



## The 2021 Conference of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History

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The 2021 Annual Conference of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History was held in Foshan, Guangdong Province, from April 17<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup>. This annual conference was organized by the Russian Language Institute of Beijing Foreign Studies University. The theme was “Thirty Years Retrospect and Prospect of the Development Path of Post-Soviet Space and Eastern European Countries and Regions”. More than 50 scholars participated in the discussion, and their papers covered various aspects of the history of the Soviet Union (Russia) and Eastern Europe.

### I. International Communist Movement and Soviet History

The international communist movement is closely related to Soviet history, and papers are presented at each annual meeting. The paper “On the Controversy between Engels and P. Tkachev” by researcher Ma Longshan, Institute of World History, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, discussed this important topic in the history of the development of Marxism and the history of the Russian revolution. The author believes that this controversy was derived from another controversy before it. The article criticizing Lavrov, published by Engels in October 1874, also criticized Tkachev, who argued with Lavrov, incurred the latter’s counterattack. Under the suggestion of Marx, Engels launched a controversy with Tkachev. Engels refuted Tkachev’s theory and practice of “conspiracy”, criticized his denial of the tsar’s class attribute, and raised the issue of the strategy, tactics and guidelines of the Russian revolution. Since Tkachev was a revolutionary who succeeded Bakunin, he was the representative of the “People’s Will” (Народнаia Volia (Народная воля)). Therefore, Engels’ guiding opinions on the Russian Revolution through this debate are particularly important. The “Refugee Literature” containing the content of this

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controversy, as well as Marx's "Marx-Zasulich Correspondence" and his translation of the Preface of "Communist Manifesto" to G. Plekhanov constituted a set of valuable documents guiding the Russian Revolution.

The study of Soviet history has always been the number one theme of the annual meeting, and this year is no exception.

Based on the information declassified in recent years, and taking the personal experience of I.V.Kurchatov as a clue, the paper "Kurchatov, the Father of the Soviet Atomic Bomb and the Soviet Nuclear Program" by Professor Zhang Guangxiang and Jin Dan of Jilin University, sorted out the implementing process of the Soviet nuclear program. In terms of political decision-making, scientific research decision-making, and intelligence work, this paper presented the scientific and military situation of the Soviet Union in the late 1940s. Professor Xu Jinqiu's thesis "V.G. Khlopin and the Soviet Nuclear Program" began with the theory of radiation research in Russia in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and focused on the topic of nuclear material preparation.

Associate Professor Lu Hui of Hainan University's paper "The Soviet Red Army and the Organizational Reform of Agricultural Economy in the 1920s and 1930s" discussed the relationship between military and economy. In the early Soviet Red Army, officers and soldiers of peasants accounted for a large proportion. Therefore, in the important period of the fundamental transformation of the Soviet agricultural organization system in the 1920s and 1930s, the military system also established Red Army farms and trained soldiers in labor skills, making the Red Army directly participate in economic construction. The author takes the Far East and Kuban as examples to illustrate that both active and demobilized soldiers have become the main supplement to the agricultural labor force, playing the dual role of stabilizing the border and agricultural production.

Associate Professor Pan Xiaowei (School of History, Culture and Tourism of Heilongjiang University)'s paper "Research on Soviet Economic Aid to North Korea (1953-1960)" argues that after the Korean War, the Soviet Union helped North Korea rebuild or build new factories, provide machinery and equipment, transfer technology, and train talents. Through which, North Korea basically achieved economic reconstruction. From the perspective of the Soviet Union, through large-scale aid to maintain friendly relations between the Soviet Union and North Korea, North Korea can become the forefront of the Soviet Union's confrontation with the United States in Asia. However, since the end of the 1950s, the process and scale of Soviet aid to North Korea began to be affected by changes in Sino-Soviet relations. The Soviet Union decided whether to assist North Korea and the size of the assistance based on North Korea's position in the Sino-Soviet divergence, which made North Korea an important element that impacted Sino-Soviet relations.



The disintegration of the Soviet Union still attracts the attention of historians. Researcher Huang Lifu (Institute of World History, Chinese Academy of Social Science)'s paper "Food Supply Crisis and Soviet Upheaval" argues that Lenin's World Revolution theory became the basis for Soviet leaders to judge the situation and formulate internal and external strategies throughout the history of the Soviet Union. Under the conditions of economically backward and being surrounded by capitalist countries, the Soviet Union chose a modernization path of catching up and surpassing to realize the world revolution. It established a highly centralized economic management system, an economic development strategy that prioritizes heavy industry, and using imports to substitute the foreign economy. After World War II, the Soviet Union successively chose the foreign strategy of confrontation with American, cooperating with American to dominate the world, and competing for hegemony with American. Under the guidance of Stalin's theory of general crisis of capitalism, all subsequent Soviet leaders made estimates that surpassed the Soviet Union's development stage and eagerly formulated guidelines for the transition to communism. The food supply crisis is a result of the world revolution theory driven by the policies mentioned above. The shortcomings of this strategy are the root cause of the Soviet Union's food crisis and faith crisis, which led to the Soviet Union's drastic changes. Meanwhile, the external factors of the international market turbulence are also indispensable factor for the disintegration of Soviet Union.

Professor Wang Xianju of Renmin University of China worked in Moscow as a reporter for Xinhua News Agency for many years. His thesis "The Process and Reasons of the Disintegration of the Soviet Union according to the *Change of Ownership of the Kremlin*" was related to his personal experience. *Change of Ownership of the Kremlin* is a collection of reports by two reporters of Xinhua News Agency. In response to comments from various circles that "no one predicted the disintegration of the Soviet Union", Wang Xianju took the book as an example and extracted many representative texts from 1987 to 1991, especially those that predicted the future. Wang believes that Chinese journalists and scholars have extraordinary insight into the development of the situation, and observers who can make such accurate judgments were rare in the world at that time.

Professor Yang Cuihong (History Department of Jilin University)'s thesis "Changes in the Relationship Between State and Church before and after the Disintegration of the Soviet Union" reviewed the policies of restoration of Bible printing and importation, allowing foreigners to preach, handing over politically sensitive sites to the church (such as the place of the last tsar's execution), the revision of religious laws and other measures in the later period of Gorbachev's



reign. He believes that these political measures led to the severe weakening of the power of the CPSU and the rapid infiltration of external forces. The polarization of religious policies from the Stalin period to the Gorbachev period caused the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

## II. History of Tsarist Russia

In this annual conference, the number of papers related to the history of Tsarist Russia has increased compared with previous years.

Song Ge, a doctoral student from the School of History and Culture, Central China Normal University's dissertation "Dispersion to Unity: Reform of Russian Railway Freight Rates at the End of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century" argued that due to the failure of the Crimean War in 1856, the Russian treasury was empty. The railway under building can't help but introduce private capital and allow private operations, which made high freight rates, pent-up factory profits, over-complicated procedures and prices, and low efficiency. These factors suppressed the economy and prevented the treasury from increasing. Therefore, since the 1880s, the Russian government began the process of nationalization of railways. In this process, there were disputes between "supervised floating prices" and "uniform pricing", struggles between the Ministry of Finance and the Ministry of Transport, and trials of various pricing methods. After the completion of this reform, the development of Russian capitalism accelerated significantly, and the treasury became abundant, which has also created conditions for the development of centralized politics.

The paper "Fur Trade and Northern Colonization of Russia in the 17<sup>th</sup> Century" by Li Qiao, a doctoral student in the Department of World History at the Chinese University of Social Sciences, believes that because furs (such as sable skins) are highly profitable in the trade with the Hanseatic League countries, they can greatly improve the financial situation of the Tsarist Russian government. As a result, expanding the supply of fur became an important reason for the Tsarist authorities to colonize Siberia, and Siberia was able to integrate into the unified Russian market in the 17<sup>th</sup> century. However, over-hunting led to the depletion of fur resources, which further prompted the Russians to continue to seek markets and supplies from China and Alaska.

The paper "The First University in Siberia: A Long and Tortuous Road to Running Schools" by Wang Xiaodan, a doctoral student in the Department of World History at the Chinese University of Social Sciences, believes that the establishment of a university in Siberia has been on the agenda since the liberal reforms of Alexander I in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, this idea was not widely accepted until the serfdom reform in 1861. In 1878, Alexander II ordered the establishment of the Siberian



92 *The 2021 Conference of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History*  
Imperial University in Tomsk, and the opening ceremony was held in 1888. Why is the birth process of the University of Siberia so difficult and long? The author believes that Siberia's subordinate status in Russia is the root cause, coupled with the ever-changing educational policies of the tsarist governments, and the fact that society has not reached a consensus on the establishment of the university also has an impact on this. The University of Siberia is the epitome of the relationship between European Russia and Siberia, as well as the government and universities.

### III. Contemporary History of Russia

The annual conference also covers the contemporary history of Russia after 1991. Lecturer of Tianjin Normal University, Ye Zhaoxia's paper "Contemporary Russian Orphan Housing Security Status" introduced Russia's housing policy for orphans. Among them, the preferential policies on renting and buying houses for orphans who are adults but under 23 years old are quite meaningful. From this perspective, the author not only enables readers to have a deeper understanding of the social and ideological turmoil in Russia in the 1990s, but also analyzes the concept of welfare of the Russians from the Orthodox Church and the socialist experience. It has important enlightening significance for understanding contemporary Russia.

Professor Dai Guiju (Beijing Foreign Studies University)'s paper "A Research on the Relationship between the Government and Religion through the Religious Management in Russia under the New Coronavirus Epidemic", introduced the attitudes of various religious factions in Russia towards the epidemic after the outbreak of the new coronavirus. They resisted prevention and control measures in the early stages of the epidemic. Even some clergymen accused the state of banning large-scale religious activities in religious venues as "unconstitutional." This aggravated the spread of the epidemic and caused many clergies to get sick and die. But with the spread of the epidemic, religious believers in Russia changed from resisting self-isolation to gradually adapting to the prevention and control of the epidemic. Religious organizations and believers of various factions have gradually recognized the prevention and control policies, and the degree of compliance with the control measures has increased significantly.

### IV. Historical Theory and History of Historical Science

History theory and history of historical science are also the research fields to which scholars pay attention.

Professor Zhang Jianhua (Beijing Normal University)'s paper "Between World History and Chinese History: The Mission, Geography, Paradigm, and Changing of Northeast China History", proposed a plan to construct the "History of the



Northeast China(Китайская Северо-Восточная История)". He believes that the history of Northeast China has a development process that is very different from other disciplines of Chinese history and is closely related to the history of China's border politics, border history and geography, history of Sino-foreign relations, the history of modern international relations, and world history. It was born out of the decline period of China, so from the beginning, it has a strong sense of duty. The author reviews the Northeast history works written by Russian and Japanese scholars and the works of European and American scholars during the period when Russia and Japan occupied the Northeast, and then analyzed the research process of Chinese scholars. "Compendium of Northeast History", the foundational work of Northeast history written by Fu Sinian, and works by Jin Yufu and Bian Zongmeng, both of which were full of worries about the nation's fate. They exposed Japan's aggressive ambitions and created a research paradigm for Northeast history. In the 1950s to 1970s, the history of Northeast China became a hot topic due to the evolution of Sino-Soviet relations, but the tendency of "academic services the politics" appeared again. Since the 1980s, multi-disciplinary and interdisciplinary research emerged in Northeast history research, including geography, economics, demography, statistics, ethnology, sociology, psychology, new cultural history, new social history, and the new history of the Cold War, etc. All of these are related to the history of Northeast China. Therefore, the simple local history research is inconsistent with the overall view in contemporary academic research. The history of Northeast China has become a "cross-field", "cross-professional", and "interdisciplinary" discipline. The author introduces Professor Wang Yulang's concept of "Northeast Basin Civilization", studies on "people" such as the history of population and immigration under the framework of the new social history, and case studies of urban history.

Professor Liu Shuang's paper "The Changes and Value Reconstruction of Russian History in the Past 30 Years" analyzed the three stages of the changes in Russian history in the past 30 years. He believes that the historiography of Yeltsin's era while trying to get rid of Soviet dogmatism historiography, was accompanied by the filling of historical gaps and the national nihilism that negated the motherland's history. At that time, the work of deciphering, sorting and publishing archives was promoted. In the early Putin era, the main theme of historiography was the restoration of historical functions and its transformation. In-depth study of the history of the motherland, affirmation and promotion of the value and role of traditional Russian culture, re-excavating the Russian nation's cultural characteristics and ideological origins, and looking for the revival of the spiritual power of Russia from history became the main target. The restoration of the function of history is mainly reflected in the



94 *The 2021 Conference of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History*  
newly compiled history textbooks and other important general history works. After Putin's second term, Russia was affected by the international financial crisis, crude oil devaluation, Ukraine crisis, and Western sanctions. During this period, one of the important roles of historians was to unite the people and evoke all ethnic groups with national spirit and patriotism. The people's struggle for the rejuvenation of the motherland is mainly reflected in the launch of the "Year of Russia", the compilation of a unified history textbook, and the holding of commemorative activities for major historical events. These three stages have not only internal logical connections, but also large morphological differences. The mental process of historians has also undergone significant changes in different stages.

The paper "Changes in Russian History in the Transitional Period" by Liu Xianzhong, a researcher from the Institute of Eurasia, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, analyzed the strong politicization of Russian historiography in the 1990s, and discussed Russian historians' evaluations of the October Revolution and Stalin. Considering the academic and political background of the writers of the history books, the author pointed out that Russian historiography has shifted from the overall affirmation of the Soviet ideology to the overall negation during this period, and slipped from one extreme to another. The old historical interpretation framework has been broken, but the new interpretation framework has not really been established. In terms of methodology, the author introduced the process from the "new dogmatism" that completely denies Marxism-Leninism to the introduction of "social form" analysis methods and "civilization" analysis methods, and listed the "combined civilization constituents" and other "civilization" historiography's definitions of Russian civilization. The author also introduced the quantitative distribution of Russian scholars' research on the topic selection of associate doctoral (кандидат, candidate) in the periods before 1953, 1954-1964, 1965-1984, 1985-1991, and after 1991.

The paper "Putin's View on Soviet History" by Professor Zuo Fengrong from the Central Party School is also part of the long-term follow-up of a series of major issues such as Russian history textbooks and World War II evaluations. She believes that Putin is not only a powerist, but also a leader with strong traditional Russian culture and obsessed by historical inheritance. Putin attaches importance to the important role played by history education in consolidating national consensus and cultivating patriotism. He respects the power of the Soviet Union, traditional patriotism, and the idea of "iron fist" governing. Putin's views and evaluations of history are directly related to his determination of the future path of national development and the idea of governing. It is precisely under the influence of these ideas that Putin attaches great importance to the study of World War I, because World War I led to the establishment of the Soviet Union and affirmed the heroism of the Tsarist fighters in World War I.



Putin praised the events that showed Russia's great power and unification, and affirmed the active role of the Soviet Union's planned economy, the construction of the "Soviet nation", and the promotion of Russian.

Professor Feng Yujun (Fudan University)'s paper "A Preliminary Study of Soviet-Russian Research Methods" reviewed the changes in Sino-Russian and Sino-Soviet relations and China's history of cognition and academic research on Russia and the Soviet Union, and proposed that scholars should have a grand historical outlook and a systematic international comparative ability and a clear ontological consciousness, that is, taking China's national interests as the fundamental starting point for research. In terms of research methods, first, we must pay attention to the transformation of different paradigms, and second, we must pay attention to interdisciplinary research. He took Russia's diplomacy with Europe and China before and after the Crimean War in 1856 as an example, and proposes to realize the "return of history" and make a scientific historical comparison. He also took the concept of "economic temperature" presented by American scholars in the study of Siberia as an example, and suggested that the field of research should be continuously expanded. As a conclusion, he proposed: "Sino-Russia relations are in the best period in history" is not just based on the results of specific cooperation, but after 400 years of ups and downs, China and Russia both agree with "non-alignment, non-confrontation, not targeting a third country" and "establish relations between the two countries based on the principles of "friendship for generations and never being an enemy".

Associate Professor Zhou Houqin (Shaanxi Normal University)'s paper "The Historical Evolution of the Concept of "самодержавие" and the Construction of the Russian State System" believes that "самодержавие" is a historical term exclusively in Russia, which is roughly equivalent to the English autocracy. This autocratic system was gradually established in Russia during the reign of Ivan IV to Peter the Great. It is different from the monarchy development of Western European countries, whose monarchy power was restricted from the beginning. Only in the formation of nation states, the royal power gradually became stronger, and taking the opportunity to pursue unrestricted power. In the traditional Russian autocratic system, ensuring the independence and unrestricted power of the monarch is its core concept. This was achieved under the conditions of the extremely weak bourgeoisie, underdeveloped capitalist economy, dominant serfdom, lack of hierarchical representative institutions, and lack of developed autonomy in cities and rural areas. It was not the result of the monarch seeking a political balance between the aristocracy and the bourgeoisie. As a result, the social consciousness of a highly sacred monarchy can hardly develop the concept of restricting monarchy by law. Therefore, the Russian monarchy is an unrestricted supreme power.





## V. History of the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe

As the theme of this forum shows, in addition to Russia, the history of the countries in the space of the Soviet Union and independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union is also an important field of research by the Institute's members.

### (1) The history of CIS countries

The CIS countries have historical ties with Russia/Soviet Union, and they are also a research field to which scholars pay attention.

The essay “Kazakh Awakening and the Proposal of Kazakh Autonomy” by lecturer Zhao Jing (Northwestern University) analyzed that after the Kazakh region was incorporated into the Russian Empire in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, its traditional society was severely impacted by colonial rule, and the Kazakh intellectuals began to propose Enlightenment. They participated in the elections of the Russian Duma step by step, carried out literary creation and publishing activities, and promoted the awakening of the Kazakh nation with practical actions during World War I, February Revolution, and October Revolution.

“An Analysis of Kazakhstan’s Modernization Construction” by Kong Chuiliu of Beijing Foreign Studies University divided Kazakhstan’s modernization construction after independence into three stages: 1992-1996, 1997-2017, and 2017 to the present. He interpreted the general situation of each period and focused on the analysis of Nazarbayev’s four “development principles”; namely, reform rather than revolution (rejection of “leapfrog development” and “shock-style democracy”), economic first, then politics (after the economy has made significant progress, gradually weaken presidential power, and transited to a parliamentary system of government), relying on human resource (adopting active birth, immigration, health, and education policies), and taking advantage of crises (such as actively abandoning nuclear weapons and introducing floating exchange rates in financial crisis). These principles have created a better development environment for Kazakhstan both domestically and internationally.

“Study on the Uniqueness of the National Culture of Belarus” by Geng Haitian of Hebei North University started with the once-discussed question of “Belarus” or “Bela-Russia” and introduced the research achievements of scholars from that country: First, based on the etymology of geographical names and genetic testing, it is believed that its ethnicity has a more common and pure Baltic national ancestry than the Russian nation. Second, it further proves the uniqueness of its ethnicity in terms of ethnic formation history and language characteristics.

### (2) History of Eastern European Countries

In recent years, as more and more Central and Eastern European countries have become members of the European Union, their political attributes as “Western



countries" have been widely recognized. However, considering its history of a series of small and medium-sized countries, should Eastern European history be part of European history dominated by Western European history or still be part of Soviet and Eastern European history is still a question. From the current point of view, the authoritativeness of the Eastern European History Research of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History continues to be widely recognized by the academic circles.

The report by Ma Xipu, a researcher at the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, "Why did I write the *History of Yugoslavia*" proposed that the Yugoslav government has a conceptual confusion in terms of ethnic issues, and in practice, there are mistakes in the one-sided and absolutization of the principle of "national equality". In the theory and practice of the party and the state, the issue of the demise of the party and the state has been raised prematurely, democratic centralism had been abolished, and the country lost its unified leadership. In terms of interference by external forces, according to the latest declassified materials, Western countries had plans to overthrow the Yugoslav regime as early as the 1970s. These factors made the Yugoslav countries break away from the Soviet model firstly, and even close to joining the European Community and NATO, but finally split.

In recent years, with the advancement of China's Belt and Road Initiative, Eastern Europe (that is, today's Central and Eastern Europe) has received increasing attention from practitioners and academic circles. More and more Soviet and Russian scholars began to dabble in this field. Researcher Wang Xiaoju (Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences) 's paper "Bulgaria and Russia since Transition: A Comparative Analysis of the Demographic Crisis" argues that the drastic changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe changed the political systems, and affected the economic, social, cultural and other fields of these countries. Since the transition, Bulgaria and Russia encountered crises in the demographic field, which inevitably brought severe negative effects to Bulgaria and Russia. The normal development of the two countries had been severely restricted, and their national security had also been challenged. Getting rid of the population crisis as soon as possible became a top priority for the economic and social development of Bulgaria and Russia.

The paper "Analysis of the Economic Structure Evolution of the EU and Central and Eastern European Member States" by Dr. Bao Hongzheng from the Institute of World History of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences analyzed ten production departments including agriculture, industry, commerce, finance, etc. from 1995 to 2017 and the economic data of 12 sectors including internal chemical industry, metallurgy, machinery, etc. He believes that after more than two decades of





98 *The 2021 Conference of the China Research Society of the USSR and East European History*  
development, these Central and Eastern European countries have almost the same industrial structure as the Western European member states of the European Union. Therefore, the economic structural integration of the old and new member states has been achieved, and the Central and Eastern European countries should no longer be regarded as a separate economic region.

In addition to academic seminars, this annual conference also passed a new association charter and elected the new leadership of the eighth seminar. Researcher Zhang Shengfa of the Eurasian Institute of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences was re-elected as chairman.

Edited by Liu Fan

