THINKING ABOUT NATIONAL DELIMITATION POLICY OF THE USSR: THE COMPARISON OF WEBER’S THEORY AND THAT OF MARX

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Summary

This article compares Marxist theory with that of Max Weber, analyzing the process of national delimitation policy of the Soviet Union. Bolshevik defined the USSR as a step before the communist society and needed to create the condition of modern capitalist society so that communist revolution would occur. Therefore the Soviet Communist Party directed to fostering “national identity and national culture” of every groups on the basis of the right of self-determination. However, this policy caused the differences of political and economic structure among each Soviet Republics and enlarged them. Namely, it did not cause the unification of proletariat and situation suitable for communist revolution, but caused the disintegration of the USSR and the different process of development of each Republic after that. In conclusion, it can be said that the Soviet national delimitation policy departed from Marxist theory, but followed and ended in practice as Max Weber emphasized.


Introduction

Today, the reasons of disintegration of the Soviet Union and the social, economic and political developments in post-Soviet area are very often discussed all over the world and this agenda brought critical discussion also to the area of sociological theories. In the process of this discussion,
the Soviet Union’s national delimitation policy is one of the important topics as well as economic policy. In fact, as a result of national delimitation policy, many non-Russian people obtained national identity and developed national culture. But this policy brought about ethnic conflicts in many areas of the Soviet Union and led the USSR to chaos. Therefore, the analysis of the reason why national delimitation policy was applied and how this policy lead the USSR to collapse is worth researching.

In this paper, we focus on national delimitation policy of the Soviet Union in the process of analyzing why the USSR was disintegrated and why the states in the post-Soviet area followed different process of development after this disintegration, comparing Weber’s theory with Marx’s.

To begin with, I explain briefly what the Soviet Union’s national delimitation policy is and why Lenin and Bolshevik realized this policy for non-Russian population, connecting with social, economic and political situation at that time.

At the second, Marx’s elaboration about identity and culture will be explained and what meaning the national delimitation policy of the Soviet Union has according to Marxist theory is discussed. In this chapter, the concepts of “class struggle” and “production system” are very important and national delimitation policy is also discussed over these concepts.

At the third, Weber’s theory about the relations between social action and superstructure will be referred and How Weber elaborates the USSR’s national delimitation policy. In this chapter I give criticism to Marx’s elaboration about this policy, focusing on the conceptions “social act”.

Finally, I give summaries of each chapter and emphasize that national delimitation policy did not create appropriate situation for revolution and communism and that it lead the Soviet Union to disintegration and different development of states in post-Soviet area, combining the result of these chapters with each other.

What is National Delimitation Policy?: Definition and Reason

During the October Revolution, Vladimir Lenin and Bolshevik defined Tsarist Russia as “the Prison of Nations” and declared the right of national self-determination. In Tsarist Russia, Russian area was regarded as “civilized” area while non-Russian regions are defined as “backwards.”

According to Bolshevik, all nation have right to manage their lives autonomously. They have the right whether they remain in the other state inside federal structure or exist as a completely independent state. That is, all nations can be exist as an independent state and each nation is regarded equal existence, although there are large differences and gaps in power, population, area and speed of development.[1] Inside the territory of Russian empire, some nation, especially Russian society had modern-capitalist structure and national identity, non-Russian groups’ economic structure was that in ancient ages or middle ages. The identity of non-Russian nations were mainly based on tribe, clan, localism and kinships. The members of Bolshevik such as Lenin, Trotsky and Stalin thought that the reason of this situation and gap was derived from oppression and exploitation by Russian Empire.[2] They defined Russians as “oppressor nations” and non-Russian nations as “oppressed nations”. However, Bolshevik wanted all nations to be equal even if certain nations are "backward because all nations have same rights as an independent nations according to Bolshevik’s thought.[3]

So Bolshevik insisted that all “oppressed” non-Russian nations should be liberated from “oppressor” Russians’ exploitation and dominance and that they should have national identity and nation-state. This is the basis of the right of national self-determination and national delimitation of the Soviet Union.

After Tsarist regime was broke down, the civil war continued inside the Soviet Union and
Bolshevik had to deal with this issue. Bolshevik was forced to suppress not only White Army lead by Denikin and Kolchak, Menshevik and the intervention forces but also non-Russian peoples’ national movements such as Basmachi movement in Central Asia and socialist movements in Transcaucasia. In order to suppress them, it was not enough to fight against them with military powers.[4] At the same time Bolshevik needed supports of non-Russian people and had to convince them to take part in the revolution in order to win the Russian civil war. Bolshevik emphasized the right of national self-determination, the liberation from the “peoples’ prison” and the chains of “Russian exploitation”.[5] The reason why Bolshevik applied national delimitation policy is mainly derived from the Russian civil war and necessity of supports from non-Russian peoples. After the revolution ended, many of non-Russian peoples decided to join the Soviet Union voluntarily.

After the Soviet Union was established, Bolshevik focused on fostering industrial workers in non-Russian regions.[6] They made efforts also to form non-Russian titular political elites[7] and made use of them as “the bridge between Moscow and local population and the soviet organs on the Republic and Raion levels are nationalized. These are called korenizatsiya and this policy was applied so as to ensure the legitimacy of Soviet regime and integrate non-Russian population into the Soviet system.

As for languages, Soviet regime made efforts to develop the languages of non-Russian peoples in all areas such as education, publishing and literatures.[8] New alphabet was determined for languages which had not originally had original letters. The languages originally written in Arabic letter, such as Uzbek, Azeri, Tajik and Uyghur began to be written in Cyrillic letters (in the beginning, languages such as Turkmen, Tatar and Azeri were written in Latin alphabet).[9]

In this way, national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya advanced and Soviet Union had rare political structure of ethno-federalism, in which republics and their borders under central government were determined according to ethnic groups while Soviet Union itself was not defined as nation-state.[10]

National Delimitation Policy and Marxist Theory

The Condition for Realization of Communism and Class Struggle

Marx emphasized in “German Ideology” that understanding superstructure such as history, religion culture, identity and politics is based on economic structure, types of production[11]and that the changes of means of production determined the ways of ownership and economic actions.[12]The development of society depends on material condition which the society has or the development of productive power and the change of productive power is independent from the intension of each person.[13]For these reasons, the relations of production are the most important social relationship for society.

When the type of production and the power of production developed at a certain level, contradictions between productive power and traditional relations of production arise and the power generated by this contradiction changes the relations of production.[14] In Marx and Engel’s opinion, this is the power which generates class struggles and stimulates history. When this contradiction reaches at the highest level and existing relations of production comes to prevent productive power from growing, a revolution happens and superstructure transforms.[15]

In fact, according to Marxist theory, history continues to develop through class struggle and transformation of mode of productions. Marx says that there are 5 historical steps of development of the relations of production: Primitive times, Ancient ages, middle ages and modern era. Ancient
Ages are specified as the struggle between slaves and freemen, middle ages are specified as the struggle between feudal and peasants and modern ages are specified as the struggle between bourgeois and proletarians. Identity also develops from kinship to religious and local identity such as “mahalle” and from religious and local identity to national identity. Marx emphasized that communist society and revolution could be realized from the modern capitalist system, where struggle between bourgeois and proletarians exists.\[16\]

When I explain the separation between economic power and political power, the economic power was the same as the political power in Primitive times, because people sustained life through handing and collecting together and people who obtained the most things was regarded as the most powerful. In middle ages, the political power of kings and aristocracy depended on the economic power of villages where peasants lived. Peasants were strongly tied with their lands and were dominated by economic and political power, which was not fully divided. So peasants were not free.\[17\] In modern era, economic power and political power were completely divided and came to have limited relations through government and state.

In the modern capitalist era, peasants in rural area became proletariat, deprived from lands.\[18\] Capitalism is a type of economy which produces market or meta, in which there are only ties of paying cash or pure benefit among people.\[19\] Here proletariat also becomes meta and sells themselves.\[20\] In capitalist system proletariat-bourgeoisie relations are unstable while peasant-feudal relations are stable in middle ages. Marx explains that the development of capitalism and competition among labors develop the union of revolutionary derived from collective labor.\[21\] In this way, contradiction of capitalist grows and this leads society to socialist / communist revolution.\[22\] At the same time, he said that the development of capitalism increased the demand of more labors and that the development of traffic networks united proletariat and directed them to collective works.

In socialist revolution, old relations of production are removed as a result of these movements of labors. In the process of revolution, the first target of struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie has to be the struggle against the bourgeoisie in the country of certain proletariat and have to be national struggle at first.\[23\] From this step, many kinds of national revolution are strengthened and grow to universal revolution, united with each other.\[24\] In this way, superstructure dominant in capitalist system like nation-state system is removed and the new relations of production will be formed.

According to Marx, the most important feature of communist world after capitalist system is the abolishment of property which belongs to bourgeois class.\[25\] Because in communist world there are no class distinctions and all production is owned by united whole nation, the political and public power used in order to oppress proletariat will lose characters and become meaningless.\[26\]

When we evaluate nationalism and national delimitation policy, Marx emphasized that nationalism and national identity grew in the process of transformation from feudalism to capitalism through the change of relations of production. Richard Terrell described the relation between national identity / nationalism and Marxist theory like this:\[27\]

“Nationalism assists the destruction of the feudal system and helps usher in and strengthen the capitalist phase of societal development. Up to this point, nationalism is a progressive force because it assists what Marx considered an inevitable progression of societal evolution.”

Because of the appearance of bourgeois class and transformation from manufacture to large-scale production in factories, the contradiction between capitalist economic system and traditional politic feudalism became larger and larger. As a result of revolution, political system transformed feudalism to the system which is more appropriate to modern capitalist economy. This new superstructure is nation-state system, national identity and nationalism. This superstructure
contributed to the development of capitalist system.

But as for the latter situation of capitalist system, he explained like this:[28]

“During the latter stages of capitalism, however, nationalism becomes a device of the bourgeoisie used to divide workers along national lines and to prevent them from realizing their unity as an economic class.”

In other words, after the capitalist system grew at the highest level, superstructure such as national identity and nation-state system was used in order to oppress and exploit proletariat and prevent labors from unifying.

And Marx emphasizes that as a new economic structure and mode of production develops, the contradiction between existing nation-state system and new relations of production gets larger and larger. Here the proletariat class begins to struggle against bourgeoisie. In this process national identity and national borders become meaningless because of the unification of proletariat and disappearance of class.[29] As a result, revolution for communist society without class happens and international proletarian unity becomes dominant without nation-state system.

That is to say, nation-state system, national identity and nationalism were automatically generated and developed by the change of economic system and struggle between feudal and peasants, and were not determined by the power of state. However, these new structures also become the reason of proletariat’s struggle against bourgeoisie and will be removed in the process of communist revolution and unity of proletariat. Therefore, “national delimitation policy” applied by the Soviet Union does not originally exist in Marx’s theory[30] and the nationality policy was not discussed among Marxists.

**National Delimitation Policy According to Marxists**

While Marx and Engels expected that communist revolution should be realized in Western Europe, in which modern capitalist system developed at high level, communist / socialist revolution occurred in Russia, where industrial revolution and the development of modern capitalism began later than Western Europe. Developed capitalist economy and proletariat class had existed only in cities such as Moscow, Petersburg and Baku and class struggles between bourgeoisie and proletariat had grown in those cities before Bolshevik revolution.[31]

On the other hand, inside most of Russian territory many people were peasants and the economic and political system was based on feudalism. Especially in Central Asia and Siberia, the lives of people were based on the mode of production in primitive times or middle ages. Turkmens, Kazakhs and Kyrgyzs lived a nomadic life. The life of people in Siberia was based on hunting and collecting. Therefore large-scale industry in factories which is the most important feature of capitalist economic system had not existed and neither had the consciousness of proletariat. The life of sedentary population in Central Asia was also based on feudal system, agriculture and manufacture. Of course, nation-state system and national identity were not dominant in these regions and their identity was based on tribe, clan, kinships or localism rather than ethnicity. So among most of population in Russian Empire capitalist system had not settled and “national identity” in Marxist terms had not existed.[32]

The Soviet Union defined itself as “the step before realizing of communist society” and had to create the situation in which communist revolution can be realized. That is to say, in order to develop proletariat class inside all over the Soviet Union, the development of national identity and nationalism among the Soviet population was necessary. The goal of national delimitation policy of the Soviet Union was based on the assumption that people would be unified in Communist world.
It is estimated here that the development of proletariat class and national identity causes the class struggle between proletariat and bourgeoisie and the change of the relation of production and that communist world without class will realized through these trends. Thus, Lenin declared the right of national self-determination and applied national delimitation policy. At the same time, he attributed this situation to “Russian exploitation” and emphasized the unification of “oppressed people” against Russian.

The national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya were strongly related with fostering of proletariat class. About this topic, Slezkine discusses like this:

“They needed native languages, native subjects and native teachers ("even for a single Georgian child") in order to “polemicize with 'their own' bourgeoisie, to spread anticlerical and anti- bourgeois ideas among 'their own' peasantry and burghers” and to banish the virus of nationalism from their proletarian disciples and their own minds.’ This was a missionary project analogous to the so- called “Ilminskii system” formulated in the Kazan of Lenin’s youth.” “Only the mother tongue,” claimed Ilminskii, can truly, rather than only superficially, set the people on the path of Christianity.” Only the mother tongue, wrote Stalin in 1913, can make possible “a full development of the intellectual faculties of the Tatar or of the Jewish worker.”

In other words, Bolshevik says that the consciousness of proletariat can grow through native languages, cultures and nationalism against bourgeois among non-Russian peoples. Besides, Bolshevik emphasized that the mission of communist party is to make non-Russian peoples catch up with the economic, cultural and political level of Russians, especially the part of cities. In fact, Bolshevik thought that homogenization of economic structure of the Soviet Union would make it easy to the society near the communist world through national delimitation and korenizatsiya. Up to this point, the Soviet Union fostered local proletariat and local political elites as well as determined national identity and borders for non-Russian population and developed their languages. When we discuss the national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya, these policies are based on the expectation that the development of national identity and proletariat class cause the class struggle and the transformation of the mode of production.

The Criticism of Weberian Theory to Marx

The Evaluation of Social Development by Max Weber

When we evaluate nationalism and national identity according to Max Weber’s theory, the conception of “social action” is very important. Weber emphasizes that it is important to analyze meaning loaded in human being’s social action.

Weber explains the concept social action like this: Social action is related to the past, present or future behavior of the other human being. Not every kind of action is regarded as social action. The condition is that one’s behavior is related in this behavior’s meaning to the other’s one. Besides, when only several people acts in the similar way together or one acts under effect of the others’ action, this action is not social. Social action is related with objective possibilities.

At the same time, He explains the definition and elements of social action like this: “(1)Behavior which is traditional in a strong sense lies, like purely reactive action […], directly on, and often beyond, the boundary making out the area of what can in general be called ‘meaningful’ action. […] (2) Behavior which is strongly affective
lies likewise on, and often beyond, the boundary marking out the area of consciously ‘meaningful’ behavior: it may be simply be a spontaneous response to an unusual stimulus. […] (3) The difference between affectively determined action and action which is intended to realize an absolute value is that, in the latter type, the agent consciously decides on the ultimate goal of his action and in consequence systematically organized his action to achieve his goal.[…] the meaning of the action does not lie in the consequences which result from it but is inherent in the specific nature of the action itself. […]”

In other words, Weber says that superstructure such as religion, culture and identity as ‘meaning ’has an important effect on and determines human beings’ social action. Up to this point, the worldwide communist revolution to which Marx and Engels refer never occurs and the type of development of politics and economy is different by nations and states.

Max Weber discussed this trend in detail in “The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”, referring to the example of the economic development in Western Europe. According to him, modern capitalist economy seen like universal system in the world today was not historically universal and was unique structure in certain cultural area. Weber thought that there were relationship between the spirits of capitalism (the ethos which supports economic movements) and Puritanism. Here is its summary and the process of development of capitalism:[39]

According to Calvinist theory, God’s providence is prepared in advance and cannot be changed by human being’s efforts, intention and whether one did beneficence or not. No one can know this providence in advance. Therefore the world has to be accepted as it was and the providential purpose of the division of labor is to be known by its fruits. This structure leads specialization of occupies and the ethos of ascetic labor was created.

Therefore, people came to have the conviction that one is able to go to heaven by contribution to society through coping with faith and labor ascetically and by realizing “God’s glory” in this world. In Calvinism, gaining money without labor has to be looked down on and is one of sins.

But at the same time, Puritanism allowed people to gain money. Working ascetically and gain profit as a result of work is defined as the result of realizing “love of neighbors” by way of provision of economic and high-quality service or things, as an evidence of labor’s being suitable for God’s providence and of one’s being able to go to heaven. In this way, Calvinist asceticism created the acceptance of gaining money and modern capitalism.

As a result, people began to pursue profit as “result of labor”. The amount of profit is the evidence of realizing the love of neighbors and of salvation. So people have to work diligently and ascetically in order to gain more profit. People began to use watch and control the labor of themselves with the term oh “hour”.

In this way, Protestantism and Puritanism brought people the power of production and the way of more efficient production based on scientifically rational spirit was introduced. At the same time, money (capital) gained by means of ascetic labor was not spent, but was stocked and reinvested in order to pursue profit. This process enabled people to raise large-scale industry up. So the most important factor of the development of capitalist system is Protestant spirit.

As we can understand from this book, modern capitalist system which is universal today was not originally universal and was unique structure in Protestantism and Puritanism. Superstructure such as culture and identity determines economic action with important degree. Up to this point, national identity and culture differentiate each nation’s economic and social actions and never create the circumstance which is suitable for transformation to communist society, change of mode of production and the unification of proletariat, while Marx and Engels emphasized that capitalist
system produced national identity and nation-state system.

National Delimitation Policy According to Weberian Theory

When we evaluate national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya of the Soviet Union according to Weber’s theory, these policy differentiate each nation’s economic and social actions and do not contribute to “unification of peoples” and final homogenization and transformation of economic, political and cultural structure which Marx and Bolshevik expected. On the contrary, each nation begins to behave apart and these policies may cause not the basis for revolution, but the disintegration of framework as a united state. In fact, Stalin was also anxious about this topic and chose a restrictive course and criticized Lenin as the promoter of “national liberalist”. He considered historical structure of nations that could not be removed and determines the feature of nations.\(^4\)

After Stalin became the first secretary of Soviet communist party, many ethnic schools and institutes were closed, the Latin was replaced to Cyril as standard letter of nations in the USSR and Russian became a compulsory language in all non-Russian schools and lingua-franca.\(^4\)

However, in the Soviet period, the influence of sub-national identity and religion which should be swept out in the way to the development of capitalism remained while the Soviet Union determined new national identity and culture for non-Russian population and fostered local proletariat and elites. As a result of this situation, the large differences of political and economic structure began to appear in each Soviet Socialist republic.

As for the differences of political structure, the Europeanized universal rational system was dominant in Baltic area and European Russia, because the influence of Christianity, especially Protestantism, which Weber defined as the condition of the development of capitalism, and modern capitalist economy were dominant in Pre-Soviet era. Thus, particularly in Baltic countries comparatively European rational system continued to settle solidly and people had solid national identity in comparison with Central Asia and Siberia. About the topic of economic structure, this region had advanced economic system and military industry and Heavy and chemical industry grew in this area. Therefore the economic level of this region was more advanced and higher than the other regions of the USSR.

On the other hand, in Central Asia, solid clan identity such as tribal identity and localism, which should be removed in the process of development to capitalism, remained even after the USSR was established. Because korenizatsiya and nationality policy were applied under this situation, traditional domination system since pre-Soviet era, whose stability is kept the balance, cooperation of power of clans, continued even during the soviet era. For example, Khodjand (Leninabad) clan had occupied the post of political elite by 1992 in Tajikistan\(^4\) and political structure of Soviet Uzbekistan was formed over the balance of power of clans from Tashkent, Samarkand and Fergana.\(^4\) In this way, the political structure of Soviet Central Asia was very different from that of Baltic region and Russia. As for economic structure, the economy of Soviet Central Asia was mainly based on agriculture, which had been dominant in pre-Soviet era, and industry related with it.\(^4\) Therefore high-technology industry and the level of life were lower than in Baltic region and Russia.

When we analyze this situation, national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya by the Soviet Union did not bring about the situation which is suitable for the unification of proletariat and the revolution for communist world. These policies brought about the differences of political and economic structure among each Soviet republic and enlarged them. This trend became the reason of corruption of the structure of the Soviet Union and finally, Soviet Union disintegrated in 1991 and
each Republic followed the different way of development after independence.

**Conclusion**

The Soviet Union applied national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya in order to obtain supports of non-Russian people for suppression of the Russian civil war. In this process, Bolshevik emphasized the liberation of Russian oppression and the right of national self-determination. After the Soviet Union was established Bolshevik began to determine new national identity and borders and foster local workers and elites.

According to Marxism, national identity is formed in modern-capitalist economic system and contributed to development of capitalism. But this identity will be removes in the process of the unification of proletariat and struggle between bourgeois and proletariat. However, the Soviet Union (former Russian empire) did not have developed capitalist system and had to create the situation which revolution for communism and communist world without class could be realized. Therefore Bolshevik determined national identity and applied korenizatsiya.

On the other hand, Max Weber emphasized that social action of human being is determined by meaning / superstructure such as identity, culture and religion. Therefore, modern capitalist system which is the prerequisite for communist revolution and class struggle is originally specific in Protestant countries and is not universal. Of course worldwide communist revolution and class struggle are impossible according to Weber. When we criticize korenizatsiya and nationality policy, these policies causes the differences of political and economic structure among each Soviet Republics and enlarged them. As a result, these policies did not caused the unification of proletariat, creation of “homo-sovietics” and situation suitable for communist revolution, but caused the corruption and disintegration of the USSR and the different process of development of each Republic after that.

Finally, when we compare with Marx’s theory and Weber’s theory about national delimitation policy and korenizatsiya, it can be said that these policies departed from Marxist theory, but followed and ended in practice as Max Weber emphasized.


[8] Ibid., 45-46.

[9] Ibid., 42-45.


[12] Ibid., 80-94.


[17] Ibid., 40-44.


[20] Ibid., 121.

[21] Ibid., 123.

[22] Ibid., 122-123.

[23] Ibid., 124.

[24] Ibid., 124.

[26] Ibid., 40-41.


[28] Ibid., 4.

[29] Ibid., 4-5.


[34] Slezkine, op. cit., 416.

[35] Ibid., 418.

[36] Ibid., 423.


[38] Ibid., 46-50.


[40] Gerhart, op. cit., 22.

[41] Slezkine, op. cit., 443; 445.


[43] Ibid., 109.


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