

Soviet Sinology and Two Approaches to an Understanding of Chinese History

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Abstract

The theoretical foundation for Soviet studies of social relations in traditional and semi-traditional China was based on Lenin's version of the Marxist theory of social-economic formations. Unlike Marx, who identified two different trends in world history, which represented the unique Western and Eastern historical experiences, Lenin emphasized the universal character of the development of human civilization. In his view, the "feudal mode of production" was the basis for the system of social-economic relations in all parts of the world prior to the emergence of the "capitalist mode of production" in the West. This approach to the world in general, and to Chinese history in particular, became an unchallengeable paradigm in the late 1930s, when the partisans of the "Asiatic mode of production" among Soviet historians were defeated. Nevertheless, even after the concept of the "Asiatic mode of production" was declared to be "anti-Marxist and anti-scientific," the latent controversy between these two paradigms in Soviet sinology became the essence of the polemics on the nature of the Chinese form of feudalism and the driving social force behind the Chinese revolution. Recently, Russian Sinology has demonstrated a retreat to some of the arguments of the partisans of the "Asiatic mode of production" under the framework of "Chinese traditional society."

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