



Title	Soviet Historians' Views of the "Asiantic Mode of Production"
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Citation	Acta Slavica Iaponica, 5, 1-20
Issue Date	1987
Doc URL	<a href="https://hdl.handle.net/2115/7964">https://hdl.handle.net/2115/7964</a>
Type	departmental bulletin paper
File Information	KJ00000034120.pdf



## Soviet Historians' Views of the "Asiatic Mode of Production"

Donald W. Treadgold

A distinguished Soviet orientalist recently expressed the following view. Before the Neolithic revolution<sup>1</sup> there was only one line of human development ; a protobureaucracy made its appearance, along with priests, and together they organized and used soldiers and laborers. There was no private property. There was only state property, and antagonistic classes were nonexistent. After the Neolithic revolution, however, early societies developed along two different lines. One appeared in European antiquity : the institutions of private property, private law, and civil society were among its features. The Middle Ages saw a continuation, to be sure with important changes, of this line of development. The second line was to be found outside Europe. The institution of private property was present, but it was only secondary. The chief focus was state-oriented and the center was a bureaucracy. Though it took form in ancient times, it persisted up to the modern era, and its effects have not yet been eradicated ; its legacy is very much with us.

### I. Early Western Perceptions of Mainland Asian Society

This basic distinction has been recognized by a long line of thinkers of the first rank, beginning with Aristotle and continuing through Machiavelli, Bodin, Montesquieu, Quesnay, Herder, Hegel, the classical economists, and Marx.<sup>2</sup> It has been attacked by a host of people who at various times asserted, suspected, or feared that the motives of the thinkers concerned were evil or politically pernicious.

Thus the French pioneer of Iranian studies, Abraham-Hyacinthe Anquetil-Duperron, criticized Montesquieu in particular for the alleged offense of setting forth the notion of Oriental despotism as simply a rationalization for European intervention in the East.<sup>3</sup> Anquetil-Duperron denied that private property was absent from Asia — an observation that had been made by many travelers and that was supported by the claims made by and for Oriental despots was that they owned all the land in the realm. He argued that "the idea of the absence of the rights of private property in Asia was a fiction employed by colonialists who favoured the confiscation of native estates."<sup>4</sup> Marx seemed for a time to be influenced by such arguments. Much later Arnold Toynbee insisted that Karl Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* was merely an updated version of the Greeks' condescension and prejudice against the Persians, the myth of "good Europe and bad Asia."<sup>5</sup>

In order to examine the notion of an Asiatic mode of production with success, and in particular to trace its recent fate in Soviet scholarship, it is necessary to identify its chief constituents, so that the absence or presence of this or that term will not seem to determine whether the concept is being employed. For the time being the question of the good or evil motives of those who used it, the extent to which it could be turned to the purposes of political thinkers of this or that sort, will be set aside.

Hegel accepted and set forth a picture of the Orient and Oriental despotism distinguished by emphasis on the absence of any system of rights on the part of corporate bodies or individuals vis-a-vis the state.<sup>6</sup> In contrast Quesnay and other Physiocrats declared China to be a well-regulated, stable and prosperous state that could serve as an example to France; Nicolas-Gabriel Le Clerc offered it as an example to Russia, specifically to the future Paul I. (Which side Russia belonged on was not then a question closely scrutinized by Le Clerc.) Simon Nicolas Linguet highly praised the control that Oriental rulers exercised over property and privilege, the result being to the advantage of the poorer classes. This view was attacked by Etienne Dumont: "Oriental despotism is the model to which he seeks to make all European governments conform, in order to cure them of the notions of liberty and humanity..."<sup>7</sup> The features of Oriental empires thought to be fundamental were assessed rather similarly by both admirers and detractors of the system.

(1) The first characteristic observed by the writers mentioned of what my Soviet colleague termed the extra-European line of development was the absence of rights in relation to the ruler. In the view of Aristotle, the Asiatics (chiefly the Persians) were servile; "the people are by nature slaves." Despotism as found in Asia was unlike both monarchy and its corrupted form, tyranny. But it seemed to result from ethnic and genetic causes. The Christian and post-Christian (as well as Judeo-Christian) writers did not repeat the ethnic point. Neither, indeed, did all other Greek writers: Xenophon, for example, described the Persians in quite different terms.

(2) The absence of rights was soon located more definitely as being centered in the issue of private property. In the Orient, private property was lacking, or extremely weak. So argued Jean Bodin, very possibly inspired by the translation of Aristotle's *Politics* published in 1568 by Loys le Roy.<sup>8</sup> He declared that "seigneurial monarchy" was one of the three forms of monarchy and the earliest of the three, though it survived in Europe only in the Ottoman and Muscovite states, though widely in Asia and Africa. The ruler owned the goods and persons in his realm by right of conquest and was subject to no law but his own. Jean Baptiste-Tavernier and François Bernier, two seventeenth-century travelers who spent time in India, were especially important in reinforcing this view and the "related notion of the existence of a service-based elite as contrasted with a landed hereditary nobility."<sup>9</sup>

Here began to emerge the feature that seemed to mark the dividing line between West and East. It was soon recognized, as a result of the reports of travelers as they visited Asia and returned, that few if any Asiatic or African states exactly conformed to this model. Perhaps Burma, Siam, and Cambodia approached it; there was, it seemed, no land outside the royal domain and no agriculturists who were not servile tenants of the monarch. But in China, Russia, and elsewhere things were different; the monarch was very powerful, but there were areas of private property or periods in which it was significant, and groups of freemen or at any rate degrees of dependency. Nevertheless the Asiatic system still seemed different from the European.

(3) The nobility of mainland Asia was not a nobility. That is to say, it might consist of partly bureaucrats — in China, recruited by passage of examinations of the Confucian classics — partly of aristocrats, dissident members of the ruling family, religious functionaries, and various shadings on the margin of these groups.<sup>10</sup> In his *Essays* (XIV : Of Nobility) in 1625, Francis Bacon declared that the fundamental distinction between the Ottoman Turkish and European polities rested on the fact that the Turks had no hereditary aristocracy. The main point was that the nobles of the West, characteristically landlords, received land rent, the rulers received taxes ; but in the Orient, there was a fusion of the two groups and the two sorts of revenue. Adam Smith noted that the Oriental ruler collected “something which was either rent or tax, but which could not be differentiated as either one or the other.” Smith regarded “the relation of the sovereign to the land as both a public and a private relation, or one that could not be distinguished [as either].”<sup>11</sup> It was of course not only the ruler of whom this could be said, but of the tributary groups through which the revenue was collected.

In India there were the tax-collectors of the Mughal emperors, the zamindars and the ryotwars ; Lord Cornwallis, as governor-general in India (1786–1793), on arranging a land settlement in Bengal turned the zamindars into a landed gentry like England’s. It was a fundamental part of the first social revolution in Asia — or so said Marx — that was carried out, in India, by the British. It was revolutionary precisely because it undertook to turn bureaucrats into nobles.

(4) The institutional feature that kept the derivative aristocracies of the Orient weak and unable to mount any real challenge to the ruler’s power was the absence of primogeniture. In the East high mortality, infant and other, helped to prevent the speedy and total destruction of aristocratic property that one might have expected as every generation divided the father’s lands and received the father’s titles. There must have been something that deterred them from seeking the status of Western nobles, either the grant of rights from the ruler or single-inheritance legislation that would assure continued aristocratic wealth and therefore power. When, for example, Peter the Great of Russia attempted to enact inheritance by a single son (not precisely primogeniture, therefore), he encountered indifference or resistance, and the measure was never effective.

(5) The durability and unity of the village community struck a number of observers. On the basis of his experience in Mysore, Lt. Col. Mark Wilks wrote in 1810, “every Indian village is and always appears to have been in fact a separate community or republic.” Wilks held that the land was actually owned by the private cultivators who lived on it. Other Englishmen believed that the village owned the land in common. Still other Europeans, following Bernier, held as did Richard Jones that the sovereign had exclusive ownership of the soil, which was “the foundation of the unbroken despotism of the Eastern world...” But about the economically isolated or isolatable character of the village, in which agriculture and craft industry were united so that the community was self-sufficient (or very nearly so), there was no disagreement.<sup>12</sup> The Asiatic village was

eternal, unchanging, resistant to outside influences, able to handle its own affairs. Wars, famine, and disease might touch it now and again, but the boundaries of states, the identity of rulers, were matters of indifference. The village could outlast all political changes and remain intact. To be sure, the peasant must give up his surplus, whether it was to be regarded as rent, tax, or both (or possibly pay in labor rather than in kind).

(6) The agriculture of the Asiatic societies, beginning with the great river valleys, depended on water control; rainfall agriculture had been replaced by large-scale irrigation, which required the action of the central authority or state. Who among Westerners first observed the importance of the public works in question is not clear. When they were noticed, however, the scale of construction seemed incredible. The American agronomist F. H. King in 1927 estimated the combined length of the man-managed watercourses of China, Korea, and Japan as 200,000 miles. He wrote,

Forty canals across the United States from east to west and sixty from north to south would not equal in number of miles those in these three countries today. Indeed, it is probable that this estimate is not too large for China alone.<sup>13</sup>

Karl Wittfogel was led by this feature to term the society of mainland Asia “hydraulic society.”

The six characteristics just listed are approximately those which Marx regarded as most important in the correspondence to and from Engels and the articles in the *New York Daily Tribune* of June to August 1853.<sup>14</sup> Marx was first taken by the feature of the absence of private property in land, which he termed the “key to the Oriental heaven.” But he learned later that there was sufficient private property, in China and elsewhere, so that he must alter his view.

## II. Marx and Engels’s and Early Soviet Marxist Views

Beginning in 1964 there has been a rediscovery of the Asiatic mode of production in the Soviet orbit, and there has been a corresponding return of interest in it in the Western world. Several works have appeared that undertake to explore such questions as : what Marx and Engels thought about Asiatic society, whether one or the other or both changed their minds about it in later life, whether Plekhanov or Lenin accepted the Marxian view in regard to Russia or Asia, whether that view is really to be reduced to some other category and whether it is good or bad Marxism to do so, and so forth.

None of these works is primarily concerned with the truth or justifiability of the category, or the question of whether it accurately mirrors the early history of Asia. And none touches on the question of whether the Asiatic system, as described in the pre-Marxian and Marxian works concerned is a present problem and, if so, what the remedy might be. In fact one work, Lawrence Krader’s, explicitly declares the whole concept irrelevant today : “the traditional form of the Oriental society and the Asiatic mode of production cannot be reconstituted and is irrelevant to the present developments

in Asia.”<sup>15</sup> Doubtless they could not be reconstituted, if anyone wished to try (a wish difficult to imagine), and would not ever be reconstituted in any easily imaginable spontaneous concatenation of events. Whether those two related concepts are entirely irrelevant to the present period is much less obvious.

It is desirable to summarize Marx and Engels’s views before examining their fortunes in the recent writings of Soviet scholars. The fathers of Marxism turned their attention to the problem of mainland Asia in connection with the debates in the House of Commons on the renewal of the charter of the East India Company, the Taiping rebellion, and, a little later, the great Mutiny in India in 1857; Marx’s starting point, precisely or very nearly, was the work of Bernier, physician at the Mughal court. Bernier declared unequivocally that the Mughal emperor was the sole owner of the land of his realm; Marx quoted him in a different form and added his own assertion: “Bernier finds rightly the foundation of all phenomena of the Orient — he speaks of Turkey, Persia, Hindustan — to be that *no private property in land* exists.”<sup>16</sup> Marx does not accept Bernier’s assertion that the king is the only landowner, but seems to distinguish “between the communal ownership of the village and the sovereign right of property throughout the realm,”<sup>17</sup> — though before long he was to recognize that there was some private property in Asia.

Marx soon linked the great power of the state with artificial irrigation, deriving the idea from Engels, and in a famous passage declared:

There have been in Asia, from immemorial times, but three departments of Government: that of Finance, or the plunder of the interior; that of War, or the plunder of the exterior; and finally, the department of Public Works. Climate and territorial conditions...constituted artificial irrigation by canals and waterworks, the basis of Oriental agriculture.<sup>18</sup>

In 1859, in the foreword to the *Critique of Political Economy*, he penned this sentence: “in their general features, the Asiatic, ancient, feudal and modern bourgeois modes of production may be considered as progressive epochs in the economic order of society.” This is Stephen Dunn’s translation, and he insists that “each of the modes of production mentioned is given in the plural, so that one cannot assume that each of them is one specific thing; rather, each term refers to an entire category.”<sup>19</sup> In fact, this statement has been worried to death by a host of Marxist commentators (one of whom Dunn acknowledges himself to be); scholars have argued also whether all the four modes of production listed are intended by Marx to be consecutive, so that the Asiatic is merely the pre-ancient (pre-slaveholding) mode, or not.

But such exegesis is for the faithful rather than the agnostic. The fact is that Marx and Engels never put together their scattered observations on the Asiatic mode of production (though it has to be said that they do not present their observations on some of the other “modes” in textbook form either), and thus we confront two questions about their views: what precisely they were, and whether or when they changed.

Marx declared in his *New York Daily Tribune* articles that “two circumstances” had

brought about, from the remotest times, the characteristic social system of the Orient, “the so-called *village system*,” and they were (in Marx’s awkward phrasing) :

the Hindu, on the one hand, leaving, like all Oriental peoples, to the Central Government the care of the great public works, the prime condition of his agriculture and commerce, dispersed, on the other hand, over the surface of the country, and agglomerated in small centres by the domestic union of agricultural and manufacturing pursuits...

Or, briefly, central governmental (many would say simply, bureaucratic) control of public works (and specifically for the purposes of artificial irrigation, since Marx had in mind the “prime condition” of agriculture in such parts) and dispersed village communities (which were the “solid foundation of Oriental despotism”).

It remains to point out that Marx and Engels believed that the society of mainland Asia was unchanging ; India had no history, it was said, meaning both a succession of changing historical events and a written record of them. Moreover, and finally, only the act of breaking into Asiatic society from the outside can put an end to such stagnation, and the occasion for the whole discussion, British policy in India, was the first such instance — England “dissolved these small semi-barbarian, semi-civilized communities, by blowing up their economical basis, and thus produced the greatest, and, to speak the truth, the only *social* revolution ever heard of in Asia.” The old Asiatic society had to be destroyed, and what was also required was “the laying of the material foundations of Western society in Asia.”

Here another mare’s nest is uncovered. Marxists, determinedly internationalist and bound to avoid any ethnic or racial discrimination or simple snobbery in their discussion of regional or national differences, are forced to recognize that Marx believed that Western civilization was superior to Eastern : “the British were the first conquerors [of India] superior, and, therefore, inaccessible to Hindu civilization” — so they did not become Hinduized like the Arabs, Turks, Tatars, and Mughals before them, who *did*. Scholars are not immune from fears that they will be charged with racism, or that they themselves will really adopt a racist position if they do not avoid such a stance. To be sure, Marx (in the words of Carrère d’Encausse and Schram) “was persuaded that the Indians, whose human qualities he praises highly, were entirely capable of playing a role in the world and of developing in their turn a dynamic civilization — but only on condition that they become ‘Europeanized.’”<sup>20</sup> Much of the skittishness of Marxists in dealing with the concept of the Asiatic mode can be traced to this point, which is specifically the basis of the charge Toynbee levied against Wittfogel : good Europe, bad Asia. It may also help to explain the Soviet search for and success in finding alternative labels for the same or similar things.<sup>21</sup>

A few remarks are in order regarding the application of the concept to Russia. As the events in India and China had earlier attracted Marx and Engels’s attention, so did the rise of the revolutionary movement in Russia in the 1870’s. Even earlier, however, in 1853, both men had referred to Russia as “semi-Eastern” and “semi-Asiatic.” In articles of 1856–57 in the *Free Press of London*, republished in 1899 as *The Secret Diplomatic History of the 18th Century*, Marx declared that the Mongols had destroyed the

proto-feudalism of the Kievan period, by causing the Muscovite princes to “tartarize” Muscovy, enslaving the people and enlarging the realm of despotism. In 1875, in a polemic with the Russian socialist Tkachev to which he gave the title “Soziales aus Russland,” Engels declared the isolated village communities “from India to Russia” to be the foundation of the Oriental despotism prevailing in the latter country, and he repeated the statement in the work usually termed *Anti-Dühring*, written a year or so later.

Marx, puzzled, fascinated, and hopeful for the prospects of a Russian revolution, indicated in correspondence with the Russian socialists of his day that revolution might indeed come to Russia before even the West but the implication was that it could succeed only if a proletarian revolution occurred in the West so the two could complement each other. The starting point for a Russian revolution, Marx acknowledged (it was not and could not be capitalism, for in the 1870s, even tender shoots of the new economic formation could scarcely be discerned), was “the present Russian common ownership of land” — that is, the still-isolated village communities that constituted the second and crucial characteristic supporting the despotism of the tsars — which Marx hated so much he was willing to defend Ottoman Turkey in preference.

The Russian Marxists appeared under that guise only in 1883, the year of Marx’s death. George Plekhanov embraced the notion of the Asiatic mode of production and applied it unhesitatingly to old Russia. The prominent legal historian, M. F. Vladimirskii-Budanov, in his *Obzor istorii russkago prava* (1886 ; 6th ed., 1909) declared flatly that “feudalism and autocracy are quite incompatible” — and so they are, if feudalism is taken to mean the contractual and conditional arrangements among the monarchs, lords, and vassals of the West (and Japan), while autocracy refers to the unlimited power of the Russian monarch from Muscovy to the immediately prerevolutionary period. (The Marxists, to be sure, use “feudalism” in a somewhat different sense.) Thus not only Vladimirskii-Budanov but also several of his fellow Russian, non-Marxist, historians of the time helped to pave the way for Plekhanov’s position, though the latter’s intent was simply to follow the path of Marx and Engels.

In the dispute between Plekhanov and Vladimir I. Lenin carried on at the IV (Unification) Congress of the RSDLP at Stockholm over the question of “Asiatic restoration” (that is, whether a Russian revolution might end not in socialism or communism but the restoration of the old Asiatic system that prevailed in old Russia), Lenin seemed to minimize the danger Plekhanov took seriously, that a Russian “Wang Anshih” (the Chinese minister of the 11th century thought by Elisée Reclus, Plekhanov’s source, to have tried to make the state the owner of all land) would arise instead of the beneficent society of the socialist theorists.

However, Lenin was clearly disturbed, after the Kronstadt revolt of 1921 and the arguments about bureaucracy had erupted in the Communist party, by precisely some such possibility, partial or full. He declared, “socialism is better than capitalism, but capitalism is better than...a bureaucracy connected with the dispersed character of small producers.”<sup>22</sup> Several times, in his last writings, Lenin lamented the survival and persistence of the old bureaucracy, the “old apparatus” which, he said, “is only slightly repainted on the surface.”<sup>23</sup> And in the article just cited, he unambiguously declared that

our bureaucracy [unlike the bureaucracy of the developed bourgeoisie] has a different economic root : it is the fragmented and dispersed character of the small producer, his poverty, his lack of culture, the absence of roads, illiteracy, the absence of exchange between agriculture and industry, the absence of connection and interaction between them.

Anyone who is familiar with Marx and Engels's views from 1853 onward about the Asiatic mode of production will recognize in these statements clear and unmistakable references to the "two circumstances" that characterize the mode : a bureaucracy (of course, in the Russian case not one managing large-scale public works) and a society based on dispersed village communities. Lenin does not name it, but there are no two possibilities about what he means.

Such statements can only be interpreted in the context of a *cri de coeur* of a man who has presided over many horrors for the sake of an outcome which he has come to fear has not occurred but instead may have been replaced by something quite different. Karl Wittfogel quotes them in *Oriental Despotism*, pp. 399–400, but he does not invent them, and it is unconscionable of Stephen Dunn to suggest that there is only one passage from Lenin which Wittfogel quotes at length and "which actually says, on its face, what he reports it as saying" — after which Dunn then quotes a passage which is quite different from the above citations, yet which (curiously) does not at all designate the Asiatic mode unambiguously.<sup>24</sup> To make matters worse, Dunn tries to cinch the argument by declaring that Lenin does not use the term (quite so, Lenin does not, he clearly is squeamish about using it), "nor does he make any reference to the absence of private landholding, or the identity between rent and taxes, which would be the fundamental criteria for the existence of this mode of production according to any orthodox Marxist interpretation."

I defer to Dunn about exactly what an "orthodox" Marxist interpretation might be, but there is no doubt that Marx and Engels repeatedly designated two quite different features as basic to the Asiatic mode and, moreover, at a very early stage they came to recognize that there *was* some private property in mainland Asia and therefore that rent and taxes were not identical. But some Marxists are apt to become emotional about Wittfogel, as they are apt to shy away from the term "Asiatic" in the context in question. They regard him as a political renegade, since he left the Communist party and became strongly anti-Communist. And yet, as we shall see, he is largely responsible for the "rise" of the concept of the Asiatic mode that Dunn discusses, in a generally quite useful book.

After the October Revolution Michael N. Pokrovskii, who had earned a reputation before it as an able Marxist historian, became a dominant figure among the members of his guild. As a student of Sir Paul Vinogradov, he was prone to seek universal patterns and to reject any suggestion that Russia did not conform to the phases of development of Western Europe. He therefore insisted that N. P. Pavlov-Silvanskii (*Feodalizm v drevnei Rusi*, 1907) was right in finding feudalism in old Russia. Pokrovskii had no room in his historical schemata for anything that differentiated it from Western Europe or, it must be noted, made it share common features with its neighbors to the east and

south. Samuel Baron declares that Pokrovskii “may have been partially or entirely ignorant” of the notion of an Asiatic mode, and that in any event he adhered to the view that feudalism was the basis of Russia’s past, “steadfastly,” though not clearly or consistently.<sup>25</sup> In any event it was subsumed by Pokrovskii and his cohorts under the categories of either feudalism or slaveholding or relegated to the marginal areas of discussion, although there were brave men who not only clung to or rediscovered the Asiatic mode but defended the idea against assault by others.

In 1925 David Riazanov, director of the Marx-Engels Institute, and Eugen Varga, one of the foremost Soviet economists, reaffirmed the Marxian view of mainland Asia. In 1928 Liudvig Mad’iar a Hungarian who had been involved in the attempt of Béla Kun to create a Hungarian Communist state, published a book entitled *Ekonomika sel’skogo khoziaistva v Kitae*, in which he identified himself as an Aziatchik (a defender of the concept in question). In 1930 Mikhail Kokin and G. Papaian produced a study of the agrarian system of ancient China entitled *Tszin-Tian*.<sup>26</sup> In 1928 the new program of the Comintern found in the economy of colonial and semi-colonial countries “feudal medieval relationships, or ‘Asiatic mode of production’ relationships prevailing,”<sup>27</sup> but since the document owed much to Bukharin his fall removed part of its authority.

The debate by this time had become somewhat tangled. In Ulmen’s words,

While upholding the relevance of the theory of the Asiatic mode of production for the structure of Chinese society, [the] Madyar faction was at the same time — and incorrectly—maintaining that in China there was no private ownership of property; whereas those who were upholding the feudalism thesis were maintaining — and correctly — that in China there was private ownership of property.<sup>28</sup>

In 1929 S. M. Dubrovskii published a book entitled *K voprosu o sushchnosti ‘aziatskogo’ sposoba proizvodstva, feodalizma, krepostnichestva i torgovogo kapitala*; in it he opposed the Asiatic concept. During the following year discussions were held in several cities in which the notion was discussed: Leningrad, Baku, Moscow, Kharkov, and Tbilisi. Few of the proceedings were published.

It would seem that the highest authority then decided to terminate the debate. In February 1931 a discussion was held in Leningrad whose proceedings were published. The position of the attackers was often cautiously expressed; it was rather incautiously phrased by Evgenii Iolk, a Comintern official who insisted that the Asiatic mode was merely a variant of feudalism, and who declared early in the Leningrad discussion: “What is really important is to unmask [the theory] politically, and not to establish the ‘pure truth’ as to whether the ‘Asiatic mode of production’ existed or not.”<sup>29</sup> Wittfogel points out the curious way in which the Leningrad discussion and the whole argument received no attention in the international Communist press. He finds the reason in that the Asiatic theory

endangered Communist leadership in Asia in that it depicted the “capitalist” West as capable not only of oppressive, but also of constructive, action... and endangered the Communist attempt to... hide the primary problem of bureaucratic class rule and

general state slavery [the last phrase was used both by Hegel and Marx in regard to mainland Asia].<sup>30</sup>

Or, to say it outright, the discussion came perilously close to suggesting that an Asiatic restoration had occurred in the USSR instead of a revolution inaugurating socialism.

As a result of the 1931 discussion, the Asiatic theory became a *malum prohibitum* and remained so until de-Stalinization began, or at any rate reached the public in the wake of Khrushchev's secret speech to the XX Congress of the CPSU in 1956. Stalin did not merely approve the silencing of the Aziatchiki, but himself sliced references to the Asiatic category from Marx. He might refer to himself as an "Asiatic" — as he did to Japanese Foreign Minister Yosuke Matsuoka — or an "Oriental," but he was not about to let anyone refer to him as an "Oriental despot" or the USSR as an Oriental despotism, and the best way to avoid such a thing was to prevent any mention of the category in any connection whatever.

In 1957 the publication of Karl Wittfogel's *Oriental Despotism* produced what the Bailey-Llobera book terms "the Wittfogel watershed" in the history of the concept. The Wittfogel volume had both a positive and negative effect on the popularity of the idea — positive, for a wide range of reviewers praised the book in the most enthusiastic, even extravagant terms, and the concept was brought into international scholarly discussion in continuing fashion; negative, for from very early on Soviet reviewers, followed in an interesting fashion by a number of others (pro- and anti-Soviet, politically engaged and indifferent), and soon afterward the Hungarian Ferenc Tökei, arriving in Paris, helped to inaugurate a new debate on the Asiatic mode of Production, first centering in the Centre d'études et de recherches marxistes (CÉRM).

All the Communists concerned attacked Wittfogel, but Tökei, it seems, in discussion "insisted on the necessity of 'taking back' (*reprendre*) from the hands of the revisionists and falsifiers of Marxism like Wittfogel this tool which Marx created, namely, the concept of the Asiatic mode of production."<sup>31</sup> The way was clear, quite possibly because of some behind-closed doors decisions finally confirmed in Moscow, for a renewed examination of the theory in the USSR that would include supporters, under one or another label.

### III. Recent Soviet Views

The resumption of debate in the USSR began in a puzzling fashion. It was announced in the program of the VII International Congress of Anthropology and Ethnography, August 3–10, 1964, that papers by Jean Suret-Canale, Maurice Godelier, and V. V. Struve would be read dealing with the Asiatic mode. However, none of the three appeared at the session, and the Soviet journal *Narody Azii i Afriki* published only abstracts of the two French Communists' papers along with the full (but brief) text of the Soviet specialist on the ancient East, Academician Struve. Struve declared that the concept, which "had been rejected for decades" despite the fact that Marx was its author, deserved attention as describing the mode of production that arose whenever the communes of primitive communism were unified by the public works needed for an

irrigation system. That is, he tried to make it a special form of primitive communism preceding slaveholding society. In any case, clearly the fiasco of the August 1964 panel indicated that the authorities were not ready for such discussions.

However, in December 1964 a discussion was held at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences in Moscow in which there figured prominently the views of Eugen Varga, restated in a volume published shortly before his death in October 1964, and Iu. Levada, which seemed to have changed substantially since he undertook to demolish Wittfogel in 1958. Levada's views now were transmuted into an attack on the unilinear conception of history that most of his colleagues still professed. That discussion was only part of a broader consideration of historical methodology.

The Asiatic mode was the exclusive subject of discussions held at the Institute of History on March 5, 12 and 16, and the Institute of the Peoples of Asia on May 27–28, 1965. The three contributors to the former that were of greatest significance were N. B. Ter-Akopian of the Institute of Marxism-Leninism, and L. V. Danilova and A. I. Pavlovskaja of the Institute of History, but they ventured nothing startling. At the May discussion the official position, in effect repeating Struve's view that the Asiatic mode should be regarded as intermediate between primitive communism and the slaveholding formation, was set forth by N. V. Nikiforov.

Thus far the discussion had centered on the societies of the ancient Near East (Struve was a specialist on Sumeria) and China (Nikiforov's main concern). But on June 2–4, 1965, a conference sponsored by the Academy's Scientific Council, attended by some 300 historians from all over the country, raised the question of the background of Russia itself.<sup>32</sup> It sounded from the title of the conference proceedings as if the question had been foreclosed from the start: old Russia was feudal, period. But at least two participants challenged that assumption: M. Ia. Volkov and A. M. Sakharov. Volkov declared that the Russian state in the 17th and 18th century ought to be likened not to the absolute monarchies of Western Europe but rather to what Marx had called "the Asiatic mode of rule."<sup>33</sup> These remarks were overshadowed by the rest of the discussion, but they were made without evoking attack.

For the next few years there seemed to be two chief ways in which it was permissible to treat the Asiatic mode of production: first, to describe it but to dismiss it as inferior in importance or reducible to something else: primitive communism, slaveholding, or feudalism; second, to accept part or all of the five-fold characterization given above as representing what might be called the classical tradition of Asiatic-mode theory but to suggest another term for it. It was even more common not to treat the concept at all, to ignore it completely or at most to relegate it to a position of marginal significance.

Nevertheless there was an outpouring of books and articles in the late 1960s and early 1970s that dealt with the problem in one way or other. An example of the former may be found in an article by E. M. Medved'ev of 1970. He enumerates three views of ancient and medieval (his terms) India: (1) slaveholding prevailed in the ancient period, feudalism in the medieval; such views are prevalent in the Far East, but contradict those of the Soviet school of *vostokovedenie* who declare that state land taxes constitute a form of feudal exploitation and that the transfer of the right to collect them into private hands is semi-feudal (I. M. Reisner, A. M. Osipov, L. B. Alaev, & c.); (2) state tax (or rent-tax)

is a form of exploitation characteristic of the Asiatic mode of production, in which there is no private property in land (N. B. Ter-Akopian asserts that the commune is the basis of the Asiatic mode of production — but Medved'ev declares that it is also not incompatible with feudalism); (3) the purpose of his article is to show that there are logical inconsistencies in the concepts of the Asiatic mode and slavery as applied to ancient India and therefore that feudalism is the best answer.<sup>34</sup>

Iu. Z. Polevoi in an article of 1967 went further. Pointing out how Plekhanov was relegated to scholarly oblivion under Stalin, he undertook to describe how Plekhanov developed his ideas on Eastern despotism and the Asiatic mode of production; he refers to the Plekhanov-Lenin debate of 1906 on the danger of Asiatic restoration in a future Russian revolution in a tone that actually suggests more sympathy for Plekhanov than Lenin. He offers an interesting list of characteristics of Eastern despotism: the concentration of the plenitude of power in the hands of a single head of state; the uniting of political power and the supreme right of property in land; a great bureaucratic apparatus, and also the presence of a great economic system of the ruler resting on irrigation (*nalichie bol'shogo tsarskogo zemel'no-vodnogo khoziaistva*) and deification of the despot. He declares that recent findings indicate that the notion of a “wide, if not all-embracing, spread of despotism in time and space is exaggerated” — but that mild and vague demurrer is his only criticism of the views he has just summarized.<sup>35</sup>

The honor of serving as the chief spokesman for the (apparently current) official position seems to have been divided, after the death of Struve, between two persons: V. N. Nikiforov and Iu. I. Semenov. Nikiforov presented the main paper at the May 1965 discussion sponsored by the Academic Council of the Institute of the Peoples of Asia, but with some curious shortcomings well pointed out by Stephen Dunn.<sup>36</sup>

It was thought desirable to follow up the publication resulting from that discussion with another one, without benefit of a conference preceding. This time Nikiforov presented an “expanded and cleaned-up version” of the 1965 one, in which he at last summarized an official position. It ran as follows: in the 1850s Marx was an Aziatchik, but the position was gradually abandoned under the influence of better data; “any revival of the concept of the Asiatic mode of production at the present point in intellectual history must depend on data and considerations of which Marx and Engels were not aware.”<sup>37</sup> Thus, declares Dunn in an observation of much insight, in Nikiforov's exposition the official, anti-Aziatchik position, appears as “a kind of Marxist ‘higher criticism’” (though it abandons any attempt simply to explain away what Marx and Engels plainly said about the Asiatic mode), whereas the Aziatchiki are made to appear as a kind of simple-minded “Marxist fundamentalists” who cite scripture but do not understand the process of historical change in thought.

But why, it may be asked, do Nikiforov and his cohorts try to do away with the concept or consign it to insignificance? The answer may be found, perhaps, in the 1971 work of Iu. V. Kachanovskii. He writes:

Not only Marxists, but also opponents of Marxism deal with the problem of the Asiatic mode of production. Among the latter, K. Wittfogel occupies the leading place [; the views of such as he must be] considered separately, because between

them and any Marxist notions there is a difference in principle. [Marxists try to understand developments in Asia, Africa, and Latin America and thus help in working out means and forms of revolution there. But Wittfogel has a different aim.] Crudely distorting the statements of the founders of Marxism on the Asiatic mode of production, he finds an analogy between the despotisms of the ancient Orient and the Socialist states, both of them being included under the rubric “total power” of “hydraulic society.”<sup>38</sup>

Here are two points : Wittfogel is a “renegade,” as many Soviet writers have willingly or unwillingly called him ; he was a long-time Communist who left the party. But if Wittfogel had never lived, there would still be the possibility of making comparisons between the bureaucratic state of the ancient Orient and that of modern Communism and hinting that the latter was closer to restoring the tyranny of the Pharaohs than to realizing the visions of the 19th-century theorists of socialism.<sup>39</sup> Moreover, the term “Asiatic” in this context may offend Asiatics and thereby impede the revolution that Kachanovskii is seeking to advance.

There is no doubt in my mind that some Soviet scholars are primarily interested in scholarship, despite their obligatory bows to Marx’s 11th Thesis on Feuerbach — some even exclusively so. I do not intend to embarrass or endanger them by trying publicly to guess which. The worst political hacks may come up with true statements, the most admirable and heroic defenders of freedom may write rubbish. Without associating him with either category, I quote Kachanovskii again in making a new and different point ; he declares that the theory is a failure : as the discussion advanced, “the more obvious it has become that about the character of the Asiatic mode of production there was nothing more to say,” so that instead “questions of the general history of pre-capitalist societies are occupying the center of attention.” Whatever “questions” of that sort are supposed to be like, the argument has the merit of resting in social science and not the political imperatives of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>40</sup>

The decade of 1961–71 reflected the considerable recovery that Soviet historiography experienced on the heels of Khrushchev’s secret speech of 1956 and the high point of de-Stalinization, reached at the XXII Congress of the party in 1961. L. S. Perelomov endeavored to sum up the decade and to speak favorably if not proudly of a certain pluralism that had been reached regarding the issue :

Thus, in Soviet Sinology today there are differing conceptions : slave-owning (Academicians N. I. Konrad, L. V. Simonovskaia, L. I. Duman, T. S. Stepugina, L. S. Perelomov, V. N. Nikiforov) ; the concept of the late ripening of class relationships in ancient China (Yin and Chou) with a tendency to develop to feudalism (M. V. Kriukov) ; the slave-owning feudal (L. S. Vasil’ev, V. P. Iliushechkin).<sup>41</sup>

Conspicuously missing, of course, is the concept of the Asiatic mode of production. But it is elementary that it is impossible at the present time to subscribe to it. It is permitted to describe it, to state accurately what was said about it by the church fathers of Marxism,

and indeed to accept much of its substance under different labels.

We shall conclude by brief examinations of the work of five Soviet scholars which seems indeed to reflect greater concern about substance than terminology and whose publications indicate that the issues remain important in Soviet academia up to the present time.

The first is N. B. Ter-Akopian, who published in 1973 a reworked version of his article in *Narody Azii i Afriki* in Nos. 2 and 3 of 1965. He referred to the fact that Marx had pondered the peculiarities of mainland Asian polities before 1853 and had cited Herodotus's story of Greek freedom ("Thou knowest what it is to be a slave" in addressing a Persian) in the "Debates in the 6th Rhenish Landtag, First Article," written in 1842. He then goes on to examine several of Marx and Engels's writings, including lesser-known ones, in detail, emphasizing the position of the commune as the basis of Asiatic society, pointing out how the Dutch, for example, retained it in Indonesia as a means of exploitation, declaring that its strength was such as to render it proof against what damage might be done by the accumulation of capital in Asiatic society — for merchant and usury capital under conditions of Oriental despotism could call forth nothing but economic decline and political corruption. Ter-Akopian concludes by endeavoring to show that Marx and Engels did not abandon their views of the Asiatic mode in later years, and charging that Nikiforov and Kachanovskii (who argued the opposite, as shown above) set forth Marx and Engels's views in a "wholly inadequate manner."<sup>42</sup> It is a judiciously constructed article; and suggests no reason at all (and denies reasons advanced by others) not to accept the concept of the Asiatic mode.

Next comes L. B. Alaev, a distinguished Soviet authority on India, who published in 1980 an article on "Typology of Eastern Feudalism." Common to all medieval Eastern societies, he writes, was the supreme state ownership of land. The state sometimes allotted land to persons from all social strata from commoner to nobleman. In China, for example, this system prevailed from the 3rd to the 8th century; then restrictions on land ownership were repealed and land could be transferred, though under state control still. There were annual land surveys, decennial land and tax censuses, and from time to time redistribution of the land on a per capita basis. The chief element of the new system was taxation of almost all landowners. Alaev then proceeded to examine comparable (or, in some cases, different) features in other Asian societies in a manner demonstrating control of the history of a broad range of Asian countries and periods.<sup>43</sup>

Shortly afterward Alaev edited a book assembling articles on Egypt, Ottoman Turkey, India, Nepal, Thailand, and elsewhere in Asia. In the foreword he observes that the question of the naming of the

structures characterizing the coincidence of the ruling class with the state apparatus [in Asia and North Africa in the Middle Ages] remains controversial. L. S. Vasil'ev proposes 'state mode of production,' Iu. I. Semenov 'polarism,' which in essence are both the same thing ("polity" equals "state"). The defenders of a more traditional approach see in this structure only 'state' or 'Oriental' feudalism. Theoretically more important is the question whether this structure is

characteristic for the first class formation preceding antiquity (as Iu. I. Semenov holds) or it represents a variant of development parallel to that of Western Europe (the view of L. S. Vasil'ev).

In the Orient, Alaev continues, the extent of state interference in the economy varied, as did the extent to which the ruling class coincided with the bureaucracy. The more extensive the state role in redistribution of the surplus product of the private holdings, the less it took part in production directly. In sum, "the extent to which [a given society] was near or far from the 'Asiatic model' may serve as an important parameter [*sic!* Russian has also been invaded by this misused word] of typologization."<sup>44</sup> Despite the awkwardness of some terms, Alaev writes sensibly and clearly on the subject.

In 1980, in a compendium published in Tbilisi, G. V. Koranashvili challenged the view of Nikiforov, Kachanovskii, B. F. Porshnev, and others, that Marx and Engels abandoned their earlier "hypothesis" about Oriental society after they had encountered the theories of Morgan, thus substituting the notion that primitive communism was universal; as a result, wrote Koranashvili, the men he mentioned had concluded that the Asiatic mode of production had no more right to exist in science. After examining the writings of both, he strove to prove that they were wrong. Marx, in April-June 1881, gave a sharp critique of the English writer, Sir John Phear's book on the Aryan village in India and Ceylon in which Phear affirmed the existence of feudalism in India; Engels in *The Frankish Period*, written in 1881-82, and letters of 1882 to Bernstein and 1884 to Kautsky repeats earlier statements. In *The Origin of the Family*, which Nikiforov *et al.* cite in support of their opinion, Engels writes that class society arises (after the collapse of the gentile order) only in the Greco-Roman world and nowhere else.

Thus, "contrary to bourgeois scholars" (one does not know whether to laugh or cry at that effort to affirm Koranashvili's own orthodoxy) Marx and Engels were "far from believing in a unilinear development of society." (In the text the Russian word for "unilinear" is followed by the English word.)<sup>45</sup> Here Koranashvili does not explicitly espouse the notion of the Asiatic mode; but his assault on one of the chief critics of the concept is a telling one.

It remains to note the views of the two men who have offered substitute nomenclature. One is the eminent Sinologist, L. S. Vasil'ev. In 1981 he was responsible editor of a compendium on China in which he stated, in the foreword, that China, in ancient as well as in imperial times,

obviously and most fully exhibits the basic features and characteristics of that mode of production which Marx in his time termed 'Asiatic' and which more accurately may be called 'state,' having in view both its substance (centralized direction of the organization of production and the system of redistribution along with the structure-creating role of state property and relations of the 'state-producing' type) and its universality [presumably, its existence in areas outside Asia].

Vasil'ev's own article, on the feudal clan in ancient China, describes how the feudal clan

declined, putting an end to the cult of aristocracy and feudal-clan relations characteristic of the Ch'un-Ch'iu period, and opening the way to the rise of the Confucian empire based on centralized bureaucratic administration.<sup>46</sup>

Iu. I. Semenov is a student of Lewis Henry Morgan, the latter's book *Ancient Society* (1877), Marx and Engels's use of it, and several topics dealing with the ethnography of the ancient world as well as Asia and Africa in later times.<sup>47</sup> Semenov set forth his general views in an article of 1980. In English translation the title means "On One of the Types of the Traditional Social Structures of Africa and Asia: Early Government and Agrarian Relations." Semenov declared, "many peoples of Asia and especially Africa were drawn into the sphere of influence of the world system of capitalism at a time when they were still at the stage of transition from primitive society to class society." He gave illustrations from southern Africa, Burma, Oceania (New Caledonia and Hawaii), etc. Out of the genuine class societies known to historians, two with the greatest similarity to the early-class societies previously discussed in the article were, he declared: China of the Western Chou (11th to 8th c. BC) and the empire of the Incas (16th c. AD).

Marx in the 1850s and 60s called this sort of mode of production, in which the government was the supreme landowner, "Asiatic," writes Semenov. However, when he became convinced that the system existed elsewhere as well, "he ceased to use the term without *in the slightest degree* abandoning the concept" (my italics). We shall use the term "politarianism" for the mode, he writes; in the case of societies where this mode is just taking shape, the same term (with cognates) adding the prefix "pra" (early). He concludes with a discussion of Buganda coming up to 1962.<sup>48</sup> So much for Lawrence Krader's view that for a Marxist the concept (or the reality that lies behind it) has nothing to do with our times.

Semenov followed this up with other writings. Most recently, in an article in *Narody Azii i Afriki*, he set forth a new term or variant on his older one: *protopolitarnyi*. He declared, "*politarnye* relations not only existed but were dominant in all countries of the ancient Orient." But then his discussion introduced several complexities. It was best, in his view, to recognize magnatism and politarianism as independent antagonistic modes of production different from all other modes of production including feudalism. And, finally: to the number of early modes of production belong the *dominatnyi* with four variants; the *magnatnyi* with three variants (all the variants are named); and the *politarnyi*.<sup>49</sup> At this point one begins to suspect that the object is to drown the concept of the Asiatic mode in a sea of new terminology rather than to acknowledge or emphasize its importance. But in any event Semenov accepts the idea, as does Vasil'ev.

It seems that Soviet scholars may look forward at least in the near future to employing the framework of analysis and investigating the applicability of the characteristics of the mode of production mentioned at the beginning of this article. What is necessary, however, is for them to avoid any suggestion that the Asiatic mode is in any way comparable or related to socialism (and to refrain from any favorable reference to Wittfogel or acknowledgment of any indebtedness to him). It may not be necessary, but it seems prudent, and it appears to be the path present-day Soviet scholars have taken, to

place the term “Asiatic” on the shelf. They may recognize that Marx and Engels used the term, even admitting (as against some of their colleagues) that the two ideological ancestors never changed their mind about the fact that it represented a system distinct from the patterns of Western Europe, but preferring terms of their own coinage to designate it.

Doubtless there will be more to the story. Thus far it is a tortuous one, but one that has its encouraging side ; certain scholars have persisted in their determination to analyze phenomena that plainly cannot be subsumed under the old headings they were required to use and to find suitable new headings and terms for such analysis. For the moment, they have made considerable headway, circumventing the political requirements they are compelled to observe or reconciling such demands to their own satisfaction with their own scholarly work.

## Notes

- 1 The “Neolithic revolution” is, of course, not an exclusively Marxist or materialist conception. In a recently reproduced essay, the late great Christian historian, Christopher Dawson, wrote that it was “one of the greatest changes in the whole range of human history... Man ceased to be a parasite on Nature, like the hunter. He learnt to co-operate with Nature — to govern and direct her... And that change involved a revolution in his whole way of life [including] his religion and thought.” “The Stages of World Religion,” in *The Dawson Newsletter*, Winter 1985–86, 4, No. 4, p. 5.
- 2 Marian Sawer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (Nijhoff : The Hague, 1977), Chapter I, “The Prehistory of the Marxian Concept of the Asiatic Mode of Production,” gives a 39–page summary of the relevant views of these men. For Marx, it should be noted, the Middle Ages represented a new beginning. As anyone who has worked on this subject knows, the scholarly and semi-scholarly literature on it is enormous, and even the bibliography is scattered and difficult to assemble. In this article the author makes no pretense of being other than highly selective.
- 3 In his work *Législation Orientale* (1778). See Sawer, *Marxism*, p. 23 ; Franco Venturi, “Oriental Despotism” in *Journal of the History of Ideas*, 24 (Jan.-March, 1963), 137.
- 4 Sawer, *Marxism*. See fn. 2.
- 5 Toynbee’s review of the book appeared in the *American Political Science Review*, 52 (1958), 195–98 ; Wittfogel replied on pp. 502–06, also 1958.
- 6 See G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, tr. J. Sibree (London, 2d ed., 1901).
- 7 Quoted in Sawer, 1977, *ibid*.
- 8 See Anne M. Bailey and Josep R. Llobera, eds., *The Asiatic Mode of Production : Science and Politics* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 16.
- 9 Sawer, *Marxism*, p. 10.
- 10 See Karl A. Wittfogel, *Oriental Despotism* (New York : Vintage Books, rev. ed., 1981), pp. 305–29.
- 11 Lawrence Krader, *The Asiatic Mode of Production : Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx* (Assen : Van Gorcum, 1975), p. 39 ; the paraphrase is Krader’s.
- 12 See M. Sawer, “The Sources of Marx’s Concept of Oriental Despotism in British Political Economy,” *Études de Marxologie* (1974), Série S, 17, pp. 1516–23.
- 13 King, *Farmers of Forty Centuries* (London, 1927), p. 97 ff., as quoted in Wittfogel,

- Oriental Despotism*, p. 34.
- 14 E. Mandel in *The Formation of the Economic Thought of Karl Marx* (New York, 1971), p. 121, and P. Anderson in *Lineages of the Absolutist State* (London, 1974), p. 483, provide almost identical lists. See Kate Currie, "The Asiatic Mode of Production : Problems of Conceptualising State and Economy," *Dialectical Anthropology*, 8, No. 4 (April, 1984), 251–68.
- 15 Krader, p. 60.
- 16 Marx's letter to Engels of June 2, 1853.
- 17 Krader, p. 87.
- 18 Marx, *New York Daily Tribune* article of June 25, 1853.
- 19 Stephen P. Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production* (London : Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1982), p. 10.
- 20 Hélène Carrère d'Encausse and Stuart R. Schram, *Marxism and Asia : An Introduction with Readings* (Eng. ed. : London, 1969), p. 9.
- 21 For further examination of the development and details of Marx's and Engels's views on the subject, the reader is referred to Lawrence Krader, *The Asiatic Mode of Production : Sources, Development and Critique in the Writings of Karl Marx*. It may be useful to point out that the Carrère d'Encausse-Schram book is primarily about "Lenin and his disciples" ; the work by Marian Sawyer, *Marxism and the Question of the Asiatic Mode of Production*, spends some time on the "prehistory" beginning with Aristotle and devotes about half of the book to post-Marx-Engels developments ; Anne M. Bailey and Josep R. Llobera, *The Asiatic Mode of Production : Science and Politics*, is largely a collection of articles on the concept from G. V. Plekhanov to L. Krader (a selection from the book cited above) ; Stephen P. Dunn, *The Fall and Rise of the Asiatic Mode of Production*, is a study of Soviet intellectual history with only the briefest references to Marx and Engels. Peter Junge, *Asiatische Produktionsweise und Staatsentstehung* (Bremen, 1980) is one example of renewed German interest in the concept, but is a sociological analysis rather than a historical or historiographical treatment of the Asiatic mode.
- 22 Lenin, "O prodoval'stvennom naloge," *Sochineniia*, 4th ed., 32, p. 329.
- 23 Lenin, "Kak nam reorganizovat' Rabkrin," *Sochineniia*, 33, p. 440.
- 24 Dunn, p. 14. It is true that the context seems to suggest (though requiring the reader to go back a page) that Dunn is examining only the points Wittfogel cites from the pre-1914 Lenin, but on p. 14 Dunn refers to what Lenin accepted "at any stage in his career."
- 25 Samuel H. Baron, "Feudalism or the Asiatic Mode of Production : Alternative Interpretations of Russian History," *Windows on the Russian Past : Essays on Soviet Historiography Since Stalin*, Baron and Nancy W. Heer, eds., (Columbus ; AAASS Press, 1977), pp. 27–28.
- 26 L. S. Vasil'ev cites the Kokin-Papaian book, which he calls "interesting but in general little-known," in an article of 1968, entitled "Sotsial'naia struktura i dinamika drevnekitaiskogo obshchestva," in L. V. Danilova, ed., *Problemy istorii dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv*, I, (Moscow, 1968), p. 455. Selections from the contributions to the Leningrad discussion of 1931, *Diskussiiia ob aziatskom sposobe proizvodstva* (Moscow-Leningrad, 1931) by Mad'iar and Kokin, are to be found in Bailey and Llobera, pp. 76–96.
- 27 Quoted in Wittfogel, p. 401.
- 28 G. L. Ulmen, *The Science of Society : Toward an Understanding of the Life and Work of*

- Karl August Wittfogel* (The Hague : Mouton, 1978), p. 137.
- 29 Wittfogel, p. 403.
- 30 Ibid., p.404.
- 31 According to Jean Chesneaux in the Marxist journal *La Pensée*, as quoted in Ulmen, p. 398.
- 32 Samuel H. Baron, "The Transition from Feudalism to Capitalism in Russia : A Major Soviet Historical Controversy," reviews V. I. Shunkov *et al.*, eds., *Perekhod ot feodalizma k kapitalizmu v Rossii: Materialy vsesoiuznoi diskussii* (Moscow, 1969). Baron's review article appears in the *American Historical Review*, 77 (June, 1972), 716–29.
- 33 *Perekhod ot feodalizma*, pp. 192, 149–50, and 399, as quoted in Baron, "The Transition," p. 727.
- 34 E. M. Medved'ev, "Feodal'nye otnosheniia v drevnei i srednevekovoi Indii," *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 1970, No. 3, pp. 71–79.
- 35 Iu. Z. Polevoi, "G. V. Plekhanov o vostochnoi despotizme," *Narody Azii i Afriki*, 1967, No. 2, pp. 73–80.
- 36 Dunn, pp. 82–83.
- 37 The paraphrase is Dunn's, p. 86. The 1965 discussion is published as G. F. Kim *et al.*, eds., *Obshchee i osobennoe v istoricheskom razvitiu stran Vostoka : materialy diskussii ob obshchestvennykh formatsiakh na Vostoke* (Moscow, 1966), the follow-up is G. F. Kim, responsible ed., *Problemy dokapitalisticheskikh obshchestv v stranakh Vostoka* (Moscow, 1971).
- 38 Kachanovskii, *Rabovladienie, feodalizm ili aziatskii sposob proizvodstva?* (Moscow, 1971), p. 6, as quoted in G. L. Ulmen, p. 437.
- 39 See, for example, Frank A. Barbaria, *Modern 'Asiatic' Despotism* (La Mesa, California, 1981). In this self-published book of 400 pages, an apparent autodidact who is a former Trotskyist discusses the ancient Near Eastern Empires (which he declares Marx and Engels did not study sufficiently) and equates the present-day USSR with them in structure. The writer seems never to have heard of Wittfogel.
- 40 Kachanovskii, "Diskussiia ob aziatskom sposobe proizvodstva na stranitsakh zarubezhnoi marksistskoi pečati," in G. F. Kim *et al.*, pp. 87–88, as quoted in Dunn, p. 87.
- 41 Perelomov, "Izuchenie problem drevnego Kitaia," in G. V. Astaf'ev *et al.*, eds., *Problemy sovetskogo kitaevedeniia* (Moscow, 1973), as quoted in Ulmen, p.441.
- 42 Ter-Akopian, "Marks i Engel's ob aziatskom sposobe proizvodstva i zemledel'cheskoi obshchine," in A. I. Mal'ush, ed., *Iz istorii marksizma i mezhdunarodnogo rabocheho dvizheniia* (Moscow, 1973), pp. 167–220.
- 43 The Alaev article is in *Soviet Oriental Studies Today*, Part I (Moscow, 1980), pp. 39–53.
- 44 L. B. Alaev, "Ot redaktora," in Alaev, ed., *Tipy obshchestvennykh otnoshenii na vostoke v srednie veka* (Moscow, 1982), pp. 3–4.
- 45 Koranashvili, "K voprosu ob evoliutsii vzgliadov K. Marksa i F. Engel'sa na vostochnoe obshchestvo," in *Kavkazsko-blichnevostochnyi sbornik*, VI (Tbilisi, 1980). Koranashvili, using his first name, Guram, then published this, or approximately this, in English translation, in *Dialectical Anthropology*, 5 (1980), 249–59, and 7 (1982), 185–90. Since I used the Russian only in Moscow and the English only in Seattle, I cannot be sure whether there were changes.
- 46 A. A. Bokshchanin, L. S. Vasil'ev (responsible ed.), and N. I. Fomina, eds., *Sotsial'nye*

*organizatsii v Kitae : Sbornik statei* (Moscow, 1981). The quotation is from p. 4 ; the article by Vasil'ev is entitled "Feodal'nyi klan v drevnei Kitae. (Vozniknovenie, rastsvet, upadok.)"

- 47 Although I had not requested to see him, I was asked to do so in the course of my own visit to Moscow in late 1982 to study the topic of this paper, a sure sign that he had become, in G. L. Ulmen's words, "the leading spokesman for the Soviet position on the Asiatic mode of production." Ulmen, p. 400.
- 48 Semenov, "Ob odnom iz tipov traditsionnykh sotsial'nykh struktur Afriki i Azii : pragosudarstvo i agrarnye otnosheniia," in *Gosudarstvo i agrarnaia evoliutsiia v razvivaiushchikhsia stranakh Azii i Afriki* (Moscow, 1980), pp. 102–29.
- 49 Semenov, "Tipologii rannikh form ekspluatatsii," *Narody Azii i Afriki*, No. 4, 1985, pp. 59–68.