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## **Central and East European Countryside and Agriculture from the Japanese Perspective\*\***

At Hokkaido University in Sapporo, Japan a research unit deals with interdisciplinary, comparative Slavic-Eurasian studies. The Slavic Research Centre (SRC) is the only academic research unit in Japan covering these issues in such a comprehensive way. The Centre came into being in 1953 – initially as a coordinating body of researchers on Slavic-Eurasian studies and since 1955 as the Slavic Institute which is a formal part of the Law Faculty. The unit became independent (within the university) in 1978 and in 1990 the Japanese Ministry of Education granted it the status of a national centre coordinating Slavic-Eurasian studies and research. The SRC academic activity covers a range of five themes concentrating on Russian studies, Siberian and Far Eastern studies, Central Eurasian studies, East European studies and Comparative studies.

Apart from the already mentioned research in the field of Slavic-Eurasian studies the SRC's main goal is also the exchange of views and information between specialists from Japan and other countries. Due to its high standard and interdisciplinary character, it is worth noting that the SRC organises international academic conferences twice a year and occasionally seminars and panel discussions.

The exchange of views, information and knowledge is also carried out through visiting scholars and fellowships: the Foreign Visitors' Fellowship Programme, Japanese Visiting Professors' Programme as well as the 21<sup>st</sup> Century COE Programme and the Foreign Visitors' Fellowship Programme.

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Although the centre's main goal is academic research, its educational activity carried out by SRC staff in Hokkaido University's various faculties is not insignificant – educating both at undergraduate and postgraduate level.

The SRC boasts the largest and most versatile collection of books, periodicals and research studies as well as microfilms and various materials concerning Slavic and Eurasian issues in Japan and also possibly within that longitude.

The forum of dialogue and exchange of ideas and information between Japanese and Slavic academics is an English and Russian annual periodical *Acta Slavica Iaponica* which has been coming out since 1983. Once a year the SRC also publishes its oldest daily *Suravu Kenkyu* (Slavic Studies) which unfortunately only exists in Japanese. Interesting publications which are the result of conferences organised by the centre come out in English with one exception published in Russian.<sup>1</sup>

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Among the many post-conference materials covering issues such as “The Construction and Deconstruction of National Histories in Slavic Eurasia” or “Slavic Eurasia's Integration into the World Economy and Community” there is a particularly interesting book concerning transformation and diversification of rural communities in the countries of Eastern Europe and Russia. The book is the result of a summer symposium organised by the SRC from 11 to 14 July, 2001: *Transformation and Diversification of Rural Societies in Eastern Europe and Russia*, concerning the wide interdisciplinary analyses of directions and results of changes in the modern countryside in the above mentioned countries. As Ieda Osamu, the book's editor points out in the introduction, rural communities in Russia and the countries of Eastern Europe have a “common” history – in their most recent history they experienced many profound changes – from the granting of freeholds to the peasants, agrarian reforms, collectivisation, decollectivisation and privatisation, to the changes adapting to EU requirements and standards. Hence, twelve papers in the already mentioned publication, although accentuating various aspects of the analysed issue, openly and thoughtfully refer to those “common” historical experiences.

The first chapter “Rural Russia in Historical Perspective” is an attempt at emphasising the historical perspective for current change in Russia's rural areas and communities. Ilya Gerasimov brings the reader closer to understanding the less known history of rural Russia – the modernisation campaign which representatives of the Russian intelligentsia tried to carry

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<sup>1</sup> The publications are available on the SRC website:  
<http://src-h.slav.hokudai.ac.jp/index-e.html>

out between 1907 and 1917 (A Little-Known Project of Public Modernisation of the Russian Countryside: The New Generation of Russian Intelligentsia and the New Peasantry, 1907–1917). The author points to the failure of many government campaigns of Russian and then Soviet rural and agricultural modernisation as being the reasons for the advancing socio-economic and cultural isolation of the countryside. He thus brings the reader closer to the efforts of the Russian intelligentsia – agronomists, economists, voluntary workers, teachers, aiming towards the modernisation of the countryside and agriculture. Ilya Gerasimov underlines the differences between their plans and action, defining them as public and government plans and activity (administrative and bureaucratic plans). For public plans, created separately from ideological slogans were based on social agreement and constant social dialogue. The author sees the results of public plans which were implemented mainly in the changes which occurred in the mentality and way of thinking of many rural inhabitants. These are not quantitative changes which can be calculated in the percentage of those working in the Russian countryside, those who achieved considerable change in their legal status or ownership, it is thus difficult to evaluate the efforts of the reformers.<sup>2</sup>

The Russian peasant mentality and way of thinking were analysed by the author of the following article entitled “Customary Law as a reflection of the legal Consciousness of the Russian Peasant.” Yoshida Hiroshi describes many Russian regional customs by analysing documents, making use of former judicial decisions on controversial issues concerning ownership (inheritance, the division of property of family estates) in the Moscow region. The author analyses local customs, common law and how it functioned throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the mentality of the Russian peasant, how it manifested itself in his actions and the influence it had on the adaptation of Russian peasants to legal and socio-economic changes.

Zemphira Kalugina gives an outline of the situation of the current Russian agrarian sector, directions of change and their social consequences, whereas David O’Brien and Valeri Patsiorkovski analyse the changes in the income and employment structure in rural family households. Both articles constitute the second chapter concerning issues of the current transforming Russian countryside (Rural Russia in Transformation).

Zemphira Kalugina (Rural Transformation in Russia: Inconsistencies and Results) presenting concepts and consequences of the transformation of agriculture in Russia and analysing the current situation in the Russian agrarian sector reaches a conclusion about the paradoxes of agrarian reform: expansion of small commodity production, inefficiency of agrarian

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<sup>2</sup> It is difficult to evaluate the work of the intelligentsia since their relatively short period of activity was interrupted by the 1st World War and revolutionary “ferment.”

economy "capitalisation," destroying work motivation, utter poverty of the rural population and degradation of the rural social sphere. The author presents possibilities of getting out of this deadlock. One of the more interesting proposals is abandoning efforts aimed at eradicating "anticapitalism" from the mentality of the rural population – a collective way of thinking and acting, attitudes which according to the Russian reformers block the "creative power of reform." Zempira Kalugina suggests a model of transformation of the Russian countryside which would be based on a system of values of the rural population and particularly their deeply rooted feeling of collective solidarity.<sup>3</sup>

Another result of the structural changes in the countryside are the growing differences in the capital of rural households. David O'Brien and Valeri Patsiorkovski draw attention to the changes in the employment structure and consequently the diversification of family incomes in the Russian countryside. The authors of the article *Household Capital and Structural Change in Employment and Income in Rural Russia from 1991 to 1999* in their considerations about the success or failure of rural households, use empirical data from six longitudinal studies carried out in different Russian regions between 1991 and 1999. They carry out analyses of empirical data on two levels – the first aiming at the identification of institutional changes emerging locally and global, incremental, long-term tendencies in economic behaviour. The second level is a revision of the differences between households and specific villages with references to their ability to take advantage of new opportunities – entrepreneurship.

Considerations on the possibilities of developing a capitalist form of farming in present-day Russia (chapter III – "Re-Thinking on Russian Agricultural Development") appear in the following two articles – "Kondrat'ev's View of Russian Agricultural Development: A Preliminary Note" by Kojima Shuichi and in Yamamura Rihito's "A New Phase of Post-Socialist Structural Change in Russian Agriculture."

According to Kojima Shuichi, in their search for a transformation model, current Russian academics turn to less or better known history. Making use of earlier experiences, they analyse the work and achievement of economists forgotten during the Soviet era. The author of the above article is convinced that representatives of the Russian intelligentsia played a considerable role in the development of agrarian theory and practice. The most advanced and best documented studies as well as theoretical dissertations concerning the problems of the peasant economy during the period from 1880 to 1930 were written by Russians. One of the forgotten and most significant specialists is N. D. Kondratiev who had great influence on agri-

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<sup>3</sup> The author proposes the integration of collective and individual initiative – autonomous farms.

cultural theory and policy in the early 1920s. According to Shuichi N. D. Kondratiev's view, emphasising private enterprise in agriculture can be taken into consideration in current studies on entrepreneurship in Russia and is adequate in the context of research of the emerging Russian market.

The article by Yamamura Rihito consists of two parts: in one of them the author presents a comparative view of the general trends in agriculture in post-socialist countries, whereas in the second he presents changes in the private sector of Russian agriculture (in this part his conclusions are based on field research and many other available statistical data). As Yamamura Rihito emphasises, the aim of this part of the article is not a wide review and analysis of all the changes taking place in the Russian structure of agriculture. That is why he concentrates on selected aspects of the problem which interest him with particular consideration given to changes in the private agricultural sector. The author notices the fall in number of small and medium-sized family farms and the growth in significance (alongside the numerical growth) of large "capitalist" forms of farming (most properties being on lease).

In the fourth chapter – "Diversification of Agriculture in Eastern Europe" the authors raise the issue of structural changes in agriculture in East European countries, particularly Polish and Slovak agriculture. Yoshino Etsuo discusses the state and conditions of Polish family farms ("Polish Agriculture: Present and Future – Polarisation Process of the Family Farm in Poland"). The author uses GUS (Central Statistical Office) and IERiGZ statistical data from the second half of the nineties. Pointing to the polarisation of family farms in Poland, localising the reasons for the crisis<sup>4</sup> affecting many of them (stemming from the change in demand for farm produce), Yoshino Etsuo presents the possibilities of solving problems of family farms – government subsidies and low interest bank loans for capital investment and land purchase by private farmers. The author's idea considers excluding those farmers least capable of managing in the new economic circumstances from subsidies and preferential loans. Being aware of the consequences of such a move – the likely growth of poverty in rural areas in Poland, Yoshino Etsuo suggests compensating these "inefficient people" by the redistribution of social income (in the name of social justice and prosperity).

"Is the Completion of Agricultural Reforms in Central and Eastern European Countries Conditional on a Move to Family Farming?" is the next article in the fourth chapter. Using the Slovak example, its author – Gejza Blaas tries to answer the question about the legitimacy of agricultural reform in Central and East European countries depending on the develop-

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<sup>4</sup> Considerable changes have occurred since Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004.

ment of family farming. He also points out the significance of historical heritage in the process of change in rural societies in post-socialist countries. In other words, common historical heritage (mainly collectivisation) largely defines the directions of change in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe and Russia. With the exception of Poland, in each of these countries a dual agricultural structure is emerging, consisting of private family farms (generally small) and large agricultural enterprises. The author argues that the large agricultural enterprises which often cope well in the new market conditions in the agricultural sector of countries such as Slovakia, the Czech Republic, Hungary and Russia have a numerical and economic advantage (at the expense of small private family farms). Referring to Slovakia Gejza Blaas describes these enterprises as the winners of transformation. That is why it is not without cause that he calls for a revision of the former direction of agricultural reforms aimed towards the development and support of private family-style farming.

In the fifth chapter Idea Osamu and Katalin Kovacs present the state and consequences of structural changes in rural Hungary – “Structural Change in Rural Hungary.” In his article “The Re-transformation of Cooperative Farming and Rural Society in Hungary: Dual Leadership of Integration in Agricultural Production” Ieda Osamu broaches the issue of integration of agricultural production. In the concentration of ownership and large-scale agricultural production in Hungary, he sees not only a certain economic dominance over the peasant but also the hierarchical transformation of rural society – an opportunity for private family farming. He points out the significance of the emergence in Hungary of dual leadership among rural leaders who by efficiently integrating and managing large-scale farms are capable of leading and activating Hungarian peasants towards change.

Katalin Kovacs sees the situation and opportunities for family farming rather less optimistically in her article “Agricultural Restructuring in Hungary and its Social Impacts.” She presents a retrospective view of changes which have occurred with privatisation in Hungarian agriculture while also outlining its current state together with the social consequences of transformation; she analyses the advantages and disadvantages of these changes. According to the author, the changes in ownership structure (concentration and diversification) and changes in organisational structure lead to many social problems – the most severe being the growing pauperisation of small family farms. Hence the apparent legitimacy of the author’s suggestion that the solution to these problems cannot only be the further development of the agricultural sector. Katalin Kovacs detects opportunities for the impoverished rural communities in non-agricultural investment in rural areas.

Issues connected with the adaptation of rural areas in Central and Eastern Europe to EU requirements (immediately prior to entering its political and economic structures) are raised in the sixth and final chapter

entitled "Rural Enlargement towards East and West" by Tomas Doucha and Klaus Froberg together with Steffen Abele. Tomas Doucha describes and ponders on rural and agricultural development in the Czech Republic ("Agriculture and Rural Development in the Czech Republic"), while Klaus Froberg and Steffen Abele present EU aid programmes and point out the causes of problems connected with their implementation in candidate countries in 2001. ("The Rural Economies in the EU Accession Countries: Do EU Agricultural and Structural Policies Need to be Adjusted?") According to Tomas Doucha, an important factor and opportunity for rural development in the Czech Republic (and in other East and Central European countries) is EU aid and support, which stimulate the activity of rural inhabitants and their entrepreneurship as well as being an important driving force in creating many essential institutional changes. Hence the lack of specialised organisations, institutions capable of implementing many EU programmes is one of the main obstacles in the development of rural areas in the countries under discussion (Klaus Froberg's and Steffen Abele's article).

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A review of the contents of the analysed publication of the Slavic Research Centre clearly shows that privatisation, transformation of the production system and also in the rationality of functioning of rural society are central problems concentrating the attention of an international team of authors, many of whom – let us add – have also for years been published by *Eastern European Countryside*.

From the considerations of the authors writing in this publication a not entirely innovative conclusion can be drawn that due to privatisation a dual agricultural structure is taking shape in East European countries and Russia with the exception of Poland. It consists of numerically and economically dominant large agricultural enterprises and very often small family farms which have difficulty coping in the free market environment. Despite certain doubts as to the originality of this type of thesis, there is no doubt as to many new topics which are important in the discussion concerning the state, direction and results of changes in the rural areas of post-socialist countries. It is worth underlining that in many articles, beside a diagnosis and description of the situation, there is also an attempt to outline the structure of agriculture and shape and condition of rural communities in the future. I would also like to draw the reader's attention to proposals of solving the main economic and social problems in rural areas.

It is curious that almost half of this publication is devoted to issues concerning historical experiences and topics connected with the current transformation process in rural Russia, which was not dictated by the

subject matter adopted during the conference.<sup>5</sup> Common historical experience is a certain justification for such a construction of the book (unfortunately this is mere conjecture on my part since I was unable to find an explanation of this fact on any page). In this context collectivisation seems the most adequate issue, since soviet collectivisation introduced in the Soviet Union was considered as the binding example for countries in the communist bloc (Kominform decisions about the uniform example of rural collectivisation). Hence discussions about the past and also present structural changes of the Russian countryside can be a reference point for many analyses presented in this book.

This is a composite book and it is therefore difficult to find a centre line putting order and integrating the raised issues (apart from the widely understood issue of transformation and diversification of rural communities in these countries which do not concern three articles in the book). That role may be fulfilled by the common historical heritage which many of the authors directly refer to. At this point it is worth agreeing with the suggestion of those authors who are convinced that reflections concerning the state, conditions and trends of current changes in the countryside of post-communist countries, should be carried out with reference to not only the specifics of a given country but also with reference to the wider geopolitical historical context.

Those common historical experiences which are the basis for analysing similarities and dissimilarities in the current economic and social development in the mentioned countries are interesting for many readers.

The rural communities of the former socialist bloc discussed in *Transformation and Diversification of Rural Societies in Eastern Europe and Russia* are till this day battling with the consequences of the idea of rural and agricultural development, based on Marxist socio-economic doctrine which assumed its marginal role in the process of socio-economic changes. The policy carried out according to such a doctrine led to the negligence of agriculture in the country's general development, political and economic discrimination of the countryside (private farms in particular) and to the fact that the current state of agriculture in the mentioned countries stands out for its relatively low level of economic and technological development compared with other sectors of the economy.

One of the most drastic changes which affected this sector of the economy in the Communist countries was getting rid of the kulaks, collec-

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<sup>5</sup> Being aware of the fact that the structure of the book under discussion depends on the topics of papers presented at the conference (cf. *Programme of the Symposium*, Ieda Osamu 2002 (ed.), *Transformation and Diversification of Rural Societies in Eastern Europe and Russia*, Slavic Research Centre, Hokkaido University, Sapporo, Japan, p. 343) the question on the legitimacy of allocating so much space to the transformation of the Russian countryside remains open.



tivisation of agriculture and the eradication of the peasant strata which in accordance with the binding socio-economic doctrine and political tendencies of the time were a threat to the new social order.<sup>6</sup> Few concessions by the state in favour of private ownership were the effect of growing social tensions leading to deep political crises.<sup>7</sup> The collectivisation process took on a slightly different shape in each of the mentioned countries of Central and Eastern Europe – the soviet model with all its mechanisms and institutions did not however fully catch on in any of them.<sup>8</sup> Taking into consideration those countries under discussion in the mentioned book, the Czech model of rural collectivisation, where agriculture mainly relied on the collective sector (most arable land belonged to it) was closest to the soviet model. Collective farms were well supplied and highly subsidised, whereas the private sector, consisting mainly of allotments and small private farms was of a rather residual character.

The Hungarian model was based on the specific and rare cooperation between private and collective agricultural structures, which were not in competition with one another. Although large state and collective farms were the most significant in Hungarian agriculture, they were complemented by private farms. Although these were fragmented and small in size they were an important and profitable link in general food production.

Collectivisation in Poland did not bring expected results. In 1956 the Polish government abandoned the idea of introducing direct soviet collectivisation since it had given rise to Polish peasant resistance. Hence in the structure of Polish agriculture there were mainly small and medium-sized peasant farms as well as privileged, well equipped large yet unproductive state farms. Fragmented private property which acted in competition to state property was in many ways restricted by the authorities (mainly by far-reaching interventionism and by hindering the buying and selling of land and agricultural equipment) became dominant. It was an essential complement to the economy of shortages in Poland.

As a conclusion I would like to mention that *Transformation and Diversification of Rural Societies in Eastern Europe and Russia* is a good example of the interdisciplinary character of topics that the SRC deals with and an example of dialogue, exchange of ideas between academics in Japan and other countries.

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<sup>6</sup> Collectivisation is of course only one of the aspects of the already mentioned common historical heritage.

<sup>7</sup> The example of Poland in 1981, when private ownership in agriculture became considered a permanent aspect of the socialist economy.

<sup>8</sup> Halamska, M., 1996; Swain, N., 1998, pp. 267–284.

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