctrine, is merely an illusion. Paradoxically, globalization has intensified nationalism and ethnocentrism, challenging the notion of a single dominant model of modernization. Liberal institutions, once seen as guarantors of market freedom and global trade, are no longer perceived as sources of stability and security. This shift highlights the need to reconsider their role and adapt them to new challenges that extend beyond economics to include social, environmental, and security issues. The previous international order, built on Western hegemony, is no longer cohesive or stable. Instead, Golinowski identifies the rise of a "multiplex world," characterized by a multitude of influential political actors. He astutely observes that while multipolarity is not new, it now encompasses not only major powers but also international institutions,

corporations, and social movements. This leads to the conclusion that, alongside this diversity of actors, there are multiple pathways to development and modernization, many of which do not follow the neoliberal model.

The reviewed publication is distinguished by an extensive bibliography, demonstrating a thorough understanding of the chosen topic and academic rigor. The gathered sources encompass a wide range of literature, including both classical and contemporary works on modernization theory, globalization, neoliberalism, and related subjects. The author references prominent scholars such as Karl Polanyi, Joseph Stiglitz, and Dani Rodrik, while also directly engaging with the works of renowned theorists like Adam Smith, Max Weber, and Friedrich August von Hayek. The breadth of topics covered, including the transformation of economic systems, the impact of technology on society, and climate change, is particularly noteworthy. This wide scope allows for a comprehensive understanding of modernization and its multidimensional nature. Additionally, the inclusion of up-to-date examples ensures that the book is not only a rich source of theoretical knowledge but also a valuable guide to the complex realities of the contemporary world.

On the other hand, the critique of capitalism in the text feels somewhat incomplete. While the criticism is both justified and well-argued, it anchors the work within a specific academic perspective. J. Golinowski frequently references critics of neoliberalism, such as Naomi Klein and David Harvey, but engages less often with opposing viewpoints. Addressing and dismantling these counterarguments (which the author would likely do effectively if pursued) could have enriched the discourse on modernization processes.

Another compelling aspect would have been a deeper exploration of alternative economic systems capable of addressing the challenges discussed in the monograph. While the text does propose some intriguing ideas for change, a more detailed examination of these alternatives could have added further value. Perhaps the author will delve more extensively into the future of modernization in his future works, something well worth looking forward to.

“The world has entered a new, undefined era” (Golinowski, 2023, p. 383) – these words, found in the book’s conclusion, succinctly encapsulate the essence of our modern age, beset by recurring economic crises, political tensions, deepening social inequality, and the adverse effects of climate change. While modernization processes offer undeniable advantages, they are far from being a panacea for humanity’s challenges. In fact, without careful management, they could become a source of further harm.

In response, J. Golinowski urges a conscious approach to shaping the future, grounded in thoughtful reflection on the past, present, and the potential impacts of continued progress. He argues that only global responsibility and collaboration can ensure that modernization leads to lasting and equitable benefits for all members of the international community. The real question is whether humanity is capable of rising to this challenge. Let's hope the answer is yes.

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