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Marxism and the Role of the State in the Soviet and Chinese Experience

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Abstract

This article reflects on the contrast between theoretical Marxism, especially its views on the state, and the actual developments in Russia and China, in which Marxist inspired revolutions created totalitarian states similar to Oriental despotism, and this became especially clear in China, where totalitarian arrangements fit well with native traditions. While Communist rule reinforced the country's totalitarian traditions, it hardly hampered the country's economy. Actually, the opposite happened: totalitarian China engaged in speedy progress and would most likely emerge as a global leader in the foreseeable future.

Keywords: *Marxism, totalitarian state, despotism, China, Russia*

1. Introduction

Marxism as the professed ruling ideology of China is ironical, given that China today is governed by an omnipresent and powerful party-state, while Marx approached the strong state as an attribute of the oppressive socio-political order which preceded the socialist regime. He actually ignored the role of the state in the future socialist society as an important, actually crucial institution for socio-economic development. In this downplaying of the role of the state, especially the strong state, Marx followed the centuries-long tradition of Western thought. With all his great insight into the future and many great predictions, he failed, in general, to understand not just the rise of the totalitarian state in socialist societies in the future, but even more so, its essential role for not just socialist societies' success but for their very survival. Still, experience shows that a strong, actually totalitarian, state is essential for socialist societies. It protects society from external threats, speeds up economic development, and is related to social mobility. It plays an especially important role in China, where the state was the only force which

could secure the very existence of Chinese civilization and its people, and increased China's global footprint.

This article reflects on the contrast between theoretical Marxism, especially its views on the state, and the actual developments in Russia and China, in which Marxist inspired revolutions created totalitarian states and enabled their transformations into rising global powers. Totalitarian state power in fact has always been instrumental for rapid economic development.

2. The Origin of Marx's Views of State

Marx was a child of his time and civilization/culture. Western civilization has a strong anti-statist streak, which increased after the French Revolution, during the so-called Romantic era. Most political thinkers and philosophers of this time had extolled the political liberties and looked at the strong state critically. The late Middle Ages had been marked by social decomposition and the rise of strong, absolutist states as an antidote to this process, but the dawn of European modernity had also been marked by the opposite process. It was the creation and continuous strengthening of what is usually called "civil society," self-controlled, self-policed urban communities. As their strength and cohesiveness grew, their members' views of the strong state changed. In the beginning of the early modern era, the king, the symbol of the strong state, was divine. In another narrative, the king had "two bodies" (Kantorowicz, 2016).

One represented the king as a person, and this "body" could be corrupted and weak. The other "body" was the embodiment of the state and its law. And this body was divine, for it maintained the order, in the holistic meaning of the word. Still, with the strengthening of self-policing and self-controlling abilities of "civil society," the image of the state changed dramatically. This had a direct implication on the image of the ruler and the strong state. The King lost his divine, eternal body, which epitomized the law and order in its holistic meaning. Consequently, the King, or the strong state in general, became useless or even harmful. Consequently, any external restraints or regulation of socio-economic life was seen as harmful, and the king, especially an absolutist king, was seen as a tyrant.

The entire Enlightenment, the dominant trend in the 18th century, has been marked by an anti-statist trend, and the liberation from "tyrants" was the battle cry of both the American and French Revolutions. It is true that the French Revolution was marked by Jacobin dictatorship and Napoleon. Still, for many European intellectuals, these events were just aberrations, and zigzags on the way to the final affirmation of political liberty and weak state. It was not accidental that in the context of this narrative, writers, poets and painters from the post-French Revolution era – usually known as Romantics – glorified "rebels," whatever rebels could be. At the same time, the state had

never emerged in this narrative as a positive force. This anti-state view had percolated in philosophy and political thought, and they influenced Marx, either indirectly or directly.

3. Marx's View of State

The Western intellectual traditions shaped Marx's view of state. In Marx's view, the state, while acquiring a certain level of independence from society, was still deeply connected with the society or, to be precise, with the ruling elite which controlled the "means of production." Thus, the major role of the state was to protect the elite, and employed violence towards this very goal. The ferocity of the capitalist state was due to the fact that its capitalists, a small minority, should rule over the majority – the workers. It was this isolation of the capitalist elite that predicated the repressive, controlling nature of the capitalist state in Western Europe. The story would be absolutely different in the case of a socialist revolution and workers' control over the "means of production." At that point a strong state would not be needed to deal with the minority, e.g. representatives of the defeated and "expropriated" capitalists. The state could be quite weak, and in the process of the development of the socialist society and its transition to communism, the state would "wither away."

Some observers believed that Marx assumed that true democracy could emerge only in the case of complete destruction of the state (Abensour, 2011). Not only would the state be useless as a repressive institution, but also in performing many other functions. Marx did not see much of a role for the state as promoter of economic development, or even organizers of economic activities. Everything, Marx implied, would be done at the grass-roots level, in a fully developed and self-controlled and self-organized civic society. The profound anti-statism of Marx's reasoning was thus squarely placed in the context of European tradition. Even less did Marx envisage the role of the socialist state as being important for national sovereignty in socialist societies. Nationalism and national sovereignty were seen by Marx exclusively as attributes of bourgeois society. In Marx's view, the proletariat revolution was to be a global phenomenon. Marx proclaimed that the "proletariat of all countries" shall "unite" for the common struggle and the "proletariat has no motherland." The state, especially the strong state, was absolutely useless for the proletariat.

4. Russian Marxists and Reassessment of Marx's Views on the State

Marxism became an important intellectual and political trend in Europe by the late 19th century. In Russia, the Marxist Party (Social-Democratic Party) also emerged, and Bolsheviks – the party's radical branch or, to be precise, a fully

independent party by 1912 – took power in 1917, and was able to survive despite all odds. It was the October (Bolshevik) Revolution of 1917, and more than 70 years of socialist regime provided the great impetus for development of the revolutionary movement globally, including China. As Xi Jinping said, "A hundred years ago, the salvos of the October Revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to China" (Mitchell, 2017).

Russian Marxist Social-Democrats fully embraced Marxism, with its anti-statist drive. In their minds, the strong state was clearly connected, not with socialist revolution and related socio-economic progress, but with reaction. Consequently, Vladimir Lenin, Bolshevik leader, believed that victory of the workers, the very beginning of the socialist transformation, would lead to a dramatic decline in the state's power. Lenin made his views clear in his work, *State and Revolution*, which he composed on the eve of the Bolshevik takeover (Lenin and Service, 1993).

At the same time, the Russian Revolution and Civil War were marked by a dramatic rise of the Soviet state. After the end of the Civil War, the power of the Soviet state increased even more and reached its crescendo in the 1930s. After several decades of its history, the Soviet regime, especially the 1920s and 1930s, started to be assessed by Western observers and historians who became attracted to the Soviet experience during the Cold War. Some of them were Cold War warriors, anti-Communist historians who saw only the problems and dark side of the Soviet historical experience. They deal with millions who were worked to death in the camps (Solzhenitsyn, 1974), died from famine (Conquest, 1987), or were consumed by terror (Conquest, 2007). In all of these horrors, the socialist totalitarian state was directly involved. Moreover, after Stalin's "revolution from above" in 1929, which eliminated the last traces of private property, the Soviet state became truly totalitarian, resembling Oriental despotism (Wittfogel, 1981).

While dealing with the problems and costs, those historians who dealt with repression and the control of the totalitarian state were blind to anything positive which the strong state had brought about. There were no discussions on speedy industrial development, elimination of illiteracy, or social mobility. The story was different with those who were usually called "revisionists," who approached the Soviet, and implicitly Chinese, experience differently. One should note here that "revisionists" had dominated academia in the 1960s and 1970s, and marginalized the more conservative historians. "Revisionists" admitted the great socio-economic progress in the USSR: the rapid industrial development, cultural and social uplifting of millions, social mobility and the great progress in science (Fitzpatrick, 1970b). They also implicitly praised the Soviet regime in its victory in what Soviet/Russians called the Great Patriotic War, the mortal struggle between the USSR and Nazi Germany. Still, the totalitarian state had disappeared from their narrative almost completely.

And needless to say, how this strong totalitarianism had emerged was not discussed at all. The authors of this work would have discussed neither the mass starvation, use of slave labour of Gulag inmates on a grand scale, nor even the spate of terror of the Great Purges. The works of John Archibald Getty could be a good example here. He presented the Great Terror as just the result of disconnected events, cleaning of bureaucratic machinery and as a force which Stalin could not actually control. Getty was also a well-known revisionist (Getty, 1987).

As a matter of fact, many of them discarded the very notion of the totalitarian state as an all-embracing Leviathan which controlled all aspects of societal life. They usually noted the aspects of societal and personal autonomy from the state as an indication that the state had no totalitarian propensities or simply failed to instill control and therefore the socialist state emerged as a peculiar democracy. The falseness of this approach could be seen, if one compared these socialist totalitarian regimes with their ancient prototype: Oriental despotism. One could assume that neither Egyptian pharaohs nor Chinese emperors could control any local bureaucrats or the average person. Even the present-day Chinese Communist totalitarian regime could not do this, despite the wide use of electronic surveillance. Still, the Orwellian "Big Brother" – both in the modern and ancient modifications – exercised full control over what could be called the "command heights" of society and, if needed, dealt with society as the leader wanted: either marshal flocks to build Great Walls or alternatively dig for gold in the tundra of Kolyma. And in all cases, the leader wasted lives of millions; needless to say, no autonomy for persons or groups existed in these cases.

And while conservative historians and political scientists saw in the totalitarian state only problems – and here, they paradoxically also followed the Marxist template – the liberal/radical historians and political scientists saw just the achievements and did not relate them to the totalitarian state, its coercive power, enslavement and, in many cases, terror on a large scale. The last one became either marginalized or caused by the masses' grass-roots desire to deal with a corrupt bureaucracy. Terror, as practically everything else, emerged not from above but from below. In the "revisionist" narrative, the changes in the USSR, including Stalin's era, were due not to direct intervention of totalitarian, all-powerful state, but because of changes in society. The "history from above" became "history from below," in which the state plainly responded to its people's wishes, or was carried out by impersonal and the irresistible current of *Weltgeist*.

Thus, while conservative intellectuals saw in the strong, totalitarian state only damnation, as was the case with Marx, the liberals/Leftist intellectuals did not see this state at all. Moreover, they ignored the fact that control over the "command hand" of economy led not to the state "withering away," and/

or flourishing of grass-roots democracy, albeit in idiosyncratic form, but to the rise of the totalitarian state, with absolute power. In the revisionist narrative, the states fall from the equations and disappear from the scene. Still, a closer look at the work of the totalitarian state in the USSR clearly shows that the country's achievements were clearly connected with the totalitarian state and implicitly with all of its monstrosities. One might note that these monstrosities were not a byproduct of the regime's achievements, but an essential prerequisite for these achievements. To what degree the achievements of the regime were related to its brutality, its "Orientalism" is not completely understood, either by more conservative historians or "revisionists," who modified their stance after the collapse of the USSR. Sheila Fitzpatrick, one of the "revisionist" doyennes, noted in the early 2000s that the USSR was "a prison or a conscript army," and at the same time a "soup kitchen," i.e., it had different and, in a way, contradictory features. These views were strongly criticized by the late Martin Malia, who before his death was a professor at the University of California, Berkeley. In his view, the sheer idiocy of these statements was not just the fault of Fitzpatrick, but of the entire body of "revisionist" scholarship (Malia, 2001). Still, even for "modified" "revisionists," the very notion that terroristic brutality and state-sponsored slavery was the road for the regime's success is not acceptable, possibly on a purely emotional and related cognitive level.

5. Totalitarian State and the Achievements of the Socialist Regime

"Revisionists" credited the USSR with rapid industrialization. Still, the speed of the industrial transformation – essential for the country's readiness to face the hostile West – would be impossible without the totalitarian state. It was the totalitarian state which used slave and semi-slave labour to build factories, mines and railroads, construct canals and buildings. One should look here for the template not in the presumed enthusiasm of shock workers, anxious to build socialism, as many American leftist, liberal historians claim (Kotkin, 1997), but in the template of the great pyramids and Great Wall builders.

It was the totalitarian state and centralized economy which made possible the concentration of the resources to transform the USSR/Russia into a first-class industrial and military power. It was the totalitarian state which allocated the crucial resources for scientific development which was essential not just for the end of illiteracy but to ensure the country's quick catching up with the West and finally, after WWII, actually surpassing the West in many ways. As a matter of fact, these technological and scientific breakthroughs indicated the fallacy of the common views popular in the West, that it was only Western capitalist democracies which, in this narrative, created the conditions without which technological and scientific progress could take place.

"Revisionists" often noted the social mobility in the USSR, where the workers and peasants could quickly be promoted and reach top positions in the state apparatus, industry and science. This upward mobility was, they implied, absolutely impossible in the modern West, where most of the poor could not change their condition. One might add here that this ignoring of the poor could be seen in the present American policy of so-called "affirmative action." The policy supposedly is aimed at helping the underprivileged. Still, the major thrust of this policy actually ignored them, plainly because it ignored social classes completely. The importance of class, i.e., support of the masses in their social mobility, and this was at least the thrust of Soviet power in the early years of the regime, was often totally ignored by American liberals. For them, the Soviet regime actually ignored class distinctions completely and dealt exclusively with minorities. And this was what made the regime "progressive" (Martin, 2001). The reason for this approach for American institutions of higher education reflected the needs of U.S. elite, despite political sloganeering. "Affirmative action," while allegedly helping the poor, actually reproduced multi-ethnic and multi-cultural elite with little chance for the truly downtrodden to engage in social mobility. Thus, middle-class and upper-class representatives of minorities had a much greater chance of being admitted to top universities than poor representatives of the majority. The Soviet state put emphasis on social position and used its power to elevate workers and peasants to high social positions. Many of them were also of minority origin.

This manifestation of social mobility had nothing to do with democracy as it is usually understood in the West. The roots of this mobility were mostly, albeit not exclusively, in the totalitarian power of socialist states. Stalin could elevate a humble member of lower classes to the top of the social/political hierarchy. This despotic "democratism" has had its other side. Absolute despots could easily elevate people, but with the same ease could send them to hard labour, or to their death. Neither this or that aspect of socialist totalitarian state had been predicted by Marx. The story, of course, was different with the leaders of the Soviet state. Indeed, while Marx saw no role for the state in this socio-economic and technological development, the Soviet leaders openly proclaimed the crucial role of the state in the transformation of Soviet society. While the totalitarian state played a crucial role in societal transformation, socio-economic and scientific progress, the totalitarian state became even more important for China, due to the country's tradition and specificalities. The totalitarian socialist state had fulfilled here several crucial roles, and many of them were interconnected:

1. It ensured the country's independence and assertive position in the world, without which economic and social development would have been impossible.

2. It channeled the nation's resources in the most important areas of economic and scientific development.
3. It ensured equitable redistribution of the most crucial resources, such as water.
4. It helped social mobility.
5. It ensured China's transformation into a global power.

In acting for the benefit of society, China's totalitarian state actively relies on the thousand-year-old traditions of Chinese civilization and what is often called "Oriental despotism," with its totalitarian underpinnings. Indeed, here, oriental despotism, blasted by Marx and Karl Wittfogel as well as generations of Western thinkers, provided China with a smooth transition to the totalitarian present, which was basic for the country's very existence and future success.

6. The Problem of Sovereignty and Strong State in the Chinese Context: Karl Wittfogel Equation

Chinese economic and related socio-political developments have been historically connected with the notion of what is called, in the context of Marxist and even non-Marxist thought as the "Asiatic mode of production" and related "Oriental despotism," the society in which the ruler has not just absolute power but also control over the "means of production" – land and ultimately the people themselves. He was actually the ultimate proprietor of the land and the people. The Asiatic mode of production and related Oriental despotism have attracted considerable attention from Western scholars (Krader, 1975; Bailey and Llobera, 1981; O'Leary, 1989; Dunn, 2012; Brook, 1989; Curtis, 2009; Singh, 1983; Sawer, 2013; Tichelman, 2013; Choudhary, 2016; Da Graca and Zinarelli, 2015). Discussions on the "Asiatic mode of production" and related Oriental despotism were also covered in various articles, including those which deal with Marx's view on the subject (Tökei, 1982, 1983).

While the study of Oriental despotism has a long history, the most important contribution to the subject – or at least the most controversial one – was made by Karl Wittfogel, German-American sinologist.

Wittfogel launched his political and intellectual career as a leftist. "Wittfogel's political career is still somewhat of a mystery" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 551). According to his biographer, "Wittfogel joined the Independent Social Democratic Party in 1918; the Independents sympathized with the Bolshevik Revolution, but did not espouse applying Bolshevik methods in Germany like the Spartacists" (551). Wittfogel was hardly parochial in his intellectual and political aspirations, and played an active role in Comintern (Communist International), the umbrella organization for

communist parties all over the world. Moscow was logically the centre and, as a specialist in China, Wittfogel became engaged in collaboration with Soviet sinologists.

"In the 1920s Wittfogel became one of the leading Comintern specialists on China and became associated with L. Madyar, S.M. Dubrovski, E. Varga and D. Riazanov. E. Varga was one of the first to draw certain theoretical conclusions on the basis of both Marx's recently published *New York Daily Tribune* articles on events in China (E. Varga: 'Les problèmes fondamentaux de la revolution chinoise,' *La correspondence internationale* No. 561, 16 June 1928)" (551). In totalitarian society, even the most abstract discussion immediately acquired political implications, and they were not positive, at least from the Kremlin's perspective. "The possibility that the Asiatic mode of production (hereafter AMP) had been dominant in recent Chinese history placed the anti-feudal nature of the Chinese bourgeoisie in doubt, and hence the Stalinist strategy of a bourgeois-proletarian national revolution in China" (551).

As a result of this, Wittfogel had become *persona non grata* among intellectuals in the USSR. "Whether by virtue of his association with E. Varga or through his own critique of Stalin's policy in China, Wittfogel's academic work was condemned by the Congresses of Tiflis (1930) and Leningrad (1931)" (551).

By the middle of the 1930s, Wittfogel underwent dramatic intellectual/political evolution. "The crucial period for locating Wittfogel's political about-face is from 1934, when he was released from a Nazi concentration camp and began his 'fieldwork' in China under the auspices of both the *Institute für Sozialforschung* and the Institute of Pacific Relations, until 1939, when he states that he officially broke with the Comintern after the signing of the German-Soviet pact" (551).

The very fact that Wittfogel became disenchanted with Stalinist USSR did not mean that he became an ardent anti-Communist. Actually, his intellectual evolution was different. By that time, Wittfogel most likely became a Trotskyist. Indeed, in Trotsky's view, Stalinism was not a "real" socialism but bureaucratic perversion. The "real" socialism was, in this narrative, related not with totalitarian state, but with grass-roots democracy; the very fact that Trotsky was hardly a proponent of democracy in his position as Red Army Commander-in-Chief does not matter much in this new context. Wittfogel apparently struggled in his attempt to deal with Chinese history in the context of his Trotskyist views; the crucial breakthrough took place in 1947.

"While his biographer, Ulmen, speaks of the progressive disenchantment of Wittfogel with the Soviet Union beginning around 1930-31, it is unclear what role, if any, Wittfogel continued to play in the Comintern China policy of the 1930s. Ulmen tells us that Wittfogel discarded five drafts of the sequel to Wirtschaft under Gesellschaft Chinas (1931) before beginning the final

draft in 1947 which was published a decade later as *Oriental Despotism*. The crucial turning point for Ulmen is 1947…" (551).

Wittfogel changed his view once again, not just because observation of the late Stalinist USSR, but also because of reading the Plekhanov-Lenin debate. The point here is that Georgii Plekhanov, the first Russian Marxist, believed that control over land in Russia was the very foundation of Oriental despotism, the framework of Russian polity for centuries. Nationalization of land after the socialist revolution would just reinforce this trend, regardless of political slogans. It was these ideas of Plekhanov's which became the catalyst for Wittfogel's fresh look at Soviet and later the Chinese experience. Indeed, "the reading of the Plekhanov-Lenin 1906 debates sparked off in Wittfogel 'the same combination of intellect and passion that had made him so compelling a revolutionary in the 1920s and 1930s'" (551).

From that point on, Wittfogel quickly moved to the Right and his views became quite handy in the political milieu in the USA, when the Cold War was launched. "Wittfogel's testimony before the McCarran Committee, particularly his attack on O. Lattimore, and his membership of the so-called Committee for Cultural Freedom, identified him with McCarthyism" (552). By that time, Wittfogel's views were marked by "anti-Soviet and anti-Chinese tracts" (552) and testified by his many works (Wittfogel, 1950: 445-462; 1953; 1955; 1964; 1958; 1960: 29-34). At the same time, he was unable to predict the China/Soviet split, even in the early 1960s. His belief that the socio-economic and political affinity between Red China and the USSR would predicate their unity shattered his reputation as the man who understood the interplay of communist state geopolitics. Indeed, his "reliability as a 'Communist-watcher' was considerably impaired when he predicted in 1963 'in the years ahead the global communist strategy will be Krushchev's strategy'" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 552; Wittfogel, 1962: 698).

While Wittfogel was the author of many works, he is mostly known for his *Oriental Despotism*. As in the case with many other works in social sciences and humanities, its impact on social science was mostly due to the political and related intellectual changes, both in the West and the USSR. In many ways it was related to the breaking of the old paradigm. One of the new trends was a fresh view of socialism, related to Nikita Krushchev's attack on Stalin and Stalinism. The new approach came from a new intellectual/political species – the anti-Soviet Left. And their views were often related to similar views of the Right, creating, in some cases, a peculiar intellectual alliance or symbiosis, even when both sides rejected the very notion of its existence. One of the major trends here was the final realization that state control over the "means of production" does not lead to the creation of a society without "exploiters." The ruling class in socialist societies could well exist without private property on the "means of production." Bureaucracy, in this reading,

was not just the agent of proprietors, as was the case, for example, in capitalist societies, but a ruling class in itself.

Milovan Djilas' *New Class* was an important contribution to this subject. An ardent Yugoslavian communist, Djilas became disenchanted with both the creed and its application to real political life. In his *New Class: Analysis of the Communist System*, Djilas argued that the socialist regime was hardly egalitarian and was ruled by the new privileged class: bureaucrats (Djilas, 1957). The publication of the book in 1957 had corresponded not just with Krushchev's intensifying forays against Stalin, but also with the publication of Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism*. In any case, the new trends in the USSR had also stimulated the new interpretation of Marxism, and clearly influenced Wittfogel.

"The publication of *Oriental Despotism* in 1957 coincided with the beginnings of the breakdown of Stalinist orthodoxy after the 20th Party Congress. E. Welskopf's *Die Produktionsverhältnisse in Alten Orient und der Griechisch-Romischen Antike*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin, 1957, was one of the first studies to emphasize the importance of Marx's *Grundrisse*, which had been republished in German in 1953. There is no doubt that the wider circulation of the *Grundrisse* gave impetus to the renewed discussion of the AMP among Marxists, but Wittfogel's work played no less a role" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 555).

Following the new intellectual trend and transformed Marxist lenses, Wittfogel looked at both pre-revolutionary and post-revolutionary China and the USSR and discovered that the socio-economic constructions were essentially the same, regardless of the difference of slogan. Party bureaucracy as a new class was essentially the same as Chinese imperial mandarins. He noted that "it was not necessarily the ownership of the major means of production, land and water, but their *control* which made the ruling bureaucracy of Oriental society a *class*" (545). The Oriental despots, similar to modern socialist dictators, lived by terror, and this was the major output of their rule. A little later, this vision of socialist regimes would be reinforced by scores of intellectuals. One of course should mention here Alexander Solzhenitsyn, whose monumental *Gulag Archipelago* would reinforce Wittfogel's conclusions in the future. (There is no information as to whether Wittfogel had any direct influence on Solzhenitsyn.)

While Wittfogel's findings were in tune with the new trends (e.g. represented by Djilas), they were still shocking for Western liberals and Leftist intellectuals in the late 1950s. "Wittfogel's possible new sociology of class has been swept aside by his political desire to demonstrate that the state in certain societies (Oriental and 'totalitarian') constitutes a class; a shocking notion of which only a reactionary could be capable in 1957 but far less problematic in the 1970s when the Soviet model of socialism is hardly the ideal of many of the world's communist parties" (546).

While Wittfogel's findings were attacked by the Left and Liberals for what they saw as an emphasis on terror and general misery of socialist societies – one might note that Solzhenitsyn would be attacked in the future for the very same reason – the others could not accept Wittfogel because of another consideration. Oriental despotism and related "Oriental mode of production" and the socialist regime were not just brutish but, in the context of this narrative, doomed to economic stagnation. In any case, they could not compete with the capitalist West. Stagnation is also related to the "Third World" and therefore was unacceptable in the context of "multiculturalism," which had become the ideological mantra for the Left since the late 1950s and early 1960s. For this very reason, some of them plainly rejected the very existence of the "Asiatic mode of production."

"Meanwhile, orthodox Marxists maintain that the theory of the AMP is 'politically harmful and methodologically incorrect,' since it 'is associated with the view that oriental society was stagnant and therefore that European capitalism played a messianic role' (Godes, 1981: 104). According to them, '[e] very attempt to give an affirmative answer to this question must lead to only one answer, to a recognition that the AMP is nothing other than feudalism' (Ibid., 103)" (Li Jun, 1995: 335).

Thus, laying Oriental despotism as the foundation of Chinese history and demarcating it from classical European antiquity – with the idea of personal rights, property, and democracy – transformed China – and, of course, not only China – into a peculiar pariah, in the context of broad historical narrative. This, predictably, led to a negative response. For the "multiculturalist" Left, the Chinese path was just an appropriate "alternative modernity" (Karl, 2005: 61). At the same time, for Chinese scientists, the Asian mode of production was at least partially rehabilitated as nationalistic protest against "historicist unilinearity," imposed by the West (p. 66), and which implied that the Asiatic mode of production, related Oriental despotism and, of course, the absence of even the seeds of "human rights," doomed China to stagnation and decay, both in the past and in the present. One might state that more centrist Western scholars have a more balanced view on Wittfogel (Starr, 2014: 37). At the same time, the fresh view, supported by an increasing body of scholarship, indicated quite the opposite: Oriental despotism and the related Asiatic mode of production was the framework for China's millennia of economic prosperity, at least in comparison with Europe.

7. Oriental Despotism and China's Economic Progress

The fresh look at the historical narrative indicated that the relationship between Oriental despotism and economic stagnation does not work. Even Wittfogel, with his predominantly negative view of Oriental despotism,

acknowledged that the transition to Oriental despotism helped the development of productive force. "This transition originates in the expansion and intensification of agriculture through irrigation and the development of handicraft and commercial activity" (Bailey and Llobera, 1979: 544). The increase of arable land was due to "expansion of government-coordinated drainage and irrigation work" (p. 544).

Thus, it was clear even from Wittfogel's narrative that the despotic state was essential for the development of agriculture. One could assume that China, like other states with the "Asiatic mode of production," had much more developed agriculture than in many parts of Europe, or at least was not inferior to it. Still, it was not agriculture, but other branches of the economy where China was not just on a par with Europe but actually surpassed it for centuries.

Historically, China was a quite developed society and the leader in many areas of science and technology. Printing, gunpowder, silk and porcelain are four of the most well-known inventions which emerged in China hundreds, if not thousands, of years before they emerged in Europe. These were hardly the only inventions in which China was ahead of the West. Joseph Needham, the seminal historian of Chinese science, proved this some time ago in many of his works. His views are supported by other scholars who noted that premodern China was indeed quite a developed society.

"China's premodern achievements in science and technology were even more remarkable" (Lin, 1995: 270). "It is not surprising that based on this 'advanced' technology, Chinese industry was highly developed. The total output of iron was estimated to have reached 150,000 tons in the late eleventh century. On a per capita basis, this was five to six times the European output" (p. 127). The high economic performance led to high standards of living. Indeed, its prosperity "astonished even that sophisticated Venetian, Marco Polo" (p. 270). Indeed, for centuries, China was not just a great economic force, but one of the richest powers by per capita income. Indeed, "on a per capita basis, China was the wealthiest part of the world from 1200 to the 1300s – aside from Italy" (Holodny, 2017).

It was not just economy. China was the first country to develop the means for modern commerce and war. Indeed, it was China which introduced paper money and "gunpowder into human life" (Andersen, 2017). Chinese cultural achievements were also evident and variations of Chinese written "language was adopted across much of Asia" (Andersen, 2017). "In short, China by the fourteenth century was probably the most cosmopolitan, technologically advanced and economically powerful civilization in the world" (Andersen, 2017).

In comparison to China, most of Europe, possibly to the end of the Renaissance, "was poorer and underdeveloped" (Lin, 1995: 270). The

Chinese economy slowed down somewhat by the 18th century. "Evidence documented in the monumental works of Joseph Needham and his collaborators shows that, except in the past 2 or 3 centuries, China had a considerable lead of the Western world in most of the major areas of science and technology" (p. 220).

Still, some Western scholars believed that the Chinese economy either surpassed the European economy or at least was on a par with it through the 19th century. This was, for example, the view of the late Albert Feuerwerker, the prominent specialist in Chinese studies from the University of Michigan. He noted that indeed, "late imperial China – from the tenth century to the nineteenth – experienced in world perspective a remarkable millennium of premodern economic growth" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 324). According to Daniel Chirot, "China remained the most advanced part of the world until the 16th century, and only fell behind Europe in the 19th" (Chirot, 2011: 64). And the economic growth was in many ways responsible for rapid rise in population (Feuerwerker, 2004: 321), despite the periodic cyclical decline due to famine and related calamities (Chu and Lee, 1994).

The economic growth and comparatively high level of economic well-being throughout most of the imperial era, all calamities and related mass starvation notwithstanding – one should remember here that mass starvation, pandemic diseases and similar calamities were attributes not just of China but Europe as well – contributed to a high level of literacy (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322).

Why did China's economy decline later, in absolute and even more so in relative terms? And this process accelerated since the beginning of the 19th century. There are, of course, many explanations. One of the most common explanation is that China's mandarins lost interest in technological improvements and discarded technological innovations from the West. The brightest Chinese had been engaged in preparation for tests, mostly based on Confucian classics, to enter the ruling bureaucracy; technology was forsaken and money-making was discouraged, at least officially, for merchants were placed at the bottom of the social structure, according to the Confucian template. It was this ideological and related societal structure which, according to Max Weber, was the major reason why China did not develop capitalism, and by the second half of the 19th century, by the time when Weber published his research on China, China started to experience a clear economic decline *vis-à-vis* Europe.

This of course played a considerable role. The entire bureaucratic system of the late Manchu China became ossified, but it was not the only reason, and possibly not the reason at all. Indeed, while some observers regarded the problems in Chinese culture in excessive focus on philosophical abstraction, other observers saw Chinese problems as absolutely opposite:

Chinese culture was too pragmatic. Dmitry Merezhkovsky, one of the leading Russian writers in the beginning of the last century, noted here, "But we have before us, a centuries-old culture founded on strict positivism in service to the principle of utility. The name of this truly grandiose culture is China, its essence is petrification, the defeat of the human spirit by a slow death" (Glebov, 2017: 53). Thus, cultural specificity and Mandarins' unwillingness to embrace technological innovation were not the only reasons for economic underperformance. Or, possibly, they were not the reasons at all. There were other reasons.

One of them, often ignored by observers, is the weakness of the Chinese state; it was much weaker than the Russian state. China was a victim of external pressure. Despite what seemed to be the absolute power of the emperor/empress dowager, China as a state was weak in dealing with foreign powers, and this had most negative implications for the Chinese economy and technological progress. While many Western observers ignored this aspect of China's problems, there are a few who acknowledged them. This was, for example, the case with Professor Stephen C. Thomas.

Thomas rejected the notion that China's socio-political and cultural framework were responsible for China's inability to catch up with the West in the 19th and early 20th centuries. He called this the "blame the victim" explanation (Thomas, 2006). Thomas rejected the notion that China's bureaucracy was so ossified that it was unable to understand the importance of technological innovation from the West (p. 13). As a matter of fact, "Chinese officials and entrepreneurs initiated Chinese-owned steam shipping, a modern coal mine, a steam railway, a telegraph company, and modern mechanized cotton mills. The Qing government also approved the setting up of a modern iron and steel mill and a Western-style bank" (p. 22). Here, the Qing government's involvement in the economy clearly relied on the millennia-long Chinese tradition, and it actually helped economic development rather than hindered it. Already-quoted Albert Feuerweker noted: "On balance, the actions of the state probably helped rather than hindered the long-term growth of population and total output" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322).

The state played a rather positive role in the past and could have well played the same positive role in the late imperial period. Indeed, "the Chinese experience of managing and participating in complex bureaucratic organizations may have left a positive legacy for the twentieth century" (Feuerwerker, 2004: 322; von Glahn, 2016).

Still, China was not able to achieve this economic and technological progress, because the Chinese state was weak. Indeed, in his view, an important prerequisite for economic progress was that "a country needs to have enough sovereignty to keep control of its economy and foreign trade…" (Thomas, 2006: 11). Still, the military defeats and China's subservient

position toward Western powers and Japan prevented China from engaging in technological and economic progress.

"At the same time, the global system with its military-backed Western colonization activities, forced on Qing China a series of 'unequal treaties' that deprived China of much of its sovereignty and funds to pay for foreign-technology based industrialization" (p. 4). There were several ways in which China's enemies took funds which China needed for economic and technological progress. First, "Qing China was forced to pay huge war indemnities in 1842, 1860, 1896 and 1900, that saddled the Chinese government of economy with immense unproductive expenses and after the huge 1896 indemnity that Japan imposed on China, the Chinese government suffered large deficits of about 18% of its central government income" (p. 6).

Secondly, "because of the existing unequal treaties prevented China from raising tariffs on foreign trade to pay off these deficits, the Chinese government beginning in 1895 had to seek huge foreign loans. Between 1895 and 1911, the Qing government paid out 476 million taels in principal and interest to foreign creditors for the foreign loans to pay the Japanese indemnity and the 1900 Boxer indemnity, which was more than twice as much as the total investment in all foreign, joint, and Chinese-owned modern manufacturing established in China between 1895 and 1913" (p. 6). Third, there were drains on resources because of opium sent to China from the West. It was so extensive that even members of the British Foreign Office compared those British merchants who dealt with opium in China with "robbers (Harrison, 1895; Allen, 1853)."

Fourth, it was the inability of Chinese businesses to engage in equitable business with the West. "Another cost of China's loss of sovereignty, though also one hard to quantify, was the unequal treaty stipulation that prevented China from holding foreign businesses legally accountable." 'Extraterritoriality' took away China's normal sovereign right to enforce Chinese laws against foreigners for theft, embezzlement, contract violation, and commercial fraud. Chinese businesses could be cheated by foreigners without legal recourse" (Thomas, 2006: 19). China was absolutely powerless in dealing with one of its major enemies – the UK. For example, "the Chinese government had to sue (mining engineer and later US president) Herbert Hoover and his employer the British Mining Company Bewick Moreing in a British court in London legal redress regarding Hoover's questionable takeover of the Chinese-owned Kaiping Coal Mines during the 1900 Boxer Rebellion. Although the Chinese government won the case against Bewick Moreing in British courts in 1907, the British Embassy back in Peking refused to enforce the judgment, saying that it would hurt British interests in China (fn). The British company kept control of the mine until 1949" (19). The very fact that weakness of the state and its semicolonial positions were the major

reason for the country's economic underperformance was not a uniquely Chinese phenomenon. The same could be said for another country of "Oriental despotism" – India. As an independent subcontinent, India "was responsible for 23% of global GDP. When the British departed in unseemly haste 200 years later, this percentage had dropped to just over 3% (Book reviews, 2018).

The weakness of the Chinese state had led to its final collapse in the beginning of the 20th century. The country lapsed into anarchy, was divided by warlords, and finally invaded by Japan. It was no surprise that the economy declined even more. All of this was ended by the 1949 revolution.

8. The Despotic State and its Implication in Post-revolutionary China

The totalitarian socialist state which emerged after 1949 was to deal with the lack of Chinese sovereignty. The revolution in this case was not only social but also national in the sense that it restored China's sovereignty as a state. It finally released China from unequal treaties and other similar matters which had drained China's resources. It unified China. And this created the essential prerequisite for economic growth.

The 1949 Revolution could be seen, like many other phenomena, from many different perspectives. One could well interpret the 1949 Revolution from Wittfogel's perspective as a "reactionary revolution" (Lee, 1982). The reason why the Chinese Revolution – and in the context of Wittfogel's theory, the Bolshevik Revolution was "reactionary" as well – is clear. The notion of revolution, at least in the modern, post-French Revolution meaning of the word, implied not just dramatic changes in socio-economic and political makeup of society, but also a political liberation. As a matter of fact, Hannah Arendt, the seminal Jewish German-American philosopher and political scientist, regarded political liberties as essential attributes of true revolution (Arendt, 2006).

The Chinese Revolution had led to an absolutely opposite result: total enslavement of the populace by a new edition of Oriental despotism. As in the case with the Bolshevik Revolution and Soviet regime, the Chinese experience has its own "revisionists" who argue that Mao's China was not totalitarian. In their view, the Cultural Revolution demonstrated not just the regime's weakness, but also implicit democratization, for purging the Party bureaucracy from below was a hallmark of the Cultural Revolution. Still, for other observers, the Cultural Revolution had nothing to do with shaking the foundations of the totalitarian state. It was plainly the way for Mao to purge the Party of those who could potentially create problems for him (San, 1977). From this perspective, the Cultural Revolution was not drastically different from Stalin's purges when, as some revisionists claimed, the masses hailed the tough treatment of corrupt bureaucrats. One might add here that Cultural

Revolution modes of dealing with the bureaucracy is not just a peculiar method of the socialist totalitarian state. The absolute rulers of the past often either appealed to the masses during the purges of the elite – here the rulers emerged as avengers of the masses – or/and actively used "assistance from below" to conduct the purges. Ivan the IV ("the Terrible"), whom Stalin liked in the same way that Mao appreciated the First Emperor of Qin, engaged in mass purges of the traditional aristocracy. Here, he also appealed to help from below. His henchmen, "*oprichniki*," were usually people of comparatively low social positions, upstarts and foreigners; all of them were outside the body of traditional Russian aristocracy. This "democratic" aspect of Ivan did not reduce his absolute power. Similar to the masses from the time of Stalin's purges and Mao's Cultural Revolution, they acted only because they received the order from a charismatic leader. If the masses got out of hand, as was the case with Mao's supporters by the end of the Cultural Revolution, the leader employed the army to restore order.

Thus, neither Mao nor Stalin were "democratic," at least as the term is understood in the West, and the Cultural Revolution, together with similar actions during Mao's long rule, led to the death and suffering of millions. Still, Mao was proclaimed to be a great leader in the post-Mao era. What is the reason for this? One could find what seems to be an easy answer. Mao's cult is maintained by the ruling Communist Party as the way to prove the regime with legitimacy. Still, it could not explain Mao's continuing popularity on a grass-roots level, manifested by the stream of visitors to Mao's mausoleum. "And each year, hordes of Chinese descend upon Mao Zedong's rural hometown, Shaoshan, to pay homage" (Campanella, 2018).

For some, Mao's era was the era of social justice and equality, and the state dealt mercilessly with corruption. Still, Mao's popularity is not just due to his image as social equalizer, avenger of the populace's grievances, and creator of a truly "democratic" society, in which simple, uneducated peasants could be elevated to high social positions; all of these characteristics of the regime became increasingly mythologized as time progressed. There are other aspects of Mao's personality and his regime which are pleasing to the populace regardless of all calamities which Mao brought to the Chinese, especially peasants. Mao was the ruler who finally ended the Civil War, the prolonged period of anarchy which engulfed the country after the collapse of the Manchu dynasty, 1911-1912 (Courtney, 2018). Indeed, even those observers who believed that China continued industrial development after the collapse of the Manchu dynasty still acknowledged that little was done after the Japanese full-fledged war against China, for the invasion had "the crippling effect on the Chinese economy" (Chang, 2017).

All of these calamities most likely killed as many people as the Great Leap Forward. More importantly, the preservations of these conditions implied

that these horrific losses of human life would continue indefinitely, and could be arrested only by the re-creation of a strong or actually totalitarian, distinctly Oriental Chinese state. The mind of the average Chinese, especially peasants, has here – as in the past – two mutually exclusive drives. On one hand, they resent the state which uses them as material for the state's projects and source for maintaining the bureaucratic elite. On the other hand, the same peasants realize that the same state is essential for their survival, for it is the despotic state which maintains basic order. Peasants both hate and fear the state embodied in the rulers' bureaucracy and, at the same time, worships the same state. State and the ruler, Mao in this case, has actually "two bodies," if one would remember the definition of Ernst Kantorowicz. In his view, the kings from this era had "two bodies" in the minds of the local populace. One of the king's bodies was mortal and potentially sinful. The other body, which symbolized the state and law, never died; it was also pure, and without any flaw. This template could well be applied to understand the populace's approach to Mao. Mao, the totalitarian socialist state which he embodied, has the real historical "body" which, among his attributes, has starvation and terror for millions. Mao's other "body" is related with the unity of the state which promotes national independence, economic growth, equitable distribution of resources and social mobility. The populace also understood that the end of the strong state would inevitably lead to chaos (Ellison, 2017).

The positive images are also related to a sense of state glory and prestige. A strong ruler could be glorified, plainly because of his power and terror in a peculiar Orwellian way and, in this context, those countries which did not enjoy absolute rulers are despised. Aleksei Malashenko, well-known Russian political scientist, noted that the Chinese despise Russia and believe that Russia is a decaying state (Malashenko, 2012). One might state that Western observers also saw many problems with Putin's Russia and they usually connected them with Putin's authoritarian rule. Still, one could assume that the Chinese elite's skeptical view of Russia might be related to quite the opposite assumption: Putin does not have as much power as Chinese leaders and this is the reason for Russia's decline.

As time progressed, it was this wholesome "body" which became remembered and enhanced the totalitarian template which ensured China's speedy growth. One might note here that totalitarianism's positive image is not just due to China's specificity, and could be found among similar societies. In post-Soviet Russia, Stalin enjoyed popularity among a considerable segment of the Russian population. This positive view usually marginalized or ignored terror and starvation, and emphasized Stalin as the man who brought order, purged the corrupt bureaucracy, won the war against Germany, and stimulated economic development. Thus, a considerable segment of the population internalized the importance of a strong totalitarian state and

saw it implicitly as a force which brought positive outcomes to the country. One, of course, can be sure: this internalization of the necessity of a strong government would survive only in the context of explicit/implicit fear. Without a coercive framework, the populace would immediately discover the "second," negative body of the state, which in this case would plainly fall apart as happened often throughout Chinese history. Yet chaos would once again drive the populace to crave strong government. Thus a totalitarian regime not only evolves from Chinese cultural context, reinforced by borrowing the Soviet experience, but is also a model which ensures the country's quick economic and geopolitical advance.

9. Economic Development of the Totalitarian State: China's Example

The strong socialist state in China had followed in many ways the Soviet template. "The Chinese government took control of most large economic enterprises and industries, as well as the financial sector, and began to channel investment into economic development" (Thomas, 2006: 24). Following the Soviet model, the Chinese state focused its resources on the key elements needed for economic progress: industry and infrastructure. Despite the tragedies caused by the Great Leap Forward (According to reliable sources, dozens of millions were starved to death.) (Dikötter, 2010; Manning and Wemheuer, 2011) and the Cultural Revolution (Dikötter, 2016), China's achievement was impressive, at least in comparison to similar countries. "China's economic growth rate was faster than that of India and of most other similarly poor countries, and the government's social and economic policies had vastly improved the education and health levels, and life expectancy of most Chinese (World Bank, unpublished, 1978)" (Thomas, 2006: 25; Alvarez-Klee, 2018). According to some reports, "LE has more than doubled, from 35 years before 1949, to 76.3 in 2015" (Chen et al. 2018).

This combination of tens of millions starved and rising life expectancy and improved medical services seems to be incomprehensible and illogical. Still, the same model could be found in other totalitarian societies when two polarities exist and, in a way, are interconnected. During the era of revolution and especially the Stalinist era, the cream of Russian intelligentsia was destroyed or, as was the case in the beginning of the Soviet era, emigrated. At the same time, the literacy and general education level had increased considerably all over the USSR by the end of Stalin's rule. Thus, as in China, the state engaged both in destructive and constructive work; both functions of the state were interwoven.

After 1978, the economic control was loosened and market forces started to play a bigger role in the economic development of the country. Still, the state continued to control the "command heights" of the economy. Wayne

M. Morrison, from the Congressional Research Service, noted that "despite China's three-decade history of widespread economic reforms, Chinese officials contend that China is a 'socialist-market economy.' This appears to indicate that the government accepts and allows the use of free market forces in a number of areas to help grow the economy, but the government still plays a major role in the country's economic development" (Morrison, 2018: 29). Elaborating on this point, Morrison emphasized the role of state-owned enterprises in the Chinese economy. He stated that "they continue to dominate a number of sectors (such as petroleum and mining, telecommunications, utilities, transportation, and various industrial sectors); are shielded from competition; are the main sectors encouraged to invest overseas; and dominate the listings on China's stock indexes. One study found that SOEs constituted 50% of the 500 largest manufacturing companies in China and 61% of the top 500 service sector enterprises. Not only are SOEs dominant players in China's economy, many are quite large by global standards. Fortune's 2016 list of the world's 500 largest companies includes 103 Chinese firms (compared to 29 listed firms in 2007). Of the 103 Chinese firms listed, Fortune identified 75 companies (73% of total) where the government owned 50% or more of the company. Together, these 75 firms in 2016 generated $7.2 trillion in revenues, had assets valued at $20.7 trillion, and employed 16.2 million workers. Of the 28 other Chinese firms on the Fortune 500 list, several appear to have financial links to the Chinese government" (p. 30).

The result of the combination of the state control over major "means of production" and elements of market economy was stupendous. From 1978 to 2012, China's economy rose 9.4% per annum. It could decline to 7 to 8% in the future, from 2012 to 2024 (Hirst, 2015). Still, even this growth is much higher than in any country in the West. The centralized planned economy and totalitarian state, without which the planned economy would be impossible, made it possible for the Chinese government to shift priorities. At present, the stress is increasingly not on quantitative, but the qualitative dimension of production. "The Chinese government has made innovation a top priority in its economic planning through a number of high-profile initiatives, such as 'Made in China 2025,' a plan announced in 2015 to upgrade and modernize China's manufacturing in 10 key sectors through extensive government assistance in order to make China a major global player in these sectors'" (Morrison, 2018: 29). The quoted author from the Congressional Research Service believed that China could reach these goals and would not be dependent on the US and other Western countries for modern technology. And this bothered the US government. "However, such measures have increasingly raised concerns that China intends to use industrial policies to decrease the country's reliance on foreign technology (including by locking out foreign firms in China) and eventually dominate foreign markets. U.S.

Trade Representative Robert Lighthizer has described the Made in China 2025 initiative as a 'very, very serious challenge, not just to us, but to Europe, Japan and the global trading system'" (p. 29).

Indeed, these plans look quite plausible, due to the profound changes in present-day China's culture. Indeed, in the past, with all of China's technological achievements, Chinese scholars from the pre-revolutionary era often disregarded technology as being inferior to the humanities, wrapped in Confucian cocoons. It deals with the eternal, whereas technology deals with fleeting terrestrial, and while some observers, like Merezhkovsky, believed in the pragmatism of the Chinese mind, the reality was the opposite: as in the case with similar societies, the mind of the elite was often focused on the abstract and only tangentially related to reality. This has changed. "Deng evinced a near-religious reverence for science and technology, a sentiment that is undimmed in Chinese culture today" (Andersen, 2017). Now "China has largely focused on the applied sciences. It built the world's fastest supercomputer, spent heavily on medical research, and planted a 'great green wall' of forests in its northwest as a last-ditch effort to halt the Gobi Desert's spread. Now China is bringing its immense resources to bear on the fundamental sciences. The country plans to build an atom smasher that will conjure hundreds of 'god particles' out of the ether, in the same time it took CERN's Large Hadron Collider to strain out a handful. It is also eyeing Mars. In the technopoetic idiom of the 21st century, nothing would symbolize China's rise like a high-definition shot of a Chinese astronaut setting foot on the red planet. Nothing except, perhaps, first contact" (Andersen, 2017). It has already built the biggest radiotelescope to find extraterrestrial reason. China also projects its technological proofs far and wide. "The country has already built rail lines in Africa, and it hopes to fire bullet trains into Europe and North America," through "a tunnel under the Bering Sea" (Andersen, 2017).

Centralized, planned economy and related totalitarian state also helped China to withstand the economic crisis of 2008 much better than the US (Morrison, 2018: 28). China was clearly affected by the 2008 crisis. "The Chinese government responded by implementing a $586 billion economic stimulus package (approved in November 2008), aimed largely at funding infrastructure and loosening monetary policies to increase bank lending. Such policies enabled China to effectively weather the effects of the sharp global fall in demand for Chinese products. From 2008 to 2010, China's real GDP growth averaged 9.7%" (p. 5).

Some observers noted that China already "overtook the United States as the world's largest economy in 2014" and "IMF predicted that by 2022, China's economy will be 46.6% larger than the U.S. economy on a PPP basis" (9). One should note that "in terms of trade, China has become much less reliant on exports than in the past" (p. 37). This transition is quite important

for diminishing China's dependence on foreign, especially American, markets. It would make Beijing less dependent on Washington's largesse, and reorient China to accomplish the Belt and Road Initiative, which will project China's influence far and wide in Eurasia. Here, the totalitarian state facilitates the development of the Chinese economy. At the same time, the strong economy reinforces the power of the state. Both the totalitarian state and centralized economy, with planning for generations to come, exists in dynamic synergy.

10. The Totalitarian State and Social Mobility

The tradition of totalitarian state, deeply rooted in Chinese history, is also related to high social mobility. In any case, it was much higher in China than in many countries in the West. "Most scholars agree that there was a high degree of social mobility in traditional China. The chief means of upward mobility were the civil service examinations, which were virtually open to all" (Wang, 1960). The socialist regime, especially after Deng's reforms, had rested on this tradition, whereas the strong state was deeply connected with social mobility.

The most important reason for this social mobility was the rapid economic progress, which, as was noted, would have been impossible without a totalitarian state. For several decades, China experienced rapid economic growth, and it "enabled China, on average, to double its GDP every eight years and helped raise an estimated 800 million people out of poverty" (Morrison, 2018: 28). With increasing income for a broad segment of the Chinese population comes more educational opportunities for the brightest members of Chinese society. And this striving for educational excellence was reinforced by thousand-year-long Chinese tradition, tightly interwoven with the tradition of the totalitarian state.

11. Providing the Distribution of Essential Resources: Solving the Water Problem

National defense, asserting national independence, rising of economic potential of the country and ultimately improving the living conditions of the citizens, and encouraging social mobility – all of these aspects of modern Chinese life could be found in Soviet Russia. For all of this, the totalitarian state was essential. Still, there is one aspect of Chinese life which is unique to China: the strong state's role in distribution of the most vital resource: water.

Equitable and efficient distribution of raw materials and resources is one of the essential hallmarks of the socialist, centralized economy, and the totalitarian state which props it up. In China, not only was there unequal distribution of water – China's south has much better water resources than

the north – but the country's staple crop, rice, demands a lot of water. Consequently, the distribution of water resources and maintenance of the irrigation systems is essential for Chinese, or actually any other "hydraulic" civilization, if one would use Wittfogel's definition. It was not surprising that maintenance of the irrigation systems and canal building was one of the hallmarks of Chinese civilization. It has been one of the essential *raisons d'être* for the very existence of Oriental despotism, the traditions of which were smoothly transmitted to socialist totalitarian arrangements of Red China. The plans for grand canal-building had been firmly embedded in the national psychology and was easily reactivated when the nation needed a new grand canal, similar to projects from China's past. The continuity between Oriental despotism of the past and present-day totalitarian regime is well manifested in the clear connection between the grand constructions in the distant past to those which had emerged recently. The grand projects of this type have been well lodged in the Chinese political culture. Conner Beff noted that "Infrastructure projects designed to solve big national problems and that achieve otherworldly scale are a cultural priority as old as China. The 2,500-year-old, 5,500-mile Great Wall of China was designed to safeguard the nation from northern invasion. More recently, China finished the Three Gorges Dam in 2008, which generates as much electricity as 25 big coal-fired plants, holds back 600 kilometers (375 miles) of the Yangtze River, and is so big that it makes the Hoover Dam – the iconic U.S. water engineering project of the 20th century – look like a bathtub toy" (Beff, 2011). It was not surprising that the idea of a new grand canal was resurrected easily when the need for such construction became clear.

The problems with the water supply became extremely acute in recent years and were due to the rapid industrial development and urbanization of the north. Naturally the idea of transferring of water from south to north had emerged in the minds of the Chinese elite soon after the victory of the 1949 Revolution. At that point, the South-North Water Transfer project was conceived.

The problem with the water supply in the north was noted by Mao Zedong soon after the Revolution. "The solution, as Mao Zedong first said in 1952, is to 'borrow a little water from the south.' Southern China is home to four-fifths of the country's water sources, mostly around the Yangtze River Basin. It took another 50 years after Mao's suggestion for China to start work on it. Finally, on December 10, [2014] the first phase of the South-to-North Water Diversion Project (SNWDP), or *nanshuibeidiao*, began operating" (Kuo, 2014). "On Friday, December 12, for the first time, Beijing residents who turned on their faucets to rinse vegetables or take showers may have been using water piped to the arid capital from distant Hubei province. The middle leg of China's ambitious and controversial South to North Water

Project – the world's largest water transfer project ever – has just opened" (Larson, 2014). The project of mammoth proportions truly rivaled the great constructions from China's past. "The project's eventual goal is to move 44.8 billion cubic meters of water across the country every year, more than there is in the River Thames. The infrastructure includes some of the longest canals in the world; pipelines that weave underneath riverbeds; a giant aqueduct; and pumping stations powerful enough to fill Olympic-sized pools in minutes. It is the world's largest water-transfer project, unprecedented both in the volume of water to be transferred and the distance to be traveled – a total of 4,350 kilometers (2,700 miles), about the distance between the two coasts of America. The U.S., Israel, and South Africa are home to long-distance water transfer systems, but none on this scale" (Kuo, 2014).

The project was extraordinary, not just by its magnitude but also sophistication. "The 1,400-kilometer waterway was constantly monitored by 100,000 sensors which watched over the water quality and other matters" (Staedter, 2018). The project could not be accomplished without a totalitarian state and planned economy. Only these socio-economic and political arrangements could lead to full success and the reason is clear. It is the totalitarian state which could allocate the huge resources for a project, the completion of which could take generations. Only a totalitarian state could reconcile regional interests and deal with local narrow parochialism. It is only the totalitarian state that could plan and see far into the future. All of this would be impossible in the USA's capitalist democracy. As a matter of fact, as the author of the quoted *The Atlantic* article acknowledges: "It's the kind of operation, observers of China say, that would never have a chance somewhere like America. The project requires the coordination of at least 15 provinces – several of them water-rich areas that will have to give up some of their own water. It involves building over hundreds of archeological sites and eventually through religious ones as well. Almost half a million people will have to be relocated. The cost is budgeted at some $60 billion and is likely to exceed that considerably. In the U.S., proposals for large-scale water transfers from the Great Lakes to the west or south of the country have been repeatedly put down. It would seem to be an example of the power of an autocratic central government to enact the kinds of far-reaching national transformations that, in a democracy, get bogged down" (Kuo, 2014).

12. Conclusion

While assessing Marxism, one should remember not just the historical framework of the doctrine's birth, but its cultural and civilizational setting. One could assume that Marx himself, fully aware of any man's, even geniuses' limitations, would assess his own doctrine from this angle if he were

alive today. The 18th and 19th century European thought had a strong anti-statist streak, and it strongly influenced Marx, who downplayed the role of the state in future socialist societies. The USSR and China demonstrate that the socialist society reinforces and strengthens the state which became important not just for socio-economic progress of the socialist societies, but for their very survival. The state was often quite brutish. Still, without this application of rough power, the state could hardly achieve much. Indeed, the socialist state achievements were intimately related to the Hobbesian power. At the same time, paradoxically enough, one could conclude that the very existence of the strong state provides the ultimate validation of Marxism. Indeed, according to Marx, the superiority of one socio-economic formation to another is measured by the level of the development of productive forces, the vitality of the economy. And here the dynamism of the Chinese economy, which has already surpassed the US economy, not only demonstrates the superiority of socialism, as a peculiar modernized version of Oriental despotism, over capitalism, but dialectically affirms the validity of the Chinese civilization, the cultural DNA of which makes it more predisposed to totalitarian government than other countries' civilizations. And the full integration of Marxism in the Chinese civilization's matrix actually reinforces this totalitarian streak, provides it with modern affirmation. And this might well make China the future leader of the global community.

Note

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