

Geopolitics

Imperialism(s), Russia, China - a contribution to the debate centred on the historical context

Monday 16 January 2023, by [ROUSSET Pierre](#) (Date first published: 20 December 2022).

At first glance, the trajectories of Russia and China in the course of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries seem very similar: from revolution to reintegration into the capitalist world market at the risk of (again) becoming dominated countries, followed by a rebound leading to the affirmation of two new imperialisms. On closer inspection, these trajectories also turn out to be irreducibly specific in more than one aspect.

Contents

- [A partial review of our \(...\)](#)
- [A big capitalist power is an](#)
- [What there is in common \(...\)](#)
- [The Russo-Japanese War and the](#)
- [Revolutions, counter-revolutio](#)
- [Some peculiarities of the](#)

A comparison “in context” makes it possible to address a wide range of political, conceptual and historical questions that this article only outlines, knowing that each element of analysis put forward here is debatable. These “avenues for reflection” aim above all to fuel the debates on the changes imposed by the current upheaval in the world situation: what to keep, reformulate, introduce, discard?

The answer to these questions depends in part on the current of thought to which we have belonged, but we are all faced with the same necessity: to take stock. Dialogue between political traditions is both necessary and possible. An example: Mao’s China was, as far as I am concerned, a non-capitalist transitional society (which does not mean socialist); for others it was state capitalism – but not imperialism. We agree in judging that it has become so and past differences should not prevent us from working together to analyze the Chinese social formation and to position ourselves together on what constitutes an internationalist commitment in the present world. The same goes for “third-worldist” currents and activists or those coming from Maoism for whom China is no longer red – such as Kavita Krishnan in India, who broke with the PCML-Liberation (she was a member of its political bureau).

This contribution is organized in four parts:

- A critical look at the geopolitical vocabulary that we have inherited from the previous period.
- A renewed examination of the notion of imperialism.

- A comparison of Russian and Chinese historical trajectories.
- A schema for interpreting the succession of revolutions and counter-revolutions in China.
- An insight into the particularities of the current Russian and Chinese regimes.

Without being a sinologist, I am more familiar with the “Chinese question” than the “Russian question” and this is reflected in the balance of this contribution – a contribution which does not concern the present situation, but its historical background. Throughout the analysis, some theoretical notions are called to the rescue, such as the particularities of a transitional society, bureaucracy...

A partial review of our geopolitical vocabulary in the light of the present time

Under the influence of multiple crises, the world situation continues to change, leading us into unknown territories. Having to revisit the vocabulary, notions or concepts that we use is certainly not specific to the twenty-first century. The previous century had its share of novelties and unforeseen events, such as the world wars, the revolutionary wave initiated in Russia and prolonged in China, fascism and Nazism, the Stalinist counter-revolution, the formation of the Eastern and Western blocs, the transformations of capitalism and globalisation...

The particularity of the contemporary period is therefore neither the degree of violence of the present times nor the eruption of the unforeseen, but the historical tipping point caused by capitalist, market and financial globalization, as evidenced by the health crisis, the brutality of climate change, the scale of the global ecological and social crisis, the specific forms that inter-imperialist conflicts are taking today.

Clarifying the use of a vocabulary inherited from the “before” period can help to pose fundamental questions.

- The term “New Cold War” is misleading, because the Cold War of yesteryear did not involve opposing imperialist powers and the degree of economic interdependence within the world market was nothing compared to what it is today. It is inevitable that the phrase “New Cold War” will flourish in the media and political discourse today, but we should not use it.
- The term Third World is obsolete, since it was defined in relation to the Japanese-Western imperialist bloc on the one hand and the Soviet bloc on the other. It has often been replaced by the term South, as opposed to North. The English formula is more meaningful: Global South. The so-called Third World has always been heterogeneous, bringing together very different countries, although all dominated, but these terms need to be clearly redefined today. Does the G77 [1] represent the “Global South”? Is China its representative, as it claims? Or Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Qatar...

The term semi-industrialized countries sought to take into account some of these differences, but led to putting in the same conceptual bag a British colony (Hong Kong) and Mexico, which was moreover very little industrialized at the time. The notion of sub-imperialism had been forged to take into account power relations within the Third World, such as the place of Brazil in Latin America, but it implied that these countries played the role of regional policeman and relay in the service of the classical imperialisms (in this case American). They can effectively still play such a role today, but it is clear that from now on, each of the “bridge” states, including the rentier petro-monarchies or South Africa, is in a position to play its own cards in the international arena and to defend the

interests of its ruling classes.

The South exists, but what is its geopolitical perimeter and what is the best way to denominate it to clarify our thinking, but also to discuss it in an understandable way in the anti-imperialist movement? On the occasion of major international conferences (such as COP27), certain activist circles tend to identify with blocs of countries (such as the G77) by confining themselves to the field of relations between states, which it is however imperative to combine with the field of class relations, which show that we do not belong to a same “camp.” I now tend to favour the existing terms, simple and widespread, of “dominated countries”, or “dependent countries”, as opposed to “dominant countries” (a broader notion than imperialist countries). Why make it complicated when it can be simple?

A big capitalist power is an imperialism

We had to and we have to continue to analyze the transformations of the “imperialist system” (which contributes to organizing the global dominant order) and of imperialisms in their diversity [2]

The diversity of imperialisms has increased qualitatively with the global deployment of China (and, to a different extent, Russia). Neoliberal globalization has caused a reorganization of the global system of domination: increased interdependence of rival imperialisms. Development of a powerful transnational Capital. Attempts (seemingly unstable) to create currencies from private sources. Partial abandonment by the imperialist states of sovereign responsibilities in favor of the private sector in fields as important as war (the private military companies - PMC) or the definition of a public health policy (the incompetent advisers of the McKinsey cabinet of whom Macron is so fond).

This place granted to the private sector goes further and further as shown by the development by Elon Musk of the Starlinks system - namely, constellations of communication satellites capable of operating even when the Internet terminals on the ground have broken down or been destroyed. The use of this system has enabled Ukrainian combat units to coordinate their operations on the ground in real time. A considerable advantage, but which places the armies that use it under the dependence of a private actor whose interests do not necessarily correspond to theirs. Did not Musk, who is eyeing the Chinese market, propose that Beijing should be able to ensure sovereign powers in Taiwan (in terms of international politics, military, etc.), while accepting the maintenance on the island of the existing political-legal framework. A rather stupid proposal, it must be said, since it corresponds to the principle of “one country, two systems” which existed in Hong Kong before the CCP repudiated it and brought the territory under its boot, but Xi Jinping must have appreciated it and maybe that was the intended purpose. Musk has previously threatened to pull his system out of Ukraine, demonstrating his power to blackmail [3].

These transformations are such that one can probably conclude that “classical” imperialism no longer exists. One might think that this remains the case at least for the United States, but, in addition to its relative decline, the changes in the international environment in which it operates are such - and the crisis of domestic governance which undermines it so deep - that it does not come out unscathed. Politically, reeling from the Ukrainian crisis and thanks to the election of Joe Biden, it was able to regain the initiative in Europe, as well as in the Indo-Pacific, but we see how the process of China-USA technological and economic “separation” comes up against many contradictions.

Whatever updates are needed, the concept of imperialism is one that must be kept and defended tooth and claw. If the extension of its use in time (Tsarist imperialism, a formula of Lenin, among others) and in space must be specified (concerning the qualification of the *policy* of regional powers), there is at least one thing that is evident: every big capitalist power is imperialist. It

necessarily defends its investments, its influence and its military deployment, which is what China and Russia are doing, and not only the United States.

The invasion of Ukraine and the particularly “dirty” type of war waged by Putin’s Russia show how far Moscow is willing to go to do this. The people of Burma have to face the devastating violence of the ruling military junta, without receiving significant help from Western states. This does not prevent Beijing from supporting this junta, investing and building a port in the very region where the Rohingya genocide took place. China (as well as Russia) is one of the main supporters of the murderous Burmese regime and the economic and geostrategic ties continue to strengthen, as recently in the field of maritime connections [4]. Xi Jinping does not mind covering his hands in blood and there is nothing benevolent about Chinese imperialism. However, these evident facts are called into question or unduly relativized on the left by a number of more or less “campist” currents.

We are directly concerned, given the place occupied by Jean-Luc Mélenchon in France - Mélenchon who is, moreover, our only figure on the left internationally known beyond restricted circles. He sings the praises of France Great Power thanks, in particular, to its maritime possessions in all the oceans, and denies that the French state is intrinsically imperialist, even if the policy of Emmanuel Macron in many places is reprehensible. When he thinks of himself as President and Chief of the Armed Forces, he reconnects with his Mitterrandian tropism and his responsible governmental posture (with Lionel Jospin in 2000-2002) - he undertakes to reinforce this status as a great power.

Claudio Katz, an Argentine economist, influential on the left, had great difficulty in admitting the existence of new imperialisms, but the facts being stubborn, he now claims that the United States is the only “hegemonic imperialism” (thus the only one that deserves to be fought?). Putin’s Russia does not have the means for global hegemonic ambition, but it does everything to impose its hegemony in its sphere of influence in Eastern Europe and the Mediterranean. That is already considerable, especially for the people who pay a high price for its interventionism. As for the Chinese leadership, it displays global hegemonic ambitions to the point that the conflict between the rising power (China) and the established power (the United States) has become one of the “structuring” factors of the world situation..

Lastly, some people dissociate the analysis of the Chinese or Russian regimes (whose authoritarian, even dictatorial character they can recognize) from the judgment passed on their international role, which is supposedly progressive because not rooted in a colonial past and offering to dominated countries an alternative vis-à-vis the imperialisms that have historically dominated them. Unfortunately, one cannot thus dissociate the two fields of action of a state whose policy proceeds from the same point of view, shaped by its class character, the nature of its resources and its means, the particular composition of the power structure... Russia and China share the first of the three factors mentioned here (there may be others), but not the next two.

What there is in common (or not) between the historical trajectories of Russia and China

The historical trajectory of the Russian and Chinese revolutions raises common theoretical questions: the conditions of the initial break with the dominant world order, the nature of the society resulting from the revolution, the reasons for their entry into crisis, the conditions for their reintegration into the world capitalist order, and then their re-emergence as new imperialist powers. To benefit from comparative analyses, we must begin by taking into account what these two countries have in common and what sets them apart.

Geographies

Russia and China have in common that they are the two largest countries in Eurasia, which implies that the evolution of their relations has major repercussions throughout the continent. They also share a long border, a source of collaboration, tension and conflict. However, they differ in their geopolitical centre of gravity and their privileged zone of influence: they do not look in the same direction.



Eurasia (iStock). The respective size of Russia and China is distorted.

Historically, the Tsarist Empire was a European power, with Siberia as its immense hinterland. Before the caesura of the First World War and the 1917 revolution, it played a major role in the redrawing of borders and areas of influence (remember the Napoleonic wars...). Its near area of interference today includes a large part of Asia (from Central Asia to the Northeast Pacific). Beyond continental borders, its gaze naturally turns north, towards the Arctic. However, this polar region is in the process of acquiring major importance, with global warming: the race to control maritime routes that the retreat of the pack ice frees and the exploitation of economic resources is underway [5], while geostrategic conflicts are intensifying in this region [6].

China is an Asian power whose area of interference extends from Central Asia to Northeast Asia. Today it (still) has the means to invest massively throughout the world and has not hesitated to do so in the Arctic, but its geopolitical gaze is above all turned towards the Indo-Pacific region where it can both play on the fact of its proximity and project itself, including militarily.

The two powers are also in competition along their continental borders, Beijing is extending its influence in Central Asia, which Moscow considers part of its imperial heritage. This rise in the power of China enables, in this region, states to reduce their dependence on Russia and to widen their geostrategic options. This is the case today in Kazakhstan, a very important country due to its location (a geographical crossroads) and its resources (iron, manganese, coal, oil, uranium, potassium, etc.), which those close to Putin denounce in terms which recall the Ukrainian precedent [7].

Stalinist Russia (which Putin identifies with, as he does with Catherine II) never recognized Maoist China as its equal, neither before 1949 nor after. In Moscow's eyes, the country had to be a satellite state - something the CCP could not accept. It turns out that this historical, well-documented conflict would explain why the Chinese and Russian translations of the famous declaration of "friendship without limits" published shortly before the invasion of Ukraine differ on one word: "friendship" in Russian, "conviviality" in Chinese, and that the same was true in two earlier treaties (dating from 1950 and 2001). Explanation: the Society for Sino-Soviet Friendship founded in 1945 acted as a propaganda organ singing the praises of the superiority of the Russian big brother [8], to the displeasure of the Chinese leaders. This is not the only case where diplomatic texts differ in their official translations and these "nuances" are often revealing.



Kazakhstan in Central Asia and Eurasia.

Today we are witnessing a reversal of the balance of power, with Chinese power far outweighing Russian power, but Vladimir Putin cannot recognize this.

Uneven and combined development

At the beginning of the twentieth century, Russian and Chinese societies bore the mark of what is called “uneven and combined development”: poles of industrialization, with sometimes strong concentrations of workers, attracted a labour force stemming from a vast rural world that was little “modernized”. In these two countries, the communist movement was first oriented towards the proletariat (and the intelligentsia), then more or less quickly raised the question of the role that the peasantry could play in the revolution. The least that can be said is that the answer to this question has been debated [9] Yet it was essential. Note that we should talk about peasant questions (in the plural), as the Chinese rural world differed so much from its Russian counterpart (and the land tenure structure in China differed from the south to the northeast of the country [10]).

Our political circles have generally “read” the Russian Revolution to find lessons applicable decades later in Western Europe, at the risk of no longer taking into account the context (the First World War) and the specificities of the Russian social formation, which nevertheless constitute the foundation of the theory of permanent revolution. This unequal and combined social formation brings the Tsarist Empire closer to modern China, beyond the obvious differences. From this point of view, the Russian revolution inaugurated the cycle of revolutions of the abovementioned Third World, which the Chinese revolution prolonged with force [11].

The effectiveness of the theory of permanent revolution in the analysis of Russian and Chinese revolutionary processes shows that they had more in common than is usually acknowledged.

Long histories

Russia and China differ radically in their long histories and this has profound political and cultural implications.

Asian mode of production. These countries belong in fact to two different paths of historical development. The first fits, although in a very particular way, into the European lineage, with a long transition from feudalism to capitalism. In the second, a form of feudalism was succeeded, for some two millennia, by imperial China. This period stems, in a plurilinear conception of history which I find inspiring, from an Asian mode of production where a centralized state bureaucracy bases its legitimacy in particular (but not only) on the realization of major works (including irrigation works necessary for Chinese rice cultivation). China is perhaps one of the non-Western countries where the urban bourgeoisie was the most developed, but the imperial power kept it under control.

The CCP today sticks to Stalinist orthodoxy, a universal unilinear conception of history and its five stages (from the primitive commune to socialism). Some of Marx’s texts certainly have a strong unilinear tone, but he explicitly removed all ambiguity in the preparatory works for *Capital* (the *Grundrisse*) [12] and in his epistolary exchanges: this historical perspective concerns Europe, not the whole world! The publication and translation of these texts by Marx and Engels in the 1950s

opened up a vast debate on the Asian mode of production [13]

This frame of reference is obviously controversial, but it is productive:

It makes it possible not to approach the history of China in terms of backwardness or late development, whereas it was, in more than one area, advanced (inventions, urban development, etc.).

It helps to understand the imprint of long history on modern and contemporary thought. Even though the Maoist bureaucracy was obviously not the sociological continuity of the imperial bureaucracy, it was able to momentarily derive a certain legitimacy from its past role. The centrality of state power was a long-standing evidence, the fact of conquering it was indeed worth a “mandate from heaven” - no need to claim dynastic continuity (the “blue blood” of our royalties). The experience of popular and revolutionary struggles is also rich and ancient, since the revolt of the Taipings, often considered to be the greatest social movement of the nineteenth century.

The Taiping revolt began in the south and spread to central China between 1851 and 1864. The Qing dynasty took almost fifteen years to defeat it, at the cost of a merciless civil war. The “Heavenly Kingdom of Great Peace” (in short, Taiping), whose founder, Hong Xiuquan, “the Messiah”, called himself the younger brother of Jesus Christ (he had read pamphlets distributed by missionaries), enacted agrarian reform accompanied by radical social measures, such as the abandonment of polygamy and the custom of binding women’s feet; gender equality (combined with a strict separation between men and women); the prohibition of arranged marriages, gambling, slavery, torture, prostitution; private land ownership was abolished; food, clothing and other common consumer goods were pooled in public warehouses; opium, tobacco and alcohol were also now prohibited [14]

China having also experienced one of the greatest revolutions of the twentieth century, it inherits a history which makes it a country with a strong political culture.

Internationalization of Marxism. This frame of reference also helps not to think of Western Marxism [15] as the norm, arguing that it was born in the West, the cradle of capitalist hegemony. The internationalization of Marxism meant that it took root in extra-European social and cultural realities, which was not necessarily possible everywhere, but it was in China. We can also say that this process of internationalization began in Russia, the European East, as we see with Trotsky (his theory of permanent revolution) and Lenin (although he long refused to recognize his own originality).

The rooting of Marxism in non-European countries must be understood as an enrichment, because in doing so it becomes universal, while taking on a regional and national content. Chinese Marxism is as plural as European Marxism, but it expresses, in its plurality, specificities. It is not a carbon copy. It is to this question that Nguyen Khac Vien, director of the Vietnamese Studies, tackled, already a long time ago, concerning Vietnam. [16]

The Russo-Japanese War and the geopolitical upheavals in the East, preludes to the world wars

The Russo-Japanese War (February 1904-September 1905) was a major event in many fields, from military history to the reconfiguration of relations between imperialisms. Its repercussions were profound in the Russian Empire (it had a lot to do with the 1905 revolution...) and in the world. It was a real geopolitical thunderclap: for the first time, a great European power was beaten - and

soundly - by an Asian army [17]. It is none the less rarely mentioned in France [18]. So much so that it is necessary to describe the stages for a French readership.

The premises. The major European powers worried about Japanese expansion after Tokyo's victory over China in 1895 [19] Russia decided to consolidate its positions in the Far East. In 1898, it seized the Liaodong peninsula, the port of Dairen and Port Arthur in Manchuria. Faced with these advances, Japan issued a kind of ultimatum to Moscow in 1904, without effect.



Map of the Russian-Japanese war (1850-1905) [20]

The Capture of Port Arthur. On the evening of February 8, 1904, a Japanese squadron sank three Russian ships at anchor off Port Arthur. Master of the sea, Tokyo declared war on Russia on February 10 and sent four army corps to the continent. Added to the maritime blockade was the land siege of Port Arthur, which fell on January 2, 1905, while three of the army corps marched in the direction of Liaoyang, where the Russian forces had withdrawn to. The rainy season caused the suspension of operations, while the Japanese reinforced their mastery of the sea by destroying, on August 14, the Russian squadron in Vladivostok. At the end of August, the Battle of Liaoyang resumed, opposing 140,000 Russians to 160,000 Japanese. The Russians were forced to fall back in the direction of Mukden, where they entrenched themselves.

The Battle of Mukden. The Battle of Mukden began on February 20. The Russian front was significantly reinforced thanks to the Trans-Siberian railway. Extending over 80 km on either side of the Mukden railway line, it comprised a triple line of trenches which linked together some twenty redoubts and five forts; 300,000 Russian soldiers were supported by a thousand guns. Opposite, the Japanese had more or less equal forces. During fifteen days of combat which caused considerable losses on both sides, no decisive result was obtained. On the other hand, the encirclement movements at great distance, led by the Japanese, forced the Russians to abandon their defensive positions, then to evacuate Mukden on March 9 and to begin a long retreat of 100 km towards the north, consecrating the Japanese victory. Casualties were very heavy on both sides (96,000 Russians, including 20,000 prisoners, and 70,000 Japanese).

The Russian defeat was consummated. Some time later, the war at sea also ended in disaster for the Russians. During the winter of 1904-1905, the Admiralty had decided to send its Baltic fleet to the Far East. It took eight months to reach the Far East. On its arrival in the Korea Strait, the Russian squadron (12 battleships, 8 cruisers, 9 torpedo boats) was destroyed within sight of the island of Tsushima on May 27 and 28, 1905 by the Japanese fleet, which included 12 battleships, 16 cruisers and 65 torpedo boats.

The Treaty of Portsmouth. In this critical situation, the Russians decided to negotiate. Thanks to the mediation of Britain, France and the President of the United States, Theodore Roosevelt, they obtained an armistice, which preceded the peace treaty signed on September 5, 1905 in Portsmouth. Russia recognized Japan's right of protectorate over Korea, ceded to it Port Arthur, Dairen and its rights over the territory of Liaodong, the South Manchurian railway as well as the part of the island of Sakhalin located south of the fiftieth parallel. From a military point of view, this war, which had seen the first appearance in force of the machine gun and the rapid-fire cannon, gave fire a now capital importance, which was to be confirmed by the continuous fronts of 1914-1918. In the political domain, the Treaty of Portsmouth marked an abrupt halt to Russian expansion towards the East and testified, on the international level, to the rise of Japan to the rank of great power.

China and, of course, Korea, were among the big losers of the Treaty of Portsmouth. Its signing by Tokyo nevertheless opened a political crisis in Japan, as it included compromises imposed by the United States concerning the island of Sakhalin (whose full possession was expected) and financial compensation.



Contemporary Northeast Asia

The significance of the Russo-Japanese War

By the scale of the troops mobilized, the war of the trenches and its fortifications, the massive use of the machine gun and the rapid-fire cannon, the massive sacrifice of the soldiers, it announced the continuous fronts of 1914-1918, entering the annals of military historiography [21]. It shows how the First World War took shape in the East and not only in the West. Russia lost most of its military means which it had to hastily reconstitute and was losing the initiative in the inter-imperialist competition for control of Asia in which all the powers were engaged. It tried to regain control from 1909, but without success in Northeast Asia. On the other hand, its "return" complicated the waltz of alliances which was the prelude to the First World War.

The division of the world was engaged in the Asia-Pacific region with the rise in force of the United States and Japan (which were measuring up to each other). The Russo-Japanese conflict thus inaugurated the cycle of world wars which ran until 1945 (and a little longer in certain regions).

To understand the echo of the Russo-Japanese war in progressive circles at the time [22], one must take into account that it was not perceived as an inter-imperialist conflict, but as the victory of a bourgeois constitutional monarchy against one of the worst autocratic regimes. Japan had a Constitution, an elected parliament, a plurality of political parties, a legal opposition, greater freedom of the press, a more educated population. Before 1906, Russia was the only European

country without a Constitution.

Thus, Lenin saluted in the victory of Tokyo the resistance against a Russian colonial enterprise: "The war of an advanced country with a backward country played once again, as it happens many times in history, a great revolutionary role, accomplished by the Japanese bourgeoisie, victorious over the autocracy", favouring the opening of a revolutionary crisis in Russia itself, despite the weakness of the organized workers' movement, thus underlining "the great revolutionary role of the historical war in which the Russian worker participates in spite of himself" [23].

The Japanese victory strengthened the movements fighting, in other countries, for the establishment of a constitutional regime, as in Iran and China. In general, the Japanese victory undermined Western claims to the superiority of the white race and its civilization, reinforcing anti-colonial resistance, the pan-Islamic reference (Turkey), pan-Asianism... meeting with a wide echo in the colonial and semi-colonial countries.

Revolutions, counter-revolutions, dependence and imperialist revival

Whatever their differences, the Russian and Chinese revolutionary processes pose the question of a double rupture: with the dominant world order and with the bourgeois order. Certainly, Russia was a great power, while China was being colonized by competing imperialisms. It seems to me however that, defeated during the First World War, Russia was on the way to becoming a dependent country, especially since it was also threatened in its Siberian east.

The course of the revolutions of 1917 and 1949 is different in each case [24]. In the Russian case, there is a close dialectic between soldiers' revolts, peasant uprisings, women's demonstrations, national movements within the Empire and proletarian mobilizations - giving rise to workers', peasants' and soldiers' soviets (councils); as for the civil war, it succeeded the conquest of power. In the Chinese case, a similar dialectic (an additional military offensive to break the power of the warlords) was broken by a succession of defeats beginning in 1927 (and for which the Stalinist faction in Moscow bears a heavy share of responsibility). The communist movement was considerably weakened in the urban centres and had, for the most part, to retreat to the rural world. The civil war preceded the conquest of power by two decades.

In both cases, however, the revolution resulted, according to our analysis, in societies of transition. What does that mean? The revolutionary overthrow of the previous order opened a process of radical transformation of the social order which was embodied in a clearly visible modification of class relations, but the transformation of social relations as a whole takes time - particularly in gigantic countries with a predominantly rural population. Society was no longer capitalist, but it was not yet socialist - and the socialist outcome is not guaranteed in advance, far from it (this is why it is better not to speak of societies of transitions *to socialism*).

The future will be determined by struggles. There is no dominant, established mode of production that reproduces itself "naturally". In the latter case, there are relations of "concordance" between the nature of the class in power, the state, the dominant ideology, social relations of subordination... which subversive counter-currents have great difficulty in shaking. In the case of a transitional society, we must think on the contrary of "discordances", because the transformation of the social formation takes place according to heterogeneous rhythms. We have not sufficiently collectivized a specific conceptualization helping to analyze and discuss these revolutionary experiences.

We have nevertheless done so concerning a major question: the process of bureaucratization, namely the crystallization of a new social elite which becomes aware of its collective interests,

behaves as a dominant “caste” and asserts its power over society. The dangers of bureaucratization have been previously analyzed in part with regard to the integration of political or union apparatuses into the bourgeois order, although it was not until 1914 that the extent of the danger became apparent, when every party of social democracy voted for war credits, integrating national unity and repudiating the much-vaunted internationalism. However, this was the first time that it had arisen in a “post-conquest of power” transitional society.

Failing to spread quickly to other countries, the revolution was confronted with two enemies, one immediate (the imperialist and bourgeois counter-revolution), the other insidious and hidden, arising from within the new regime. To illustrate the problem, when Stalin turned against the kulaks (rich peasants) and imposed forced collectivization, the Russian Left Opposition initially thought that the Stalinist regime was taking a “left” turn. While denouncing bureaucratic behaviour and apparatuses, the Maoists (with some exceptions?) have not analyzed the social specificity of bureaucratization. I will venture into a daring hypothesis. Following the outbreak of the Korean War (1950-1953), Mao Zedong led a violent campaign of repression against “counter-revolutionaries”. Independent communists (including the Trotskyists) fell victim to it, but the old dominant classes were disintegrated: the urban bourgeoisie and the rural gentry. The authoritarian character of the Maoist regime was reinforced.

The internal risk of bourgeois counter-revolution had become nil; on the other hand, the process of bureaucratic counter-revolution was initiated. In my framework of analysis, it ends in 1969, in the chaos of the Cultural Revolution, when Mao asks the army to repress all dissent, including his own supporters. Given the context of the time, the bureaucratic counter-revolution created the preconditions for the bourgeois counter-revolution which triumphed in the years 1980-1990, with as a turning point the crushing in the whole country of the Movement of June 4, 1989 (the “Tian’anmen massacre”, a misnomer, but which has imposed itself).

In conclusion, let us give all its importance to the concept of bureaucratic counter-revolution and to the analysis of its particularities (the process of bureaucratization). It remains essential to the understanding of the twentieth century. of contemporary Russian and Chinese history, as well as to the definition of our tasks to combat the bureaucratic phenomenon in its various forms: to strengthen the self-organization of the exploited. and oppressed.

To carry out this combat, it is obviously necessary to avoid using the word “communist” to designate the regimes which claim to be such and are not. We are obviously not going to quibble over proper nouns by putting quotation marks on the adjectives “communist” (as in CCP) or “popular” (as in PRC). However, the word communist is, in the dominant discourse, emptied of all content, China can, for example, be recognized as capitalist and qualified as communist in the same sentence, which represents a magnificent contradiction in terms. We must try to be specific according to the country, according to the periods. The word Stalinist must be used, but specifying its use.

“Stalinist” is our synthetic characterization of the regime established by Stalin. Beyond that, it needs to be specified. The adjective “Stalinist” can relate to the ideology of a regime, a movement, the thought of a theoretician... Still, we have to be careful: an ideology, a thought always have multiple sources and Stalinism would be only one component. It can also define the relationship of organic subordination to Moscow of a party, of a state (the satellites) - namely the subordination to the Soviet bureaucracy, to its international interests, to its diplomacy. This definition seems particularly useful to me, because it makes it possible to avoid putting in the same conceptual bag parties which have continued to follow orders, including leading counter-revolutions, and parties which have led revolutions breaking with the order of Yalta (like the CCP or, in Vietnam, the CPV). This opens up a whole field of concrete analyzes of the movements resulting from the Third International in their varieties. This is still work in progress on a vast scale.

Some peculiarities of the Chinese and Russian regimes

To deploy itself, Chinese imperialism has benefited from many more assets than its Russian counterpart, starting with the central place it has come to occupy, with US blessing, in capitalist globalization. Xi Jinping is often credited with China's international rise, but he benefited from the continuity of a policy of integration into the world market initiated by Deng Xiaoping after his return to power and led by his successors: Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao. All of this was not without factional fighting, but the transition in Russia turned out to be much more chaotic and based on a more exposed economy [25]

In both cases, power has been most centralized in favour of Xi Jinping, a man of the apparatus, of the politico-administrative elite, and Vladimir Putin, who headed the FSB, the Federal Security Service, heir of the KGB. In China, power is concentrated in the Politburo Standing Committee (entirely controlled by Xi's clique). In Russia, the FSB has seen its powers considerably strengthened in various fields (including the economy): the regime is dominated by elites from the security services who now occupy the key centres of the system [26]

The Russian and Chinese regimes converge in their ethno-nationalism and the debate on their political characterizations is ongoing. To carry it out, similarities and contrasts must equally be taken into account. Another huge work in progress.

Even more than Putin's Russia, the Chinese regime seems to me to be at a turning point. The crisis opened after the fire at the Foxconn factory in Urumqi, in Xinjiang, is symptomatic, as the solidarities that have been expressed are geographically extended, multi-ethnic, multi-classist and multi-causal. A significant part of the youth does not respond to Xi Jinping's normalizing injunctions (intensive work, early marriage, etc.). Transnationals worry that the stability of production lines is becoming uncertain; a movement of disengagement is being initiated, of which Apple (Foxconn's principal client) is an example. Although very complicated, this process could be extended.

The speed of Xi's about-face, less than a month after the last CCP congress, on his particularly brutal ZeroCovid policy, testifies to his concern. But, as the pandemic picks up in Europe and Omicron turns out to be much less benign than some would have us believe [27], a change of course (due to economic factors as much as social resistance) poses as many problems as it is supposed to solve. Maintaining the previous health policy is impossible, but modifying it looks dangerous due to poor vaccination coverage, the fragility of the health system and its inegalitarian nature. Faced with the magnitude of the challenge, Xi decided to... step aside! It was up to each and everyone, and to the local authorities, to manage things as they could.

In lockdowns and in their unlocking, Xi pushes capitalist violence and the rejection of health democracy to the point of caricature. Some people find him an excuse: the GDP per capita of China is supposedly too weak for the financing of a better health policy. However, China has the means to produce what it needs (it supplies the whole world!) and to urgently import what it still lacks (vaccines more effective than its own). Doesn't it have more billionaires than any other country?

Tuesday 20 December 2022

Pierre Rousset

P.S.

- IVP. MONDAY 16 JANUARY 2023:
<https://internationalviewpoint.org/spip.php?article7949>
- Translated by *International Viewpoint* from ESSF
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65082>

Footnotes

[1] The Group of 77 (G77) at the United Nations is a coalition of so-called “developing” countries, aiming to strengthen their negotiating capacities. Created by 77 countries, it now includes the majority of UN member states, including China (but not Russia)

[2] On the history of the concept of imperialism, see in particular Bernard Dreano , “Imperialism and the imperialists”, *Les Possibles* n° 34, winter 2022:
[ahttps://france.attac.org/nos-publications/les-possibles/issue-34-winter-2022/dossier-l-evolution-des-rapports-geopolitiques-dans-le-monde/article/l-imperialisme-et-les-imperialistes](https://france.attac.org/nos-publications/les-possibles/issue-34-winter-2022/dossier-l-evolution-des-rapports-geopolitiques-dans-le-monde/article/l-imperialisme-et-les-imperialistes)
Available on ESSF (article 65059),:
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65059>

[3] Starlinks also has many civilian applications, posing other problems. Note that it seems to have its weak points, being insufficiently encrypted. See in particular Elise Vincent, Alexandre Piquard , Cédric Pietralunga , “How Starlinks and Elon Musk’s satellite constellations are changing the war”, *Le Monde*, December 15, 2022.

[4] *The Irrawaddy*, “China Opens New Shipping Route to Myanmar From South China Sea”, November 2, 2022:
<https://www.irrawaddy.com/news/burma/china-opens-new-shipping-route-to-myanmar-from-south-china-sea.html>
Available on ESSF (article 64596), :
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article64596>

[5] Emmanuel Grynszpan , “Russia deploys in the Arctic”. *Le Temps*, March 31, 2017:
<https://www.letemps.ch/monde/russie-se-deploie-lArctic>
Available on ESSF (article 40684) , :
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article40684> , announcing a new ecological and human disaster (for the indigenous peoples)

[6] AFP, “Washington wants to counter the “aggressive attitude” of Beijing and Moscow in the Arctic”, *Le Courrier International*, 6 May 2019:
<https://www.courrierinternational.com/depeche/washington-veut-contrecarrer-lattitude-aggressive-de-pekin-et-moscou-dans-larctique.afp.com.20190506.doc.1g76jz.xml>
Available on ESSF (article 48898), Geopolitics: Washington wants to thwart Pék’s “aggressive attitude” :
<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article48898>

[7] Anna Matveeva, December 19 , 2022, “Ukraine war: Russia only hurts itself with its inflammatory discourse on Kazakhstan”, *The Conversation*:
<https://theconversation.com/ukraine-war-russia-only-hurts-itself-with-its-inflammatory-discourse->

on-kazakhstan-196670

Available on ESSF (article 65079), Ukraine war: Russia only hurts itself with its inflammatory disco:

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65079>

[8] Ariel Shangguan , “China and Russia’s uneven relationship can be explained with one word”, December 13 , 2002, *The Conversation*:

<https://theconversation.com/china-and-russias-uneven-relationship-can-be-explained-with-one-word-196300>

Available on ESSF (article 65028), :

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65028>

[9] Pierre Rousset, 18 January 2013, The peasantry seen from the left, ESSF (article 31088):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article31088>

[10] This did not fail to pose difficult problems for the CCP cadres, obliged to apply a variable national orientation concerning the rhythms of agrarian reform to particular local realities. See William H. Hinton, *Fanshen* , Terre Humaine collection, Plomb: Paris, 1971 (original edition in English: 1966). Paperback reissue (2000)).

[11] Sociologist of the peasantry, Teodor Shanin renewed the way that we could look at Russia. See in particular the two volumes of his work *The Roots of Otherness: Russia's turn of the Century: Russia as a "Developing Society"* (Macmillan 1985) and *Russia 1905-07, Revolution as a Moment of Truth* (Macmillan 1986)

[12] Kevin B. Anderson, “From the *Grundrisse* to *Capital*: Multilinear Themes“, *Marx at the Margins*, University of Chicago Press: Chicago and London, 2010.

[13] For a presentation of this debate and an argument from which I draw inspiration, see Ernest Mandel, “The “Asian mode of production“ and the historical preconditions of the rise of capital”, in *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx*, English translation 1971, Verso edition 2015

[14] Wikipedia: https://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/R%C3%A9volte_des_Taiping

[15] I mean the formula of Western Marxism in its general sense, while it is also used in a much more restricted sense.

[16] Nguyen Khac Vien, “Confucianism and Marxism in Vietnam”, *La Pensée*, no. 105, October 1962.

[17] Gerhard Krebs, May 19 , 2012, “World War Zero? Re-assessing the Global Impact of the Russo-Japanese War 1904-05“, *The Asia-Pacific Journal*, Vol 10, Issue 21, No 2:

<https://apjpf.org/2012/10/21/Gerhard-Krebs/3755/article.html>

Available on ESSF (article 65055), :

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65055>

[18] A blindness that Pierre Grosser combats, *The history of the world is made in Asia. Another vision of the twentieth century* Odile Jacob: Paris 2017.

[19] The Larousse Encyclopedia offers a good summary of this war, on which I rely here:

https://www.larousse.fr/encyclopedia/divers/guerre_russo-japonaise/141839.

[20] <https://www.lesjeunesrussisants.fr/histoire.html>

[21] Bruno Birolli , October 3, 2020, "Russo-Japanese War, Port Arthur , the mother of all the battles of the twentieth century", *Asialyst*

<https://asialyst.com/fr/2020/10/03/war-russia-japan-port-arthur-mother-of-all-battles-xx-century/>
Available on ESSF (article 65089), Russo-Japanese War: Port-Arthur, the mother of all battles of the 20th ::

[//www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65089](https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65089)

[22] Jean-Raphaël Chaponnière, July 21, 2017, "The shock wave of the Battle of Tsushima in 1905", *Asialyst* :

<https://asialyst.com/fr/2015/06/02/l-onde-de-shock-of-the-battle-of-tsushima-in-1905/>

Available on ESSF (article 65091), :

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article65091>

[23] Works, volume 8, p. 45-48. Put in context by Georges Haupt , "War and Revolution with Lenin", *Revue française de sciences politiques* , n° 2, 1971. An online version:

<http://alencontre.org/societe/histoire/guerre-et-revolution-chez-lenin.html>

[24] I addressed this issue in a previous article which also discusses its political and historical context. Pierre Rousset, "A look back at the international Maoist movement in the twentieth century and the ambivalent legacy of the Chinese revolution' , ESSF (article 42406):

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article42406>

[25] Ilya Budraitskis , January 2016, "Russia in crisis: agony of an oil empire", ESSF (article 37074), :

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article37074>

[26] Yauheni Kryzhanousky , 23 November 2022, "From Russian authoritarianism to the war in Ukraine", AOC:

<https://aoc.media/analyse/2022/11/22/de-lautoritarisme-russe-a-la-guerre-en-ukraine/>

Available on ESSF (article 64922), :

<https://www.europe-solidaire.org/spip.php?article64922>

[27] It currently kills more than a hundred people a day in France, not counting the long covids.