

Mark Bassin, Sergey Glebov, and Marlene Laruelle (eds.), *Between Europe and Asia: The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015. 268 pp.

This book summarizes the evolution of the political thought of Russian philosophers, historians, political theorists, and sociologists in the 20th century, an evolution that is still underway and continues to dominate the modern Russian consciousness. Today's Russia aspires to play a global political role, at least on the Eurasian continent. Therefore, the idea of a Russia-centered "sphere of influence" and "pole of power," often defined as the "Eurasian vision of Russian interests," wins special attention among contemporary academia and practitioners.

What is Eurasianism, and who were its architects? These are the two main questions through which authors aim to analyze, revise, and extend inquiry beyond the history of the Eurasianist movement from a range of different disciplinary and thematic perspectives. The book includes ten essays, variously describing Eurasianism as a form and outcome of nationalism (150–65; 165–87); as a response to the Russian imperial enlargement and entanglement, in particular in Asia and the Caucasus (13–27); as a concept used to emboss Russian identity (27–48); as a geographical perception (68–84); as a Russian-made intellectual movement (84–97; 113–37; 137–50); and as a body of thought whose controversial heritage is currently being revised and revived in contemporary Russia (187–94).

The Eurasianist ideology was constructed on a strong belief in "historical rhythms, symmetries and laws" (89). Its creators proclaimed that Eurasianism not only "reflects our epoch," but "also aims to *influence it*" (89); this ideology was to "rule ... in every aspect of life" (90). A key function of Eurasianism was "to offer a common ideology of integration that would be shared equally by all peoples of the former Russian Empire" (93) and to provide Russia with a special role as "a factor of the renaissance for Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, and other Central Asian countries" (107). How up-to-date do those words sound today? No doubt Trubetskoï's phrase

about the need to provide direction in the “reevaluation of values” (89) could easily be applied to modern Russian society. In the contemporary Russian consciousness “Eurasianism” is often seen as a “dynamical principle of history, giving Russia a good place in the future of the world,” and a Third Way, which “is making peace with the lost past, closing these historical chapters, and at the same time integrating them into a national grand narrative” (190–91).

Vera Tolz in her essay “The Eurasians and Liberal Scholarship of the Late Imperial Period” reviews the shaping of Russia’s identity vis-à-vis Asia and Europe and revises the widespread assumption that “‘Russian culture’ was a result of East–West interaction and symbiosis” (36–37). She explores the ideas of the founders of Orientology, Nikodim Kondakov and Viktor Rozen, and their successors, analyzing the impact of the “Oriental Other” on European history, the collapse of the European land-based empires, and the relation between European culture and colonialism. In this way, Tolz shows that the Eurasian movement was a “radical manifestation of the ideas” connected to the “‘second Oriental Renaissance’ in Europe” (28).

Olga Maiorova’s chapter describes Russia’s “Europeanizing and civilizing mission” in Asia through the philosophy of the “Eurasianists’ predecessor” Alexander Herzen and his statement that Russia was “neither of the West nor of the East.” Her work offers a revision of Herzen’s West–East dichotomy and its application in the country of “Turanian barbarians.” She suggests that Herzen’s approach to Russia and the East constituted one of the first “constructs to propose Russians’ ties with their eastern neighbors as a source of the nation’s true identity ... of the fulfilment of its historical mission” (25), and that this found “its most radical implementation ... in the Eurasian movement” (14).

Mark Bassin’s essay “Narrative Kulikovo” discusses Lev Gumilev’s vision of ancient Russian history and its modern implication in the intellectual work of Aleksandr Dugin (186), who is the most influential present-day continuator of Eurasianism and repeatedly proclaims the special role of Russia from the neo-Eurasianist perspective. Bassin pays special attention to Gumilev’s role among Russian nationalists (175; 178–81) and reviews Gumilev’s

interpretation of the Russian victory at Kulikovo, where “the ‘Russian ethnic entity’ was formed in the context of an existential and elemental struggle for its very existence” (174). Bassin critically evaluates Kulikovo as “a sort of national catharsis,” where Russians struggled against “their mutual enemies in Western Europe, Islam and the Jews” (174). He argues that this historical interpretation explains “tensions that underlie neo-Eurasianism’s relation both to the legacy of classical Eurasianism and to late- and post-Soviet Russian nationalism” (167).

Igor Torbakov, through an exploration of Vernadsky’s thesis that “there is only one Russia, ‘Eurasian’ Russia,” searches for an answer to the question of what it means to be a Eurasian and how the Eurasianists came into being (113). He argues that among Eurasianism’s founding fathers a “personal experience in the tumultuous years spanning the Russian Revolution and Civil War” engendered a philosophy based on the notion of the “integrity of historical Russia” (125–26) and a “peculiar Eurasian nation” (130).

One of the best features of the book is the presence of multiple voices of the philosophers and theorists comparing and analyzing the impact of Eurasianism on the national question. Hama Yukido in her essay “Eurasianism Goes Japanese” (150–65) proclaims a number of elements shared in common by Eurasianism and pan-Asianism, such as a critical view of the Western state system and its international order (152); diversity as a counter-concept to Europeanization (153); and the strong belief in a special mission for leading a regional union (154).

Unquestionably, from 1850 to the present pan-Asianist ideas have received wide attention and support among a number of intellectuals, politicians, and activists throughout Asia. Sven Saaler and Christopher W. A. Szpilman in their book *Pan-Asianism: A Documentary History* (2011) set out a famous description of pan-Asianism as a “reaction to the threat of Western colonialism” which “represents a specific geopolitical space bound together by such commonalities as a shared history, close cultural links, a long record of diplomatic relations, trade exchanges, and the notion of a ‘common destiny.’” It is interesting to note that Eurasianism was banned in the USSR at precisely the same time that a fruitful growth

of pan-Asianism took place in Asia. Nowadays, pan-Asianism is resurfacing in the form of “New-Asianism,” an ideology that, according to Hama Yukido, continues to provoke, influence, and stimulate ideas in various East Asian communities (164).

One particularly strong and convincing argument made in this book concerns the impact of Eurasianism on contemporary political thought, which is the focus of Marlene Laruelle’s closing remarks (187–95). While the term “Eurasianism” entered the mainstream political vocabulary in the 20th century, the current generation of intellectuals and politicians frequently and widely propagate this concept. Yet, as Laruelle points out, “today’s neo-Eurasianists have an ambivalent attitude toward the founding fathers” (187), and paradoxically, “[t]he more ‘Eurasia’ invades Russia’s public space, popular culture, and state-produced narratives, the more forgetful of its Eurasianist founding fathers it seems to be” (193).

Certainly, the notions of a Russian-dominated “pole of power” and “sphere of influence” in Eurasia require a more informed policy debate on the consequences of the re-birth and re-building of the new Eurasianism. The current book offers a theoretical interdisciplinary approach, through which we are able to understand different angles on and approaches to Eurasianism as a Russian intellectual movement in the 20th century and the basis of the troubled emergence of neo-Eurasianism in contemporary Russia. The book is a noteworthy contribution to the study of the intellectual landscape between Europe and Asia. Its audiences may range from scholars and specialists to philosophers and thinkers seeking a high quality analysis of the evolution of Russian beliefs and ideas.

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