Eurasianism

Eurasianism emerged in 1921 and was based on the observations of a "dying West" and a "rising East." Its representatives are the linguist Nicolas S. Trubetzkoy, the geographer Petr Nikolaevitch Savitzky, the theologian Georgy V. Florovsky, the musicologist Pëtr P. Suvchinsky, and—most often forgotten—the legal scholar Nicolai N. Alekseev. Savitzky used the word *azijskij* ("asisch" in German) in order to form the word "*evrazijskij*" (eurasian).[1] There exists today in Russia a kind of Great-Russianism claiming to be "Eurasian." True scholarly Eurasianism, however, in spite of its conviction that Russia should lead her "Asiatic sisters," has never produced a chauvinist, imperialist branch. Therefore, Eurasianism can be considered as a truly intellectual development of Pan-Slavism and Slavophilism, purging the latter two of imperialist connotations.

Eurasianism impresses through its intellectual variety. A creation of émigré intellectuals, Eurasianists interpret the Revolution of 1917 as the point where Russia left the European world. Being critical of Marx's reduction of history to class struggle, they focus on questions concerning society or the formation of the state. Their work embraces three main fields: Geography-economics, jurisprudence and state theory, and spiritual-cultural matters. Their general tendency is to emphasize religious and metaphysical questions, which enables them to establish Russia (like Byzantium) as an amalgam of European and Asian elements, and to see the existence of "Slavic culture" as a myth. Their theories adopt "organic" tones well known since the Slavophiles and Pan-Slavism, a critique of Western philosophy (reminiscent of Kireevsky) as well as reflections on Khomiakov's idea of *sobornost'*. Curiously, these rather conservative thoughts are combined with distinctly progressive ideas about the organization of a multicultural state as laid out by Petr Struve,[2] as well as with impressive degrees of cultural relativism and anti-colonialism. At some point, Eurasianism, which had, for the longest time of its existence been living beyond the distinctions between 'left' and 'right,'[3] split up into a (Prague based) "rightwing" and a (Paris based) leftwing group. The "rightwing" branch (especially Trubetzkoy) strove to unite all non-European civilizations; the "leftwing" branch worked towards a "universal culture" covering *all* national cultures. Like Spengler and Toynbee, like the Kyoto School and Japanese culturalists, the Eurasianists excelled in oppositions of East vs. West. This makes them somehow old-fashioned. They appear even more old-fashioned when one considers the proximity that their writings manifest with the analyses of Sir Halford John Mackinder, a British geographer who wrote in 1904 an essay entitled "The Geographical Pivot of History." Mackinder suggests that the control of Eastern Europe is vital to anyone who wants to control the world. He bases his hypothesis on reflections that have become classical since: "Who rules East Europe

commands the Heartland. Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island. Who rules the World-Island commands the world."[4] According to Mackinder, the Eurasian heartland is a supercontinent contained by the Volga and Yangtze rivers, the Arctic, and the Himalayas.

Trubetzkoy's writings have an eminently culturological aspect.[5] The paradoxical combination of East-West antagonisms and a Eurasian sphere based on cultural convergence shows best perhaps that "Eurasianism is a new quality rather than merely a new configuration of well-known ideas" (Slavomir Mazurek).[6] Many ideas are well known, but they acquire a new quality in the way they are presented. Here Eurasianism comes closest to Pan-Asianism which was, as stated Vladimir Tikhinov, "rather an 'ideological tool' for advancing different sets of ideas than an independent ideology per se."[7]

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Notes:

1. "Evrasijstvo" in *Evrazijskij vremennik* Vol. 4 Berlin 1925, 7, note. The Eurasianists, as Savitzky insists, are not the first people who saw Eurasia as a third continent, but Russian geographers like V. I. Lapansky drew attention to the existence of an autonomous Eurasia in 1892 (6).

2. Cf. Sergei Glebov: "Science, Culture, and Empire: Eurasianism as a Modern Movement" in *Slavic & East European Information Resources* 4: 4, 16.

3. Cf. L. I. Novirkovka and I. I. Sisemskaja: *Россиа между Европой и Азией: Евразийский соблазн. Антологиа* (Moscow: Nauka, 1993), 13.

4. Sir Halford Mackinder: "The Geographical Pivot of History" in *Democratic Ideals and Reality* [1904] (New York: Norton, 1962), 213ff.

5. I am using this term not necessarily in the Russian sense as an identity-oriented humanistic research but in the German or American sense of Kulturwissenschaften or cultural turn coined in the 1960s. (In Russia culturology is an often compulsory part of university courses that largely replaces the teaching of dialectical materialism).

6. Slavomir Mazurek: "Russian Eurasianism—Historiosophy and Ideology" *Slavic and East European Thought* 54 1-2 March 2002, 120.

7. Vladimir Tikhinov: "Korea's First Encounter with Pan-Asianism Ideology," http://world.lib.ru/k/kim_o_i/n101.shtml.

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