

Jie Li
Hong Kong

The Use of Lenin in Chinese Sovietology after 1989

Abstract

In 1989, China faced global criticism due to the brutal military crackdown ordered by its ruling Communist party over civilians during the pro-democratic Tiananmen demonstrations in the summer of that year. The article examines how Chinese Soviet-watchers manipulated the symbol of Vladimir Lenin and his post-1917 foreign policy, to support Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's post-Tiananmen agenda of buying time and keeping a low profile; while finding a way out of isolation and re-connecting with the world. After the Tiananmen Incident in 1989, interpretation of Lenin's writings by Chinese scholars generally supported Deng's reformist policies and legitimized his position at home against the comeback of the leftist offensive. Chinese scholarship put Deng and Lenin on the same level and stated that Deng had long followed Lenin's principle of building socialism. Moreover, Lenin's foreign policy and his rule during the early Soviet Union were selected as they had meshed well with the stance and interest of China after Tiananmen, since both regimes were bound by the common aspirations of rising to be global powers amid international hostility. Chinese scholars praised Lenin's agenda that embraced reforms and learning from the West, while persisting with communist dictatorship, as the key to saving China from the setback of Tiananmen and to keeping socialism vital in the future.

Introduction

The breakup of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in 1991 has had a profound impact on the People's Republic of China (PRC). The Soviet dissolution has had a variety of significant repercussions on Chinese politics, foreign policy, and other aspects. However, some myths about post-1991 Chinese research on the Soviet Union have been circulated and perpetuated by a body of secondary literature written by Western scholars. Some issues have been unclear or misunderstood in previous studies, and one of these inaccuracies has to do with the Chinese perceptions of the role of the last Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev.

A number of the secondary sources written by Western scholars seem to have exaggerated the impact of Gorbachev on China.¹ Previous scholarship indicates that most Chinese

¹ Gilbert Rozman: China's Concurrent Debate about the Gorbachev Era. In: Thomas Bernstein, Huayu Li (eds.): China Learns from the Soviet Union, 1949–Present. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books, 2010, pp. 464–470; Christopher Marsh: Unparalleled Reforms: China's Rise, Russia's Fall, and the Interdependence of Transition. Oxford: Lexington Books, 2005, p. 111; David Shambaugh: China's Communist Party: Atrophy and Adaptation. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2008, pp. 48–56; Jeanne Wilson: The Impact of the Demise of State Socialism on China. In: David Lane (ed.): The Transformation of State Socialism: System Change, Capitalism or Something Else?. New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, p. 272.

Soviet-watchers after 1991 considered Gorbachev and his liberalisation to be the fundamental catalysts in spelling the collapse of the Soviet Union. The literature seems to agree that Chinese Soviet-watchers were univocal in assessing Gorbachev's individual actions and failings, and that they overstated the implications of Gorbachev and his liberal programs for China, both in the 1980s and 1990s.²

In fact, apart from Gorbachev, Chinese debates on the Soviet Union were focusing on different Soviet leaders in and after 1991, particularly on the first Soviet leader Vladimir Lenin, who featured prominently in Chinese writings and claimed equal importance to Gorbachev. This article will present another issue that has been rarely mentioned by the aforementioned existing scholarship on post-1991 Chinese research on the USSR and examine the use of Lenin by Chinese scholars in the early 1990s.

Another problem is the assumption of most secondary literature mentioned above that Chinese Sovietology has taken on a mere "lesson-drawing" approach since 1991,³ designed and authorized by the PRC regime. Within this perspective, previous literature has often selected and analysed a full range of Chinese articles on Soviet studies published in and after 1991. The major concerns of those chosen papers mostly involve the causes of the Soviet demise, and how China might avoid making the same errors as did the USSR. From these Chinese articles, one gets the sense that since 1991, the "lesson-drawing" approach has become the sole avenue for Chinese research on the former USSR. Many of the quoted Chinese publications focus on discovering the inherent problems of Soviet socialism and the mistakes of Gorbachev's reforms.

Contrary to the descriptions in the secondary literature, it is incorrect to say that Chinese Sovietology after 1991 was only concentrating on the dark sides of the Soviet Union, studying its negative lessons for China's use in preserving its own communist regime. After the 1989 Tiananmen Incident, China became the target of global outrage, due to the brutal military crackdown over civilians ordered by its ruling *Chinese Communist Party (CCP)* during the pro-democratic demonstrations in the summer of 1989. After Tiananmen, Chinese scholars manipulated the symbol of Lenin and his post-1917 foreign policy, in an attempt to support the Chinese leader Deng Xiaoping's post-Tiananmen agenda of buying time and keeping a low profile – all while finding a way out of international isolation and re-connecting with the world. This article demonstrates that Chinese scholars had drawn parallels between the early Soviet Union and China after Tiananmen, when both regimes were facing international sanctions. Those scholars argued that China might learn from those of Lenin's teachings that encouraged engagement in formal relations with the West, while concentrating on economic development and maintaining a proletarian dictatorship.

² For a survey on Chinese perception of Gorbachev before and after the Soviet collapse, see Jie Li: Gorbachev's Glasnost and the Debate on Chinese Socialism among Chinese Sovietologists, 1985–1999. In: *Journal of the British Association for Chinese Studies* Vol. 6, No. 4 (December 2016), pp. 35–65.

³ The term "lesson-drawing" is produced by Marsh, see *Unparalleled Reforms*, p. 107.

Methodology and Sources

With respect to primary sources, it should be mentioned here that this research is based primarily on the “national core journals” (*Guojiaji hexin qikan*) published in the PRC, and mainly on the following four categories of journals:

The first are those journals focusing on research in the humanities and social sciences in general (*Shehui kexue yanjiu* or *Social Science Research*, *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi* or *World Economics and Politics*). Second are those journals dealing with problems of socialism or communism in the world (*Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi wenti* or *Problems of Contemporary World Socialism*, *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu* or *Socialism Studies*). The third group forms the core of this study; they concentrate on questions and issues relating to the former Soviet Union (later the Russian Federation and other Commonwealth Independent States after 1991) (*Sulian dongou wenti* or *Matters of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, *Eluosi yanjiu* or *Russian Studies*). Lastly, the research scope also included relevant articles in various university journals (*Zhongguo shehui kexueyuan yanjiu shengyuan xuebao* or *Journal of the Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences*, *Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao xuebao* or *Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP*).

All the journals selected for this research accept submissions from all over China.⁴ Most (but not all) of the contributors are academics, and the journals maintain acceptable quality standards and have a good reputation in the Chinese academic world. Some of them, such as *Sulian dongou wenti* (*Matters of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*) and *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu* (*Socialism Studies*), are the very best PRC journals in their fields.

In order to clear up previous misunderstandings about Chinese research on the Soviet Union, the researcher has chosen a different approach to re-examine the field. First, the article will focus on the publications in the bimonthly official journal of *Sulian dongou wenti* (*Matters of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe*, hereafter, *MSUEE*) as the primary source for analysis. The journal is published by the *Institute of Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies* (*Eluosi dongou zhongya yanjiusuo*, hereafter, *IREECAS*), which is the largest powerhouse of research on the former Soviet Union in the PRC. The institute is affiliated with the *Chinese Academy of Social Sciences* (CASS) – China’s most prominent institution specialising in the humanities and social sciences and under the control of the *State Council* and Party supervision. The *IREECAS* journal not only publishes articles written by the *IREECAS*’ employed scholars, but also accepts submissions by other scholars across China. It can thus be used as a medium that reflects the historical development of Soviet studies in China.

Second, the investigator will also examine other PRC humanities and social science publications regarding the research on the USSR, mostly focusing on the four categories of journals previously classified. By engaging these publications (either from the *IREECAS* journal or others) the study will not be limited to those publications merely learning lessons from the Soviet collapse after 1991. Instead, it will pay attention to various thematic research projects diverging in focus and analysis between the late 1980s and the end of the 1990s.

⁴ For a list of the PRC journals on the Soviet Union, see Gilbert Rozman: China’s Soviet Watchers in the 1980s: A New Era in Scholarship. In: *World Politics* 37, No. 4 (July 1985), pp. 440–441.

Such a methodology may reduce a certain bias on Soviet research in China and instead direct the audience to review the field from a more objective perspective.

Moreover, the article intends to examine the thinking of Chinese Soviet-watchers against the backdrop of political and social changes in 1990s China. The study will be based not only on the analysis of primary sources already undertaken, but will also attempt to locate the developments of Chinese Soviet research amid the rapid changes in the social and political environment of China. Therefore, in order for this research to be successfully located in the rich fabric of the intellectual activities of contemporary China and in the changing environment, the investigator has also identified the following three kinds of documents that may be beneficial to the research:

Articles in PRC official newspapers and journals concerning aspects of the former Soviet Union: *Renmin ribao* (*People's Daily*, owned by the CCP Central Committee); *Guangming ribao* (*Guangming Daily*, published by the CCP Central Propaganda Department); *Beijing Review* (China's only national English weekly news magazine published in Beijing by the *China International Publishing Group*), etc.

Writings and speeches of PRC officials and leaders on the matters of the Soviet state: Such as those of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping, and other contemporary Chinese leaders' related speeches scattered among the Chinese newspapers in the 1980s and 1990s.

Chinese and English translations of works and speeches of Soviet leaders from Lenin to Gorbachev: as Chinese scholars always cite the words of Soviet leaders (such as works of Lenin and Stalin and memoirs of Khrushchev and Gorbachev) to support their arguments in articles, it is important for the researcher to check the accuracy of those quotations.

The use of the term "Soviet-watchers" (or Sovietologists) in this article for those who study and research the state of the USSR is based on Christopher Xenakis' definition. Xenakis defines US Sovietologists broadly, to include "political scientists, economists, sociologists, historians, diplomats and policy makers, working in academia, government, private think tanks, and the media."⁵ He uses the terms "Sovietologists", "Soviet experts", "foreign policy analysts", "Cold War theorists", and "political scientists" interchangeably, citing the examples of George Kennan, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Pipes, and Strobe Talbott. These individuals are both Soviet-specialists and policy makers, while Hedrick Smith and Robert Kaiser are also Soviet-watchers and journalists simultaneously.⁶

In terms of this elastic definition of the field and the diversity of scholars' backgrounds, the situation in China is generally similar to the situation in the US as described by Xenakis. For example, as we shall see, although some Chinese scholars specialize in either Soviet or world communism, most of those mentioned and quoted in this paper are generalists rather than specialists in Soviet studies. Their articles often express more political zeal than scholarly expertise or analytical insight. Generally speaking, the descriptions by Xenakis of US Sovietologists could also be applied to the Chinese situation. Chinese Soviet-watchers

⁵ Christopher Xenakis: *What Happened to the Soviet Union? : How and Why American Sovietologists were Caught by Surprise*. London: Praeger, 2002, p. 4.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

are a diverse group, rather than representatives of a single school of thought or central theory. Their publications never imply a complete homogeneity of views. However, although their academic training is rooted in different disciplines and is by no means confined to Soviet studies, their research and publications are relevant to Soviet research in one way or another.⁷

Almost all Chinese Soviet-watchers included in this article come from the following three kinds of institutions: the first is *IREECAS* in *CASS* and it carries a great deal of weight in Soviet studies in China. *IREECAS* is also the headquarter of the *Chinese Association of East European and Central Asian Studies (CAEECAS)*, which administers the membership of Chinese Soviet-specialists across the country. Second, the research scope also pays attention to scholars in Soviet studies from other institutions in *CASS*, such as the *Institute of World History* and the *Institute of Marxism-Leninism*. Last, the investigation includes Chinese Soviet-watchers from provincial academies of social sciences and other universities (including the party schools), particularly those with units, departments, and journals devoted specifically to research on the USSR.⁸

Lenin and the fate of Chinese socialism after Tiananmen

The foreign policy of Lenin started to draw the attention of Chinese scholars in and after 1989, when China became a political pariah owing to the ruling Communist Party's brutal military crackdown on civilians during the pro-democratic Tiananmen demonstrations in the summer of that year. Chinese perspectives in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident argued that the PRC might learn from Lenin's policy in War Communism (1918–1921), when the newly-born Soviet Union was besieged by imperialist military encirclement. At the time, Lenin adopted a foreign policy that encouraged engagement in formal relations with the West, while concentrating on economic development and maintaining a proletarian dictatorship. Such principles were akin to Deng Xiaoping's post-Tiananmen agendas of buying time and keeping a low profile while finding a way out of the Western sanctions and re-connecting with the world.⁹ As Yu Liangzao, a lecturer at the *University of Hubei*, summarized in his 1991 article, "China should learn from Lenin's post-1917 peaceful-coexistence strategy, by pursuing the continued economic cooperation with the West and upholding the open door policy," in order to "overcome the international sanctions, change China's global image, and finally restore its rightful place in the world."¹⁰

⁷ Similarly, Robert Desjardins in his book on post-war French Sovietology also includes not only the scholarship of French Soviet specialists but also the writings of French historians, economists and political scientists, whose works are orientated only incidentally towards the USSR. See Robert Desjardins: *The Soviet Union Through French Eyes, 1945–1985*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1988, p. 10.

⁸ For a list of PRC institutes that have facilities for research of the Soviet Union, see Gilbert Rozman: *China's Soviet Watchers in the 1980s*. In: *World Politics* 37, No. 4 (July 1985), pp. 444–445.

⁹ Deng Xiaoping: *With Stable Policies of Reform and Opening to the Outside World, China Can Have Great Hopes for the Future* (September 4, 1989). In: *The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China* (ed. and trans.): *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3). Beijing: Foreign Languages Press, 1995, p. 311.

¹⁰ Yu Liangzao: *Liening wannian guanyu suetong ziben zhuyi guojia guanxide sixiang shuping* (Lenin's Thoughts on the Relationship between the Soviet Russia and Capitalist Countries in the Evening of His Life). In: *Shehui kexue yanjiu* (*Social Science Research*) No. 2 (1991), p. 21.

In the summer of 1989, a large group of Chinese university students in China's capital city of Beijing took advantage of commemorating the death of former Party General Secretary Hu Yaobang, who died in April allegedly due to a sudden heart attack, and spearheaded the hunger strike demonstrations at the heart of Tiananmen Square. Most of them wanted the Chinese communist regime to reform itself for a more efficient and clean governance. However, some of them demanded the introduction of democracy and rule of law, and the resignation of the party leadership. These requests were absolutely unacceptable to the ruling communist party. The demonstrations were later joined by many Chinese intellectuals, students, and civilians from all over the country. The *CCP* regarded the protests as a humiliation, particularly considering that the incident coincided with the historical Sino-Soviet summit taking place in May, when the leaders of the two largest communist countries in the world – Deng Xiaoping and Gorbachev – met together in front of international journalists. The *CCP* regime decided to take firm action against the uprising at the end of May, and ordered the military force to crack down the demonstrators in the midnight of the Fourth of June.

After the *CCP*'s military crackdown in 1989, China was facing four consequences. First, internationally, many countries in the world endorsed the political and economic sanctions against China, as a form of punishment for its armed suppression over civilians and its infringement upon human rights. Second, domestically, the Tiananmen Incident was followed immediately by an intensified intra-*CCP* power struggle, wherein the conservative Party members attempted to seize the opportunity to criticize Deng Xiaoping's reform and open door policies after 1978, and push China back to the rule of Maoism. Third, the event paralleled the failure of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR from 1989 onward, and many Chinese people almost entirely lost their faith in socialism. Last, combining all the causes above, China after 1989 was at a crossroad; from the top leadership to ordinary people, all felt deeply puzzled about the future direction of China and had no concrete idea about how China would weather the Tiananmen crisis.

In late 1989, the new Party Secretary General Jiang Zemin gave a warning to Party cadres about hostile international forces and the critical situation of the *CCP*:

At present we must realize that our party is in peril and the international hostile forces are engineering the plot of peaceful evolution to push the *CCP* on the verge of death. We should be acutely aware of the urgency of current situation. All cadres should work together to safeguard our Party and ensure socialism in China will survive the test and remain undefeated.¹¹

Deng Xiaoping also expressed his concern about the issue. He believed that the West had "the same attitude towards China as towards the East European countries," and that the West was "unhappy that China adheres to socialism."¹² Deng said that Chinese people did not fear being isolated. He remarked, "No one can shake China's determination to build

¹¹ Jiang Zemin: Weibadang jianshecheng gengjia jianqiangde gongren jieji xianfengdui erdouzheng (To Make the Party Become a Stronger Vanguard of the Working Class) (December 29, 1989). In: Renmin chubanshe (People's Publishing House) (ed.): Jiangzemin wenxuan (Selected Works of Jiang Zemin) (Vol. 1). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2006, pp. 87–88.

¹² Deng: We Must Adhere to Socialism and Prevent Peaceful Evolution Towards Capitalism (November 23, 1989). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), p. 333.

socialism,” and “no matter what changes take place in the international situation, China will be able to hold its ground.”¹³

From late 1989, a flood of official articles circulated in China, invoking Lenin and his writings as a model that could be useful in combating Western attacks and safeguarding socialism in China. A commentator in *Guangming ribao* commented that Lenin’s theory about the inevitable death of capitalism had not been outdated in the contemporary era.¹⁴ He said, “It is correct for China to adhere to the socialist path”, and believed that “socialism will replace capitalism in the future.”¹⁵ Another article in *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)* described Lenin’s writings as “a good weapon” for China to employ to “fight with the international vicious tendencies of peaceful evolution.”¹⁶ Li Zhun, vice minister of the *Central Propaganda Department*, wrote in *Renmin ribao* demanding that “comrades working in ideology apply theories of Marx and Lenin in their research works for the battle against the peaceful evolution.”¹⁷ Another article in *Renmin ribao* required all Party cadres to achieve “a high level of understanding of Leninist theories”, with a view to “grasp the world situation, uphold the communist conviction, and cope with the complicated international environment.”¹⁸

In response to the calls of Party authorities, Chinese scholars started to follow the example of the early Soviet Union when the country was threatened by Western military invasion, and

¹³ Deng: No One Can Shake Socialist China (October 26, 1989). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), pp. 318–319.

¹⁴ For Lenin’s theory, see Vladimir Lenin: Imperialism, the Highest Stage of Capitalism, a Popular Outline. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 24.

¹⁵ Chou Qihua: Zhengque lijie liening guanyu diguo zhuyi suisixing deguandian (To Correctly Understand Lenin’s Thesis on the Inevitable Demise of Imperialism). In: *Guangming ribao*, 25. 9. 1989.

¹⁶ Bianjibu (The Editorial Board): Fengfude lilun baoku (A Rich Theoretical Treasury). In: *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)* No. 8 (1991), p. 4. The term “peaceful evolution” was first introduced by George Kennan, US ambassador to the Soviet Union in 1947. US Secretary of State, John Foster Dulles, made it famous in the 1950s. After 1949, the CCP regime used this term to describe those countries (especially the West and the US in particular) that invoked the banners of human right and democracy to force their values and political systems on the Third World – the so-called “peaceful evolution.” After Tiananmen, the Chinese official and academic analysis tended to argue that the peaceful evolution engineered by the West had played a prominent role in jolting Eastern Europe and the USSR. In reality, the doctrine of peaceful evolution was more a propaganda trick than a genuine academic argument. After 1989, the Party hard-liners had used the threat of peaceful evolution as the justification to shut down reforms. However, 1992 marked the termination of the peaceful evolution thesis, which seemed to be an exaggerated accusation that the Soviet collapse was simply a result of Western subversion. Seen from his 1992 speech transcript during the southern tour, Deng Xiaoping believed that the chief cause of turmoil in socialism was not the imperialist peaceful evolution. The problem lays with the internal factors, such as poverty and the under-developed economies in many socialist countries. In his view, the only way for China to survive after the Soviet dissolution was to continue the open door policy and reform the past economy characterized by centralized control and enforced egalitarianism. He argued that abandoning the path of reform set in 1978 would only lead the country to the sort of catastrophe befalling the USSR. In Deng’s mind, to admit that the socialist system itself has fundamental flaws was more important than to blame foreign machinations. Instead of giving the excuse of the so-called peaceful evolution and ignoring true problems, China after 1991 should face up squarely to reality and meet the challenges ahead. By dispelling the assertion of peaceful evolution, Deng won the power battle over his Party rivals, ensuring a state-wide consensus to embrace his strategy of faster growth, enhanced economic reform, and greater interaction with the outside world. For an analysis on the pre-1992 Chinese short-lived thesis of peaceful evolution, see Shambaugh: China’s Communist Party, p. 55.

¹⁷ Li Zhun: Tigaofan heping yanbiande zizuexing (Be Leery of the Peaceful Evolution). In: *Renmin ribao*, 22. 8. 1991.

¹⁸ Luo Ding: Lingdao ganbuyao daitongxue lilun (Leaders and Cadres Should Take the Lead in Studying Theories). In: *Renmin ribao*, 18. 10. 1991.

asked the PRC to learn from Lenin's wisdom of how to break through foreign encirclement.¹⁹ According to a scholar at the *Guangxi University for Nationalities*:

Today when capitalists are mounting intensive attacks against socialism, the international communist movement is at the moment of low tide. Under such circumstances, to study Lenin's experience and theories on upholding and developing Marxism will have a great practical significance for us to march toward the socialist path unswervingly under today's stormy international climate.²⁰

The *IREECAS* scholar Jiang Yi wrote in an article that, when the newly-born Soviet Union was beset by imperial hostility, Lenin still realized that Soviet socialism was in need of peace and respite for economic recovery.²¹ After that, "peaceful co-existence with the West became the major principle of Soviet foreign policy."²² Yu Liangzao in another article argued that China should heed Lenin's strategies during its difficult time; these included strengthening the one-party rule, fighting bloated bureaucracy and corruption, and remaining vigilant of imperialist interventions.²³ Even in the late 1990s, when China had extricated itself from isolation and re-embraced the global society, Li Zhencheng, director of the *Institute of Marxism at the Central Party School*, still remarked that Lenin's counter-encirclement methods in the early 20th century were a useful example for not only Chinese socialism, but also the future of world communism:

At the time, the struggle between the international hostile forces intending for sabotaging the October Revolution and the Soviet communists for safeguarding the fruit of the Revolution, was a life-or-death final showdown between the proletarians and the bourgeoisies. It ended with the victory of the former and the outcome would be honoured by history. The struggle was one of the greatest events in the 20th century and it has been celebrated by peoples from all over the world. We can see that in a non-military battlefield, a war without bloodshed could be more prolonged, intensive, and brutal. Fortunately, at the time the imperialists did not have an effective and systematic strategy of peaceful evolution. It would be helpful for us to seriously study and sum up the lessons from this event, for subsequent campaigns against capitalist rivals.²⁴

¹⁹ For Lenin's measures to combat foreign interventions, see Lenin: The Tasks of the Revolution. In: Vladimir Lenin: Collected Works, September 1917–February 1918 (Vol. 26). Moscow: Foreign Languages Publishing House, 1960, pp. 59–68.

²⁰ Ye Runqing: Liening zenyang jianchihe fazhan makesi zhuyi (How Did Lenin Uphold and Develop Marxism). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 1 (1991), p. 44.

²¹ For Lenin's policies in state administration and economic development when the Soviet Union was experiencing internal and external problems in the early 20th century, see Lenin: The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government. In: Lenin: Collected Works, February–July 1918 (Vol. 27), pp. 257–277.

²² Jiang Yi: Shizhanluexing decuoshi haishi celuexing deshouduan (Strategic Concerns or Tactical Measures). In: *Sulian dongou wenti (Matters of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe)* No. 2 (1990), p. 66.

²³ Yu Liangzao: Lieningzai ouzhou geming dichao shiqide lilunyu shijian (Lenin's Theories and Practice during the Low Ebb of European Revolution). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 2 (1992), p. 23–25.

²⁴ Li Zhencheng: Sulian xingwangde chensi (Reflections on the Rise and Fall of the USSR). Beijing: Gaige chubanshe, 1998, p. 67.

Making use of Lenin is not unknown in PRC history. During Lenin's 90th birth anniversary in 1960, the CCP regime under the first PRC leader Mao Zedong's instruction published several harangues in the name of commemorating Leninism in official newspapers. This was an attack on Nikita Khrushchev's détente with the West and was also meant to defend the Chinese struggle against imperialism right through to the end.²⁵ Lenin's theories developed during War Communism had also been employed by Mao to serve and legitimize his radical policies in the fanatical periods of the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution.²⁶ After Tiananmen, the contemporary application of Lenin and his policies highlighted China's apprehension regarding the Western peaceful evolution, the implications of European communist demise for China, and concern about the country's position in the world after Tiananmen.

The use of Lenin in Chinese Party organs and Sovietology writings can also be considered as a legacy of traditional Chinese historiography – using the past to serve the present (*yishi weijian*).²⁷ Chinese are traditionally in the habit of appealing to examples in history to serve the present agenda, and drawing such examples from within Chinese history is only one end of the whole spectrum. As Dorothea Martin remarks:

The main task of Chinese historians in world history since the mid-1950s has been to trace the revolutionary movements of the modern world in such a way as to reveal the inevitable victory of socialism over capitalism and to depict the victory of the Chinese revolution as the logical outgrowth of this global revolutionary trend.²⁸

World history in China functions not only to promote China's own desired reading of history, but also to serve the political needs of the state and Party. Gotelind Müller-Saini reveals that in and after the 1990s the CCP regime increasingly focused on ensuring that the official party view of foreign history was transmitted via the official media and textbooks, and that the state agenda guided the audience perceptions toward legitimization of PRC policies.²⁹ Lenin's foreign policy and his rule during the early Soviet Union were selected as examples, as they had gone well with the stance and interest of China after Tiananmen – that is, since both regimes were bound by the shared traumas of Western sanctions and the common aspirations of rising to be global powers amid international hostility. The Soviet Union under Lenin was viewed as the cherished precedent of a golden age upon which present action of the CCP regime had to be based or rationalized. Chinese scholars' use of Lenin to promote socialism – like exploiting past foreign humiliation in order to fan anti-Western nationalist fervour – was an effective measure to strengthen the Chinese communist regime when it

²⁵ Zuo Fengrong: Zhongsu dalunzhan (The Sino-Soviet Big Quarrel). In: *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi wenti (Problems of Contemporary World Socialism)* No. 1 (1999), p. 55.

²⁶ Zhang Wenhuan: Xuexi makesi zhuyi bunengzou jiejing (There is No Short-cut in Learning Marxism). In: *Renmin ribao*, 12. 1. 1981.

²⁷ On Chinese scholars' use of history to serve their regimes in imperial and contemporary times, respectively, see On-cho Ng and Qing Edward Wang: *Mirroring the Past: The Writing and Use of History in Imperial China*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2005; Huaiyin Li: *Reinventing Modern China: Imagination and Authenticity in Chinese Historical Writing*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2013.

²⁸ Dorothea Martin: *The Making of a Sino-Marxist World View: Perceptions and Interpretations of World History in the People's Republic of China*. Armonk, N.Y.: M.E. Sharpe, 1990, p. 106.

²⁹ Gotelind Müller-Saini: *Documentary, World History, and National Power in the PRC: Global Rise in Chinese Eyes*. Abingdon: Routledge, 2013, pp. 1–2.

was experiencing domestic difficulties. Jin Zenglin, a researcher at the *Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences*, pointed this out quite frankly in his 1992 article on why Chinese Soviet-watchers should review Lenin's foreign policy in the early Soviet Union:

History is a mirror. It can guide people to weep through the old and bring forth the new. Although there has been a great deal of change since more than seventy years ago, the present international environment is different with that the early Soviet Union was facing. However, there are still some similarities between the two periods. So we need to research on Lenin's policy to understand the current grim atmosphere and raise our revolutionary spirits.³⁰

Lenin and the post-Tiananmen reform and open door policies

The use of Lenin in 1990s China was not only a political expedient in the face of Western sanctions, it was also a symbol of a long-term strategy for China's economic success and state building after the demise of world communism. After the Tiananmen Incident, Premier Li Peng pledged, "China will not return to the old way of self-isolation under any circumstances," notwithstanding the international sanctions.³¹ At the time, Deng Xiaoping was aware of the predominance of the conservative forces within the Party, and their exploitation of the grim international climate to push the PRC back into radicalism and anti-reform. He stepped in and elaborated the vision of China's post-Tiananmen development for outflanking his foes in a series of speeches. In late 1989, Deng demanded that China "double its GNP" amid the turmoil in Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, in order to "demonstrate the superiority of socialism." He warned that the PRC "should maintain friendly exchanges" with the West, and "should not criticize or condemn other countries without good reason or go to extremes in our words and deeds."³² In a subsequent speech publicized in 1990, Deng required China to contribute to the world by promoting "a new international political and economic order." He said, "If we can go on in this way for 50 or 60 years, socialist China will be invincible."³³

According to the words above, Deng's laying great emphasis on economic development was not only a remedy for breaking the post-Tiananmen deadlock. It was also a political tool for strengthening the CCP regime, and a means to the ultimate end of China achieving a powerful status following the demise of orthodox socialism in the wake of Tiananmen and the collapse of European communist regimes. Further to his attack on the Party old guards, Deng embarked on an ambitious inspection tour in southern China in early 1992. He delivered several landmark speeches along the way, making clear that the greater danger to

³⁰ Jin Zenglin: Lunsuweiai zhengquan chuangjian chuqide guoji daqihou helieng deduce (On the International Environment and Lenin's Policies in the Early Days of the Soviet Union). In: *Eluosi dongou zhongya yanjiu* (*Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies*) No. 3 (1992), pp. 7–8.

³¹ Li Peng: Gaige kaifang yao yanzhe jiankangde guidao qianjing (The Reform and Open Door Policies Should Be Correctly Implemented) (January 8, 1990). In: 360doc gerentushuguan (360doc Personal Library), URL: < http://www.360doc.com/content/14/0119/21/9851038_346496268.shtml>. [Last consulted: 1. 10. 2018].

³² Deng: With Stable Policies of Reform and Opening to the Outside World, China Can Have Great Hopes for the Future (September 4, 1989). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3), p. 310.

³³ Deng: Seize the Opportunity to Develop the Economy (December 24, 1990). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3), pp. 350–352.

China came from the left rather than the right, and warning that the people would topple those who opposed reforms. He urged the Party members not to fear “elements of capitalism” and not to argue “whether the road is capitalist or socialist.”³⁴

Complying with the tide, the government’s mouthpiece newspapers and journals immediately set off a chain reaction entertaining Deng’s ideas, and clearing the decks for a strong defence for reform and open door policies. At this juncture, the use of Lenin appeared on PRC’s front-pages as a means of keeping abreast of Deng’s call, and gathering support for China’s renewed momentum to resume reforms in full force.

An article in *Renmin ribao* pointed out that “learning from capitalism has absolutely complied with Lenin’s theories,” and the fundamental reason for Soviet economic backwardness and its final demise was because “the post-Lenin leaderships had not correctly handled their relationship with capitalism.”³⁵ Another article in *Qiushi* put it bluntly, that in Lenin’s mind “socialism should not be an isolated system,” and in fact, “it should be a more open society than capitalism.”³⁶ Against this backdrop, CASS President Hu Sheng weighed in and rebutted the leftist hostility to capitalism in *Renmin ribao*. He argued that “socialism should inherit the good tradition from capitalism but should not be antagonistic to it.” The author quoted Lenin’s *The State and Revolution* to demonstrate that “proletarian dictatorship could only obtain the fruits of socialist revolution by learning from the achievements of capitalism.”³⁷ Hu Sheng finally condemned the leftist thoughts as being “utterly absurd and reactionary.”³⁸

A number of academic works had predated Deng’s southern tour in early 1992; these articles advocated the acceleration of reforms and mutually beneficial interaction between socialism and capitalism, against the negative example of the Soviet Union.³⁹ After Deng’s tour and throughout the 1990s, many articles attempted to use both Lenin and Deng to enhance China’s renewed momentum in revitalizing reforms.⁴⁰

³⁴ Deng: Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai (January 18–February 21, 1992). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), pp. 358–360.

³⁵ Fang Sheng: Lunduiwai kaifanghe liyong ziben zhuyi (On the Open Door Policy and Utilizing Capitalism). In: *Renmin ribao*, 20. 4. 1992.

³⁶ Lu Luping: Nuliba duiwai kaifang tigaodao xinde shuiping (To Promote the Open Door Policy to a New Level). In: *Qiushi (Seeking Truth)* No. 8 (1992), p. 19.

³⁷ For Lenin’s theories on the transition from capitalism to communism, see Vladimir Lenin: *The State and Revolution: Marxist Teaching on the State and the Tasks of the Proletariat in the Revolution*. Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, pp. 82–86.

³⁸ Hu Sheng: Shehui zhuyihe ziben zhuyide guanxi (The Relationship between Socialism and Capitalism). In: *Renmin ribao*, 10. 4. 1992.

³⁹ Zhang Weiyuan: Liening wanqi sixiang (Lenin’s Thoughts in His Later Years). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 1 (1991), pp. 14–15. Zhang Ji: Lunlienianing wannian guanyu liangzhong butong shehui zhidu guojia guanxide lilunhe celue (On the Late Lenin’s Theories and Strategies about Two Different Social Systems and Their Relations). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 4 (1991), pp. 43–45. Du Gong: Duizhuanhuanzhong shijie gejude jidian kanfa (Some Perceptions of a Changing Pattern of International Relations). In: *Guoji wenti yanjiu (Journal of International Studies)* No. 4 (1991), p. 6. Wang Ziqi: Shilun ziben zhuyi fazhande changqixing (On the Long-term Nature of Capitalist Development). In: *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* No. 1 (1992), pp. 30–31.

⁴⁰ Li Zongyu: Renzhen qingli guoji gongyun lishishang zuode lilun guandian (To Earnestly Deal with the Leftist Theoretical Thoughts in the History of the International Communist Movement). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 3 (1992), p. 2. Liu Yichang: Muqian

On closer inspection, the use of Lenin by Chinese writings was less relevant to the context of contemporary China's international relations. Since 1987 Chinese scholars had argued that both Gorbachev's concepts of New Thinking in international relations and *glasnost* in political liberalization were a return to Lenin's original principle of true socialism. Some of them even demanded that the Chinese government study Gorbachev's programs and imitate his way of reforming the socialist political structure. However, after 1990 and the Soviet demise in 1991 in particular, Gorbachev was no longer a favourite figure owing to the change of the political tide. Chinese scholars increasingly refrained from mentioning his name and taking his programs as an example; instead, they had to forsake Gorbachev.⁴¹ In the eyes of the CCP, on the other hand, Lenin commanded high respect and was one of the most authoritative communist leaders in human history. Compared to Gorbachev and any other communist leaders in the world, using Lenin to mobilize the support of China's reforms would implicate little political risk in Chinese Sovietology writings, particularly in the days after Tiananmen when China was facing the comeback of the Party conservative force.

After Tiananmen, the exemplar of Lenin was invoked to fortify the Party's rule and tighten its grip on power. This time, Lenin was used for defending China's stand of practicing true socialism, but not the socialism perverted by Gorbachev and his followers, who were seen as leading the Soviet Union into chaos and finally, disintegration. The symbol of Lenin was used to legitimate the regime of Deng Xiaoping as a socialist government adhering to the norm of orthodox communism, but not the kind of socialism distorted by Gorbachev.

It is true that many Chinese scholars made reference to Lenin's rule in the early Soviet Union in order to offer guidance to China for coping with hostile Western sanctions after Tiananmen. Still, we need to note some differences between the early Soviet Union and China in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident. First, unlike socialism in the early 20th century, which was a rising political force after the founding of the Soviet Union, communist regimes and ideology in the early 1990s were dying remnants. Western capitalism might have felt the need to nip the early Soviet Union in the bud by force, for fearing its menace would spread across the world and threaten its own survival. However, after the Tiananmen Incident and even in the wake of the Soviet demise, China was not in a perilous situation. The West neither sent troops to threaten China's survival, nor had complicity in working with those whom Party authorities judged as opportunists within the CCP to overthrow the Chinese regime. Second, unlike what it had done with the early Soviet Union, in and after the 1990s, the capitalist West did not show wholesale hostility to the PRC, and did not sever their diplomatic and trade relations with China (although short-term sanctions had been applied).

guoji guanxide zhuyao tezhenghe fazhan qushi (The Main Characteristics and Development Trends in Present International Relations). In: *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* No. 4 (1992), p. 31. Gao Fang: Jianchi dangde jiben luxianyu fazhan youzhongguo tese shehui zhuyi lilun (Upholding the Basic Line of the CCP and Developing the Theory of Socialism with Chinese Characteristics). In: *Shehui kexue (Social Sciences)* No. 9 (1992), p. 5. Liu Seqing: Xitong yanjiu shenru linghui dengxiaoping waijiao zhanlue sixiang (Systematic Studies on and Thorough Mastery of Deng Xiaoping's Diplomatic Strategic Thoughts). In: *Xiandai guoji guanxi (Contemporary International Relations)* No. 5 (1994), p. 31. Pang Renzhi: Lunshehui zhuyiyu ziben zhuyide guanxi (On the Relations between Socialism and Capitalism). In: *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* No. 2 (1997), p. 6.

⁴¹ For a survey on Chinese perception of Gorbachev before and after the Soviet collapse, see Li: Gorbachev's Glasnost and the Debate on Chinese Socialism among Chinese Sovietologists, pp. 35–65.

Afterward, China did not implement another militarized War Communism or adopt autarkic methods to counter the Western attacks.

Indeed, the biggest fear of the CCP regime and Chinese scholars in the early 1990s seemed to be the emergence of the US as the sole superpower in the world, after the demise of world communism. Some considered that Washington would not only seek to prevent China from prospering and restoring its greatness in the world, but also wield its unchecked power to bludgeon other countries into submission.⁴² However, after Soviet socialism passed from the scene, the Chinese promptly realized that the post-communist system had spurred greater global competition rather than greater global hegemony. They could not conceal their delight in witnessing the emergence of a multipolar world, in which China would reap the benefits and make itself a crucial factor in the global balance by being integrated into the new world order.⁴³ Therefore, what most concerned the CCP regime after the eclipse of the USSR was by no means the real military threat from the West (which had been a reality in the early Soviet days), or its modern analogy of the peaceful evolution (which was actually more of a calculated invention and piece of propaganda used to fuel support for the Party after Tiananmen).

In reality, the use of Lenin and his foreign policy in 1990s Chinese writings was less pertinent to China's thinking on its relations with the West and the world at that time. Rather, Chinese Soviet-watchers tended to use the symbol of Lenin and the interpretation of his writings to defend Deng's policies and support his position at home after Tiananmen – that is, when socialism in China was in burgeoning crisis and the Party conservative force attempted to challenge reform and open door directions taken by Deng since 1978. Let us look at several pieces of evidence. First, according to Xiao Feng, a researcher in the *Institute of Contemporary World* at CASS, Lenin and Deng Xiaoping appeared to converge at two pillars: “upholding socialism” and “developing the productive forces and undertaking the open door policy.”⁴⁴ In this way, the use of Lenin serves two functions: firstly, it demonstrates China's ruthless determination to resist political liberalization and the pollution of bourgeois thoughts (upholding socialism). Secondly, it symbolizes that the CCP regime would cleave to economic capitalism by learning from the advanced West (developing the productive forces and undertaking the open door policy). The two points deterred the attacks made by the political dissents and the Party conservatives, respectively. This combination of the two directed the path that China would take.

Second, Wei Dingguang, a professor at the *Nanjing Institute of Politics*, argued that after Lenin's death, both Stalin and Mao “had not properly handled Lenin's legacy of opening to

⁴² The point is illustrated by the following sources: Jin Dexiang: Peace and Development. In: *Beijing Review*, 3. 3. 1991. Li Meng: Sulian duiwai huodong yinian huiguyu qianzhan (Retrospect and Prospect of Soviet Foreign Relations). In: *Eluosi dongou zhongya yanjiu (Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies)* No. 1 (1992), pp. 77–78.

⁴³ The point is illustrated by the following sources: Li Cong: Zhuazhu dangqian youli shiji (To Seize the Present Favourable Opportunity). In: *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* No. 6 (1992), pp. 2–7. Jiang: Guoji xingshihe junshi zhanlue fangzhen (The International Situation and the Military Strategy) (January 13, 1993). In: Renmin chubanshe (People's Publishing House) (ed.): *Jiangzemin wenxuan (Selected Works of Jiang Zemin)* (Vol. 1), pp. 278–282.

⁴⁴ Xiao Feng: Guanyu guoji gongyun xingshide jige wenti (Several Questions about the Situation of the International Communist Movement). In: *Shijie jingjiyu zhengzhi (World Economics and Politics)* No. 10 (1992), p. 50.

the outside world,” and only Deng Xiaoping “has carried through Lenin’s goal” and “upheld the open door direction as part of the socialist state policies.”⁴⁵ Liu Min, a scholar at the *University of Nanjing*, went further to put Deng in a higher position than Lenin. She pointed out that unlike Lenin, who had employed the open door policy as “a means to survive” and as “mainly for the contact with the West,” China under Deng had been transformed into “a socialist country that embraces all nations in the world regardless of their political systems.”⁴⁶ It is thus evident that quoting Lenin’s writings was more about Deng than Lenin. The authors apparently tried to elevate Deng’s standing and speak for his policies. Deng, not Lenin, was the real focus of the Chinese scholars.

Last, Li Daxin, a scholar at *Shandong University*, indicated that socialist elements “could be drawn from capitalism,” and both socialism and capitalism “could be in complete harmony but not in competition.”⁴⁷ To corroborate his argument, the scholar quoted both Lenin’s formula and Deng’s comment during his celebrated southern tour in 1992,⁴⁸ in order to emphasize that socialism and capitalism could have positive ties. In particular, he argued that the nature of socialism was to be a hybrid of various institutions and elements, as long as they could enrich the power of the socialist states.⁴⁹ In Deng Xiaoping’s mind, there was indeed no specific definition of socialism. For him, socialism and capitalism could be interconnected and it made little sense to label these two systems. It is such examples of Deng’s pragmatism that have produced the famous slogan “constructing socialism with Chinese characteristics,” a very vague slogan that Deng himself was unable to clarify. As he admitted in 1985:

In building socialism, the central task is to develop the productive forces. We are adopting all measures to develop them, including use of foreign funds and introduction of advanced technologies. This is a great experiment, something that is not described in books.⁵⁰

⁴⁵ Wei Dingguang: Lundengxiaoping zaishehui zhuyi duiwai kaifang sixiang fangmiande zhongyao gongxian (Deng Xiaoping’s Great Contributions to the Theory of Opening Socialism to the Outside World). In: *Shehui kexue (Social Sciences)* No. 2 (1994), p. 2.

⁴⁶ Liu Min: Shilun dengxiaoping duiwai kaifang sixiangde tedian (Deng Xiaoping’s Thoughts on the Open Door Policy). In: *Shehui kexue (Social Sciences)* No. 5 (1993), p. 5.

⁴⁷ Li Daxin: Shehui zhuyi yinsu nengfouzai ziben zhuyi neibu chansheng (Can Socialist Elements Be Drawn from Capitalism). In: *Kexue shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Scientific Socialism Studies)* No. 6 (1994), pp. 54–55.

⁴⁸ Lenin’s formula: Soviet power + Prussian railway management system + US technology and Trust organizations + American national education = socialism. See Vladimir Lenin: ‘Suweiai zhengquande dangqian renwu’ yiwende jige tigang (Several Outlines on the Draft of ‘The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government’) (March–April, 1918). In: Zhonggong Zhongyang Makesi Engesi Liening Sidalin Zhuzuo Bianyiju (The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels, Lenin, and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) (ed. and trans.): Liening quanji (Complete Works of Lenin) (Vol. 34). Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 1985, p. 520. Deng’s comment: “In short, if we want socialism to achieve superiority over capitalism, we should not hesitate to draw on the achievements of all cultures and to learn from other countries, including the developed capitalist countries, all advanced methods of operation and techniques of management that reflect the laws governing modern socialized production.” See Deng: Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai (January 18–February 21, 1992). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), p. 361.

⁴⁹ Li: Shehui zhuyi yinsu nengfouzai ziben zhuyi neibu chansheng (Can Socialist Elements Be Drawn from Capitalism). In: *Kexue shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Scientific Socialism Studies)* No. 6 (1994), p. 54.

⁵⁰ Deng: Reform and Opening to the Outside World Are a Great Experiment (June 29, 1985). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), p. 134.

In a nutshell, it can be said that the biggest purpose of using Lenin's foreign policy in the early Soviet state and his tenet in learning from capitalism in Chinese writings after Tiananmen, was to construct a rallying point in legitimizing and reconceptualising such post-Mao state policy of building an amorphous socialism with a distinctive Chinese way. The scholars put Deng and Lenin together in their articles, demonstrating that Deng was the true disciple of Lenin, and assuring that the Chinese leader had further developed and flourished Lenin's theories along with Chinese reality, and made great strides for socialist modernisation.

To summarize, first, the Chinese method of drawing an analogy between the post-Tiananmen PRC and the early Soviet Union was to create a tense and hostile external environment and to keep the Chinese people in a state of perpetual tension. This was conducive to strengthening the legitimacy of the CCP rule in the wake of the Tiananmen Incident, when the Chinese communist regime was discredited at home and came under strong fire from international society. The crisis became even more evident following the cascade of collapsing European communist regimes in and after 1989. The Chinese leaders feared lest the snowball of the political upheavals shaking Eastern Europe and the USSR should threaten their own survival. Therefore, by invoking the example of the beleaguered early Soviet socialist state under Lenin and the terms "the peaceful evolution" and "the international hostile forces," the CCP regime was able to use the bogey of potential national anarchy and unbridled foreign anti-China sentiment to hang on to power.

Indeed, China had been subjected to Western imperial thrashing in the past. The country's traumatic national experiences still loom large in the Chinese psyche today. In China, a country long suffering from the invasion of others, this defensive fear has not only taken deep roots but also long sponsored appropriate countermeasures, both culturally and politically.⁵¹ As a result, Chinese officials and scholars resolved to exploit and intermingle such sorry historical memories and the precedent of the early Soviet Union that had been similarly falling prey to Western sanctions. In so doing, they were able to appeal to the deep-rooted Chinese victim mentality, and present the communist regime as endeavouring to resist China's victimization in the international community again. They made use of the example of the early Soviet Union to mobilize and enhance the enthusiasm of Chinese people, and directed them to embrace a new wave of self-strengthening reform for getting the better of the post-Tiananmen sanctions. Therefore, they achieved the goal of strengthening CCP legitimacy after the end of the Cold War by playing the cards of the traditional Chinese victim mentality and an exaggerated post-Tiananmen international hostility.

Second, debates over the lessons of the failure of communism in Eastern Europe and the USSR from 1989 onward coincidentally paralleled the intra-CCP power struggle after the Tiananmen crisis. The epochal event in Moscow at the end of 1991 provided a motor for the leftist countercurrent, which questioned many of the fundamental directions taken by China under Deng Xiaoping's leadership. Interpretations of Lenin's writings became a major ideological weapon in the struggle between the forces for and against reforms in the CCP.

⁵¹ For details, see Susan L. Shirk: *China: Fragile Superpower*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2007.

After Tiananmen, Lenin was used as a device to limit the scope of reform-oriented criticism, and he was seen as a man who had come to appreciate the need for substantial market forces. Chinese scholars argued that Lenin remained fundamentally relevant to China's socialist reform and open door policies. In their opinion, the first Soviet leader did not oppose capitalist elements, though he also was not dependent on them. He advocated establishing a regime with the combination of a strong proletarian dictatorship and market economic mechanism. Chinese Soviet-watchers claimed that Deng's reform and open door agendas after 1978 were emblematic of Lenin's theories. Their conclusion served to defend Deng's post-Tiananmen policy of accelerating reforms and resist the attacks of the Party leftists, who attempted to challenge Deng's position and policies. The use of Lenin after Tiananmen demonstrates that most Chinese officials and scholars had generally stood by on the side of the reformist wing, and largely supported and defended reforms in the communist system. They did not suggest tight controls in China even in the wake of Tiananmen and the Soviet disintegration.

Third, the three year period between the Tiananmen Incident and the disintegration of the Soviet Union was an earth-shaking period that nearly convulsed the CCP regime. The Chinese reformist leadership led by Deng Xiaoping understood very well that only by successfully carrying out the reforms would the Chinese communist state be able to regain the legitimacy that it had lost. They were eager to explore a new way of dispelling tough resistance by the hardliners and make a breakthrough. They needed to regenerate the Party that was still in a coma after experiencing a heavy blow by the Tiananmen crisis and the ensuing collapse of communism in Europe.

As seen in this article, it is apparent that both Chinese officials and Soviet-watchers were trying to use the interpretation of Lenin's writings to create new momentum. They intended for this momentum to revive China's reform and open door policies, and to further the cause of socialist modernization that had been championed since 1978. Lenin was a means to rally support for the forces of pro-reform. Afterward, China was bolder in embracing economic liberalization while still refusing to transform its quasi-Leninist political system. Especially after Deng's southern tour in 1992, the CCP formally adopted the concept of "socialist market economy."⁵² China then registered unprecedented economic growth and experienced profound social transformation throughout the rest of the 1990s, a phenomenon that continued in the 21st century. As Jean-Philippe Béja comments, "The Tiananmen tragedy remains a knot that must be untied and a barrier that must be removed in China's continuous advance toward modernity."⁵³ The use of Lenin after Tiananmen was seen to be the best way for China to untie the "knot" and remove the "barrier."

Last, we may conclude by saying that 1990s Chinese Soviet-watchers' main purpose in quoting Lenin's foreign policy in the early Soviet Union, as well as his willingness to learn from capitalism, was to construct a rallying point. This rallying point was intended to re-legitimize and reconceptualise the post-Mao state policy of building an amorphous socialism with a distinctive Chinese flavour, amid the setback of the Tiananmen crisis when the

⁵² Deng: Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai (January 18–February 21, 1992). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping* (Vol. 3), p. 361.

⁵³ Jean-Philippe Béja: 4 June 1989: A Watershed in Chinese Contemporary History. In: Id. (ed.): *The Impact of China's 1989 Tiananmen Massacre*. New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 12.

Chinese party-state had become an internationally shunned regime, and worldwide socialism had reached a dead end. Scholars put Deng and Lenin together in their articles, demonstrating that Deng was the true disciple of Lenin, who was seen as the embodiment of post-Mao China's direction. They argued that Deng had further developed and flourished Lenin's theories alongside Chinese realities, and made great strides in socialist modernization.

The use of Lenin demonstrates that Chinese scholars viewed the former Soviet Union as both a warning from the past as well as an image of a possible Chinese state in the future. The example of Lenin's post-1917 open policy reveals that Chinese scholars regarded the continued reform to be the best measure for saving socialism after Tiananmen. In their understanding, only a strong, stable, open, and wealthy state could ensure that the socialist system would survive in the long term. After Tiananmen, Chinese scholars not only demonstrated concern for the survival of the CCP regime, but also attempted to envision the future direction and position of China in the post-communist world.

Lenin as a tool for rationalizing Chinese socialism

The use of Lenin and the discussions of his foreign policy in the writings of Chinese Soviet-watchers after Tiananmen seemed to challenge some predominant views on post-Mao Chinese Sovietology. As noted, first of all, unlike the claim of the secondary literature, which argues that Chinese scholars after 1991 have taken a singular emphasis on Gorbachev's individual actions and failings, and considered Gorbachev and his liberalisation were the fundamental catalysts in bringing down the Soviet state. The use of Lenin after Tiananmen demonstrated that Gorbachev was by no means the preoccupation in post-1991 Chinese Sovietology. Seen from the case of Lenin, Chinese Soviet-watchers presented a much broader historical view and offered a more systemic analysis of the reasons for the collapse, rather than being preoccupied by the so-called "blame game" to merely target at Gorbachev.⁵⁴

While Chinese scholars starting to turn hostile to Gorbachev after March 1990, when the Soviet leader announced to terminate the power monopoly of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU), the criticism on Gorbachev did not last long. It was rather a short-term phenomenon in the early 1990s. From the mid-1990s, the attack on Gorbachev gradually subsided, not only due to the good relations had been built between China and Russia, but also because Deng's 1992 landmark speech during his southern tour, which emphasized that the problem of communism came from the danger of leftism not the rightist policies, and reiterated the spirit of "seeking truth from facts."⁵⁵ The discussion on Lenin seemingly correlated with the guiding message of Deng's 1992 speech. Since then, Chinese Soviet-watchers would be able to study more objectively on the problems of the USSR, to diversify the roots of the collapse, and even to reinterpret and challenge some existing official orthodox views that were largely irrelevant to academic approach and had deep political bias. Chinese writings on Lenin and his post-1917 foreign policy demonstrated that they realized

⁵⁴ The term "blame game" is coined by Shambaugh, see *China's Communist Party*, p. 48.

⁵⁵ Deng: Excerpts from Talks Given in Wuchang, Shenzhen, Zhuhai and Shanghai (January 18–February 21, 1992). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): *Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3)*, pp. 369–370.

the internal factor of the moribund Soviet socialist system was also reprehensible for the downfall. The conservative force and rigid communist system, rather than the figure of Gorbachev, were decisive. Chinese Soviet-watchers praised Lenin's policies that embraced open door and learning from the West in order to keep socialism vital, and remarked those still had great significance on the future of world communism.

Secondly, the use of Lenin and the interpretations of his writings in analyzing the Chinese conditions in the 1990s proved that it was also not true that Chinese Sovietology only studied and focused on the negative lessons of the Soviet demise since 1991, for the long-term preservation of Chinese communist system. According to the post-1991 Chinese writings, scholars did not view the collapse of the Soviet state as a sign of the coming downfall of world socialism, but the source of its renewal. Chinese scholars re-invented and re-conceptualized the image and norm of Chinese socialism as not only the tomorrow of world socialism but also the tomorrow of humankind. The use of Lenin demonstrated that Chinese scholars had viewed the former Soviet Union as both guidance from the past as well as an imaginary of a Chinese state in the future. After Tiananmen, Chinese Soviet-watchers concerned not only the survival of the CCP regime, but also attempted to envision the future direction and position of China in the post-communist world, and how China could rise to be a powerful nation under the authoritarian one-party rule, without succumbing to Western democracy and the collapse that doomed the USSR.

In addition, there is an important issue as to why Lenin has been so important to the PRC, and to examine his lasting significance on Chinese Sovietology and China in the wake of Tiananmen and the Soviet collapse.

Mao Zedong once commented:

It was through the Russians that the Chinese found Marxism. Before the October Revolution, the Chinese were not only ignorant of Lenin and Stalin, they did not even know of Marx and Engels. The salvos of the October Revolution brought us Marxism-Leninism.⁵⁶

Mao's words actually revealed an undeniable truth that although the PRC was created by Mao and his communist acolytes, however, the founding principle and genesis of Chinese communism came from Lenin and the Soviet Union. In the eyes of the CCP, Lenin was an ideological guru and a towering figure. He was perhaps the strongest ideological bond between China and the USSR. It should be noted that after the death of Mao in 1976 and particularly after Deng Xiaoping came to power in 1978, many Chinese Soviet-watchers had made tactical use of the writings of Lenin, in order to grasp the nettle of Chinese socialism in the early 1980s, after the disastrous Cultural Revolution. Those scholars were quite enthralled by the first decade of the PRC administration, when Mao's personal power was subordinated to the collective leadership of the CCP. Under the umbrella of Lenin and his words, some scholars compared the Soviet Union after Lenin and China during the Cultural Revolution. They made it clear that both periods had seriously violated the norms of

⁵⁶ Mao Zedong: On the People's Democratic Dictatorship (June 30, 1949). In: Foreign Languages Press (trans.): Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung (Vol. 4). Peking: Foreign Languages Press, 1965, p. 413

socialism and resulted in personal dictatorship and factional strife. They demanded that collective leadership be re-enforced for rebuilding intra-party democracy in post-Mao China. In their understanding, Lenin's principle has every signature of the ideological tradition of Chinese communism. Both stress Party discipline and strong collective leadership, while keeping distance from Western liberalization and democracy. Lenin's works were an effective tool used by those Chinese Soviet-watchers in the early 1980s – useful for rebuilding intra-party democracy and erasing the lingering throes of Maoist dictatorship and factional struggle, while making a serious effort to strengthen CCP rule as it drove China into modernization. Those scholars identified the PRC as a legatee of Lenin rather than of Mao. Their arguments redefined the Chinese communist regime as a true Leninist state, the Maoist past being only an aberration but not the nature of the CCP regime.⁵⁷

For example, soon after the death of Mao in 1976, when China was still mired in the after-effects of the disastrous Cultural Revolution, a number of Chinese scholars cited Lenin's debate with the left communists during the early Soviet Union, to serve their purpose in attacking the past Maoist policies.⁵⁸ In an article written by Yang Yanjun, a researcher at the Harbin Academy of Social Sciences, although the author did not mention the name of Mao, he remarked that the goal of socialism is “developing the economy” but not aiming at “world revolution and class struggle.”⁵⁹ He praised Lenin's stand on “prioritizing the economic development and criticizing the high-sounding style of the left communists,” who opted for “marching toward communism at the time when the Soviet Union was still underdeveloped.”⁶⁰ Subsequently, Gao Fang, a professor of the history of communism at Renmin University, outspokenly remarked that both China under Mao and the USSR under Stalin had practiced utopian socialism, which plunged both states into “chaos and darkness.” He, therefore, demanded that post-Mao China returns to the path of scientific socialism set by Lenin.⁶¹ Chun Yuyu, a professor in the Institute of Contemporary Socialism at Shandong University, strongly criticized China's past abuse and mechanical understanding of “continued revolution” (*buduan geming*). Chun brought in Lenin's speech to emphasize that exaggerating the importance of revolution had been destructive for China in the past.⁶² In

⁵⁷ On how Chinese Soviet-watchers used Lenin to strengthen the weakening legitimacy of Chinese socialism and to command support for new leader Deng Xiaoping's open door policy and future reforms in the early 1980s, see Jie Li: Lenin in the Early 1980s China. In: *PONS AELIUS: Newcastle University Postgraduate Forum E-Journal* Edition 13, 2016, pp. 48–60.

⁵⁸ Gao Tiesheng: Guanyu sulian jianguo chuqi xinjingji zhengce dejidian kanfa (Several Views on the New Economic Policy during the Early Soviet Union). In: *Zhongguo shehui kexueyan yanjiu shengyuan xuebao (Journal of Graduate School of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences)* No. 1 (1979), pp. 27–36. Yu Yuanpei: Liening shiyue geminghou duizuode qingxiangde douzheng (Lenin's Struggle against the Leftist Tendencies after the October Revolution). In: *Fudan xuebao (Fudan Journal)* No. 4 (1980), pp. 19–28. Yang Yanjun: “Zuopai gongchan zhuyizhe” deguonei zhengcehe liening duitade pipan (Lenin's Criticism of the Domestic Policy of the “Left Communists”). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 2 (1981), pp. 1–25.

⁵⁹ Yang: “Zuopai gongchan zhuyizhe” deguonei zhengcehe liening duitade pipan (Lenin's Criticism of the Domestic Policy of the “Left Communists”). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi (Contemporary World and Socialism)* No. 2 (1981), p. 5.

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁶¹ Gao Fang: Shenmeshi shehui zhuyi? (What Is Socialism?). In: *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Socialism Studies)* No. 1 (1980), p. 19.

⁶² Chun Yuyu: Makeside buduan geming lilun jiqizai zhongguode shijian (Theories and Practice of Marx's Continued Revolution in China). In: *Shehui kexue yanjiu (Social Science Research)* No. 2 (1983), pp. 54–55. On Lenin's original, see Lenin: Shiyue geming sizhounian (The Fourth Anniversary of the October Revolution) (October 13, 1921). In: Zhonggong Zhongyang Makesi Engesi Liening Sidalin Zhuzuo Bianyiju (The Bureau for the Compilation and Translation of Works of Marx, Engels,

some ways, their veiled attack seemed to target Mao's assertions, as the deceased Chairman had been known as a great fan of continuous revolution and class struggle.

Back then, Chinese scholars had wisely used Lenin for symbolizing the Chinese new leader Deng Xiaoping and his new reform programs, whereby they attempted to break down the outdated Maoism and other leftists, and usher the PRC into a new age. According to Zhidong Hao, the goal of the new leadership headed by Deng after the death of Mao coincided with the goal of intellectuals to find out what had gone wrong in the Cultural Revolution. With Deng's support, they first began to pave the way for a climate that tolerated more questioning, in an effort to overcome Mao's dogmatism. From 1978 onward, with the help of intellectuals, Deng began to establish his firm position in the Party. It also guaranteed the government's shift from class struggle to the economy, a policy established in December 1978.⁶³

In the early 1980s, several articles also invoked Lenin's words to say that socialism has no fixed model and people should not build socialism using only books and experiences.⁶⁴ They urged China to construct socialism based on its own conditions, and to draw lessons from either socialism or capitalism. The authors remarked that Lenin's New Economic Policy (NEP, 1922–1928) would be exemplary for China, and associated War Communism and Stalinism with the Great Leap Forward and Cultural Revolution under Mao.⁶⁵ In 1981, Jiang Yihua, a professor of history at Fudan University in Shanghai, described War Communism as being equivalent to the direction under Mao, while the New Economic Policy symbolized Deng's path of reform and open door. In the conclusion of his article, Jiang remarked that the formulation of the New Economic Policy was a result of Lenin having learned from the mistakes of War Communism.⁶⁶ According to Gilbert Rozman, in the mind of Chinese Sovietologists in the 1980s, War Communism epitomized a rigid system that aimed to eliminate private property, commodity production, and market exchange. On the other hand, the New Economic Policy represented a moderate approach allowing small businesses, cultural diversity, and faster economic growth under the one-party rule, which is a model of value for present-day China and similar to the economic policy that Deng had carried out after 1978.⁶⁷

Lenin, and Stalin under the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) (ed. and trans.): *Liening quanji* (Complete Works of Lenin) (Vol. 42), p. 172.

⁶³ Zhidong Hao: *Intellectuals at a Crossroads: The Changing Politics of China's Knowledge Workers*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003, p. 101.

⁶⁴ On Lenin's original, see Lenin: *The Immediate Tasks of the Soviet Government*. In: Lenin: *Collected Works*, February–July 1918 (Vol. 27), pp. 235–277.

⁶⁵ Xia Daoyuan: *Yijiu yibanian lieningyu "zuopai gongchan zhuyizhe" zaiguojia ziben zhuyi wenti shangde zhenglun* (Lenin's 1918 Debate with the "Left Communists" on the Questions of State Capitalism). In: *Dangdai shijieyu shehui zhuyi* (*Contemporary World and Socialism*) No. 2 (1981), pp. 52–54. Cui Peihua: *Zaizongjiehe jiejiande jichushang bawo weilai* (Be Masters of the Future by Summing Up Our Work and Drawing on the Experience of Others). In: *Shehui kexue* (*Social Sciences*) No. 5 (1981), pp. 10–12. Zheng Biao: *Woguo shixing duiwai kaifang zhengcede lilun genju* (The Theoretical Basis of Our Country's Reform and Open Door Policies). In: *Shehui kexue zhanxian* (*Social Sciences Front*) No. 3 (1984), pp. 48–49.

⁶⁶ Jiang Yihua: *Liening zhuyiyu zhanshi gongchan zhuyi* (Leninism and War Communism). In: *Fudan xuebao* (*Fudan Journal*) No. 1 (1981), p. 20.

⁶⁷ Gilbert Rozman: *The Chinese Debate about Soviet Socialism, 1978–1985*. Princeton, N. J.: Princeton University Press, 1987, p. 4. On the histories of War Communism and the New Economic Policy, see Chapters 3 and 5 in Geoffrey Hosking: *A History of the Soviet Union*. London: Fontana Press, 1992, pp. 57–92 and pp. 119–48.

Deng Xiaoping once admitted that he did not know what socialism really meant, but he did know that socialism is certainly not pauperism, which was the situation under Mao.⁶⁸ To quote his words in 1985:

What, after all, is socialism? The Soviet Union has been building socialism for so many years and yet is still not quite clear what it is. Perhaps Lenin had a good idea when he adopted the New Economic Policy. But as time went on, the Soviet pattern became ossified. We were victorious in the Chinese revolution precisely because we applied the universal principles of Marxism-Leninism to our own realities.⁶⁹

Whether the New Economic Policy was the correct model for China under Deng is not relevant in this context. The most important thing is that both Deng and Chinese scholars had been using the symbols of Lenin and his NEP as a public declaration for post-Mao China to renounce its past Soviet and Maoist shackles, and to live up to its claim of building and reforming socialism in a very different way.

Through the enduring lustre of Lenin, scholars attempted to bring vigour to the weakening legitimacy of Chinese socialism after the Cultural Revolution, and to provide a mandate for Deng's policies and future reforms. Interpretation of Lenin thus became a solvent of the old order as well as a catalyst for major changes in early 1980s China. Back then, Lenin's name could be used to help rally Chinese communists against the radical policies that had long prevailed. On many issues, his views were introduced in an effort to justify new policies or rally support behind new proposals in the early 1980s. His stand was invoked to weaken the hold of Maoist remnants in favour of utilizing all possible resources for economic construction, and to support reformers in their pursuit of more sweeping changes. Having said this, the use of Lenin was by no means for leading the attack on Mao, but rather for defending the legitimacy of Chinese socialism founded by the Chairman. His theory was intended to help save the CCP regime that had been paralyzed by the Cultural Revolution. The first Soviet leader was seen by Chinese officials and scholars as an epitome of the new kind of image the Party forged for itself after the maelstrom of the Cultural Revolution.

Since 1987 Chinese Soviet-watchers argued that both Gorbachev's concepts of New Thinking and *glasnost* were a return to Lenin's original principle of true socialism. Some of them even demanded that the Chinese government study and imitate Gorbachev in launching the reform of socialism.⁷⁰ However, as noted, since 1990 and after the Soviet demise in 1991 in particular, Gorbachev was no longer a favourite figure due to the change of the political tide. Chinese scholars increasingly refrained from mentioning his name and taking his programs as example, instead, they had to forsake Gorbachev. On the other hand, in the eyes of the CCP, Lenin commanded high respect ever and was one of the most authoritative communist leaders in human history. Compared to Gorbachev and any other communist leaders in the world, the use of Lenin for mobilising the support of China's

⁶⁸ Deng: Replies to the American TV Correspondent Mike Wallace (September 2, 1986). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), p. 174.

⁶⁹ Deng: Reform is the Only Way for China to Develop Its Productive Forces (August 28, 1985). In: The Bureau (ed. and trans.): Selected Works of Deng Xiaoping (Vol. 3), p. 143.

⁷⁰ Li: Gorbachev's *Glasnost* and the Debate on Chinese Socialism among Chinese Sovietologists, pp. 35–65.

renewed reform movement would implicate little political risk in Chinese writings, particularly in the days after Tiananmen, when China was facing the comeback of party conservative force.

After Tiananmen, the exemplar of Lenin was invoked to fortify the party's rule and tighten its grip on power. This time, Lenin was used for defending that China was practicing true socialism, but not the socialism perverted by Gorbachev and his followers, who descended the Soviet Union into chaos and finally, disintegration. Lenin was served to validate that the regime of Deng Xiaoping was the legitimate socialist government adhering to the norm of orthodox communism.

After Tiananmen, Lenin was used as a tool to limit the scope of reform-oriented criticism, and he was seen as a man who came to appreciate the need for substantial market forces. Chinese scholars argued that Lenin remained fundamentally relevant to China's socialist reform and open door. In their opinion, the first Soviet leader did not oppose capitalist elements while not dependent on it. He advocated establishing a regime with the combination of strong proletarian dictatorship and market economic mechanism. Chinese Soviet-watchers claimed that Deng's reform and open door since 1978 were emblematic of Lenin's theories. Their conclusion could be serviceable for defending Deng's post-Tiananmen policy of accelerating reform and for resisting the assault of party leftists, who attempted to challenge Deng's position and policies.

Besides, there are two major narratives in Chinese Sovietology in the 1990s: first, many articles argued that after the death of Lenin, the Soviet state had no longer been socialist in nature. From Joseph Stalin's oppressive regime,⁷¹ Khrushchev's revisionism, to Gorbachev's *glasnost*, they were all the signs of departure from socialism. Second, Chinese

⁷¹ Joseph Stalin has long been a controversial figure in China. Indeed, Stalin was the subject of avid study in 1980s and 1990s PRC. After the passing of Mao, against the trends of cleansing the remnants of Maoism, Chinese Soviet-watchers in the early 1980s started to mount their criticisms on Stalin and his policies. During the second half of the 1980s, Moscow's re-assessment of Stalin under Gorbachev held great appeal for Chinese scholars. It coincided with the relaxed political climate since the mid-1980s generated by the liberal-minded CCP leaders Hu Yaobang and Zhao Ziyang, and more importantly, the popularity of Gorbachev's *glasnost* in China. Back then, many Chinese scholars were truly impressed by Gorbachev's determination to face the past and demanded that China learn from him. At that time, the image of Stalin in the minds of Chinese scholars was gradually transformed from deity to human, and eventually from human to a devil-like villain. Many academic articles in the late 1980s began to attack almost every aspect of Stalin. Most importantly, while Chinese scholars in the early 1980s were bold to remark that Stalinism was the distortion of Leninism, in the late 1980s some writings were not shy to point out that Stalinism was equal to feudalism and a legacy from Tsars, which had nothing to do with what they saw as true socialism at all. In the wake of the Tiananmen Incident and particularly after March 1990, when Gorbachev ordered to abolish the CPSU power monopoly, criticisms of Stalin in Chinese writings became silent. After Deng Xiaoping's southern tour in early 1992, China began to reflect on its past inefficient socialist economic system, for the take-off of a new wave of reforms after the backlash of Tiananmen. The trend re-ignited the Chinese attack on Stalin. It should be noted that back then, many Chinese Soviet-watchers criticized Stalin as a person, and some flaws of his policies; however, they only made efforts to condemn the man but not the system, and did not display an undercurrent of heterodox thought. They rarely touched the fundamentality of the institution established by Stalin, and were concerned about not socialism itself but its problems. They put the Stalinist economic model and the discredited leftism in 1990s China on an equal footing. By arguing that Stalinism was the root of the Soviet demise and retracing its damage on China under Mao, scholars justified Deng's 1992 statement that leftism has done more harm than good to China, and like rightism, it could also destroy socialism. Therefore, they used their writings to defend China's post-Tiananmen policy of accelerating economic reform and open door policy, and to assist the CCP reformers' efforts to thwart the comeback of the leftist offensive. On the Chinese debates on Stalin and his policies in the 1980s and 1990s, see Jie Li: Brezhnev and Stalin in Chinese Sovietology. In: *International Journal of China Studies* Vol. 9, No. 2 (November 2018), forthcoming.

writings also commented that since 1949 China has still cleaved to the classical Leninism of constructing socialism by taking local conditions into account. Since the Soviet state had stopped practicing genuine socialism after Lenin and therefore had fallen into demise, so the collapse of the USSR was the collapse of a state but *not* of socialism. Socialism will not die, and China is a true socialist state therefore the PRC would not fall.

Seen from their research in both the 1980s and 1990s, many Chinese Soviet-watchers tended to remark that all problems of the former Soviet Union had originated from the Stalinist model after Lenin. They contended that such a model had overly excluded the capitalist elements and obstructed the productive forces and economic development, when Soviet socialism was still in its infancy – thus contributing to the subsequent dissolution of the state. They criticized that it was Stalin who had overturned the intra-party democracy and moderate approach created and reinforced by Lenin after the latter's pre-mature death, and since then the USSR had evolved into a state saddled with tyranny and ideological fetishism.

Conclusion

Seen from the Chinese interpretation of Lenin's open policy after Tiananmen, central to my analysis is the premise that Chinese Sovietology writings evolved primarily as a response to China's then-contemporary challenges and concerns facing individuals. Political developments of the PRC and personal involvement (direct or indirect) with ongoing political and social events, influenced and motivated Chinese Soviet-watchers' changing perceptions of their subject of study. Post-Mao Sovietology writings are inseparable from the scholars' own participation in the social and political discourses of contemporary China, and from their embrace or elaboration of ideologies that served and justified their political claims and current state agendas. In short, to research Soviet socialism has primarily been to trace problems of Chinese socialism as experienced by scholars at the time of their research; this was done in order to legitimize socialist solutions, rather than to seek truth about the Soviet Union.

We can see there are two most common conclusions of post-Mao Chinese Sovietology: firstly, scholars argued that throughout the history of the Soviet Union, only the first leader Lenin had wholeheartedly and consistently practiced what they saw as true socialism. Lenin's premature death resulted in the demise of genuine socialism, and it was left to other countries to revive the system in the future. In other words, most Chinese scholars' research on the Soviet Union began under, and subscribed to, the banner of Lenin. Secondly, Chinese writings made it clear that the fall of the Soviet Union was mainly due to the post-Lenin leadership that did not practice enough socialism or deviated from authentic Marxism-Leninism. It resulted in the Soviet system failing to realize its full potential. This problem had little to do with true socialism but rather the distortion of it. In sum, China under the CCP is true to Lenin's immortal legacy, and this would guarantee the success of socialism in China.

Since the beginning of the Deng era in 1978, the new concept of socialism defined by post-Mao China was "socialism with Chinese characteristics", which means that socialism could incorporate everything for its own strengthening and survival. The term not only conveys that China's socialist system should be a product of Sinicisation of Marxism-Leninism, but also re-defines that socialism is not a doctrine, instead, it is a conflicting and self-contracting theory – you can put whatever inside as long as those ingredients are according to the requirement of

the time, but that theory is also unchallengeable. The conceptual guideline of “socialism with Chinese characteristics” has been set since the departure of Mao up to present. Chinese Sovietology followed this official tenet closely. The scholarship consistently portrayed and defined true socialism as “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. Chinese Soviet-watchers used it as the theoretical premises and compass to govern and lead their writings and research on the USSR. In research of the Soviet Union, Chinese scholars can be said to agree on one point: since 1949 the CCP has generally lived up to Lenin’s expectations, and it has applied the stand, viewpoint, and method of Leninism in building the country. The Party has scientifically analysed China’s national conditions and constructed socialism according to its own circumstances. In their eyes, Lenin symbolizes the fundamental principle of Chinese state-building – “socialism with Chinese characteristics”. The use of Lenin after Tiananmen remained true to this post-Mao political mandate, which heralded Deng Xiaoping’s claim in repudiating the post-Lenin Soviet model, introducing the capitalist elements, and building a powerful China under the communist rule.

Moreover, in 1997, Yang Xiaoyan, a lecturer at Beijing Technology and Business University, criticized that Khrushchev’s 1956 secret speech – which revealed and condemned Stalin’s supposed crimes – was the origin of the 1989 East European turmoil and the final collapse of the Soviet Union.⁷² In fact, Mao Zedong might have already sensed this sentiment. He said in November 1956, a few months after the release of Khrushchev’s secret speech, that the USSR had two swords – one was Lenin, another was Stalin. And regarding the possibility of Stalin being denounced and the fate of the Soviet state being in danger, he remarked that “Once this gate is opened, by and large Leninism is thrown away.”⁷³ In this regard, post-Mao Chinese Soviet-watchers seem to have taken heed of Mao’s 1956 admonishment and understood Mao’s premonition perfectly. They seem to have realized that although China was able to blame the Soviet model created by the post-Lenin Moscow leaderships, nevertheless both Lenin and Mao, the fundamental pillars of the socialist states, could never be overturned under any circumstances. Otherwise, the consequences for China would be disastrous, akin to those of the USSR in 1991. Therefore, seen from their research, those scholars generally aligned Lenin and Mao (as well as Deng) with the direction of post-Mao China in their writings and research on the Soviet Union; this served as self-imposed boundaries for their research, beyond which they were unable to go.

In addition, as noted, Chinese scholars always put Deng Xiaoping and Lenin on the same pedestal and stated that Deng had long followed Lenin’s principle of building socialism according to one country’s special conditions. This was particularly true in the 1990s (as this research shows), when Lenin’s policies coincided with China’s interests. At the time, Chinese Sovietologists used the interpretation of Lenin’s writings to bring vigour to the weakening legitimacy of Chinese socialism after the Tiananmen suppression and the demise of world communism, and to give a new impulse to Deng’s policies and future reforms against the post-Tiananmen leftist offensive. Chinese scholars used Lenin to help rebuild the authority of the Party and communism in China.

⁷² Yang Xiaoyan: Pingheluxiaofude “mimi baogao” (On Khrushchev’s “Secret Speech”). In: *Dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu (Contemporary China History Studies)* No. 5 (1997), p. 62.

⁷³ Mao: Speech at the Second Plenary Session of the Eighth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (November 15, 1956). In: Foreign Languages Press (trans.): *Selected Works of Mao Tse-tung* (Vol. 5), p. 341.

In 1995, Li Shenglu, a scholar at the Sichuan Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, identified the following three concepts of Deng Xiaoping with those of Lenin: everything must be based on practice, rather than theory; the key of building socialism is economic development, not political struggle; and socialism and capitalism are not in contradiction.⁷⁴ He praised, “Deng Xiaoping’s thinking in reform and open door is in fact using Lenin’s theory to build socialism with a Chinese character. He has inherited and developed Leninism.”⁷⁵ In 1999, Ye Qingfeng, a professor of socialist studies at the Central Party School, made it clear that “the path launched by Deng in 1978 is a return to and a logical continuation of Lenin’s New Economic Policy”, and “The New Economic Policy is exactly the direction of China taken since 1978.”⁷⁶

According to Gao Fang, the post-1917 Lenin administration equalled Deng’s post-1978 reforms. Both paths symbolized what they saw as true socialism, which meant integrating Marxist theory with local conditions. Both measures were “the middle way marching toward socialism”, which distinguished them from the leftist errors committed by Stalin and the rightist tendencies represented by Khrushchev and Gorbachev.⁷⁷ This perfectly encapsulated the research outcomes of post-Mao Chinese Sovietology: after Lenin, the Soviet Union was no longer socialist in nature. The demise of the Union was due to leftism and rightism after Lenin, so the collapse of the state in 1991 had nothing to do with the nature of socialism. After 1978, China returned to what it deemed as the right path of true Leninism – Deng’s reform and open door directions, and socialism with Chinese characteristics, which were intended to guarantee the success of PRC modernization even after the demise of world communism.

The discussions of Chinese Sovietologists reflect the traditional Chinese *zhongyong* (moderation) mentality: not going to extremes, but resolving problems by treading the middle way. Seen from their writings, Chinese scholars always criticized the Soviet practice as a dogmatic adherence to orthodox communist law, and instead promoted the pragmatic and flexible Chinese application of Marxist norm. They argued that China has consistently walked through the middle way symbolized by Lenin, and such a middle way is also the future path of world socialism. As Dong Yuehua, a historian at Remin University, commented in 1999, the reason for the Soviet collapse was that the Kremlin leaders had always gone to two extremes: either rigidly sticking to Marxist doctrine (symbolized by Stalin and Brezhnev) or completely renouncing it (represented by Khrushchev and Gorbachev). On the other hand, he argued, China always cleaves to socialism by improving the system but not shaking it off. So China would exist and would never fall.⁷⁸

⁷⁴ Li Shenglu: Lundengxiaoping duiliening jianshe shehui zhuyi sixiangde fazhan (On Deng Xiaoping’s Contribution to Lenin’s Theories on Building Socialism). In: *Shehui zhuyi yanjiu (Socialism Studies)* No. 6 (1995), pp. 33–36.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

⁷⁶ Ye Qingfeng: Lunlieneng wanniande shehui zhuyi sixiang (Lenin’s Thoughts on Socialism in the Evening of His Life). In: *Zhonggong zhongyang dangxiao xuebao (Journal of the Party School of the Central Committee of the CCP)* No. 4 (1999), p. 72.

⁷⁷ Gao Fang: Jiaqiang toudi dongou zhongyade guoqu, xianzaihe weilai (To Strengthen Research on the Past, Present, and Future of Eastern Europe and Central Asia). In: *Eluosi dongou zhongya yanjiu (Russian, East European and Central Asian Studies)* No. 1 (1998), p. 17.

⁷⁸ Dong Yuehua: Maozedong pingjia sidalin (Mao Zedong on Stalin). In: *Dangdai zhongguoshi yanjiu (Contemporary China History Studies)* No. 4 (1999), p. 54.

As such, many Chinese scholars expressed that Lenin was the symbol of such true socialism and the first Soviet leader still remained fundamentally relevant to China's socialist development after Tiananmen and the fall of the USSR. In their opinion, Lenin was a pragmatic man who transformed Marxist theory into reality. He created a thesis that socialism could be founded in a backward nation without previous experience of a capitalist stage – a point that Chinese scholars must defend especially after the downfall of the USSR.⁷⁹ In the minds of those Chinese scholars, Lenin was an example of Chinese-style socialism personified. For them, both Lenin and Deng were the great Marxists who shared the same legacy of building socialism by integrating theories with practice and learning from different things, while upholding the faith of proletarian dictatorship and communism – this is socialism with Chinese characteristics. The Chinese writings played on these positive associations of the Grail of Lenin, making him the moral centre of its representation of post-Mao China.

After Tiananmen, Chinese Soviet-watchers put Deng Xiaoping and Lenin on the same altar and stated that Deng had long followed Lenin's principle of building socialism according to one country's special conditions, which was exactly the so-called "socialism with Chinese characteristics." To conclude, this historical episode in the early 1990s, which used Lenin to bring vigour to the weakening legitimacy of Chinese socialism after Tiananmen and to provide a mandate for Deng's policies and future reform, functioned as learning lessons from Moscow, legitimizing the CCP rule and the Chinese way of doing socialism, as well as envisioning the future direction of China in the post-communist world. Lenin's thinking of using unorthodox methods to achieve orthodox socialism in a backward state bore the stamp of the ethos of post-Mao China: there is no universal truth, only truth according to the tide is truth. Chinese Soviet-watchers projected Lenin as much needed convenience for rebuilding the authority of the Party and communism. They succeeded in tailoring history to suit the political needs and reshaping the past to serve the interests of the present.

Through their research (as presented in this contribution), Chinese Soviet-watchers are directly or indirectly participating in defining the reform process, and devising and legitimizing reform ideology and propaganda. Their writings often say more about China than about the Soviet Union. PRC Sovietologists constantly sought to capitalize on their research of the USSR. By doing so, they attempted to further China's interests and seek solutions for its own socialist system. It became a striking example of scholarship in which traditional criteria of evidence and argument, objectivity and truth, are largely overruled by normative political considerations. By researching the Soviet Union and quoting substantially from Lenin, Chinese Soviet-watchers did not focus on the USSR alone, but mostly attempted to confirm and legitimize the state policies of reform and open door, and to propagandize and predetermine the final victory of socialism in China. In sum, Chinese scholars projected Sovietology not as an autonomous realm, but as the legitimizer of post-Mao state policies. It led to the moulding of the scholarship in the image of political goals and assumptions. This is seen in the concept of socialism with Chinese characteristics, which is a grand but marvellously vague expression that perfectly fits Deng Xiaoping's basic approach: stretching the acceptable ideological framework to allow the country to pursue policies that worked. Post-Mao Chinese Sovietology also became a malleable tool that could be reinvented to serve different political purposes regardless of academic authenticity. By doing so, Chinese

⁷⁹ On Lenin's original, see Lenin: On the So-Called Market Question. In: Lenin: Collected Works, 1893–1894 (Vol. 1), p. 79.

Sovietologists sought to make Chinese-style socialism meaningful and valued. Writings on the Soviet Union have largely reflected China's prevailing political climate as well as the current strategy of reform and open door. Although changes in the Soviet Union and in Sino-Soviet (and later Sino-Russian) relations have mattered, China's domestic concerns have been primary. We can say that Chinese Sovietology is an epiphenomenon of PRC politics.

Seen from this paper, Chinese research on the Soviet Union, therefore, could be considered as more of a rationalization of their opinions about the legitimacy of Chinese socialism, China's domestic politics, and state agendas, than an academic attempt to reconstruct and discover the Soviet past. Scholars demonstrated the purported causal relations between the Soviet past and the political views they upheld for China's future. They mainly used their interpretation of the events in the USSR to speak for the political agendas that were believed to represent the correct directions of Chinese socialism and modernization, and to justify ongoing reform programs. Thus Chinese Sovietology served to render Party policies and principles understandable and plausible.