

Why is China Still Politically Communist When Russia Left Communism? *

Rusya Komünizmi Terk Etmişken Çin Neden Hala Politik Olarak Komünist Olmaya Devam Ediyor?

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Abstract

The Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and China sought to balance each other as well as stand against capitalism, particularly in their relations with neighboring and other countries around the globe. While the political understanding sprouting from the same ideological foundations gradually disappeared in Russia, it maintains its influence in China. The most distinctive feature of this separation is the political perspectives, which are moving in different directions ideologically. In this study, the reasons for this ideological differentiation will be analyzed. In this context, China's interpretation of "new communism" and how the end of the Cold War after the collapse of the Soviet Union shaped the subsequent policies of China, which was directly affected by the USSR in the 20th century. Simultaneously, the military and political differences between Moscow and Beijing during the Cold War will be investigated. Finally, after disregarding the parallels, the motives for the continuity of communism in China are aimed at explaining, using the available data.

Keywords: Communism, Politics, China, Russia

Öz

Sovyet Sosyalist Cumhuriyetler Birliği (SSCB) ve Çin, özellikle komşu ülkeler ve dünyadaki diğer ülkelerle ilişkilerinde, kapitalizme karşı durmanın yanı sıra birbirlerini dengelemeye çalıştılar. Aynı ideolojik temellerden filizlenen siyaset anlayışı Rusya'da yavaş yavaş yok olurken, Çin'de etkisini sürdürmeye devam etmektedir. Bu ayrımın en belirgin özelliği, ideolojik olarak farklı yönlerde hareket eden ülke siyasetleridir. Çalışmada, bu ideolojik farklılaşmanın nedenleri araştırılacak; Çin'in "yeni komünizm" yorumu analiz edilmeye çalışılacaktır. Bu bağlamda Soğuk Savaş'ın sona ermesi ve Sovyetler Birliği'nin yıkılmasının, 20. yüzyılda SSCB'den doğrudan etkilenen Çin'in politikalarını ne yönde şekillendirdiği mercek altına alınacaktır. Buna paralel olarak, Soğuk Savaş döneminde Moskova ile Pekin arasındaki askeri ve siyasi ayrım incelenecek; son olarak, benzerlikler bir kenara bırakıldıktan sonra, Çin'de komünizmin devam etmesinin nedenleri mevcut verilerle açıklanmaya çalışılacaktır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Komünizm, Siyaset, Çin, Rusya

1. INTRODUCTION

There have been several ups and downs in communism, as an economic and political philosophy that calls for a classless and regulated community in which all is split evenly. It began and strengthened under the leadership of the Soviet Union, seeped into states such as China, and gradually became an international political movement. However, the changing conditions in the world necessitated

communist countries such as the Soviet Union and China to follow diverse policies. While China limited its reforms in the economy, Russia added some social reforms. As a result, while Russia parted ways with communism, China chose to frame its own interpretation of the ideology.

Although there was more than one reason behind the divergence of the two countries during the Cold War, the key reason was the difference in the interpretation of

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communism. Even though economic developments and relations with other states shaped the ideological split, the major share was de-Stalinization. Until Stalin's death, this difference in ideology remained in the background; since China saw Russia under Stalin as the representative of global communism. Besides the altered timing of the establishment of communism in both countries; after Stalin's death, relations between the two deteriorated and China did not view Nikita Khrushchev's administration and his ideology in line with Stalin's rule (Lüthi 2010, 345-348).

Another reason was the political attitude of the Chinese leaders. While establishing a hybrid economic structure of socialism and capitalism, Chinese leaders did not neglect to empower the communist party and its leading position in the country. Although the former Soviet Union had some problems absorbing democratization, communist regimes such as China, Vietnam, and Cuba resisted that process. By developing a market economy under an authoritarian regime, China interpreted communism in her own way and broke away from the "old Soviet communism" ideologically (Pei 1998, 3-74).

In this context, this study will examine how China, was influenced by the Soviet Union during the 20th century. Parallely, the focus will be on why China continues to insist on communism in a political sense, if not economically; while Russia gave up communism after the Cold War. In this regard, firstly, the military and political separation between Moscow and Beijing during the Cold War will be examined. Then it will analyze what type of changes have occurred in these two key communist countries after the collapse of the USSR. Finally, after leaving the similarities aside, the reasons for the continuation of communism in China will be determined with the existing data.

2. THE ECHO OF COMMUNISM

Hardt (2010, 346) underlines that, like the concepts of democracy and freedom, the notion of communism is manipulated and became non-functional. Principally, communism is the domination of the state over economic and social life and is perceived as the opposite of alternative concepts such as democracy and freedom. Between Marx's definition of communism and contemporary capitalist economy, it is emphasized that there are common points between human production, social relations, and lifestyles (Hardt 2010, 354). From this view, one can argue that despite having the same basis the differentiation of two concepts is directly affected by their interpretation.

Arnason (2000, 61-63), correspondingly underlines that not perceiving communism as a branch of the global modernization process may cause one to miss many aspects of it. He points out that the theoretical framework of

modernization was drawn by the West; emphasizes that this understanding, the boundaries of which are drawn with a local perspective, carries the danger of ignoring similar developments with other notions.

When investigating the reasons why communism left Russia and took root in China, it is essential to take the differences between the two countries into account. Rostow (1955, 513), addresses these differences as; the differences in nature of the economies, the length of the communist regime, the political atmosphere and the ruling groups, the existence of different cultural values and historical heritages, and finally the foreign policy perspectives of these two countries.

China was reunited with the recently formed People's Republic of China (PRC). For the first time throughout Chinese history, Communist China opened itself into a different era: in framework, a brand new dynasty; in substance, and more importantly a new ideology (Kissinger 2012, 90). However, "new" China and Russia were moving away from each other ideologically during the Cold War.

On the other hand, the Russian Revolution of 1917 represents a process that ended with Bolsheviks, taking the power. This transition into communism in Russia was the scene of a bloody civil war, followed by the February and October Revolutions. Nevertheless, the influence of communism began to weaken among citizens. The wars, in the clash with Marxist theory and the devastations, brought accelerated the disintegration of communist ideology from its former importance (Kennan 1990, 169,176). In other words, the Russian people had already declared communism as the enemy in their minds. However, it would take some time to change the system completely. For this, the Soviet Union had to be destroyed, and when this happened in 1991, some people did not want a crumb of communism in the new regime established.

While the communists in China focused on the economic revolution, they ignored the social dimension of it. The separation of Russia and China within the framework of communism began here (Daniels 2007, 76). In a way, "communism" in the traditional sense was compelled to embrace economic differences.

In addition, one of the significant reasons behind China's not abandoning communism was the conscious policies of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) (Garver 1993, 1). However, this justification is insufficient to explain the root of communism in China. Since, it was widely perceived as a transition to the "Sinification" of Marxism, in the sense of a conceptual or ideological redefinition, referred to Mao Zedong, and a more convenient modification of the Soviet model to Chinese climates (Arnason 2003, 315).

On the other hand, the Sino-Soviet split represented the political and ideological distancing of two communist countries, the USSR and China. Two countries had great differences in ideas and policies during the Cold War and at times came to the brink of war (Lüthi 2012, 386). This separation ended with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and China emerged as the new representative of the communist world. However, to understand the end of communism in Russia and its continuation in China, it is necessary to look at the communist experiences of both countries during the Cold War.

The USSR and China, especially in their relations with neighboring countries and other countries around the world sought to balance each other, as well as to stand against capitalism. As Scalapino (1964, 646) indicates there was an undeniable weight on the left for African nationalists, fighting against colonialism. For instance, in any significant rebellion on the African continent, the Chinese Communists seemed to engage, directly or indirectly. China's African policy had different results, just as it did in North Africa. In this region, many states have recognized and formed ties with China. Beijing had certain reasons to believe that it would gain important advantages in the continent against both the West and the Soviet Union. Nonetheless, the Soviet Union, being a great power, attracted more attention on the continent and Soviet prestige had a clear advantage over China. This superiority continued for a while after the 1960s, which was not only due to the vastness of its resources but also due to the presence of its industrialized allies. Moscow's superiority in terms of prestige was also a reason for the preference for African students. China was to remain in the shadow of the Soviet Union in the field of education as well (Scalapino 1964, 647-649).

Another obvious example of the division took place in the Sino-Indian War. The Indian-Soviet military partnership started before the Chinese-Indian border dispute when two airplanes from the USSR arrived in India in 1955. This support had a political meaning as well as a military one. Moscow, which aimed at balancing Beijing by strengthening its cooperation with Pakistan, also aimed at weakening China-Pakistan relations (Chari 1979, 232,242).

3. UNYIELDING GUARDIAN OF COMMUNISM CHINA

China has been a socialist republic. It was often compared to similar states as a struggling state within the developing world with a huge rural population and was often credited for its mixture of economic development and equity. The management of its left-wing citizens formed a characteristic ideological position, which made China a symbol for idealists who were in contradiction to the Chinese focus on

collaboration and equality in the Soviet Union's bureaucratic, superficial, industrialized civilization. Since most of the Chinese bureaucracy was expelled for placing the economy above politics, the strategy has been shifted to the community level and the economy improvised (Putterman 1994, 105).

Diffusion of labor into the hinterland industry led to starvation, between 1959 and 1961, costing around 30 million lives. Deng's reforms started in 1980, due to the incompetence of Mao's actions. Deng initially rejected the centralization of agriculture, returning farmland to farmer communities' private power. This has significantly enhanced production by facilitating effective and careful usage of soil. Secondly, Deng has promoted income development and created new economic regions in Shanghai and all along the southern coast where private entrepreneurship might develop. Thirdly, the population increase was directly affected by a single child policy that led to a massive reduction in the population, despite being temporary (Goldstone 1995, 40).

One of the most crucial turning points in the divergence of communist ideology was the policies of the Soviet rule after Stalin's death. The de-Stalinization of the regime in the USSR began with Khrushchev's speech denouncing Stalin and Stalinism. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) was the result of the collapse in Sino-Soviet relations that began in early 1956. The de-Stalinization of the CPSU led to a shift in its ideology from Stalin's western conflict to Khrushchev's convergence with Mao, who imitated Stalin's style of leadership and realistic implementation of Marxism-Leninism to establish Chinese-style socialism with the PRC (Lüthi 2008, 49-50).

Another main concern that directed CCP behavior towards the Soviet Union throughout 1990 and 1991 was the perception of the growing global domination of the United States. The second issue that aroused suspicion in China was the question of whether communism, which lost its influence in Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union, would lead that country to an alliance with the West. There was a contrast between the intention of the CCP to maintain the communist regime in the USSR and its willingness for Western support for Chinese financial development (Garver 1993, 19-20).

All of this was an indicator in a way that China was divided in terms of political and economic ideologies. While China was trying not to ignore the economic instruments of the West to compete with them, CCP was trying to maintain the communist ideology, which was completely dissimilar to the Western ideology.

In 1994, the Chinese economy was essentially a market

economy, in that the demand-supply nexus defined the costs of many products, and business owners rather than planners took most decisions. On the other hand, in several other contexts, China's economy appears to be "socialist." Many industrial workers get accommodation from their workplace, for which only marginal rentals are charged. Until quite recently, the government sector had secured employment, often even traditional positions such as free or highly funded healthcare. When costs on essential commodities are perceived as too high, the state comes forward (Putterman 1994, 108).

CCP relocated primarily its authority to economic success during the period of change in Communist China. In his "July First" talk in 2001, CCP Secretary-General Jiang Zemin announced a call to hire representatives from all social stratospheres, including private investors amid the tension between communist ideology and private ownership. The political transition in the party shows that entrepreneurs are incorporated into the base of the party. However, not the entire Chinese middle class is seeking to reform the existing one-party system drastically. This middle class secretly endorsed the governance in Beijing (Li 2006, 68, 81). Despite the economic reforms, the structure of domestic politics was still under the influence of ideology.

4. THE FUNERAL OF COMMUNISM IN RUSSIA AND THE CHINESE RESISTANCE

Russia experienced remarkable reforms during the 1990s. It shifted from a communist dictatorship to a democratizing multiparty system where officials are elected regularly. The central-planned economy turned into a capitalist market and private property order. Its military forces left Eastern Europe, enabling them to turn into newly established independent states. Boris Yeltsin was the first elected President of Russia in June 1991. In December, Yeltsin, the Ukrainian and Belarusian leaders accepted to dismantle the Soviet Union, leaving Russia alone, following a failed coup by communist groups in August. Yeltsin adopted fundamental economic reforms during his rule. Price liberalization took place in January 1992. Nearly 70% of the Russian economy was led by private ownership by mid-1994. Russia fixed the Ruble in 1995 in collaboration with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) (Shleifer and Treisman 2005, 151,153).

Although Russia was far from the so-called capitalist order and a democratic system in general, it was a fact that Russia was moving away from line with China's communist political ideology. Right at this point, even though it was not the cause of the economic failure of communism in the USSR, the inability of communism to ensure legitimacy in the eyes of the people encouraged the new Russian administration

for reforms not only economically but also politically.

However, the economic flaws of the Soviet model and the dysfunction of the Soviet image in the international community accelerated the collapse of communism in Russia. Anticipating this collapse, China started to move away from Soviet-type communism and began to follow a unique model. The transformation of communism in China was characterized as similar to Western economic structures and different from the other aspects (Arnason 2000, 83-85).

The same ideology that drew China and the Soviets together later pushed them apart. Chinese leaders did not forget about the Russian usurpation of Chinese lands during World War II, and they were aware of Stalin's intentions in this regard. This alienation was evident during Stalin and Mao's first meeting (Kissinger 2012, 162).

Kissinger (2012, 107-108) emphasizes that, from Mao's perspective, a communist state should not turn into a bureaucratic society. According to this understanding, power should be ideology rather than hierarchy. Similarly, the continuity of Mao's revolution was tied to ideology, tradition, and Chinese nationalism. Chinese revolutionary leader Deng Xiaoping, in his speech in 1977, implied that China could be better compared to rising Japan, and in this context, could take refuge in the safe havens of communism to establish a market economy (Kissinger 2012, 332).

On the other hand, Sandholtz & Taagepera (2005, 110) state that the transition to more democratic political administrations and market economies after communism did not eliminate corruption in post-communist societies. In this respect, while emphasizing the resistance of cultural orientations to changes, the impact of historical legacies on the social structure is more dominant than the political ideologies. This is another reason why China did not abandon communism: it enabled an order that blended with its cultural heritage.

As Burki (2017, 46-47) states China abandoned communism economically and switched to capitalism with a Chinese character. China achieved this through some prudent reforms and state-controlled private sector involvement in most areas. This was China's original interpretation of communism. It was a hybrid structure of politically communist and economically capitalist. These political and economic developments by the CCP and state tradition have directly affected China's future (Burki 2017, 52).

In Russia and China, privatization, and the transformation into "market economies" occurred under such a delicate and unstable structure of government, with uncertainty constantly raised by threats to current configurations of

control. However, the diverse fiscal plans of these two states were much more tailored to how they represent those who govern in the specific community and private needs than economic efficiency.

Communism was essentially an ideological cover for the motivation of a major power to deal with a Western industrial opponent. The obstacle was so overwhelming that it came to a strategic position to resolve underdevelopment, not socialist ideals which left their mark on the political and social characteristics of the Soviet society. Russia had to industrialize so quickly in a competitive international climate. Stalinism was nothing more than a tactic to combat aggression and oppression against instability (Brucan 1998, 202).

On the other hand, the coalition government, under the presidency of Deng since 1978, had, in theory, advocated market policies but never actively tried to remove socialism. Deng considered it primarily fundamental to choose the system for economic transformation, particularly to reinforce his strategic relationships and his political influence. His main objective was to improve CCP's power. In comparison to Russia, since 1978 Chinese leaders were not dedicated deliberately to dismantling socialism, which they perceive to be associated with the maintenance of a complete and unopposed political power (Kolko 1997, 23, 28-29).

In comparison, the reform in China has included incremental and yet much further changes after the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1990-1991. Russia on the other hand chose for a relatively quick transition, immediately turning over public goods to the private industry and rapidly adopting a free-market economy. The drastic economic shifts in Russia and China have contributed to the increase in major inequality. However, inequalities in Russia have grown much more quickly and more rapidly, and in China have been small and incremental. Trends of post-communism indicate that the increase in inequality is inevitable, and that policy, structures, and beliefs are significant in shaping this situation (Novokmet, Piketty, Yang, and Zucman 2018, 109, 113).

According to Trenin (2009, 75-76), the modernization of Russia required sociopolitical as well as technological and economic developments. In this context, it could get the support of its neighbors such as the European Union, Japan, and the United States. For this reason, Russia had to get rid of its former Soviet image and therefore be associated with communism. Underneath the new historical circumstances of the current situation, Communism maintained moral legitimacy. This understanding interpreted this

development as a story of advancement and supplied a politicization of moral principles that backed the continuation of the CCP's moral leadership by financially separating itself from communism in the classical sense (Dynon 2008 86, 109).

5. CONCLUSION

Modern China has a one-party ruling class and a unique type of market economy. In other words, the Chinese type of communism is a mixture of socialism and capitalism, far from communism in a classical sense. Therefore, China, which has a hybrid political and economic structure in a way, and the CCP, as the most obvious indicator of Chinese communism is still an active, functional political power. This status quo makes China politically still communist, but at the same time closer to capitalism economically.

Although ideological differences are analyzed in the literature, questioning the factors, that played a role in the divergence of China and Russia; there is not much study that specifically problematizes the reason for the continuation of communism in China. Even though this study does not bring anything from scratch to the literature, it approaches the current situation from a holistic perspective.

According to the inference, ideological divergence is the main reason behind the political separation of China and Russia, as a result of Russia's departure from communism with the dissolution of the Soviets and the emergence of China as the new communist leader in the world. However, this ideological division between the two was not apparent until Stalin's death. China did not hesitate to see Stalin as the leader of the communist world. However, it is difficult to say the same for Nikita Khrushchev who was his successor. On the contrary, his rule deepened the ideological separation between China and Russia. In addition, Sino-Indian War was the most vital event that defined the ideological gap between Beijing and Moscow. Russia's offer of arms to improve relations with India, rather than taking side near communist China, took bilateral relations to a completely new level.

Schwartz (1968, 39) draws attention to the uncertainty about the integration of Russian culture with the West and whether it can be a part of it. It was obvious that China, stating communism at the center would follow a different path. As the reason for this, Schwartz points to the superficial and marginal nature of China's relations with the world.

The political mindset of Chinese leaders was yet another factor behind the political distinction between Russia and China. As Chinese leaders developed their so-called unique

economic structure, they did not hesitate to attach significance to the Communist Party and the communist political structure in the country. The initial point of China's resistance to differences was domestic politics. This domestic political perspective and the innovative image of Mao Zedong cemented China's autonomous position within the socialist world. This was one of the ideological foundations that separated communism in China from that in Russia (Schwartz 1968, 88-89).

According to Kim (2015, 365), the altered political choices of Russia and China have been effective in their economic success. Although it is not clear what will be the superiority of China's economic gains over Russia by choosing an authoritarian path under the CCP; it would not be wrong to think that the influence of the CCP and communism is not sustainable in the short run unless a major political reform is made in China.

Persistent economic and political reform was a necessity in China just before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Deng Xiaoping managed to hinder conservative attempts to advance anti-reform measures in the last week of December 1990. Reformists seemed to consolidate their position (Zagoria 1991, 5). In the 21st century, the CCP does not seem to stop acting in this direction. There is an understanding that the Communist Party of China could still be connected as the key actor in modernizing and advancing the country.

To sum up, ideology served two purposes in China throughout the 20th century. Firstly, the development and accomplishment of modernity were highly connected with it. Second, conflict and division emerged in the areas of unity and stability. The biggest contrast in contemporary Chinese society in the 90s was that while the CCP's function was fundamentally and structurally changed, its powerful status was redefined and preserved. The non-state sector and civil society became increasingly vital under the management of a post-socialist solution (Brown 2012, 54, 56).

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