

A Comparative Study of the Localization Practices of Marxism in China and the Soviet Union

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Abstract

The lasting vitality of Marxism stems from its deep integration with the unique national conditions, historical culture and contemporary features of each country. As two major paradigms of Marxist nationalization in the socialist camp, China and the Soviet Union have taken remarkably different development paths and achieved completely different practical results. This paper focuses on the comparison of Marxist localization practices between China and the Soviet Union, systematically reviews their development courses, clearly defines their conceptual connotations and boundaries, and makes a multi-dimensional comparative analysis from the aspects of practical foundation, theoretical innovation, value orientation and driving mechanism. The study explores the deep-seated reasons for the success and failure of the two practices, summarizes China's successful experience and the historical lessons of the Soviet Union. This indicates that preserving the dynamism of Marxism's sinicization hinges on integrating Marxism's fundamental tenets with China's tangible practices and exceptional cultural heritage, focusing on the party and its citizens' leadership, and continuing to advance both theoretical and practical innovations. The objective of this study is to enhance the comparative analysis of Marxist nationalization methods, offer historical insights into the ongoing progress of Sinicization and the modernization of Marxism in contemporary times, and present Chinese perspectives and benchmarks for the worldwide evolution of Marxism in the 21st century.

Keywords

Localization of Marxism; Sinicization; Soviet Model; Comparative Study; Contemporary Value.

1. Introduction

Since its birth, the strong vitality of Marxism has been rooted in its close integration with the specific national conditions of various countries. Marx emphasized that the practical application of a theory within a nation is invariably contingent on its alignment with the nation's specific requirements[1]. In the socialist practice of the 20th century, China and the Soviet Union respectively carried out large-scale and far-reaching explorations on Marxist localization. Originating from an identical conceptual basis, these two methodologies diverged in their conclusions: The evolution of Marxism into a Sinicized form in China has been vibrant throughout the last hundred years, propelling the country to achieve significant progress from independence, wealth accumulation, to strength. In contrast, the Soviet Union's Marxist localization, namely the Soviet Model, despite its brilliant early achievements, finally became rigid and collapsed due to the separation of theory and practice[2].

At present, academic circles at home and abroad have achieved fruitful research results on the Marxist practices of China and the Soviet Union. Scholars increasingly emphasize the dynamic adaptation of ideology to local conditions, highlighting how China's pragmatic reforms

contrasted with the Soviet Union's doctrinaire approach. Comparative studies now explore institutional flexibility, policy experimentation, and the role of leadership in sustaining socialist development. Such discoveries enhance our grasp of history and also contribute to modern discussions about governance, economic advancement, and the interplay of ideology and real-world governance across various sociopolitical scenarios. Domestic research has methodically deciphered the historical backdrop, theoretical successes, and actionable trajectories of Marxism's Sinicization, alongside thorough examinations of the Soviet Model's ascent and decline[3]. International studies provide diverse perspectives, but some are affected by ideological bias and lack an objective and neutral systematic comparative framework[4]. However, most existing studies take the two practices as independent research objects, lacking special and systematic comparative research on their conceptual connotation, evolution logic and core essence. The analysis of the deep-seated reasons for their success or failure is insufficient, and there are even fewer studies combining this comparison with the global development of Marxism in the 21st century.

Therefore, this study tries to make up for this research deficiency. By building a multi-dimensional comparative framework including concept definition, development track, core characteristics, gain and loss analysis and development reference, this paper makes a comprehensive and in-depth comparative analysis of Marxist localization practices in China and the Soviet Union. The study holds significant theoretical value in enhancing the comparative analysis of Marxist nationalization methods and offers extensive practical benefits: it serves as a historical guide for the ongoing advancement of Sinicization and Marxism's modernization in contemporary times, and adds Chinese insights to other nations investigating development trajectories tailored to their unique national circumstances.

2. Online Administration of Student Evaluations

2.1. Conceptual Connotations and Boundary Clarification

The term "Marxist localization" refers to the method of amalgamating Marxism's fundamental tenets with a nation's unique national circumstances, its historical and cultural heritages, and present-day traits, thereby creating a theoretical framework and actionable trajectory of Marxism that aligns with the national ethos and traits of the era[5]. The essence of China's Marxist adaptation lies in "merging Marxism's fundamental tenets with China's unique situation and its distinguished traditional culture," achieving the nationalization, modernization, and widespread adoption of Marxism, marked by its practicality, inclusivity, innovation, and focus on the people[6]. Conversely, the Soviet Union's adaptation of Marxism merged its core tenets with Russia's initial national circumstances, delved into socialist development in economically and culturally underdeveloped nations, and established the centralized "Soviet Model". In the later stage, it gradually deviated from the core essence of localization, fell into dogmatism, formalism and ideological rigidity, and finally lost the vitality of theory and practice[7]. The essential difference between the two is that the former keeps innovating through "integration", while the latter becomes rigid through "solidification".

2.2. Background of Emergence and Historical Inevitability

The emergence of Marxist localization practices in China and the Soviet Union was rooted in the specific historical background of the 20th century. As the weakest link in the imperialist chain, Russia had acute social contradictions, a growing working class and Lenin's in-depth understanding of the characteristics of the imperialist era, which made it possible for Marxism to realize localization and revolutionary victory in Russia first[8]. Conversely, China existed in a society that was both semi-colonial and semi-feudal, enduring "national disgrace, the struggles of its people, and a downturn in culture". Many individuals with high aspirations

endeavored to find truth to protect the nation and its citizens, yet were unsuccessful. Influenced by the October Revolution, China ultimately embraced Marxism. However, China's unique national conditions—huge rural population, underdeveloped capitalism and deep-rooted feudal tradition—determined that Marxism must undergo a more profound and creative localization process[9]. Therefore, the emergence of Marxist localization practices in China and the Soviet Union is not only an inevitable extension of the logical development of Marxist theory, but also a necessary choice driven by historical development and practical needs of the two countries.

3. Comparison of Development Trajectories and Stage Characteristics

3.1. Historical Evolution of China's Practice of Marxist Localization

China's Marxist localization practice has gone through four main stages. In the era of the New Democratic Revolution, under Mao Zedong's leadership, the Communist Party of China amalgamated Marxism's core tenets with the unique context of the Chinese revolution. They innovatively proposed a revolutionary strategy of "surrounding urban centers from rural regions and securing state authority through military means," leading to the creation of Mao Zedong Thought and marking Marxism's initial significant shift towards Sinicization[10]. In the era of the socialist revolution and its construction, the Party spearheaded the populace's full socialist overhaul, embarking on an initial journey towards socialist building, marked by both theoretical advancements and challenging experiences. During the new period of reform and opening up and socialist modernization, the Communist Party of China, with Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao as main representatives, integrated the basic principles of Marxism with the specific reality of China's reform and opening up, formed the theoretical system of socialism with Chinese characteristics, and initiated and developed the path of socialism with Chinese characteristics[10]. In the new era of socialism with Chinese characteristics, the Communist Party of China, with Xi Jinping as the main representative, integrated the basic principles of Marxism with the specific reality of China in the new era and China's excellent traditional culture, formed Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, and promoted historic achievements and changes in the cause of the Party and the country[11].

3.2. Historical Evolution of the Soviet Union's Practice of Marxist Localization

The Soviet Union's Marxist localization practice also went through several key stages. During Lenin's period, Lenin integrated Marxism with Russian reality, put forward the "New Economic Policy", explored the transition path to socialism for countries with relatively backward economy and culture, and showed high courage in theoretical innovation[12]. During Stalin's period, a highly centralized planned economic system and political system, namely the "Soviet Model", was formed. While achieving rapid industrialization, it also systematized and dogmatically interpreted Marxist theory, laying a hidden danger for rigidity[13]. From the post-war period to the disintegration, it experienced Khrushchev's "de-Stalinization" reform, Brezhnev's "stagnation" period and Gorbachev's "New Thinking" reform.

Khrushchev's reforms aimed to break the extreme centralization and personal worship formed in the Stalin era, covering political rectification and economic institutional adjustments. Politically, he launched the campaign of de-Stalinization at the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, rehabilitated a large number of wrongfully convicted cadres and civilians, and relaxed the strict control over ideological expression within a certain range, which brought a temporary relaxation to Soviet political life. Economically, he attempted to reform the department-based industrial management system established under Stalin. In 1957, the Soviet Union issued a decree to dismantle central industrial ministries and set up regional

economic councils to delegate economic management power to local governments, and meanwhile adjusted the agricultural management mode by relaxing restrictions on private subsidiary plots of farmers. Nevertheless, constrained by the inherent logic of the highly centralized system and the resistance of conservative factions within the party and bureaucracy, Khrushchev's reforms had profound internal contradictions. His reforms lacked systematic top-level design, and many policies were arbitrary and impetuous. For instance, the unrealistic slogan of overtaking the United States in per capita output of meat, milk and butter disrupted the normal order of agricultural production. More importantly, Khrushchev only revised the specific operation of the Soviet Model but did not touch the core drawbacks of the highly centralized system. After his removal from office, most reform measures were gradually backtracked, so the reforms failed to fundamentally revitalize the Soviet socialist cause, presenting obvious superficiality and limitations.[14]

Different from Khrushchev's partial adjustments, Gorbachev's "New Thinking" reform completely deviated from the basic direction of Marxism and socialism. In the early stage, he focused on economic reform and put forward the "Acceleration Strategy", which blindly prioritized the development of heavy industry without optimizing the distorted industrial structure of long-term emphasis on heavy industry over light industry and agriculture. As a result, the shortage of daily consumer goods became increasingly serious, and the economic situation continued to deteriorate. When economic reform fell into a dead end, Gorbachev abruptly shifted the focus to political reform, advocating the theories of "openness" and "total democratization". In 1990, the Soviet Union amended its constitution and deleted the clause that stipulated the leading position of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, fundamentally shaking the ideological and political foundation of the Soviet socialist system. Many Soviet scholars at that time pointed out that Gorbachev's reforms confused the boundaries between socialist democracy and bourgeois democracy. The disorderly liberalization of public discourse and political participation triggered the rampant spread of various anti-socialist and separatist ideologies, and the original national governance order collapsed rapidly. This series of radical and direction-wandering reforms not only failed to solve the accumulated problems of the Soviet Model, but also intensified multiple crises such as politics, economy and ethnicity, ultimately pushing the Soviet Union toward disintegration under the dual collapse of theory and practice[15][16].

4. Comparative Analysis of Stage Characteristics

Comparing the development tracks of the two, we can see obvious differences. China's development track presents the unity of continuity and innovation. Every phase executes both theoretical advancements and practical breakthroughs, building on past successes to address contemporary challenges, thereby creating a progressively ascending trajectory. In contrast, the Soviet Union's development track is characterized by discontinuity and rigidity. From the flexible exploration in Lenin's period, to the solidification of the model under Stalin, and then to the disordered reforms in the later period, it eventually led to a serious separation between theory and practice. China's success lies in "upholding fundamentals while blazing new trails", while the Soviet Union's failure lies in "sticking to old ways and rigidity".

5. Multi-dimensional Comparison of Core Characteristics

5.1. Practical Foundation and Core Orientation

China's Marxist localization strategy has always been anchored in the country's distinct situation, targeting its real-world issues. From the revolution's "rural-centered theory" to the reform and opening of the "socialist market economy," each approach was grounded in a deep understanding of the key paradoxes within Chinese society. Conversely, the Soviet Union's

approach, particularly post the Stalin Model's inception, slowly diverged from the true evolution of Soviet society, substituting detailed national condition analysis with vague "socialist principles", leading to policies that were detached from actuality and the general public[17].

5.2. Theoretical Innovation and Response to the Times

China has shown strong vitality in theoretical innovation. Ranging from Mao Zedong Thought to Deng Xiaoping Theory, and subsequently to Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era, each theoretical advancement represents a deep-seated answer to contemporary queries. In contrast, theoretical innovation in the Soviet Union stagnated after Stalin, failing to respond to contemporary challenges such as the technological revolution and globalization, and eventually leading to rigidity and loss of voice in the ideological field[18].

5.3. Value Orientation and Driving Mechanism

China has consistently embraced a people-focused value system, prioritizing the populace's desire for an improved life in their struggle, thereby garnering widespread public backing. The Party's motivation stems from its robust leadership, a theoretical awareness, and the amalgamation of public creative endeavors. Conversely, during the latter part of the Soviet Union's era, bureaucratic dominance led to the disregard of public interests and demands, resulting in the loss of the ruling party's substantial support base. Statistical data shows that during the Brezhnev period, the privileged bureaucratic class in the Soviet Union occupied a large amount of social resources, and the gap between the income of leading cadres and ordinary workers continued to widen. By the 1980s, the public's satisfaction with the regime dropped sharply, and mass protests caused by the shortage of daily necessities occurred from time to time.[19] Meanwhile, its driving mechanism gradually changed from internal ideal and belief drive to external administrative orders and coercion. The national economic operation and social governance were completely dependent on top-down administrative decrees, and the initiative of enterprises and the public was severely constrained. Soviet economist Zaslavskaya pointed out in her research that the rigid administrative command system stifled social creativity, and the power of institutional operation was continuously exhausted, which became an important reason for the loss of development momentum in the late Soviet Union[20][21]. As a core economist who experienced the whole process of Soviet reform, Soviet scholar Abalkin also reflected that the long-term rigid institutional operation mode divorced from social reality fundamentally weakened the endogenous driving force of socialist construction, which was a common flaw in the localization practice of Marxism in the Soviet Union. [22]

6. Analysis of Gains and Losses and Contemporary Lessons

6.1. China's Successful Experiences

The triumph of China can be encapsulated in its commitment to "two integrations," meaning the fusion of fundamental Marxism principles with the unique aspects of China and its rich traditional culture. The core trajectory for the Sinicization and advancement of Marxism lies in maintaining the Party's leadership for proper Marxist localization, focusing on a people-centric approach to keep in touch with the populace, and continuously advancing theoretical advancements to further the Sinicization and modernization of Marxism[23].

6.2. Historical Lessons of the Soviet Union

The Soviet Union's teachings are profound: being divorced from reality and falling into dogmatism and formalism; being separated from the masses and losing the mass base of governance; theoretical rigidity and inability to respond to the challenges of the times; and

institutional solidification, lack of courage and ability for self-renewal[24]. These lessons warn us that Marxist localization is a dynamic and endless process. Any practice that regards it as an immutable "ultimate truth" is doomed to failure.

6.3. Analysis of Underlying Causes

This paper holds that the deep-seated reasons for the differences in practice between China and the Soviet Union lie in their different historical traditions, cultural foundations and actual national conditions. China boasts a continuous 5,000-year history of civilization, which has formed a cultural tradition that advocates integration, inclusiveness and reform and innovation over a long period of time, laying a solid cultural foundation for merging Marxism with the rich traditional Chinese culture. Russia has a unique historical and cultural context formed by the integration of multiple ethnic groups and Eastern and Western cultures. Its cultural tradition also contains the genes of exploration and transformation. The differences in the effects of Marxist localization between the two countries are mainly derived from the different choices of development paths, institutional operation modes and response strategies to the international environment in the process of historical practice, rather than the inherent defects of cultural genes.[25] Furthermore, China has consistently maintained a peaceful independent foreign policy, contrasting with the Soviet Union's prolonged involvement in the Cold War. Its development model was deeply affected by the pressure of the international environment, which aggravated its closure and rigidity[26].

7. Conclusion

This research, by methodically contrasting Marxist localization methods in China with those in the Soviet Union, uncovers the global principle governing Marxism's nationalized evolution: Marxism's dynamism stems from its profound assimilation with the unique realities, historical practices, and modern traits of each nation. China's success lies in consistently adhering to the "two integrations", innovating while upholding fundamentals, and developing through innovation. The failure of the Soviet Union lies in being divorced from reality and the masses, and declining in rigidity. The multi-dimensional comparative framework constructed in this study provides new perspectives and references for relevant research. The practical significance of this lies in its role as a historical guide for the ongoing advancement of Sinicization and the modernization of Marxism in modern times, and in providing insights from China for the worldwide evolution of Marxism in the 21st century. Future research can be further extended to the practices of other socialist countries to build a more comprehensive theoretical system for the nationalized development of Marxism.

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