The Peasant Commune in the Development of Capitalism in Russia — From a Study of the Communes in Moscow Province after the Reforms of 1860s*

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I The changing character of communal land repartition

It was in the eastern region of Moscow province that industry developed in the 19th century, while the western region of this province was more agricultural. However, according to the investigations of the Moscow Zemstvo\(^1\) for the 20 years following the Emancipation of Serfs in 1861, it was in the eastern region that the general communal repartition of land based on the principle of equality was more frequent, although in the western districts of Mozhaisk and Ruza with large amounts of dues in arrear it was exceptionally more frequent. What does this mean? In this respect attention must be given to the relation between the amount of dues and returns from the land in the communes.

In the communes where farming was not declining so much and returns from the land were not so much below the amount of dues, or when returns exceeded dues, the parceling and mixed arrangement (cherespolositsa) of land had made slow progress and general land repartition had not been carried out so frequently. It seems that in such communes the principle of equality had a sufficient significance for the redistribution not only of dues, but also of land.

On the other hand, in the communes where dues drastically exceeded returns from the land, as in the communes in the eastern districts of Moscow province—that is, communes where farming was declining and the means of life and payments for the peasants had to be obtained from

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occupations outside farming in their villages or through emigration—the parcelling and mixed arrangement of land made progress rapidly and the frequency of general land repartition was relatively high. However, here the principle of equality, which certainly had a sufficient significance for the redistribution of dues, became superficial with respect to land redistribution, protecting even the well-off peasants.

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The peasants, who were freed personally from the control of their lords by the Emancipation of 1861, were, however, increasingly incorporated into the official communal order, above all into the governmental system of collecting dues through the communes.

On the other hand, the peasants who utilized land in the communal order according to egalitarian principle could not be freed from the parcelling and mixed arrangement of land and from its redistribution, although they had recognized the economic disadvantage of frequent redistribution of land.

For the peasants to utilize land it was necessary for them to pay dues, and, at the same time, for them to distribute the dues it was necessary for them to distribute the land. In the communes of Moscow province, where land did not have a respectable value and non-agricultural occupations were an important source of earnings, the equalization of dues-payments required the equalization of land tenure, and there the principle of equality, which had a sufficient significance for the redistribution of dues, became superficial or subordinate with respect to land redistribution.

And yet this Moscow province saw the development of the kustar' and factory industries, which were sustained and restrained by the communal order.

II Changes seen in communes with many non-agricultural occupations

In this section I want to point out changes seen in communes with many non-agricultural occupations (promysly), using the findings of investigations made at the end of the 1870s with regard to two communes in Moscow province: Spas-Temnya village-commune (Serpukhov district), investigated by the Moscow Zemstvo,2 and Korzhen' village-commune (Mozhaisk district), investigated by the Free
Economic Society and the Russian Geographical Society. 3

Soviet historiography has already pointed out that the patriarchal, large peasant family after the Emancipation of Serfs in 1861 was declining, with the tendency for the out-immigrating youth to set up families on their own. 4 But the same was true for the above-mentioned communes. Especially in Spas-Temnya commune the scale of the household was small. And as many members of communes were engaged in non-agricultural occupations — wage-labour at the pinmaking factory in the village and the emigratory glass-inlaying work in Spas-Temnya commune, and various types of emigratory wage-labour at Moscow city in Korzhen’ commune — farming was left in hands of those remaining, especially female peasants.

Under these circumstances, the following changes in the activities of the above-mentioned communes took place.

1. A village headman (starosta) was no longer a dominant figure with patriarchal privileges, but merely someone who negotiated and arranged communal affairs, an administrative representative of the commune. In Spas-Temnya commune the accounting reports of the starosta were severely audited at the village assembly. But at the same time in the communes could be found a genuinely influential figure, who was called “polevaya starosta” (headman of the fields) as opposed to the official, administrative starosta. 5 This illustrates the problem of duality in the communal organization of this period.

2. In the above-mentioned communes, where the returns from the land could not secure the payments of dues by the peasants and non-agricultural wage-labour was an important source of earnings, the general repartition of land had been carried out relatively frequently. But this general land repartition aimed not so much at equalizing the farming of each peasant itself as at equalizing their payments of dues. Concerning this changing character of land repartition, I have already remarked on the communes of Moscow province in general.

3. One of the most important functions of the above-mentioned communes was becoming the collection of dues from the members. In Spas-Temnya commune one of required conditions for issuing a passport was that the emigrants had to pay dues into the township (volost’ ) from their advance wages. In connection with this problem,
L.I. Kuchumova remarks on the transition from communal unity (obshchinnyi soyuz) to forced unity to bear dues (obyazatel'nyi, tyaglyi soyuz) in this period.⁶

4. However, the above-mentioned communes did not want to hold actively joint liability for the payments of dues. As seen in Korzhen’ commune, the starosta resorted only to persuasion to collect dues in arrears, and if that was not effective the result was the direct intervention of the volost’ and the district-police. In some cases the starosta was punished by the district-police for unsuccessful collection of dues. Communal joint liability for dues-payment was imposed by force from above, as seen in the compulsory sale at auction of livestock by the district-police.

5. The situation described in 4 meant a decline in the communal self-regulating force, which was reflected in the decline of solidarity in other communal activities. In the report of Korzhen’ commune it is stated that there was no mutual aid at times of fire or livestock plague, and that while the carding of hemp was common work, it was based on the free will of each participant. L.I. Kuchumova also states that the mutual aid in communes in this period was not based on the whole will of the commune, but on the individual initiative of each of its members, and so communal spirit was declining.⁷

The author of the report on Korzhen’ commune raised lastly a problem about the disorganization of the commune owing to growing urban consciousness and an individualistic tendency, factors which were brought into the village by emigrating workers. But it seems that the peasant communes in Moscow province, which were increasingly incorporated into the governmental system of collecting dues, continued to be centers of daily life for peasants, even if their vital power and solidarity as land-communes was unmistakably declining. It is difficult to imagine that the communes took easily to their collapse, and it is important to recognize the adaptability of communes to social reality—the development of a state administration and industrial activities.

III Peasant-communal character of the textile production

1. The textile industry in the years 1898–1900

According to the materials of the Moscow Zemstvo on the years
1898–1900, which give information about peasants’ occupations outside farming, it is known that in Moscow province in the years 1898–1900 there were 127,002 peasant weavers, of which 49.6% worked at factories and 50.4% at their cottages or at small weaving houses (sveterki) in their villages. In cotton weaving 51.9% of weavers worked at factories and 48.1% at kustar’ industries, in woolen weaving an overwhelming majority (82.8%) at factories and in silk weaving kustar’ weavers were predominant in numbers (72.8%). Although this investigation was not of factories themselves and it is, therefore, not correctly known how many factory-weavers there were who had migrated from other provinces or came from other social classes from the peasantry, the existence of a large quantity of kustar’-weavers deserves careful attention. The materials of the Zemstvo in the year 1880 counted 45,615 handlooms, compared with 24,192 powerlooms in Moscow province. If one counts one handloom as one weaver, between 1880 and 1900 the number of handweavers in the cotton sector increased from 34,587 to 45,261 and in the silk sector from 6,452 to 8,001, although in the woolen sector this number decreased from 4,576 to 1,349.

Therefore, more significance should be given to the fact that even in the period of transition from the 19th to the 20th century there existed a large quantity of handweaving, kustar’ production in Moscow province, although from the viewpoint of productivity mechanized, textile factory production played a predominant role.

2. Peasant-communal character of the weavers

On the peasant-communal character of the kustar’ weavers, I think, there is no need to dwell here. They worked at their weaving in their cottage or small weaving-house from September to next April (Easter) or June (St. Peter’s Day, 29 June) and worked at farming based on the, even if declining, communal tenure of land with periodical redistribution of land in the summer. Their weaving was not independent and self-employed, but a putting-out production, controlled by weaving masters who were factory owners or merchants, frequently with yarn-distributors (masterki, mediators between weavers’ masters and weavers), who were often influential, well-off peasants of the same villages or regions as those of the weavers themselves.

The weavers, who were paid at piece rate in kind, had to suffer under
the arbitrary behavior of the masters and yarn-distributors (higher estimated cost of yarn and payment in kind but at values imposed higher than the market price, various fines for reasons of "poor quality" and so on), although the yarn-distributors were under the control of the masters. The dues which the weavers had to pay were deducted from their estimated payments and remitted directly to the volost' by the masters or the yarn-distributors. The relation between the masters, the yarn-distributors and the peasant-weavers reminds us of the relation between the noble landowners (pomeshchiki), the domain-commune managers (prikazchiki and burmistry) and the serfs, although, as a matter of course, an essential difference existed between these relations.

The peasant-communal character applies also to the factory weavers, as the studies of R.E. Johnson and others have already pointed out. To these studies I add my own analysis of the investigations of the Zemstvo and others and discuss this problem here. The labor migration from other districts of Moscow province and neighbouring provinces, which played a great role in factory weaving production, often has tendencies to regional collectivity. These tendencies arose, it seemed, from the traditional human relations of a village and from the method of labour recruitment by factory owners who sought labourers at times by way of the volost'. The factory owners remitted the deducted dues of weavers directly to the volost'. The return of the weavers to their villages for farming in summer months was very frequently seen, especially in handwork factories, but the year-round weavers also, who worked in large numbers in mechanized factories, had many opportunities in long holidays to come back to their villages, where their family or relatives were often living. In this way they did not lose their connexions with their villages. In the periods of depression they were compelled to come back to their villages and to engage in now unaccustomed farming, as the report for the year 1885 by the Zemstvo vividly pointed out. The aged weavers, roughly after 40 years old, returned to their villages. The daily life of the weavers was under strict conditions of employment and strict supervision by the factory owners in the enclosed factory grounds. They slept in the workshops or in common lodgings, and were fed by their autonomous organisation, the artel', with interference by the factory owners in buying food materials and so on. Contemporaries saw peasant villages in the weaving factory, nomads,
who come and go between the village and town, in factory labourers, and the relation between former noble landowner and serf in that between the factory owners and labourers. It is to be said, I think, that the peasant-communal character of the factory weavers was very strong, and the state of the factory weavers in Moscow province at this period differed greatly from that of Western European, modern wage-earners.

3. The multi-uklad structure of Russian capitalism

So even in the period of transition from the 19th to the 20th century there was, as indicated in 2 above, coexistence of factory and kustar' weaving productions, both with a peasant-communal character, in Moscow province. I think that this coexistence of both forms of production indicates the structural peculiarity of Russian capitalism itself, not that the kustar' production existed as the preceding, disappearing form of production to factory production. In this respect I recall the discussion in Soviet historiography on the many strata (mnogoukladnost'—multi-uklad, coexistence of capitalistic and pre-capitalistic uklads or forms of productive relation) of Russian capitalism. This discussion was going on in the late 1960s, for example, in the Vsesoyuznaya Nauchnaya Sessiya (All-Union Scientific Conference), 28 February-3 March, 1967, in Leningrad, concerning the 50th anniversary of the February Revolution, and in the Vsesoyuznaya Nauchnaya Konferentsiya (All-Union Scientific Conference) on the theme "V.I. Lenin on the social-economic structure of capitalistic Russia", 27–31 May, 1969, in Ural University, Sverdlovsk, by I.F. Gindin, M.Ya. Gefter, P.G. Ryndzyunskii, K.N. Tarnovskii and other many scholars. This discussion was afterward severely criticized, but, I think, is to be highly evaluated. Added to this discussion in Soviet historiography, I am reminded also of the following discussion in Japan by Takafusa Nakamura, Ken'ichiro Shoda and others, that traditional, native production supported the development of modern, capitalistic factory industry. So, I think, there is a common point at issue in the discussion about the development and the structural character of capitalism in both latecomer countries, Russia and Japan.

Notes
1. Sbornik statisticheskikh svedenii po Moskovskoi gubernii, otdel khozyaistvennoi

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7. Ibid., pp. 112-113.


13. Statisticheskii ezhegodnik Moskovskogo gubernskogo zemstva 1886 g., M., 1886, p. 78.


18. Takafusa Nakamura, Senzen ki Nihon keizai seicho no bunseki (Analysis of