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Peripheral Liberalism. New Perspectives on the History of the Liberal Script in the (Post-)Socialist World

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Peripheral Liberalism

New Perspectives on the History of the Liberal Script in the (Post-)Socialist World

Kevin Axe, Tobias Rupprecht, and Alice Trinkle

ABSTRACT

This paper surveys recent literature on the rise of the liberal script in (former) socialist countries. Economic reform debates in Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and its successor states, and communist East Asia are currently under revision by scholars of political economy, global history, and neoliberalism. We stake out an emerging research field of the intellectual history of the transformation of the (post-)socialist world with primary source-based literature that firmly places socialist states within global shifts in economics and economic thought that began in the 1970s, thus moving away from a fixation on 1989 and the arrival of foreign advisors as ostensible promoters of a Western liberal script. We suggest the term "peripheral liberalism" for a range of ideas on the market- and individual rights-based transformation that emerged in most parts of the socialist world from the 1970s and would have momentous effects on economic reforms and political change.

1 INTRODUCTION[1]

The fall of state socialism in Eastern Europe, and its quick liberalization after 1989, took most Western intellectuals by surprise. What was seen as the only existing alternative to the liberal script of democratic capitalism seemed to change tack towards a complete Westernization. Some reacted with disdain: "With all the fuss and noise", the French historian François Furet said in a conversation with the British-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf, "not a single new idea has come out of Eastern Europe" (Dahrendorf 1990: 27, citing Furet). The West German social philosopher Jürgen Habermas spoke of "catching-up revolutions", insinuating that the transformation of the socialist world was a mere imitation of the historical path predefined by the West (Habermas 1999). Largely forgotten were the many ways in which intellectuals from Warsaw to Beijing had participated in global debates of the 1970s and 80s, from Eastern European dissident intellectuals contributing to the de-radicalization of the West European left and inspiring anti-authoritarian movements around the world, and from the reflections on economic theory and cybernetics across the Iron Curtain, to the manifold ways they had debated – often in exchange with intellectuals from other non-Western states – potential economic and political reform paths for their own countries.

This somewhat denigrating assumption of passive mediocrity or irrelevance of intellectuals in the socialist world – reflected in much of the ensuing scholarship on the transformation – is currently being challenged. Cold War liberals had celebrated, and the New Left had criticized, a surmised quick and passive Westernization of the East. Historians of state socialism, however, have recently been re-instating the active role of intellectual and political elites in Eastern Europe, the former Soviet Union, and East Asia. The transformation of the socialist world, long in the remit of political scientists and scholars of International Relations

1 The authors wish to thank Aron Buzogany, Sebastian Hoppe, James Mark, George Payne, David Priestland, and Max Trecker for their comments and advice.

is now, three decades after the emblematic "1989", being reassessed with the toolkit of historians: archival work, a focus on local actors and concepts, and their change over time. This renewed interest in ideas and their intertwining with political power in specific local contexts promises new insights into the dynamics of a key process in the making of early 21st-century world economics and geopolitics that go beyond tired narratives of (failed) Westernization.

In this working paper, we survey the recent literature on economic reform in late state socialism, in political economy and area studies, in global intellectual history, and in the study of neoliberalism; we stress how these fields, long going separate ways, are beginning to communicate with each other, and we point to ways in which this collaboration could be expanded as well as to gaps in scholarship, and approaches that we consider less fruitful or incomplete. We stake out the emerging research field of the intellectual history of the transformation of the (post-)socialist world and suggest ways to connect its contributions with mutual benefit to scholarly debates in global history. We also reflect on the challenges of research into the recent history of post-socialist countries, some of which are less than hospitable towards academic researchers. Based on the existing recent literature, we suggest the term "peripheral liberalism" for a range of ideas on the market- and individual rights-based transformation that emerged outside the Western core of the world economy from the 1970s. Peripheral liberalism became part of a local spectrum of politico-economic ideas wherever intellectual and academic traditions of economics and law existed and where there was a self-perception of being on the periphery, or semi-periphery, of the world economy.

Social scientists and political historians have laid the analytical groundwork on the rise and contestation of the liberal script in (post-)socialist countries. But we content that a global intellectual history approach has important new aspects to contribute to our understanding of the transformation. Ideas as prerequisites of institutional change do matter, not only if they come from the West. While political struggles are always about power, both individual and institutional, they are also always embedded in larger conceptual and ideological trends and shifts. An intellectual history matters because it helps reconsider the chronological and geographical dynamics of marketization, which can only partly be understood as a story of the reception of its Western form after 1989. It historicizes and relativizes the turning point "1989" by outlining long-term changes in ideas on politics and economics from the 1970s. Furthermore, rather than using historical evidence produced by Western observers and advisors, it focuses on local actors and their perceptions of world developments. It thus embeds the transformation of self-professed socialist states in the global history of the late 20th century.

A global intellectual history even matters politically. Peripheral liberalism has failed or at least is undergoing a period of heavy headwinds in many parts of the former socialist world. The liberal script is being contested with a particular vengeance by nativist political leaders, from Poland and Hungary to Russia and China. On the one hand, this provides historians with a convenient narrative arc of the rise and fall of liberalism and allows them to contribute to a debate on the reasons for this decline. On the other hand, many in the West have renewed interest in socialism, and we may be witnessing a new fundamental shift in economic thought. Planning utopias have made a return with big data and automation. Climate change, mass migration, global health crises, and the destabilizing effects of a communication revolution are massive challenges that many feel democratic capitalism can no longer cope with. Future historians may detect a pendulum swing that went towards open markets in the 1970s and

has been heading back to a more prominent role of the state in national economics since the 2008 financial crisis. Revisiting the debates of late state socialism may help contextualize contemporary political narratives about a transformation that are currently produced to give political legitimacy to both the progressive left and illiberal regimes in much of the post-socialist world.

As with most of the recent literature, we focus on liberal economic ideas in this paper. The driving concepts of the transformation were indeed based around the political economy: in Eastern Europe, in the Soviet Union, and East Asia, these concepts were created in reaction to a continuous domestic economic malaise and out of intellectual engagement with fundamental shifts of the world economy from the 1970s onwards. This is not an insinuation that non-liberal economic ideas were absent from the debates. In fact, they were widely discussed, and we would encourage more research into their intellectual development and political side-lining. While they were not usually politically efficacious on the actual economic transformation in the 1990s, they have seen a comeback since the rise of anti-liberal nationalism in the 2010s. Neither do we claim that ideas on politics and culture more broadly did not matter in their own right. However, human rights activists and tiny minorities of democratic dissidents were often in the focus of both academic literature and public perception of "1989", while liberal parliamentarian democracy was not a widely discussed reform path anywhere in the socialist world before it was created top-down in some Eastern European states after the end of Communist rule.

Two other aspects of the liberal script, however, were ever more widespread among parts of the intellectual elite in the final decades of state socialism: a predilection for the efficiency of markets (as opposed to the rigidity of central planning) and an appreciation of the rule of law, including an emphasis on individual responsibility (as opposed to collective rights). From the 1970s, small groups of economists and social scientists from Warsaw to Beijing developed a spectrum of ideas that we call "peripheral liberalism". For them, "actually existing socialism" had failed to deliver on its key promise: to overcome the relative economic underdevelopment of the peripheries and semi-peripheries of the world economy. We contend that the ideational shift in politico-economic thinking in the 1970s was not limited to what at the time was still the uncontested core of the world economy, the West, and later exported to the rest; rather, the world's contemporary economic peripheries and semi-peripheries were participating in that same shift. The term "peripheral" may rile critics of Eurocentrism, but it reflects both socialist actors' (often relatively well-informed) perception of their national economies vis-à-vis the world – and at the same time their own usually ephemeral influence in the intellectual and political landscape of their home countries.

The rise of the liberal script in countries of state socialism, as in many other countries outside the North Atlantic, was not usually simply an import from the West, as is typically portrayed in the narrative of post-Cold War transitions. Peripheral liberalism was usually based on active engagement with local intellectual trajectories, sometimes intertwining with, sometimes delimitating itself from competing visions of political and economic order such as market socialism, (economic) nationalism, and a self-perception in civilizational categories. Peripheral liberalism was not only shaped by other ideas but by certain perceptions and interpretations of economic, political realities and the lifeworlds of their carriers. Hence, we suggest a less exclusive focus on individual masterminds and their breakthrough stories and instead look at larger groups and broader ideational and generational shifts. Intellectuals, including social scientists, are also human beings

who interact with institutions, academic workplaces, personal networks, lifeworlds, social milieus, and their inherited Weltanschauungen.

Ideas do not exist in a void; they are developed by real people engaging with the world around them in realms that could be referred to as the domestic and the foreign. These "real-world-factors" crucially contributed to worldviews, and in turn – occasionally – impacted power politics and economic reform. They also help understand why certain ideas become efficacious under certain historical-political-social circumstances, often a subjectively experienced or real crisis. Finally, the discussion of "real-world-factors" also turns attention to the fact that individual actors often change ideas and that they sometimes consciously adapt their ideas to make them socially more palatable, culturally more appropriate, or more likely to get politically implemented.

In the literature under review here, we discern two ideal views on the role of ideas in transforming the socialist world and two on the global connectivity of each national case. A "Machiavellian" or "Marxian" perspective has dominated much of the literature on "transition" and "transformation": here, lofty ideas are mostly considered irrelevant, and the political and economic changes are sometimes presented as nothing more than a power grab by (old or new) elites. By contrast, what could be called a "Hegelian", or "Platonian" approach, often in the form of bulky Foucauldian jargon, is present in much of the literature on "neoliberalism", which sees overpowering ideas as historical actors, a weltgeist coming from abroad subduing everything else, and their spirit as the essence of an entire historical era ("the neoliberal age").

The interconnectedness, or globality, of the numerous national cases (in Eurasia alone, thirty-one countries have a state-socialist past) has been evaluated with similar disagreement. We find that regional experts, with their linguistic competence and a good sense of the archival situation, have displayed a tendency to be inward-looking and often defensive about allegations of the role of external actors and ideas. Scholars who are more interested in the transnational dimension of marketization and the role of international organizations, especially so in the often normatively overloaded literature on neoliberalism, put a strong, and perhaps too strong, emphasis on the East-West-axis at the expense of understudied but possibly just as relevant connections between different socialist states, and with development dictatorships of the Global South.

We posit that a global intellectual history of the transformation of the socialist world can provide insights that are needed to get to a reasonable balance between these extremes. There is growing indication that the diffusionist models ("from the West to the rest") of economic thought and transition policies will not stand up to the evidence surfacing from archives and oral interviews. The following assessment of recent scholarship in the fields of political economy/area studies, global intellectual history, and the study of neoliberalism suggests that a more likely future framework elucidates how – economically-inclined – intellectuals around the world reacted to tectonic shifts and challenges from the 1970s, and exchanged knowledge on marketization transnationally, often less with the West than with more comparable states and experts in the contemporary peripheries of the world economy. We believe that further studies of the intellectual basis of the transformation of the socialist world will provide a better understanding not only of this key development of the late 20th century as a discreet historical phenomenon but also of the rise of 21st-century contestations of the liberal script. Assessing the intellectual roots of nationalist regimes and their opponents in the former socialist world will shed new light on the power of ideas and their limitations in national politics and international relations.

2 CHANGING VIEWS ON THE POLITICAL ECONOMY OF THE TRANSFORMATION

A large and prolific field of transition studies, or "transitology", had developed in the immediate aftermath of communist rule in Eastern Europe. Social scientists compared and categorized the transformation of socialist polities and economies, often applying methodologies and concepts developed in earlier studies of the democratization of Latin America in the 1980s. Devising statistics and abstract models and drawing generalizations, transitologists (often without particular regional expertise) studied institutions created after 1989 and the select few political decision-makers behind them. Their yardstick was Western liberal democracy, which some states, like Poland, seemed to adopt quickly, while others, including China, ostensibly lagged. Liberal and conservative authors often used a slightly celebratory tone (Huntington 1993; Yergin/Stanislaw 2002). It was largely left to leftist critics of a "neoliberal fallacy" to dedicate more analysis to the intellectual undercurrents and transnational links behind the return to capitalism (Przeworski 1992).

With the benefit of hindsight, and amid the backdrop of EU accession talks and eventual membership of most East European states, the scholarly debate on the transformation gained methodological and conceptual sophistication in the early 2000s. Criticism of the teleology of "transition" led most scholars to abandon the term. Studies of trajectories from late socialism amended the notion of a zero hour and the ensuing deficit stories. While sociologists and anthropologists increasingly pointed to lingering continuities from late socialism at the elite and popular levels (Eyal et al. 2000; Verdery 1996), part of the debate on Eastern Europe's transformation was now based around the application of "varieties of capitalism", a concept underlining the different pathways of national economies that emerged after the end of state planning, and variations in their degrees of global economic and financial integration (Bluhm et al. 2014).

Ideas of political economy rarely played a role in these functionalist approaches, which entailed a limited ability to explain change over time and mutual influences between different models. Some authors combined the variety of capitalism debate with repurposing Karl Polanyi's terminology of a "Great Transformation". Originally referring to social restrictions of markets and their disappearance with the 19th-century rise of capitalism, the concept of various degrees of "embedding of markets" was now used to denote the willingness of political elites to engage in industrial policies and alleviate the hardship of free markets with welfare policies (Bohle/Greskovits 2012; Rapacki et al. 2020). This reinstated the importance of state actors in analyses of the transformation period but did not usually include discussions of the intellectual backdrop of political decision-making. Even in 2005, scholars bemoaned the "dearth of knowledge about the ideational dimension of post-communist politics" (Dawisha/Ganev 2005, 340). Yet over the past few years, with new access to archival material, historians of the socialist world have busily addressed this lacuna and have re-visited the intellectual trajectories, ideological divisions and debates, and the multiple local and transnational intellectual influences on political actors in the transformation of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, and East Asia.

Historians of Eastern Europe have recently addressed the broad spectrum of political and economic reform ideas debated from Tallinn to Skopje. They have emphasized the important role of elite groups which embraced them and focused more on the variety of influences on local actors beyond those associated with Western Europe and North America. This has been accompanied by an increased recognition that the region was integrated with the global economy and thus

exposed to its ideas and forces. Taken together, a common strand of recent approaches is the recognition of an economic reform consensus among small groups of elites long before 1989, which would prove influential for the transition to capitalism. Given the rise of nationalism across the region, earlier narratives of the triumph of liberal democracy are on the defensive, while nationalist inward-looking stories of victimhood and rebirth, widespread as part of post-communist nation-building in the 1990s, have recently seen a revival amongst scholars associated with state-sponsored institutions, especially in Poland and Hungary (Institute of National Remembrance 2021; VERITAS Research Institute for History and Archives 2021).

The study of Eastern European political and economic thought, the lack of which was often lamented, has recently been taken up by major international collaborative projects led by a new generation of intellectual historians from Eastern Europe. Several volumes have come out of the Sofia- and Budapest-based Negotiating Modernity – The History of Modern Political Thought in East-Central Europe (Kopeček/Wciślik 2015; Trencsényi et al. 2016-2018). Economic ideas under communism are being reassessed at the University of Vienna's *From Balcerowicz to Bukharin*, namely concepts of central planning to market socialism, and their ongoing efficacy in contemporary East European politics (Kovács 2018; Kovács/Trencsényi 2019). They share a comparative approach, shedding earlier nation-state-centric approaches in favor of their contextualization within Eastern Europe and within Europe in general. These intellectual histories of reform socialists, conservatives, Christian and social democrats, feminists, pacifists, exile communities, liberal dissidents and the elite-guided transitions of 1989, various transition models, and ethnopopulism, have laid waste to lingering exaggerated notions of idiosyncrasy, isolation, or intellectual mediocrity in modern Eastern Europe.

Renewed attention to ideas has sparked interest in those who debated and brought them into politics: Eastern European political, intellectual, and cultural elites. Following this is a rebuttal of long-held notions about 1989 as a popular uprising for liberal democracy, and a consensus on the pivotal role of elites and their active and conscious change of ideological orientation, which had already been in the making over the course of the 1980s. Experience with market socialism in Yugoslavia and Hungary increased exposure to global trade, finance, and international organizations. Notions of economic efficiency and labor discipline in late socialism in many ways prepared select elites – both liberal dissidents and a new generation of technocratically-minded communist cadres – for the market societies they created after 1989 (Peters 2020; Sommer 2017).

Crucial for this elite consensus was the perception not only of domestic economic malaise but also developments abroad. Recent scholarship has underlined that this was not usually a simple emulation of the Western liberal script. Often more pertinent were reform experiences from countries with comparable socio-economic development. For much of the 1970s and 1980s, Yugoslavia and Hungary were the most frequently invoked examples by proponents of market reform across the socialist world. Both political scientists and historians have recently pointed to the importance for Eastern Europe of Southern Europe's path from underdeveloped authoritarianism to European political and economic integration (Bruszt/Vukov 2018; Calori et al. 2019; Christaens et al. 2017; Ther 2019). Several collaborative and individual projects on the global dimensions of late state socialism, mainly based at the universities of Exeter, Oxford, and Leipzig, have stressed the importance of Latin American and East Asian development on the intellectual horizons of Eastern European elites during the transformation (Kovács/Zentai 2012; Mark et al. 2019; Trecker 2020; University of Exeter 2019; University of Exeter 2021).

The Soviet Union was the trailblazer of world communism. The intellectual history of its transformation, however, has lagged behind that of its former Eastern European satellites. A messier and incomplete process of market creation and more difficult access to primary sources are challenges to the intellectual history of the Russian economic transformation. Even more than elsewhere, dramatic social and political consequences, and their geopolitical repercussions, resulted in often heavily normative and bipartisan scholarship, both in and beyond Russia. Nonetheless, several creative and innovative inroads have been made recently, mostly via yet unpublished PhD dissertations, and have begun to re-assess Russian peripheral liberalism; all focus on key actors in the reform process, are based on new archival and interview evidence, and agree that the – often politically instrumentalized – Western imposition stories of Russian capitalism after 1991 cannot be upheld.

Doctoral students in anthropology and sociology with Russian regional and language expertise have assessed the local roots of market thinking within the Soviet academe. In-depth descriptions of the ideas and life worlds of Russian economists, based on interviews and participant observation, have delivered fascinating new insights on the internal dynamics of Soviet economic institutes as hotbeds of post-Soviet reforms (Leeds 2016). Most liberal reformers of the 1990s had been professionally and politically socialized in mathematical economics and cybernetics in the 1970s and 1980s. Thinking of the economy as a self-regulating system allowed them to develop rather de-ideologized notions of a decentralized national economy where planning ceased to play the key role for resource allocation. From their relatively privileged positions, they also had a clear picture of the increasing extent of Soviet economic malaise, which led a younger generation of economists to reject high-modernist pretensions of planning and mathematical optimization (Boldyrev/Kirtchik 2013; Shironin 2020).

Other scholars still point to important exchanges with Western economic thought and an increasingly financialized world economy. They now underline, however, that this was not simply a matter of receiving Western advice – and that it happened long before the Soviet collapse. After the oil crisis, selective but increasing integration into world markets subjected the USSR to the peaks and troughs of volatile financial capitalism and forced Soviet economists to cope with these new challenges (Bartel 2018; Sanchez-Sibony 2020). Both economic historians and specialists in science and technology studies have shined new light on the ways academic collaboration between East and West was expanded and institutionalized during détente (Rindzeviciute 2016). What emerges is a common understanding that, at least in parts of the socialist world with elaborate academic traditions and institutions, the global economic and intellectual shifts of the 1970s and 80s were not so much cases of diffusion from core to periphery but a co-production of knowledge reacting to the same global economic, technological, and ecological challenges.

Much of the recent literature on the Russian transformation has been written by former participants. Their approaches can be categorized along with familiar political narratives, which scholars tend to align with. One is a story of well-meaning liberals who (partly) failed due to massive resistance to their reform ideas from old elites and a poorly informed public; the others are variants of a story of treason by the group surrounding Yeltsin. The former narrative was strongly endorsed by the late Yegor Gaidar himself and is now being defended in Russia by his former acolytes (Aven/Kokh 2015; Gaidar/Chubais 2016; Kokh/Svinarenko 2009). They have created a foundation with a vast online archive, which provides ample if pre-selected evidence that the Soviet Union was

doomed to fail and that "shock therapy" was not ideologically driven but necessary to avoid famine and create political stability after perestroika had led to the collapse of the state (Gaidar Archive 2021). Gaidar famously summed up his role as a passenger on an airplane who went to the cockpit to find no one at the controls. This narrative of an attempted but failed Westernization, which usually underlines the limits of the influence of liberals on the path of reforms in the 1990s, is also reflected in recent accounts of Western scholars with a liberal bent (Åslund 2012; Zweynert 2019).

Such sympathetic assessments are seen critically by other former participants and scholars, who consider the collaboration of liberals with the new Russian state, and thus with parts of the old nomenclature, as a betrayal of Russia's democratic awakening. Interestingly, this criticism has come both from liberals and the left. Former liberal allies, usually politically sidelined before they turned into critics, blame the group around Gaidar for abandoning liberal ideals through their collaboration with an increasingly authoritarian government (Yavlinsky 2019). Neo-Marxists suspect a class conspiracy to preserve and expand old elites' power and wealth (Kagarlitsky 2002; Kagarlitsky 2009). The moderate left often endorses a view defended by Gorbachev, and, with the help of a foundation and an archive in Moscow, blame a power-hungry Yeltsin for treason, the Gaidar group for inflicting unnecessary pain on the Russian population, and both of them for the failure to arrange a more humane and fair transition to a democratic market society following perestroika's ideas (Gorbachev 2019; The International Foundation for Socio-Economic and Political Studies 2021).

Comparisons of the Soviet and Chinese transitions have long been popular in political history. Lately, economic historians have reflected on the differences and mutual impulses between individual economic advisors in the two largest state-socialist countries. In line with Gorbachev's view, it has been argued that perestroika was indeed based on the same ideas as Deng Xiaoping's reforms from the late 1970s but failed due to the heavy resistance of powerful, entrenched elites in the massively subsidized heavy industry and agriculture sectors – a political obstacle from local party elites and bureaucrats that allegedly confronted Deng less, thanks to the turmoil after the Cultural Revolution and Mao's death (Miller 2016). A school of thought has emerged in Russia that embraces China's gradual authoritarian path, including several liberal apostates, some of whom were close to Putin after the ousting of liberal ministers and advisors in his third presidency (Glaz'ev 2016; Khanin 2008-2019).

Long after Moscow and Beijing's perestroika-era rapprochement, the Sino-Soviet split remained largely intact in historiography. The academic separation of most non-European history into distinct area studies institutes and specialist journals inhibited fruitful conversation between Sinologists and experts on Eastern Europe and Russia, who were usually attached to history departments. Comparisons of the paths of China and Eastern Europe in the 1990s were mostly undertaken by social scientists and journalists. In the aftermath of the 1989 Tiananmen massacre, these usually aimed to explain why China lagged in democratization. With China's rise to global economic powerhouse, epitomized by its 2001 accession to the WTO, it was instead asked why Eastern Europe did not enjoy spectacular economic growth like China. Going beyond such normative comparisons and returning to primary sources, historians have recently revisited important transnational moments and developments in the creation and transformation of socialist states in Europe and Asia. Similar to developments in the historiographies of Eastern Europe, there is a discernible shift away from structuralism towards approaches focusing on the ideas of intellectual and political elites.

As it became increasingly apparent that East Asian state socialism, from China to Vietnam to North Korea, would not belatedly follow the liberalization of Eastern Europe, comparisons with its democratization lost purchase in transitology literature (cf. Gilley 2004). Communism, it dawned on many, had not collapsed after all (Dimitrov 2013). However, different approaches to capitalism still enjoyed some popularity among East Asia experts. Their focus on production and labor, rather than politics, offered the analytical toolkit to present Chinese and Vietnamese economics as still developing along the lines of post-socialist Europe, yet undergoing a different kind of transition (Peck/Zhang 2013; Szelényi 2010; Witt 2010). To this day, literature on the Chinese transformation focusses on the nature of economic reform and economic policymaking, its export-led growth, the state's grip on financial markets, and the roots of the communist planned economy, new ways of controlling capital, labor, and entrepreneurship, and the limits of political reforms and transition (Fewsmith 2013; Garnaut et al. 2018; Naughton 2015).

Once regarded as unstable hybrids, China and Vietnam are increasingly described as distinct consolidated polities. Scholars with this view talk of a "China Model" or "East Asian Model" that combines free private enterprise and global economic integration with active industrial policy, political control of financial markets, and propagation of a certain interpretation of Confucian values (Bell 2015; Boltho/Weber 2015; Do-Pham et al. 2018; London 2020). For some commentators, a "Beijing consensus" represents an alternative development model to the "Washington Consensus" (Halper 2010; cf. Dirlik 2017). Critics who refer to China's economic system as "neo-totalitarian", "market-Leninist", or "authoritarian capitalist" usually dispute the claims of a distinct and successful model (Béja 2019; Hung 2017; Milanović 2019).

A lively debate has also emerged in Chinese academia around China's transformation. In the 1980s, Mao-era revolutionary and Marxist historical narratives were replaced by government-endorsed accounts of Chinese national modernization. These narratives diversified from around 2000, and three leading schools of political thought can be discerned today: the liberals, the New Left, and the New Confucians (Cheek et al. 2020; Li 2015; Ownby 2021). For liberals, the market reforms of the last decades were successful but are now endangered by a lack of political reform (Xu/Ownby 2018). New Left thinkers argue that China has readily embraced globalization and neoliberalism, and call for the maintenance of state socialism (Wang 2014; Wang/Huters 2011). New Confucians, on the other hand, criticize the application of Western concepts like socialism or capitalism altogether and envision a China that follows its distinct traditions and development path (Jiang et al. 2012).

A new broadly enforced ideological party line from 2018 has threatened this intellectual pluralism. In the spirit of "Xi Jinping thought" and "New Marxism", the role of liberals in the transformation is now censored. Questioning the official historical narrative of so-called party historians has become a punishable offense; a government-run webpage offers a portal for denouncing cases of alleged "historical nihilism", often with reference to the intellectual underpinning of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. This campaign reached a new pinnacle during the celebrations of the 100th anniversary of the Communist Party in 2021. Party archives remain largely inaccessible, certain historical figures cannot be discussed online, and the influential liberal think tank Unirule was summarily closed in 2019 (Ji 2017; Unirule Institute of Economics 2021).

Moving away from a purely structural understanding of economic reform in East Asia, scholars have increasingly emphasized the role of intellectual

and political actors behind the reform process. As in the case of Eastern Europe and Russia, interest in the academic and political debates behind the reform process is reflected in a series of studies on the role of economists in the transformation. Historians have assessed the intellectual formation and professional life paths of Chinese economists and their attempts to influence economic policymaking (Bottelier 2018; Cheek et al. 2021; Cohn 2019; Karl 2017). It has now been firmly established that throughout the 1980s, China had a lively and open discussion of economic and political reforms unparalleled in the socialist world. The equally spectacular economic changes in Vietnam, usually overshadowed by developments in its giant northern neighbor, have also been re-assessed with an analytical focus emphasizing the relevance – and limitations – of ideology and intellectual debate (Vu 2017).

These Chinese reform discussions were not a purely inward-looking affair. Recent historical research has highlighted the global entanglements of Chinese academics and the role of transnational intellectual exchange processes. From the beginning of the reform era in 1978, delegations of Chinese economists traveled to Southern and Eastern Europe, the West, and most of their Asian neighbors to learn from the achievements and shortcomings of market socialism, US and West German neoliberalism and conservativism, the Asian Tigers, and from the perceived failures of the Eastern European and Soviet transitions (Mühlhahn 2019; Weber 2020). While it had long been believed that "the relationship with the United States stood left, right, and center in Communist China's initial market revolution" (Westad 2013: 378), several historians have recently emphasized the importance of exchange processes with authoritarian developmental states such as Singapore and Brazil, and other socialist countries, especially Hungary and Yugoslavia (Vámos 2018; Weigelin-Schwiedrzik/Liu 2020).

Thus, a generation after 1989, the study of the transformation of the socialist world has produced enormous knowledge on political, economic, and social changes from Berlin to Beijing and has itself undergone a process of methodological sophistication. Common characteristics include the economic reform consensus among small groups of elites long before 1989, a focus on their political and economic thought under socialism, and an understanding that many ideas were developed independently of the West, in collaboration with other socialist states and the Global South, often in response to global challenges. Recent research firmly places socialist states within the global shifts in economics and trade that began in the 1970s and has demonstrated how socialist actors influenced each other. This has generally been accomplished by focusing on historical actors and their production of economic knowledge, especially individuals previously behind the scenes, instead of deterministic structures or cultural factors. This trend has also moved beyond an older Westernization narrative and a fixation on 1989 as a turning point.

Historians have increasingly harnessed locally produced sources, enabling them to better focus on ideas and their carriers, expanding knowledge in local debates. This has worked to the advantage of both actor- and idea-based perspectives. A better sense of dynamics within individual national economies has clarified why localized influences shaped pathways. As a result, the limitations of simplified culturalist explanations of post-socialist transformation and the significance (or lack thereof) of some ideas have become increasingly clear. The turn towards local sources has brought more attention to chronological and geographical dynamics beyond older West-to-East diffusion models. Certain patterns have become visible across diverse geographic dynamics; these transformations were always shaped by local experiences with reform, intellectual traditions, and elite interests. But, as has even been

acknowledged in the *Handbook of Political, Social, and Economic Transformation*, the trajectories of reform in the socialist world and its successor states can no longer be explained from one single vantage point, within one coherent theory, or by one uniform method (Merkel et al. 2019: 7).

The new approaches centered around ideas and actors in the study of the political economy of the transformation have some caveats: ideas are not all-powerful ideologies. An idea can be a reaction to real-world conditions as much as a factor shaping them. In this two-way process, economics, power structures and local cultures remain relevant. The balance of home-grown versus outside ideas also merits further debate. It is difficult to balance a global history perspective with the need to give sufficient attention to local strands instead of imported concepts. Regional specialists tend to overlook or downplay the roles of external agents and intellectual currents. Local expertise helps highlight problems with sweeping global narratives but cannot sufficiently explain parallel historical phenomena. Thus, local narratives alone are just one of several key parts in examining a genuinely global phenomenon like the turn to more market- and efficiency-oriented economic thinking.

Nonetheless, ideas, including those that were not originally politically implemented, deserve further study. Paying more attention to paths not initially taken helps avoid analytical traps of historical determinism. What is more, abandoned ideas can also have multiple lives, resurfacing later with more efficacious results. Regarding the Soviet transition, it may, for example, be beneficial to revisit concepts debated during the Andropov interregnum, a relatively overlooked period that saw strong vertical political control by a former KGB head, alongside relatively open economic debates, a renewed focus on efficiency, and a vivid interest in China. Ideas of political economy in that era may turn out to have had more of an impact on the current regime than the oft-discussed Chicago School. Similarly, notions of world order based on former connections within the socialist world, or often explicitly anti-Western economic nationalism – deemed largely irrelevant after 1989 – have returned to the fore with the rise of ethnic nationalism.

Finally, a still largely untapped source for the future relevance of a "transformation" paradigm in the study of the former socialist world is its integration into global history by highlighting commonalities with, and differences to, other forms of large-scale transformation processes. Obvious candidates for comparative approaches would be the re-ordering of Eastern Europe in the aftermath of World War I or China after the end of the Empire in the republican revolution of 1912. Globally, Meiji-era Japan, Southern Europe's liberalization from the 1950s to the 1970s, and the rise of the Asian Tigers from the 1960s to the 1990s may provide insights into the roles played by foreign and domestic experts.

3 THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE SOCIALIST WORLD

The embedding of the transformation of the socialist world into the global history of the late 20th century raises the question of how to relate the state socialist experience within the larger story of second-wave globalization beginning in the 1970s. A familiar story is that of a Western-driven process of international opening that eventually cracked the self-isolation of socialist states. Earlier interaction between socialist states in Europe, Asia, Africa, and Latin America, or between the socialist camp and non-allied states, was not considered part of post-war international integration. As Eastern European illiberal regimes partly re-activated some of these links after 2008, scholarly interest in the Second World's own forms of globalization increased considerably.

Global histories of state socialism gained popularity, and historians of globalization expanded the chronological and geographical remit of their object of study. Global intellectual history offers a yet underdeveloped forum for dialogue for the two fields.

The historiography of globalization has recently underlined the polycentric and longue durée character of global integration. Going far beyond the Western-led re-emergence of deregulated capitalism from the 1970s, scholars have used the moniker "globalization" to address multiple forms of increasing global integration, exchange of commodities, ideas, movement of people, and cultural forms. They have pushed back the supposed origins of globalization to a first wave around 1900, to the rise of European-dominated maritime trade from the 1400s, or even back to contacts between the first city-states 1000BC (Stearns 2019; Zwart/van Zanden 2018). In this literature, the West has lost its role as the sole driver of globalization. Rather, authors underline how European globalization was a reaction to global impulses (Conrad/Osterhammel 2018) or how other world regions have been at the heart of globalization processes in all ages (Frankopan 2017; Hansen 2020; Pérez-García/de Sousa 2017).

The socialist world and its successor states are still conspicuously underrepresented in such expanded histories of globalization. This is untenable for a region that once encompassed a third of the world's population, and for several decades was the key challenger to the Western liberal script. Lately, historians of state socialism have begun addressing this deficit. Several scholars have argued that socialist internationalism was itself a form of globalization. Some have pointed to increased connections between socialist states (Burton et al. 2021; Mark et al. 2020; Mark/Slobodian 2018). Others have re-assessed the manifold connections between socialist states and postcolonial states in Africa and the Middle East (Babiracki et al. 2014; Babiracki/Jersild 2016; Gorsuch/Koenker 2013). These types of studies have addressed a wide range of global exchanges that were not linked to Western-led globalization: from the tens of thousands of Soviet advisors in countries emulating the Soviet system to the hundreds of thousands of students from developing countries at universities of the socialist world, from Chinese railway building in Africa to Eastern European technical assistance in the Middle East, from North Korean advisors in Ethiopia to Cuban doctors in Mozambique (Mark/Rupprecht 2019).

Beyond having their "own" globalization, some socialist states were also increasingly involved in the latest wave of capitalist globalization long before 1989. Mostly, their integration into global value chains and financial flows during socialist times has been presented as a story of socialism falling victim to globalization (Kotkin 2011; Romano/Romero 2020; Trecker 2020). Recently, scholars have stressed how the active embrace of globalization could also produce success stories. This obviously concerns China, which from 1978 globalized under the tutelage of the Communist Party, but China's own contributions to global integrative trends even through the 19th and early 20th century have also been highlighted (Branstetter/Lardy 2010; Wasserstrom 2014). Regarding socialist Eastern Europe, scholars have highlighted the conscious decision of political elites to participate in capitalist globalization and the profits they drew from doing so. Such "socialist proto-globalization" often prepared economic elites for the transformation emerging in their own countries and paved the way for foreign direct investments into post-1989 market economies (Mark et al. 2019; Pula 2018; Sanchez-Sibony 2014).

Much of this literature that, in the spirit of anti-Eurocentrism, has re-instated the socialist world as an active player into histories of globalization was written by Western scholars. The

literature on globalization from scholars in Eastern Europe and China seems to reflect their country's own experience: before 2008, scholars from Eastern Europe tended to portray globalization as a chance to transform from isolated to globally interconnected liberal societies (Fábián 2007). The ongoing popularity of translations of Western classics critical of globalization suggests that this enthusiasm has become less widespread in Eastern Europe (Klein 2013; Stiglits 2020). By contrast, Chinese social scientists and an expanding field of global history still mostly emphasize the opportunities brought about through globalization. Many have argued that it has enabled China to pursue its national interests, and strengthen its autonomy, political institutions, and even its traditional culture, although some have warned against embracing globalization blindly (Fei 2015; Wang 2018; Wang 2020). The applicability of the surmised "Western" concept of globalization was only called into question with the rise of Xi Jinping. Stories of national glory have since seen a revival (Sachsenmaier/Sartori 2018).

Long a bastion of Eurocentrism, giving little room for analysis for ideas and concepts outside the West beyond processes of diffusion and adaption, intellectual history has recently opened up to global history approaches. A growing field of "global intellectual history" now combines approaches from the traditional history of ideas with an embedding of these ideas, or words and texts, into the social contexts of their carriers, and has particularly focused on non-Western intellectuals and their creation and distribution of ideas in international networks and debates (McMahon/Moyn 2014; Moyn/Sartori 2015). Most of such global intellectual history studies focus on the post-colonial world, which is probably due to the accessibility of texts in European languages. Such approaches still tend to focus on heroic individual masterminds and particularly mobile elite figures; a lack of attention given to ideas on political economy has been bemoaned (Winch 2015). But scholars of global intellectual history have broken ground in the study of circulating ideas that do not necessarily originate in Western Europe or North America.

The intellectual history of the socialist world remains disconnected from these debates on global intellectual history. This underrepresentation might have an institutional explanation: scholars of Eastern Europe and China have a sufficiently large academic audience within their field; they thus feel no pressure to connect to scholars researching global history and overlook the possibility and opportunity of doing so. But much of their research could easily be linked to global intellectual history. For instance, scholars have assessed the Chinese development of academic disciplines and the production of expert knowledge on mathematics, statistics, and technology within global networks (Bréard 2019; Ghosh 2020; Hannas/Tatlow 2021). The global impact of Chinese ideas such as Maoism has also been studied (Lovell 2019). Research on Eastern European ideas has tended to be less "global", but transnational approaches have bridged Eastern and Western European as well as Russian schools of thought (Bluhm/Varga 2018; Müller 2013). Further opening-up these debates and connecting them to intellectual currents beyond Europe promises new insights on both sides, for instance, on common historical roots or parallels in the rise of nativist ideas in Hungary, Brazil, and India.

The socialist world is still underrepresented in debates on the global history of economic ideas, although this is being addressed. Studies on the transformations' intellectual roots tended to focus on political, literary, and philosophical ideas and much less on economic ones. The notable exception is a recent issue on "Economic Thought in Socialism" in the journal *History of Political Economy*, which argues that this research gap was due to wrong assumptions in the West about an absence of serious economic debate beyond hollow

ideology in the East. Notwithstanding a repressive intellectual climate, self-censorship, and widespread Marxist jargon, its editors contend, intellectual debate on economics was livelier and less clear-cut than the usual stories about dogmatists and ideologues, reformers, and rebels suggest. To better understand, they point out, research must adopt "a perspective from within the socialist state" (Düppe/Boldyrev 2019).

This perspective from within should not stop at national borders. A consensus has emerged among younger China experts that Chinese reforms built upon a global flow of economic ideas in the late 20th century. Focusing on Chinese economists' exchange with colleagues abroad, these scholars agree that the Chinese transformation was characterized by an openness to reform ideas from around the world. There is still considerable disagreement, however, on the impact of different international concepts in China – and on the political ramifications of the creation of the Chinese model. Some scholars have emphasized the crucial role of allegedly Western intellectuals in the success of Chinese marketization while lamenting the lack of political liberalization (Gewirtz 2017). Others have explicitly welcomed the Chinese rejection of some Western advice and pointed to a broader global spectrum of state-centered reform concepts impinged on Chinese reform, from ancient Chinese political economy and US war economics to Eastern European market socialism and South American authoritarian capitalism. From such a left-Keynesian perspective, the Chinese path appears as a successful challenger of the Western liberal script rather than an incomplete copy of it (Weber 2021).

Recent scholarship has shown how the socialist world was an active contributor to globalization and how its intellectuals were producers of political and economic ideas that circulated in global networks. Furet's notion of Eastern Europe as an empty vessel is no longer tenable. If Western observers could not discern autochthonous ideas and debates in transforming countries, it was because they were largely looking at the evidence produced by Westerners. Such one-directional diffusionist approaches that assumed an imposition of Western forms clearly need a rehaul. While some legal arrangements and economic policies were taken from the West, a much larger spectrum of ideas on marketization and transition models had been exchanged within the socialist world long before 1989. Analyzing continuities regarding the formation, adaptation, and continuation of ideas helps avoid fallacies such as the assumption of a "return" (instead of a new visibility) of illiberalism in much of the former socialist world. A key insight from recent approaches of intellectual history is that ideas are always embedded in the lifeworld of their carriers – a better understanding of economic ideas may well require a better understanding of their lifeworlds with their own cultural and intellectual traditions.

Ideas matter, but how exactly they matter – and sometimes do not – should be studied carefully rather than assumed. The flow and adaption of ideas are relatively easy to reconstruct through an analysis of published texts. Lately, this has been done successfully for many non-Western intellectuals. Much trickier, however, are estimates on the impact of ideas on political decision-making. Here, a pure discourse analysis approach cannot replace solid empirical research. Ideas and language are rarely powerful in themselves, and politics is never just the execution of one set of ideas. Neat anecdotes are not proof, and remarkable quotes need proper textual and social contextualization. Political and economic pressure from the West still needs to be considered, though its impact must be empirically proven, not presupposed. Intellectual historians of the transformation of the socialist world will need an excellent understanding of this political context to get to meaningful approximations. They need to consider political culture and mentalities, that

is, supplementary or competing ideational factors like notions of political, social, and cultural order and justice. They must not forget institutional power relations that are eventually decisive when it comes to the implementation of ideas. And they need to be very creative to get access to archival documentation or interviews with political figures.

4 THE SOCIALIST WORLD AND NEOLIBERALISM

The role of powerful ideas in economic transformation processes has been claimed most vigorously by scholars of "neoliberalism". An ideational turn in international political economy from the 1990s had already laid the groundwork; scholars from this new branch of a traditionally interest-focused field now saw ideas as normative blueprints for how the economy should be and for courses of action to transform it (Blyth 2002). A plethora of Foucault-inspired views of pervasive "neoliberal governmentality" took this view of all-powerful ideas to an extreme, and they were usually more successful at condemning than explaining their object of study. Lately, intellectual historians have grounded the history of neoliberalism; they have re-instated the carriers of neoliberal ideas and their lifeworlds and pointed to the large variety of such notions, which went much beyond the free market euphoria commonly associated with Milton Friedman. The socialist world is still underrepresented in this scholarship, but there is reason to assume that the long-held view of state socialism as a passive recipient or victim of Western-imposed "neoliberalism" is on shaky ground.

Many scholars have recently coalesced around an understanding of neoliberalism not as market fundamentalism but rather as a set of ideas on legal arrangements, at a national and international level, to create and defend markets from interest groups and democratic access (Biebricher 2015; Slobodian 2020). All neoliberals share a preference for a state that sets the framework for a market society: free prices as an indispensable provider of information, the primacy of (especially property) rights over notions of social justice, and currency stability over labor concerns. But recent scholarship has also underlined the varieties of the neoliberal thought spectrum, which often tied into, or explicitly went against, national intellectual traditions: German and Austrian neoliberals were particularly skeptical of historicism and high modernist schemes of planning and optimizing, but also of a concentration of corporate political power; French neoliberals incorporated elements of étatism, while neoliberals in the US revived 19th-century skepticism of central government (Hien/Joerges 2017; Schulz-Forberg 2019).

Along with the new attempts to define neoliberalism as a serious category of analysis, scholars have begun to re-think its geography and chronology. Intellectuals in inter-war Central Europe, not US free marketeers of the Cold War, have been newly identified as the originators of neoliberalism. Confronted with the collapse of an old imperial order, massive economic crisis, and often violent and politically destructive popular mobilization, they adapted what was now called "classical" 19th-century liberalism – and later influenced proponents of a market-based order around the world (Schulz-Forberg/Olsen 2014). Yet the notion of neoliberalism as a wholesale Western imposition driven by free-market activists, libertarian think tanks, and "neoliberalized" international organizations has been amended by contemporary research investigating how imported ideas intermingle with local intellectual traditions (Ban 2016; Madariaga 2020) or how varieties of such thought sometimes emerged independently from different strands of thought before it connected to such global networks (Rupprecht 2020).

A contentious issue in the study of neoliberalism, which has come to the fore with the ongoing crises of Western capitalism, is the question of the

resilience and the limits of neoliberal thought. One side assumes continuous pervasiveness of neoliberal dogma in ever new forms (Callison/Manfredi 2020; Crouch 2011; Plehwe et al. 2020). The other side identifies the limitations that neoliberal thinkers encountered when entering the realm of the political: actual economic policy in West Germany was a combination of Freiburg neoliberalism with decidedly non-neoliberal corporatist concepts and Catholic social theory (Bösch et al. 2018; Germann 2021); in the US, a strong protectionist tradition in the Republican Party remained intact, and Reagan's neoliberal rhetoric was not always put into practice. Much has been made of neoliberalism's alleged inherent propensity towards authoritarianism (Biebricher 2018; Brown 2019; Chamayou 2020) though it could be argued that their willingness to collaborate with already existing authoritarian regimes, as in the case of Chile, was rather a sign of their self-acknowledged limited popularity and political influence.

The study of neoliberalism in Eastern Europe has hardly been affected by these new trajectories. While a debate on the "socialist roots of neoliberalism" has been led, it was based on an equation of "neoliberalism" with libertarianism and neoclassical free-market economics (Bockman 2011). Nor have many scholars from the region delved into neoliberalism's intellectual history. This could possibly be a legacy of state socialism when national historians tended to shun politically contested recent history. Much of the existing scholarship on the executors of marketization in Eastern Europe follows a questionable paradigm Georgy Arbatov set out in a 1992 op-ed for the New York Times. Here, the prominent spokesman of perestroika complained about "Neo-Bolsheviks of the IMF [...], who love expropriating other people's money, imposing undemocratic and alien rules of economic and political conduct" (Arbatov 1992). This set the tone for many tomes on "neoliberal Leninists" or "Market Bolshevism" (Reddaway/Glinski 2000), conjured up in US academia and ruthlessly implemented by international financial institutions and greedy local elites (Cohen 2001; Murrell 2005; Stiglitz 2002; Wedel 2001).

That was a poor comparison, politically motivated, and not usually based on historiographical evidence from Eastern Europe. No state ever experienced a full implementation of a neoliberal agenda; no neoliberals ever captured the state as Lenin did. Reducing post-communist politics to little more than the ideologically-driven imposition of foreign ideas on hapless Eastern Europeans ignores the substantial differences between different countries, overlooks important local intellectual and political trajectories, and reproduces some neoliberal notion that there were no alternatives to their reform plans. This problematic state-of-the-art research on neoliberalism in Eastern Europe, and what has trenchantly been called its "obscurantist analytical underbrush" (Dawisha/Ganev 2005: 349), has been deplored but not fully dealt with. Still, neoliberal ideas were discussed, and they probably mattered politically – but to which extent needs to be assessed based on empirical evidence and context-sensitive historical analysis.

The question of the hegemony or limitations of neoliberalism and its historical trajectories has also been engaging scholars and political commentators of contemporary China and Russia. Those who operate with the term usually use it in a very broad sense as everything market and consumer-culture related. In Western scholarship on Russia's turbulent 1990s, the term is very popular (Collier 2011). In Russia, leftist critics of free markets, and lately also the nationalist right, frequently use the imported term "neoliberalizm". Chinese scholars, too, use the translation ("xīn zìyóu zhǔyì"), and the New Left argues that the entire non-democratic, state-driven market expansion, rooted in the post-1989 legitimacy crisis,

was a form of neoliberalism (Wang/Huters 2011). Some even consider the entire reform period from 1978 as the Chinese form of neoliberalism (Chu/So 2010). Others restrict the use of the term to describe specific policies since the 1990s, such as the privatization of pensions, the commercialization of education, or the materialist ethos of the officially-sanctioned "China Dream" (Hu 2012; Liu 2018; Zhang/Bray 2017).

This generous application of the term neoliberalism has not gone without critique. Fundamental components of the neoliberal credo, such as secure property rights, they point out, are absent in contemporary Russia and China (Rutland 2013; Weber 2018). For many observers of both countries, the term "state capitalism" seems to best capture the nature of the current systems, which are based on profit-maximizing, commodified labor, and largely free markets and prices – while key industries and banks are in state hands, and large enterprises need to kowtow to political interests (Lin 2011; Naughton/Tsai 2015; Pollard 2011; Zhang 2015). Those who point to the fundamentally corrupt nature of both regimes speak of "crony capitalism" (Åslund 2019; Pei 2016).

While not all the recent literature has given up on notions of neoliberalism as radical free-market capitalism or an all-pervasive despicable zeitgeist, a less openly normative strand has defined it more succinctly as concrete concepts by concrete people, who developed their ideas in engagement with the social and political challenges of their historical time. Helpful demarcations have been made to neoclassical economics and utopian market radicalism or libertarianism. Neoliberals were actually skeptical of the mathematical optimization schemes, notions of economic equilibrium, and cybernetic utopias of the former. And far from the anti-state fervor of the latter, they underlined the necessity to preserve their preferred social order with the help of the state. In our view, neoliberalism is best understood as such a spectrum of ideas and not as a set of economic policies or an ominous "governmentality".

The varieties across time and space through almost a century of the history of neoliberalism still warrant more attention. Neoliberal thought collectives did not capture states like the Bolsheviks did but always had to compromise with concurring ideas and political predicaments in their attempts to influence policy. Perhaps the notion of one coherent, imperialist, anti-democratic "neoliberal project" needs rethinking. Neoliberalism changed over time: inter- and post-war European neoliberalism is sometimes too readily connected to the deregulation, privatization – and often, simply, pro-big-business – policies beginning in the 1970s. It was a long way from Karl Popper's fear of the unruly masses in interwar Vienna to the legal frameworks of international organizations that were created to shield free trade from sectorial business interests and their influence on national politics. Neoliberalism also looked different in different places. Armin Müller-Armack and Milton Friedman were both members of the same neoliberal thought collective, but the ideas behind West Germany's social market economy were a far cry from Chicago School monetarism and an equation of free-market capitalism with democracy.

The experience of market-based transformations in the former socialist world is a great but largely untapped testing ground for that debate. An acknowledgment of a neoliberal spectrum will be crucial for meaningful assessments of forms of neoliberal thought in non-Western contexts. Scholars might increase their understanding of how ideas were formed within and spread throughout much of the socialist world. Contrasting newly excavated primary sources with the existing ample literature on economic transformation and the many texts produced by participants will reveal some of the intellectual underpinnings of these processes.

The memoir literature of participants already corroborates the notion that many varieties of neoliberal thought – while not usually referred to as such – existed from East Berlin to Shanghai already before the arrival of Western advisors. These notions share much with the spectrum of neoliberal ideas but often display distinct qualities. The sense of a historic mission that shines through the writings of many Eastern European neoliberals, for example, and their numerous claims to set their countries back to a path of "normalcy" clearly distinguish their ideas from the anti-historicism that characterized the German and Austrian variants. As opposed to the anti-government fervor of US neoliberals, their Eastern European, Soviet, and Chinese peers were very willing to work with the state, if it let them, both before 1989 and after.

5 PERIPHERAL LIBERALISM – POTENTIAL INSIGHTS AND CHALLENGES OF STUDYING THE LIBERAL SCRIPT IN (POST)SOCIALIST COUNTRIES

Recent scholarship on the intellectual history of the transformation of the socialist world clearly indicates that its marketization was not limited to a process of Westernization. Furet and Habermas erred; the East was not only a recipient of a Western script after 1989. Intellectuals in state socialism were not passive copycats or mediocre, tout court. Historians of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union and its successor states, and East Asia have begun re-addressing a rich landscape of diverse schools of thought on political economy that came into being in late socialism. Their research firmly places socialist states within global shifts in economics and economic thought that began in the 1970s, moving away from a fixation on 1989 and the arrival of Western advisors. The countries of state socialism had not been hermetically isolated; integrative processes within the socialist world, and involvement in global networks of trade, finance, and knowledge exchange, allowed select academic elites to draw their own conclusions about necessary economic reforms long before the end of the Cold War.

In this working paper, we have connected research on the political economy of former and current countries of state socialism with debates in global intellectual history and the study of neoliberalism. We have suggested the term "peripheral liberalism" for a range of ideas that emerged in most socialist states from the 1970s, which to varying – and yet to be assessed – degrees impinged on economic policymaking after 1989. These ideas were developed in engagement with local intellectual traditions and economic realities and often included certain interpretations of global models. Notions of the utility of marketization, free prices, privatization, and individual rights thus developed amongst – initially marginal – groups in late socialism. Such peripheral versions of the liberal script often paved the way for the rapid transitions to democratic capitalism when, after the retreat of the Soviet empire, these liberals were the only ones who could present explicitly non-socialist reform programs and thus gained access to politics.

This divulgation of liberal ideas in late socialism does not imply that liberal parliamentarianism was necessarily part of the agenda of liberals before 1989. Peripheral liberals from Czechoslovakia and Poland to Russia and China were usually quite willing to work with whoever was in power and possessed the state capacity to actually implement their economic reform plans. Peripheral liberalism thus provides an insight that is of relevance beyond the socialist world: it serves as a reminder that the "liberal" in liberal democracy is qualifying, not complimentary. There is no natural bond between marketization and democracy, as opposed to the long-held view of many Western liberals that was given currency during the post-1989 euphoria. Indeed, liberal notions of individual rights and markets are often in a tense

relationship with democratic ideals of political and economic participation.

As we have expounded above, the term "peripheral liberalism" reflects not only the position of state socialist countries in the world economy, but also the ephemeral influence of liberals in academe and politics within socialist policies. No state ever experienced the full implementation of a liberal or neoliberal agenda, and the extent of its influence varied across countries. Communism has not collapsed in self-described "socialist" China and Vietnam, and some scholars have even suggested the emergence of a new type of script along the lines of an "East Asia Model". Liberals mostly remained peripheral figures in other local contexts, too. Their influence was highest in the Czech Republic and the Baltic States; they faced increasing headwinds in Poland and Hungary; they remained at the margins in much of the post-Soviet realm.

Recently, peripheral liberals have experienced a decrease in influence: their ideas are contested by nativists, whose economic agendas are based around nationalist protectionism, or even state-capitalism, including, occasionally, an expanded welfare state. Peripheral liberalism thus elucidates the limits and fragility of the liberal script in political practice that are sometimes lost in accounts of overpowering neoliberal ideas. It can also call into question popular accounts that see the roots of the contestation of the liberal script in a reaction to an allegedly imposed Westernization. Granting liberal ideas their, if often peripheral, place on local intellectual and political spectra will also cast doubt on political narrative strategies that externalize them as alien Western imports.

In conclusion, what are the open questions and challenges of a global intellectual history of the transformation of the socialist world? Research into the recent history of post-socialist countries confronts researchers with certain methodological and practical challenges, some not yet fully addressed in the literature we have discussed. We find the intellectual history of liberalism's contesters to be underdeveloped. Liberalism was never the only game in town, and developed in a process of mutual inspiration and delimitation from other local intellectual traditions and global concepts. Such alternative scripts were not simple counterreactions to the vicissitudes of free markets and individualism in the 1990s but had their own intellectual roots, too. A global intellectual history of the socialist world should also include reflections on pre-socialist concepts of statecraft and political economy and earlier socialist reform ideas. Here, a challenge for researchers is to distinguish between actual intellectual traditions that impinged on the thoughts and actions of their historical actors – and their own retroactive interpretations of their intellectual development.

We have suggested an approach to intellectual history as not only the history of ideas but also the history of intellectuals and experts in their lifeworlds. Following the development of the carriers of ideas allows for a better understanding of the domestic and transnational flow of ideas, and the change of ideas over time. This perspective should also provide new insights into the role of institutional competition, generational change and conflict, and the contingency of the political power of ideas. When and under which circumstances lofty ideas actually translate into politics are vexing questions. The focus on (groups of) individuals and their professional careers may help tackle this analytical challenge to get the balance right between a purely ideas-driven history and one that considers only pure power politics. Here, too, a focus on individuals and an understanding of local traditions of statecraft, law, political culture, and economics will help assess both the actors' strategies of getting their ideas politically implemented and their frequent failure to do so.

Historians of the former socialist world are confronted with particular practical challenges for their research. Narratives about the past are a key source of political legitimacy; as we have touched on above, active contesters of the liberal script from Budapest to Moscow and Beijing have increased their pressure on historiographical research. There is reason to fear that the global health situation delivers the pretext for maintaining restrictions on access, especially for foreign scholars. Maintaining close working relationships with local scholars is crucial to benefit from local knowledge, networks, and a good sense of political developments. On the one hand, the usual 30-year access limitation period has expired, or will expire soon, for archival material on much of the transformation; in many archives, this rule has never applied to the socialist period anyway, as in the Baltic States, Poland, or (East) Germany. On the other hand, state and communist party archives in China remain largely inaccessible; those in Russia and South-Eastern Europe are partly open, but access to collections is unpredictable, and there are currently long waiting lists for their reading rooms; Hungary has forcefully integrated archival holdings into a government-controlled institution and restricts access to some collections.

The good news for those interested in the socialist world's intellectual history is that much of the relevant writing never ended up in state archives anyway. Pre-1989 reform discussions usually happened under adverse political conditions and often left no official traces in party organs. But intellectuals did write about their ideas in academic journals and underground publications, which are available – partly in Western libraries and the special collections of emigrants and private foundations from West Germany and the USA to Taiwan. What is more, there is a rich memoir literature which – diligently analyzed – provides new perspectives on individual careers and intellectual developments as well as struggles over historical memory. Furthermore, a perk of contemporary history is that many historical actors are still alive and often available for qualitative interviews; some even have their own small private archives, online source collections, or blogs and social media channels. Certain politically side-lined figures have since gone into exile – often making it easier to establish contacts and talk freely.

The key for analyzing the perspective from within the socialist world is proficiency in pertinent languages. It is probably fair to assume that notions of Eastern intellectual mediocracy, passivity or irrelevance, and the ensuing Western import stories of critical and celebratory vintage were largely a result of a predilection for sources in Western languages. With this focus on locally produced primary source material, however, comes another challenge for intellectual historians: a divergent and changing terminology in the sources, which requires context-sensitive analysis, a clear distinction between actor categories and analytical vocabulary, and clear definitions of the latter. No one spoke of a "liberal script" and few, if any, thought of themselves as "peripheral liberals" in 1970s Poland or 1980s Vietnam. A self-perception as "peripheral" often disappeared, as in China in the 2000s, or became stronger, as amongst some Russian liberals in the 2010s.

Some intellectuals in socialist countries that justifiably could be called "liberals" did use the term themselves; most did not. Especially in official pre-1989 publications, they often used Marxist-Leninist vocabulary (such as "accountability" or "commodity-money relations") to express ideas, either because they were brought up with this language or because they deemed it safer than demanding "fiscal austerity" or "free markets". And if historical actors called for "market socialism", this could mean they pleaded for an authoritarian government to introduce markets and competition – or for maintaining public ownership under

a democratized egalitarian political system. After 1989, some intellectual and political elites stylized themselves as closet liberals during socialism, which they had not necessarily been, and some with a proclivity for markets and efficiency in late socialism developed into the sharpest critics of a presumed "neoliberalism", while human rights activists were labeled "liberals" even though they preferred a mixed economy. Historians who chop their way through the intellectual undergrowth of the transformation of the socialist world will have to provide clarity in this verbal thicket.

A language-sensitive and actors-based approach to the study of peripheral liberalism can uncover the roots of politico-economic ideas, processes of intellectual negotiation, and (the limits of) their political efficacy. A global history methodology can refute assumptions about non-Western intellectuals and polities as empty vessels that, for better or worse, were filled by actors and ideas from the West. Forms of the liberal script, that is, notions of individual rights and free markets, emerged globally from the 1970s, also based on transnational links that sometimes bypassed the core of the world economy, and circulated in-between peripheries, socialist and other. The avail of studying these forms of peripheral liberalism, we believe, will provide a better understanding of the dynamics of ideas and power, the interactions between East, West, and South during the transformation of the socialist world, and thus the rise of a liberal script as a global phenomenon.

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