

On the Disintegration of the Soviet Union

- From the Perspective of Soft Power in Culture

Yuzhi Zhang

School of Politics, Qufu Normal University Rizhao Campus

Rizhao 276826, Shandong, China

Tel: 86-633-398-1058 E-mail: zyz911@yeah.net

Fengwei Xue

School of Politics, Qufu Normal University Rizhao Campus

Rizhao 276826, Shandong, China

Tel: 86-633-398-0933 E-mail: fengweixue@sohu.com

Abstract

The disintegration of the Soviet Union is widely discussed in academic circles. From the perspective of soft power in culture, stating the gradual loss of soft power in the public and political culture, at last led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Keywords: Soft power, Hard power, The disintegration of the Soviet Union, The public culture, The political culture

Many scholars have explored the reasons for the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Chinese scholars generally agreed that: the disintegration of the Soviet Union was due to the complicated international background and profound reasons inside the Soviet Union; and both historical and practical reasons; and both political and economic reasons. Combination of all aspects led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union so this was the standard theory of history. While the above listed were the reasons for the disintegration of the Soviet Union but did not illuminate which was the dominant or fundamental reason. The dominant view had two kinds in the West: One was that the Soviet economic system in the long run had been proven to be practicable. In the 1980s the internal contradictions of its economy led to economic collapse and had to establish capitalism; another view Gorbachev introduced free speech and free elections in politics. The Soviet people used the newly acquired rights to abolish socialism and adopted capitalism. The former view looked plausible but a bit far-fetched to simplify the reasons for the disintegration of the Soviet Union; the latter view took the Soviet people as a scapegoat. In addition David Coues, the U.S. University of Massachusetts economics professor thought the Soviet Union was disintegrated because the Soviet Communist Party elites determined its ideology in his book "revolution from above - the disintegration of the Soviet Union". Among them 9.6% were in favor of communism and nationalism. 12.3% were in favor of democratic socialism. 76.7% were in favor of the capitalism and other attitude accounted for 1.4%. In contrast to most people, all of high-level elites were in favor of capitalism because it suited their own interests well. They allied with other interest groups such as some of gang Dom, the rich, urban intellectuals and seized power established capitalism. In short David Coues considered the Soviet Communist Party elites buried the Soviet Union being 74 years in the world. This view of the re-interpretation of the Soviet Union had an important reference, but this view was slightly narrower. I believe that the reasons for the disintegration of the Soviet Union had many but the Soviet Union used up its all soft power step by step, no doubt led to the end of the Soviet Union in the absence of a strong enemy's invasion.

Soft power is relative to hard power. As we all know, hard power usually refers to a country's economic strength (the "carrot") and military power ("stick"), which is our most well-known power. In international politics, country frequently uses it to deal with the problem, and it is the soft power of the premise and foundation. Soft power will lose its support without hard power. With the changing times, the use of hard power is increasingly restricted. The meaning of soft power is difficult to define. Joseph Nye the United States well-known international relations scholar thought that soft power is able to achieve goal through attraction rather than coercion. A country, its soft

power mainly comes from three kinds of resources: culture, political values and Foreign Policy. (Nye, 2005, p2) In international politics, with the power resources changing, soft power of culture is increasingly highlighted its importance. The Communist Party of the Soviet Union did not realize the evolution of international power in the new era. In the process of use of hard power seriously undermined its own soft power of culture, eventually losing its ruling position, leading to the disintegration of country.

It was obvious to the whole world that the Soviet Union had strong soft power in the culture, political values and foreign policy. However, the Soviet Union didn't take good use of its soft power. On the contrary, it made the attraction of culture and political ideologies gradually reduce in all kinds of political campaigns, with the involvement of political authority. The culture was divided into the public culture and political culture. I refer to Joseph Nye's soft power theory, to analyze how the Soviet Union gradually lost soft power, and ultimately led to the disintegration in the Soviet Union's public and political culture.

1. Gradually losing soft power in public culture

"People took culture as national strength. In the analysis and study of state power, people have always regarded these intangible factors as the basic pillars of state power." (Wang, 1993, p93) Culture's status and role in the country, mainly was manifested in the "social integration and political legitimacy. It is the formation of national cohesion and to maintain political stability, as important political resources." Therefore, "culture's the rise and fall impacts on the country's the development process and affects the ups and downs of national power." (Zhang, 1999, p38) One country, if it lost soft power in culture, the state would cease to exist. The Soviet Union gradually lost it in a long historical process.

After the Soviet regime was established, under the leadership of Lenin, the cultural construction was attended seriously. He believed that "communist society didn't come true by illiteracy in a country for ever." (Lenin, pp.301-302) He also stressed that they needed to learn from the advanced Western capitalism and all the excellent culture. In 1920s, the Soviet Union's primary, secondary and tertiary education had a great development. While Lenin and the Bolshevik Party were extremely complex and contradictory on the view of intellectuals, however, the shift of the party's work made Lenin recognize the importance of scientific research and intellectuals. On the one hand, a lot of innocent intellectuals were suppressed in the "Red Terror", and excellent person went abroad; on the other hand, the USSR Academy of Sciences sent more and more scholars abroad year by year in the case of shortage of foreign exchange. Scholars abroad were only 10 people in 1920, and there were 17 people in 1922. There were 25 people in 1924, added to 44 people in 1926. (Zhou, 2002, p200) The Soviet Union made great achievements in scientific research, shortening the gap between the Soviet Union and the world. Meanwhile, there was academic debate in literature and art, philosophy, economics and so on. Culture of the rapid development enhanced the soft power of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union. During this period, political authority had been involved in the cultural sector, but it was relatively moderate to intellectuals overall, and cultural development enhanced social cohesion.

Political authority completely occupied the cultural field in Stalin's reign, and cultural development and innovation suffered harsh repression. The Soviet cultural appeal drastically reduced because of political interference and aggression. "In Russia, there was a new cultural self-isolation period and the period of spiritual emptiness." (Migranyan, 2002, p32) The Soviet Communist Party put the purge on intellectuals, which was equal to uproot the basis of their own ruling. In the political authority of aggression, literary and art circles established organizations that highly centralized and unified, stifled innovation in the arts, established the dominant position of socialist realism. The rule of Stalin's ideology was established in the field of philosophy. The massive criticism of Deborin School brought out. In October 1931, "proletarian revolution" No. 6, Stalin published a letter, entitled "On Some Problems in the history of the Bolsheviks." This letter brought stern repression to arts fields and formed a closed and rigid institution. Since then, the task of philosophical circles could only explain Stalin's philosophy in the Soviet Union, towards the Stalinist-style 20th century scholasticism in a fairly long period. In this political environment, innovation and freedom of thought was impossible. The majority of party cadres and the masses almost all become "would move the puppet." in such a culture-building system (Tagore, 2004, p7). The social integration of culture could not play, and didn't provide the social basis for a legitimate rule of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union, resulting in loss of Soviet political domination of the cultural foundation, which undoubtedly dig the grave for the ruling party.

Khrushchev completely denied Stalin after he came to power. The West called "de-Stalinization", which brought the ideology of domestic chaos in the Soviet Union and the socialist camp. Khrushchev's reforms did not completely break through the culture system of Stalinist tyranny. On the contrary, Khrushchev himself equally was interested in the personality cult and politically implemented arbitrary rule. In a thawing period of literature,

revealed the Soviet party's problems and shortcomings of the Stalin personality cult, had also been attacked and criticized, but the culture of authoritarian regime had not changed. The field of philosophy was still influenced by the political needs and cultural development was still being tied up in the political war chariot. In Brezhnev era, the power was more important than scientific knowledge. (Zhou, 2002, p739) The Soviet Union still didn't give the culture free, but instead to show the trend of return to the Stalin-era. For example, the Soviet writer Alexander Solzhenitsyn, with its outstanding literary talent in 1970, won the Nobel Prize for Literature, to treat such an accomplished writer, the Soviet Union was deprived of his Soviet citizenship and deported. The Soviet government was simply afraid of Solzhenitsyn creative thinking, which reflected the regime of non-self-confidence after a history of baptism.

In short, from the Stalin era, the USSR's culture didn't follow the laws of their own free development because of the political severe interference. Dominated by political power, culture was bound to have no innovation and vitality, making politicized culture lose its attractiveness to domestic and abroad, greatly weakened the legitimacy of its rule. In fact, the culture can be subject to political influence and guidance, but can not withstand the excessive interference of political authority. The gold-plated culture can only be a handmaiden of politics by the power. Only cultural independence, freedom of thought were given enough room by political and legal protection, even if some aspects of culture stimulated the nerves of politics and issued a number of different political views, yet insisting on letting the culture develop freely, the culture maintained energy, and made the ruling party's political legitimacy stronger. Throughout the tortuous course of development of Soviet publican culture, especially pop culture almost had been blank in the Soviet Union. It was totally abandoned to compete with the United States in this area. For example, in film, television and pop music, the Soviet Union had never been a real challenge to U.S. global influence. As Joseph Nye has said, "the Soviet Union itself had never been found in popular cultural products in overseas markets." (Nye, 2005, p82) The Soviet Union's soft power of culture was a vastly disproportionate to its position of world power. This is the best footnote for the sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union. The culture was dominated by political power in the Soviet Union under Stalin. The culture had been seriously questioned at home and abroad in Khrushchev era. Brezhnev relied on national enforcement machinery to further the rule of political culture, resulting in the culture of ruling party shrinking and becoming lost. Gorbachev's "new thinking" eventually led to the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

2. The gradually weakening of political culture

Whether the people approved national ruling class's political culture was related to the fate of the ruling group. If their political culture has lost their attractiveness at home and abroad, it indicates the ruling group's demise. Political values are the focus of political culture. It is the world values of the ruling class. The Soviet Union's political culture in the process of socialization was severely hampered due to their own reasons. The attractiveness of its political values gradually lost at home and abroad.

The Soviet Union's official political culture had a very large appeal in Lenin's time. Communist ideology had played an important pole to safeguard Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) in the beginning of Soviet. Lenin attached great importance to ideological work. "The Bolshevik ideology of Marxism spread widely by education and indoctrination. The majority of workers agreed with the Russian Communist Party (Bolshevik) the ruling position including its socialism, communism value target and path selection." (Zhou, 2009, p46) The ruling class's ideology had become the ruling ideas of society in many areas. Many people chose to join the party. In their lead, the people of the Soviet Union defeated the enemy; to overcome the difficulties faced by the early founding. All of this highlighted the scientific and political values of the positive function.

The Soviet Union's political culture were rigid, deified and dogma in Stalin period so that soft power was weakened. In particular, Stalin thought class struggle more and more acute in all the phenomenon of a socialist society. In all, the attractiveness of Lenin's political culture almost disappeared. "The big cleansing occurred in the Soviet Union in 1930s victimized a large number of people, causing a lot of cases of injustice. Innocent people's call was the most useful pretext for the Western hostile forces discrediting of socialism and the destruction of the socialist reputation so that shook people's faith in socialism." (Zhou, 2002, p935) The movement caused serious consequences. First, the Soviet Union's socialist construction would inevitably suffer the injustice of millions of good people. Second, an atmosphere of terror in the country made socialist democracy disappeared and stifled the party's cadres and the masses of enthusiasm and creativity. Third, a number of Eastern European communist leaders were suppressed, to artificially create distrust between the international Communists. With state power, that is, violent means, to undermine society's thinking, it not only can not make the ruling group's political culture be approved, but also get worse. The more emasculated, the more opposition was strong. It is impossible to enhance the attractiveness of the official political values.

Khrushchev came to power and completely denied Stalin so further weakened the Soviet political culture. Although he made Stalin step down the altar, but the political culture of the dogma was difficult to change. At the surface the people adhered to the ideology of Marxism and in fact the masses gradually discarded mainstream ideology. Khrushchev opened the road of reform, in order to change Stalin's ideology, but didn't inject fresh blood for the Soviet Communist Party.

Soviet society had undergone great changes and intellectuals accounted for 40% of the country's population in Leonid Brezhnev era. It had a profound impact on social ideology. The Soviet Union had made great social development, but the Soviet Union's political values didn't change. "Brezhnev's speech must cite the writings of Lenin, but there was no appeal and persuasive power. The ideology had been growing loss of combat effectiveness and scientific nature. The crisis had been notably improved, which the top leadership of the CPSU was also aware of. "(Zhou, 2009, p49) The official political values is not static. It should change with the progressive development of society. It must keep up with the times. If it was out of date, it would face the fate of being eliminated by society.

The top leadership of the CPSU was aware of the seriousness of this problem. Gorbachev came to power, and actively carried out reforms, but this reform denied the legitimacy of the CPSU and the premise of social existence. The reform referred to the so-called "historical hot ", which denied the Soviet Union itself."Gorbachev's reforms opened the Pandora's Box, which seriously threatened the Soviet Union's political culture. As if the original ideology of the dam opened a gap, so the public's dissatisfaction with the existing system could only be piled up in heart; once you had the opportunity, it would be like floods, burst out of the same outlet. "(Zhou, 2009, p51)

The Soviet Union's political culture deviated from the true Marxism the Stalin era. These values especially on young college students lost their identity during the Gorbachev period. Students were not interested in political theory course and the writings of Lenin and Marx, or even unwilling to join the party. In their view, "The party at this stage was a springboard for career and fortune. It was not the organization united in accordance with the ideological view. "(2002, pp.144-201) As Ryzhkov said, "Our tragedy was that we lost the 'Soviet values,' we did not bring the positive things in the past into the new era. ... Our country was the lack of a central ideology; we had some foreign ideas and value which made our country collapse. " (Ryzhkov , 2009, p61) Soviet political values held less and less soft power, which was the fundamental causes of the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

3. Conclusions

Disintegration of the Soviet Union attributed to the loss of its soft power. The academic mainstream view was that the main reason of the Soviet Union's collapse was the loss of its hard power, especially in the economic collapse. This should be questioned. The Soviet Union had experienced a period of rapid growth since 1928-1975, from an agricultural society to industrial society. It was estimated by the West. The Soviet Union had an average annual increase of 5.8% in 1928-1940, which was very fast speed at that time. In 1950, the Soviet Union achieved industrialization. Its pace of development had been faster than the United States until 1975. The Soviet Union's average annual growth rate was 4.8% during this period, while the U.S. was only 3.3%. After 1975, its technology slowed down so the growth rate was lower than the U.S., but there was still 1.9% or 1.8%. There was no negative growth so can not be called the economic collapse. Yeltsin made planned economy disintegrate since 1990. There was an absolute decline in the economy. Planned economy no longer worked in 1991. Yeltsin did not hand the taxes, so the Soviet planned economy collapsed. The Soviet economy wasn't the reason for the collapse. Yeltsin decided it in politics. We can see that the real reason for the disintegration of the Soviet Union was not due to economic collapse.

The Soviet military power was not the reason of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As we all know, the disintegration of the Soviet Union was a peaceful transition in international politics by far in world history, without a world war and large-scale armed conflict. The Soviet Union was unique military power in the world with U.S. rival in military technology. So the military hard power was not the reason for the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

Therefore, the primary causes of the disintegration of the Soviet Union could only be the loss of soft power in culture. Too many political factors invaded public cultural development and led to the lack of inclusiveness and openness. After Stalin, the Soviet Union official political values gradually weakened. The attractiveness to the people gradually reduced, resulting in the loss of ideological identity. The Soviet Union during the Cold War had never been a the United States real opponents because of closed system, the lack of attractive pop culture, as well as wrong foreign policy. (Nye, 2005, p83) In short, the disintegration of the Soviet Union gave us a very deep inspiration. It is necessary to maintain stability of the regime and the country's prosperity. We must make

the ruling party accumulate soft power of culture. It is the best way for government to maintain security in a new era. Controlling society only by hard power will get society inevitably into a split or broken up. The tragedy of the Soviet Union can not but make us think deeply. The publican culture is very important for us to construct our country under the lead of the ruling party. It is more important for the Communist Party of China to let the public receive the political culture in heart.

References

- (2002). *Soviet Selected Records*. Social Sciences Academic Press, Vol. 31, pp144-201.
- A. Migranyan. (2002). *Why Russia's modernization is so tortuous*. Xinhua Press, p32.
- Collected Works of Lenin*. Vol. 39, pp301-302.
- Department of Culture of Shandong Province. The subject of "soft power and harmonious society." The medium-term results. project number: 20080083.
- Joseph Nye, Wu, Xiaohui & Cheng, Qian. (2005). *Soft power - the world's road to success in politics*. The Oriental Press, p2, p82, p83.
- Ryzhkov. (2009). Dwelling on the Fundamental causes of the Soviet Union Collapsed. *History Collection*, No. 2, pp54-63.
- Tagore. (2004). *Russian Letters*. Guangxi Normal University Press, p7.
- Wang, Huning. (1993). As the culture of national power: soft power. *Journal of Fudan University* (Social Science Edition, No. 3, pp91-96.
- Zhang, Ji & Sang, Hong. (1999). Culture: The International Politics of the soft power. *Socialist study*, No. 3, pp38-41.
- Zhou, Shangwen, Ye, Shuzong & Wang, Side. (2002). *The Soviet Union History of Rise and Fall*. Shanghai People's Publishing House, Version 1, p200, p739, p935.
- Zhou, Shangwen. (2009). The Ideological Collapse and the Disintegration of Soviet Union. *East China Normal University* (Philosophy and Social Science Edition), No. 2, pp6-65.