

**Western Visitors' Views of Russia
and the Russians:
Origin, Bias and National Mythology
during the 16th–19th Centuries***

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The Russian tends to deal only in extremes, and he is not particularly concerned to reconcile them. To him, contradiction is a familiar thing. It is the essence of Russia. West and East, extreme cold and extreme heat, exaggerated cruelty and exaggerated kindness, violent xenophobia and uncontrollable yearning for contact with the foreign world, simultaneous love and hate for the same objects: these are only some of the contradictions, which dominate the life of the Russian people.
George F. Kennan¹⁾

This nation is composed of the most striking contrasts. Perhaps the reason lies in the mixture of European civilization and Asiatic character.
Madame de Staël²⁾

The Russian peasant had been living in the Middle Ages through the nineteenth century.
George P. Fedotov³⁾

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- 1) George F. Kennan (1967) *Memoirs, 1925-1950*, Boston and Toronto: Little, Brown and Company, pp. 528-529.
- 2) Germaine de Staël (2000) *The Years of Exile*, trans., Avriel H. Goldberger, DeKalb: Northern Illinois University Press, p. 148.
- 3) George P. Fedotov (1960) *The Russian Religious Mind. Kievan Christianity: the 10th to the 13th Centuries*, New York: Harper Torchbooks, Vol. 1, p. 3.

I. Introduction: Theoretical Premise and Cultural Backgrounds for the Study

Considering the fact that there has been much talk about the history of memory, to be more exact, about the cultural history as memory, it is true that relatively little research has been done either in Russian historiography or intellectual history. In particular, no comprehensive study of "the Other's views (чужой in Lotmanian and most Russian ethnographers' binary scheme)" of Russia and the Russians. In other words, the everyday life of Russian common people, бытовые жизни, seen from the eyes of Western visitors and travelers, has not drawn scholarly attention. Rather, ample archival documents, personal journals, anecdotes, etc left by the outsiders need a meticulous reading and synthetic interpretation, as well. To answer this lingering question, however, we partly do follow Lotman's framework of "semiosphere" – a dynamic cultural system of symbols, stereotypes, and rituals that provide mechanisms of interpretation to members within a cultural community.⁴⁾

One thing we should take into consideration is that Russian history and culture, especially of the nineteenth century, as such evolved "in the presence of an influential "other" in the form of the Western social and cultural experience."⁵⁾ Indeed, as this paper shall explore, the first encounter between the West (the other, or чужой) with Russia (свой) and the idea-forces, which are a corollary of the countries' relations, provide an epochal-making springboard to further development of another periphery, which is not being structurally ordered yet.⁶⁾ As usual, history

4) Juri Lotman and Boris Uspenskij (1984) *The Semiotics of Russian Culture*, Ann Arbor, p. xii.

5) Edith W. Clowes, Samuel D. Kassow and James L. West eds. (1991) *Between Tsar and People: Educated Society and the Quest for Public Identity in Late Imperial Russia*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 11.

6) Viewed from the perspective of history of mentalities, to use the French *Annales* school's concept, ideas become, like myths or value complexes, one of

as memory of a past and culture as a collective concept, both of which continue to live and to change as one society succeeds another, are always linked to each other, assuming the continuity of the ethical, intellectual, and spiritual life of the individual, society, and humankind.⁷⁾ What all materials by the Western visitors to Russia might be defined as cultural memory by the Others. Viewed from this, the first chaotic and pejorative impressions that the Western viewers held became a center in their early stage of discovery of Russia and the Russians. When these "other" gradually turn into idea-forces in the Russian land and sneaked into the intellectual lives throughout the end of 18th century and the first three decades in the 19th century, they were replaced by the *свой* that took the shape of nuclei—structurally ordered elements—in almost disciplines in terms of debates, aspirated enthusiasm about the nations destiny, and all kinds of artistic inspirations.⁸⁾ In relation to our conceptual scheme, we can take a brief look at James Billington's tripartite successive passages, all of which for me are well suited to figure out the basic characteristic of history of Russia. Though his premise is attempted from the standpoint of the Russian art, I believe that his understanding is quite palpable even to our further discussions at least at the first and second stage. To use his phrases:

First, and without much warning, this seemingly proud and self-centered people suddenly takes over some new type of creative enterprise lock, stock, and barrel from precisely that more advanced foreign civilization which they had previously reviled. Second, having

the collective forces by which men live their times, once the ideas are grasped through the circulation of the words. The **idea-forces** thus might offer the subsequent development of another periphery.

- 7) Jacques Le Goff (1988) *Medieval Imagination*, Chicago and London: The University Chicago Press, p. 11.
- 8) Jurii M. Lotman and Boris A. Uspenskii (1985) "The Dynamic Model of a Semiotic System," in *The Semiotics of Russian Cultural History*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, p. 74.

taken over in finished form someone else's exemplary model of a new art medium, they suddenly produced a stunningly original and even better version of their own. Finally, having lifted the new art form to a higher level, Russians themselves tend to cast it down and break it apart—leaving behind only fragments of their best creations for future generations.⁹⁾

Here we catch a glimpse of hints at the dynamism that Russia herself witnessed throughout three hundred history of Western visitors' perception: the relation between чужой (foreign, the others invasion into свой) and свой (the center, a force pushing the other from the place of center to the periphery). The idea-forces that had been established in the domestic atmosphere in the first two decades of the 19th century and reached its peak in the middle of the century were surely enough to give powerful impetus to the Russians to think themselves and to absorb the foreigners' cultural heritages voluntarily even negative remarks to their prejudiced self-images. Then the outsiders' records and views, as it were cultural memories or legacy in short, became conflated into the inside fervor to create what we can call typical Russian one, or something nature that stands for Russian characteristic in general. This dialectic and dynamic process, as Billington sees, are in good harmony with the basic development that Russian history presents.

Not only building on the binary contrast Lotman proposes, but following Billingtonian understanding of Russian art history, I make an effort to map out a long historiography regarding views of Russia and the Russians by Western visitors through the 15th and well into the early 20th century of Russia before the October Revolution. Our primary concern here is not to analyze the surrounding theoretical terrain, but to provide an over-arching topography—but not an exhaustive picture—through which we can perceive of a total contour of how the Western visitors' impressions on Russia and her common people had been made. On the other hand, our purpose is to explore how the impressions effectively influenced on domestic debates to

9) James H. Billington (1998) *The Face of Russia. Anguish, Aspiration, and Achievement in Russian Culture*, New York: TV Books, pp. 16-17.

put forth the hinterland's own mythology of the *Russianness*, namely a concept of the Russian soul.

II. Embryonic Stage of Discovery of Russia during the 15th–17th Centuries

As Richard Pipes in his introduction to *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (by Giles Fletcher in 1591) notes, Muscovite Russia, until the 15th century, had indeed been a "*terra incognita*,"¹⁰⁾ the land hardly known to the West. Since the mid 16th century, however, the country drew foreigners' attention as a place of legends and secrets. The Westerners' visits to Russia and their cultural contacts with her people rapidly developed by the opening of the maritime route to northern Russia by the English in 1553, as well as the creation of the Muscovy Company in 1555. The result of this epoch-making was the establishment of commercial, diplomatic, and even cultural connections.¹¹⁾ The growth of Anglo-Russian trade resulted from Richard Chancellor's journey to Moscow during Ivan IV's reign (1547–1584).¹²⁾ Since then, during the seventeenth century the Russians witnessed a transition as Muscovy embarked on state-building, Westernization, and territorial expansion

10) Giles Fletcher (1966), *Of the Russe Commonwealth*, with intro. by Richard Pipes, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 1.

11) Iu. D. Levin (1998) has recently overviewed this history between the countries in his essay, "Россия в английской эссеистике XVIII века," *Образ России. Россия и русские в восприятии запада и востока*, Санкт-Петербург: Наука, сс. 5–28.

12) Chancellor's account was first published in 1589 in London, as "*Principal Navigations*," a Russian translation, "*Первое путешествие англичан в Россию, описанное Климентом Адамом, другом Чанселера, капитана сей экспедиции и посаященное Филиппу, королю английскому*," completed and introduced in *Отчественные записки*, XXVII (1826). Lloyd E. Berry and Robert O. Crummey (1968) *Rude & Barbarous Kingdom*, Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, pp. 7–8.

during continuing upheaval at the dawn of modernity.

The visual impression of strangeness and exotic otherness, recorded by virtually every early visitor to Russia, were reinforced by curious customs. Muscovite Russia appeared to the novice-travelers not as a European country, but as "a Christian-exotic country of the New World."¹³⁾ This initial impression had been engraved upon the European imagination for centuries. In fact, "it was conventional for travel accounts to consist of a combination of first-person narration, recounting one's trip, and description of the flora and fauna of regions passed through and the manners and customs of the inhabitants" by the early sixteenth century in Europe.¹⁴⁾ Since the middle of the 16th century, the rediscovery of Russia proliferated a sizeable body of literature that is known as "*сказания иностранцев*" (accounts of foreigners) in Russian historiography.¹⁵⁾ This literature, like the whole fabric of travel accounts of the age of discovery, has both specific strengths and weaknesses as a historical source. The early explorers were largely subjective and biased, and occasionally showed even blind criticism toward Russia and her common people. At the center of the earliest records was a clear-cut dichotomy characteristic of mostly negative views of Russia.

The first account of foreigners was written by an Italian **Ambrogio Contarini**, a Venetian diplomat and merchant. He was dispatched in 1474 to Persia, as one historian recalls, but on his return voyage in 1475 he was forced north and found himself unexpectedly in Moscow. He saw Russian people, and wrote an account of his travels, mainly focusing on his contempt of the Orthodox faith.¹⁶⁾ Almost seventy years later then we

13) Karl H. Ruffman (1952) *Das Russlandbild im England Shakespeares*, Göttingen, p. 176.

14) Mary Louise Pratt (1986) "Fieldwork in Common Places," in *Writing Culture. The Poetics and Politics of Ethnography*, ed., James Clifford and George E. Marcus, Berkeley: University of California Press, p. 33.

15) В. О. Ключевский (1991) *Сказания иностранцев о Московском государстве*, Москва: Прометей.

16) Marshall Poe (2003) "A Distant World: Russian Relations with Europe before

come across one of the most important early accounts by **Sigismund von Herberstein** (1486-1556). He was sent to Russia in 1526 as an Imperial ambassador to the Grand Duke Vasili III. His book, *Commentarii rerum Moscoviticarum* (in Vienna in 1549), ran through several editions, and later was translated as *Notes on Russia*; it served as an extensive source for Western European knowledge of Russia in the period 1550 to 1700.¹⁷⁾ The book was based on good knowledge of the written sources as well as intelligent personal observations, and it provided Westerners with the first serious vast description of Russian history, geography, government, and customs.

For Herberstein the prominence of religion was one of impressive pictures he received from the Russian people, but he observed at the same time the stubbornness of their religious obsession that influenced negatively upon the Habsburg statesman.

Giles Fletcher (1546-1611), the ambassador to Moscow dispatched by Elizabeth in 1588, was a critic of Russian Orthodoxy. And one of the most scathing attacks on Russian beliefs was made by the Englishman. While in Russia, Fletcher kept a journal that furnished the basis of his book, *Of the Russe Commonwealth* (1591), during the return voyage from Russia. Fletcher himself, as we shall see later in details, including successive generations, saw "no writer capable of the penetration which he had shown in his book in spite of the multiplicity of political and above all commercial ties between the two countries."¹⁸⁾

Structurally, the book is composed of unequal parts. The first (chapters 1-4) contains a geographic description, the second (chapters 5-25) an

Peter the Great," in *Russia. Engages the World, 1453-1825*, ed., Cynthia Hyla Whittaker, Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, p. 12.

17) According to an authentic investigation, by 1620 Herberstein's book "had appeared in eleven Latin, seven German, and two Italian editions". John Quentin Cook (1959) "The Image of Russia in Western European Thought in the Seventeenth Century," *PhD Dissertation*, University of Minnesota, p. 140.

18) M. S. Anderson, *Britain's Discovery of Russia 1553-1815*, New York and London: Macmillan & Co Ltd, pp. 106-107.

analysis of the state and its institutions, and the third (chapters 26-28) an account of customs and manners.¹⁹⁾ The English ambassador notes that Russians crossed themselves incessantly, but without either reverence or understanding, adding in sarcastic disbelief: "And they [the Russians] think they all strangers Christians to be no better than Turks (and so they will say) because they bow not themselves when they meet with the cross nor sign themselves with it as the Russue manner is."²⁰⁾

In Fletcher's account, the tsarist government is based on the absolute power of tyranny, whose characteristic is "a monstrous vampire which sucks from the nation all wealth and robs it of all initiative."²¹⁾ The core of the work, in fact, is a dissection and interpretation of the "manner of government by the Russe emperor." Beginning with the description of Russian absolutism by stressing that the Russian tsar has all the principal points and matters of state wherein Sovereignty lies, Fletcher also presents a characterization of the Russian clergy as being ignorant and deprived. The condemnation of Russian vice, self-indulgence, and barbarity, together with of administrative setbacks, are key objects with which the author paints the gloomy picture of Russia at the time. He has been accused of being hostile to the Russians and giving an unfair picture of their intellectual and moral condition. The charge of distrust toward Russians is that he has reasons to dislike the country; his antipathy was invariably directed against the regime, and never against the people. One of the principal premises and conclusions of his account is that tyranny breeds barbarism. The total picture of Russian society is of an interlocking system of economic exploitations. This kind of class-based feudal system, one characteristic of the Middle Ages, was predominant in Russia. The zenith of that tyrannical social structure was taken by the Emperor,

19) Giles Fletcher, *op. cit.* Fletcher's journals are available in modern English translation by Llyod Berry and Robert Crummey, *op. cit.*, pp. 87-246, but this version has no chapter division throughout the text.

20) Berry and Crummey, *ibid.*, pp. 232-233.

21) Richard Pipes, *op. cit.*, p. 29.

personified by "Religion, God, the Pope, and the laws, while the serfs had no laws, no courts of justice, no regular mode of legal redress."²²⁾

III. Flourishing Period of Discovery of Russia during the beginning of the 18th–the early 20th Centuries

1. Negative and Pejorative Views of Russia and the Russians

Not surprisingly, western travelers hardly paid attention to peasant-lord relations, such as their ways of life, traditional rituals, mentalities regarding folk wisdom, etc. Rather, their focus was on the subservience of the Muscovite aristocracy toward the tsar, and of the peasantry toward the nobles. Along with this, those foreigners, Fletcher in particular, link this feature to Russian basic nature distinguished from other peoples. In a sense, the fact that "the Muscovite government was an absolute, autocratic tyranny became a cliché of the sixteenth century," as a critic writes, seemed to be a notable corollary shared by the early foreign viewers.²³⁾ Fletcher's description of Muscovite tyranny was intended, as he himself declares in his preface, to provide a programmatic antithesis to what the English regime should be. Be that as it may, one significant thing to be mentioned here is that the foreigner points out one important facet that upholds the Russian social structure: the subservient relation of the peasantry to the State, as well as the deep rooted origin of barbarous nature of the peasants.

22) Germain de Lagny (1854) *The Knout and the Russians; or the Muscovite Empire, the Tsar, and His People*, New York: Harper & Brothers, Publishers, pp. 145-146.

23) Charles J. Halperin (1975) "Sixteenth-Century Foreign Travel Accounts to Muscovy: A Methodological Excursus," *Sixteenth Century Journal*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 99.

Regarding the relations between the servant and the lord, **Marquis de Custine** (1790-1857), a French traveler to Russia, beginning in 1843, deals with almost the same matter, providing his clear opinion to this issue. Citing Herberstein's journal of three hundred years ago, Custine posed the question under discussion as follows: "Here, then, is what von Herberstein has written in decrying the despotism of the Russian monarch."

He (the Czar) speaks and everything is done: the life, the fortune of the laity and of the clergy, of the nobility and of the citizens, all depend on his supreme will. He has no opposition, and everything in him appears just—as in the Divinity—for the Russians are persuaded that the Great Prince is the executor of celestial decrees. Thus, God and the Prince will it; God and the Prince know best, such are the ordinary expressions among them; nothing equals their zeal for his service.²⁴⁾

Unlike his predecessors who enter the service of the tsar in Russia as well as of business enterprise, Custine's status was different. His journey "was motivated by a desire to find the model of a well-ordered society that could be invoked and held up as an alternative to the petty philistinism and egalitarianism of the regime of Louis Philippe in France."²⁵⁾ For this political reason, it is no accident that his attention was mostly on political and social structure of Russia. His analytical insights reached their peak in describing the social structure of "chin", the fourteen-class rank system of Russia, which was introduced by the Peter the Great. Gogolian outcry against the vanity of city dwellers in his *Petersburg Tales*, especially when the writer describes the ambitious and phantasmagoric nature of the city, Petersburg, in his *Nevskii Prospect* and *The Nose*, is echoed in one of Custine's most impressive notes that

24) Phyllis Penn Kohler, ed. and trans. (1953) *Journey for Our Time. The Journal of the Marquis de Custine*, London: Arthur Barker Ltd, p. 55.

25) Kevin J. McKenna (1987) "Russia Revisited: A Cultural Update to the Marquis De Custine's Journey for Our Time," *Selecta: Journal of the Pacific Northwest Council on Foreign Languages*, Vol. 8, pp. 109-114.

examines this social class categorization. Gogolian stamp of criticism of the city's profanity and evil environs is reflected in Custine's insightful phrases.

Similar to the previous visitors to Russia, Custine was struck by the autocrat's waging power over submissive peasants, and his aggressive pen does not fail to record the seamy side of the Russian people. Succinctly, and sometimes very aptly, Custine's vision sees inside the Russian mindsets. Despite that his words seem to be on the basis of ethnocentric superiority over the "barbaric primitive people", his observation reminds us of another aspect of Russian national character: "barbaric jealousy" and "xenophobic disposition".²⁶⁾

Remarkably, when Custine describes the atmospheric environs of the city Petersburg, some of his phrases such as "a sharp angle with the surface of the earth—stepchild of the Creator"(Petersburg, July 10, 1839) and "All Russians are born imitators characteristic of infant peoples" (Petersburg, August 1, 1839) are reminiscent of **Petr Chaadaev's** famous passages in his *Philosophical Letter* (1836). Chaadaev, "forefather of Russian cultural studies and ethnic self-consciousness,"²⁷⁾ wrote: "We Russians, who have come into the world *like illegitimate child (italics is mine)*, without a heritage, without any ties binding us to the men who came before us on this earth" clearly resonates in the foreigner's journal. In addition, Chaadaev's passage calling his Russians a "blind, superficial, and often clumsy imitation of other nations" is strongly echoed again in Custine's scornful contempt. Likewise, a 19th century American traveler, **Robert Bremner**, writes about diverse aspects of Russian character, mostly making a negative inquiry into them.²⁸⁾ Given the year of

26) Ibid., p. 139.

27) Dale E. Peterson (1997) "Civilizing the Race: Chaadaev and the Paradox of Eurocentric Nationalism," *The Russian Review*, Vol. 56, No. 4, p. 550.

28) Robert Bremner (1839) *Excursions in the Interior of Russia: Sketches of the Character and Policy of the Emperor Nicholas*, London: Henry Colburn, Publishers, vol. 1, p. 162. For the early history of American travelers to Russia

publication of Chaadaev's work (1836), the latter's accounts by American travelers such as Bremner (1839) and Maxwell (1850) lend a convincing premise that there are numerous **intertextualities** among their travel narratives. A further study demands whether these travel accounts either copy the Russian works' important passages or cite themselves. Yet, suffice it to say that these negative descriptions about the other, the Russian people, abound in the Westerners' ethnocentric superiority over the opposites as most travel accounts and records have demonstrated so far. **John Maxwell's** observation of the Russian peasants is consistent with that of his predecessors to Russia in general.²⁹⁾ A portrait of the physical figure of the peasants, for instance, allows the reader to think to what extent the foreigner's perceptions of Russia are alike. Maxwell's phrase—"His muscular strength is not remarkable, but his passive resistance of privation and fatigue, and his obstinacy under the most severe and painful punishment, is almost incredible"³⁰⁾—is slightly copied in the French visitor's (Custine) diary.

For foreign travelers Russian public bath was an object symbolizing not so much a cultural peculiarity of the Russian people as the backwardness and barbaric primitiveness they represent.

In Moscow we ourselves several times saw men and women come out of public baths to cool off, and, as naked as God created them, approach us and call obscenely in broken German to our young people. Idleness strongly prompts them to this kind of dissolute behavior. Daily you can see hundreds of idlers standing about or strolling in the market place or in the Kremlin. And they are more addicted to drunkenness than any nation in the world.³¹⁾

during 1776-1861, see Anna M. Babey (1938) *Americans in Russia 1776-1917. A Study of the American Travelers in Russia from the American Revolution to the Russian Revolution*, New York: The Comet Press, pp. 3-9.

29) He was secretary of the American legation at Petersburg from 1842 to 1844.

30) John S. Maxwell (1850) *The Czar, His Court and People: Including a Tour in Norway and Sweden*, New York: Baker and Scribner, p. 236.

31) *The Travels of Olearius in the Seventeenth-Century Russia*, trans. Samuel H.

In addition, the Russians were compared to "a filthy animal". One of typical condemnations made by the foreigners is found in **Adam Olearius's** book (in 1662, in London). Olearius (1603-1671) was a learned German scholar as a court mathematician and director of the ducal library. His book became available during the 17th century in an English translation, and "considerably influenced the ideas of the country generally held by Englishmen during the pre-Petrine period".³²⁾

Observations of "wife-beating" by husbands were also a shocking example of "inferior others" for the foreign travelers. A number of writers reported that whippings were so integral part of matrimony in Russia that the wife regarded them as a sign of her husbands' affection. A couple of proverbs recorded by the foreigners vividly reflect what they saw, not to mention the Russian peasants' moral constructs. For instance, "beat your fur coat, and it will be warmer; beat your wife and she will be sweeter, and a dog is wiser than a woman; he won't bark at his master, or a hen is not a bird, a woman is not a person"—all of these proverbs indicate "the Russian husband's brutal and contemptuous attitude toward his wife."³³⁾ John Maxwell, too, writes a sweeping indictment of women of all classes. The position and dignity of the Russian women are on the whole ignored

Baron, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1967, p. 142. Olearius, as secretary of the Duke of Holstein's embassies to Muscovy and Persia, left this travelogue, the one which "was almost certainly the most widely read book about Russia to appear during the seventeenth century." John Quentin Cook, op. cit., p. 144. The book's original title is "*The Voyages and Travels of the Ambassadors Sent by Frederick, Duke of Holstein, to the Great Duke of Muscovy and King of Persia, Begun in the Year 1633, and Finished in 1639.*"

32) M. S. Anderson, op. cit., p. 35.

33) Jane McDermid (1992) "Victorian Views of Peasant Women and Patriarchy in Russia," *Coexistence*, Vol. 29, p. 189; Sir Donald Mackenzie Wallace (1886) *Russia*, Popular Edition, with an Autobiographical Memoir, London and New York: Cassell & Company, Ltd, pp. 129-130; Quoted from Richard Stites (1978) *The Women's Liberation Movement in Russia. Feminism, Nihilism, and Bolshevism 1860-1930*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, p. 3.

in his travel narratives. Nor are cultural otherness or, cross-cultural variants are considered at all.

More importantly, the outsiders are no more than just bystanders, who have no intention to know further about the Russians' traditional rituals in their life-cycle patterns i.e. intercultural dimensions. This is generally true, except for **Samuel Collins** (1619-1670), who gives a detailed picture of marriage and funeral ceremonies, to which most observers pay scant attention.³⁴⁾ In such a genre of travel narrative, the accounts-recorders recognize Russian peasant women as being made to work with overburdened labor lords, as if they were valued as labor resource, a passive inanimate ones, and even like beasts that only know their loyalty and subservience to their mastershusband, father-in-law and mother-in-law after marriage, in particular.

In short, for more than three hundred years from the 15th century, it was English authors who made the first-hand descriptions of Russia. The number of their works greatly exceeded those of any other nationality. To use a good example, 38 Englishmen, 24 of them before 1600, wrote accounts of Muscovy that appeared in print.³⁵⁾ The contents and their narrative point of view of Russian realities, unfortunately, show no drastic changes. Without making an effort to present their own descriptions, as a wealth of evidence substantiates, a great deal of records not only relies on each other, but cites the former ones for their information. One of these prejudiced conventions was that there had been writings about Russia that "often ignored the contemporary accounts, citing instead the works published before 1600."³⁶⁾ Obviously, this evidence can serve as reasons of

34) Samuel Collins (1671) *The Present State of Russia. In a Letter to a Friend at London*, London. For a complete and comprehensive report of Russian peasant women by a Russian woman at the time, see A. Ефименко's ethnographic expedition and her results in her book, *Крестьянская женщина* (1884), in *Исследования народной жизни*, Выпуск 1: Обычное право, Москва.

35) For a graphic figure of the publication of the foreigners travel accounts, see John Quentin Cook, op. cit., p. 155.

36) *Ibid.*, p. 162.

why most travel accounts are invariably larded with negative views toward the Russians and how rare a fresh discovery about Russia and her various features is.

2. Positive and Considerate Views of Russia and the Russians

The Westerners' accounts were not always negative, however. Mentioning the brutality and barbaric disposition of the Russians, most foreign visitors constantly write that they are primitive and hostile against foreigners. Given these hackneyed remarks, **Franz August Maria von Haxthausen's** (1792-1866) observation of the Russians regarding the relation between the country and the Finnish tribes should be of interest here. In one of his noticeable remarks it is suggested: "I believe it cannot be maintained that the Russians displaced the Finnish tribes in the north of Russia. The former were never nomadic, but were always colonists. They did not drive away the hunting tribes from the interior, for it was not their nature or disposition to penetrate inland. Nor were they hostile to these tribes. Thus the Finnish hunting tribes and the Russia settlers lived together in a peaceable and friendly manner."³⁷ Having undertaken his journey of discovery in 1843, Haxthausen was encouraged to pursue his former studies on rural institutions. One of his primary objects for research in Russia is thus working on the *mir*, or village commune. No doubt, Haxthausen's naïve enthusiasm partially kindled the quest for Russian national mythology, which the **Slavophiles** were attempting to project for their ideological target at the time. As one historian aptly points out, he "contributed richly to the myth of the Russian soul, although by the time this myth surfaced in Western Europe the composition of the Russian soul had become noticeably more complex."³⁸

37) Franz August Maria von Haxthausen (1970) *The Russian Empire. Two Volumes in One*, New York: Arno Press & The New York Times, p. 191.

38) Francesca Wilson (1970) *Muscovy Russia through Foreign Eyes 1553-1900*, London: George Allen & Unwin Ltd., p. 242.

In almost the same vein, an American visitor in the late 19th century, **Francis Palmer**, was more favorable, contrary to his predecessors. In his records, Palmer notes "the exceptional honesty of the Russian peasants," praising the people that "There are few countries on the Continent in which theft of personal property is so rare."³⁹⁾ As if he were offsetting the previous distorted negative image of the peasants, Palmer attempts to write good nature of his encounters.

The idea of trespass is practically unknown. If the route through the garden chances to be the easiest way to the village, peasants with their carts will continually pass through. This is not done with any intention of insolently asserting what they believe to be their rights. *Russians are naturally kind-hearted, and, especially in the more remote districts, where old-world ideas have least changed, many are often engaged simply because they are in want and distress (italics is mine).*⁴⁰⁾

Madame de Staël's (1766-1817) seemingly objective observation, on the other hand, takes more moderate stance. A few of her words and remarks can be parallels to that of domestic intellectuals' frank confession as in Chaadaev's writing. For instance, she employs such phrases as "public spirit," "the devotedness inherent in the character of the people," "the natural pride of the nobility," and "profound influence of religion," etc., while describing the psychological disposition of the peasantry. Russia's national history is assessed properly in her journals. Namely, she even tries to correct the country's shameful history: "Some bad anecdotes of the preceding reigns, some Russians who have contracted debts with the Persian's shopkeepers, and some *bon-mots* of Diderot, have put it into the heads of the French, that Russia consisted only of a corrupt court, military chamberlains, and a people of slaves. *This is a great mistake. This nation it is true requires a long examination to know it thoroughly, but in the*

39) Francis H. E. Palmer (1904) *Russian Life in Town and Country*, New York and London: G. P. Putmans Sons, pp. 100-101.

40) Francis H. E. Palmer, op. cit., pp. 101-103.

circumstances in which I observed it, every thing was salient (italics is mine)."⁴¹⁾

To be sure, as Cook reminds, these kinds of negative accounts can derive from the foreigners' prepossessions, biases, and even unwarranted willful misrepresentation, but their recurrent themes and points at the same time make us think over the essential problem under discussion in a different perspective. First, for the most part, the strange visitors spent most of their time in the capital Moscow, or Petersburg in the residence of the dynasty, where imperial authority would likely be greatest.⁴²⁾ In fact, members of diplomatic missions to Moscow spent only a brief period of time there, and consequently "they had to depend on interviews with Russians through interpreters, and on conversations with Western residents of Muscovy, for their information."⁴³⁾ Cook's investigation, at this point, is noticeable; he maintains that only "less than twenty-five percent of the sixteenth century English authors of descriptions of Muscovy knew Russian." Furthermore, while Herberstein knew Slavic, Fletcher did not; and "it is doubtful whether Olearius did."⁴⁴⁾ One of the more astonishing examples of this rare phenomenon is detected in Fletcher, who entered Russia in 1588 and spent less than a year, but nonetheless left the most important English work on Russia, and presents the first extensive, systematic analysis of Muscovite governmental institutions as well as their structures. Madame de Staël's achievements on her critical comments on

41) Quoted from Anthony Cross, op. cit., pp. 304-305.

42) John Q. Cook, op. cit., p. 275.

43) Regarding the period and scope of stay, Anthony Jenkinson, who was appointed by the Russia Company captain-general of the fleet sailing for Russia in 1557 and continued to travel to Russia until 1572, is a unique case to be noted here. In contrast to his former diplomatic and commercial officials, Jenkinson "won and retained the respect of Ivan IV and was therefore able to visit the court as an honored guest and travel freely through the country". See Francesca Wilson, op. cit., pp. 35-44.

44) For an interesting citation regarding the language ability of the early visitors, see John Cook, op. cit., p. 158.

Russian contemporary are even more remarkable, considering her extremely short-term sojourn in Russia from July 14 to September 7, 1812. In less than two months though, she made significant journalistic and sharp observations on her environs.⁴⁵⁾ While the former two travelers stayed in Russia very shortly, for an anonymous German, who resided for thirty three years, the Russian circumstances nonetheless are same: filthy, coarseness, superstitious nature, submissiveness, servility, disgraceful serfdom, and the like. Of particular significance of this unnamed work by a German nobleman is that it touches on the problem of "evils of slavery" and "human rights of the people", which are relatively less dealt with in other travelers' accounts. Nowhere is such a strong personal conviction felt than under the anonymous German's pen. Throughout the accounts, including anecdotal occasions, the author projects his belief and even sympathy toward inhumane Russian world. Later we come across another rhetoric trust, expression used in exclamation:

Sunk in the deepest slough of superstitious, unsusceptible of suffering, and impassive to every joy which has any higher inspiration than the senses, he never makes an attempt to rise above his humiliation. Looking into the history of this nation, and we ever find it in the most unheard-of state of degradation a miserable existence! *Serfdom must be abolished! Further, the peasant was to be enlightened (italics is mine).*⁴⁶⁾

By the same token, **Robert Lyall**, a nineteenth-century Scottish doctor in service of tsar Aleksandr, draws our attention from the Christian and philanthropist view. Not only in his deep sincerity toward the Russians, but also in his strong "defense against false imputations" of former

45) As the author herself writes, the most important was the discovery, noting that "the religious and military spirit so dominate the nation that many failings may be forgiven in the light of these two grand sources of fine human deeds." Madame de Staël, op. cit., 150.

46) Ibid., pp. 129-130.

illustrations of Russia, Lyall takes a quite unique place in the entire history of Western viewers of the country. First he was the first foreigner who dedicated his work to the Russian tsar directly. In his book, *The Character of the Russians, a Detailed History of Moscow* (in London in 1832), Lyall shows respect toward the tsar, Aleksandr. At any rate, he does not record any baneful, degrading, and contemptuous remark on the tsar in opposition to most of his predecessors.

Making a comparison of his opinions with those of Samuel Collins, Madame de Staël, and Dr. Clarke, as to "the real state of the vassals of Russia," the Scottish observer writes that "Russian peasantry are in the first, or agricultural stage of civilization; they are therefore not in a state of barbarism; neither are they civilized, but they are making progress towards civilization, especially to the imitative stage."⁴⁷⁾ To be sure, we recognize that he himself acknowledges Russia's uncultured and uncivilized status, but his perception of Russia requires a different reading. Instead of comparison between Russia and other European countries, Lyall places his focus on Russian historical development itself: "Russia must be compared with Russia herself, at various epochs; and in order to ascertain her progress in the intellectual world, must be viewed through all her gradations and ramifications."⁴⁸⁾ I am far from asserting that Lyall is absolutely right in his disputes against other viewers. The point is here Lyall's moderate and sound stance, not generalizing unfavorable false impressions, but discovering what has not been said before and at least doing justice to Russian characteristics. A typical observation by him is that: "Russia presents an anomaly, one of the most extraordinary in the history of nations; equally interesting in a political, a moral, or a religious point of view. Many of the descriptions which unduly degrade, or disingenuously extol this empire, have arisen from false principles."⁴⁹⁾

47) Robert Lyall (1832) *The Character of the Russians, a Detailed History of Moscow*, London: Edinburgh, p. cxl.

48) *Ibid.*, iv.

49) *Ibid.*, ii.

Second, his delineations, thus, are so far all the more objective and reliable because all of his accounts represent that he is neither a sycophant nor a down-right complainer of Russia. Judging from what has been said above, his statements in the preface to the book should be emphasized:

Two very opposite opinions may be formed with respect to the character which I have given of the Russians: the one that I may always have evinced a disposition to palliate their imperfections and their vices, and to relieve the gloomy ground-work of the picture by some redeeming light; the other; that the frequent severity of my remarks is consistent with general charity and Christian feelings. My answer to both of these anticipated accusations is the same; viz. that I have formed my opinions from facts, and stated the convictions of my heart with impartiality. If any bias be discovered, may it rather be on the side of benevolence than on that of malice.⁵⁰⁾

In these ways, the overall impressions of the Muscovites and the Imperial Russia later created by the travel accounts are highly unfavorable and by and large constantly negative, except for a couple of cases such as Fletcher, Madame de Staël, and Lyall. The Russians were said to be ignorant, drunken barbarians, perpetrators of almost impressive series of vices, cruel, coarse, brutal and deceitful. Given the fact that the early visitors to Russia were political figures or rich merchants, with the additional drawback of ignorance of the Russian language, it is scarcely surprising that the foreigner's non-journalistic eyes expose "patriotic curiosity," taking a firm stance of ostracism over the inferior land, Russia. To use Pethybridge's words, these "self-styled ambassadors eager to advice the British public and government on Russian politics," especially during the early 19th century.⁵¹⁾ Simply stated, the early Victorian travelers to Russia, including the later time, were restricted in their

50) Ibid., p. 8.

51) Roger W. Pethybridge (1972) "The Merits of Victorian Travel Accounts as Source Materials on Russia," *Jahrbücher für Geschichte Osteuropas*, Vol. 20, 1972, p. 11.

interpretations of Russia by their class origins, which were nearly always upper or upper middle, not to mention the nobles and pure travelers from France and America respectively.⁵²⁾

Second, some accounts, even in scholarly analysis of those descriptions, support this negative evaluation of Muscovite culture. Ernest Simmons, for example, asserts that the culture of Muscovy was "literally nil", consisting of a collection of religious books and tracts without genuine cultural significance.⁵³⁾ As Halperin disapprovingly writes, "this judgment is incorrigibly ethnocentric"; furthermore, like other travelers, Simmons does not treat the raw data as a primary source for the ethnohistorian. Instead, he rests on an ethnocentric bias which is focused on "the traveler's attention not so much on what is actually seen but on what he *expects to see based on what he has heard in his own culture.*"⁵⁴⁾

Simmons's statement reminds us of the foreign observer's provocative words about Russians being ignorant and totally uncultured. From a perspective of social structure, Madame de Staël quite convincingly points out the general lack of taste of arts and of literature by the Russians, ascribing the reason for this to no middling class in Russia, which is a great drawback on the progress of literature and the arts. Noticing this cleavage, the author makes an important statement that "enlightenment is not spread widely enough for there to be any public judgment based on the opinion of each individual." Considering Staël's journey in Russia (July 14-September 7, 1812) which almost coincides with the emergence of national identity in Russia, her underestimation of literature by the common people is not misleading at all. As has generally been accepted, during the first half of the 19th century in Europe, "literature was utilized in national systems of education and privileged by elites as an expression

52) Ibid., p. 14.

53) Ernest J. Simmons, op. cit., p. 4.

54) For a remarkable note regarding "travel accounts as texts", see Caroline B. Brettell (1986) "Introduction: Travel Literature, Ethnography, and Ethnohistory," *Ethnohistory*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 1986, p. 128 (*italics added*).

of national culture."⁵⁵⁾ This on the whole holds true of Russia. Staël's estimate accordingly hints at the fundamental legitimation of the nation-state apparatus by exploring the making of national identities at the juncture of imperial power and creating a model for national mythology.

While examining the overall history of the Western travelers' sketches, it is equally inviting to ask what is not said. In a sense, this notion will be fulfilled when further research fills in some serious lacunae in this genre of travel narrative. At the moment, it would be safe to say that this critical view addresses a seminal question pertaining to the transitional connection of how Russian intellectuals react to the foreigner's writings. It also, if so, indicates in what ways the domestic views of the others emerged and forged further philosophical debates about Russia's national fate as well as ethnographic expeditions carried out by the **Geographic Society** (1856-1862). It is of tremendous significance to screen this transitional period from 1830s to 1850s, given the national exertion to gather and disseminate information and authoritative descriptions of rural conditions under the direction of the commission. The primary goal of the eight **Russian-Ukrainian ethnographers'** journey was to overcome "disqualified older ways of reporting on rural culture" manifested by the foreign observers.⁵⁶⁾ Providing a link through ethnographic reports, between the *narod*, the imperial state, and educated Russia, this special investigative commission "sought a new socio-political path for the public."⁵⁷⁾ Most importantly, however, the expedition of the ethnographers aimed to forge a "nation". The movement hoped to bring imperial diversity, the ethos of the peoples, to "transform Uvarov's Official Nationality based on diverse ethnic and regional groups."⁵⁸⁾ If the

55) Allen Carey-Webb (1998) *Making Subject(s). Literature and the Emergence of National Identity*, New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc., p. 11.

56) Catherine Clay (1995) "Russian Ethnographers in the Service of Empire, 1856-1862," *Slavic Review*, Vol. 54, No. 1, p. 51.

57) *Ibid.*, p. 45.

58) *Ibid.*, pp. 45-51; Catherine Clay, p. 318.

philosophical debates between the opposite poles during the 1830s and 1840s and the ethnographic expedition in 1850s were the final step for establishing a model for a Russian national mythology, or the second stage in Billington's scheme, we can propose that the foreign observers' accounts and records contributed to the national building of a mythology, the so-called Russian soul in their embryonic stage, but most dynamically in their own Russian nature. Drawing upon "the recognition of legitimate diversity" among peasant cultures, potentially on "the rethinking of the official nationality formula," the expedition in the era of the Great Reforms played a formative role in the creation of the Russian national mythology. That is, for over three centuries as an exterior origin the foreign visitors' writings influenced Russian intellectuals and writers to look deep inside the lives of the Russian peoples in all of their cultural varieties.⁵⁹⁾

IV. Conclusion

Regardless of the characteristic nature of genres, Western viewers' travelogues, personal diaries, anecdotes, non-professional essays continued to serve as a backdrop to the foreigners' historical investigations, providing the reference points that gave them an orientation from which to proceed. The specific inventories of the overall materials we have attested are placed into clear-cut binary dichotomy. Partly positive notions of course exist, but this "fixed and constricting identity was *confirmed* from without and *affirmed* from within Russia, creating a vicious circle of mutually validated stereotypes" as one critic succinctly summaries. In what

59) For a complete discussion for this question there are useful works: Catherine B. Clay (1989) "Ethos and Empire: The Ethnographic Expedition of the Imperial Russian Naval Ministry 1855-1862," *PhD Dissertation*, University of Oregon, and Jacob Kipp (1970) "The Grand Duke Konstantin Nikolaevich and the Epoch of the Great Reforms 1855-1866," *PhD Dissertation*, Pennsylvania State University.

follow we can see a list of contrast pairs that clearly presents a customary image shared both by West and East and in the East both by **Westernizers** and **Russophiles** [**Slavophiles**]:

<i>West European self-image</i>	<i>Russian self-image</i>
civilized	uncivilized
advanced	backward
progressive	reactionary
enlightened	fanatically religious
mannered, polite	coarse, uncouth
democratic, egalitarian	autocratic, despotic
rational	mystical
stable	unstable, uncontrollable
peaceful	violent
urban	rural
bourgeois, urbane, aristocratic	rustic, peasantry
Westernized (Rome, etc.)	Easternized (Byzantine, Tatars, etc.). ⁶⁰⁾

Taken as a whole, Western viewers' descriptions were excessively absorbed with negative impressions of the Russians and very few positive are praising recommendations of their life-style or good attitudes. Despite that we consider Cross's stimulating remark that "As the eighteenth century moved toward its end, travelers, influenced by the Rousseauist notion of the particular strengths and attractions of primitive and backwardness peoples," the deep-rooted prejudices still remained intact.⁶¹⁾ For this overall reason, neither translations of their works into Russian, nor the circulation of them in the Russian reading public were imaginable. Similar to Herberstein's well-received reputation throughout Europe, Custine's book *The Journal of the Marquis de Custine*, enjoyed massive circulation. Aside from the Russian reactions, from the mid 16th century to the late 19th century, British, German, and American, and partially

60) Howard F. Stein (1976) "Russian Nationalism and the Divided Soul of the Westernizers and Slavophiles," *Ethos*, Vol. 4, No. 4, pp. 407-408.

61) Anthony Cross, op. cit., p. 41.

French, as well as Scottish impressions invariably remained much the same. For those civilized strangers, Russia was considered inferior, barbaric and primitive; any of these characteristics could not be compared to themselves.

All of these *topoi*, which are "commonly held notions about people, places, or things—as a literary device characteristic of these accounts," as Bretell succinctly defines, represent "a rhetorical baggage carried by the traveler,"⁶²⁾ but the Western outsiders' rhetoric in their accounts was all the same: not the least instructive, positive, and non-sympathetic to their new environs in Russia. Nevertheless, as this paper has demonstrated, I strongly stress that this cultural legacy by the strangers to Russia was instrumental in laying the rudimentary foundation of national mythology in the Russians' own basis later on, especially during the first three decades in the 19th century. The ideological and literary fulcrum for the national mythology indeed began to form *in medias res* during the first half of the nineteenth century in particular, along with the philosophical debates between the Slavophiles and the Westernizers.

Back to the epigraphs to this paper, we now understand the dual meanings of them. Not only do they represent the whole contour what we have examined so far in a figurative meaning, but they also epitomize the essence of the Russian national character from the standpoint of both the seemingly **anti-Russian features** and **Russophile statements**. Madame de Staël's short but evocative comments are certainly applicable to the remaining period of entire Russian history in that her phrases represent the inextricably complex world of the Russian character in such a concise rhetoric. Naturally, here one can come up with **Nikolai Berdiaev's** encapsulating attempt at the mythology of the Russian character, the key of which is articulated in the polarization of quite opposite traits such as: "goodness and cruelty," "emotional subtlety and boorishness," "extreme love of freedom and despotism," "altruism and egoism," "self-abasement

62) Caroline B. Bretell, op. cit., p. 128.

and national pride," even "chauvinism."⁶³⁾ Regardless of the problem of whether the generation of foreign travelers during the late 19th century and the early 20th century affects the philosophical thoughts of the Russian people, the three-hundred long history of Western viewers' travel accounts and personal journals left indelible imprints on Russia and abroad as well. Viewed from this, an essential thing we have to keep in mind is not so much how considerably important the Western estimates are for the understanding of the Russian character, but as to how they serve as an impetus for the "*idea-forces*" capable of forging a model for the mythology of Russian national character in the Lotmanian "semiosphere" at the time of the 1830s and 1840s. Directly or indirectly, the stimulus that the strangers to Russia gave should not be overlooked. The cultural contacts between Russia and other countries were the cultural fossils, upon which a new layer of intercultural activities could be laid. Therefore, the intercultural dialogues, or "cultural memories", to use Lotman's phrase, in turn, contributed to the creation of the Russian national mythology, not always being as positive connotations, but having multifaceted values.

Another thing to be unforgotten is that the foreigners' records and travel narratives, which are replete with overall stereotyped negative ways, are "a reflection of a certain fundamental lack of development in Russia herself," as an excerpt from Fedotov's book succinctly implies. True, Russia "remained in many respects a medieval country until the 1860s or even later."⁶⁴⁾ Additionally, the second substantial intercultural fossils were paradoxically not initiated by the Russians, but introduced by "European thought which provided the Russians with the intellectual categories of nationalism which enabled them to describe themselves as different from, hostile to, and superior over the West" as Robert Williams contends.⁶⁵⁾

63) Н. Бердяев (1946) *Русская идея: Основные проблемы русской мысли XIX века и начала XX века*, Париж: YMCA-Press; Н. Бердяев (1955) *Истоки и смысл русского коммунизма*, Париж: YMCA-Press.

64) M. S. Anderson, op. cit., p. 93.

65) With this in mind, the author ascertains that the question of the Russian soul

Apparently, the first carriers of those cultural interactions were the Western travelers to Russia. Although there needs to be a thorough examination of the extent to which these accounts were directly linked to the Russian intellectuals and writers, most of those negative, prejudiced *topoi*, at the same time, could be changed thanks to Western influence again, not the Russian one.

To capitulate briefly, this paper has traced the historical process of how the so-called the Russian national character epitomized in the term of Russian national mythology was formed through the exterior origins from the foreign visitors' travel accounts and records from the middle of the 16th century to the second half of the 19th century. To this end, using various writing sources such as travel accounts, anecdotal episodes, and personal journals, this paper explores the conundrum of the Russian national characters multifaceted features. Beyond that we have been able to demonstrate and attest what Lotman and Billington try to propose in their interpretative understandings of Russian history of culture.

began not in Russia first, but under the influence from the West. See his article (1970), "The Russian Soul: A Study in European Thought and Non-European Nationalism", 『*Journal of the History of Ideas*』, Vol. 31, No. 4, p. 573.

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Резюме

**Представления России и Россиян
у Западных Путешественников:
Источник, Предрассуждения и Национальная Мифология
в XVI – XIX вв.**

Ким, Санг-Хеон

Целью этой работы является обсуждения вопроса о внешних обстоятельствах происхождения создания русской национальной мифологии, выраженной в так называемой «русской душе» двумя способами. Первый из них – через описания русской окружающей среды западными путешественниками, начинающиеся в 16 в. на Руси и продолжающиеся до середины 19 в. Российской Империи; второй – внутренние волнения, появившиеся в 1830 – 1850 гг. Основываясь на общих представлениях долго существовавших предубежденных традиций установленных на взглядах и письменных сведениях западных наблюдателей, я не только привожу достаточные доказательства, но также показываю сущность проблемы в этой дискуссии. Другими словами, какими другими направлениями можно продолжить обсуждение источника русского национального характера и каково было типичное изображение этого источника, а также какова была общая точка зрения на вопросы в частности политических, социальных, литературных и культурных аспектах. Таким образом, я рассматриваю картину в целом, представленную западными посетителями с ранних исторических и культурных контактов между Россией и другими странами, сосредоточиваясь на изображении бытовой жизни и психологических расположений русского крестьянства. Затем, эта работа утверждает, что национальная мифология русских была создана сперва с обширных межкультурных контактов русских и западных наблюдателей на первоначальном этапе, и, что философские дискуссии интеллигенции в бытовой среде были продвинуты вперед под соединением связанным с сопоставлением разных культур. Наконец, самый главный этап для создания

национальной мифологии был завершен этнографической экспедицией во время Великих Реформ (1856-1862). Вследствии этого, данная работа пытается изложить топографию того, как представители других культур смотрели на русских, и как посторонние наблюдатели повлияли на создание русской национальной мифологии.

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