



PROJECT MUSE®

Chinese Scholars on Revolutionary Russia

Zhou Jiaying, Zhang Guangxiang

Kritika: Explorations in Russian and Eurasian History, Volume 19,
Number 3, Summer 2018, pp. 671-681 (Review)

Published by Slavica Publishers

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1353/kri.2018.0036>



➔ *For additional information about this article*

<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/701573>

Chinese Scholars on Revolutionary Russia

ZHOU JIAYING AND ZHANG GUANGXIANG

Yao Hai, *Eguo geming* (The Russian Revolution). 642 pp. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2013. ISBN-13 978-7010122700.

Zheng Yifan, *Xin jingji zhengce de Eguo* (The Soviet Union in the NEP Era). 729 pp. Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2013. ISBN-13 978-7010095431.

In 2013, the People's Publishing House launched a new multivolume series on Soviet history, the first of its kind in the People's Republic of China (PRC). The two books reviewed here, both works within this series, can be seen as an indication of current Chinese research on revolutionary Russia.

Intellectuals in China have been interested in the October Revolution and the New Economic Policy (NEP) since these events first took place, and both the revolution and the policies of the 1920s have long been seen as important reference points for nation building.¹ After the communist victory in the Chinese Civil War and the founding of the PRC, Russian and Soviet historical studies in China were deeply affected by *The History of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (Bolsheviks): A Short Course*, which was accepted by the Communist Party of China (CPC) for many years as a de facto encyclopedia of Marxism-Leninism and an indispensable guide to the early history of the USSR. The *Short Course*, however, attributed the success of the revolution and of socialist construction almost exclusively to Lenin and Stalin. Today Chinese scholars are prepared to look much more broadly at the causes and consequences of revolutionary change in Russia, challenging some of the simplifications of the *Short Course*. The dissolution of the USSR has played a role in this adjustment, as have the profound reforms that have taken

¹ Jin Shujun and Sun Xingfang, "Ershi shiji zaoqi Zhongguo zhishijie dui Liening xin jingji zhengce de guancha, yanjiu he sikao" (Chinese Intellectuals' Thinking on NEP in the Early 20th Century), *Makesi zhuyi yu xianshi*, no. 3 (2015): 155–61.

place in China since the Deng Xiaoping era, including expanded access to paper-based and online archives and increased academic exchanges between Russia and China.²

During the 1970s and 1980s, Chinese scholars edited and translated a number of relevant source collections.³ This effort was followed in 2002 by the publication of the wide-ranging *Selected Archives on Soviet History*, which offered Chinese translations of numerous Soviet state documents on domestic, diplomatic, and military affairs.⁴

Since the reforms initiated by Deng Xiaoping, Chinese scholars have been increasingly interested in the history of 1917—in particular, the causes of the February overthrow of the monarchy and the origins, nature, and significance of the October Revolution. According to the traditional view, tsarist Russia before the February Revolution was a “focus of all the contradictions of imperialism” and had been the “weakest link” in the imperialist chain that united the world’s great powers. Since the reform era, however, this view has been revisited, and new trends suggest a reconsideration of the context and causes of the February Revolution. One approach that scholars have taken has been to focus on the experience of social groups, such as the prerevolutionary bourgeoisie and the upper nobility, as well as on the crisis of governance that increasingly preoccupied and ultimately sidelined the regime. Another has been to examine the positive contributions of the Constitutional Democratic Party and the State Duma in the years before the revolution.⁵

² Zhang Guangxiang and Zhou Jiaying, “Bainian yilai de Zhongguo eguoshi yanjiu” (A Century of Studying Russian History in China), *Shixue yuekan*, no. 11 (2015): 108–28.

³ The Central Compilation and Translation Bureau (CCTB), ed., *Tuoluociji yanlun* (Views of Trotsky) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Co., 1979); Zheng Yifan, ed., *Sulian wuchan jieji wenhuapai lunzheng ziliao* (Archives of Proletkul’t) (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1980); CCTB, ed., *Buhalin wenxuan* (Selected Works of Bukharin), 3 vols. (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1981–83); CCTB, ed., *Minzhu jizhongpai he gongren fandui pai wenxuan* (Selected Works on the Democratic Centralist and Workers’ Opposition) (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1984); Zheng Yifan, ed., *Yiguo shehui zhuyi wenti lunzheng ziliao* (Archives of Socialism in One Country) (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1986); CCTB, ed., *Likefu wenxuan* (Selected Works of Rykov) (Beijing: People’s Publishing House, 1986).

⁴ Shen Zhihua, ed., *Sulian lishi dang’an xuanbian* (Selected Archives on Soviet History), 34 vols. (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2002).

⁵ Zhu Zhenghong, “Eryue geming qian Eguo shangceng guizhu de lixi he dongyao” (The Separation and Vacillation of the Russian Aristocracy before the February Revolution), *Xinjiang daxue xuebao*, no. 3 (1985): 81–89; Yao Hai, “Eguo lixianpai zhengdang yu eryue geming” (The Russian Constitutional Party and the February Revolution), *Suzhou keji daxue xuebao*, no. 1 (1989): 31–38; Du Like, “Eguo ziyou zhuyi fandui pai yu 1917 nian eryue geming” (Russian Liberal Opposition Parties and the February Revolution), *Neimenggu daxue xuebao*, no. 3 (2002): 46–52; Yao Hai, “1917 nian Eguo geming de genyuan” (The Origins of the February Revolution), *Eluosi yanjiu*, no. 4 (2007): 69–74.

In their work on the October Revolution, Chinese scholars have traditionally devoted their greatest attention to the presumed inevitability of the revolution, the Bolsheviks' policies toward the revolutionary peasantry, and Lenin's personal contributions.⁶ These studies have reached a number of conclusions: the revolution was rooted in historical forces; the Bolsheviks had established a united front to seize power and put forward the fourth slogan of "Freedom," in addition to their call for "Peace, Land, and Bread"; and the revolution was socialistic and democratic in nature. At the same time, these studies had limitations. The October Revolution was viewed as an unproblematically predictable outcome of Russia's social and economic development, while the historical process that unfolded between February and October tended to be simplified; and the roles of the Provisional Government, the Liberals, Mensheviks, Socialist Revolutionaries (SRs), and even certain voices within the Bolshevik leadership were neglected. The research, which was expressly politicized, made frequent references to Lenin and Stalin as the ultimate authorities on the revolutionary process and was deeply influenced by studies of the history of the international communist movement and scientific socialism.

In this vein, when it came to NEP, for example, Chinese scholars tended to explore it as a program focused on building the domestic economy, examining the evolution of Lenin's thinking on economic questions in theoretical

⁶ Sun Chengmu, Li Xianrong, and Kang Chunlin, *Shiyue geming shi* (A History of the October Revolution) (Beijing: SDX Joint Publishing Co., 1980); Chen Zhihua, *Eguo shiyue shehui zhuyi geming* (The Russian October Socialist Revolution) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012); Liu Zhi, "Shiyue geming yu lishi de xuanzexing" (The October Revolution and Historical Choice), *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 5 (1988): 168–81; Ding Shichao, "Eguo de ziben zhuyi yu shiyue shehui zhuyi geming" (Russian Capitalism and the October Socialist Revolution), *Shixue yuekan*, no. 5 (1992): 85–92; Wu Enyuan, "Shiyue geming: Biranxing, lishi yiyi he qidi" (The October Revolution: Inevitability, Significance, and Enlightenment), *Shijie lishi*, no. 5 (1997): 10–21; Wu Enyuan, "Shiyue geming yu Eguo xiandaihua jincheng: Jianping dangqian shiyue geming yanjiu zhong de zhenglun" (The October Revolution and Russian Modernization: Current Debates in Research on the October Revolution), *Lishi yanjiu*, no. 5 (2007): 22–34; Chen Zhihua, "Shiyue geming de biranxing he lishi yiyi" (The Inevitability and Historical Significance of the October Revolution), *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 4 (2007): 4–10; Shen Yongxing, "Tantan shiyue geming de qianti he Liening de gongxian" (The Preconditions for the October Revolution and the Contributions of Lenin), *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 4 (2007): 11–14; Sun Chengmu, "Dui shiyue geming pingjia de yidian renshi" (Understanding the Russian October Revolution), *Shijie lishi*, no. 2 (2008): 126–30; Zheng Yifan, "Zuopai shehui gemingdang dui shiyue geming de gongxian" (The Contributions of Left SRs to the October Revolution), *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi*, no. 1 (2004): 104–6; Xu Tianxin, "Bu'ershaweike zai shiyue geming zhunbei qijian de nongmin zhengce" (The Bolsheviks' Peasant Policies in the Preparatory Phase of the October Revolution), *Shijie lishi*, no. 6 (1981): 12–18; Zheng Yifan, "Ziyou: Shiyue geming de disige kouhao" (Freedom: The Fourth Slogan of the October Revolution), *Tansuo yu zhengming*, no. 1 (2008): 62–65.

terms, especially his thoughts on state capitalism, retreat, and offensive.⁷ After Deng Xiaoping's famous southern tour in 1992, several monographs appeared offering comparisons between Deng Xiaoping's theory and the NEP of the 1920s.⁸ Some examined the rural economy and the industrial and agricultural crises of the period.⁹ Others studied the development of social stratification and the everyday life of Soviet peasants.¹⁰ Still others analyzed the reasons behind the abandonment of NEP and the various arguments about the program advanced by various leading Bolsheviks.¹¹ These studies also suggested

⁷ Yang Chengxun and Yu Dazhang, "Lun Liening cong gonggengzhi dao hezuozhi de zhan-lue sixiang zhuanbian" (Lenin's Transition of Strategic Thought from Common Tillage to Cooperation), *Zhongguo shehui kexue*, no. 2 (1984): 73–91; Shang Dewen, "Shilun Liening xin jingji zhengce xueshuo de xingcheng he lilun gongxian" (The Formation of NEP and Its Theoretical Contributions), *Makesi zhuyi yanjiu*, no. 2 (1984): 236–56; Liu Peixian, "Liening guanyu guojia ziben zhuyi sixiang de xingcheng yu fazhan" (The Formation and Development of the Theory of State Capitalism), *Makesi zhuyi yanjiu*, no. 3 (1984): 194–205; Yang Chengxun and Yu Dazhang, *Xin jingji zhengce lilun tixi: Lun Liening dui shehui zhuyi jingji de zairenshi* (NEP: Lenin's Recognition of the Socialist Economy) (Zhengzhou: Henan People's Press, 1985); Yu Liangzao, "Liening zai su'e xin jingji zhengce shiqi liyong shichang fazhan jingji de sixiang" (Lenin's Thoughts on the Market Economy under NEP), *Shehui kexue zhanxian*, no. 1 (1994): 42–48; Zheng Yifan, "Dui xin jingji zhengce de butong chanshi jiqi mingyun" (Various Interpretations of NEP and Their Destiny), *Dangdai shijie yu shehui zhuyi*, no. 6 (2005): 135–39.

⁸ Yang Chengxun and Li Zhushi, "Deng Xiaoping lilun dui Liening xin jingji zhengce sixiang de jicheng he fazhan" (Deng Xiaoping's Theory: The Inheritance and Development of NEP), *Makesi zhuyi yu xianshi*, no. 5 (1998): 12–18; Zheng Yifan, "Su'e xin jingji zhengce he Zhongguo gaige kaifang zhi bijiao" (A Comparative Study of NEP and the Reform and Opening Up), *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi wenti*, no. 4 (2005): 31–39.

⁹ Jin Yan, "Guanyu xin jingji zhengce shiqi funong jingji de ruogan wenti" (Some Issues on the Rich Peasant Economy in the Era of NEP), *Shixue jikan*, no. 4 (1985): 69–77; Huang Lifu, "Sulian xin jingji zhengce shiqi geti nonghu yu jiti nongzhuang laodong shengchanlv zaitantao" (Rethinking the Labor Productivity of Individual Peasant Households and Collective Farms in the Era of NEP), *Shijie lishi*, no. 5 (1987): 111–20; Shen Zhihua, *Xin jingji zhengce yu sulian nongye shehuihua daolu* (NEP and the Soviet Development Path of Socializing Agriculture) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 1994); Shen Zhihua, "Shilun sulian xin jingji zhengce shiqi de funong wenti" (Rich Peasants in the Era of NEP), *Shijie lishi*, no. 4 (1994): 11–20.

¹⁰ Huang Lifu, ed., *Xin jingji zhengce shiqi de sulian shehui* (Soviet Society in the Era of NEP) (Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press, 2012); Huang Lifu, "Xin jingji zhengce shiqi sulian shehui zuzhi guanli tizhi de chuchuang yu quelì" (The Creation and Establishment of the Soviet Social Organization Management System in the Era of NEP), *Eluosi yanjiu*, no. 3 (2012): 103–25; Zhang Dan, "The Transition of the Urban Housing Management System in the Era of NEP," *Eluosi yanjiu*, no. 3 (2012): 126–43; Wang Xiaoju, "Xin jingji zhengce shiqi sulian nongmin de richang shenghuo" (The Everyday Life of Soviet Peasants in the Era of NEP), *Shixue lilun yanjiu*, no. 4 (2014): 49–57.

¹¹ Ma Longshan, "Quxiao xin jingji zhengce yuanyin xinlun" (The Reasons for the Termination of NEP), *Dangdai shijie shehui zhuyi wenti*, no. 2 (2009): 11–26; Zheng Yifan, *Bubalin lun* (Bukharin) (Beijing: Central Compilation and Translation Press, 2006).

broad conclusions about the NEP era that became staples of Chinese scholarship, arguing that Lenin's thinking on the *artel* and the proper focus of Bolshevik work underwent a fundamental change in the early 1920s; that state capitalism and retreat represented transitional stages on the road toward socialism; and that NEP represented a fruitful nexus between socialist industry and small-scale peasant production that was both consonant with Marxist thought and an important source of Deng Xiaoping's theory. They also pointed out that the party-state's classification criteria for determining rich versus middling or poor peasants was vague, individual peasant households demonstrated higher labor productivity than collective farms; the social management system became increasingly centralized during the 1920s; and basic tensions between NEP practices and Bolshevik ideology as well as between a mixed economy and the Bolshevik-ordered political system led to the termination of NEP.

At the same time, the studies published during the Deng era identified a number of open questions and areas for future research, in particular with regard to the initial decision to implement NEP in 1921, the "struggle for power" within the party leadership that ultimately led to a victory for Stalin's radical course, and issues related to nationality and cultural policies in the 1921–28 period.

The two books reviewed here at least partially address these questions and thus reveal something of the trends and intellectual shifts that have shaped Chinese historical scholarship on revolutionary Russia over the last 20 years.¹²



Written by a prolific specialist on the history of the era, Yao Hai's *The Russian Revolution* examines 1917 as the start of a process that involved two successive yet distinct stages.¹³ He devotes his book largely to exploring the causes, general dynamic, and ultimate nature of the revolutionary upheaval, as well as the discrete actions and positions of the principal political groups and their leaders.

¹² In the PRC, studies of the October Revolution and NEP are interdisciplinary. History, politics, and international relations—with the subdisciplines history of the international communist movement, world history, modern Chinese history, and studies of Marxism—all pay close attention to these topics. The literature reviewed here mostly belongs to the discipline of history.

¹³ Yao Hai, "Zhanzheng dui Eguo fazhan daolu de yingxiang" (The Effects of World War I on the Russian Development Path), *Shihie lishi*, no. 1 (2009): 4–14; Yao Hai, "Eguo geming zhong de lixian huiyi wenti" (The Constituent Assembly in Revolutionary Russia), *Shixue jikan*, no. 1 (2009): 64–73; Yao Hai, "Eguo geming zhong de Deguo jingfei wenti" (German Funds in Revolutionary Russia), *Shixue yuekan*, no. 8 (2012): 87–98.

Yao argues that the February Revolution was the result of a clash between modernization and Russia's traditional religious and patriarchal culture, which was exacerbated by the rising domestic political tensions created by World War I. Yet even as late as January 1917, the immediate way forward was still unclear. Would the answer be reform or revolution? According to Yao, the rapid turn to revolution had short-term, contextual causes. A generally harsh winter led to difficulties in supplying grain to the imperial capital, while a slight warming in February created conditions for demonstrators to take to the streets. Once street protests began, all it took was for the soldiers of the Petrograd garrison to transfer their allegiance to the crowd, and what had started as simple unrest and discontent soon turned into a revolutionary situation. In presenting this picture, Yao repeats some fairly traditional positions, notably that the Bolsheviks had nothing to do with the February events, which were in effect spontaneous; the revolution was not broadly popular but a specifically Petrograd phenomenon; and the revolution then spread by telegraph to the rest of the empire and to the fronts.

Chapters 3 and 5 offer an overview of the most significant activities of non-Bolshevik political forces from February to October. With the beginning of what would become the February Revolution, the liberal opposition within the State Duma quickly established a provisional committee to try to lead the uprising. Following the tsar's abdication, the opposition dispatched political commissars to take control of the state, took steps to spread the revolution beyond the capital, and established the Provisional Government. At the same time, they struggled to secure their legitimacy and ultimately lost the support of the masses as they failed to meet popular demands. Meanwhile, the Mensheviks and SRs played leading roles in the Petrograd Soviet, where they championed initiatives such as the famous Order no. 1, which contributed to the breakdown of the Russian army. The essence of dual power lay in the lack of a single central authority, a situation exacerbated by the prevalence of anarchism. Aleksandr Kerenskii's reorganization of the Provisional Government in the aftermath of the July Crisis put a formal end to this situation, because the non-Bolshevik socialist parties took charge. According to this view, the liberals were not counterrevolutionary; nor were the Mensheviks and SRs compromised.

The Bolsheviks on the Road to Power

In chapters 4 and 6–10, Yao argues that the Bolsheviks were not the leading power until the Kornilov Affair. The Bolsheviks conducted propaganda and fought for social revolution after the April Theses, but Russian economic and cultural preconditions for the revolution had yet to mature. When the military coup d'état failed, the Bolsheviks put forward new slogans aimed at

satisfying the masses' demands for land, property, and national equality. In this way, the Bolsheviks strengthened their position in the major cities.

Here Yao also presents some new conclusions: Germany financed the Bolsheviks during the revolutions, but there is no evidence to suggest that Lenin and the Bolsheviks were German spies; the Bolshevik leaders squabbled constantly, especially about the nature, paths toward, and strategies of the revolution; Trotskii and the Military Revolutionary Committee oversaw the practical work of the October Revolution; and the soldiers guarding the Winter Palace surrendered, meaning that was no real "Bloody Revolution." As a result, although the October Revolution was indeed orchestrated by the Bolsheviks, it was not inevitable. Russia still had many alternatives.

The Challenge of Soviet Russia in the Postrevolutionary Era

In chapter 11, Yao states that the issues of "Peace, Land, Bread, and Freedom" remained unresolved in the postrevolutionary era. The Bolsheviks, unable to deal with the relationship between democracy and dictatorship, also misestimated the degree of Russia's capitalist development. The country's constitutional foundation was weak due to the masses' relatively low levels of political awareness and educational level. It was the tragic fate of the Russian Constituent Assembly that heightened domestic conflicts and led to the Civil War. Therefore, the October Revolution had particular rather than universal characteristics.¹⁴



Zheng Yifan has long been engaged in the study of Soviet history, and he is the editor in chief of the Soviet History Series. *The Soviet Union in the NEP Era* consists of ten chapters that trace the development of NEP and the politics, culture, and inner-party struggles of that time, because in the USSR the political system was the decisive factor affecting economic development, and the cultural system served the political system.

The Causes of NEP

In chapter 1, Zheng examines the "serious political and social crises" that afflicted Russia in 1921. At the end of the Civil War, famine caused widespread malnutrition and impoverishment, and the peasants were dissatisfied with food requisitioning (*prodrazverstka*) and the decline of the soviets. Massive

¹⁴ Yao Hai, "Su'e shiqi de gaige zhi liuchan" (The Abandonment of Reforms in Early Soviet Russia), *Tansuo yu zhengming*, no. 8 (2015): 108–12.

unrest swept the country, most notably the Antonov Rebellion, the Chapan War in the Volga region, and the West Siberian Uprising.¹⁵

The Functions of NEP

In chapters 2 and 3, Zheng turns to analyzing NEP's positive effects and limitations. He considers NEP as the first economic reform in Soviet history, affirms the gains produced by NEP in the fields of agriculture, industry, and the financial and monetary system. Among NEP's limitations, he lists concerns among the leadership about rural capitalism, which increased the likelihood of future interparty struggles and policy changes, the prevalence of wage arrears, large wage differentials among workers, and higher unemployment rates.

Bolshevik Struggles for Power

In chapter 6, Zheng explores the interparty struggles in the 1920s based on abundant archival materials. Vladimir Lenin disagreed with Lev Trotskii and Nikolai Bukharin about trade unions. Iosif Stalin, Grigorii Zinov'ev, and Lev Kamenev disliked Trotskii's views on democracy within the Party, party factions, opposition to the bureaucracy, and economic policy. In essence, the party leaders held different opinions on the best ways and means to build socialism.

The struggles continued. Trotskii issued a challenge with "Uroki oktiabria" (The Lessons of October) in 1924. Zinov'ev and Kamenev disagreed with Bukharin and Stalin about economic policy, bureaucratism, the doctrine of Socialism in One Country, and the need to choose between economic development and class struggle. Zinov'ev and Kamenev joined Trotskii in opposing Stalin and Bukharin when it came to ideas about centralized power, permanent revolution, and Socialism in One Country. Stalin argued with Bukharin, Aleksei Rykov, and Mikhail Tomskii over issues of grain procurement, class struggle, and capitalism. These leaders not only fought for power but also diverged over their theories of building socialism and promoting the world revolution.¹⁶ Their conflicts over Trotskii's *Novyi kurs* (The New Course [1924]) and emergency measures reflected their struggle for democracy. As a result, in the 1920s not all Bolsheviks fought for socialist industrialization, nor were the opposition factions enemies of the Soviet regime and Stalin.

¹⁵ Zheng Yifan, "Nongmin de Buliesite" (Prodnaog: The Meaning of Brest-Litovsk for Peasants), *Kexue shehui zhuyi*, no. 4 (2010): 20–24.

¹⁶ Zheng Yifan, "Geming haishi gailiang?" (Revolution or Reform?), *Makesi zhuyi yu xianshi*, no. 4 (2010): 38–46.

The End of NEP

NEP was terminated in response to long-term tensions in Soviet society and leftist ideas within the Party, among which four factors had particular significance. First, the exacerbation of unrest in the countryside, which had reached serious levels, required a rapid response from the Bolshevik government (chapters 1 and 10). Because the leaders held different views on NEP and were deeply influenced by War Communism, they did not initially draw up a single, consistent reform plan, which forced them to solve problems one at a time and backtrack frequently. Second, Soviet economic reform came about through orders from above—the leaders' preferred method of solving problems—rather than through market mechanisms (chapter 10). Third, the contradiction between ideas about equality and wealth impeded productivity (chapter 10). Soviet society was always characterized by hatred of the rich, and workers and townspeople resented the NEPmen. Fourth, the needs of the political system also conflicted with those of economic policy (chapters 1 and 7).

In response to these four factors, the Bolsheviks strengthened their dictatorship and eliminated the potential threat posed by other socialist parties, intellectuals, and the Russian Orthodox Church. Stalin held several posts simultaneously, appointed members of the *nomenklatura*, and recruited new party members to expand his power. The Right SRs went to trial, the Mensheviks were forced to dissolve, and the Soviet Union became a one-party state. The Bolsheviks expelled political activists and intellectuals, moved away from democratic principles, and suppressed dissatisfied peasants. They confiscated the property of the Orthodox Church and maintained a barrier between religion and the state to weaken the influence of Orthodox Christians. In the late 1920s, agricultural collectivization, rapid industrialization, and the Shakhty Affair, a precursor to the Great Purges, formed the scaffolding of the Stalinist system (chapter 8).

National and Cultural Policy under NEP

Zheng also discusses national and cultural policies in the NEP era. He examines the building of socialism by the Mensheviks in Georgia and the nationality policies introduced by Soviet Russia after its annexation of Georgia in 1921. He claims that Georgia may have been a socialist state and that the right of national self-determination was applied only to oppressed nations (chapters 4 and 5).

The 1920s were also a period of transition in which cultural policy became dictatorial. At first, there were many cultural and literary groups. Of these, the ultra-left-wing Proletkul't movement provoked disputes about

the nature, path, and tasks of proletarian culture; Proletkul't also influenced Chinese literary criticism in the 1930s.¹⁷ Meanwhile, the Soviet government often denied that censorship was pervasive and strictly enforced. In fact, although the 1923 bill on censorship did not become law, the Central Committee was the highest organ of censorship. The Main Administration for Literary and Publishing Affairs (Glavlit) had unlimited censorship power and operated with the assistance of the political police—the Unified State Political Administration (OGPU) and the People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs (NKVD) (chapter 9).



The two books reviewed here achieve three important tasks. First, their scholarship is based on historical materials rather than the classics of socialist thought. Second, Chinese scholars are clearly moving beyond the constraints of the *Short Course*. Lenin and Stalin no longer receive sole credit for the 1917 revolution and the building of socialism in the Soviet Union, and the history of revolutionary Russia is presented as vivid and colorful. Third, these authors recognize that political and economic reforms should occur in tandem and that antiquated ideas should be revised.

Both of these books exist within the framework of traditional political history, which originated in particular historical circumstances. On the one hand, Russia has left a deep imprint on China. The 1917 revolution brought Marxism-Leninism to the CPC and revolutionary ideology to the Kuomintang. The “wholesale Westernization” of the 1930s gradually gave way to “learning from Russia.” After the birth of the new China, the PRC’s approach to nation building drew heavily on Stalinism. China’s First Five-Year Plan emphasized the development of heavy industry, and the Great Leap Forward and the People’s Commune Movement of the 1950s and 1960s were also based on Soviet models. Class struggle was pervasive, and the campaign against the right wing expanded. Mao Zedong “leaned to one side” (the USSR) in foreign policy, launched the Cultural Revolution at home, and introduced Soviet-inspired changes in state institutions, the educational system, the military, culture, and art. Khrushchev’s and Gorbachev’s efforts at reform failed, and China, too, attempted to eliminate the effects of Stalinism after 1978. From 1978 to 1992, Deng Xiaoping repeatedly discussed issues associated with planning and the market. After his southern tour in 1992, he

¹⁷ Zheng Yifan, “Tuoluociji chi wuchan jieji wenhuapai guandian ma?” (Did Trotskii Belong to Proletkul't?), *Tansuo yu zhengming*, no. 11 (2010): 29–33.

affirmed the positive aspects of a market economy and aimed at establishing a socialist market economic system.

On the other hand, traditional Chinese historiography has been characterized by pragmatism, emphasizing its service to politics, society, and life. In essence, Russian historical studies in the PRC have searched for the origins of the three Russian revolutions (1905, February 1917, and October 1917). Studies of Soviet history have focused on analyzing the reasons for the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, explored the two transformations and three reforms,¹⁸ discussed whether Stalinism was unique, and ultimately promoted the opening up and modernization of the PRC.

The books reviewed here also have limitations. Chinese historians of Russia face two common problems. First, because of the language barrier, Chinese scholars have little familiarity with the achievements of their Western counterparts. Second, scholars tend to prefer traditional political history and modernization theory. In general, they lack experience in analyzing political culture, social mentality, and behavioral patterns. They are also unfamiliar with the new political history (new imperial studies) and new cultural history (postmodernism). Yao pays insufficient attention to the proposals made by political factions among the Bolsheviks after the revolution, the development of revolutionary situations in different regions, and the impact of the revolution on both developed capitalist countries and the Russian borderlands. Zheng overlooks the economic limitations of NEP and its influence on peasants and rural society as a whole. In addition, his book is not always well organized: discussion of some topics is scattered, and in places repeated almost verbatim. The economic policies of the Bolsheviks, SRs, and Mensheviks also merit comparison and further study.

In short, the books reviewed here both shed new light on traditional issues and make important contributions to studies of Russian history in the PRC, even as they reveal how and why approaches to the history of revolutionary Russia have changed in the PRC in the last 20 years.

Institute for History and Culture
Northeast Asian Studies College
Jilin University
Changchun 130012, People's Republic of China
zhoujiaying1989@126.com, zgxlcc2002@aliyun.com

¹⁸ The two transformations are from War Communism to NEP and from NEP to Stalinism. The three reforms are NEP, Khrushchev's Thaw, and Gorbachev's reforms.