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PHILOSOPHICAL ANALYSIS OF THE THEORY OF “THREE HARMONIES” IN THE INTERNATIONAL POLITICAL VIEWS OF CHINA AND THE USSR

Abstract

Researched that, the concept of the “three harmonies”—the foreign policy advocated by the Soviet government during Nikita Khrushchev’s tenure—aimed to redefine not only the USSR’s foreign policy but also the trajectory of global socialism. This policy emphasized peaceful coexistence, competition, and transition, forming the basis of détente between the East and West. Essentially, it sought peaceful coexistence with Western countries to avoid war while striving to surpass the United States through peaceful competition. However, the concept faced criticism and did not garner unanimous approval. The concept of peaceful coexistence was particularly groundbreaking, as it acknowledged the existence of different social systems and sought to find common ground despite ideological differences. By promoting peaceful competition, the Soviet Union aimed to demonstrate the superiority of socialism through economic, technological, and cultural achievements, rather than through military means. However, the theory of the “three harmonies” faced challenges and criticisms both domestically and internationally. Within the Soviet Union, hardliners criticized Khrushchev’s perceived concessions to the West and feared that peaceful coexistence would undermine the revolutionary zeal of the socialist cause. Internationally, foreign powers, like China, which has historically developed its own current idea of peaceful coexistence, viewed the concept with skepticism, interpreting it as a tactic to divide and weaken the unity of the capitalist bloc.

Keywords: History of philosophy, political philosophy, theory of the “three harmonies”, People’s Republic of China, Communist Party of the Soviet Union, Peaceful Coexistence, Socialist Internationalism, Marxist-Leninist Thought.

Introduction

The theory of the “three harmonies” represented a significant departure from Joseph Stalin’s more confrontational approach to foreign policy. It aimed to navigate the complexities of the Cold War era by advocating for peaceful coexistence and competition rather than direct conflict with the West. This shift reflected Nikita Khrushchev’s desire to pursue a more pragmatic and less ideologically driven approach to international relations. Despite its limitations and challenges, the theory of the “three harmonies” marked a significant moment in the history of Soviet foreign policy. It reflected the complexities and contradictions of the Cold War era, as well as the Soviet Union’s evolving role on the world stage. By exploring the philosophical underpinnings and reception of this theory, we can gain insights into the dynamics of international relations during a pivotal period of the 20th century.

Gucheng Li in *A Glossary of Political Terms of the People’s Republic of China* (1995), collection of over 560 important and frequently-used Chinese political terms and phrases writes: “‘San he’ refers to ‘peaceful coexistence, peaceful competition, and peaceful transition.’ ‘Yi shao’ refers to ‘reducing support and assistance to the liberation struggles of other peoples.’ There is another interpretation of ‘San he’: offering peace to imperialism, to modern revisionism, and to the reactionary factions of foreign countries (Li, 1995: 366). On February 9th and February 29th, 1964, Mao Zedong held meetings with party leaders from foreign states. During these gatherings, he criticized Wang Jiaxiang, the Director of the Central Liaison Department, for advocating the “San he yi shao” approach and accused individuals in the United Front Department of neglecting class struggle. Mao stated that their international agenda focused on implementing “three peaceful acts and one reduction” and asserted the presence of revisionist elements throughout the Central Committee, the Secretariat, including the Vice-Premier, and in various departments, provinces, and branch party committees.

To comprehend the critique of this theory, it is essential to undertake a historical study of the philosophical and ideological underpinnings of this concept, analyzing its components in depth.

Methods

To achieve this goal, the article employs a meticulous review and analysis of primary sources, scholarly works, and official documents within the Soviet historiographical context. By delving into the writings of Soviet historians, the article aims to identify the key themes, interpretations, and nuances that characterized their discussions on the Sino-Soviet relationship. This method involves a comprehensive exploration of historical archives, academic publications, and official statements to unveil the evolving narrative and shifts in interpretation over time. Through a nuanced examination of these sources, the article seeks to contribute valuable insights into the historiographical trends that have influenced the portrayal of this critical geopolitical relationship within the Soviet academic discourse.

Results

The concept of “peace” in the concept of “Peaceful Coexistence” and its involvement in the philosophy of Marxism-Leninism

The concept of “peaceful coexistence” holds a significant place within the framework of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, particularly in the context of international relations during the Cold War era. Central to this concept is the notion of achieving harmony and stability among nations without resorting to violent conflict. This article delves into the understanding of “peace” within the concept of “peaceful coexistence” and its implications within Marxist-Leninist ideology.

From a philosophical perspective, peace encompasses a multidimensional concept that extends beyond the mere absence of conflict or war. Philosophers have approached the notion of peace from various angles, considering its ethical, political, social, and metaphysical dimensions.

Johan Galtung’s book *Peace by Peaceful Means: Peace and Conflict, Development and Civilization* (1996) is a seminal work that explores various dimensions of peace, conflict, development, and civilization from a holistic and interdisciplinary perspective. In this book, Galtung draws upon his extensive experience as a peace researcher, mediator, and theorist to offer insights into the complex dynamics of contemporary global affairs. “To start with, two compatible definitions of peace: *Peace is the absence/reduction of violence of all kinds; Peace is nonviolent and creative conflict transformation.* For both definitions the following holds: *Peace work is work to reduce violence by peaceful means; Peace studies is the study of the conditions of peace work.* The first definition is violence-oriented; peace being its negation. To know about peace we have to know about violence. The second definition is conflict-oriented; peace is the context for conflicts to unfold nonviolently and creatively. To know about peace we have to know about conflict and how conflicts can be transformed, both nonviolently and creatively. Obviously this latter definition is more dynamic than the former” (Galtung, 1996: 9). Transforming world conflicts nonviolently and creatively requires a multifaceted approach that addresses the root causes of conflicts while promoting reconciliation, justice, and sustainable peace.

The idea of eternal peace, also known as perpetual peace or everlasting peace, is a philosophical concept that envisions a state of global harmony and absence of conflict that endures indefinitely. This notion has been explored by philosophers, political theorists, and activists throughout history, reflecting humanity’s aspiration for a world free from the scourge of war and violence. Immanuel Kant, the renowned German philosopher, articulated his vision for eternal peace in his seminal work titled *Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch* (“*Zum ewigen Frieden: Ein philosophischer Entwurf*”), published in 1795. He advocated for republican forms of government, suggesting that democratic states are less likely to engage in war. Kant also proposed the establishment of a “federation of free states” based on principles

of equality and collective security. Additionally, he emphasized the importance of international law and the recognition of cosmopolitan rights to regulate interstate relations. Kant believed that perpetual peace hinges on moral and intellectual progress, stressing the need for education and enlightenment to overcome violence and prejudice. “A peace treaty nullifies all existing causes for war, even if they are unknown to the contracting parties, and even if they are assiduously ferreted out from archival documents” (Kant, 2003:). His ideas continue to influence discussions on global governance and peacebuilding.

From a philosophical standpoint, the concept of “peace” is polysemantic. Various definitions of “peace” can be categorized according to three principles: the inner world of an individual represents peace within the soul, the external world of individuals represents peace among nations, and the metaphysical realm signifies peace in the transcendental sphere. Some of these concepts intersect. For instance, “Satyagraha” (Gandhi, 2001), Mahatma Gandhi’s philosophy of nonviolent resistance, integrates multiple interpretations of peace.

Idea of “Peaceful coexistence” emerged as a response to the heightened tensions of the Cold War, particularly after the death of Joseph Stalin and the subsequent leadership of Nikita Khrushchev. It represents a departure from Stalinist confrontational tactics towards a more pragmatic approach to international relations. At its core, “peaceful coexistence” advocates for the cohabitation of socialist and capitalist states without the necessity for armed conflict.

In the context of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, “peace” within “peaceful coexistence” is multifaceted. It encompasses not only the absence of war but also the promotion of mutual understanding, cooperation, and respect among nations regardless of their ideological differences. This notion of peace is rooted in the Marxist principle of historical materialism, which posits that social progress is driven by class struggle but can ultimately lead to a classless and harmonious society. Historical materialism is a foundational concept in Marxist theory that serves as a framework for understanding historical development and societal change. Coined by Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, historical materialism posits that the material conditions of society—such as the mode of production, social relations, and the economic base—determine the course of history and shape human consciousness and behavior. In 1938, a pivotal moment occurred with the endorsement of *A Short Course in the History of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks* (1939) by a special resolution of the Central Committee of the All-Union Communist Party of Bolsheviks. Notably, Joseph Stalin (Rappaport, 1999: 130) played a significant role in its creation, adding weight to its authority. Of particular importance was the inclusion of the chapter “On Dialectical and Historical Materialism”, which effectively became the benchmark for philosophical understanding within Marxism-Leninism. This text set the standard for interpreting key aspects of the history of the CPSU (Bolsheviks) and Marxism-Leninism, dismissing alternative viewpoints as incorrect. The *Short Course* exerted considerable influence on the ideological direction and was compulsory reading

in party history classes. Central to its narrative was the enduring spirit of struggle, recognized as a perpetual force within its pages.

The book *Stalin's Master Narrative: A Critical Edition of the History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks), Short Course* (2019) edited by David Brandenberger and Mikhail Zelenov focuses on the critical examination and analysis of the *Short Course* in the history of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks). The *Short Course* was a key ideological text during Stalin's era, providing a narrative of the party's history that reflected Stalin's perspective and policies. This critical edition offers insights into the construction of historical narratives, the manipulation of history for political purposes, and the role of ideology in shaping historical understanding (Brandenberger & Zelenov, 2019). It aims to provide readers with a deeper understanding of the ideological mechanisms employed by the Soviet regime under Stalin.

The concept of "peaceful coexistence" reflects a pragmatic understanding of international relations within the Marxist-Leninist framework. It acknowledges the geopolitical realities of the Cold War while striving to advance the interests of the socialist bloc through peaceful means. However, it also underscores the belief that the ultimate victory of socialism is inevitable, albeit through gradual and non-violent processes. Moreover, "peaceful coexistence" aligns with Leninist principles of proletarian internationalism, which advocate for solidarity among oppressed peoples worldwide. By promoting peaceful relations with capitalist states, Marxist-Leninist regimes sought to consolidate their influence on the global stage and foster alliances with other anti-imperialist forces. Despite its idealistic aspirations, the concept of "peaceful coexistence" faced criticism from within the Marxist-Leninist camp. Hardline factions argued that it amounted to capitulation to bourgeois ideology and compromised the revolutionary integrity of socialism. Additionally, Western powers viewed "peaceful coexistence" with skepticism, often interpreting it as a tactic to undermine the unity of the capitalist bloc. The concept of "peace" within "peaceful coexistence" embodies a central tenet of Marxist-Leninist philosophy, emphasizing the importance of non-violent cohabitation and cooperation among nations. It represents a pragmatic response to the complexities of international politics while remaining rooted in the fundamental principles of Marxism-Leninism. Despite its challenges and criticisms, "peaceful coexistence" remains a significant aspect of Marxist-Leninist thought and continues to shape discourse on international relations and conflict resolution.

The Concept of "Competition": Philosophical and Political Analysis in International Diplomacy

The 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union stands as a watershed moment in both historical and philosophical terms. Its condemnation of Stalin's personality cult marked a critical shift in Soviet politics, acknowledging past abuses and initiating a process of de-Stalinization. Concurrently, the Congress introduced the ideology of peaceful coexistence, advocating for amicable relations

between the socialist bloc and the capitalist West, in stark contrast to the confrontational stance of the Stalin era. Moreover, by recognizing the diversity of paths to socialism, the Congress acknowledged the potential for countries to pursue socialism according to their unique contexts, rather than rigid adherence to the Soviet model. This acknowledgment allowed for greater flexibility and experimentation within the socialist bloc. Overall, the Congress profoundly altered Soviet domestic governance and international relations, shaping the course of socialism, communism, and global geopolitics for decades to come. Vyacheslav Molotov, a prominent figure in Soviet politics and a longtime associate of Joseph Stalin, held skeptical views regarding Nikita Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence. Molotov believed that Khrushchev's policy of peaceful coexistence compromised the principles of Marxism-Leninism and undermined the revolutionary struggle against imperialism. He viewed peaceful coexistence as a form of capitulation to capitalist interests and argued that it weakened the international communist movement.

China's reaction to the 20th Congress of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union was mixed and evolved over time. Initially, Chinese leaders expressed cautious optimism about the Congress's condemnation of Stalin's personality cult, viewing it as a positive step towards rectifying past injustices within the Soviet Union (Tucker, 1979).

However, as the Soviet Union embraced the ideology of peaceful coexistence and advocated for coexistence with the capitalist West, tensions between China and the Soviet Union began to emerge. Chinese leaders, including Mao Zedong, viewed peaceful coexistence as a betrayal of revolutionary principles and accused the Soviet leadership of deviating from Marxist-Leninist ideology (Zhang, 2023).

Furthermore, China's leaders were wary of the Soviet Union's efforts to maintain stability within the socialist bloc and promote détente with the West. They believed that such actions compromised the revolutionary struggle and weakened the global socialist movement.

In response to these perceived ideological deviations by the Soviet Union, China pursued a more assertive and revolutionary foreign policy stance. This included supporting revolutionary movements in Asia, Africa, and Latin America, as well as advocating for a more militant approach to confronting imperialism and capitalism. Overall, China's reaction to the 20th Congress and its results was characterized by a growing ideological divergence and eventual estrangement from the Soviet Union, leading to the Sino-Soviet split and the emergence of two distinct branches of communism in the Cold War era.

The theory of peaceful coexistence was perceived as Marxist revisionism by some within the communist movement because it deviated from traditional Marxist-Leninist principles and strategies for achieving socialism. Marxist-Leninist theory historically emphasized the inevitability of class struggle and the necessity of revolutionary action to overthrow capitalist systems and establish socialism.

According to this perspective, socialism could only be achieved through the revolutionary overthrow of the bourgeoisie and the establishment of a dictatorship of the proletariat.

The theory of peaceful coexistence, however, proposed that socialist and capitalist states could coexist peacefully without the need for revolutionary upheaval. It suggested that socialism could be achieved through gradual reforms, diplomatic negotiations, and peaceful competition with capitalist countries. Critics of peaceful coexistence argued that this approach represented a departure from Marxist principles by downplaying the centrality of class struggle and revolutionary change. They believed that peaceful coexistence amounted to accommodation with the capitalist system rather than its overthrow. Additionally, some critics saw peaceful coexistence as a form of capitulation to capitalist interests, allowing capitalist powers to maintain their dominance while undermining the revolutionary aspirations of the proletariat.

The Concept of “transition” to Socialism: Ideals, Realities, and Challenges

The idea that the working class of capitalist countries could gain power through parliament and peacefully transition to a socialist system was a central tenet of Marxist theory, particularly as it evolved in the early 20th century. This concept, known as “parliamentary socialism” or “democratic socialism”, posited that workers could achieve political and economic power through the democratic institutions of the capitalist state, primarily through participation in elections and the legislative process.

The notion was based on the belief that the capitalist system contained inherent contradictions and injustices that would eventually lead to the radicalization of the working class. Through organized labor movements, political parties, and trade unions, workers could mobilize and use the electoral process to elect representatives sympathetic to socialist ideals. Once in power, these representatives could enact legislation and implement policies aimed at gradually transforming society towards socialism. This transition might involve nationalization of key industries, implementation of social welfare programs, and redistribution of wealth to reduce economic inequality. The concept of “peaceful transition” to socialism through parliamentary means gained traction during periods of relative political stability and economic prosperity in capitalist countries. Proponents argued that violent revolution could be avoided, and socialism could be achieved through peaceful, democratic means. However, the feasibility and effectiveness of parliamentary socialism have been the subject of debate among socialist thinkers and activists. Critics argue that the capitalist state is inherently biased against socialist transformation and that attempts to work within the system ultimately lead to co-optation and compromise. Nonetheless, the idea of parliamentary socialism remains influential in socialist thought, and many socialist political parties and movements continue to advocate for progressive change through democratic institutions and grassroots organizing.

The concept of the initial stage of socialism, as articulated by Chinese economists Yu Guangyuan, Xue Muqiao, and Sun Yefang, referred to a transitional period following the establishment of socialism in China. This concept emerged in the 1950s as China embarked on its socialist transformation under the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). The initial stage of socialism was characterized by the coexistence of socialist and capitalist elements within the Chinese economy. It recognized the need to utilize market mechanisms and incentives to drive economic growth and development while gradually transitioning towards a fully socialist system. This approach allowed for the coexistence of state-owned enterprises alongside elements of private ownership and market-oriented reforms.

Mao Zedong supported the concept of the initial stage of socialism as a pragmatic approach to economic development in China. He acknowledged the necessity of utilizing market forces and allowing for the development of productive forces during this transitional period. "At the First Zhengzhou Conference in November 1958 Mao Zedong mentioned the "initial stage of socialism" when he discussed the necessity of commodity production" (Li, 1995: 400).

However, Mao's support for the initial stage of socialism was not without reservations. He remained committed to the ultimate goal of building a classless society and eliminating capitalist influences. Mao emphasized the importance of maintaining the leading role of the Communist Party and preventing the emergence of capitalist tendencies that could undermine socialist principles.

Overall, the concept of the initial stage of socialism reflected the complex and evolving nature of China's socialist transition. It provided a framework for balancing economic development with socialist principles and guided China's economic policies during this critical period of its history. One of the principles emphasizes mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity. In the context of China's socialism, this principle underscores the importance of safeguarding China's territorial sovereignty and integrity.

The "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" originated from the diplomatic negotiations between China, India, and Myanmar (then Burma) in the early 1950s. The "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence", also known as the Panchsheel Treaty, are a set of principles that outline the basis for peaceful relations and cooperation among nations. These principles were first formally articulated by China and India in the 1954 Sino-Indian Treaty and have since become fundamental to China's foreign policy approach. The five principles are:

1. Mutual Respect for Sovereignty and Territorial Integrity: Nations should respect each other's sovereignty and territorial integrity, refraining from interfering in each other's internal affairs.

2. Mutual Non-Aggression: Nations should commit to resolving disputes and conflicts through peaceful means, refraining from the threat or use of force against each other.

3. Non-Interference in Internal Affairs: Nations should respect each other's political systems and refrain from interfering in each other's internal affairs.

4. Equality and Mutual Benefit: Nations should engage in relations based on equality and mutual benefit, promoting cooperation and collaboration for shared interests.

5. Peaceful Coexistence: Nations should seek to coexist peacefully, fostering harmonious relations and mutual understanding to prevent conflicts and promote stability.

These principles are intended to guide interactions among nations, emphasizing the importance of diplomacy, dialogue, and mutual respect in international relations. The Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence reflect a commitment to peaceful coexistence, cooperation, and the resolution of disputes through peaceful means, contributing to global peace and stability (Murphy, 2022).

Conclusions

The theory of "Three Harmonies" of the USSR and the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" of China are related in their overarching principles of international relations, particularly in the context of promoting peace and cooperation among nations. The theory of "Three Harmonies" was a foreign policy approach adopted by the Soviet Union, it emphasized the principles of peaceful coexistence, peaceful rivalry, and peaceful transition. The Soviet Union aimed to coexist peacefully with Western countries, engage in peaceful competition, and promote peaceful transitions to socialism around the world.

On the other hand, the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" were first articulated by China in the 1950s as the foundation of its foreign policy. These principles include mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. While the specific principles articulated in the theory of "Three Harmonies" and the "Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence" may differ, both frameworks share common objectives of fostering peaceful relations among nations and promoting cooperation while respecting each other's sovereignty and interests. In essence, both they reflect attempts by the USSR and China, respectively, to establish guidelines for international relations based on principles of mutual respect, non-aggression, and cooperation, thus contributing to global peace and stability.

Modern China looks boldly into the future; it is actively interested in the problems of globalization and peaceful coexistence. Which in turn activates issues of peaceful security. "Since the end of the Cold War, China's thinking about national security has changed greatly. During the Cold War, China viewed its national security mainly in terms of its struggles against the hegemony of one of the two superpowers or even against that of both superpowers and their followers. At present, China has been attaching most importance to the trend of globalisation, which has had positive and negative impacts on the country's national security... So, although military security is still very important for China, it is increasingly

concerned about non-traditional security issues, such as energy, food and environmental security, financial security, information security, and so on. In order to resolve these issues, China and other countries have to cooperate more with each other” (Liping, 2009: 103). This quotation discusses the evolution of China’s perspective on national security since the end of the Cold War. During the Cold War era, China primarily focused on its national security in terms of its struggles against the hegemony of the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union. However, in the post-Cold War era, China’s approach to national security has shifted significantly. In the contemporary context, China places greater importance on the trend of globalization, which has both positive and negative impacts on its national security. While military security remains important, China is increasingly concerned about non-traditional security issues such as energy security, food security, environmental security, financial security, and information security. There is a need for international cooperation to address these non-traditional security challenges effectively. China and other countries work together to find peaceful solutions to common security issues in the era of globalization.

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**ФІЛОСОФСЬКИЙ АНАЛІЗ ТЕОРІЇ «ТРЬОХ ГАРМОНІЙ» У
МІЖНАРОДНО-ПОЛІТИЧНИХ ПОГЛЯДАХ КИТАЮ ТА СРСР***Резюме*

Досліджено, що концепція «трьох гармоній» — зовнішня політика, яку пропагував радянський уряд під час правління Микити Хрущова, мала на меті переосмислити не лише зовнішню політику СРСР, а й траєкторію глобального соціалізму. Ця політика наголошувала на мирному співіснуванні, конкуренції та переході, формуючи основу розрядки між Сходом і Заходом. По суті, вона прагнула до мирного співіснування із західними країнами, щоб уникнути війни, одночасно прагнучи перевершити Сполучені Штати шляхом мирної конкуренції. Однак концепція зіткнулася з критикою і не знайшла одностайного схвалення. Концепція мирного співіснування була особливо новаторською, оскільки вона визнавала існування різних соціальних систем і намагалася знайти спільну мову, незважаючи на ідеологічні розбіжності. Пропагуючи мирну конкуренцію, Радянський Союз мав на меті продемонструвати перевагу соціалізму через економічні, технологічні та культурні досягнення, а не військовими засобами. Проте теорія «трьох гармоній» зіткнулася з проблемами та критикою як усередині країни, так і за кордоном. У Радянському Союзі прихильники жорсткої лінії критикували уявні поступки Хрущова Заходу та боялися, що мирне співіснування підірве революційний запал соціалістичної справи. На міжнародному рівні іноземні держави, як-от Китай, який історично розвинув власну ідею мирного співіснування, сприйняли цю концепцію скептично, інтерпретуючи її як тактику розколу та послаблення єдності капіталістичного блоку.

Ключові слова: історія філософії, політична філософія, теорія «трьох гармоній», Китайська Народна Республіка, Комуністична партія Радянського Союзу, мирне співіснування, соціалістичний інтернаціоналізм, марксистсько-ленінська думка.

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