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Neo-Narodniks’ View of the Russian Agricultural Development*

Shuichi Kojima

1. Introduction

Studies of Russian peasant economy indicate that before the collectivization of agriculture Russia was among the world’s most advanced countries on the rural studies. As D. Thorner, B. Kerblay and R.E.F. Smith have pointed out, “probably the most sophisticated and best documented studies of the theory and problems of peasant economy in the half-century from 1880 to 1930 were written by Russians.”

These Russian scholars have contributed many studies of rural economy, and Russia has produced a number of eminent agricultural economists and rural sociologists in the early twentieth century. The leading figures among them were the agricultural specialists called neo-narodniki. Most of them remained in Russia after the October Revolution and continued to play an influential role in the front rank of rural studies in the 1920s.

During the era of collectivization, however, neo-narodnik scholars suddenly disappeared together with the peasant economy and commune that they had studied. Since then the works of neo-narodniks have been disregarded until recent times not only in the Soviet Union but also in the Western countries.

This essay is devoted to a consideration of neo-narodniks’ view of the Russian agricultural development in order to approach the structure of traditional rural society in Russia which confronted the Soviet government after the revolution. Neo-narodniks’ view is very important because of the fact that they were the experts most familiar with the rural realities in those days, and of the fact that some of the insights which recent studies on Russian rural history obtained were already seen in their works.

The narodnik movement, as widely known, was actually revived in various guises at the beginning of this century. The representative of this revival in the political field was the Socialist-Revolutionary Party organized in 1901. But new approaches to narodnik rural studies as distinguished from political movement are also not to be overlooked. In this essay the term “neo-narodnik” is understood in the latter sense, denoting the agricultural specialists representing these new approaches. The main problems with which they were grappling in those days were the theoretical explanation for the “vitality of peasant economy” and the elaborate plan for restructuring Russian agriculture based upon the network of cooperatives. But it is clear that they showed the deepest interest in the former problem, through the examination of which they attempted to provide systematic explanations of Russian rural realities.

It was on this point that neo-narodniki showed original and keen insights into the structure of traditional rural society in Russia based on the manner of peasant thought.

Dealing with the three representative neo-narodniki, K.R. Kachorovskii, N.P. Oganovskii, and A.V. Chaianov in the following, I focus on the way they approached the problem of the “vitality of peasant economy.” Their basic view of the
Russian agricultural development would become clear through this examination.

2. Peasant Commune and Customary Law—K.R.Kachorovskii

As well known, the study of the Russian peasant commune has a long history and appeared in various fields, but so far as the research of the existing commune was concerned, it flourished around the turn of century. During this short period (1890-1910) the most comprehensive monographs on the Russian commune, which summarized and systematized the results of previous studies, were published one after another. As examples may be cited V.P.Vorontsov, Krest'ianskaia obshchina (Moscow, 1892), A.A.Karelin, Obschinnoe vladenie (St.Petersburg, 1893), W.G.Simkhowitsch, Die Feldgemeinschaft in Rußland (Jena, 1898), K.R.Kachorovskii, Russkaia obshchina (St.Petersburg, 1900), A.A.Tschuprow, Die Feldgemeinschaft (Strassburg, 1902) and A.A.Kaufman, Russkaia obshchina v protsesse ee zarozhdeniia i rosta (Moscow, 1908).

Among these notable works, Kachorovskii’s study is now cited as “the best of the Russian studies on commune.” He is also known to have assembled what is probably the most extensive personal collection of materials relating to the commune, and to have organized and led the group of scholars studying the commune, the so-called Kachorovskii School.

Kachorovskii (1870-?) found the prototype of communal peasantry in the state peasants (the peasants settled in Siberia and the state peasants in European Russia after the emancipation of serfs) which “the intelligentsia had hardly looked at.” He tried to explain the formation and development of the commune primarily from the shortage of land created by population growth. Such an explanation is inseparably connected with his another hypothesis called “geographical history,” according to which the geographical type of commune was seen to vary from thinly populated Siberia to the densely populated western part of Russia as though it corresponded to the stages of historical development of commune. To use Kachorovskii’s words, “the geographical arrangement of the communal forms corresponds to the pattern of their historical development.” This hypothesis, however, can be seen also in the works of other neo-narodniki, such as N.P.Oganovskii and A.N.Chelintsev, and is shown to have originated with Chernyshevskii. Concerning the demographic explanation for the development of the commune, A.A.Kaufman was also engaged then in the study of Siberian communes from the same viewpoint as well.

What emerged as the most important and probably the most original contribution of Kachorovskii was his explanation of how the agreement on the redistribution of land was reached among the peasants. The ground and process of this agreement was his main concern.

A conflict of interests between wealthy and poor peasants, according to Kachorovskii, usually appeared as an ideological confrontation of different “right consciousness” (pravosoznanie) to land. For this reason he began to study the peasant customary law and to analyze the Russian peasants’ relationship to legal right in landholding.

Based chiefly on case studies of peasants who settled in Siberia, Kachorovskii regarded the ideological confrontation mentioned above as that between the “right of labor” (pravo na trud) and the “right to labor” (pravo truda), and explained the dynamics peculiar to the peasant commune from this point of view. The term “right of labor” was used in the sense of the right of the laborer, derived from his spent labor, for the product and land. The land held by those old peasant families who had settled at an earlier period was usually based on this right. On the other hand, the
term “right to land” defined by Kachorovskii meant the right, which originated in the right to life, to acquire consumer goods by self-labor, that is, the right to means of production and usually to land in rural Russia. This right served as the basis for supporting demand for land by those new peasant families who had just settled or appeared as a result of the partitioning of older families.28

Since the laboring unit was normally a peasant family in Russia, according to Kachorovskii, the “right of labor” was individualistic by nature, and showed the tendency to strengthen the “spirit of proprietor” (sobstvennicheskii dukh)29, to break up the commune and in the end to prepare the transition to the individual ownership of land. On the contrary, it is impossible to consider the “right to labor” apart from some land organization or collective ownership of land, as this right contains the means of securing opportunity for labor, that is, securing the distribution or use of land. Since the commune had generally played such a role in Russia, Kachorovskii called this “right to labor” the “spirit of the commune” (obshchinnyi dukh).30

It be admitted, however, that the idea of “right to labor” prevailed throughout Russia, the distribution of land has to be carried out ultimately on a broad national scale. Only the state can carry out such a significant plan. Therefore, although the “right of labor” tends to negate the existing commune on an individual basis, the “right to labor” tends to undermine the commune from the more collectivistic standpoint. In such a way Kachorovskii described the peasant commune as an unstable institution that existed between the peasant family and the state using the two concepts of peasant customary law.

Thus such a troika as state, commune, and peasant family, namely, the three-layered structure of landholding, in Kachorovskii’s view, constituted the foundation of the landholding system not only in developing Siberia but also throughout Russian territory, that which came from the long history of peasant settlement in state-owned land and from the tradition of land allotment there. Out of this peasant concept of State dominance over the land, which Kachorovskii called the “state-allotment landholding” (gosudarstvennoe nadel’noe zemlevladenie)32, the claim of land allotment by state for guaranteeing the right to life had been repeatedly laid by Russian peasantry. Hence he regarded the peasant land revolution from 1917 to 1918 and the nationalization of land as the landmark that had finally established this “State-allotment landholding.” To Kachorovskii, therefore, the Russian Revolution signified not the transition to some new social system, but the restoration of the old institution, which had been invaded by tsarist government’s policy of modernization. For this very reason he called the Russian Revolution a “conservative” revolution.


N.P.Oganovskii34 (1874-1930) belonged to the so-called Kachorovskii School of commune study at the beginning of this century. But there was a significant difference between their viewpoints. Though Kachorovskii, as previously stated, was concerned primarily with the customary law inherent in the contemporary Russian commune, Oganovskii was known as an expert in Russian agricultural history including the affairs of commune. Absorbed in this study of agricultural history, he was constructing an original theory of “agricultural evolution,” which one could recognize as the most systematic theory of agricultural development to emerge from the neo-narodnik viewpoint.35

Oganovskii’s theory is presented in his magnum opus entitled Law of Agricultural
Evolution (3 vols., 1909-1914), where he compares the noncapitalistic development of agriculture ("agricultural evolution") with the capitalistic development of industry ("industrial evolution"), and explains the "vitality of peasant economy" within this framework.

He claimed that the social relations based on the market economy and industrial production were implicitly taken for granted in the Western "political economy," and that agriculture was organized and managed by principles different from those of industry, so agricultural studies should be established as a separate discipline independent of "political economy." Oganivskii, who called this discipline "economics of agriculture" (ekonomiia sel'skogo khoziaistva) or "agricultural theory" (agrarnaia teoriia), attempted to systematize it through his analysis of "agricultural evolution."

Oganovskii’s "agricultural evolution" consisted of both the "evolution of agricultural production" and the "evolution of land distribution." The former was taken to be "the decisive factor" in the long run. But the latter, "evolution of land distribution" was also considered to have an original, "complex and complicated mechanism," since landholding had been firmly linked to the political power. The discrepancy and tension between both of these evolutions was for Oganovskii the very essence of the so-called agricultural problem. That was why he found the solution to this problem in the adaptation of the form of landholding to the "evolution of agricultural production."

Based on such a hypothesis, Oganovskii gave the following account on the "agricultural evolution." First, concerning the "evolution of agricultural production," population growth was taken as the independent variable, which was a major factor in determining the course of this evolution: population growth brings about the increasing demand for agricultural products and creates serious pressure on the land, forcing the peasantry to try to heighten land productivity in reaction to this process. Such an intensification of farming, according to him, was fundamentally a common process in both Western Europe and Russia, but it was progressing more rapidly in Russia, the agrarian country that had experienced an "extraordinarily rapid increase of population" after the emancipation of serfs and had significantly fewer "exits" through emigration overseas and to industrial towns.

In the second place, regarding the "evolution of land distribution," Oganovskii found in its early stages the transition from the original individual occupation of land to the individual landholding and even the differentiation of landholding with the population growth. But since Russia, in his opinion, could hold sustain the "economic and political autonomy of commune" to a certain degree, the increasing differentiation of landholding was checked by the commune and the land redistribution took place spontaneously within it. In particular the rapid increase of population after the emancipation had caused the further leveling of land within the commune and produced many labor-intensive family farms of small size.

The question that naturally arises, therefore, is this: what was the relationship between such communal peasants and need to intensify farming through the "evolution of agricultural production?" Oganovskii’s answer was that the "middle-sized cooperative farm" organized by those labor-intensive peasants would be the most ideal one, as it would reconcile the most intensive with the most profitable. He judged that it would be much easier to establish such cooperatives in the agricultural production in Russia than in Western Europe, since the right of landholding still remained primarily in the commune there. Thus the prevailing small peasant farm to Oganovskii never meant the abnormal phenomenon derived from the stagnation of
productive force, which P. Maslov conceived, but the normal one corresponding to the "law of agricultural evolution." Moreover, he considered that the Russian agricultural development with the autonomous commune and with few means to relieve the population pressure was "pure" and even more advanced than that of Western Europe in the light of this universally valid "law." It is noteworthy here that this neo-narodnik described Russia as representing the universal aspect of development in agriculture, although the nineteenth-century narodniks had usually conceived the Russian development as a special type of development and assumed implicitly the Western universal development as well as the backwardness of Russia.

4. Peasant Economy as a Non-Capitalist Economic Organization—A.V.Chaianov

At the same time that Oganovskii wrote his *magnum opus*, there appeared a group of scholars who approached the problem of the "vitality of peasant economy" through study of the organization of peasant farm. This was the "Organization and Production School" represented by A.V.Chaianov (1888-1939), A.N.Chelintsev (1874-1962) and N.P.Makarov(1887-?). The significance of this school for Russian rural studies lies in the fact that it made a generalization of various orientations and streams of the study in peasant economy, such as the academic agricultural economics and the zemstvo statistics. These orientations, though very interesting, are not discussed here. The following discussion, which is focused on the leading scholar of this school, Chaianov, deals only with the scheme in which he treated the problem of the "vitality of peasant economy."

From his own fieldwork on peasant farms, Chaianov recognized that the peasant economy was built on an original "organizational basis" which was different from that of capitalist enterprise. His main concern lay in the analysis of this "organizational basis."

In Chaianov’s opinion, the "organizational basis" of peasant economy consisted in the use of family labor to satisfy the consumption-needs of the peasant family. The peasant behavior is to be explained by the so-called subjective equilibrium between the disutility of labor and the utility of consumption, namely, "labor-consumer balance." But both the consumption-needs and the self-labor of the peasant depend upon the size and composition of his family, which also constantly varies according to its life cycle. Therefore, the economic behavior of a peasant farm shows its own peculiar dynamics that basically arise from demographic factors. Thus, in the national economy where the peasant farms are dominant, there emerged what one might call peasant price system concerning such categories as the price of agricultural products, rent, and land price, and this price system tends to regulate the dynamics of macro economy. Such was Chaianov’s view. He paid particular attention to the fact that this price system exerted a strong influence on the general level of rent and land price. It was his basic recognition that because of the "labor-consumer balance" of innumerable peasant farms, most of the lands had been transferred de facto into the hands of peasants through the market mechanism. So he considered that the peasant farms were making inroads on the capitalist farms in Russia.

If the life cycle of the family is of vital importance for the size of the family farm, the size of area it works has to be proportionate to the size of family. If this is so, then the distribution of land needs to be changed constantly to conform to the demographic factors of each peasant farm. Chaianov found such "flexible" land organization in the Russian rural society with the periodic redistribution of land as well as the tradi-
tion of inheritance by equal distribution. This was why he sought the prototype of peasant economy in the economic behavior of Russian peasantry, on whose studies he tried to provide a general theory of peasant farms. It was on this point that he was most confronted with those German agricultural economists who stressed the peculiarities of the Russian peasantry. In this interpretation of Chaianov we might see the same orientation as Oganovskii’s in his seeking the universal model in Russian agricultural development.

It should also be noted that Chaianov’s study of peasant economy was proceeded by a grand conception. He defined his work on the peasant farm with non-capitalist “organizational basis” as a “theory of peasant economy” definitely distinguished from the prevailing “modern national economics” clearly with the capitalist enterprise. Moreover, he tried to construct the comparative economics covering various economic systems in term of this “organizational basis,” thereby seeking the “future of economic theory.”

In Chaianov’s comparative economics, so-called economizing principle was held to work in the foundations of economic systems. This “most general principle” manifests itself in the diverse “outer layers” (nasloenie), that is, the concepts of profitability or the forms of “net income,” such as rent and family labor income, according to each economic system. To clarify their calculation formulas and the categories necessary for them was the method he took. We might accordingly say that Chaianov’s comparative economics in fact consisted of comparative economic calculations of various economic units representing the economic system rather than structural analyses of economic systems.

Chaianov, who defined all economies without wage labor as non-capitalist economic systems, examined family economy, slave economy, quitrent serf economy, feudal system and communism as the “main types.” What is of great importance here is that the family economy represented by peasant economy was held not only to build the family economic system as an Idéaltypus, but also to prevail as the basis of any society prior to capitalism. Such an idea was clearly reflected in his words that the “classical homo economicus often does not sit in the entrepreneur’s chair, but is the organizer of family production” before capitalism. Besides, there is no doubt that he conceived the working principle of communist economy by analogy with that of the natural peasant farms. So we can say that the implications of Chaianov’s comparative economics consisted in showing the historical omnipresence of peasant economy on the one hand but also in finding the working principle similar to peasant economy in the economic system where it completely disappeared on the other. As already stated the prototype of such a peasant economy for him was a Russian one.

5. Concluding Remarks

We have examined the basic approaches to Russian rural society by three leading neo-narodniki: Kachorovskii, Oganovskii, and Chaianov. But even they do not represent all of the various neo-narodnik attitudes in rural studies. The works of other neo-narodniki, such as V. M. Chernov, N. N. Sukhanov, A. V. Peshekhonov, N. N. Chernenkov, and P. A. Vikhliaev, should not be overlooked. In addition, neo-narodnik rural studies covered not only the basic view discussed here, but also statistical surveys of peasant farms, policy-making for agricultural reform, etc. This essay, therefore, is only a preliminary survey of three views by neo-narodniki. But at least to a limited extent, we can construct from this preliminary sketch a basic neo-narodnik
Almost all the neo-narodniks agreed upon the demographic point of view. The rapid increase of rural population after the emancipation of serfs in 1861 and the immigration to such frontier areas as Siberia constituted their common starting point of discussion. But there were also differences in emphasis among them. Kachorovskii's main concern was to show how the shortage of land and struggle for land, which was brought about by such a rapid population growth, produced the land leveling in the condition of communal landholding. His contribution was to provide a systematic, though tentative, explanation for the formation and development of periodic redistribution of land by studying the customary right, which moved peasants to demand equal distribution of land. Oganovskii, however, was primarily interested in the problem of how the farming system would correspond to the expanding demand for foods, which originated from the population growth, and found a means of promoting the intensification of agricultural production in the peasant-organized cooperatives. Finally, Chaianov's work sought to examine the adaptation behavior of the individual family farm to the process of "agricultural evolution" by analysing the mechanism of "labor-consumer balance." But it was the perspective of his school that the peasantry would not only passively adapt, but would also regulate the movement of Russia's national economy, as seen in the land concentration in peasant farms.

Though these three neo-narodniks presented different explanations for the problem of the "vitality of peasant economy," they turned out to be not incompatible, but complementary as far as the interpretation of Russian agricultural development was concerned. What is remarkable is that such a perception was also shared by a contemporary notable liberal economist, L.N.Litoshenko, who foresaw the coming of "a colossal peasant state" in Russia based on his analysis of landholding just before the Revolution. He was very negative in his appraisal of it, however, and passed judgment that the overpopulation of rural Russia would finally lead to a "dead end," "China's destiny." A recent Japanese study on Russian economic history has likewise shown the mechanism, in which the communal order peculiar to the Russian rural society had accelerated the population growth and produced a perpetual shortage of land. The significance of neo-narodnik notions has been pointed out by T. Shanin and M. Lewin as well. There would be no room for doubt that the neo-narodnik medel examined above is of great significance to the study of Russian rural history prior to the collectivization as a working hypothesis.

Notes


2 It is not clear who first used this word. But since L.N.Litoshenko called the viewpoint of Chaianov's school "neonarodnichestvo," the use of this word became widespread.


4 These scholars, who have been neglected since the 1930s, have restored their honor this year (1987) in the Soviet Union. For Soviet historians' remarks about this rehabilitation, see “Vozvrashchenie: Reabilitirovana gruppa uchenykh,” *Moskovskie novosti*, No.33, August 16, 1987.


10 This neo-narodnik plan exerted a strong influence on the controversy over Soviet rural in-


15 Yasuda: 410. Kaufman called Kachorovskii “one of the men most familiar with the economic condition and land order of Russian peasantry.” Kaufman: 205.

16 A.A.Kaufman, “Sel’skaiia pozemel’naiia obshchina,” *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar’ Granat* 38 (1922): 75. Kachorovskii, ed., *Bor’va za zemliu* (St. Petersburg, 1908) was a joint research of this “school.”


18 Kachorovskii, “Krest’ianstvo i intelligentsiia”: 205. According to him, the state peasants including the cossacks, constituted the majority in peasant population and in landholding. See ibid.: 203-204.


24 C.Goehrke called this viewpoint “economic” theory and stated that many economic historians had been in the same position. Goehrke: 178.
27 See ibid.: 163-166.
30 Ibid.: 179.
32 Kachorovskii, "Obobshchestvenie sel'skogo khoziaistva v Rossii": 189.
34 For his career, see Jasny: 204-206; *Novyi entsiklopedicheskii slovar*, 29 (1916): 230-231; *Entsiklopedicheskii slovar* Granat, 30: 488-489.
35 Oglovskii was called "one of the most eminent narodnik economists in this century." Schiffrin: 723.
38 Oglovskii, "Zakhvatnoe, kapitalisticheskoe i trudovoe zemledelie v Rossii": 105.
39 E. David, a German socialist agricultural economist who emphasized the difference between agriculture and industry, exerted a strong influence on Oglovskii in this respect. See Oglovskii, *Zakonomernost' agrarnoi evoliutsii*, ch.1: 111-112, 164.
41 Ibid.:211.
42 For example, see ibid.: 86, 176, 179-180. It is to be noted that E. Boserup's recent work, which "analyses the problem of agricultural progress in primitive communities from an entirely new angle" (N. Kaldor), provided a theory very similar to that of Oglovskii. See E. Boserup, *The Conditions of Agricultural Growth: The Economics of Agrarian Change under Population Pressure* (London, 1965).
46 See ibid.: 299-300; Oganovskii, "Zakhvatnoe, kapitalisticheskoe i trudovoe zemledelie v Rossii": 151-152, 163, 167, 169.
48 P. Maslov was the greatest opponent of Oganovskii in the debate. For his criticism of Maslov, see Oganovskii, *Zakonomernost' agrarnoi evoliutsii*, ch. 1: 39-110.
49 For the origin of the name of this school, see Makarov, *Krest'ianskaia khoziaistvo i ego evoliutsiia*:10-17. The detailed studies of this school can be found in Solomon's, and Figurovskia's works.
50 The Scientific-Research Institute for Agricultural Economics directed by Chaianov worked as a research center for peasant economy in the 1920s. Thus the Russian studies of peasant economy reached golden age in the early twenties. See A. Tschajanow, "Gegenwärtiger Stand der landwirtschaftlichen Ökonomik in Rußland," *Schmollers Jahrbuch*, 46, (1923): 110-116; and A. Tschayenoff, "Die neueste Entwicklung der Agrarökonomik in

For his detailed career, see B. Kerblay, "A.V.Chayanov: Life, Career, Works," Thorner et al.: xxv-bxxv. In Japan Chayanov’s works had been introduced and translated in the 1920s, since the peasant problem was the central issue among the Japanese agricultural economists in those days. The titles of his Japanese translations will be found in my bibliography, "Russische neo-narodniki."

51 Chaianov, Organizatsiia krest’ianskogo khoziaistva (Moscow, 1925): 16.

52 Ibid.: p.32.

53 See Tschayanoff, "Die neueste Entwicklung der Agrarökonomik in Rußland": 242; and Tschajanow, "Gegenwärtiger Stand der landwirtschaftlichen ökonomik in Rußland": 114.


55 See Chaianov, Organizatsiia krest’ianskogo khoziaistva: 33.


57 For example, see A.Skalweit, "Die Familienwirtschaft als Grundlage für ein System der Sozialökonomie," Weltwirtschaftliches Archiv, 20 (1924): 231-246.


59 Ibid.: 613.

60 See Tschayanoff, "Zur Frage einer Theorie der nichtkapitalistischen Wirtschaftssystem": 582-609.


65 L.N.Litoshenko, Evoliutsiiia i progress krest’ianskogo khoziaistva (Moscow, 1923): 46.
