

Foreword

The political revolutions in the Slavic-Eurasian World, which took place from 1989-1991, changed the conditions for historical studies of those regions. The access to sources obviously improved. The sudden collapse of political regimes which seemed stable induced historians to doubt various axioms concerning the make-up of these regions. Of course, no external changes can advance academic activities, if they are not combined with the intra-academic achievements until the changes. In this sense, historical science would seem to be especially conservative. It is *a* challenge for historians to exploit new sources and promote new approaches.

This was the main theme of the International Symposium "Empire and Society: New Approaches to Russian History," held at the Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University (Sapporo) on July, 13-15, 1994. This volume is based on the proceedings of that Symposium.

The first three chapters of this volume focus on subcultures and discourses. Laura Engelstein (Princeton University) spotlights self-castrators, a famous but rarely studied religious group. She analyses self-castrators not merely as a religious minority or a behavioral deviation, but as a "mirror" reflecting contemporary understanding of such fundamental concepts as sex, labor, crime, and so forth. Criticizing the traditional image of Russian workers as semi-peasants, Yoshifuru Tsuchiya (Nihon University) scrutinizes rituals, customs, and institutions which "urbanized" newcomers to factories. Boris Kolonitskii (the St. Petersburg Branch of the Institute of Russian History, RAS) reveals a complex intertwining of modern and traditional (or religious) concepts in contemporary interpretations of political events during and after the February Revolution. As a whole, these authors are extremely successful in anatomizing the collective consciousness in various phases of Russian history.

The next two chapters elucidate the formation and function of empires — a particularly up to date topic, since we witnessed the collapse of another gigantic empire only several years ago. Both Orest Subtelny (York University) and Gyorgy Kover (Budapest University of Economic Science) promote attractive comparative analyses between the Habsburg and Romanov empires. Their conclusions are similar too: both regard the former as being more viable than the latter. According to Subtelny, before World War I the Habsburg empire stood a good chance of transforming itself into a commonwealth, while the Russian government was strengthening its notorious Russification policy. Based on solid data elicited from surveys, Köver refutes O. Jaszi's thesis of the economic disintegration of the Habsburg empire before the war. Both conclusions might provoke a heated debate — a necessary process to advance an unfairly neglected issue: the *raison d'être* of empires in the modern world.

Chapters six to nine analyze the relationship between the state and society, or the mechanisms of decision-making in

Russia and the Soviet Union. Pavel Zyrianov (the Institute of Russian History, RAS) and Yutaka Takenaka (Osaka University) present arguments which have much in common with each other. First, both of them think that the Russian landed nobility could not be a social base for a constitutional, parliamentary development of the country. Second, for the non-violent development of a country it is very important to accumulate parliamentary experiences before its industrializing spurt: Japan got the timing right, whereas Russia did not. (It is not by chance that Zyrianov lists only two fatal defeats of Russian constitutionalists — 1825 and 1881, but not 1905, when Russian industrialization had already destabilized the society.) On the other hand, the authors place their accents on different points. Zyrianov emphasizes the anti-Weberian character of Russian bureaucracy, while Takenaka evaluates positively the development of a legal consciousness within Russian officialdom. Takenaka regards the estate system as a shock-absorber in the course of capitalist transformation, while Zyrianov denounces the tardy steps of Russia from an estate to a class society. Zyrianov elucidates structural faults in decision-making of the tsarist government, in particular, the role of the State Council.

The theme of the following two chapters (i.e., political decision-making during the Stalinist period) would seem to be particularly blessed by the opening of archive materials during the last several years. Takeshi Tomita (Seikei University) analyzes domestic policy, while Jonathan Haslam (Cambridge University) analyzes foreign policy. Criticizing primitive interpretations of "dictatorship," both authors emphasize the role of Stalin's entourage. Based on the abundant use of archive materials, Tomita clarifies institutional aspects of the political process.

The last chapter of this volume is dedicated to historical geography. Kimitaka Matsuzato (Hokkaido University) remarks that historical studies of Russia have been hampered by historians' negligent attitude toward geographic factors. As one of the first steps in overcoming this "geographic nihilism" he promotes a case study of the administrative-territorial division of Russia and the Soviet Union during this century.

As a whole, the editors are very glad to see that the contents of this volume do not betray its title: "new approaches to Russian history." On the other hand, to borrow O. Subtelny's words spoken during the Symposium, "newness does not guarantee the excellence of the study." It is the readers' prerogative to judge to what extent the "newness" of this volume will contribute to the development of historical studies of Russia.

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The editors