

Original Paper

John Locke's Doctrine of Limited Government: Establishment, Limitations and Criticisms

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Abstract

John Locke was a famous political philosopher in the 17th century. The theory of limited government proposed by Locke in the Second Treatise of Government has delivered a profound impact on the modern politics. Based on the theoretical foundation of liberalism, Locke argues that, for the purpose of defending the right to private property, only when the majority agree can we establish a government after signing the social contract and shifting from the state of nature to the political society. By analyzing the limitations of the source, affiliation and range of government power, this paper demonstrates the limitations of the limited government as the rule of law and the separation of powers on the inside, and the collapse of government and people's revolution on the outside. In the process of modernizing the national governance system and governance capacity, it is necessary for developing countries to be fully confident in their political systems and absorb what is best from Locke's theory so as to build a modern service-oriented government.

Keywords

John Locke, limited government, service-oriented government

1. Introduction

John Locke (1632-1704) was a distinguished English philosopher, a representative of liberalism, and a pioneer of limited government theory in the 17th century. His most famous works are *A Letter Concerning Toleration* (1689), *Two Treatises of Government* (1689), *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding* (1690), *Thoughts on Education* (1693), and *On the Reasonableness of Christianity* (1695). The *Two Treatises of Government* written from 1689 to 1690 is the most important political essay for Locke, of which the second piece has epoch-making significance both historically and academically and proves the validity of the new regime, the bourgeoisie.

The ideas Locke illustrated in the two treatises like liberalism, rule of law, division of power and the limited government theory has laid a solid foundation for the tradition of constitutionalism in Britain and other Western countries, and has had a deep influence on the bourgeois revolutions in the US and France, and on the Western political theories. The first treatise was aimed squarely at the theory of “divine right of kings” of another 17th-century political theorist, Sir Robert Filmer. The whole book is meant to indicate that, in the *Old Testament*, the God did not accept Adam and his successors as the rulers of the entire world, shaking the theoretical foundation of royalists. This viewpoint formed the basis for the second treatise: Locke believes that everyone is equal in the state of nature. In other words, people do not have to act under the authority of others unless they themselves agree. Although Locke wrote the two treatises not for defending the Glorious Revolution, this great work was, in essence, undoubtedly calling for a revolution. The limited government theory proposed by Locke in the second treatise has become the role model for the bourgeois government, which is aimed at arguing that once a government does not follow the trend of the times or goes against people’s will, people have the right to overthrow the government. He used metaphor in the book for many times to suggest that James II did not fulfill government duties and went against people’s will so as to ensure the validity of the upcoming Glorious Revolution.

Based on Locke’s masterpieces and the specific historical background, and combined with opinions from the history of mainstream political thought, this paper aims at answering the classical question of why Locke’s limited government is limited systematically and points out the theory’s incompatibility with the political development of latecomer countries. This paper is divided into 5 parts. First, the historical background of Locke’s limited government. In the specific political and social environment of the English bourgeois revolution, the purpose of creating the *Two Treatises of Government* was to eliminate the remnants of outdated philosophies and systems such as the divine right of kings and to build a limited government on behalf of the bourgeois class. Second, how Locke’s limited government is built. Due to the inconveniences of the state of nature, in order to protect possessions obtained through their own labor, people enter the political society by signing the social contract and build the limited government with the consent of the majority. Third, Why Locke’s limited government is limited. This part tells the difference between limited government and unlimited government and then analyzes the limitedness of the government power from its source, affiliation, and scope. Fourth, restrictions on Locke’s limited government. Locke’s limited government is not only restricted by rule of law and separation of powers within the government, but also by the dissolution of government and people’s revolution outside the government. Fifth, limitations of Locke’s limited government. In the practice of political modernization, it is impossible to balance the relationship between government efficiency and government power with Locke’s doctrine of limited government.

2. John Locke's Life and Historical Background

Locke was born on 29 August 1632 in Britain. His father was an attorney. In 1647, he was sent to the prestigious Westminster School in London which was under the control of the Parliamentary forces. After finishing studies there, he was admitted to Christ Church, Oxford in 1652 at the age of 20. Locke was awarded a bachelor's degree in 1656 and a master's degree in 1658, about which period he was elected a student (the equivalent of fellow) of Christ Church. In 1667, Locke started to serve as the personal physician, private tutor, and secretary of Lord Anthony Ashley Cooper who later became the leader of Whigs and the 1st earl of Shaftesbury. As one of the founders of the Whigs, the earl advocated freedom, religious tolerance, and exclusivism, which shaped Locke's political thoughts. In 1681, Locke was persecuted due to the earl of Shaftesbury's failure to fight against James II. And he fled to the Netherlands in 1683. In 1688, a bloodless revolution involved the overthrow of the Catholic King James II took place and it is typically called as the Glorious Revolution. In February 1689, Locke accompanied Princess Mary on her journey to join her husband, William III of Orange and de facto ruler of the Dutch Republic. In the same year, the Bill of Rights was passed in the parliament to lay down limits on the powers of the monarch, which marks the point at which the balance of power in the English government passed from the King to the Parliament and laid the foundation for constitutional monarchy. After that, Locke was appointed as the judge of the Court of Appeal, and the minister in charge of trade and colonies successively. Due to poor health, Locke resigned from office and went back to his hometown where he spent his last years revising his works. He died on 28 October 1704.

The 17th-century Britain was moving towards the typical capitalist country. Economically, manufacturing workshops were developing; the Enclosure Movement was taking place in the rural areas; Britain was launching a period of colonial expansion and plunder overseas; the domestic capitalist economy was booming; and the bourgeois class was powerful. Politically, the new aristocrats and the bourgeoisie were opposed to the British king who was on behalf of the feudalistic force and they preferred to restrict the powers of the monarch through the parliament rather than overthrowing the monarch. Religiously, in order to fight against the feudal power, the Puritanism emerged in the late 16th century sought to "purify" the Church of England of remnants of the Roman Catholic "popery". And Puritanism could be mainly divided into 2 types, namely Presbyterianism and Independents. Ever since the first parliament summoned by king James I in 1604, the bourgeoisie and the new aristocrats had struggled with the king for a long time by refusing to pay taxes, leading to the outbreak of the revolution. The period 1640-1642 witnesses the start of the English bourgeois revolution when Charles I summoned the long-suspended parliament to raise money for the military expenditure on suppressing the Scottish rebellion, and the parliament rejected the king's demand and delivered the Grand Remonstrance to limit his power. In 1660, the Stuart monarchy was restored. King James II (1685-1688) supported the Catholicism and advocated the divine right of kings at home and followed the suit of the French royal family at abroad, greatly harming the interests of the new aristocrats and the bourgeoisie. In 1688, the bloodless "Glorious Revolution" took place, bringing the English Revolution to an end.

The Whigs on the parliamentary side and some of the Tories overthrew the reign of James II and they invited James I's daughter Mary and her husband, William III of Orange and de facto ruler of the Dutch Republic, to jointly rule Britain.

John Locke's whole life and his political thoughts are closely associated with the English bourgeois revolution. This bourgeois revolution has 4 features. Firstly, the revolution was led by the bourgeois class and the new aristocrats. Secondly, this revolution aimed at ensuring the right to private property. Thirdly, different parties struggled with one another mainly through the parliament. Lastly, at the end of the revolution, constitutional monarchy was created to restrict the powers of the monarch. As mentioned above, during his entire life, Locke experienced the English bourgeois revolution, of which the historical background greatly shaped his political ideas. Since this revolution would inevitably touch on the interests of all classes of society, the debate over various political thoughts such as the divine right of kings by Sir Robert Filmer and the strong central authority proposed by Thomas Hobbes in his book *Leviathan* emerged subsequently. The controversy over all kinds of political ideas could, to some extent, inject vitality into the academic thinking, but it would unavoidably let to British people's ideological confusion. After the victory, what the bourgeoisie should do first is to find a political path that is suitable for the development of capitalism and get rid of outdated systems and ideas especially the philosophy of the divine right of kings by royalists. Just as the Cambridge School says, when analyzing theorists' thoughts, we need to take into consideration the specific political context. In the political and social environment of the English bourgeois revolution, Locke's mission was to eliminate the remnants of old-fashioned ideas and to lay a solid theoretical foundation for the new system. The establishment of a limited government could be used as an institutional and ideological basis for the prosperity of the British capitalism.

3. The Formation of Locke's Limited Government

Based on 3 distinct states of nature, Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau created their own ideal governments. Compared with Hobbes and Rousseau, Locke's state of nature is intact and equal, and it is a state of freedom instead of indulgence in which people are their own judges. In addition, everyone has natural rights given by the god. At the same time, they must protect and respect other people's rights. Due to the flaws in the natural law and the state of nature, in order to protect possessions obtained through their own labor, people enter the political society by signing the social contract and build the limited government with the consent of the majority. It is worth noting that, as a representative of the bourgeois class, Locke's hidden purpose of creating the principle of limited government was to protect the property rights of the new aristocrats and factory owners.

3.1 The Nature and the Features of the State of Nature

According to the supporters of the social contract theory, the state of nature is a term used to describe a state without definite political authorities. In other words, it is the hypothetical life of people before societies or countries came into existence, which is the opposite of political societies and countries.

However, classical thinkers of the bourgeois class have different understandings of the state of nature. Hobbes describes a horrific state of nature where everyone is against everyone else: people live in constant fear of loss or violence, and life is solitary, poor, nasty, brutish, and short. Locke believes that there are 4 characteristics for the state of nature: Firstly, the state of nature is intact, and all men are free to dispose of their possessions and persons. Secondly, in the state of nature, everyone is equal despite their differences in talents and capabilities. Thirdly, the state of nature is a state of freedom instead of indulgence. Fourthly, in this state, everyone is judge and has the right to punish violations of the law of nature. Rousseau thinks that, in the natural state, people are born free and equal, and they enjoy mutually unimpeded peace. Also, he maintains that human beings are only restricted by “self-preservation”: man’s first feeling was that of his own existence, and his first care that of self-preservation.

To get rid of the state of nature, early bourgeois intellectuals assume that people could enter the political society and establish the government by signing an agreement or the social contract. In order to get away from the natural state in which everyone is against everyone else, Hobbes believes that people could sign the social contract that transfers all their rights, and establish the powerful government described in the *Leviathan* that could bring peace and orderliness. From Locke’s point of view, people could transfer part of their rights and create the limited government that protects the right to private property so as to avoid the inconveniences of the state of nature. By contrast, Rousseau is rather optimistic about the state of nature. In this way, he thinks that people should transfer all their rights to establish a centralized government with popular sovereignty to enjoy god-given equal rights and happy life. However, the state of nature is essentially a thought experiment. Under the circumstance of its political vacuum, issues like “the shift from the state of nature to political society” and “what kind of country should be built” are discussed.

3.2 Possessions and Property Rights

Defending the right to private property and restricting the powers of the monarch are the main features of the English bourgeois revolution. Property rights are not only the basis for natural rights, but also the economic foundation for people to limit the power of the government. But we need to make clear the definition of property by Locke in both the broad and narrow sense. In the narrow sense, property refers to natural resources obtained through their labor; in the broad sense, property (possession) refers to personal rights including life and liberty and property rights in the narrow sense. Locke’s philosophy of property can be divided into 4 parts. Firstly, one may appropriate natural resources through one’s own labor. Secondly, one may only appropriate as much as one can use before it spoils. Thirdly, the labor theory of property is also applicable to the land, which can be seen in its role as the defender for land ownership. Fourthly, personal properties appropriated through labor is not only limited but can also decay. If we can transform properties into durable, rare, and valuable currencies acting as a store of value, then we can possess the properties forever so as to increase their value.

Locke’s theory of property rights tells us that it is necessary to shift from the state of nature to the

political society. According to Locke, in the state of nature, people lack sufficient supply of valuable items and then end up in dire poverty. After that, the emergence and advancement of labor, technology, art, and currency lead to the increase in the supply of valuable items. As a result, properties are in the hands of the few, contributing to the disproportion of the division of power. During the later period of the state of nature, the uneven distribution of private property results in the inequality of the political power. To defend this inequality, it is necessary to build a common authority with judicial power to protect properties from coveting and infringement.

3.3 The Establishment of the Political Society and the Government

Locke points out that the main purpose for people to establish a country and put themselves under the control of the government is to protect their personal properties, but there exist many deficiencies in the state of nature. Firstly, the natural state lacks a formal, stable, and common law agreed, accepted, and recognized by all. Secondly, the state of nature is devoid of unprejudiced arbiters who have the right to rule on all disputes according to the law. Thirdly, the state of nature tends to be short of power to guarantee impartial rulings.

Some scholars believe that Locke tries to guarantee people's natural rights given by the natural law by letting them agree to sign the social contract so as to establish a political system. Firstly, people shift from the state of nature to the political society by signing the social contract. To avoid 3 unsafe and unstable deficiencies in the natural state and to protect personal properties, people transfer part of their natural rights to a common authority with judicial power by signing the social contract, which is when they enter the political society from the state of nature. Secondly, when facing issues like "what path should the political society choose" and "what kind of government should be built to rule the society", it is necessary to create a government agreed by the majority. The political society entrusts its power to enforce the law of nature to a government through a majority vote. As long as the trust exists, the government can exercise power on behalf of the political society. However, Locke does not advocate theory of the two contracts: one is the contract made between the people themselves; the other is the contract made between the people and the government. It seems to Locke that the only contract is the social contract to enter the political society by giving up the executive power of the natural law. Therefore, government power comes from part of the natural rights transferred by people through the contract, which is why the idea government proposed by Locke is limited.

4. Analysis on the "Limitedness" of the Ideal Government Proposed by Locke

Why does Locke favor limited government instead of unlimited government? Why is government power limited? To answer these two tricky problems, we need to consider the historical background of Locke and to make a text analysis of his masterpiece, *Two Treatises of Government*. Firstly, it is important to tell the difference between limited government and unlimited government. And then, we should analyze the limitedness of the government power from its source, affiliation, and scope.

4.1 Limited Government and Unlimited Government

The limited government of the bourgeois class is relative to the unlimited government. There are mainly 2 major distinctions between them two. Firstly, governments have different cognitive abilities of themselves, leading to distinct ways of exercising power. The cognitive basis for the notion of unlimited government is that the government can do everything and knows everything and no limit is placed on the government power. By contrast, the cognitive basis for the principle of limited government is that there exist blind spots and misunderstandings and the government power is restricted rather than limitless. Secondly, whether the government operates under the constitution and laws or not. The limited government is the kind of government restricted by strict constitutions and laws in terms of authority, functions, and scale, whereas there are few or no limits on the unlimited government. In conclusion, limited governments are law-based governments that have limited self-cognition and are restricted with regards to authority, functions, and scale. The principle of limited government means that the government is limited by the parliament. As the representative of the limited government theory, Locke established the limited government model known as the separation of powers, rule of law, and the fact that the parliament holds the supreme power. The *Two Treatises of Government* by Locke was initially written to oppose to King Charles II, but when it was published, it served as the theoretical foundation for the Whigs to start the Glorious Revolution.

4.2 Analysis on the Limitedness of the Government Power

What has been discussed above is how to create a government and what kind of government should be built, and this paper will talk about why the government power is limited. Government power is the kind of power delivered to the society and enjoyed by everyone in the state of nature. The society regulates that this power can only be used to seek interests for the people and protect their personal properties through explicit or implied authorization. And then the society gives its power to the ruler appointed for itself. Since the establishment of the government is based on people's agreement and trust, and it is intended to safeguard their private properties, political power should be under supervision.

Firstly, the powers of government come from the consent of the majority. Everyone is born free and nothing can put it at the mercy of secular power unless they agree. The community must take actions considering most people's consent and decisions. Besides, the establishment of the community is based on most people's consent, which can be divided into 2 types, namely expressed consent and implicit consent. On the one hand, Andrew Heywood believes that authority and social relations should be based on consent or voluntary agreement, and the consent of the ruled should serve as the cornerstone of the government. As for Locke, whether monarchy government or democratic government is based on people's consent and exercises power in a way that they trust. On the other hand, military force and conquest have their advantages because they destroy the old community and lay the foundation for the new one, but we can only start a new country from the ruins with people's consent.

Secondly, government power belongs to people. As a defender of popular sovereignty, Locke believes that state power belongs to people and people's well-being represents the supreme law of a country. On

the one hand, people are entitled to change the legislature and the legislative power is the power entrusted by people to make laws. When the legislature is against people's source of power, their will, they have the right to decide whether or not to preserve, change, or rebuild the legislature. On the other hand, whether Parliamentarianism and its representative or monarchy and its monarch should serve the interest of the people. In addition, Locke also discussed royal prerogative that serves public interest rather than the monarch's selfish desires. As long as this privilege is conducive to people's welfare, then it is a legitimate privilege.

Thirdly, government power is limited. When ending the state of nature, people just transfer their judicial power, executive power, and the right to punish crimes, so they establish a limited government whose power is restricted by laws, instead of the strong central authority proposed by Hobbes in his book *Leviathan*. On the one hand, government power based on limited rights is only restricted to protecting the public interest. Locke points out that social power or the power from the legislature that it builds can never go beyond the public interest, and 3 unsafe and unstable deficiencies in the natural state should be avoided so as to protect personal properties. On the other hand, restrictions are imposed on the government with compelling force which can only be used when enforcing the law at home and resisting foreign invasion or claiming compensation at abroad. Locke believes that all of this is not for other purposes, but for peace, safety, and common interests. The limited power of the limited government theory proposed by Locke comes from people's consent and serves their well-being, so it should be restricted by popular sovereignty within and outside the government.

5. Dual Restrictions on the Locke's Limited Government

Locke argues that government power is limited rather than unlimited. So what can restrict government power? Power is regarded by the bourgeois philosophers as a necessary evil. For people's freedom and happiness, it is necessary to empower governments. Locke's limited government is not only restricted by the rule of law and separation of powers on the inside, but also by the dissolution of government and people's revolution on the outside.

5.1 Restrictions within the Government: Rule of Law and Separation of Powers

To protect people's life, liberty, and property, Locke proposed the rule of law and the separation of powers of the bourgeois class. His doctrine of rule of law has a double meaning. For one thing, he values the important role of laws in governance by promoting the rule of law. In the historical context of Britain at that time, it means that monarchs are below the law, and people would rule the country with a set of established laws instead of monarchs' talents. These theories and principles exert a profound impact on the law-based governance of China. For another thing, it is imperative to impose restrictions on the law and its derivative systems. As the supreme power, the legislative power must serve the public interest. Besides, legislative power and the election for legislative representatives should be under restrictions. Firstly, it is necessary to rule the country according to enacted and formal laws. Secondly, the ultimate goal of the law is to benefit people. Thirdly, the government should not

impose taxes on citizens without their or their representative's consent. Lastly, the legislature should not and cannot transfer lawmaking powers to others or exert power in a way that goes against people's will.

Locke's idea of separation of powers refers to threefold separation of legislative, executive, and federative powers. And these powers are exercised through different organizations.

Firstly, legislative power is the highest state power while executive and federative powers are subordinate to the legislative power. Legislative power is the power to make laws and to direct how the force of the commonwealth shall be employed to protect itself and its members. Executive power encompasses the execution of the laws that are made, and remain in force. Federative power entails the power of war and peace, leagues and alliances, and all transactions with all persons and communities outside the commonwealth. Secondly, legislative power is only effective when it is exercised. So it is necessary to have a long-standing power to enforce laws and help them remain in force. The separation of executive power and legislative power is a great contribution to the constitutionalism by Locke. Locke thinks that if a group of people have the power to make laws and the power to execute these laws at the same time, it will pose a great temptation to the weakness of human nature. Lastly, executive power and federative power tend to be closely related and inseparable, so some scholars regard threefold separation of powers as twofold separation of powers. Executive power is domestically oriented and it refers to the power to enforce domestic laws whereas federative power is overseas-oriented and it is the power to deal with public security and interest concerning foreign affairs. Locke points out that the execution of these two powers needs the support of social forces, so it would be unrealistic for different and unrelated people to exercise the national power.

If monarchs do not realize the limitedness of their political power and neglect the fact that they are below the law, then they would lose the legitimacy of the governance. Locke's national outlook is that administrative power cannot be absolute and should be under restrictions of the independent judiciary and the legislature. From this we can catch a glimpse of Locke's influence on the United States Declaration of Independence and the Constitution. Locke's idea of threefold separation of powers blazed the trail for constitutionalism featuring the separation of legislature and administration of the bourgeoisie, but it is strange that some domestic scholars over-interpret the fact that the legislative power controls executive and federative powers as checks and balances. However, in fact, the *Two Treatises of Government* by Locke only mentions the separation of powers rather than the balance of powers by Montesquieu. What's more, their definitions of the political power differ significantly.

5.2 Restrictions Outside the Government: the Dissolution of Government and People's Revolution

Locke's political philosophy is revolutionary to a certain degree. As mentioned above, government power comes from the consent and trust of the majority. Therefore, when the government abuses its political power or turns its back on the people, they have the right to end the delegation and take back the natural rights. At this time, the government power comes to an end and the government collapses. To be specific, there are 2 reasons for the collapse of government: one is foreign invasion, and the other

is domestic factors. There are mainly 3 kinds of dissolution of government due to internal elements. The first is the alteration of the legislature. Secondly, if those who hold the supreme executive power neglect or abandon their duties, it would be impossible to carry out enacted laws. Thirdly, if the legislature or monarchs turn their back on the people, the government will dissolve.

On the one hand, Locke's theory of revolution is quite cutting-edge, which can be embodied in its strict restrictions on the governmental abuse of power. If the legislature infringes people's property rights and betrays their trust, or if the government prevents the legislature from holding the assembly and transfers the legislative power to somewhere else, the boycott will lead to a revolution. At this time, the power of the limited government goes back to the social group in the first stage when signing the social contract, and people will regain the freedom to create a new government in the initial state. James Tully believes that revolution is a natural, legal way for people to deal with rulers who abuse their power. According to Leo Strauss, people have no power to overthrow the government, but have the power to rebel when the state of war is reintroduced. Firstly, Locke points out that force is to be opposed to nothing but to unjust and unlawful force. Since the government aims to benefit people, if it infringes on people's property with force, then they have the right to fight against the force with force. Secondly, if people are in a state of war with the government, they have the right to overthrow it. When the government ignores people's well-being and betrays their trust, they are at the state of war with each other. At this very moment, the rebel is the government rather than people, so people are entitled to topple this brutal government with force.

On the other hand, the Lockean Revolution is illusory and deceptive. The fact that Locke returns the legislative power to the parliament means that he, in essence, is a defender of parliamentary sovereignty. In the last paragraph of the *Second Treatise of Government*, Locke concludes that as long as the society exists, then the power everyone gives to the political society can be returned and will stay in the commonwealth forever. Although Locke proposed people's right to revolution, it only exists under extreme conditions like tyrannies or tyrants. As a matter of fact, the Glorious Revolution in Britain is rather conservative and it is the product of a compromise. Just as Edmund Burke, a conservative, points out that, the Glorious Revolution is a revolution not made but prevented. The English revolution is essentially a revolution of moderation. The political principles of the Whigs can only be established through a compromise of interest with the Tories so as to start the constitutional monarchy in 1689, turning the political crisis into a more lasting and formal constitutionalism. In short, through the Glorious Revolution, people did not try to build a brand new constitutional system, but respected Britain's constitutional tradition instead. Therefore, people's right to revolution by Locke integrates the limited government theory into the constitutional system by urging the limited government to protect private property rights and improving its economic status in the capitalist world. This kind of people's right to revolution is merely a safety net for the constitutional system instead of its gravedigger.

6. Limitations and Criticisms on the Locke's Limited Government

Locke is undoubtedly a great political philosopher. In the *Two Treatises of Government*, he proposes the limited government theory including the state of nature, the establishment of government, and dual restrictions on the government power at both home and abroad. The doctrine of limited government not only plays an important role in the political history, but is also regarded by Western developed countries like the US and UK as a role model. The core of Locke's limited government theory is that the government power comes from people's delegation and consent, instead of the divine right given by the god. The government is only a representative of the public interest, so its power is inevitably limited as it is restricted by the rule of law and the separation of powers within the government and by the dissolution of government and people's right to revolution outside the government. Furthermore, if the government goes against people's wishes and infringes their rights, it should collapse. Whether a violation of enacted laws or unscrupulous abuse of power means that the government betrays the people. People can take back their authorization and build a new government, which is the so-called people's revolution. But this kind of revolution is meant to be conservative and compromised because the fundamental goal is to safeguard the more lasting constitutional system.

After several twists and turns in its development, the theory of limited government finally became the mainstream form of government in the Western world. With the constant development of the industrial civilization, major strands of political thought like the small government, big market, and social benefit maximization emerged in the Western society. People believe that a good government should adopt non-interventionism and advocate the free market economy characterized by the invisible hand. Ever since the late 19th century, the capitalist economy has been moving towards monopoly. The disconnection between limited government, market competition, and socio-economic development made it difficult to tackle poor resource allocation and the recurrent economic crises. The Great Depression lasting from 1929 to 1933, in particular, cast doubt on classical liberalism and the limited government theory. Under this circumstance, in order to save the capitalist economy, the Keynesian Economics, the opposite of limited government theory, rose to the occasion. This theory emphasizes government power and tries to bridge the gap in market mechanism with government intervention. The Keynesian Economics pulled the United States out of the Great Depression and guided the economic recovery of the Western Europe after World War II. The Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union after WWII and the stagflation prevalent in the Western society allowed the limited government theory to get out of the slump and to be developed. The major theoretical developments during this period are Friedrich Hayek's failure of government planning and James M. Buchanan's public choice theory.

In the history of Western political thought, the Cambridge School led by Skinner does a much better job than its predecessors who focus on probing into classical texts. The Cambridge School places emphasis on the historical conditions and the intellectual context of the masterpieces written by philosophers. Understanding the literal meaning is not enough and what we should do is to put the text in a specific context. Many jurists maintain that latecomer economies should learn from Locke's limited

government theory, but just as the Cambridge School insightfully points out that, this borrowing must be combined with specific historical contexts. Establishing the reign of the new aristocrats through the Glorious Revolution and developing industrial production were the themes of the British society in Locke's era. Due to the changing times, we can neither apply Locke's political philosophy to the information age mechanically nor use the doctrine of limited government for the design of political systems of latecomer countries. In other words, it means that, in the 21st century, it is necessary to reinterpret Locke's political philosophy by tracing our political origin, taking into account our political system, and solving specific real-world problems.

A comparison of Locke's theory of limited government and Chinese political thought can be taken as an example. To be more specific, firstly, Locke's rule of law is different from China's law-based governance. Locke's rule of law and constitutionalism is rooted in the prosperity of the British Capitalism while China's law-based governance conforms to its socialism with Chinese characteristics. It is true that Britain's sophisticated legal system is enviable, but it has an inherent defect: the negligence of the role of morality. By contrast, China promotes the dialectical unity of the rule of law with the rule of virtue. In addition, Locke's doctrine of the separation of powers is incompatible with the people's congress system of China. Locke upholds parliamentary sovereignty featuring the separation between the legislative and executive powers whereas China adopts the people's congress system marked by the combination of legislative and executive powers. Therefore, copying the separation of powers will only be in conflict with China's fundamental political system. From the perspective of the liberalism, the division of powers is out of fear of the dark side of humanity whereas China has the political and cultural heritage known as harmony and cooperation, and the rule of virtue. For example, the institutional and governance advantages of the principle of democratic centralism and the combination of legislative and executive powers can be seen clearly in this battle against Covid-19. In fact, the improvement of government efficiency and restrictions on the government power constitute a contradictory unity. And this unity of opposites can boost governance capacity. Professor Yang Guangbin believes that the overall goal of the modernization of national governance system and governance capacity is to build an effective, limited government. In this way, the existence of the limited government is necessary, but should be based on government efficiency. Locke's idea of limited government is a compromise between capitalism and the society, and between government power and individual rights while China's effective, limited government requires government efficiency and performance, and boundaries of and restrictions on its power. These two political systems share one thing in common, which is to confine power within an institutional cage. By combing through and critically evaluating Locke's limited government theory, and comparing it with its Chinese counterpart, we try to explore a new path for the Chinese government in the new era. In other words, we aim to build an effective and limited government that upholds law-based governance, takes a people-centered approach, and pursues the dialectical unity of institutional restrictions on government power with governance efficiency.

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