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Post-Imperial Agony or Pan-Continental Future? Classical Eurasianism as a Global Ideology in the Interwar Period

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This article focuses on the Eurasianist movement which was first developed in the 1920s among Russian emigrants in Sofia who began to rethink the results of the Russian Revolution. These young intellectuals aspired to create a ‘Third Way’ of state development which would be different from European liberalism as well as Soviet socialism. In their conceptions, Eurasianists underlined the uniqueness of ‘Eurasian’ culture and renounced Western European influences on the Russian Empire. They furthermore focused on the ‘National question’, discussing the challenge of the coexistence of many nationalities within the former Empire. This preoccupation makes the Eurasianist movement comparable to the Soviet project which also aimed at appeasing nationalisms by establishing a federalized system. But unlike the Soviet project, Eurasianist ideas confined themselves to the boundaries of the former Russian Empire and Eurasianists generally remained invested in a highly imperialistic conception of the future ‘Eurasian state’. Despite formally proclaiming the equality of all Eurasian cultures and peoples, Eurasianists supported the idea of the political and cultural supremacy of Russia by pointing out that only the Russian culture could truly reconcile European and Asian ways of living. These imperialistic notions prevented Eurasianism from being adopted by more than a few representatives of the former imperial periphery, most importantly the Kalmyk doctor Erenzhen Khara Davan whose vision for the Eurasianist federal state stressed the need for cultural autonomy. Leading representatives of the Eurasianist movement were neither ready to make concessions to such initiatives of Khara Davan or Iakov Bromberg, a Jewish historian, nor to cooperate with the Japanese Pan-Asianist movement which on the other hand had incorporated Eurasianist ideas. The imperialistic nature and isolationism of the mainstream Eurasianist movement shows that it remained a product of a global imperial crisis and an expression of the post-imperial agony of exile intellectuals.

Introduction

As Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier have pointed out, the first decades of the twentieth century saw the global spread of many different concepts

rethinking nation, class, law and the state.¹ The origins of this process lie in the disastrous First World War and its consequences, causing a global economic crisis as well as the rise of nationalisms as part of a widespread search for new political identities. Right-wing parties became influential throughout Europe, but also in Asia, establishing a Pan-Asianist regime in Japan and a Fascist state in Italy.

Russia also faced various serious challenges between 1914 and 1922: the continuing crisis of the Tsarist empire, revolutions, the World War as well as the Civil War, and finally the exile of almost three million people, many of whom were intellectuals, scholars, and former participants of the anti-Bolshevik movements and armies. These emigrants created highly critical, politicized diasporas with centers in Berlin, Prague, Paris, Harbin, and elsewhere. They initially refused to assimilate into the societies of their host countries as they believed the instability of the Bolshevik regime meant that their emigration would only be temporary.² Remaining involved in Russian political discourse, members of the diaspora published newspapers, magazines, and declarations – from liberal, to conservative, through to socialist orientations – in which they tried to reconsider past events such as the question why the Bolsheviks had prevailed over the Russian Empire. In consequence, many political concepts formulated at the time aimed at replacing Soviet Communism after its ‘inevitable’ fall but also avoiding the mistakes of Tsarist policies. Eurasianism was one of these alternative visions.

As contemporaries of the imperial crisis, Eurasianists – people who pertained to Eurasianist organizations or adhered to Eurasianist philosophy – tried to explain the collapse of the Russian Empire in terms of geopolitics, culture, and religion. They created a holistic ideology that suggested reconsidering Russian history from an Eastern, rather than Western, point of view and renounced Eurocentrism. Furthermore, Eurasianists intended to find a ‘Third Way’ of socio-economic and political state development that would differ from European liberalism and Soviet socialism but include advantages of both. Finally, they sought to solve the challenge of diverging nationalisms within the space of the former empire by unifying all Eurasian nationalities under a protectorate of the Russian nation. Eurasianism thereby continued a tradition of Russian political philosophy that had been expressed before in the ideologies of the so-called ‘Slavophiles’ who proclaimed the uniqueness of Russian culture in the 1840s as well as the necessity to find a uniquely ‘Russian’ path for its development. Eurasianist ideas were also

¹ Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier, “Introduction: Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s,” in *Competing Visions of World Order: Global Moments and Movements, 1880s–1930s*, ed. Sebastian Conrad and Dominic Sachsenmaier (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 1–25.

² Marc Raeff, *Russia Abroad: A Cultural History of the Russian Emigration, 1919-1939* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1990).

influenced by the rise of interest toward the relations between Russia and Asia in the late Russian Empire, the so-called “Oriental Renaissance”.³

However, this article moves beyond these conventional perspectives on Eurasianism and tries to relate the ideology more closely to the events of the Russian Revolution and their consequences. Based on historiographical works debating Eurasianism⁴ and extensive archival research in the State Archive of the Russian Federation⁵, the National Library of the Czech Republic, and the Russian State Library, this study seeks to answer the question of whether Eurasianist ideology merely was an imperialistic dream of exiled intellectuals, or could have provided a real political alternative for a pan-continental future. Firstly, it gives a brief history of the movement and outlines the main features of its ideology. Secondly, it considers the Eurasianist approach to the important question of nationalisms within a multi-ethnic space that had been at the heart of the Russian Empire’s crisis, and was discussed by Eurasianists in reference to the project of Soviet federalism. A viable solution to this question seemed to be the key to reinstating control over the territories of the former empire after the many national uprisings and projects that had accompanied its collapse. Thirdly, it explores alternative projects of non-Russian participants of the Eurasianist movement, as well as the reaction of the Kalmyk⁶ national diaspora toward Eurasianism and their own considerations of the ‘National question’. After thereby having analyzed the ‘imperial’ relations within the former Russian Empire, the final part considers relations and similarities between Eurasianism and Pan-Asianism, another popular conservative ideology which flourished in interwar Japan and also sought to define its political identity by rejecting European values. This discussion of Pan-Asianism will position Eurasianism in a wider framework of profound global changes and highlight once again its imperialist and isolationist nature.

The History of Organized Eurasianism

Eurasianism as a cultural movement originated in Bulgaria’s capital Sophia in the early 1920s, when the city was one of the biggest centers of post-revolutionary emigration, sheltering almost fifteen thousand migrants from the former Tsarist empire. All of the three key figures of early Eurasianism – Nikolai Trubetskoi⁷,

³ Vera Tolz, *Russia’s Own Orient: The Politics of Identity and Oriental Studies in the Late Imperial and Early Soviet Periods* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011).

⁴ In the last few decades, the study of Classical Eurasianism was greatly developed by the endeavors of Sergei Glebov, Mark Bassin, Marine Laruelle, Viktor Shnirellman, and others whose works will later be cited.

⁵ The State Archive of the Russian Federation will be abbreviated as GARF in the footnotes.

⁶ Kalmyks are a Mongolian ethnic group living in the Volga region and in the South of European Russia.

⁷ Nikolai Trubetskoi (1890-1938) was a linguist and philosopher. As a Eurasianist, he worked on the concept of a multipolar system of international relations, the importance of Mon-

Petr Suvchinskii⁸ and Georgii Florovskii⁹ – were philosophers and representatives of the aristocracy, forced to emigrate soon after the beginning of the Russian Civil War.

Eurasianist ideas were first developed in a philosophy circle where the founders of the movement shared their views with visiting listeners. Eurasianists offered a cardinal new interpretation of Russian history and the origins of Russian culture: they suggested that the Mongol Empire of Genghis Khan was a platform for the establishment of Russian statehood in the beginning of the 15th century and that the Russian empire should have been oriented eastward rather than to the West due to these origins. The assumed discrepancy between ‘borrowed European culture’ and the ‘real need of the Eurasian nationalities’ was perceived to lead to “historical discontinuities” such as the revolution of 1917 and the Civil War.¹⁰ The Bolsheviks’ success was explained by Eurasianists using the theory of “consequentialism”, suggesting that all major political turns happen due to their historical necessity. In the view of Eurasianists, the revolution heralded a transitional period in which the Russian people needed to be guided by a strong and politically authoritative organization: the Bolshevik party. Eurasianists therefore accepted the legitimacy of the Soviet state but also believed in its imminent collapse.¹¹

Eurasianist concepts were built on the core principle that the government’s actions should directly represent the will of the population. In consequence, ‘Russia-Eurasia’ would emerge as a new type of state, based on harmony, justice, and legitimacy. Eurasianists developed three main terms to define the most important characteristics of the ideal state: *ideokratiia*, *garantiia*, and *demotiia*.¹² These terms can be translated as ‘ideology, guarantee, and democracy’ but all have specific ideological connotations. Through a unified ideology based on these conceptions, the state was supposed to control the moral frames of the citizens’ behavior and the appearance of diverging ideas within society, thereby guaranteeing the stability of society. Moreover, the state should comply with its democratic obligation by answering to the peoples’ demands. All of these principles would become reality with the help of a new class of working intellectuals as guarantors of the states’ future.¹³

golian influences on the Russian culture, as well as the interaction between Slaves and the ancient Turanians.

⁸ Petr Suvchinskii (1892-1985) was a composer and philosopher. As an early Eurasianist, Suvchinskii was responsible for organizational questions of the movement. In 1927, he initiated the ‘Clamart split’ which led to the division of the movement into right and left wing factions.

⁹ Georgii Florovskii (1893-1979) was an Orthodox priest, philosopher and historian. He was soon disappointed with Eurasianism’s development and ended his involvement in 1928.

¹⁰ Lev Karsavin, “Osnovy Politiki,” in *Rossiiia Mezhdyy Evropei I Aziiie: Evraziiskii Soblazn*. (Nauka, 1993), 174–216.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² GARF, f. P5783, op. 2, d. 23. (“Evraziistvo”. Deklaratsiia, formulirovka, tezisy. Praga 1932)

¹³ Georgii Vernadskij, *Opyt Istorii Evrazii. Zven’ia Russkoi Kul’tury*. (Moscow, 2005), 317.

Just after the foundation of the movement, Eurasianist ideology began to rapidly spread in emigrant circles. The Russian-Bulgarian Publishing House, *Russko-bolgarskoe knigoizdatel'stvo*, played an important role, allowing Eurasianists to publish their books, newspapers, and other works. In 1920, it published the first and probably the most popular work of Nikolai Trubetskoi, *Evropa i chelovechestvo* (translated as *Europe and Mankind*),¹⁴ which was highly critical toward Europe's influence in the world. According to Trubetskoi, European thinking and politics was itself highly particularistic but nevertheless presented its 'Romano-Germanic' perspectives as universal truths. Blaming European modernity for the observed global crisis, Trubetskoi suggested refusing the European legacy and reconsidering the future politics of Eurasia in order to end the impact of "artificial European values".¹⁵

That idea of rejecting Eurocentrism was virulent at this time of political crisis. A few years earlier, Oswald Spengler had published his famous work *The Decline of the West*,¹⁶ in which he stated that the period of the formative power of European culture was coming to an end and Eurocentrism should be rejected as an obsolete practice. Reflecting this *zeitgeist*, Trubetskoi's book gained great fame among representatives of the post-revolutionary emigration and attracted several new participants to Eurasianist circles, such as the geographer Petr Savitskii¹⁷, the lawyer Nikolai Alekseev¹⁸, the Kalmyk doctor Erenzhen Khara Davan¹⁹, the historian Georgii Vernadskii²⁰, amongst others.

By 1925, Eurasianism had developed from a philosophically oriented circle to a well-organized politically engaged movement with main centers in Prague, led by Petr Savitskii, and Paris, led by Petr Suvchinskii. Most notably, a large number of former military officers of the Tsarist army were interested in promoting Eurasianism as a political vision for their country.²¹ Both centers were closely interlinked and acted as one by organizing annual Eurasianist congresses, publishing anthologies, and sharing resources.

Ultimately however, the Eurasianist movement experienced a split into a 'right wing' and a 'left wing' faction. The background for this division was the Bolsheviks' success in organizing a stable state as well as consolidating the economy and the international relations of the Soviet Union, putting an end to the emigrants'

¹⁴ N. S. Trubetskoi, *Evropa I Chelovechestvo* (Sofia: Russko-bolgarskoe knigoizdatel'stvo, 1920).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Oswald Spengler, *The Decline of the West* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1991).

¹⁷ Petr Savitskii (1895-1968) was a Russian geographer, economist and geopolitical thinker.

¹⁸ Nikolai Alekseev (1879-1964) was a Russian lawyer and author of Eurasianist economic concepts.

¹⁹ Erenzhen Khara Davan (1883-1941) was a Kalmyk doctor, politician and historian, he participated in the Russian Civil War.

²⁰ Georgii Vernadskii (1887-1973) was a Russian-American historian.

²¹ Sergei Glebov, *Evrasiistvo Mezhdru Imperiei I Modernom: Istoriia v Dokumentakh* (Moscow: Novoe izdatel'stvo, 2010), 123.

dreams of a speedy return to a conservative Russian state. At the same time, the Soviet security service, Joint State Political Directorate (OGPU), organized the ‘Trest’ operation aimed at persuading exiled former subjects of the Tsarist empire to cooperate with the Soviets. Emigrants were to be convinced of a return to the Soviet Union and of stopping any controversial activity abroad which could compromise the image of the Soviet state.²² Faced with these initiatives, Eurasianists were divided between those who wanted to cooperate with the Bolsheviks due to their belief in the historical consequentiality and legitimacy of the Soviet state, and those who rejected any idea of cooperation.

Petr Suvchinskii and other participants of the Paris group²³ began to see the future of Eurasianism as a Soviet political laboratory that would help Bolsheviks rule the country.²⁴ Agents of the OGPU organized several visits to USSR for them during which some Eurasianists were convinced that there was a strong pro-Eurasianist movement within the Soviet Union looking for cooperation. On the other side, Eurasianists in Prague believed that Eurasianism should remain more of a theoretical idea without practical implementation in the USSR. The ‘right wing’ Prague group claimed that the ‘left wing’ Paris group had betrayed the original purpose of the movement by cooperating with the Soviets.²⁵

The confrontation within the movement escalated in 1928-29 when Paris activists took control of the important Eurasianist newspaper *Gazeta Evrazia* and used it to propagate their aim of cooperation with the Soviets.²⁶ In response, Nikolai Trubetskoi, Petr Savitskii and Nikolai Alekseev published the brochure *Gazeta Evrazia - Ne Evraziiskii Organ*, translated as: “The Eurasia Gazette is not the Eurasianist voice”. They stated that the ‘Clamart group’²⁷ had crossed the line between the acceptance of the Soviets’ historical legitimacy and the full acceptance of “anti-orthodox” ideas.²⁸ In his personal notes, Petr Savitskii pointedly criticized: “Despite transforming Communists into Eurasianists, Eurasianists transformed into Communists”.²⁹ The ‘Clamart split’ would start the breakup of Eurasianism as an organized political movement. In the end of the 1920s and the early 1930s, the leading participants of the ‘Clamart group’³⁰ moved to the USSR. There, they

²² Glebov, *Evrasiistvo Mezhdur Imperiei I Modernom*, 135.

²³ The Russian philologist Dmitrii Sviatopolk-Mirskii (1890-1939), the participant of the Civil War Petr Arapov (1897-1937), and the philosopher and historian Lev Karsavin (1882-1952) were notable members of the Paris group.

²⁴ Glebov, *Evrasiistvo Mezhdur Imperiei I Modernom*, 32.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 134-42.

²⁶ GARF, f. 5783, op. 1, d. 310. (Review of the Eurasianism movement from June 1928 to January 1929, by P. Savitskii).

²⁷ The name owes to the suburb of Paris where the group around Suvchinskii held their meetings.

²⁸ Nikolai Alekseev and Petr Savitskii, *O Gazete Evrazia* (Prague, 1929).

²⁹ GARF, f. 5783, op. 1, d. 310. All translations from the original Russian into English are provided by the author.

³⁰ Petr Suvchinskii decided to stay in France, he gave up Eurasianism and worked as a composer in Paris where he died in 1985.

wanted to continue in cooperation with the Bolsheviks but Eurasianist ideas were never actually implemented. With the beginning of Stalin's Great Purges in 1937, Dimitri Sviatopolk-Mirskii and Petr Arapov, two close associates of Petr Suvchinskii, were sent to labor camps where they both eventually died.³¹

The Prague group continued functioning for almost ten years after the split, publishing several periodicals and even establishing its own political party. The death of 'Classical' Eurasianism finally occurred in 1937 when the Eurasianist organization in Prague was dissolved in consequence of the decrease in political and intellectual activity among the post-revolutionary emigrants, which was linked to their declining hope for the Bolsheviks' fall. The mission of emigrants to preserve 'truly Russian' political and cultural identities for later use within Russia seemed progressively more futile. At the same time, the cooperation of the Paris faction with the OGPU negatively influenced the reputation of the whole movement among other emigrants who turned away from Eurasianist ideas as a result. Finally, important participants departed from Eurasianism: Trubetskoi spent almost all his time working as a linguist, Alekseev taught law in Paris, Khara Davan devoted himself to work with Kalmyks, and Cossack national diasporas were busy elaborating projects to settle in the steppes of Mexico.³²

Against all odds, Eurasianist ideology flourished again in the 1980s due to the activity of Petr Savitskii who had continued to develop Eurasianist ideas in Prague even after its end as an organized movement. Eurasianism owes its reemergence to the Soviet historian Lev Gumilev³³ who offered a radically new interpretation of ethnogenesis which acknowledged geographical space as one of the main factors in the formation of nationalities and their characteristics.³⁴ Gumilev's ideas were not widely discussed in Soviet academia but gained popularity after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, offering a new ideology with the potential to reunite the post-Soviet space. The contemporary neo-Eurasianist movement is supported by the Russian state and positions itself as a new geopolitical ideology aimed at creating a Turkic-Russian national identity and again formulates a political rationale for Russia that moves beyond Western universalist narratives.³⁵

³¹ Glebov, *Evrasiistvo Mezhdur Imperiei I Modernom*, 36, 43.

³² P. E. Alekseeva, ed., *Erenzhen Khara-Davan I Ego Nasledie: Sbornik Statei I Materialov*. (Elista: Izdatel'skii dom Gerel, 2012), 17.

³³ Lev Gumilev (1912-1992) a historian, ethnologist and archeologist, was a son of the famous Russian poet Anna Akhmatova. He was twice imprisoned by the Soviet authorities and spent twelve years in labor camps. In the 1950s, he began a correspondence with Petr Savitskii and Georgii Vernadskii.

³⁴ Mark Bassin, *The Gumilev Mystique: Biopolitics, Eurasianism, and the Construction of Community in Modern Russia* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2016).

³⁵ Marlène Laruelle, *Russian Eurasianism: An Ideology of Empire* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press; Johns Hopkins University Press, 2008).

The Eurasianist Interpretation of Post-Imperial Soviet Federalism

The fall of the Russian Empire in 1917 was intertwined with the rise of national movements in the imperial periphery. The Tsarist state underestimated the importance of finding a viable answer to the demand for self-determination in non-Russian parts of the empire.³⁶ As a result, the question of how to manage ethnic diversity remained of fundamental importance for post-revolutionary politics. For the Bolsheviks, a federalist solution seemed to be the ideal way forward that would equalise the status of the different nationalities and offer the possibility to merge territories after the Civil War. On the 15th of November 1917, the new Bolshevik authorities proclaimed the *Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia* that became the basis for the federalization of the state.³⁷ The later constitution of 1924 confirmed the entrance of federal republics in the Soviet Union and the establishment of a single Union citizenship. From that moment on, republics could freely secede from the USSR in theory but all territorial reorganizations would need to be approved by the Central Executive Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union.³⁸ Besides ‘solving’ the national question by giving all nationalities formal rights to self-determination,³⁹ Soviet officials used the new federalist structure of their state to ‘demonstrate’ “a globally applicable model of transcultural governance”.⁴⁰

Eurasianists similarly understood federalism as a stable basis for future re-configurations of ‘Russia-Eurasia’ and used it for their concepts of Eurasianism built on opposition to the West.⁴¹ A Eurasianist Declaration of 1927 stated that ‘Eurasia’ should build federalism in a “Soviet, not European understanding of its meaning”.⁴²

But what did that mean? And how exactly did Eurasianists imagine the ‘post-imperial Russia-Eurasia’ they intended to create? Georgii Vernadskii saw the federal Soviet state as a “juridical facade” and pointed out that the Soviet Communist Party autocratically ruled the peoples of Eurasia. In his view, the Soviet system was built on the principle of “centralism, not federalism”.⁴³ This understanding

³⁶ Andrei Shcherbak, Liliia Boliachevets, and Evgeniia Platonova, “Istoriia Sovetskoi Natsional’noi Politiki: Kolebaniia Maiatnika?,” *Politicheskaia Nauka*, no. 1 (2016): 103.

³⁷ “Declaration of the Rights of the People of Russia,” November 15, 1917, accessed March 25, 2017: <http://www.ctevans.net/Nvcc/HIS102/Documents/Russian.html>.

³⁸ “The Text of the Constitution of the USSR (1924),” *Russian Constitutions*, accessed October 16, 2016, <http://constitution.sokolniki.com/eng/History/RussianConstitutions/10266.aspx>.

³⁹ Terry Martin, *The Affirmative Action Empire: Nations and Nationalism in the Soviet Union, 1923–1939* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001).

⁴⁰ Ivan Sablin, *Governing Post-Imperial Siberia and Mongolia, 1911–1924: Buddhism, Socialism and Nationalism in State and Autonomy Building* (London: Routledge, 2016), 2.

⁴¹ Mark Bassin, “Classical Eurasianism and the Geopolitics of Russian Identity,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 2 (2003): 257–67.

⁴² “Politicheskie Vzgliady (Evraziistvo, Formulirovka 1927),” *Evraziiskaia Khronika*, no. 9 (1927): 6.

⁴³ GARF f. 5783, op. 2, d. 6. G. (Vernadskii. Opyt Istorii Evrazii. P. 172).

helped to promote Soviet federalism among Eurasianists whose ideology included the goal to create a unified geographical and religious space in the realms of the former empire under the leadership of the Russian nation.⁴⁴ The movement's official declaration on the 'National question' accordingly stated in 1927:

The role of the Russian nation in the construction of Russia-Eurasia goes far beyond the formal frames of national self-determination. Exactly because Russian culture includes elements of other Eurasian nations, it should become the foundation of supranational [Eurasian] culture which would serve the common demands of all Eurasian nationalities without restricting their national originalities.⁴⁵

The later declaration of 1932 continued that idea: "Eurasianists want to reflect [...] Soviet federalism and Soviet nationality policy, aimed at combining strong political control with tough forms of enforcements of power".⁴⁶

Sergei Glebov, a historian of the Eurasianist movement, notes that the Soviet Union aimed to reunite the global working class as Eurasia aimed to construct an ideological system that would be opposed to Western values and become the leader of a bloc of decolonized countries.⁴⁷ But in order to become a part of the future state, different nations would first need to accept the Eurasianist ideology, to recognize Eurasianism's "organic connection" with Eurasia and understand its role in the development of the Eurasian continent.⁴⁸ Eurasianists stated that they sought to create a society in which all cultures would coexist on equal terms, but at the same time pointed to the necessity for a dominant role of 'Great Russian' nationalism that they thought could combine Asian and European identities.⁴⁹ All Eurasian nations were supposed to be united by this supranational 'Russian-Eurasian' nationalism, and centralized Soviet federalism was understood by Eurasianists as the perfect model technique to manage national diversities.

At the same time, Eurasianist ideology did not consider the nation as the basis for federalized autonomy in the future of 'Russia-Eurasia'. Eurasianists suggested that national autonomies were extremely attractive for native peoples but incapable of developing viable regional economies, hence the future 'Russia-Eurasia' was planned to be based on geographic and economic units instead. Georgii Vernadskii proposed to destroy all national units and restructure territory according to geographic and economic regional specifics in order to create a state with well-

⁴⁴ Ch. Sangadzhiev, "Priznanie Sovetskogo Federativnogo Opyta v Russkom Zarubezh'e: Evraziiskie Razmyshleniia N. Alekseeva," *Omskii Nauchnyi Vestnik* 2, no. 54 (2007): 47–52.

⁴⁵ "Politicheskie Vzgliady (Evraziistvo, Formulirovka 1927)."

⁴⁶ GARF f. 5783, op. 2, d. 23. ("Evraziistvo". Deklaratsiia, formulirovka, tezisy. Praga, 1932).

⁴⁷ S. V. Glebov, "N. S. Trubetskoi's Europe and Mankind and Eurasianist Antievolutionism: One Unknown Source.," in *Between Europe and Asia. The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism*. (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 49.

⁴⁸ GARF f. 5783. op. 1, d. 193, L. 3. (Zametki Arapova "o nacionalizme").

⁴⁹ Nikolai Alekseev, *Russkii Narod I Gosudarstvo* (Moscow: Agraf, 1998), 112.

functioning units which would avoid the rise of nationalism inasmuch as there would be no dominant nationalities in the different regions.⁵⁰

However, the official position of the Eurasianist movement supported the project of lawyer Nikolai Alekseev who – contrary to Georgii Vernadskii – envisioned the possibility to save several national autonomies coinciding with economic boundaries.⁵¹ With regards to the organization of the economy in these federal units, Vernadskii emphasized the importance of state leadership that should nevertheless leave room for private business activity. This ‘state-private’ system, heavily informed by geographic determinism, was important for Vernadskii’s overall conceptualization of the new state and was supposed to serve as an alternative ‘Third Way’ of socio-economic development, different from both socialism and liberal capitalism but including the advantages of both. Alekseev wrote: “Spatial reorganization on the principle of economic and geographic units is the biggest problem of the Russian policy. The one who successfully solves this problem will own the destiny of the future Russia-Eurasia.”⁵²

Glebov has pointed out that it is hard to find a more “imperial” ideology than Eurasianism.⁵³ Claiming the cultural and national unity of Eurasia, Eurasianist intellectuals sought to justify the reinstatement of the Russian Empire’s former borders and their further expansion to the East. Neither the Soviet nor the Eurasianist interpretation was intended to secure effective self-determination in the various parts of the country, but was instead intended to reinstate an imperialist order by using federalism as a tool to accommodate and control minority nationalisms. However, this mainstream, and indeed official, position of the organized Eurasianist movement contradicted the views of its non-Russian participants who had already experienced imperial rule and therefore instead supported solutions that stressed the importance of national autonomies.

Eurasianism in Debate with Intellectuals from the Imperial Periphery

Despite its claim to merge all Eastern nationalities and give them freedom for cultural development, Eurasianism did not gain popularity among many representatives of non-Russian diasporas. This was due to several reasons, starting with the highly nationalistic atmosphere in these communities, participants of which considered Russians as aggressive invaders of their homelands, and ending with the imperialistic emanation of Eurasianism itself. Still, there were a few representatives of non-Russian national minorities who regarded themselves as Eurasian-

⁵⁰ Alekseev, *Russkii Narod I Gosudarstvo*, 112.

⁵¹ Nikolai Alekseev, “Sovetskii Federalizm,” *Evrasiiskii Vremennik* 5 (1927): 240–61.

⁵² Alekseev, *Russkii Narod I Gosudarstvo*, 367. “Economic-geographic units” is used as the translation for the original Russian “Khoziaistvenno-geograficheskaia”.

⁵³ Sergei Glebov, “A Life with Imperial Dreams: Petr Nikolaevich Savitsky, Eurasianism, and the Invention of ‘Structuralist’ Geography,” *Ab Imperio*, no. 3 (2005): 299.

ists. The abovementioned Kalmyk doctor Erenzhen Khara Davan, the Georgian philosopher Konstantin Chkheidze and the Jewish historian Iakov Bromberg were among those who published extensively on a solution to the ‘National question’ within a Eurasianist polity but from a non-Russian perspective.

Khara Davan and his friend Chkheidze were both representatives of the imperial periphery that had been incorporated into Tsarist Russia in the 18th and 19th century. They both called themselves “Asiats” and frequently underlined their non-Russian origins, but welcomed Eurasianism as the only ideology able to reconnect all cultures of the former empire. Their answer to the ‘National question’ was to give every nationality unlimited possibilities of cultural development.⁵⁴ In the 1920s, they offered an alternative project of Eurasian statehood as a confederation of states that would each be based on the principle of nationality. Khara Davan and Chkheidze were against a centralized federation, in opposition to other participants in the movement. In their view, the Soviet system could not claim to represent the different nationalities and national minorities: “The RSFSR is no federation and the USSR is no Union of Republics”.⁵⁵ Khara Davan personally supported the idea of a national confederation which would include “neighbouring nationalities, similar regarding their economic, cultural and military aims”.⁵⁶ According to this plan, the Eurasian confederation would be divided in several states: Great Russia, Crimea, the Cossack Lands, and the Caucasian Federation.⁵⁷ Khara Davan criticized imperial structures in multinational states, claiming that they would destroy cultural legacies and deny national rights. The fall of several empires in consequence of the First World War and the Soviet practice of establishing convenient regimes on the territories of Ukraine, the Caucasus, Siberia, and the Far East only seemed to strengthen Khara Davan’s argument concerning the impossibility of a voluntary coexistence within one state in the eyes of his supporters. Nevertheless, Khara Davan and Chkheidze considered themselves to be Eurasianists – their stark contrast to Vernadskii’s and Alekseev’s projects shows the wide spectrum of opinions within the Eurasianist movement.

However, the majority of Kalmyk emigrants did not think that Eurasianism responded to their needs due to the imperialist positions that Eurasianists like Vernadskii and Alekseev promoted with respect to national minorities. Many Kalmyk

⁵⁴ GARF, f. 5911, op. 1, d. 79, L. 6. (Perepiska Chkheidza K. s Khara-Davan Eranzhenom, doktorom meditsiny).

⁵⁵ Erenzhen Khara Davan, “Natsional’nyi Vopros v Razreshenii Russkikh Politicheskikh Partii,” in *Erenzhen Khara Davan I Ego Nasledie: Sbornik Statei I Materialov.*, ed. P.E. Alekseeva (Elista: Izdatel’skii dom Gerel, 2012), 236. RSFSR stands for the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic.

⁵⁶ Erenzhen Khara-Davan, “O Nashikh Natsional’nykh Zadachakh,” in *Erenzhen Khara-Davan I Ego Nasledie: Sbornik Statei I Materialov.*, ed. P.E. Alekseeva (Elista: Izdatel’skii dom Gerel, 2012), 174.

⁵⁷ In his notes, Khara Davan did not provide any detailed description of how exactly “*Velikorossia*” and “*Kazakiia*” would be formed. However, he mentioned that “*Kazakiia*” would include “*Kalmykia*” and neighboring areas with Cossack populations.

emigrants gathered around their leaders, Erenzhen Khara Davan in Prague and Badma Ulanov in Belgrade, but did not support moves to reunite with Russian nationalists. The most active and strong group of Kalmyks was in Prague, where Thomas Masaryk, the president of Czechoslovakia and a former participant of the Russian Civil War organized the ‘Russian Action’, a work program for Russian emigrants.⁵⁸ Here, Kalmyks in exile also published their official magazine *Kovyl'nye volny*, roughly translated as “Waves of Feather Grass”, in which they discussed the problems of Kalmyk emigrants but also of the Kalmyks in the USSR. In this magazine, they argued against the Eurasianists’ idealization of Asia’s role in Russian history, calling that approach inconvincible and “far-fetched”.⁵⁹ Such positions could be explained by nationalistic attitudes within the diaspora, as Kalmyks tried to identify their nationality as independent and specifically without any connection to the Russian people. In fact, Kalmyks regarded the Russian culture as leaning towards an aggressive nationalism.⁶⁰

Finally, the Eurasianists’ rejection of Buddhism did not foster Kalmyk goodwill toward the movement. Despite formally supporting cultural diversities, Eurasianists suggested that only Orthodoxy could reunite all Eurasian nationalities as it supposedly combined Eastern and Western cultural peculiarities.⁶¹ Moreover, the Russian Orthodox church was presented as the one continuum in Eurasian history that survived under the pressure of ‘Romano-Germanic’ cultural influences and had saved principles of Christian benignity and original Russianness. According to Trubetskoi, Muslim and Buddhist populations of Eurasia would have to accept the domination of Orthodoxy and understand that their own religious practices were not “organic” to the peoples of Eurasia.⁶² This blunt cultural imperialism in concrete political speech was in contradiction to more theoretical Eurasianist concepts of cultural realization that stressed the importance of self-conception through national and religious experience.

Another ‘peripheral’ perspective on Eurasianist ideas was offered by Iakov Bromberg, a historian of Jewish origin who tried to identify the role of Jewry in the future of Eurasia. Bromberg published the book *The West, Russia and the Jewry* in which he reconsidered the ‘Jewish question’ with regards to the cultural and historical interrelationships of the Eurasian peoples.⁶³ Bromberg frequently used the concept of “place-development”⁶⁴ to explain the role of the Jewish nation in the history of Eurasia. He took this term up from the leading Eurasianist Niko-

⁵⁸ Ivan Savitskii, “Nachalo ‘Russkoi Aktsii’” (Novyi zhurnal, 2008), accessed on March 21, 2017, <http://magazines.russ.ru/nj/2008/251/sa11.html>.

⁵⁹ Sh. Balinov, “Iz Kalmytskoi Istorii,” *Kovyl'nye Volny*, no. 2 (1930): 19.

⁶⁰ S. Savel'ev, “Po Stranitsam Starykh Nomerov Zhurnala «Dni»,” *Kovyl'nye Volny*, no. 2 (1930): 42.

⁶¹ GARF, f. 5783, op. 2, d. 21. L. 53 (“Evraziistvo” (opyt sistematicheskogo izlozheniia), 1926.

⁶² N. S. Trubetskoi, “Na Putiakh. Utverzhdienie Evraziitsev. Praga, 1922,” *Literaturnaia Ucheba* (1991), 140.

⁶³ Iakov Bromberg, *Zapad, Rossiia I Evreistvo* (Berlin, 1931).

⁶⁴ The Russian original for “place-development” is “*mestorazvitie*”.

lai Trubetskoi. Considering the Jews as a nation, Trubetskoi stated that all cultural stereotypes were irrelevant since behavior and culture depended on the place of settlement and its conditions.⁶⁵ Consequently, the Jewish people of Eurasia did not seem to be necessarily any different than other Eurasian nationalities. Bromberg supposed that the Jewish nation could therefore accept shared responsibility with other Eurasian peoples for the future of ‘Russia-Eurasia’.

Bromberg also took up Trubetskoi’s thesis about ‘false’ and ‘true’ nationalisms formulated after the collapse of the empire and claiming that the Jews, just like the Ukrainians, did not have the right to demand national autonomy. Bromberg agreed and suggested that Eastern European Jews should take an “unassuming, but deserving place” among the peoples of ‘Russia-Eurasia’ without claiming statehood. According to Bromberg’s view, ‘Russia-Eurasia’ was the “New Jerusalem” which would give all Eastern European Jews the opportunity to express their interests under the auspices of “Great Russian” nationalism.⁶⁶ Despite Bromberg’s claim to offer a solution for the ‘Jewish question’, his project did not provoke much response from other representatives of the Jewish diaspora.⁶⁷

Eurasianism’s International Potential: Pan-Asianism in Exchange with Eurasianism

Eurasianism continued the Slavophiles’ intellectual current that blamed the Russian government and society for imitating European culture and not following authentic Russian patterns.⁶⁸ Criticizing Western values, Eurasianists claimed that the imperial crisis occurred precisely because of attempts to modernize and Europeanize the Tsarist Empire, and suggested instead that a future state identity should be constructed based on the proclamation of Asian supremacy. However, despite this praise for Asian influences, Eurasianism remained highly imperial and orientalist, romanticizing the image of the East without any actual intention to cooperate with representatives of Asian movements. This is proven by Eurasianist positions toward the question of ‘peripheral’ nationalisms in the realms of the former empire. Furthermore, Marlène Laruelle has noted how Eurasianists used the concept of the Orient to “solve the Russian identity quest by exalting the oriental alterity”.⁶⁹

Eurasianists did not only react to ‘Asian’ demands within the former empire but were also in exchange with Pan-Asianism, the Japanese state ideology gaining

⁶⁵ Viktor Schnirelmann, “Evraziitsy i evrei,” accessed February 4, 2017, http://sceptis.net/library/id_952.html.

⁶⁶ Bromberg, *Zapad, Rossiia I Evreistvo*, 29.

⁶⁷ Viktor Schnirelmann, “Evraziitsy i evrei,” accessed February 4, 2017, http://sceptis.net/library/id_952.html.

⁶⁸ Janko Lavrin, “Populists and Slavophiles,” *The Russian Review* 21(3) (1962): 308.

⁶⁹ Marlène Laruelle, “The Two Faces of Contemporary Eurasianism: An Imperial Version of Russian Nationalism,” *Nationalities Papers* 32 (2004): 116.

political influence in interwar Japan. Pan-Asianists suggested the unification and integration of Asia under Japanese leadership and the project was spread to Asian countries colonized by Japan.⁷⁰

In the late 1920s, probably on one of his journeys to Harbin, the Kalmyk Eurasianist Erenzhen Khara Davan met Shimano Saburo,⁷¹ a Japanese translator and specialist on Russian affairs, who was a strong supporter of Pan-Asianism. It has been suggested that Saburo had already been in contact with Khara Davan when Japanese Buddhist communities donated to the Buddhist temple in Belgrade built by the Kalmyk diaspora and helped to fund a gold statue of Buddha.⁷² Prior to this, Saburo and Khara Davan might even have known each other from their student years in St. Petersburg from 1905 to 1907.

Saburo began to translate several Eurasianist works, such as Trubetskoi's *Europe and Mankind*, Khara Davan's book *Genghis Khan as a Military Leader, and his Legacy*, Savitskii's article *Geopolitical Notes on Russian History* and even the pamphlet *Eurasianism: Declaration, Formulation, Theses*, that gained some success in Japan.⁷³ As Hama Yukiko has pointed out, both movements had several common features that influenced the perception and popularity of Eurasianist ideas in Japan. Firstly, they were united by the criticism of Europe's cultural and political imperialism. Pan-Asianism used anti-Western rhetoric in order to justify aspirations to unite Asian and Japanese identities, underlining racial and cultural similarities among them.⁷⁴ The immediate context for the formulation of these ideas was the rise of the Japanese economy within the global market and the widespread desire in Japan to position the state as an equal participant in international relations. Both movements therefore aimed to reconstruct unified supranational spaces: A Eurasianist polity would have reestablished the boundaries of the former Russian Empire under the supremacy of the Russian nation, while Pan-Asianism sought to form a bloc of Asian countries led by Japan.⁷⁵ Concretely, Japanese Pan-Asianists interpreted the Eurasianists' desire to construct a state in which several nations would coexist under Russian leadership as a justification of

⁷⁰ Prasenjit Duara, "The Imperialism of 'Free Nations': Japan, Manchukuo and the History of the Present," in *Imperial Formations*, ed. Ann Laura Stoler, Carole McGranahan, and Peter Perdue (Santa Fe: School for Advanced Research Press, 2007), 211–39.

⁷¹ P. E. Alekseeva, *Ėrenzhen Khara Davan I Ego Nasledie: Sbornik Stateĭ I Materialov*. (Elista: Izdatel'skii dom Gerel, 2012), 42.

⁷² A. Iukiasu, "K Istorii Iaponskogo Perevoda Knigi E. Khara-Davana," in *Ėrenzhen Khara-Davan I Ego Nasledie: Sbornik Stateĭ I Materialov*. (Elista: Izdatel'skii dom Gerel, 2012), 41–43.

⁷³ Yukiko Hama, "Eurasianism Goes Japanese. Toward a Global History of a Russian Intellectual Movement," in *Between Europe and Asia. The Origins, Theories, and Legacies of Russian Eurasianism* (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2015), 155.

⁷⁴ Hama, "Eurasianism Goes Japanese. Toward a Global History of a Russian Intellectual Movement," 153

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 154.

Japanese colonial policy towards Manchukuo.⁷⁶ Shimano Saburo was nonetheless careful not to translate Eurasianist publications discussing the formal Eurasianist principle of multiculturalism that contradicted the blunt imperialist policies as pursued by Japan.

Furthermore, Saburo met Vsevolod Ivanov, a central figure of the Russian community in Harbin and supporter of Eurasianist views. In 1926, Ivanov published the book *We: Cultural-Historical Features of Russian Statehood* in which he analyzed 'Russia-Eurasia' not from a European, but an Asian perspective.⁷⁷ Ivanov considered China to have played a leading role in the formation of the Mongol Empire which he understood as the foundation of Russian statehood. He also claimed that cooperation between a Eurasianist and a pan-Asianist state would lead to the prosperity of both political spaces and establish a strong alliance that could resist Western values. However, other Eurasianists reacted negatively to Ivanov's ideas and Saburo's aspiration to spread their concepts in Japan. In a public letter, the famous Orientalist and Eurasianist Vasilii Nikitin criticized Ivanov's friendly position toward Japan as a misconception:

Pan-Asianism appeared with the end of the rapture between the United States and Japan, and now Japan is trying to unite Asia. Japan exploits Chinese labor and floods the Chinese market with its worthless stuff. It is a very unpleasant competitor for Indian industry. Japan is Americanized.⁷⁸

In 1932, Petr Savitskii published the article *Eurasianists Talk about the Far Eastern Question*, a direct response to Ivanov's writings in favor of Japanese Pan-Asianism in one of the Harbin newspapers.⁷⁹ Savitskii claimed that Ivanov had no connection to organized Eurasianism, the "single and unified representation of the Eurasianism movement".⁸⁰ Savitskii also blamed Japan for adopting Western colonialist and imperialist policies toward China as well as for the attempt to disguise these policies behind a 'Pan-Asian vision'. Stating that Eurasia would not deploy a colonial policy in the East, Savitskii also wrote that Eurasianists did

⁷⁶ Japan invaded Manchuria in 1931 and set up the formally independent vassal state of Manchukuo. According to P. Duara, Japanese policy in Manchuria represented a new type of imperialism which implied the creation of independent nation states under military control of the metropole. See: Prasenjit. Duara, "The New Imperialism and the Post-Colonial Developmental State: Manchukuo in comparative perspective," in *The Asia-Pacific Journal* 4 (2006).

⁷⁷ Vsevolod Ivanov, *My: Kul't.-Ist. Osnovy Rus. Gosudarstvennosti* (Harbin: Bambukovaia roshcha, 1926).

⁷⁸ Vasilii. Nikitin, "Iz Pis'ma V. Nikitina V. Ivanovu: Iz Parizha v Kharbin," *Evraziiskaia Khronika*, no. 6 (1926), 7.

⁷⁹ GARF, f. 5783, op. 2, d. 26, L. 1 (Evraziitsy o dal'nem vostokey).

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, L. 2.

not desire to cooperate with Asian countries, mostly because Eurasia was itself a “self-sufficient economic unit”.⁸¹

Georgii Vernadskii further criticized Pan-Asianism, stating that Eurasianists should be cautious with regard to Japanese Pan-Asianism:

Pan-Asianism is a concept that the Japanese press advanced to support Japanese imperialism. Asia for Asians – of course only on the assumption of Japanese superiority over Asians. In response to this slogan, we can suggest the concept ‘Eurasia for Eurasians’. If the peoples of Eurasia understand their mutual connection and common historical destiny then every slogan founded on other geopolitics claims would be a weapon of foreign imperialism aimed at splitting Eurasian unity.⁸²

As it has been shown above, Eurasianism was highly imperialist toward national minorities despite claiming their support for national cultures and languages. Leading Eurasianists, who criticized Ivanov’s attempts to establish closer connections with Japan, were representatives of noble Russian families who had lived in the center of the former Russian Empire. These Eurasianists described the Japanese project as imperialist and oppressive toward other Asian nationalities but could not see the similarities to their own project. Both the ideologies of Eurasianism as well as Pan-Asianism were created in opposition to Western culture and positioned themselves ‘between Europe and Asia’, responding to profound economic and geopolitical change. However, Pan-Asianism realised the state support necessary to have real impact while Eurasianism remained an imperial dream of post-revolutionary Russian emigrants.

Conclusion

Was Eurasianism an imperial agony or did it promise a pan-continental future? Despite the fact that Eurasianism now receives support of the state elites in some post-Soviet countries, the answer to this question is not an obvious one. The ideology of Eurasianism was formed in the interwar period and presented a direct reaction to the global crisis, wars, and dissolutions of empires. Eurasianists believed in the near future collapse of the Soviet Union and later establishment of an ideal autocratic state, so-called Russia-Eurasia, which would reflect the will of the people and accommodate cultural diversity of all Eurasian nationalities. However, the political projects of Eurasianism remained highly imperialistic due to its underlying assumption of the supremacy of Russian culture and the necessarily leading role of ‘Great Russian’ nationalism which supposedly united both

⁸¹ GARF, f. 5783, op. 2, d. 26, L. 2 (Evraziitsy o dal’nem vostokey).

⁸² GARF, f. 5783, op. 2, d. 6. L. 25 (Vernadskii G.V. “Opyt istorii Evrazii”).

Russian and Asian identities. Besides, Eurasianist ideology was fixated on Russia and therefore could not be taken up by any other state in Eurasia.

The rise of Pan-Asianism in Japan, which was also used to justify imperial aims, involved the distribution of Eurasianist ideas beyond the Russosphere through Shimano Saburo's translations of Eurasianist works. However, despite Pan-Asianism's claim of Asia's prominent role in world history as well as its criticism of Eurocentrism, Eurasianists rejected any cooperation with representatives of Pan-Asianism blaming it for conducting an imperialist policy.

The few non-Russian participants of the movement, such as Erenzhen Khara Davan and Iakov Bromberg, representatives of the Kalmyk and Jewish diaspora respectively, stood against the official Eurasianist project of centralized federalism along economic fault lines. Instead, they demanded the acknowledgment of the rights of national minorities to autonomy and the creation of a confederation on the basis of nationalisms in any future Russia-Eurasia. Yet the refusal of mainstream Eurasianism to accept these projects of national confederations led to Eurasianism's rejection by the Kalmyk and Jewish diasporas who claimed that the Eurasianist 'successors of Tsarist imperialist policy' would oppress national minorities again. These findings lead to the conclusion that Russian Eurasianism could not offer a competitive alternative to the Soviet project and therefore remaining an imperial agony of exile intellectuals.