

REFORM AND STABILITY – THE RUSSIAN AND THE CHINESE WELFARE SYSTEMS COMPARED*

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Abstract

Systematic theoretical work on Russian and Chinese social policy seems to be lacking. While previous research establishes how democratic systems produce welfare, it is unclear what kind of welfare such transitional systems provide. Our analysis adheres to structuration based theoretical explanations, taking into account both agency and structure as factors needed to explain these regimes' welfare policy. Hybrid regimes are eager to adopt global liberally oriented welfare policies, which tend to ignore popular demands. Western analysis of Russian and Chinese social policy emphasizes the dualistic influence of liberal versus statist social policy. This dualistic conceptualization fails to take into account the contradictions between ideological frames and hybrid regimes' vulnerability to popular pressures. Widespread corruption undermines formal procedures and underlies growth of informal practices. Both Russia and China have considerable welfare achievements and vast problems. In conditions of economic growth, both have experienced huge increases in inequality and individualization of risk.

Keywords: Russia, China, social welfare, reform, stability, hybrid regime

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Introduction

Both Russia and China have been governed by the communist party and ideology. They had eliminated private ownership of the means of production and classes based on that. However, Russia was an industrialized and urbanized society and China still predominantly an agrarian society. These differences exist today, even if China has experienced exceptionally rapid urbanization during the last three decades. Nowadays, both Russia and China face the challenge of developing a new socio-economic model and a new social contract between the state and society in the context of the market economy reality. While it is well established by previous research how democratic systems produce welfare, less is known about what kind of welfare these transitional systems – generally classified as hybrid produce – and how.

Usually the concept of hybrid regime refers to a political system comprising both democratic and authoritarian elements. China is not a hybrid system in this sense. Rather it is traditional communist party state and cadre power system. However, as a comprehensive social system China is a hybrid combining a capitalist market economy with a communist political regime. In this article, we argue that we need new theoretical and methodological perspectives for explaining welfare in these hybrid systems. What is the significance of the welfare regime for stability of the political system in hybrid regimes? We maintain that there is a lack of systematic theoretical work on Russian and Chinese social policy. We need more conceptual specification, more solid empirical evidence and fewer ready-made totalizing answers.

Christian Aspalter¹ argues that explanatory theories of social welfare may be characterized either as actor-based (conflict) theories, or structural (functional) theories. Actor based

¹ Aspalter, Christian: The welfare state in cross cultural perspective. *International Social Work* Vol. 51, 2008/6, 777-

789; Aspalter, Christian: New Developments in the Theory of Comparative Social Policy. *Journal of Comparative Social*

theories suggest that the power and programs of different actors are the key to the formation of welfare regimes. These actors comprise classes and the state, corporatist institutions, political parties, labor unions but also ruling elites, governing administrators, activists and professional organizations. In many cases the role of international bodies, such as the IMF, the World Bank, the United Nations, or the OECD has to be taken into account. The actor based explanatory theories seem to imply a diversification of welfare regimes based on different power resources of various actors in particular societies. On the other hand, structural theories predict a convergence on social policies based on common structural determinants e.g. the degree of economic development, urbanization, modernization, or advancement of capitalist market economy.

Our analysis here adheres to a structuration based explanation that takes into account both agency and structure. Structuration theory, as developed by Giddens, refers not to fixed structures but to the fact that structures come into existence and fade away in dynamic processes in which actors are continuously changing structures. Russian or Chinese development should not be seen as some kind of evolution and development without actors and agency. Furthermore, in this process people are also observing themselves, modifying their intentions and executing their actions differently. This brings to the research focus the prospect of learning and changing understanding of interests and intentions. If we want to study the institutions we cannot view them straightforwardly as the institutionalization of pre-given values. Rather we should conceptualize them as a multifaceted tension field of various intended and unintended structuration processes.²

Welfare Vol. 1, 2006/1, 3-22. (2006a); Aspalter, Christian: The East Asian Welfare Regime. *International Journal of Social Welfare* Vol. 15, 2006, 290-301. (2006b)

² See especially Giddens, Anthony. (1984) *The Constitution of Society. Outline of the Theory of Structuration*. Cambridge. Cf. Kivinen, Markku and Cox, Terry. (2016). "Russian Modernisation – A New Paradigm." *Europe-Asia Studies* 68: 1 – 19

The comparative social policy literature has produced several well-known distinctive ideal typical models of welfare regimes in particular regions, specifically Europe (OECD), contemporary East Asia, and Africa. Best-known are Esping-Andersen's three ideal-type welfare state regimes in the OECD, liberal, conservative and social democratic. The post-World War II communist welfare regimes were distinct from any of these paradigms. Basic welfare was relatively comprehensive and secure, yet determined by the state rather than democratic politics. Furthermore, unlike in other regions, welfare provision was concentrated mainly at the enterprise level. The Soviet type of welfare policy was constructed on two pillars: Firstly, the state provided non-monetary social benefits for particular social groups. Secondly, most social benefits and services were based on work, and distributed at state owned enterprises. Both of these old pillars are vanishing in the contemporary market system. Gough and Therborn categorized post-socialist states as proto-welfare states that have superior welfare outcomes in the context of the non-OECD world.³ However, the contemporary situation has to take into account both the old rusting elements of the inherited welfare state, and the development of a new welfare model. Our main argument is that in both Russia and China choice of the welfare model is still open, comprising several contradictory frames and event-driven agencies.

In this article, we first describe the development of social policy in Russia and China. In the next section we indicate some basic results and major challenges of the contemporary situation. Rather than making a comprehensive empirical analysis, we concentrate on similarities and differences in policy making processes in the two cases. As a starting point for major generalizations

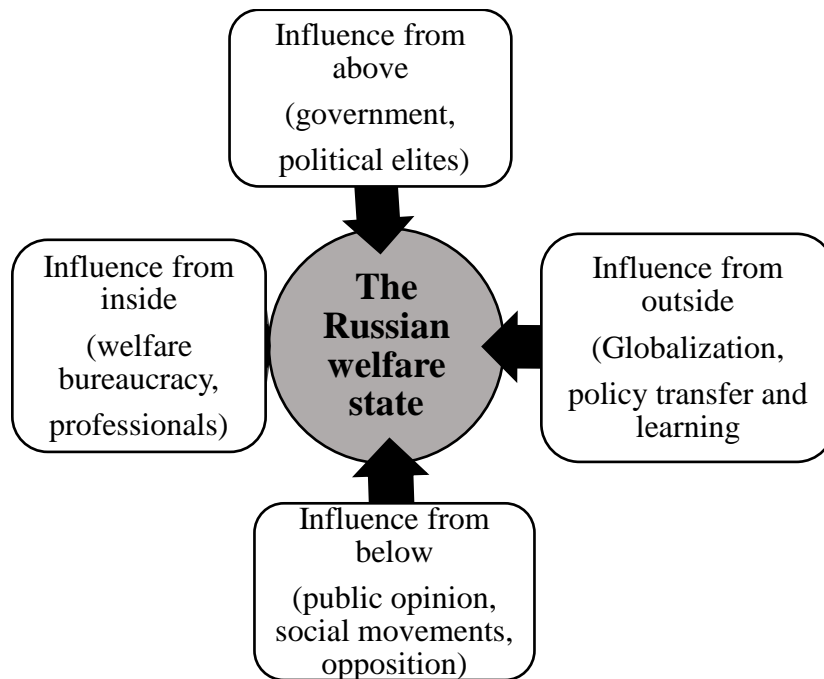
³ Ian Gough and Göran Therborn. The Global Future of Welfare States. *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*

Edited by Francis G. Castles, Stephan Leibfried, Jane Lewis, Herbert Obinger, and Christopher

Pierson. Online Publication Date: Sep 2010 DOI: 10.1093/oxfordhb/9780199579396.003.0048.

we use the analytical model developed by our Norwegian colleagues. We conclude by suggesting new conceptual openings for further analysis.⁴

Figure 7.1 Analytical model



Changing frames of Russian social policy

The creation of a new welfare state is one of the most challenging? – and thus far to a large extent unresolved – strategic tasks of Russian society. As Alfio Cerami⁵ puts it, Russia is called upon to face a double burden of responsibilities: it must ensure protection against old and new social risks for a

⁴ For a previous comparison see Kivinen, M. and Li, C. L. (2012). “The Free-Market State or the Welfare State?” In C. Pursiainen (ed.), *At the Crossroads of Post-Communist Modernisation: Russia and China in Comparative Perspective*. Palgrave Macmillan: Houndmills. pp. 47-113.

⁵ Cerami, Alfio: Socio-Economic Transformations in Post-Communist Countries: Central and Eastern Europe and Russia Compared. *Romanian Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 9 No. 1, 2009 (<http://www.sar.org.ro/polsci/>)

larger proportion of its citizens than in Western societies, while, simultaneously, dealing with the most serious social, political and economic challenges stemming from transition.

It is difficult to overstate the social crisis that emerged as an effect of the Russian transition. The rise of poverty, mortality, infectious diseases, alcohol and drug abuse, homelessness and unemployment are dramatic indicators. Cerami ⁶ summarises four main trends in a drastic restructuring of the Russian welfare system:

- (1) privatisation of provision
- (2) individualisation of risks
- (3) monetisation of access
- (4) decentralisation of management.

During the first years of transition, the reform of Russian society began with crucial institutional changes in order to transit to a market economy as rapidly as possible⁷. The emphasis was on economic reforms, while changes in social policy occurred as side effects of economic restructuring. Priority was given to relievin pressures on the state budget.⁸ Liberalisation, privatisation

⁶ Cerami, Alfio: Welfare State Developments in the Russian Federation: Oil-led Social Policy and 'The Russian Miracle'*Social Policy & Administration, Volume 43, Issue 2, 105-120*

⁷ *Russia: A Long View*, by Yegor Gaidar (Author), Antonina W. Bouis (Translator), Anders Aslund (Foreword), The MIT Press (October 12, 2012),

⁸ Cook, Linda J.: *Postcommunist Welfare states: Reform Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*. Cornell UP 2007.

Tuomi, Maria (2012): *Diffusion of social innovations across the borders social sector cooperation with the Republic of Karelia*, Publications of the University of Eastern Finland. Dissertations in Social Sciences and Business Studies., no 33

and decentralisation were motivated by the goal of retrenching, i.e., restricting the role of the state in the welfare structures. Social policy reforms featured radical changes that were often poorly developed and implemented. Inconsistency in policy was reflected in slow and contradictory institution building. During the 1990s, centralised institutions broke down and became decentralised and subject to strong informal pressures. When Vladimir Putin came to power there was a reversal toward greater centralisation in key areas of social policy and return to more systematic reforms.

In the Soviet system, education and health care were universally available public services funded by the state, though the quality of services was stratified by status and place of residence. The system of public welfare included extensive non-monetary benefits, often provided to different categories of citizens (l'goty), War veterans and their families, victims of Chernobyl, teachers working in rural areas, and dozens of other categories received various in-kind benefits such as free transportation, medicine, etc.⁹ Overall, as in most welfare systems, pension provision was by far the largest cash transfer program.

At the micro level of society another component of welfare was provided by enterprises. Soviet ideology characterised a Soviet enterprise as a “labour collective”: The real standard of living in society was based, to large extent, on workplaces and those services that they provided. . The achievements of an enterprise were measured not in money or in tons produced, but in the size, education and skill composition of the labour force, the number of houses built, kindergartens supported, etc., These dominate the iconography of the Soviet

⁹Remington, Thomas (2011) *The Politics of Inequality in Russia*, Cambridge University Press, 40-46

enterprise and of socialism's achievements.¹⁰ It should be kept in mind that the extent and quality of these social benefits varied depending on the nature (state-owned versus collective) size (big versus small) and administrative level (central, provincial or county authorities) of the firms. Political, security and administrative elites had access to separate, higher-quality services. Workers in the public sector, predominantly women, got relatively few benefits. Because various sectors provided different benefits, the system of "working collective" welfare had only a weak re-distributive effect.¹¹

When the Soviet political and economic systems collapsed, many of the social structures began to erode. Enterprises shifted to market principles and were no longer responsible for social services. By 1997 most provision of social goods had shifted to municipalities. At the same time, a more general welfare restructuring was introduced more or less in a neo-liberal spirit. Consequently, both of the security systems of Soviet life are disappearing.

Cook's systematic analysis of the Russian welfare state's development during the transition identifies three distinct stages. The first, during 1991–93, featured unrestricted liberalisation by the executive in the absence of political counter-forces. During the second stage, 1994–1999 political resistance by Communists and other political parties largely blocked consolidation of reforms. Instead, the welfare state went through a process of informalisation, spontaneous privatisation and

¹⁰ Clarke, Simon: The contradictions of 'state socialism'. In Simon Clarke (et al.): What about the Workers. Workers and the Transition to Capitalism in Russia. Edgar Elgar 1993, p.25

¹¹ Hughes, M.C.: Smashing the iron bowl. Foreign Affairs, Vol. 77, 1998/4. cf. Lin, Ka & Kangas Olli: Social Policymaking and its institutional basis: Transition of the Chinese social security system. International Social Security Review, Vol. 59, 2/2006, 61-76.

cracking of the control of means of social security and social benefits”¹². During the third stage, in Putin’s first term (200-2004), reform legislation contributed to a welfare state model based more on the market. Pension insurance was partially privatized, de-statization of the housing sector advanced, and private services and insurance markets became more important in health care.¹³

Prioritizing health and demography

Already during the last two decades of the Soviet Union demographers started to pay attention to increasing mortality¹⁴. During the turmoil of the 1990s this tendency increased dramatically especially among men, who experienced growing rates of cardiovascular diseases, suicide, violent crime and accidents. Low birth rates and high premature mortality resulted in an unprecedented peacetime depopulation of approximately 700,000 a year. At the beginning of the 1990s, Russia’s population reached 149 million; at the beginning of 2007 it had fallen to 142 million¹⁵.

In 2005, Putin declared that because of the demographic problems social policy should be the main national priority. The national demography plan, passed in 2006, set a goal of stabilizing the population at 140–142 million by 2015, and increasing it to 145 million by 2025. The main target

¹² Cook, Linda J.: *Postcommunist Welfare states: Reform Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*. Cornell UP 2007. p.25

¹³ Cook, Linda J.: *Postcommunist Welfare states: Reform Politics in Russia and Eastern Europe*. Cornell UP 2007. p.25

¹⁴ Anderson, Barbara A. & Brian D. Silver. 1989. "The Changing Shape of Soviet Mortality, 1958-1985: An Evaluation of Old and New Evidence." *Population Studies*, 43: 243-65. And Feshbach, Murray: *Between the Lines of the 1979 Soviet Census*. In *Problems of Communism*, January 1982, pp. 27-37.

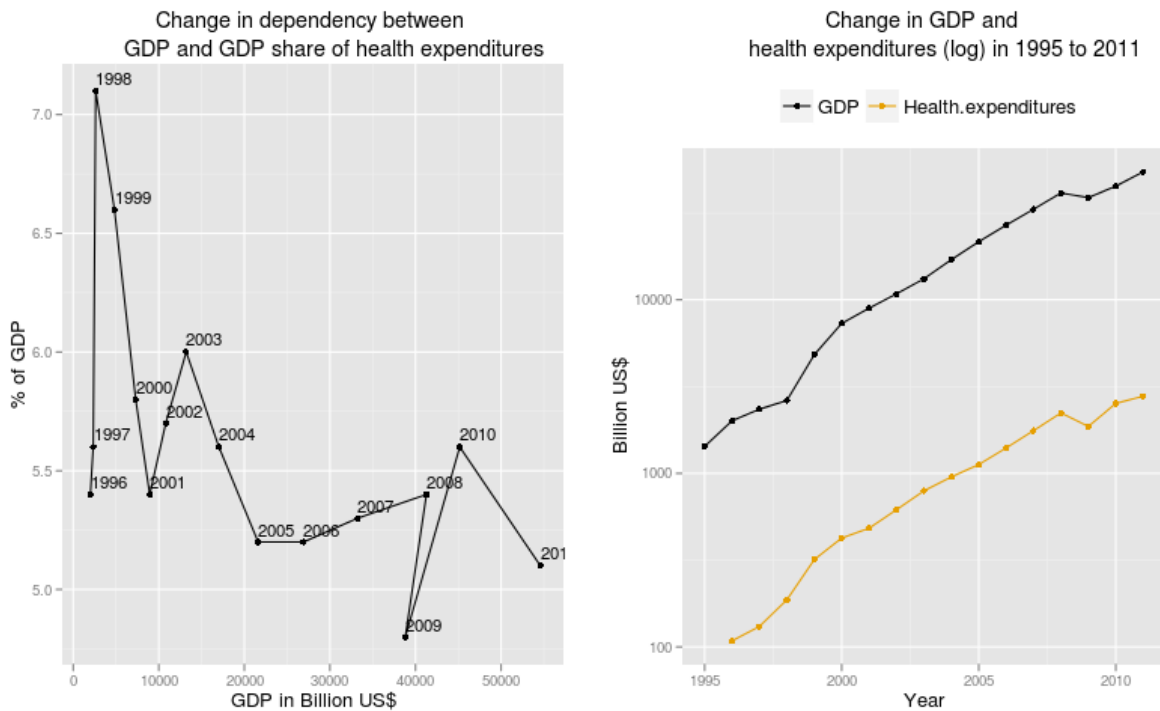
¹⁵ Paikallishallinnon reformi vahvistaa keskushallinnon valtaa Venäjällä: paikalliset taloudelliset kannustimet Kulmala, M. & Tekoniemi, M., 2007, Helsinki: Suomen Pankki, Siirtymätalouksien tutkimuslaitos (BOFIT) And UNDP: *Human Development Report 2010. The Real Wealth of Nations: Pathways to Human Development*. United Nations Development Programme. Palgrave Macmillan. New York.

was an increase in the birth rate, from 1.3 births per woman to 1.7 through a range of pro-natalist benefits and incentives. The priority given to this issue can be seen in the relative growth of expenditure on family and childhood protection compared to other areas of welfare. (Table 6). The government also modernized health care and built fifteen state-of-the-art hospital centres in various regions of the federation. The size of public expenditure on health care increased dramatically, though spending as per cent of GDP changed little. (see Figures 2 and 3) Figure 2 shows the division of expenditure on health between general government expenditure, private insurance and out-of-pocket expenditure. Figure 3 describes the dependency of health expenditure on GDP growth. Although there is a lot of fluctuation over the period, the logarithmic figure shows a strong interdependency and some decline in major economic crises. This would not indicate a strong effort to face the exceptional problems of national health with determined and exceptional financing efforts.

Figure 1 Expenditure on health in the Russian Federation (Million USD)
(to be added)

Source: WHO Global Health Expenditure Database 2012

Figure 2



Source for figure??

As noted earlier, one of the core challenges facing Russian society – as well as the Chinese society – is to create a new welfare regime. However, societal interests cannot shape welfare policy in Russia as democratic class struggle is nearly absent.¹⁶ The Russian political system is based on a power vertical that underlines the role of the elite¹⁷. While elites have emphasized the priority of social policy rhetorically since 2005, and real spending has increased rapidly, relatively stable

¹⁶ Korpi, Walter: *The Democratic Class Struggle*. Routledge and Kegan Paul 1983.

¹⁷ Sakwa, Richard: *Putin Russia's Choice*. Routledge 2004. Sakwa, Richard: *Russian Politics and Society*. Routledge 2008. OPFR: *O sostojanii grazhdanskogo obshchestva v Rossiiskoi Federacii*. Moskva: Obshchesvennaia palata Rossiiskoi Federacii 2008.

percentages of budget expenditure on health care and other areas of human development (with the exception of pensions and family benefits) indicate a lack of political will. Federal social outlays have increased but not more rapidly than other outlays. Despite the political elite's emphasis on the social-demographic crises, in real terms, fiscal conservatism has so far been more significant than active social policy. Within the ministerial structures, the Ministry of Economic Development has been the most important.

In many areas of welfare, the Russian state continues to withdraw from its previous social obligations. Recent initiatives encourage Russian NGOs and businesses to step in as welfare providers. The federal government has enacted legislation that enables the state to outsource its social obligations to Russian socially-oriented NGOs, a policy that, will presumably increase the already dominant social orientation of Russian civil society. New policies have also reduced taxes on charity activities for businesses, which are thus encouraged, if not expected, to participate in various social programs.

Russia's government has opened the decision-making to input from experts and NGOs through cross-sectoral consultative bodies under governmental bodies at various levels. This is not a system of genuine interest representation through the political institutions but a more restricted space set by the state. In these quasi-corporatist bodies the government restricts the agenda to non-securitized policy areas and defines selection criteria for participants. Still they represent a degree of controlled pluralism, with multiple societal actors, including experts and civil society activists, participating in policy discussions and implementation processes. Thus, the increasingly authoritarian political regime does not exclude extra-governmental expertise but provides a restricted space for it – which may open windows of opportunity for a real change, as in case of paradigm shift in child welfare¹⁸

¹⁸ Bindman, E., Kulmala, M., Bogdanova, E. (2018) NGOs and the Policymaking Process in Russia: the Case of Child Welfare Reform. *Journal of Public Administration and Governance* (under review with minor revisions). Kulmala, Meri (2017): "Paradigm Shift in Russian Child Welfare Policy." *Russian Analytical Digest* 200, 28 March 2017, 5-10. Kulmala,

In contemporary political and economic constellations the vulnerabilities of Russian oil-led welfare regime might be realized. In addition to this exogenous vulnerability, there seems to be endogenous vulnerability as well. Large questions concerning contradictory approaches and incentives remain unresolved. The Russian welfare system has not failed completely, but Russian welfare model is highly incoherent. We have previously shown¹⁹ that, in the absence of mechanisms for democratic accountability and articulation of interests, welfare policy is produced by several somewhat disparate processes; namely, incremental bureaucratic processes, priority setting by the government, event-driven agency, and agency at the regional and local levels. Until 2013 there were evident improvements in quality of life that is experienced by citizens, which legitimized for the Putin administration. However, the government has not produced any comprehensive or coherent welfare policies that might alleviate hardship in Russia's stagnant economy. A major antinomy prevails between state oriented expectations of the population and neoliberal social policy. The elite prioritizes fiscal conservatism over dissatisfactions of a population with few organizational power resources.

Looking at the Russian welfare regime as it now stands in the light of our results, we would like to highlight main developments and trends. For most of the period from 2000 to 2013, substantial improvement in living standards, income levels and social service provision were observable social facts. Yet, inequalities y.- income, inter-regional and rural urban – increased dramatically.

We also note three important trends.

The **first** is associated with the structures of decision making and policy implementation in the social sphere. In conditions of a hybrid regime with strong state control, there nevertheless exists a degree of controlled pluralism as multiple societal actors participate in policy discussion and implementation. Many institutional forms at different levels of administration have been set up to accommodate this

Meri, Rasell, Michael & Chernova, Zhanna (2017): "Overhauling Russia's Child Welfare System: Institutional and Ideational Factors Behind the Paradigm Shift." *The Journal of Social Policy Studies* 15 (3), 353-366.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

participation. While some analyses consider these institutions to be mechanisms of cooptation, we highlight that they, nonetheless allow voice to different societal groups and civil society organizations. Second, contemporary Russian social policy features major global trends such as outsourcing, de-institutionalization, increase in the pension age, and a shifting work-family balance to name a few. Third, with regard to a distinct emerging model of Russian welfare we would underline its liberal character, developing in conditions of a hybrid political system and heavily controlled pluralism. Societal input and protest may set limits to liberalization, but it remains the defining direction of Russia's welfare reforms.

Table 4 Phases of Welfare Development in Russia and China

	Russia	China
Phase 1.	1991-1993 Rampant and unrestricted liberalisation without political counter forces. Contradiction between rules and resources.	1949-1978 Urban-rural dual welfare system. Enterprise-based (<i>danwei</i>) in urban areas, and minimum welfare provision in rural areas. Social insurance for state employees.
Phase 2.	1993-2004 Privatisation, individualisation of risk and cracking of the control of means of social security and social benefits despite of political opposition by both the communists and Yabloko. Since 2000 consolidation of political system around United Russia. Liberalisation ending with failure of monetarisation of the Social benefits.	1978-2003 State withdrawal, influence of neo-liberalism, transformation of economic system towards a market-oriented economy. <i>Danwei</i> system dismantled, privatization of health care, collapse of cooperative medical scheme in rural areas, massive shrinking of the collective economy in rural areas. Rapid economic growth, but growth of serious social problems by the end of the 1990s
Phase 3.	2005-2012 Turn toward statist welfare policy. This is elite-led and motivated by demographic pressure. Rather than addressing the concerns of the majority of people, the shift addressed narrowly selected issues focusing on Russian families, especially those with reproductive potential National Priority Projects, invested the economic growth to social policy but Russian demographers and social policy experts had little influence on those programs.	Since 2003, formulation of the vision to develop a moderately well-off and harmonious society, <i>xiaokang shehui</i> . Market-oriented reforms and privatization had resulted in large social inequalities. Comprehensive social reforms introduced, new medical insurance and care schemes and minimum standard of living schemes for urban and rural areas, and compulsory free primary education introduced. The urban-rural dual welfare system maintained, but the aim of the CPC is to achieve nation-wide universal health care and pension systems by 2020. Expansion of social security and social assistance reflects new emphasis on equality and

		social justice, and increasing concern for social and political instability.
Phase 4.	Since 2010 the welfare policy is formulated in a broader context of growing authoritarianism and conservative ideological offensive. However, this does not exclude extra-governmental expertise but provides a restricted space for it.	Since the end of 2015 a universal pension system is established and a universal health insurance system and a comprehensive social assistance system basically completed. Expansion of social security and social assistance reflects new emphasis on equality and social justice, and increasing concern for social and political instability. But government faces challenges of financial sustainability and further improvement of standards of benefits.

Major trends in Chinese social policy

China has experienced historically unprecedented economic growth in the world during the last four decades, since economic reforms and ‘opening up’ of the economy began in 1978. About 600 million people have been lifted out of extreme poverty, but inequalities of income and living conditions have risen dramatically. The gaps between rich and poor households, between urban and rural populations, and between rich and poor regions have become major concerns for political authorities, as has the lack of adequate social protection for the rapidly growing migrant population of currently around 260 million people. What has happened to social policy development during the period of economic reforms? What kind and scope of state responsibility for citizen welfare is developing – a ‘welfare state’ with “Chinese characteristics” or a type of welfare state that resembles welfare states elsewhere?

Table 4 compares phases in the development of welfare in Russia and China. Chinese social policy has undergone tremendous changes since the establishment of the People's Republic of China in 1949, from a highly centralized communist 'iron-rice-bowl' regime into a socialist market economy²⁰. But one institution, the household registration system (*Hukou*), introduced during the first decade of the 'Maoist period' of social policy development after the foundation of the PRC, has had lasting implications until the present day for urban-rural differences in social protection coverage and entitlements. Welfare in urban areas was guaranteed through the *danwei* (working unit) system in State Owned Enterprises (SOEs), providing cradle to grave social security, and government employees were covered by social insurance based on a law from 1951. The *danwei*-system represented a kind of mini-welfare state, and played a key role for health service provision. The originally much larger rural population obtained minimum security through the public ownership of land and the establishment of People's communes in 1958.

A new phase of social policy development began after the initiation of economic reforms from the late 1970s, and lasted until the early 2000s. People's communes were disbanded and the state's responsibility for citizen welfare was downplayed to give space for market-oriented flexibility and competitiveness, which led to erosion of previous welfare arrangements. Economic growth was the prioritized public policy goal. In urban, industrialized areas, the *danwei* system was dismantled and, for example, health care was delegated to local authorities. Through a management reform, hospitals were generally transformed into profit-oriented, largely autonomous, entities. The overall trend was characterized by state withdrawal and increased out-of-pocket payments by workers for health services²¹. Due to the collapse of the Cooperative Medical Schemes a similar process of

²⁰ Kettunen, Pauli, Stein Kuhnle and Yan Ren (2014), "Introduction: The development and diffusion of welfare systems and policies in the Nordic countries and China", in Kettunen, Kuhnle and Ren (eds.) *Reshaping welfare institutions in China and the Nordic countries*. Helsinki: Nordic Centre of Excellence NordWel. p.24-25

²¹ Saich, Tony (2011), *Governance and Politics of China*. 3rd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

health care deterioration took place in rural areas. In the 1980s 900 million rural residents were in practice without health insurance coverages²².

China is currently in its third phase of social policy development, which can be said to have started around the turn of the last century, and more clearly after Hu Jintao and Wen Jiabao became the new leaders of the party and government in 2003. “At the beginning of the 21st century, levels of economic development improved, as did public demand for social services.”²³. Imperfect social policies were seen to have a negative impact on economic growth. Attention shifted from pure economic growth policies towards a more balanced, sustainable and socially equitable approach to development. A vision of development towards a "moderately well-off society" (*xiaokang shehui*) was formulated by the Communist Party (CPC) in 2004. The concept of “building a harmonious socialist society” was introduced, later abbreviated to “Harmonious Society”²⁴. New concepts have later been formulated, such as “Scientific Outlook on Development” (2007) and “Shared Development” (2015). Chinese authorities have acknowledged the destabilizing potential of the highly unequal distribution of income and access to social security and health care. The separation of welfare provision from SOEs (State-Owned Enterprises) and the rapidly growing numbers of migrants from rural to urban areas, many or most of them informal workers, have left many millions without basic and/or adequate social security or protection.

²² Chan, Kwan, Kinglun Ngok and David Phillips (2008), *Social Policy in China. Development and Well-being*. Bristol: Polity Press.

²³ UNDP and DRC (2016), *China National Human Development Report 2016: Social Innovation for Inclusive Human Development*, edited by Gong Sen, Ge Yanfeng and Stein Kuhnle. Beijing: China Publishing Group Corporation, China Translation and Publishing House. p.43

²⁴ *ibid.*, p.18

A great number of social policy initiatives have been taken /in response to these problems?/ including many laws enacted during the last 15-20 years, over a broad range of social, welfare and education policies. Among major social policy reforms are the introduction of basic medical insurance for urban areas (1998); minimum standard of living scheme for urban areas (1997) and rural areas (2007); new rural cooperative medical scheme (2003); pension schemes for all urban workers (2005); new measures to provide social protection for migrant workers (2006); labour contract law (2008); free nine-year compulsory education for all (2006); new health care reform (2009); and the first social insurance law (2010). From 2003 onwards, the social policy agenda has shifted towards the inclusion of larger proportions of the population and the most vulnerable groups; i.e. rural residents, the unemployed and migrant workers. The agenda has been followed up in practice. For example, in 2003, only 55% of urban households and 21% of rural households were covered by basic medical insurance, but the figures increased to 89% and 97%, respectively, by 2011²⁵. The entire population is now covered by basic medical insurance. The pension system is also moving towards universal coverage, after the introduction of (voluntary) new rural (2009) and urban (2011) social pension schemes to supplement the (compulsory) Unified Pension System for Enterprise Employees (1997)²⁶. The ambition of CPC and the government is to achieve a nation-wide universal health care and pension systems by 2020. Social justice, equity, equality, and sustainable development have to a greater extent shaped the political discourse in China over the last decade. Besides fulfilling these goals, the aim is also to preserve social stability, which in turn is considered the main precondition for continued and stable economic growth²⁷.

²⁵ *ibid.*, p.64

²⁶ Dalen, Kristin, Tone Fløtten and Jon Hippe (2015), "Restructuring welfare in China – Scandinavian and Chinese pension and poverty policies compared". Paper for the 2015 FISS Conference, Hong Kong, June 7-9, 2015.

²⁷ Saich, Tony (2011), *Governance and Politics of China*. 3rd edition. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan

Is the Chinese social policy development following Western patterns of ‘welfare state’ development, and if so, what path of Western development? The spread of the idea of ‘the welfare state’ (although the concept is not globally used) is, in spite of the apparent global strength of neo-liberal ideology and policies, one element in the still on-going process of the globalization of economics and politics. Public responsibility for citizens’ welfare is increasing, as measured by public expenditure data and scope of legislation, in emerging economies around the world, and China is clearly no exception²⁸. The “East Asian welfare model”²⁹ most often refers to two groups of states, including the *de facto* autonomous political/administrative systems in the cases of Hong Kong and Taiwan: Japan, South Korea and Taiwan on the one hand and China, Hong Kong and Singapore on the other, sharing some commonalities in terms of cultural values basis (Confucian heritage), but being distinguished by qualitatively different types of welfare policy orientation³⁰. The first group shares the characteristics of having developed more redistributive social insurance institutions and more universal health care and pension systems, while the second group has relied

²⁸ Castles, Francis G., Stephan Leibfried, Jane Lewis, Herbert Obinger and Christopher Pierson . (eds) (2010), *The Oxford Handbook of the Welfare State*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

²⁹ Goodman, Roger and Ito Peng (1996), “The East Asian welfare states: peripatetic learning, adaptive change, and nation buildings”, in Gösta Esping-Andersen (ed.) *Welfare States in Transition*. London: Sage.,
Kwon, Huck-Ju (1997), “Beyond European welfare regimes; comparative perspectives on East Asian welfare systems”, *Journal of Social Policy*, 25 (4): 467-484.

Walker , Alan and Chack-Kie Wong (eds.) (2005), *East Asian welfare regimes in transition*. Bristol: The Policy Press

Peng, Ito and Joseph Wong (2010), “East Asia”, in Castles, Francis G. et al. (eds.)

³⁰ Kuhnle, Stein (2011), “Towards a Nordic-East Asian welfare dialogue?”, *Journal of Asian Public Policy*, 4 (3): p.256

more on the individual's capacity to mitigate social risk³¹, that is, social protection schemes have been designed to rely more on private savings, and are less redistributive. Chinese social policy development seems to aspire in the direction of the first group of other Northeast Asian countries, such as Japan, South Korea and Taiwan, where the principle of universalism has been underlined in contrast to Hong Kong and Singapore where provident funds are the main anchor of the welfare state with a strong emphasis on public housing³². Thus, elements of both Continental European and Scandinavian/Nordic welfare models (or "conservative" and "social democratic" welfare regimes in the Esping-Andersen terminology) can be observed in recent Chinese experience. But it should be noted that the overall welfare state effort is modest and in practice, there are still a number of impediments to the implementation of effective national, universal social policies. Divisions between urban and rural populations persist, and the vast population of migrants is only slowly and gradually being included under the Social Insurance Law of 2010³³.

Since the end of 2015, China's reconstruction of social security and welfare system has moved into a new phase (the fourth phase). During 2010-2015 (the 12th five-year plan of the Chinese government), social security and welfare system had expanded very fast, which was reflected both in social security coverage and social assistance improvement. According to *China Social Security Development Report* (China Society of Social Security 2016), by the end of 2015, a universal pension system was established; universal health insurance system basically completed; comprehensive social assistance system basically formed. However, with economic slowdown since

³¹ Peng, Ito and Joseph Wong (2010), "East Asia", in Castles, Francis G. et al. (eds.)

³² Cook, Sarah and Huck-Ju Kwon (2007), "Social Protection in East Asia", *Global Social Policy*, 7 (2): 226

³³ Ringen, Stein and Kinglun Ngok (2013), "What kind of welfare state is emerging in China?", The Social Security in China Project, Asian Studies Centre, St. Antony's College, University of Oxford, unpublished paper, January 2013.

2015, this development has been facing great challenges and becoming unsustainable. The previous expansion of social security and the welfare system relied heavily on governmental expenditure. Under the "new normal" of China's economy, the government fiscal could not afford continuing expansion of social security and welfare. Social security funds have encountered increasing difficulties in maintaining a balance between revenue and expenditure (何晖芦艳子 2016).

This issue is especially prominent for the pension system. With the advent of the aging society, the elderly population receiving pension has been increasing while working population paying into insurance has been decreasing since 2012. The UN report of *World Populations Prospects 2015* shows that the number of people aged over 65 in China will rise from 132 million in 2015 to 331 million by 2050 (and 480 million people will be over 60), while the number of people aged 15–64 will fall from 1bn to 849m. (United Nations 2015) The funding shortfall in China's pension system reached RMB 3.6 trillion (equivalent to US dollars 522 billion) according to China Social Security Development Report 2016.) With increasingly financial pressures, the Chinese government has put forward the new direction of social security construction in its 13th Five-year Plan (2016-2020), which is that "the attention of social security development should be shift from the size-expansion ("extension development") to sustainable development and improving fairness".(王延中 2016) The government has tried to reduce the dependence of the social security fund on the government fiscal, and share social security responsibilities with enterprises, individuals, families and charities (何晖芦艳子 2016). At present, another major source of social security funds is from enterprises, which are also facing pressure to cut social contributions because of falling corporate profits and rising labor cost. In early 2016, the government had to cut down the social security contribution rate of enterprise, from 20% of employee income for pension to 19% in most provinces and even 14% in tow provinces (Guangdong and Zhejiang), from 2% for unemployment insurance to 1% - 1.5%.

At the same time, there have been existing significant inequalities in the social security and welfare between urban and rural areas, public and private sectors, developed and less developed regions. In the past decade, the government strategy for reducing such inequalities was to include most people in the social security system and continuously upgrade welfare of the disadvantaged groups (such as rural residents or migrants). This strategy is intended to narrow the gap between disadvantaged and advantaged groups in social security and welfare, and to promote integration of the national social security system. It has resulted in the continuous and universal improvement in social security and welfare during previous decade. This strategy cannot be sustained now because the government is incapable of continuing to raise welfare standards of the disadvantaged groups. The new strategy is to lower partially welfare standards of the advantaged group (such as lowering pension standard of workers in government-affiliated institutions in line with enterprises' employees), and redistributing social security funds among developed and less developed regions. That is bound to change the previously universal beneficiary into interest conflict among groups. The new policies have aroused much controversy and been experiencing a lot of resistance in 2016.

Contemporary levels of welfare : Comparing Russia and China?

If we look at contemporary Russia in the light of the key welfare indicators at the national level from 2017 we can see that according to UNDP Human development indicators Russia is placed in a high human development category at similar levels with United Arab Emirates or Greece. Russia is ranked either at the bottom *high-income* or top of *upper-middle-income* category by the World Bank, together with Poland and Brazil, whereas mean wages are at the same level as Estonia and Jamaica. As for all demographic indicators Russia performed alarmingly badly in 1990s, but indicators have gradually improved.. Natural change in population turned positive in 2013 for the first time since 1992. In Human Development Index ranking Russia is in the position of 49th in the World, while China being the 86th.

1.4 Human Development Index and its components

ind	year	China	Finland	Norway	Russian Federation	Sweden	United States
Expected years of schooling	2014	13.07	17.07	17.49	14.69	15.82	16.48
GNI per capita rank minus HDI rank	2014	-7.00	0.00	5.00	-1.00	-1.00	3.00
Gross national income (GNI) per capita	2014	12547.03	38694.77	64992.34	22352.05	45635.50	52946.51
hdi_rank	2014	90.00	24.00	1.00	50.00	14.00	8.00
Human Development Index (HDI)	2014	0.73	0.88	0.94	0.80	0.91	0.91
Life expectancy at birth	2014	75.80	80.80	81.60	70.10	82.20	79.10
Mean years of schooling	2014	7.54	10.29	12.63	11.95	12.10	12.94

China is lagging behind the developed Western societies in educational indicators whereas the key problem in Russia is the national health. In fact life expectancy of Russian men is not only behind China but also behind India. Moreover, this is the case despite that fact that Russia has more medical doctors than any other society due to the Soviet legacy, and infant mortality figures have all the time been good and improving. In China the unintended effect of the successful one child policy is the biased development of the gender composition of the population.

1.1 Health outcomes

ind	year	China	Finland	Norway	Russian Federation	Sweden	United States
Adult mortality rate, female (per 1,000 people)	2013	76.00	51.00	47.00	126.00	43.00	76.00
Adult mortality rate, male (per 1,000 people)	2013	103.00	114.00	73.00	339.00	69.00	128.00
Infant mortality rate	2013	10.90	2.10	2.30	8.60	2.40	5.90
Life expectancy at age 60	2010/2015	19.45	23.84	24.00	17.46	24.11	23.23
Physicians (per 10 000 people)	2001-2013	14.56	29.05	37.39	43.09	32.65	24.52
Public health expenditure (% of GDP)	2013	5.57	9.40	9.57	6.55	9.71	17.10
Under-five mortality rate	2013	12.70	2.60	2.80	10.10	3.00	6.90

Table 1 Human Development Index and its components in 2017

	China	Finland	Norway	Russia	Sweden	U.S.
HDI rank	86	15	1	49	7	13
Value	0,752	0,920	0,953	0,816	0,933	0,924
Life expectancy	76,4	81,5	82,3	71,2	82,6	79,5
Expected years of schooling	13,8	17,6	17,9	15,5	17,6	16,5
Mean years of schooling	7,8	12,4	12,6	12	12,4	13,4
GNI per capita	15,270	41,022	68,012	24,233	47,766	54,941
GNI per capita minus HDI rank	-9	10	5	3	9	-2
HDI rank in 2016	86	15	1	49	8	12

Source: UNDP 2018 --> <http://dev-hdr.pantheonsite.io/en/composite/HDI>

Both countries have experienced considerable improvement in their incomes and welfare since the 1990s. The absolute improvement in the economic situation seems to be a key to the legitimacy of the contemporary elite in both countries. At the same time, inequality has quite dramatically increased and inter- regional inequality is very high. In general Russia now has the highest gini-coefficient among the Eastern European transition countries and China is at the top level in East Asia (Remington 2016). However, among the BRICS-countries they do not have exceptionally high inequality. This growing inequality has not, we would argue, led to a polarized society. Rather the social structure is complex and social classes play a very limited role in both countries, leaving a lot of room for other agencies, especially ministries and professional organizations.

In China as well as in Russia, the economic transition towards a market-based economy, including elite and mass privatization, has fundamentally transformed social structures. The transition has created new capitalists as well as small employers and petty bourgeois social groups. However, these groups remain a minority in a wage-labor based society. In Russia, the new wage laboring middle class positions have been growing stronger during the Putin regime, having been in decline during the first ten years of transition. There are more entrepreneurs in urban China than in

Russia. On the other hand, wage laboring middle classes are larger in Russia. In both societies also the working class situation has improved in economic terms for an extended period. . This may be more significant for the working class experience and consciousness than the growth of relative differences. In urban China, both the working class and middle class positions have increased and the general level of living has considerably improved. The remarkable economic growth has increased the real incomes of the Chinese working class. This has paradoxically maintained the legitimacy of the hegemonic project, which in fact means an implicit erosion of the “sacred” working class. The communist regimes always declare themselves as representatives of the working class and the growth of the middle classes emerges as an unintended result of their modernization effort.³⁴ Analyzing postcommunist labour in comparative perspective, Chen and Sil argue that while organized labor may be weak both in Russia and in China this can be explained by fundamentally different mechanisms. Russian labor, while more autonomous from the state, has been too fragmented to organize widespread protest, whereas Chinese labor, while organizationally unified, is not autonomous enough from the state to even consider challenging it.³⁵

(INCLUDE HERE A TABLE AND ONE PARAGRAPH ON SOCIAL EXPENDITURE)

In contemporary China the working class has been growing, while deep internal segmentation has emerged. It should also be noticed that neither in Russia nor in China can inequality be reduced

³⁴ Kivinen, M. and Li, C. (2012). Socioeconomic Systems – Comparative Analysis of Russia and China. In. Pursainen, C. (ed.) *The Dragon and the Bear: Strategic Choices of Russia and China*. Palgrave MacMillan.

³⁵ Calvin Chen and Rudra Sil, ‘Communist Legacies, Postcommunist Transformations and the Fate of Organised Labor in Russia and China’, *Studies in Comparative International Development*, Vol. 41 (2), pp. 62-87. Cf. also Pringle and Clarke, *Op.cit.*, pp. 202.

to class differences. In Russia huge regional differences prevail, whereas in China the class structure is to a large extent dualistic. Upper classes are almost non-existent in rural China.

Unlike Russia, which started its transition when it already was a fully industrialized and largely urbanized society, China's transition has been characterized by large-scale industrialization and urbanization, which have resulted in a significant reduction of the peasant class, increase of the working class in 1990s and expansion of the middle class during 2000s. The privatization process has led to the emergence of the capitalist and middle-class entrepreneurial classes, members of which are previously worked in the public sector. While most or all people have improved their economic situation, the rising income gap has become the main source of social discontent and criticism against government policies. Like in Russia, in China the role of the middle class is an issue. Some regard it as a potentially destabilizing group which needs to be controlled, whereas others see it as the socio-political stabilizer that defends political conservatism, because it benefits most from the economic reform and rapid economic growth and at the same time it is strongly depended on the state. In general, the central government has since the beginning of the 2000s deliberately taken a series of measures to balance the interests between the elite groups and the mass majority. Although the trade unions are more or less weaker bargaining parties in the huge bureaucratic machinery, the state has been rather successful in its role as an arbitrator of interest conflicts. Moreover, within the elites, it can be noticed that an 'elite coalition' was formed during late 1990s, which seems to have found a balance between the elite interests and solved the potential major conflicts, especially between political elites and economic elites.

The economic reform in China meant shifting towards a liberal, U.S. inspired model of welfare. While China's welfare regime is still evolving, it seems that the government has already turned in that direction. The liberal model brought about a series of social problems, which were understood as producing instability and thus threatening the current power constellation. Due to this policy shift, many social classes and groups, which were excluded from social security in 1980s and

1990s, have returned to the social security system. One can tentatively conclude that since around 2000 the policy of China's government has been moving towards a new model with stronger corporatist elements. In this system the cost bearing of social insurances has been shifting from the individuals to a shared responsibility of the government, enterprises and individual insurance holders. However, the new contradictions between regions as well as between state sector and private sector.

Conclusion: Contradictory frames and open issues

Neither Russia nor China is a completely predatory system neglecting the issues of welfare. Both have considerable achievements and vast problems in welfare systems. Their policies have produced both intended and unintended results. In conditions of economic growth, both countries experienced a vast rise in inequality, and inequality in earnings is translated directly into high post-tax-and-transfer inequality³⁶. This is the case because of the largely non-redistributive system of

³⁶ Remington, Thomas (2013) Inequality and authoritarian rule in Russia and China, in William M. Reisinger (ed.):

Russia's Regions and Comparative Subnational Politics p. 163-184, Routledge

Remington, Thomas (2014) *The Politics of Social Insurance in Russia and China* APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper.

Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2451884>

Remington, Thomas (2015) Pension reform in authoritarian regimes: Russia and China compared in *Workshop on Comparative Studies of Regional Governance in China and Russia, Hong Kong*

Remington, Thomas (2015) Why is interregional inequality in Russia and China not falling? in *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* Volume 48 Issue 1 p. 1-13

taxation and social spending and the preservation of categorical and in-kind rather than cash-based, means-tested benefits. Widespread corruption and diversion of public resources into private gain by state officials makes the formal procedures vulnerable and underlies the role of informal practices.

Most analysis of the hybrid regime fails to clarify the influence of the political system on the welfare regime. They seem to suggest almost a direct structural causation from the non-democratic regime to the welfare vulnerability. To write about hybrid welfare is to write about deformation and failure. It may very well be that this is ultimately correct. Democracy can also be a value as such, but it seems a more sound sociological approach to separate the analysis of the capacity of the hybrid regime from its evaluation. Consequently, our first thesis is that evaluation and analysis must be separated. There is no structural causation, rather the social policy field must be analyzed as a complex interaction of changing structural constraints and various action frames of several agencies.

Our second point is that in both countries' ideological starting points are contradictory. Western analysis of Russian and Chinese social policy tends to emphasize the ideological aspect of social policy, in most cases with a straightforward distinction between liberal and statist social policy. This dualism fails to conceptualize the simultaneous and contradictory nature of the ideological frames. The ideological bias also bypasses the institutional implementation, outcomes and reflexive monitoring of the social policy results. Thomas Remington has analyzed the similarities and differences in policy-making processes in Russia and China³⁷ He argues that in the bureaucratically

³⁷ Remington, Thomas (2013) Inequality and authoritarian rule in Russia and China, in William M. Reisinger (ed.): *Russia's Regions and Comparative Subnational Politics* p. 163-184, Routledge

Remington, Thomas (2014) *The Politics of Social Insurance in Russia and China* APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper.

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pluralistic political systems, there are multiple centers of initiative and (often informal) veto power with the difference that China gives sub-central entities many more points of access to policy making. In both countries, a major contradiction seems to recur on the part of two coalitions of bureaucratic agencies over the proper balance of economic development and social welfare objectives: a bloc consisting of the ‘social’ departments (the ministries and agencies concerned with administering social benefits, such as the labor, health, social security and pension bodies) and the ‘economic’ departments (the ministries of finance and economic development. And each bloc cultivates alliances with outside partners. For example, the social blocs often join with trade unions and the financial-economic bloc with business associations. However, in China, policy making process is much more decentralized than in Russia. This also creates another significant difference, since China has used its decentralization deliberately to test out policy reforms through local experiments³⁸. Whether the Western distinction between ‘neoliberal’ and ‘leftist’ approaches can really be applied to the analysis of ideological frames in Russia and China requires considerable more empirical analysis.

Our third point is that the legacy argument must be conceptually rigid and empirically specified. A crucial question for the hybrid regime is whether the top-down politics of the elites responds to

Remington, Thomas (2015) Pension reform in authoritarian regimes: Russia and China compared in *Workshop on Comparative Studies of Regional Governance in China and Russia, Hong Kong*

³⁸ Remington, Thomas (2014) *The Politics of Social Insurance in Russia and China* APSA 2014 Annual Meeting Paper.

Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=2451884>, p. 9. Remington, Thomas; Rochlitz, Michael; Kulpina, Vera and Yakovlev, Andrei (2015) *Performance incentives and economic growth: regional officials in Russia and China in Eurasian Geography and Economics* Volume 56, 2015 Issue 4 p.421-445

the bottom-up concerns of the masses. The social contract thesis explained stability in communist autocracies as a consequence of an implicit exchange between the regime and the populace: citizens would remain quiescent as long as the regime provided them with benefits including secure jobs, social services, subsidized housing and consumer goods³⁹. A modified version of this thesis has been applied to post-communist hybrid regimes as well⁴⁰. Although the social contract thesis has been one of the most sophisticated efforts to explain welfare development in transition, it fails to be rigid enough concerning the legacy, leaving the contradictory nature of approaches, the implementation process and the reflective monitoring of outcomes almost unexplained. In this sense it remains highly structural, leaving the actual agencies untheorized.

Our research also shows that Russian and Chinese social policy has a strong global element, as neoliberal privatization and deinstitutionalization policies have been adopted in Russia. China has been more inclined to look for examples from European practices⁴¹. In hybrid regimes, social policies and welfare structures emerge out of contradictory and complementary frames. In Russia's case, social policy and welfare structures are a combination of global, managerial trends and the paternalist, statist Soviet legacy (individualization of risks and strong administrative control). Hybrid

³⁹ Hauslohner, P.A. (1987). Gorbachev's Social Contract. *Soviet Economy* 3:1, 54-89.,

Bialer S. (1980). *Stalin's Successors: Leadership, Stability and Change in the Soviet Union*. New York: Cambridge University Press.

⁴⁰ Cook, L.J. (1993). *The Soviet Social Contract and Why It Failed. Welfare Policy and Workers' Politics from Brezhnev to Yeltsin*. Russian Research Center Studies 86. Cambridge MA.

Cook, L.J. and Dimitrov, Martin K. (2017) The Social Contract Revisited: Evidence from Communist and State Capitalist Economies. *Europe-Asia Studies*. Volume 69, issue 1 p.8-26

⁴¹ Attila Marján, SOCIAL POLICIES: ARE "EUROPEAN MODELS" VIABLE MODELS FOR CHINA? *PRO PUBLICO BONO* – Magyar Közigazgatás, 2016/2, 80–103.

regimes are eager to adopt global managerial public sector techniques and consequently carry through liberally oriented welfare policies/reforms while tending to ignore popular demands. In the Russian case, due to the Soviet legacy, the citizens expect the state to serve as the main provider of social welfare, despite the fact that the state has been constantly withdrawing from its previous social obligations

Furthermore, the globalized ideas of public sector reform (New Public Management) force organizations to reconsider their results. States – including Russia – have de-centralized, de-regulated and delegated resource-using powers. At the same time, the effective implementation of public sector reforms requires attention to questions about inclusiveness, transparency⁴², capacity-building⁴³ and accountability⁴⁴. Our argument is that the relevance of global tendencies to actual practices and outcomes can be shown only by studying the whole process from decision-making to the reflective monitoring of results.

⁴² E.g. Bourgon, J. (2010). The History and Future of Nation-building? Building Capacity for Public Results. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 76, 197-218.

⁴³ E.g. Saner, R. (2001), Globalization and its Impact on Leadership Qualification in Public Administration. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 67, 649-661.

⁴⁴ Veselý, A. (2013). Accountability in Central and Eastern Europe: Concept and Reality. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 79, 310–327.,

Lindberg, S. (2013). Mapping Accountability: Core Concepts and Subtypes. *International Review of Administrative Sciences* 79, 202-226.