

**Reviews of papers given by the participants in the conference
'Russia and Eurasia in the Post-Financial Crisis Era'**

Session: 'Eurasianism Past and Present: Views From the East'

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In accordance with the conference programme, at this session, five presentations were given and discussed:

1. 'The Resonance of Eurasianism in the Far East'

Wu Yuxing (China)

2. 'Eurasianism as an Alternative: Linguist Nikolai Trubetskoi's Conceptualisation of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany'

Shohei Saito (Japan)

3. "'Anarchy" Against "Asian Menace": "Yellow Peril" in Mikhail Bakunin's Criticism of Giuseppe Mazzini'

Kenso Yamamoto (Japan)

4. 'Beijing is a Friend to Us, But Tokyo is Dearer: The Destiny of the Southern Kurils and Eurasian Geopolitics'

Paul Richardson (Great Britain)

As well as the programmed presentations, an additional paper was also delivered on the causes of the collapse of the USSR.

‘The Resonance of Eurasianism in the Far East’

Wu Yuxing opened the session with her presentation ‘The Resonance of Eurasianism in the Far East’. The focus of her presentation was the little-explored topic of the development of Eurasianist ideas in the Far East in the works of Russian émigrés. Her particular focus was the writings of the Russian historian, philosopher, and writer Vselovod Ivanov (1888-1971), who emigrated to China in 1922. Yuxing built her presentation around an exploration of Ivanov’s *We: The Cultural-Historical Foundations of the Russian State* [*My. Kulturno-istoricheskie osnovy russkoi gosudarstvennosti*], published in Harbin in 1926. From the moment of its publication, the book had an extremely broad impact: a flurry of varying, and sometimes critical, responses appeared in print. Examples include a negative reaction from Aleksei Remizov, and Pyotr Bitsilli’s convoluted review in the Paris-based journal *Modern Notes* [*Sovremennye zapiski*].

One of the key achievements of Yuxing’s paper was undoubtedly her comprehensive presentation of the fundamentals of Ivanov’s ideas, which brought together a wide range of fragments of primary sources that remain little-known to Ivanov scholars. The speaker paid particular attention to Ivanov’s unique view of the historical process, and was able to convincingly affirm her thesis that Ivanov’s opinions were not in line with the generally accepted doctrine of classical Eurasianism. It can be argued that that Ivanov’s conception of history ran counter to that of Eurasianists in Western Europe. What, then, might have lain behind these differences?

I feel that they can be explained by Ivanov’s insider perspective on the peculiarities of the Eastern way of life and mindset. This meant that he did not share his Western counterparts’ tendency to idealise. In fact, the opposite was true: Ivanov was able to acutely observe the differences between the Russian and Chinese

peoples. He wrote, for example, that the Chinese were significantly harder-working than their Russian neighbours.

In her presentation, the speaker demonstrated a thorough understanding of contemporary Russian scholarship of Ivanov's work, and offered constructive criticism of many of its claims. Yuxing's conclusion that Ivanov's views cannot be attached to the Eurasianist school does, then, appear to be well-founded.

Wu Yuxing showed herself to be capable of presenting well-argued conclusions. Her paper was a testament to a long and thorough exploration of the field and demonstrated that Yuxing is, undoubtedly, one of the leading experts in this area.

‘Eurasianism as an Alternative: Linguist Nikolai Trubetskoi's Conceptualisation of the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany’

The topic of Shohei Saito's presentation was extremely prescient and will be of interest any scholar of the history of Eurasianism. The speaker analysed a series of issues surrounding celebrated Russian thinker Nikolai Trubetskoi's theoretical legacy, with a particular focus on his work in linguistics. In turning their attention to the issue of comparative linguistics, the Eurasianists, and Trubetskoi in particular, followed in the footsteps of the Slavophiles (Aleksei Khomiakov and Konstantin Aksakov). However, unlike his predecessors, who had been eager to emphasise the cultural commonalities between Russia and the other Slavic nations, Nikolai Trubetskoi attached more importance to the Turanian influence on Russian culture. For him, the Slavic tradition was not a cultural bond, but merely a linguistic one.

From his home in exile, Trubetskoi closely followed and analysed events in his homeland, which had by then become the USSR. He observed that the USSR was

turning away from the policy of ‘Russifying’ the various ethnic groups living within its borders.

In his presentation, Saito provided a thorough analysis of Trubetskoi’s views regarding events taking place in the Soviet Union and Nazi-era Germany. Even the formulation of Saito’s research question, bringing together as it does these two countries, is a point of interest. The very notion of carrying out such a comparative examination is something that is characteristic international scholarship rather than the Russian approach.

Many of the sources referred to in Saito’s presentation are not easily accessible to specialists in the field. Saito also demonstrated an ability to analyse extremely complex historical events, such as those that took place in mid-twentieth century Europe, not only through the factual lens traditional for historical research, but also from philosophical-theoretical and linguistic standpoints.

The appendix to the theory-based paper, in which the author provided a graphical representation of three different conceptualisations of the development of the nation, provided a perfect complement to the written portion and was highly effective.

“‘Anarchy’ Against ‘Asian Menace’: ‘Yellow Peril’ in Mikhail Bakunin's Criticism of Giuseppe Mazzini’

Kenso Yamamoto’s paper explored the views of celebrated Russian political thinker Mikhail Bakunin and the Italian Revolutionary Giuseppe Mazzini. His presentation also touched upon the theme of the ‘Yellow Terror’ as viewed by the two revolutionary ideologues.

The author set out his view that the emergence of the expression ‘Yellow Terror’ in the late nineteenth century was the result of German Kaiser Wilhelm II’s reaction to events such as the Sino-Japanese war and the Boxer Rebellion. The presentation examined the theme of the ‘Yellow Terror’ in relation to Bakunin by referring to his work *The Political Theology of Giuseppe Mazzini and the International*, where the Anarchist ideologue attempted to forecast events in the near future. Bakunin’s predictions proved accurate: Europe’s Asian immigrant population grew and Japan defeated Russia at war. In my view, however, there is no justification for viewing this historical forecast as a ‘Yellow Peril’ theory.

Indeed, in his concluding remarks, Yamamoto also rejected the notion of a link between Bakunin’s views and a theory of the ‘Yellow Peril’. In his paper, the author therefore proposes a thesis which he then logically and systematically deconstructs.

The author was able to successfully negotiate this sophisticated approach to writing an academic paper thanks, in part, to his extremely high level of Russian. This sophistication may also have been the result of Bakunin’s personal influence on Kenso: as we well know, Bakunin was no stranger to crafting the occasional red herring.

The paper’s academic focus is the relationship between Bakunin and Mazzini, and Yamamoto provided an objective overview of Bakunin and Mazzini’s diverging opinions. The basis for these differences was to be found in the two men’s approach to religion. Where Bakunin was a staunch atheist, Mazzini approached questions of faith from a resolutely religious perspective.

In his works, the Italian revolutionary rejected the atheist approach to Socialism. It was, then, the two men’s attitudes to religion that divided them. Attitudes to faith also determined their respective political views. According to Bakunin, Mazzini's

religiosity meant that he was unable to understand the true significance of the Paris Commune.

Yamamoto's paper significantly enriches our understanding of the relationship between Anarchism's greatest ideologue, Mikhail Bakunin, and his revolutionary counterparts abroad.

The author refers to a great many foreign sources. In conclusion, I also feel must mention once again the exceptionally high level of Russian in which this paper was written and delivered.

'Beijing is a Friend to Us, But Tokyo is Dearer: The Destiny of the Southern Kurils and Eurasian Geopolitics'

In this paper, Paul Richardson discusses the most intractable stumbling block in Russian-Japanese relations: the issue of the Kuril Islands, a territorial dispute with an extremely long political history.

The paper focuses in particular on the views of Aleksandr Dugin, one of the few figures in contemporary Russian public life to regularly assert that he is a Eurasianist. It was, then, Dugin's self-definition as a successor to the Eurasianist legacy, as well as his many radical nationalistic declarations, that brought him to Richardson's attention.

I would assert that Dugin is an exponent of the sort of 'Left Eurasianism' that gave rise to the movement's scission in the late 1920s. The development of this trend in Eurasianism was predicted by Nikolai Berdiaev. He asserted that Eurasianism's drift away from its culturological roots would reveal its nationalist core, which might eventually "evolve into a Russian Fascism". There is one more feature of Eurasianism observed by Berdiaev that is worthy of note: first and foremost,

Eurasianism was not an intellectual reaction to the 1917 revolution, but rather an emotional one.

In his many writings, Dugin accords particular emphasis to political issues. His titles often include the word 'geopolitics'. Clearly, he harbours ambitions to carve out a reputation as Russia's leading expert in this field.

Dugin's efforts to provide a theoretical basis for his political views are clearly visible. He regularly refers to the best-known works in the political philosophy canon, but this fails to conceal the inherent bias and intellectual incoherence of his writings.

In his works, Dugin consciously depicts Russia as a 'besieged fortress' threatened by Atlantists from without and internal enemies from within.

Richardson dealt with his task well, and succeeded in providing his audience with an understanding of Dugin's views.

The final paper of the panel touched on the theme of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The presentation held more rhetorical questions than ready-made answers; something that is quite understandable given the necessarily limited scope of the paper and the scale of the topic in question.

The speaker was particularly interested in the question of why the Soviet general public did nothing to defend the Socialist system it had fought so hard to create, responding to the breakdown of the USSR as passively as it did.

As the author sees it, the main guilty party in the collapse was Mikhail Gorbachev, who ‘sold Socialism out’.

The breakdown of the USSR was the result of complex economic and ideological processes: there were certainly objective circumstances that led to the country’s collapse. The start of Perestroika in the mid 1980s was not a freely chosen policy, but, rather, a necessary response to these circumstances. If Gorbachev had succeeded in leading the country as Brezhnev and other Communist Party General Secretaries had done before him, then there would have been no Perestroika for us to hear of today.

Turning to the main culprit in the collapse of the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev, we should not exaggerate the role of a single individual in history. However, it is equally foolish to underestimate this role. No leader could radically change the structure of his society during a period of historical development where the majority of the people were satisfied with their economic situation. It would be difficult to imagine a historical situation where the US President could ‘sell out American Capitalism’ while the people simply watched on from the sidelines.

The collapse of the USSR was the complex and largely inevitable result of the country’s historical development, at a time when the most pressing economic and political problems had been left unresolved. The ideology that had long given the people hope of a ‘bright future’, quelling the public’s desire to protest, was also in a profound state of crisis.

From 1917 onwards, no adequate model of ‘Soviet Socialism’ capable of satisfying all members of society had been proposed. The Stalinist model was no exception: it is interesting to note that some of the first to express their dissatisfaction were the Party’s own leaders, who foreswore their ‘leader and teacher’ in 1956.

Gorbachev made a decisive step towards the collapse of the USSR in that he succeeded in freeing not only the general public, but also the regional élites, of fear. With his arrival, all of Soviet society was spurred into motion – and the direction of this movement could not be controlled by the General Secretary, the KGB, the army, or anyone else.

More recent events in the 1980s and 90s demonstrated that the Soviet Union could only be brought down by immanent (internal) processes within the country. External pressure only made the Soviet system stronger and more durable.

Future conference organisers might like to consider setting up a separate session where other specialists could discuss issues related to the breakdown of the USSR.

In conclusion, I feel that the presentations given by the speakers at ‘Russia and Eurasia in the Post-Financial Crisis Era’ were notable for the relevance of their focus, the complexity of their research questions and approaches to answering them, the depth of primary source analysis, and the weight of their conclusions. It is especially worth highlighting the value of an Eastern viewpoint on the issue of Eurasianism: a view from the other, non-Eurocentric, side of the East-West dilemma. This starting point – which, as was so clearly shown in the course of the conference, differs from the Eurocentric one – gives us the opportunity to re-examine issues that have already become established within Eurasianism. It allows us to give an original assessment both of contentious historical issues and of trends in modern Russia’s socio-political development.

This conference was, then, a fine example of collaboration and constructive dialogue between different cultures: two civilisations, East and West.