

# METHODOLOGY AND PRAXIS IN RESEARCHING THE NON-WESTERN WORLD: DIALOGUE BETWEEN ALEXEI D. VOSKRESSENSKI AND FRED EIDLIN\* as an Introduction to the Special Issue of “Comparative Politics Russia”

<p><b>Article history:</b></p> <p><i>Received:</i> 16.11.2019</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 01.12.2019</p>	<p><b>Abstract:</b> Introduction to the Special Issue of “Comparative Politics Russia” – “<i>Non-Western Transformations</i>”. In Honor of the “Comparative Politics Russia” author [Fred Eidlin]. The text is compiled by fragments of a selected correspondence – the exchange of views between professors Alexei D. Voskressenski and Fred Eidlin while preparing methodological articles of F. Eidlin for publication in the journal “Comparative Politics Russia” and other books on Non-Western processes.</p>
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<p><b>Key words:</b> non-western world; non-western theory; comparative politics; international relations</p>	

**Alexei D. Voskressenski.** It seems obvious for the group of Russian researchers who started to analyze processes in the Non-Western World long ago that as a result of political and socio-economic transformations in the late 20th – early 21st centuries, the Modern World entered the new phase of its evolution, in which the Western countries were not at all the only ones that set the parameters of this evolution and the frameworks of its conceptualization. More recently this phase is associated with

the attempt to challenge, indirectly or directly, the concept of post-industrial development put forward by Social Sciences in the West and later substantiated by the western Social Sciences and IR theory. Notwithstanding the extremely sensitive perception of such attempts in the western countries, this fact quite soon was addressed in the contemporary – including western – academic analysis. In Russia these conceptual attempts were concentrated politically not on the plans to “bury the West”

\* Текст представляет собой фрагменты избранной переписки – обмена мнениями профессоров А.Д. Воскресенского и Фреда Эйдлина в связи с подготовкой методологических статей Ф. Эйдлина в журнале «Сравнительная политика», а также подготовкой и рецензированием в международных издательствах книг “Is Non-Western Democracy Possible? A Russian Perception” (World Scientific, 2017) и “Non-Western Theories of International Relations: Conceptualizing World Regional Studies” (Palgrave Macmillan, 2017). Первая книга планировалась к изданию в издательстве *Palgrave MacMillan*, с которым был заключен первоначальный договор на издание, но в связи с предложением сократить текст на 50% в конечном счете появилась в полном варианте в сингапурском издательстве *World Scientific*. Вторую книгу опубликовало издательство *Palgrave MacMillan*. Фред Эйдлин принимал участие в обсуждении и рецензировании указанных изданий. Обе книги вышли в 2017 г., в год его скоропостижной кончины, однако Фред успел написать краткий *эндорсмент* (отзыв в поддержку), который был помещен, как это и полагается по международным стандартам, на обороте титульных страниц. Первоначально обсуждение планировалось опубликовать в журнале «Сравнительная политика» в виде отдельной статьи, однако преждевременный уход из жизни Фреда помешал выполнению этого замысла в запланированные сроки. Некоторые положения этого диалога-обсуждения, однако, получили все же отражение в текстах вышеуказанных книг.

but on pragmatically analyzing non-western dynamics in their complexity aimed at building fairer World of Converging Modernities. This approach broadens our view of world transformations, including transformations of a non-western type on extending possibilities for broadening social access as well as exploring more thoroughly specific problems pertaining to non-western countries. Such a discourse makes it possible to follow a rather clear line of transformation in the role and place of the Non-West and of the East particularly in the global and also Russian Social Science. Thus, two set of problems, theoretical and practical, emerged:

– political ones, related to the elaboration of areas (regional sub-systems) tied by certain principles of a regional order not necessarily of western nature but based on modernized political, economic and social understanding including a necessity to broaden conceptualization of such ideas as “non-western democracy”;

– and the necessity to explore possibilities to construct transdisciplinary field of studies being able to incorporate this new evolving agenda on national and international levels.

**Fred Eidlin:** The model of democracy that emerged in Europe and the Anglo-Saxon world was long taken to be the universal standard for democracy. This model is increasingly being called into question from different directions. On one hand, increasing criticism of the theory and reality of democracy in the Western world has led many politicians, diplomats, and scholars to look to non-Western models of democracy. Calls for different models of democracy are becoming more prominent and widespread in thinking about democratic reform. Yet it is not clear that non-Western countries actually have useful models of democracy to share with the West. On the other hand, modernization in the non-Western world has not been leading in lock step towards approximation of the Western model of democracy. Non-Western regimes have been adapting Western ideals and institutions to local and regional traditions, institutions, and values. Yet it remains unclear whether what they really want is fundamentally different from Western democracy. Political scientists have long classified regimes as democratic, totalitarian, or autocratic. These categories have

also been applied to non-Western countries, although the fit has been growing increasingly uncomfortable. Most non-Western countries have been slotted into the vague residual category of “under-developed” or, more politely, “developing.” It was assumed that, as they modernized, their political institutions and processes would come increasingly closer to the “universal” Western model of democracy. As long as the superiority of Western regimes and the backwardness of non-Western countries seemed obvious, this “universal” standard remained unshaken. “Developing countries” were squeezed into the Western classificatory scheme as “autocracies,” “emerging democracies,” or “hybrid regimes”. However, Western knowledge and understanding of non-Western countries has advanced, and many of these countries have modernized. As a result, the inadequacy of viewing their political development as merely way stations along the road towards the “universal” Western model of democracy has been increasingly recognized.

**Alexei D. Voskressenski.** A special note should be made in this connection to some works issued in the last decades as in the given case they represent the vector of political-economy studies analyzing the economic role of the East. For example, A.G. Frank’s book, “Re-Orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age”<sup>1</sup> written in the polemics with Professor McNeil<sup>2</sup> (prof. McNeil’s books are translated into Russian, A.G. Franks’s are not, but Edward’s Said<sup>3</sup> book became well known indeed and translated into Russian some twenty years after it was written) is focused mainly on the analysis of the global economy’s structure and dynamics through the prism of the entire system (including the Asian sub-system) rather than just its European segment. In another interesting group of studies, the role of the East in international relations is addressed through the prism of international-historical approach. In this

<sup>1</sup> Frank, A.G. Re-Orient: Global Economy in the Asian Age. University of California Press, 1998. 416 p.

<sup>2</sup> McNeill, William H. The Rise of the West: A History of the Human Community. University of Chicago Press, 2009. 866 p.

<sup>3</sup> Said, Edward. Orientalism. Pantheon Books, 1978. 368 p.

connection should also be mentioned works by C. Bayly<sup>4</sup>, B. Buzan and R. Little<sup>5</sup>, who reach a conclusion that at the given stage the history of international relations should be decentralized rather than reoriented from the West to East. Further concluding idea was put forward in the book edited by A. Acharya and B. Buzan<sup>6</sup> that the non-Western IR may indeed somehow exist. They also envisaged a possibility for an appearance of the non-Western IR theory as a new phenomenon of really international IR. Some even started to call it Global IR, though the contribution of these non-western additions to this allegedly “global IR” is still contested.

While the afore-mentioned studies certainly do not encompass the whole variety of works that analyze the changing role and position of the East and the West as world macro-regions in contemporary international political and socio-economic relations, they, however, serve a sufficient ground for an unambiguous conclusion: eventually, the positions of those were gaining weight, who insisted on including the non-Western agenda into the political and political-economic analysis of international relations without a regard of whatever the repulsion such stand could cause in the classical “West-centric” or “East-centric” Social Sciences. If we are taking this proposition as a basic one for a further exploration, we must note at the same time, as evidenced by the preceding analysis, through to the present time the studies of the East and of the global policy were never linked directly in the mainstream IR theory except the theories of modernization, development and dependency or the world-systems' analysis which never were at the mainstream of IR theory. In this connection, at the current stage it appears reasonable to identify the two vectors of newly conceptualized comprehensive world or global studies:

The first vector represents the probability of appearance and development of IR concepts of non-western nature, global politics or

<sup>4</sup> Bayly, C. *The Birth of the Modern World, 1780-1914*. Wiley-Blackwell, 2004. 564 p.

<sup>5</sup> Buzan, B.; Little, R. *International Systems in World History: Remaking the Study of International Relations*. Oxford University Press, 2000. 472 p

<sup>6</sup> Acharya, A.; Buzan B. *Non-Western International Relations Theory: Perspectives On and Beyond Asia*. Routledge, 2010. 256 p.

comprehensive world regional studies created, among others, by researchers of Eastern countries (or with their direct participation) and based on such non-Western concepts as “Chinese global order”, “Mandala state”, “Buddhist world order”, etc. but not necessarily on the emergence of non-Western theories per se. The second vector would focus attention on extension of other than West-centric constructivist approaches within theoretical constructions of the global and regional levels positioned “between” the universal and exclusively area / country-related approaches. This vector focuses on the comparative analysis of practical aspects of constructing the harmonious international relations through expanding the field of interaction between states and also of trans-regional relations up to the formation of global regions as new highly integrated non-traditional actors in world politics.

Within the latter vector, a segment of the Russian experts in international politics conduct research analyzing the problems of the East and, in particular, East Asia in the context of, and with due regard to dynamics of such phenomenon as the comprehensive global policy. Another subdivision of researchers within this vector concentrated on the constructivist attempts to create alternative visions aimed to fundamentally reshape global configuration. It is not clear yet to what extent they may be productive.

**Fred Eidlin:** Recognition of the inadequacy of old ways of understanding the non-Western world opens up a new set of problems and sets a new agenda: If old ways of understanding are inadequate, what new ways might be more fruitful? Herein lies the importance and originality of the book “Is Non-Western Democracy Possible?”<sup>7</sup>. It breaks out of the strictures of Western models of democracy and development, and confronts the open question of whether or not a distinct, non-Western model of democracy might be existing. The first part of the book presents its theoretical and conceptual framework, and explores the general characteristics of the political and

<sup>7</sup> *Is Non-Western Democracy Possible? A Russian Perspective*. With forewords by Kevin Rudd and by Adam Przeworski. Ed. by Alexei D. Voskressenski. Singapore: World Scientific, 2017.

social-cultural aspects of economic regimes in the East and West. The next two parts divide the Eastern world into two broad regions: (1) Africa and the Greater Middle East, and (2) East Asian. Each of these two parts contains chapters that deal with sub-regions. Some of the chapters deal with a single state, others with groups of states that comprise conceptual units that are useful for analytic purposes. The final part of the book presents general conclusions based drawing together the discussions in parts 2 and 3 of specific regions and sub-regions. It concludes with the question that unifies the work: Is a non-Western democracy possible?

Two features make this work a particularly original and important contribution to understanding of democracy in practice, and understanding of politics and government in the non-Western world. First is its organizing concept of “non-Western democracy.” This is not just a catchy phrase or label intended to draw attention. The concept runs through the entire work and methodically unifies it. The proposal claims that it represents “all major points of current debate between the East and the West on the issue of democratic development, political modernization and political changes in Eastern as well as Western societies,” but seen through the Russian eyes. Although I can’t confirm that it actually does represent “all” major points of the current debate, it represents a substantial range of them. It is certainly broader in geographical and theoretical scope than its competitors.

A second original and important feature of the book is that it is written from a Russian point of view, and that represents views of an influential segment of a Russian research, analytical and policy-making community. Most of the team that produced this book are faculty members of Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO), one of Russia’s most distinguished educational institutions. In addition to being under the Ministry of Education and Science, MGIMO belongs to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and is directly connected with the making of foreign policy. The Western scholarly community is not much aware of the richness and magnitude of Russian expertise on the non-Western world. Of all countries in the Western world, Russia is by far the one most

involved with the non-Western world, and this helps explain why the non-Western world receives so much attention in both Russian scholarship and policymaking. Throughout its history, Russia has had far more contact with non-Western peoples than any other Western country. For hundreds of years, there has been a perennial debate in Russia as to whether Russia is a Western country, or whether its identity has been fundamentally shaped by Eastern influences. Large numbers of non-Western peoples have always lived within Russia’s boundaries, and Russia neighbors on many non-Western countries.

**Alexei D. Voskressenski:** The ongoing global transformations, including globalization, modernization, integration/disintegration trends, have particularly highlighted the uneven nature of international political and economic space. Indeed, the world is not so flat as it was described by Thomas Friedman in his book “The World is Flat”<sup>8</sup>. Various regional segments of this global space generate their own ways of coping with world transformations and living through them. An increasingly complex nature of the international system and the emergence of new actors contribute to the fact that conceptual framing existing within the classical disciplines of IR, Political Theory, International Political Economy or Comparative Politics can no longer explain in full a number of processes originating from a tighter and intricate nexus between local, regional and global dimensions. To assess and fill this lacunae World Regional Studies as a new framework for analysis emerged being a tool to bridge the gap between IR theory, comparative politics, development studies, comparative macro history and comparative international political economy. Indeed, one does not know if theories tested in Western cases have explanatory power in non-Western cases or not, so the discussion is on the need for IR research to incorporate non-Western regions. Thus, we maybe do not need specific theories that solely explain phenomena in non-Western regions. As Johannes Vüllers once observed, “the main methodological problem with the low representation of non-Western cases is that

<sup>8</sup> Friedman, Thomas. *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2005. 488 p.

one cannot draw any empirical conclusions about non-Western cases if the theories and the empirical studies of IR ignore these regions”.<sup>9</sup> Thus, the aim of World Regional Studies as a field of study and as a conceptual framework is to explain the emergence of the new phenomena in international relations and world politics on a regional and predominantly non-Western regional level such as regional complexes, regional subsystems of international relations and, finally, global regions being at the same time in the conformity with the existing international (i.e. Western) IR theories.<sup>10</sup> However, it is still not clear how to teach these new phenomena especially on international level.

**Fred Eidlin:** Taking “Is Non-Western Democracy Possible?” as an example it is likely to have both interdisciplinary and international appeal. It appears to be of potential interest as a textbook for graduate courses in Comparative Politics, World Politics and the non-Western world. It might be interesting reading for the educated public and professional communities that deal with the non-Western world. Regarding competing works: Inglehart’s “Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies”<sup>11</sup> is the competing work that is most closely related to your volume. Conceptually, it looks like a tighter work, being the product of a single author. However, it takes a completely different approach from that of your group of researchers, and appears to be complementary. If I were to teach a course along the lines of your book, I think I would use both books. Alagappa’s “Civil Society and Political Change in Asia”<sup>12</sup> is not a truly integrated study. It

consists of a wide variety of contributions without an integrating theme like the concept of “non-Western democracy” that runs through and integrates the volume. Civil society is in the titles of a majority of the chapters, but not all of them. And it appears that each author uses this already vague term in his/her own sense. Also, the focus is only on Asia. de Bary’s “Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective”<sup>13</sup> is a single author study that deals only with Asia, and has a much narrower focus than your volume. Chu, Diamond, Nathan, and Shin, “How East Asians View Democracy”<sup>14</sup> deals only with Asia and has a much narrower focus than your volume.

My recommendation: I recommend that this book be published as it stands or after minor revisions. I do have criticisms, but they are general, and not serious enough to delay publication. The only problems that need to be addressed before publication are occasional clumsiness in English language usage. These problems are mostly cosmetic, and do not obscure understanding of what is being said. A copy editor should either be able to deal with them as part of the normal copy-editing process, or recommend what needs to be done before copy editing. It is inevitable in a work that brings together so many authors, regions, countries, and kinds of theory, that it could be improved by further integration, clarification, and focusing. I suggest that the editor and contributors keep this in mind as they continue to revise the book. This is especially important with regard to the concept of “non-Western democracy,” which is so central to this work. The concept shares problems similar to those of Max Weber’s “Protestant Ethic.” There is undeniably something real and important behind Weber’s concept, and it clearly represents a breakthrough in understanding. Like the “Protestant Ethic,” the concept of “non-Western democracy,” is ideal-typical and unavoidably somewhat vague. It is therefore

<sup>9</sup> Vüllers, Johannes. Geographical Patterns of Analysis in IR Research: Representative Cross-regional Comparison as a Way Forward. GIGA Working Papers, 2014, No. 256. P. 21.

<sup>10</sup> Voskressenski, Alexei D. Non-Western International Relations Theories: Conceptualizing World Regional Studies. Springer Global: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

<sup>11</sup> Inglehart, R. Modernization and Postmodernization: Cultural, Economic, and Political Change in 43 Societies. Princeton University Press, 1997. 464 p.

<sup>12</sup> Alagappa, M. Civil Society and Political Change in Asia: Expanding and Contracting Democratic Space. Stanford University Press, 2004. 552 p.

<sup>13</sup> de Bary, Wm. Theodore. Asian Values and Human Rights: A Confucian Communitarian Perspective. Harvard University Press, 2000. 208 p.

<sup>14</sup> Chu, Yun-han; Diamond, Larry; Nathan, Andrew J.; Shin, Doh Chull. How East Asians View Democracy. Columbia University Press, 2010. 328 p.



difficult to know just how to move forward with it. Nevertheless, unlike so much of the empty verbiage that is published in the social sciences, I believe the concept of non-Western democracy can lead to fruitful discussion and advancement of knowledge. If this were merely a proposal, I would be skeptical that the project could be actually be realized. To produce a coherent study involving a team of scholars, dealing with so many countries and bringing to bear such a wide range of theory, almost strains the imagination. Yet, the project has already been realized. You have a translated portion of a prize-winning book that has gone through four editions in Russia. Moreover, since most contributors are colleagues at the same educational institution, revision has been driven by experience using the book in teaching. If you proceed with publication, I would be pleased to provide an endorsement of the final manuscript that could be used to publicize the book.

**Alexei D. Voskressenski:** I will proceed with both ‘Is Non-Western Democracy Possible?’<sup>15</sup> as well as with “Non-Western Relations Theories”<sup>16</sup>. Moreover, there are further problems to be investigated through future research. These are:

- What principles do determine the functioning of non-Western societies?
- What is the role of emerging non-western world regions, especially in the reassessment of the meaning of development?
- Shall we de-westernize modernization and development theory? Shall we de-westernize the West? How can we do it? What are the consequences of these processes?
- If we are de-westernizing regionalism, what is the new correlation between regional norms and international norms? And also, between regional values and international / global values? Do we need a separation of these or a merge into a new normative approach? If this new approach is emerging, when what

<sup>15</sup> Is Non-Western Democracy Possible? A Russian Perspective. With forewords by Kevin Rudd and by Adam Przeworski. Ed. by Alexei D. Voskressenski. Singapore: World Scientific, 2017.

<sup>16</sup> Voskressenski, Alexei D. Non-Western International Relations Theories: Conceptualizing World Regional Studies. Springer Global: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017.

is the possible balance between specifics of the regional components and a global generality?

– How to attest the need for a new interdisciplinarity and for integral research in view of interdependence, and also in view of debates on the necessity of IR theory to attest non-Western phenomena?

– What should be the appropriate methodological approach to address issues raised above? Should we discuss the possibilities for the appearance of a non-Western IR theory or a new framework for analyzing de-westernized global development?

I do not know if I will be able to proceed with these questions alone because they are time and vital energy consuming, but maybe one day people will be ready to contribute their texts on the mentioned issues to the special issue of “Comparative Politics Russia”?

\* \* \*

So, here it is, these people and these texts.

*Prepared for publication  
by Alexei D. Voskressenski*

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## МЕТОДОЛОГИЯ И ПРАКТИКА ИССЛЕДОВАНИЙ НЕЗАПАДНОГО МИРА: ДИАЛОГ А.Д. ВОСКРЕСЕНСКОГО И ФРЕДА ЭЙДЛИНА. Вступительная статья к специальному номеру

<b>Информация о статье:</b>	<b>Аннотация:</b> Вступительная статья к специальному номеру журнала «Сравнительная политика» – «Незападные трансформации». Памяти профессора и автора журнала «Сравнительная политика» <u>Фреда Эйдли</u> на. Текст представляет собой фрагменты избранной переписки – обмена мнениями профессоров А.Д. Воскресенского и Фреда Эйдли
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