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Krejci, Jaroslav

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The Comparative Historical Approach as a Unifying Principle in the Humanities and the Social Sciences

JAROSLAV KREJČÍ*

Centre for Research into Socio-Cultural Pluralism, Institute of Philosophy, Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Prague

Abstract: The article deals with the importance of comparative history for an integrated approach to the study of social phenomena, in particular for the study of society in a global perspective. The point is illustrated by several transformation processes which have taken place in the 20th century.

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The title of this article was suggested to me by the editor of this issue. As I have been working along these lines for almost fifty years, I gladly accepted the opportunity to explain what it means to me and how more science, not merely scholarship, may hopefully come from it.

At the beginning I have to answer certain basic questions. Why do we need a unifying bond and why is it that history can provide one? We need such a link because humans as social beings are indivisible. Even if their individual social acts, behaviour, relationships etc. may be best analysed using specialised methods, a broad understanding of societal life requires, in order to provide a full answer, at least an integrated combination of those specialised approaches. From an historical point of view, there are two reasons. First, the aforementioned integration may be best achieved within an account for which the time dimension provides the unifying bond. Second, in social sciences there is a limited scope for making experiments. Historiography (in particular that written by modern historians) is, in the long run, one of the main suppliers of empirical data. The other sources are regional studies, which, while looking at their subject with an integrated, interdisciplinary approach, also take the historical dimension into account.

The Concepts of a Global Apprehension

Most articles in this issue are focused on contemporary history. My concern is history in general, as well as the link between historiography and the complexity of social science, in particular. I have in mind an integrated social science, in which cultural, political, economic and demographic aspects enter into an appropriately modified framework of sociology, in which the idiographic account is analysed in comparative, nomothetic terms.

A similar kind of integrated social science has indeed already been routinely practised, though at various levels of theorising and/or conceptual consistency, in the schools and departments of area studies in British and American universities.

In the School of European Studies at Lancaster University, I had the opportunity to work out the following integrated approach to area studies with reference to the then divided Germany [Krejčí 1976: 272]. First the situation was put into a historical and geographical perspective; the subject matter was divided into three sections: (a) income and

*) Direct all correspondence to: Prof. Jaroslav Krejčí, Centre for Research into Socio-Cultural Pluralism at the Institute of Philosophy of the Academy of Sciences of the Czech Republic, Jilská 1, 110 00 Praha 1, phone + 42 2 24 21 21 08, fax + 42 2 231 38 82.

wealth¹, (b) stratification and mobility, (c) power and freedom. Population shifts and gender issues were given particular attention. The concluding chapter recapitulated the main features and related them to the dominant ideologies of the respective German states.

Although this approach involved a historical dimension, its limitation to circa thirty years of the present epoch did not necessitate the use of historiography much. Most data and other factual information were obtained from statistics, public opinion polls, mass media information, and from various types of official or private documents, i.e. from primary sources.

However if we want to apply a similarly structured framework to earlier periods and in wider and/or distant areas, we have to turn to secondary sources which summarise and analyse the empirical material we are looking for. Fortunately, such high quality literature is amply available and is continuously increasing.² I have found it more interesting, and from a sociological point of view, more revealing than the unending discourse on the virtues of various methodological positions such as structuralist, functionalist, conflict theorist, organicist, historicist, or that which has reached the nirvana of post-modernism.³ Those who do a solid job in area studies tend to see their subject in terms of its structure, functioning (whether as an organism or mechanism) and conflicts and even do not shun a critical evaluation – all this, as a rule, without any predilection for the aforementioned concepts.

Studying history as empirical material for social sciences may reach varied depths and extents according to the researcher's focal point. My interest resided in the global perspective within historical time and geographical space. There were the social or economico-political formations (not only in the Marxian sense) on the one hand and civilisations or socio-cultural configurations (not only in Toynbee's sense) on the other. Teaching at Lancaster University – first, Max Weber's sociology of religion followed by the role of the main Asian religions in social structure and development – provided me with a testing ground and valuable feedback for my own observations and theorising.⁴

In my view both the aforementioned global categories are useful tools for theoretical insight, provided that we observe a few caveats. First, there is an epistemological difference between them. Economico-political formations such as feudalism, capitalism etc. are taxonomic constructs which consequently are conceived in generic terms. This stance

¹) The structure of economic aggregates was calculated for both countries in the UN Standard as well as according to the Soviet national accounting systems.

²) As an example of what I have in mind, I give the names of a few sinologists who provided me with a sociologically relevant insight into the development of Chinese society with respect to its values, institutions, structure, (functioning or non functioning) and social change: I. Bianco, D. Bodde, J. Chesneau, J. Escarra, O. Franke, J. Gernet, M. Granet, J. Gray, I. C. Y. Hsü, Kung-Chuan Hsiao, K. S. Latourette, H. Maspero, H. McAleavy, H. F. MacNair, J. Needham, R. H. Salomon, A. F. Wright.

³) As John Holmwood recently put it, "the claims of postmodernism do not represent an answer to our current problems, but a capitulation in the face of them" [Holmwood 1966: 130].

⁴) A good English translation of Max Weber's *Religionssoziologie* from 1922 was available from 1963. The result of my own study and teaching the subject was published in *The Civilizations of Asia and the Middle East Before the European Challenge* [Krejčí 1990]. In the US at SUNY with the title *Before the European Challenge, the great civilizations of Asia and the Middle East*.

follows Max Weber's position. For him both capitalism and feudalism were ideal type labels which could be applied with possibly further specification (appropriate adjectives) to any society, irrespective of socio-historical time and space. Civilisations or, following Gurvitch's less categorical nomenclature, socio-cultural configurations [Gurvitch 1968: 90], are unique historical entities demarcated, though often not in precise contours, in time and space. They have to be identified by a specific, proper name.⁵

As far as social formations are concerned, I can refer to an excellent secondary source, a comparative study of feudalism, written by nine scholars and published by Princeton University Press in 1956 under the title *Feudalism in history*. The area studies cover Western Europe, Russia, the Byzantine Empire, the Middle East, India, China and Japan. In the comparative analysis, the editor, Rushton Coulborn, took a wider view, the gist of which, relevant to our discussion, reads:

“Feudalism cannot be fully understood until it has been placed in its larger context, the movement of the whole culture... Feudalism was found to be a mode of revival of a society whose polity had gone into extreme disintegration... No single cause of such a disintegration was discovered but the revival was often connected with, or preceded by, the formation of a religion” [Coulborn 1965: 364 ff].

These findings point to the link with the socio-cultural configurations which we shall be discussing later. In this context, Coulborn made also a perspicacious observation on the relationship of history and theory:

“Theory is what is abstracted as common to a series of similar courses of events and used to predict the character of future courses of events. It is far more useful than history, but, for plain numerical reasons and for other reasons, it is often much harder to get. And, when theory is hard to get, the scientist must resort to the discovery of all the relevant history he can find, for that may eventually yield him the material for the establishment of theory.” [Ibid.: 393]

This is the gist of the matter but only by half. If the theory, like Icarus, gets too close to the sun, its glue melts and the whole ingenious construct disintegrates. In such a case we need to go further than Max Weber. We need a more elaborate nomenclature; ideal types alone will not suffice, especially as far as global concepts are concerned. Here it has proved advantageous to work with concepts whose definition would allow for alternative sets of defining characteristics thus making it possible to consider separately individual aspects or dimensions of what would otherwise be an integral part of a conceptual cluster, in short, to use multidimensional concepts.

The most fertile ground for such a practice is found in economics, where the obvious need for quantification calls for more conceptual precision than in other social sciences. Thus for instance the need to measure a country's output of goods and services generated a two-fold multidimensional approach; firstly with respect to the different coverage of the aggregate (national product, domestic product, national income, etc.; all either gross or net), secondly with respect to the method of calculation (by industrial origin, by distributive shares and by type of expenditure). Another differentiated aggregation became necessary with respect to the concept of money. Money ceased to be a clearly demarcated concept a long time ago. Yet the modern economy having its proliferation of

⁵) I have further elaborated this issue in my inaugural lecture “Specialised or general knowledge? Strategy for Harmonisation” (Lancaster University, 24 January 1979).

multifarious types of deposits with various degrees of liquidity and various types of credit facility, requires a conceptual differentiation between individual means of payment. These means of payment represent different degrees of what may best be described as *moneyness*.⁶

Sociologists, too, felt the need to make their concepts more operational and, as far as possible, quantifiable. The major breakthrough came with the concept of stratification, an issue whose multidimensional nature was largely blocked by the popularity of the Marxian concept of class, unduly simplified by its interpreters.⁷

Of what help may this comment be in theorising about social formations? Let us look at the already mentioned case of feudalism. One cardinal point, or dimension, concerns the relative roles of contract and enforcement in, what Marc Bloch has called, the emergence and growth of the ties of dependencies [Bloch 1961]; another dimension concerns which parts of the sovereign's jurisdiction were transferred to, or usurped by the vassals; equally important is the nature of the division of the land or other property between dispositional and usage tenure; connected with this division is the scope of serfdom and bondage, and whether there are any escape routes from these forms of dependence; finally whether the above mentioned issues also concern non-agricultural sectors such as cities, religious organisations, nomads etc. In comparison with other social formations – (in the light of what has been said they too will be better dubbed configurations) – something needs to be added. In a feudal type configuration there is a contrasting structure of power in the upper tier or echelon of society (i.e. relationship between the sovereign and the vassals), and in the lower tier or echelon (relationship between the feudatories and their subjects). In the upper tier the power constellation tends to be pluralistic, in the lower tier totalitarian.

Differences between feudalisms, or to put it better, feudal elements, in various countries carry the imprint of the local socio-cultural configurations. Comparing the two conceptual tools, that of social formations and that of civilisations, we find that it is the latter which provides a more suitable framework for both long term diachronic and synchronic analyses and also for understanding social change at large.⁸

We are supposed to live in an era in which capitalism has become an almost ubiquitous phenomenon. In this context, I intentionally avoid the term 'social formation' because unlike feudalism, capitalism is a denotation only of the economic aspects of social life. Its functioning (whether good or bad) is not necessarily linked with a particular system of political organisation. Although its main ideological support is provided by liberalism and although pluralistic parliamentary democracy is its most frequent and favourably suited political counterpart, its existence in countries with authoritarian regimes is no exception. It may be assumed that this is only a temporary confluence, since once people attain a certain economic standard they begin to demand civic rights also.

⁶) On the concept of 'money' in the multidimensional understanding 'moneyness' see, for instance, [Hart 1968: 426].

⁷) A fitting example of such a multidimensional approach to social stratification, with the inclusion of a historical dimension and an area comparison, is given in [Machonin 1996].

⁸) I hope I have proved this point in the discussion on the emergence and changes of feudal elements in the countries of Islamic and Confucian/Buddhist civilizations in my *Civilizations of Asia and the Middle East* [Krejčí 1990].

But in my opinion, often it is less an internal than an outward pressure from the core of capitalist democracy which prompts this development. I have in mind in particular the countries of the Far East, where the authoritarian Confucian ethic, and not the democracy-prone Protestant ethic, provides the psychological support for the sense of duty and for entrepreneurial drive.

Here we have touched again on the link between the economico-political and cultural parameters of social life. Individual parameters may be vital in different ways, there being always a disparity between the core and the periphery, and the continuous stream of change may show a significantly different configuration only after a prolonged period. Nevertheless the economico-political parameters encapsulated in the labels feudalism, capitalism and socialism may follow a different rhythm of change from that of the configuration as a whole.

Furthermore there is a special problem with the term socialism. Firstly it was not coined as a denotation for an existing social formation but as a programme, a blueprint. Secondly, what in reality has been already described by this term, means two quite different matters: an egalitarian welfare state combined with liberal parliamentary democracy, on the one hand, and comprehensive communist dictatorship, on the other. In both cases, alien elements crop up, strong capitalist elements in the former, feudal type dependencies in the latter.

The conventional triad of social formations (feudalism, capitalism, socialism) – which, of course, does not constitute an exhaustive list – is not the only conceptual device for a global apprehension of the structure and development of society. With more emphasis on the main type of occupation and organisation at large we may conceive yet another triad: agrarian, industrial and, as Harold Perkin called it, professional society.

“Unlike James Burnham’s managerial revolution, Max Weber’s bureaucratisation, or Vilfredo Pareto’s circulation of elites, says Perkin, the rise of professional society is more than a change at the top, the replacement of one elite by another. It transforms society from top to bottom. It raises living standards not just for the few but for every member of society. It puts most of its man- and woman-power into services rather than agriculture and manufacturing. It substitutes professional hierarchy for class as the primary matrix of the social structure. It recruits for those hierarchies by means of meritocracy, entailing an increase in social mobility from below. It extends this to women, thus ensuring their (admittedly limited) emancipation. It entails the massive growth of the welfare state, which enlarges and moralises the concept of citizenship. It expands the provision of higher education in order to create human capital. It concentrates production of both goods and services in large business corporations, whether private or state-owned, in a new structure of corporate neo-feudalism. And, paradoxically perhaps, it threatens to erode the nation state by internationalising corporate neo-feudalism and creating a global economy.” [Perkin 1996: 8]⁹

This assessment embraces quite a few structural dimensions whose social relevance varies in geographical space and historical time. What may yet be done, is to follow Coulborn in his comparative study of feudalism and to find out whether the rise of society, which Perkin calls professional, corresponds to a change in its cultural paradigm. I wonder

⁹) For a detailed case study see [Perkin 1989].

whether there is a correlation with the new paradigm of the human predicament that the West began to develop at the time of the Enlightenment, namely the paradigm of human rights. Its first declarations appeared during the American and French revolutions. Its practical effects began to be perceived much later; a significant advance with respect to gender equality and civic rights came after the first world war.¹⁰ After the second world war it acquired international backing, but only after the demise of military and communist regimes in Europe did it become rooted in constitutions and observed by the legal practice of countries which constitute the core of professional society.

This paradigm of human rights allows a wide range of liberties, including religious affiliation, innovation and syncretism. This makes the spectrum of denominations and cults, the latter often of a secular nature, more variegated; there is also a growing import from other parts of the world. The resulting contrasts in lifestyle and, in particular, norms of conduct, are bound to create tensions. Thus the lay state has acquired a new, difficult, agenda for a balanced interpretation of human rights and of the responsibilities connected with them.

In the 1970's yet another alternative emerged for the apprehension of society in a global perspective. It has been dubbed, with a touch of overstatement, world system theory. The world systems, except for the very modern one, are regional frameworks of interaction, in which trade, diplomacy and wars are the main channels of action. The extent of these interactions defines the boundaries of these systems. Cultural or, in economic-political terms, systemic homogeneity or affinity is irrelevant. These factors may, at best, appear as a contrast between the core and the periphery. Insofar as the world system theorists write well-documented history,¹¹ they do a valuable job. But once they start to look for the world systems in the distant past and attempt to quantify their findings, their scholarship becomes highly conjectural and their theoretical discourse tends to acquire a scholastic bent.¹²

The preoccupation with the ways and boundaries of interaction make the world theorists less perceptive of what in social life matters most. This may lead to surprising discoveries, such as that the pre-1989 West-East polarity, generally perceived as a fundamental contrast between two different economic-political systems and civilisations, was "a highly structured, carefully contained, formal (but not substantial) conflict, in which the U.S.S.R. acted as a subimperialist agent of the United States" (...) and (...) "served as an ideological shield for the United States in the Third World as well." [Wallerstein 1995: 10, 13]

A Comparative Account of Social Change: Responses to the Challenge of the West

The intricacies of confluence of, or interaction between, economic-political and cultural aspects of social life, within the context of one and the same society, can best be illus-

¹⁰) For a comparative analysis of the dynamics of the paradigm of the human predicament see [Krejčí 1993].

¹¹) Such is, for example, Immanuel Wallerstein's three volume opus on the rise and world-wide spread of European capitalism from the 16th century to the mid 19th century [Wallerstein 1974, 1980, 1989].

¹²) This is my impression from the Spring 1994 issue of *Comparative Civilizations Review* (published at the University of Missouri at Rolla) devoted to the exchange of views between the world system theorists and the civilizationists, i.e. students of civilizations.

trated by situations in which a thorough-going multifaceted social change, a profound societal transformation, took place. In the past, the most likely causes of such thorough-going changes – provided that they were not so slow as to be barely perceptible to contemporaries – were the conquests and, exceptionally, the revolutions. In the 20th century revolution became a more frequent phenomenon. Most of these recent changes can best be understood as responses to the challenge to the superior military, technical and organisational power of the Euro-American civilisation. This term involves the economic-political shell as well as the cultural kernel.

The Western challenge, for the first three centuries purely European, occurred in three waves, each having a different configurational setting. The first wave was due to the Portuguese and Spaniards. Their navigators set out not only for wealth and power for their royal sponsors but also for the conversion of the conquered peoples to Catholic Christianity. With this wave, a mixture of monarchic and ecclesiastical bureaucracy, privileges of upper estates, peasant serfdom and urban guilds and, above all, long distance commercial undertakings expanded overseas.

From the mid 17th century the Dutch, British and French started the second wave of overseas expansion. Although missionary activities were supported, religious conversions ceased to be a matter of primary importance. What made an overwhelming impact overseas was rather expanded trade and capital market and soon after that a new mode of production, creating in its turn a new type of personal dependency.

After the Catholic-Protestant split had lost its acerbity, West European civilisation began to assume a new cultural profile. With the enlightenment there was a move from fideism to empiricism, which triggered off a rapid and progressively amplifying movement from muscles to machines. With romanticism came the shift from religious to ethnic loyalties; with liberalism and socialism came the movement from inequality and obedience to equality and self assertion. Eventually human rights, theoretically anchored in the philosophy of natural law, but in practice codified by the decisions of elected representatives of the citizens, became the unifying, normative paradigm of Western Civilisation. This paradigm was deemed to be acceptable by any religion and/or social philosophy, provided its followers would accept it as a guiding principle.

However before the world wide appeal of this philosophy could be launched (as happened in 1948 by the vote of the brand new organisation, the United Nations), almost the whole world, and Europe in particular, was to undergo an upheaval, in which both socio-cultural values and the economic-political principles were to clash with an unprecedented degree of strength and fervour. There were several key themes, each with its particular set of issues but which in one way or another affected the world at large. Quite a few countries underwent an unsettling alteration to their socio-cultural profile.

In Germany, it was the collapse of national pride, of social and economic security and of the state's power to enforce the law that produced a state of anomy which led to a hysterical outburst of nationalistic fury. The scope of its violence, racist hatred and megalomaniac aspirations revealed a phenomenon, the emergence of which in a highly civilised country would require a special discipline of social psychiatry to explain.¹³ Only the

¹³) For the sake of fairness, it has to be pointed out that Germany was not the only country which would have called for socio-psychiatric treatment. At the time of writing there are many compara-

combined forces of the states, which represented contradictory socio-cultural and economic-political configurations, could utterly defeat the military might of that infected society. The subsequent policies of the victors (the West was wiser than after the first world war) and, above all, the change in the prevailing concern of the German people, more devoted now towards economic prosperity than towards political might, made the German society, it is to be hoped, less susceptible to recidivist behaviour.

Russia was quite a different case. From the turn of the seventeenth century she began to emerge on the periphery of the economic-political configuration of the European West, but socio-culturally she continued to be an entity in her own right. Thus, it may be surmised that the socialist blueprint aiming at replacing the economic structure of the West with a better arrangement was more acceptable for a large segment of Russia's political class. Furthermore the socialist blueprint, due to its vagueness, did not necessarily postulate a pluralistic structure of power and, above all, offered Russia the opportunity to safeguard her socio-cultural identity. After the failure of the soviet experiment (it had the life span of one average individual life in Eastern Europe) the situation returned to the dilemma of 1917. The main differences are: the capitalist elements are slightly stronger, socialist aspirations appear less comprehensive, and the feudal elements which survived in Russia until the beginning of the 20th century, reappear in a new, mafia-type shape. Professional society has not yet had time to develop properly.¹⁴

At the start of the 20th century, the position of China, in terms of our global categories, was similar to that of Russia. However China's peripheral position vis à vis the Euro-American civilisation, with its expanding world market and cultural radiation, was much weaker. On the other hand, the coexistence of capitalist elements with an authoritarian regime was not unknown to Chinese tradition. Also the idea of egalitarian land distribution had left some vestiges in the Chinese tradition. But the main difference, was the strength and particularities of Chinese culture. In the struggle about the reorientation of Chinese civilisation, the Kuomintang could be more moderate; they laid stress on the continuity of the Confucian tradition; only with respect to science, technology and economic organisation were they westernised (some prefer to say modernised) in accordance with the Euro-American example. The communists, in particular under Mao Zedong, wanted to effect a complete transformation of Chinese civilisation. Confucianism was to be swept into the dustbin of history, and replaced by the teaching of the Marxist-Leninist classics to which Mao Zedong acceded as a seal of the prophets. The Russian example of state socialism was followed with caution and with quite a few substantial alterations. But, as in the French revolution, a Supreme Being could not replace God, so in China, the great Helmsman of Revolution was not to replace Confucius. But a great revolutionary change nevertheless did occur. The government of the day is no longer legitimised by the Mandate of Heaven but by the mandate of the correct doctrine. To uphold the balance between the precepts of their teaching and the reality of everyday life, the present day senior

ble atrocities perpetrated, though in a less systematic way, throughout the world, the nearest case to us being that of the former Yugoslavia.

¹⁴) 'Mafia-type feudalism' is here used as a cipher for a wider range of relationships reflecting the failure of the state to protect people from extortion by criminal gangs and obliging them to hire private guards in areas endangered by organised crime etc; practices known in various parts of the world.

‘ideocrats’ (to borrow Malia’s term for this kind of elite¹⁵) try to find a workable balance between their authoritarian rule and the free market economy as the Emperors’ mandarins had.

The Japanese also paid a price for the reorientation of their socio-cultural profile – a Shinto-Buddhist complex imbued with Confucian, and above all, samurai ethos. After the first impact of the West upon it in the 16th century, that of the Portuguese with their alarmingly efficient missionaries, Japan reacted with a hedgehog reflex: she closed her ports to the outside world. But, eventually, in the third wave of the Western challenge, American gunboat diplomacy forced Japan to abandon her isolation. A revolution from above in 1867 paved the way for a gradual catching up with the advanced challenger. But before that could happen, Japanese leaders, overestimated their country’s resources; Japan, as an ally of Nazi Germany, suffered a humiliating defeat and occupation. The incipient empire was lost and the samurai ethos discredited. Only then the new phase of Euro-American Civilisation (that of human rights, parliamentary democracy and more-or-less managed capitalism) found more fertile ground in Japan.

This is in fact the second time that Japan has imported constituents of another civilisation. The first came in the 7th century from China. Then it was religion rather than the political system which – after centuries of adaptation – came to be fully absorbed.¹⁶ This time, it seems that it is the legal and political structure rather than religion and ethics which is the object of reception.

In Turkey, the transformation had been preceded by a three cornered contest. There were three schools of thought: the Islamists, the Westernists and the Turkists. The Islamists of that period admitted that the Muslims were far behind the West, as regards both material and non-material civilisation, but this, in their view, was due to the fact that Islamic law was not being applied thoroughly to all details of life. Furthermore, in the past, Muslims had contributed more to science than had the Europe of that time: there was no reason why they should not do so again in the future. The Westernists, on the other hand, ascribed Turkey’s plight to the mental barrier created by Islam. They were mainly concerned to appropriate the Western mode of thinking. For them the technical and organisational achievements of Western civilisation were manifestations of Western ideas and values. Finally, the Turkists located the essence of Western civilisation not so much in rationalism or humanism but in a nationalism in which religion also played a part. Thus Western civilisation was for them an acceptable framework for Turkish national self-assertion. This understanding allowed them to Westernise and at the same time to fight against Western imperialism. It also enabled them to substitute a clearly circumscribed concept of the Turkish nation (defined by the possession of its own literary language) for the artificial concept of a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual Ottoman nation where Arabic and Persian were the languages of the elite.¹⁷

¹⁵) Malia’s full label is *bureaucratie universelle idéocratique* [Malia 1980: 128, 214].

¹⁶) I have discussed this in more detail in my *The Civilizations of Asia and the Middle East* [Krejčí 1990: 284 ff.].

¹⁷) In 1920 the political spectrum was temporarily complicated by the appearance of a communist element. The so-called Easternists came upon the scene, urging the Turks to follow the Bolshevik example. From among the disgruntled peasants, partisan units, the so-called Green Army, were recruited, and in the National Assembly the ‘Populist’ group advocated socialist policies. But the progress of the pro-Soviet Communist Party was checked by the official Turkish Communist Party

As Kemal Atatürk succeeded in unifying the Turkists with the Westernists, his revolution, carried out by what may be described as the New Model Army won the day. This army has subsequently remained the main guardian of Kemal's legacy. Within the twenty years of Kemal's dictatorship all necessary changes were inaugurated; the Turks emerged as a nation in its own right, using Latin script adapted to their language and developing a new style of life; Turkey emerged as a lay state, a republic which after the second world war began to develop into a parliamentary democracy with a Western type market economy. However Turkish nationalism orientated itself on the example of post-revolutionary France where all ethnic differences were suppressed. Armenians had already been exterminated or expelled by the Ottoman regime, whilst the Kurds are to be absorbed, as the 'Mountain Turks', into one indivisible Turkish nation, which its leaders want to make a part of Europe on all counts. Of all the transformations discussed here Turkey underwent the most thoroughgoing socio-cultural change. Until recently the Islamic opposition was muted. But in the 1990's with the rise of religious consciousness in the whole of Islam, the Turkish Islamists likewise entered the political arena with more determination. Economic shortcomings and poverty are their main electoral chips. In that respect they do better than the socialists.

Iran's political spectrum was more variegated than that of Turkey. The Westernists were divided between the followers of the Shah's modernising dictatorship on the one hand, and democrats of liberal or socialist hue on the other. There was a strong communist party, the Tudeh. Iranian nationalism, unlike that in Turkey, was based on religion rather than on language. It is the Twelvers' version of the Shiite Islam, established by the Safavid revolution at the beginning of the sixteenth century as a national creed, which differentiates Iran from other Islamic countries. This religion came to be shared also by the main ethnic minority, the Azeris. In opposition to the Shah's oppressive regime the Marxists and the mullahs (i.e. the clerics) started to move closer together. On the intellectual plane there was even a synthetic stream engaged in deriving socialist principles from the Islamic tradition. The aim was to establish a *tauhipi* society, a society of 'unity', where man is united with the product of his labour, with nature, and with all creation and ultimately with God. 'All oppression and exploitation will crumble and social solidarity, based on Islamic principles, will emerge.' [Kamrava 1990: 62] Yet, the Lenin of the Iranian revolution was to be one of those very clerics. Ayatollah Khomeini, at the head of a multitude of determined mullahs, outwitted his Marxist-Islamist rivals; against the communists he could always refer to their godlessness.

Nevertheless Khomeini's revolution did not end in a full return to the past. On the one hand it re-emphasised the idea of a very distant past. This is the belief in the hidden imam, Ali's 12th descendent who in 874 AD went into 'occultation' and is due to reappear as Mahdi (by God guided) and to establish the rightful Islam all over the world. On the other hand, in striking contrast to Islamic tradition, there is the republic, with universal suffrage and various elected bodies. However, all candidates are carefully vetted; women, although under male guidance and family jurisdiction as Islamic tradition requires, are encouraged to perform professional work and to participate in political life. The main area open to discussion is economic policy. However, all attempts at the badly-

created and dominated by Atatürk, and was eventually eliminated by the defeat of the partisan units, whose Circassian commander fled over to the advancing Greeks.

needed land reform, started under the Shah's regime, have been discontinued on religious grounds.

There were many issues in the four aforementioned revolutions, political, economic and cultural. But with respect to continuity or discontinuity, it was the issue of nationhood which became crucial. I shall review the four cases, ranged according to my perception of their discontinuity, from strongest to weakest.

Both Turkey and Russia were multiethnic and multireligious empires. In Turkey which officially did not bear this name, it was the Ottoman dynasty and Islam which were the dominant and unifying links. The religious-cum-ethnic minorities enjoyed a limited autonomous jurisdiction. In Russia, it was the Russian nation, its orthodox brand of Christianity and the Czar at the top which gave the Empire its character. Only a few minority nations enjoyed a kind of autonomy. The great revolutions in both these two countries were inspired by the French revolution which had taken place more than one hundred years earlier. The Ottoman Turks wanted to emulate its nation unifying effect. The Russian revolutionaries wanted to take over the legacy of the radical stream in the French revolution and push it a big step forward.

The attempt to build up an Ottoman nation in which the Turks, Arabs, Greeks, Slavs, Armenians etc. could be united was doomed to a failure. Secession of the non-Turks was the result. The Kemalist revolution cut the losses and made of the ethnic Turks a European style nation. This amounted to a change of civilisation. The Russian attempts to build upon the legacy of the Paris Commune went astray. Social and environmental engineering, based on a total concentration of power at the top, resulted in collapse. But a by-product of the revolution, the division of the country along ethnic lines, survived. Although, under the unifying bond of the Communist party, this division had a limited practical meaning, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, its constituent republics became more or less one nation sovereign states. Whatever co-operation may be arranged between some of these states, it is unlikely that the ethnic emancipation will be reversed.

The Iranian revolution drew from more sources of inspiration. First, came the example of the Young Ottomans, then the rivalry between two European models: the communist and the fascist. The latter, however, was superseded by a monarchic principle; which eventually looked for a link-up with the pre-Islamic legacy of the Persian Empire in all its glory. But this was not palatable to either of the modernising streams, the Eastern and the Western; above all it was not acceptable to the Islamists. They could base their appeal on what was most popular at the grass-root level and they won. They 'modernised' the time-honoured Iranian nationalism by dressing it in a parliamentary democracy of sorts with carefully selected female participation. In this way, the clerics could promote their societal power to an unprecedented level. Also ethnic Sunnite minorities are subject to the control of the Shiite hierarchy.

In China there was least scope for discontinuity. Revolution, as a cause of a dynastic change and of some improvement in administration, is a well known phenomenon in Chinese history. The Taiping revolution in the mid 19th century gave a foretaste of what may happen if the helmsmen of the revolution go berserk. The issue between the Kuomintang and the communists was not only of economico-political nature. The Kuomintang cherished the link with the Confucian tradition whereas the communists showed more patriotism vis-à-vis the Japanese invaders. The communists won the war thanks to their superior fighting spirit and concern for the common man. Due to the follies of their

great leader's social engineering, they might have lost the fruits of their victory. But the Chinese tradition gave them both the strength and inspiration to carry on in a more cautious way.

This brief sketch of the dramatic social change in China, Iran, Russia and Turkey was based on the case studies in my comparative study of eight great revolutions [Krejci 1994].¹⁸ The case of Japan has been added in order to show an alternative, non revolutionary response to the Western challenge, a response which is vigorous but without any formal break in continuity.

The sketch should illustrate what I consider to be the merit for social science of a comparative historical account and analysis. It should also restate my refutation of those approaches which try to exorcise the subjective factor, be it will, belief, ethos or spirit, from explanation and theorising, and look instead for some depersonalised structural or systemic perspectives of social reality as the only rational explanation. Achievement in social action, whether cultural, political or economic, depends not only on the number and skill of the people involved, on the resources being available and effectively used and, possibly, on a propitious environment or frame of interaction; it depends above all on motivation; on the will to create, to fight and to work, to save and invest. These are the social vectors the sum of which decide the direction and magnitude of social change.

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JAROSLAV KREJČÍ studied law and economics in Prague. He specialised in macroeconomics, but due to his particular life experience, he turned his interest to macrosociology with particular reference to the links between the socio-cultural and economico-political aspects of social change. He is, at present, Emeritus Professor at Lancaster University and in Prague director of the Centre for Research into socio-cultural pluralism at the Institute of Philosophy of the Czech Academy of Sciences. His most recent books are *Czechoslovakia at the Crossroads of European History* (Tauris, 1990); *The Civilizations of Asia and the Middle East before the European Challenge* (Macmillan, 1990); *The Human Predicament: its Changing Image* (Macmillan, 1993); *Society in a Global Perspective* (SLON, Prague 1993); and *Great Revolutions Compared. The Outline of a Theory* (Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1994).

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¹⁸) The other four revolutions under study are those in France, England, Mexico and in the Hussite Bohemia.

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