



**Yukiko Tatsumi, Taro Tsurumi, eds.** *Publishing in Tsarist Russia: A History of Print Media from Enlightenment to Revolution*. Library of Modern Russia Series. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2020. Illustrations. 280 pp. \$69.00, cloth, ISBN 978-1-350-10933-9.

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*Publishing in Tsarist Russia*, edited by Yukiko Tatsumi and Taro Tsurumi, is a collection of interesting studies about a fundamental question on the rise of national identities and nationalism in late imperial Russia. Was print capitalism present in tsarist Russia, and if so, to what extent? The book, comprising three parts in ten chapters, is dedicated to different aspects of this question.

The approach is multidisciplinary and advances from the hypotheses first presented by Benedict Anderson in his *Imagined Communities* on the role of print capitalism, “which made it possible for rapidly growing numbers of people to think about themselves, and to relate themselves to others, in profoundly new ways.”[1] The introduction includes a detailed panorama of studies on the history of publishing in Russia, with an interesting problematization of Anderson’s definition of the Russification promoted in the Romanov empire. Taking advantage of the historiographic revolution carried out in the last three decades on the multinational character of the Russian Empire, Tatsumi and Tsurumi point to, with great precision, the presence of a much more complex situation starting from the publishing market of the time, used as an important vantage point for the international dynamics of the nationalities in late imperial Russia.

The editors make it clear that “when we focus on the actual function of Russian publishing in imperial society from the age of Enlightenment to the age of nationalism, rather than on the purpose of the state authority, the history of Russian publishing is not confined to the history of Russification and the development of Russian nationalism: it

also includes the history of the nationalism of non-Russians” (p. 21). This importance of foreign influences is outlined as fundamental in the development of the space for print media because it allowed the formation of styles and tastes and the use of technologies specially adapted to the Russian reality, and at the same time it created the conditions for the diffusion of Russian literature, which in the nineteenth century established itself on a European level, enjoying critical and public successes and becoming a fundamental part of national identity.

The book is divided into three chronological parts. The first part consists of three essays, covering three equally important topics for Russian literature and language. In chapter 1, Yusuke Toriyama illustrates the attempt sponsored by Catherine II to translate the main works of the European Enlightenment, identifying with great acuity the political objectives of the empress in the definition of Russian as a vehicle of Enlightenment ideas and precepts, rising to the role of *lingua franca* in the imperial space.

A deep reflection on the birth and construction of the concept of classics in Russian literature is provided in the second essay, presented by Abram I. Reitblat. The Russian scholar highlights the role of literary criticism and anthologies in the affirmation of the classics, and the way this process saw till the end of the nineteenth century the virtual absenteeism of the state, an attitude then changed over the years, with the inauguration of the monument to Alexander Pushkin in Moscow in 1880. Reitblat points out that the inclusion of the classics in high school programs in 1905 definitively affirmed the idea that “literary classics are the quintessence of national wisdom, one of the foundations of Russian identity” (p. 83).

Concluding the first part is the chapter by Hajime Kaizawa, dedicated to a period considered generally obscure in the golden century of Russian literature, the 1880s. Kaizawa shows how the period known in Russian as *bezvremen'e* was actually

a turning point in the 1870s-90s, when Russian literature “became the property of a national mass reading public, including readers from the lower classes,” and he underlines how “these classic works began to gain wide recognition as valuable parts of the Russian national cultural tradition” (p. 92). At the core of this Japanese scholar’s analysis is the change in the production, reception, and consumption of literary works, with the emergence of a real publishing market in the 1880s—a change that goes hand in hand with the exponential growth of readership and the opening of reading rooms and libraries in cities and villages. The dissemination of economic editions of the main novels of the time, of which the publisher A. S. Suvorin editor of the conservative newspaper *Novoe vremia*) was one of the promoters, contributed to the nationalization of the readership. Kaizawa underlines that, “in other words, in Russia, the desire for the nationalization of literature appeared earlier than the formation of the nation-state or the maturity of civil society” and that this desire then contributed to promoting the formation of civil society in the last imperial decades (p. 108).

Regarding print capitalism theory, an important contribution is made by Tatsumi in her well-documented essay on Russian publishers in the late nineteenth century, which opens the second part. The work underlines the role of foreign-born publishers in the Russian market, which was then developing. The growth of private publishing, supported by the participation of actors of foreign origin or trained abroad, made it possible to introduce new publications in Russian society, such as illustrated magazines, children’s books, and calendar books. Tatsumi identifies in Polish M. O. Volf and the Prussian A. F. Marks, two figures able to explain the process of transformation of the Russian press and publishing and highlights their role in disseminating publications capable of playing an important role in the formation of national and nationalist consciousness. The main Russian prerevolutionary encyclopedia, the Brockhaus-Efron, was published by the homonymous joint-

stock company, made by the Brockhaus multinational holding based in Germany and Ilya Efron, publisher of medical literature in Saint Petersburg during the 1880s. The partnership between the two publishers established the encyclopedia, which went from being a mere translation of the German equivalent to becoming an original and essential reference work written and designed by Russians for Russians.

Takehiko Inoue, in a fascinating reconstruction on Kalmyks and Russian orientalists in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, highlights the connections established through Buddhist culture between the tsarist empire and Tibet. The analysis presented of the relationships of mutual influence (and use) appears convincing and is part of broader research conducted by Inoue on the Kalmyks in the Russian Empire. The Volga-Ural Muslim book culture is the topic treated by Danielle Ross. In her analysis, which covers the long nineteenth century, Ross focuses on the richness of the book culture development in the region already before 1905. Ross demonstrates the existence of a vibrant cultural environment, stimulated by both state (Asian Press) and private initiatives and by the birth of the papermaking industry in the empire. The progressive shift from Arabic to Tatar-Turki testifies to the development of a national self-awareness in the region, where Russian was struggling to establish itself as a *lingua franca*. The inclusion strategies of the Finno-Ugric peoples of the Volga Basin and their place in Russian Orthodoxy constitute the topic of Akira Sakurama, who analyzes the role of the non-Russian clergy through a magazine published by the Kazan Theological Academy, *Izvestiia po Kazanskoi eparkhii*. Sakurama raises an important point in his reconstruction of the positions expressed in the articles of the magazine, the perception of Russification by the non-Russian clergy not as ethnic assimilation but as a means of cultural advancement: in fact, according to the scholar, the claim of its own ethnic identity different from both the Russians and the Muslim Tatars, integrated but distinct in the sphere of Orthodoxy.

In part 3, Melissa K. Stockdale points out how the Russian case found itself combining the influence of the diffusion of the press, a process that had already begun thirty years before, and the First World War, an event capable of initiating total mobilization of the entire society. The war increased the exposure of the peasant world to the press, often illustrated, in a way never known before, and Stockdale's thesis on the acceleration of

the process of formation of a mass national identity due to the combination of war and the spread of media appears fundamental in understanding the effects of World War I on Russian society. In another important essay, the author discusses patriotic culture, its ability, and its limits in mobilizing late imperial society, but in the study in this collection, the attention to print culture integrates and broadens the reflections already developed by the American scholar.[2] The Russian language has managed to be a vehicle for the construction of national identity not only for Russian nationalist projects but also for non-Russian movements.

Tsurumi discusses the Siberian Zionists and the Russian Far East press during the twilight of the empire. The Japanese scholar's remark on how "many Jews published in Russian" because "they discussed their nationalism in Russian contexts" clarifies the question of the linguistic vehicle (p. 268). The work is based on two magazines, *Evreiskaia zhizn'* (a Zionist and anti-Bolshevik magazine published during the Kolchak regime between 1918 and 1920) and *Sibir'-Palestine* (published from 1920 until 1943 in Harbin). The use of Russian makes Siberian and Far Eastern Zionists bearers of a particular identity, where Zion intersects with the reality of exile in Manchuria.

The conclusion presents the main reasons for the essays in the collection, which can be summarized in three fundamental topics: the making of Russian language and its literary culture until the nineteenth century, the autonomy of the Russian publishing system with its proper dynamics, and the growth of the publishing system beyond restrictions and authorities' actions. The study of the establishment and development of the publishing system as a soft infrastructure embodies the possibility of understanding the transnational (and transimperial) relations present in tsarist society and highlights the mutual influences and the peculiar but reasoned choices of political and cultural non-Russian movements in adopting the Russian language.

*Publishing in Tsarist Russia* is highly recommended to anyone who deals with nations and nationalism in the Russian Empire and, in general, to scholars of nationalism because it demonstrates the possible variations in identity-building processes and uses of the language of the "master-nation" by other subjects. In this sense, the book is linked to a long and fruitful tradition of studies on the subject of the multinational character of the Russian Empire and the complexity of the Russification category, joining the ranks of publications by such other authors as Edward C. Thaden, Andreas Kappeler, and Alexey Miller, and provides numerous reflections and facts from which to start further research on the role of print capitalism and readership in the formation of national identity in the 1780s-1910s.

#### Notes

[1]. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 2006), 36.

[2]. Melissa K. Stockdale, "Mobilizing the Nation: Patriotic Culture in Russia's Great War and Revolution, 1914-20," in *Russian Culture in War and Revolution, 1914-22*, ed. Murray Frame, Boris Kolonitskii, Steven G. Marks, and Melissa K. Stockdale (Bloomington, IN: Slavica Publishers, 2014), 3-26.

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