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Author(s)	Nakada-Amiya, Mizuho
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Stefano Bianchini, *Eastern Europe and the Challenges of Modernity, 1800–2000* (London and New York: Routledge, 2015), 288 pp.

In this book, Stefano Bianchini, Professor of East European Politics and History at the University of Bologna, presents an overview of the political ideas that emerged in “Eastern Europe” in the 19th and 20th centuries.

“Eastern Europe” here denotes the wide territory “from the Elbe to the Ural Mountains, from the Baltic to the Aegean” (p. 38), namely, Russia, East-Central Europe, and the Balkans. In recent publications, researchers tend to concentrate their academic attention on one of these regions, considering the cultural or historical differences between them. Bianchini revitalizes the concept of “Eastern Europe,” reminding us of the existence of networks of ideas and movements there even in the 19th century and the first half of the 20th century.

What was the common concern that drove intellectuals and politicians in “Eastern Europe” for the cultivation of new political ideas? Bianchini points out that it was the backwardness of this area. To compensate the misfortune of the latecomer and to achieve modernization in ways different from those of Western Europe, heated debate on modernization continued for centuries and more. One idea was the *Narodnichestvo*, which aimed to “skip” the phase of capitalism and arrive at the socialist phase by transforming the traditional collective agricultural structures in Russia. *Narodnichestvo* found its supporters in Southeast Europe. The Slavophile alternative was the Romantic cousin of the *Narodnichestvo* and its democratic and egalitarian version was supported even among the Slavs in Cisleithania.

Thanks to the revolutions during and after WWI, these “ideas” seized chances to become official policy with agendas toward modernity in each country. The agrarian politicians acquired governing power in Central-Eastern Europe between the two world wars and they formed the “Green international” for mutual cooperation. In Soviet Russia, the Bolsheviks debated the role of peasants and agriculture for the construction of an industrialized socialist society. After WWII, the whole of “Eastern Europe” chose the socialist way towards modernization, although the Central-Eastern European and Balkan countries tried to raise the question of whether there should be plural development models in socialism. A serious dividing line appeared between market socialism and state socialism after Stalin’s death.

Bianchini successfully illuminates the importance of agrarian problems in the overall modernization of Eastern Europe. Premodern features of production in the agricultural sector inspired the ideas for the new way towards socialism. Debate on agricultural structure and the necessity for revolution among Japanese socialists is rooted in a similar concern. Ideas spread far beyond the East European borders. The relationship between agriculture and capitalism was another factor. Most of the ideas premised that agriculture should be exploited and the capital gained from agriculture invested into industries. The fate of agrarianism was doomed on the road to modernity. The development of cooperatives in East-Central Europe was an exceptional way for agriculture to coexist with the market.

This bitter fate of agrarianism makes us rethink the definition of modernity in this book. What does modernity or modernization mean here? Is industrialization, the take-off from agrarian society, a goal for modernization? Bianchini takes this definition and argues that agrarianism, which highly values peasant virtue, runs into self-contradiction in the course of modernization.

Here exists one confusing point of this book. If the goal of modernization was to enter urban industrial society, the quest for modernity should have ended by the 1950s or 1960s in most parts of Eastern Europe, or even by the 1920s in some parts of East-Central Europe. Why does this book not put an end to this point? Bianchini goes on to examine the ideas after Stalin's death, in spite of the fact that market socialism, state socialism, and self-governing socialism, among which tense debate took place in the 1960s to 1980s, had goals other than mere industrialization or urbanization.

In order to understand Bianchini's endeavor consistently, it is necessary to add some consideration to the consequences of "socialist modernization." It could be presumed that socialist modernity was not "modern enough." Different models of socialist reform seek such new goals as human rights, democracy, wealthy consumer society, and sustainability of industrial development. The latter two, consumerism and environmentalism, are new issues that have emerged as a challenge for post-modern society, as Bianchini approves. Incorporating these issues into ideas for modernity seems to make the point of discussion too diffuse. The former two, human rights and democracy, if they were to be included as important elements of modernity, should have been discussed from the beginning, when the project for modernization was established in Eastern Europe in the 19th century.

In conclusion, Bianchini stresses the fact that, on 4 June 1989, two events occurred simultaneously: the massacre in Tiananmen Square and the Polish free election. Demonstrating the element of enlightenment in the narodnik movement, Bianchini concludes that the "transformation of East European society between the 19th and 21st centuries occurred within the parameters of a modern culture shared in Europe, and sealed by the events of 4 June 1989" (p. 206). This interpretation of the political ideas in Eastern Europe reminds us of the biblical story of the "Parable of the Prodigal Son." Were the political thinkers and politicians in Eastern Europe, who searched for an alternative way towards modernity, the prodigal sons who left the Western European father for several decades just to return and admit the rightness of the father's choice? How can we understand the recent political development in Russia? It is interesting to see the Hungarians and the Poles prepare for another running away from home.

To explore these unanswered questions, it is essential for us to return to the 1950s or 1960s and examine the "real-existing socialist modern society." What was achieved by socialist modernization and how was it different from modern society achieved by capitalism? This informative book leads us further to this point and it may open a new page for research on the history of Eastern Europe in the 20th century.

NAKADA-AMIYA Mizuho