

Preliminary Exam Summary; Section: Social Change

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Skocpol, Theda. *States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979. Part I.

ABSTRACT:

In this part of the book, Skocpol presents an argument about the causes of social revolutions in France, Russia, and China (hence, the title of Part I). In brief (and in the first paragraphs of the two chapters in this section), “social revolutions in France, Russia and China emerged from specifically political crises centered in the structures and situations of old-regime states. The events of 1787-9 in France, of the first half of 1917 in Russia, and of 1911-16 in China not only undermined autocratic monarchical regimes but also disorganized centrally coordinated administrative and coercive controls over the potentially rebellious lower classes. The revolutionary crises developed when the old-regime states became unable to meet the challenges of evolving international situations. Monarchical authorities were subjected to new threats or to intensified competition from more economically developed powers abroad. And they were constrained or checked in their responses by the institutionalized relationships of the autocratic state organizations to the landed upper classes and the agrarian economies. Caught in cross-pressures between domestic class structures and international exigencies, the autocracies and their centralized administrations and armies broke apart, opening the way for social-revolutionary transformations spearheaded by revolts from below” (47). “Widespread peasant revolts coincided with, indeed took advantage of, the hiatus of governmental supervision and sanctions... Their revolts destroyed the old agrarian class relations and undermined the political and military supports for liberalism or counterrevolution. They opened the way for marginal political elites, perhaps supported by urban popular movements, to consolidate the Revolutions on the basis of centralized and mass-incorporating state organizations” (112).

SUMMARY:

[Schema:] In Chapter 2, Skocpol analyzes relationships and tensions between autocratic-imperial states and landed dominant classes; in other words, “the political crises of the absolutist states” (43, 48). In Chapter 3, she analyzes relationships and tensions between the producing classes and the dominant classes and states; in other words, “the situation of the peasantry” (43, 48).

I. Chapter 2: Old-Regime States in Crisis

[General background and overview of her argument:]

Prerevolutionary France, Russia, and China were *autocratic monarchies* focused upon (1) maintaining internal order and (2) contending with external foes (47). [The success with which these three monarchies fulfilled both of these roles ends as a result of political crises, thus paving the way for revolution.]

These three case studies involve “imperial states”: differentiated, centrally coordinated administrative and military hierarchies functioning under the aegis of the absolute monarchies (47). She also calls them “old regimes,” which seems self-explanatory (47).

Each imperial state is *proto-bureaucratic*, so power was not as great or as centralized as in a modern nation-state. Also, each state rested on “large-scale, predominantly *agrarian* economies in which land and (nonstate) claims to agricultural products were divided between a mass of peasant families and a landed upper class” (emphases added; 48). This is not to say there was no industry, but that agriculture was the most important economically.

The *fundamental politically relevant tensions* in all three Old Regimes were centered in relationships of (1) producing classes to the dominant classes and states and (2) the landed dominant classes to the autocratic-imperial states (48). [Note: although Skocpol opens this chapter with a quote from Lenin, she is opposing Marx here by saying explicitly that relations between commercial-industrial workers and landed bourgeoisie were not most important for these three revolutions.]

Also, Skocpol assumes that there was an ever-present level of grievances on the part of the peasants and urban workers. The key is to find out where the opportunity for revolt originated, and for that she looks to (2) in Chapter 2. For more on (1), see Chapter 3. [Note: Skocpol never uses terms “grievance” or “political opportunity” explicitly, though she seems to be talking about same genre of phenomena as main body of social movement theorists.]

So, the imperial states and landed classes are both *partners* in control and exploitation of the peasantry as well as *competitors* for control over the peasants’ manpower and agrarian surpluses (49). The landed classes did not have an institutionalized, routine role in policy making, but they did have privileged access to state offices; Skocpol concludes that this situation meant that the aristocracy couldn’t control state activities but it *could obstruct* them (49). Why the state would want to buck the economic interests of the aristocracy in the first place and thus open the door for obstruction is a good question, but extraordinary *international circumstances*, particularly increasing *military* competition, put these states in a bind where they *needed lots of resources and structural [pro-industrialization] transformations* that did not sit well with the aristocracy (though, for instance, Prussia and Japan both managed to maintain state autonomy and implement similar reforms, so it wasn’t impossible to meet foreign threat and avoid revolution) (50).

More significantly, the *structure* of the institutionalized relationships between state and landed classes and between landed classes and peasants in France, Russia, and China significantly contributed to these states’ impotence in meeting foreign threats. Russia got defeated in a total war, the monarchies in France and China were deposed by landed classes, and **“the upshot was the disintegration of centralized administrative and military machineries that had theretofore provided the sole unified bulwark of social and political order. No longer reinforced by the prestige and coercive power of autocratic monarchy, the existing class relations become vulnerable to assaults from below”** (50-51). Thus, according to Skocpol and Lenin, “there occurred a ‘crisis in the policy of the ruling class which cause[d] fissures through which the discontent and indignation of the oppressed classes [could] burst forth” (51). [a.k.a. instance of political opportunity]

[Specific case studies used to support her argument:]

A. *Old Regime France: The Contradictions of Bourbon Absolutism* (pages 51-67)

French Revolution is usually explained by one or more of the following themes: (a) the rise of the bourgeoisie and (b) the emergence of an Enlightenment critique of arbitrary, traditional authority (51). The upshot is that the French Revolution is interpreted as being the result of causes immanent to French culture and society (even when international cultural and economic situation is taken into account). But, Skocpol asks, what about France's decline relative to other European states in military stature and into royal bankruptcy (despite 50 years of economic expansion) in the context of the international military situation (ever-increasing competition)? You already know where she's headed, but there are lots of details along the way...

1. The State

- a. Absolute monarchy came to France in 1643 with Louis XIV. Government didn't become centralized and streamlined so much as multi-layered: new controls were simply imposed 'over' established controls without abolishing the old. Skocpol notes that this practice, in effect, guarantees "the very sociopolitical institutional forms—seigneurial, corporate, provincial—whose original functions it replaced or superseded" (53).
- b. Bourbons were out to become supreme power in Europe, so they embarked on an ambitious campaign of military aggrandizement. Initial successes caused coalitions to form in opposition; coalitions turned tide and soon France was unable to even hold its own as first-ranked power in Europe (54).

2. The Economy

- a. On eve of revolution, peasants still accounted for 85% of national population; agricultural production constituted 60% of GNP.
- b. Due to a complex web of proprietary interests involving peasants and upper classes, as well as sheer size of country and burdensome tax system (for peasants), rapid breakthroughs to capitalist [read: efficient, specialized] agriculture or to industrialism were extremely difficult (54-55). Also, forty years of good weather, internal order, and population growth facilitated a huge expansion of production that kept everyone from recognizing need for structural change [evident by looking at England during same period] (55).
- c. Agriculture's limits in turn affected manufacturing, whose growth was also retarded (55-56).

3. The Dominant Class

- a. Wasn't 'feudal' and wasn't 'capitalist', but did appropriate surplus directly and indirectly from peasant agriculture through rents and dues, enforced in part by state institutions (judiciary; monarchical revenue redistribution) (56).

- b. Social stratification wasn't extremely strict—wealth and office holding, not simply “estate” membership, were keys to success [three Estates: church, nobility, Third].
 - c. Basis of its wealth was “proprietary”—having to do with property, but including various types of rents and dues, the existence, form, and enforcement of which depended heavily on the peculiar state structure and the state of old-regime France (58-9).
 - d. “This situation of dependence on the state naturally produced a dominant class with vested interest in both the older institutional forms, such as seigneurial rights and proprietary offices, and the new absolutist functions,” mainly state's capacity to develop military and to tax economic expansion (of the non-privileged) (59). So the dominant class rose or fell with the commercial, non-capitalist, agrarian-imperial power of France (59-60).
4. Wars and the Fiscal Dilemma
- a. France fought in two general wars in mid-1700s, straining its resources to utmost, getting its trade disrupted by British navy, and losing chunks of empire—gaining nothing and losing a lot (60).
 - b. France was losing because it was fighting on both land and sea and had inadequate financial resources compared to its enemy, the navy-only, rich Britain (60).
 - c. Rather than stop the military exploits, France borrowed lots of money at high interest from private lenders (61). Ministers of finance also tried to end exemptions, equalize tax burden, and increase taxes, but everybody, particularly famous, wealthy govt. beneficiaries like the *parlements*, resisted, successfully (61).
 - d. The *parlements* opened the door for revolution by calling for the convening of the Estates-General (advisory/supervisory body to King) in response to financial crisis, though doing so right after France finally won a war—the one for American Independence (62-3) [was really the straw that broke the camel's back—govt. was deep in debt and in an economic recession]. Previous French governments in similar financial crises got out of them by betraying lenders, but that was not possible in 1787 because lenders had joined consolidated ranks of the dominant class (64).
5. The Revolutionary Political Crisis
- a. King at first resisted call for an Estates-General, but as many army officers could not be counted on to suppress popular demonstrations (officers were all privileged), administrative chaos and military breakdown resulted (64-65).
 - b. So the Estates-General convened, the multiple factions within the ruling classes started disagreeing on representation and the future structure of government, and paralysis resulted. This paralysis served

to dismantle the old-regime administrative system, opening doors for expression of popular discontents (which ruling factions even attempted to use to their advantage).

- c. In the summer of 1789, there was a nation-wide wave of political revolutions, culminating in the fall of the Bastille in Paris. While the people were roaming around looking for bread and liberty, liberal revolutionary leaders were taking over municipal governments, forming militias, and ultimately succeeding in forming a Parisian National Assembly (new constitution; per head, not per order, voting). Control over administration and coercion thus became rapidly decentralized. But look out for the excluded lower classes, especially in the countryside...

B. *Manchu China: From the Celestial Empire to the Fall of the Imperial System* (pages 67-81)

China was a self-contained world with a hegemonic center, practiced over centuries at defending its borders and maintaining internal order (67). The Ch'ing dynasty (1644-1911) would see both the height (peace and order, economic expansion, and cultural elaboration) and collapse of this system, thanks to the influence of "an aggressive, expanding, industrializing Europe" (68).

Think of Imperial China's sociopolitical structure as consisting of the interpenetration of two worlds (68):

(1) agrarian economy and society of villages involved in locally focused marketing networks

(2) an Imperial state administration that recruited and deployed educated individuals certified by an elaborate examination system

1. The Agrarian Economy and the State

- a. 80% of Chinese were peasant agriculturalists who owned, rented, and bought and sold small units of land.
- b. Peasants depended on trade within marketing communities (12-18 villages) to pay taxes; wealthy families in market towns also supplemented their income with various investments that in turn generated source of surplus appropriation (69).

2. The State

- a. The dynasty (native or foreign, won through military prowess) was the kingpin of a centralized, autocratic, semi-bureaucratic, administrative structure staffed by 40,000 officials (under the Ch'ing)—it was the only thing unifying the vast agrarian China into one society (69).
- b. Wealthy families aspired to participate therein through state service (69). Financial security and leisure time were prerequisites to maintenance of obligatory Confucian status-manner (70). The state actively tried to create loyalty to itself, to reduce nepotism and power

cliques, and to reduce loyalty to family or home region (70-71). Lowest state official oversaw up to 200,000 people, though, so dependent on local help/cooperation (71).

3. The Gentry

- a. Based upon office-holding and ownership of surplus land and liquid wealth, not unlike pre-Revolutionary France (71). Necessary to cultivate appropriate Confucian status-manner (72).
- b. Dominant class depended on state for administrative/military backing and employment opportunities; state depended on dominant class individuals to extend controls and get resources from huge, agrarian population.
- c. Thus, “the core of the gentry were landlord families with degree holding official members presently in their ranks” (72). Poor degree holders and rich non-degree holders were marginal members of the gentry, whose striving for central status kept gentry alive (72).

4. Foreign Intrusions and Domestic Rebellions

- a. Western industrial nations engaged in massive attack, through treaties and invasions, to “open” China to trade (meaning Ch’ing couldn’t regulate and tax rigorously, as it had previously) (73). Competition for spheres of influence among the Western powers eventually led to takeover of former Chinese tributaries and a threat to China’s very sovereignty (73).
- b. But at the same time, “the traditional economy was reaching the limits of its possible expansion without creating the conditions for any spontaneous emergence of industrialism. As a consequence, rural disorder became more likely” as disruptions in production or trade meant decreases in grain availability (74).
- c. Also, Imperial authorities were becoming weaker financially and administratively. (They’d locked in the land tax in 1711; the population was growing quicker than the administration, meaning more dependence on local help with its informal revenue squeezing from peasants → not happy peasants.)
- d. So the peasants periodically rebel throughout the 19th century, draining and reducing contributions to the Imperial treasury (75). State gave concessions (mainly decentralization of military and administrative authority) that ultimately reduced its ability to deal with foreign threats (partly because couldn’t raise funds to modernize) and left door open to overthrow by gentry (who were newly empowered) (75-6)

5. Reforms and the “Revolution of 1911”

- a. When China’s “vassal,” Japan, beat China in 1896, many Chinese woke up to the need for structural reforms coming from the center. Slow going until 1901, when upper classes generally began to favor nationalistic reform (77). Then, reforms exploded—education,

- specialized central ministries, national budgeting, representative advisory assemblies at all levels...
- b. but “reform destroyed the reforming government” (78). The gentry became politicized, both ideologically (class; nationalist) and structurally (finally able to advocate class interests) (78) [what, Skocpol gives credence to ideas? What is her materialism coming to?].
 - c. In 1911, a revolt against nationalization of the railway line in Szechwan led to military intervention that led to a backlash in Wuchang that proved contagious...province after province declared independence, led by military governors and gentry-official-merchant leaders (79).
 - d. Afterward, a republic was declared, then military general declared himself emperor, but eventually the conflicting interests of the dominant-class groups led to a constantly fighting arrangement of regionally-based warlords (combo of gentry officials and military governors) (80).
6. Similarities between France and China
- a. “Relatively prosperous landed-commercial upper classes gained collective political leverage within and against the administrative machineries of monarchical autocracies” (80).
 - b. **The revolutionary crises emerged because “the Old Regimes came under unwonted pressures from more developed nations abroad, and because those pressures led to internal political conflicts between the autocratic authorities and the dominant classes” (80-81).**
 - c. **That is, “autocratic attempts at modernizing reforms from above in France and China...triggered the concerted political resistance of well-organized dominant class forces. In turn, because these forces possessed leverage within the formally centralized machineries of the monarchical states, their resistance disorganized those machineries. Autocratic authority was abolished” and as the ruling class groups competed for power in shaping new arrangements, “monarchical administrations and armies were broken irretrievably apart” (81). This opened the door for deepening revolutions (81).**

C. *Imperial Russia: An Underdeveloped Great Power* (pages 81-99)

Russia is the third “successful” example used by Skocpol to analyze social revolutions (she is examining the 1917 revolution). France and China are the other two “successful examples,” though they differ from Russia in that their revolutions occurred “during times of formal peace as autocratic attempts at reforms and resource-mobilization were resisted by politically powerful dominant classes,”

whereas Tsarist Russia's revolutionary crises "developed only under the direct impact of defeats in war" (81).

1. Some Russian History

- a. Imperial Russia was born under the reign of Peter the Great (1682-1725), who "suddenly imposed upon his people the latest European techniques of land and naval warfare and of 'rational' administrative domination" (for specifics, see p.82), and thus quickly produced an efficient state power.
- b. Although Russia's *agrarian* economy was and remained relatively backward, the development of *bureaucratic* state power and the *technologically modern* military machine counterbalanced the economy's deficiency (82).
- c. The Imperial State's socioeconomic basis was serf-based agrarian.
 - i. Two types of landlord/serf relations prevailed, depending on how productive soil was. In productive areas, serfs worked part of week on lord's land; in non-productive areas, lords shared in serfs' income from handicrafts or industrial labor (82-3).
 - ii. Despite little change in yields-per-unit of land over centuries and in agricultural technology, Russia's economy was not stagnant. Agricultural production kept pace with a four-fold population increase during the 18th and early 19th centuries (83).
- d. After 1815, Russia was the strongest single power in Europe. After the revolutions of 1848, Russia was the dominant power in Europe. Nonetheless, Russia was slow to industrialize, unlike other Western European great powers in the 19th century. As a result of this lag, Russia was badly defeated in the Crimean War in 1854-5, losing geopolitically-important access to the Black Sea to France and England (83-4).
- e. The Russian tsar and higher bureaucrats recognized that the defeat resulted from insufficient modernization and began a series of reforms to "liberalize" Russian society enough to enable the Great Power mission but not to destabilize the internal political situation (84). For specifics, see p. 84. Most important reform was the "Emancipation" of millions of Russian serfs, begun in 1861 by the Tsar. This was part of plan to create "a modern army of 'citizen' conscripts," as well as to stabilize Imperial Rule (free the serfs from above before they try to do it themselves from below) (85, 88).
 - i. In emancipating serfs and requiring landowners to give serfs legal ownership of sub-plots of landowner's land, the Tsar was acting against the clear interests of the Russian landed nobility. The nobility opposed the Tsar, but unsuccessfully because they

were “economically weak and politically dependent vis-a-vis Imperial authorities” (unlike in France and China) (85); for more specifics on Russian nobles’ particular “service” hierarchy and the state’s deliberate creation and maintenance of the nobility’s weakness, see page 86. *Take-away point:* Russian nobles had little autonomous, collective power and thus could not effectively oppose the Emancipation (88). In addition, the State had less incentive to cater to nobility because it had become less dependent on the landed nobility (state had opened the civil service bureaucracy to literate commoners and opened noble status to all successful bureaucrats, regardless of origin (87); these noble non-commoners remained politically impotent (89-90)) (87).

- ii. The nobility did get to shape the implementation of land division, however, since state authority stopped at edge of estates. Nobility acted in own interest to the fullest, giving peasants either little fertile land or a lot of infertile land for which huge “redemption” payments had to be made (88-89). Land plots were often cut off from access to crucial resources (e.g. water). Result of land division: peasants could not modernize agriculture and nobility had no incentive to (89); state solidified control of peasantry and agricultural revenue (89). Landowners remained as dominant class and as target for peasant revolt (89).
- f. Second important reform was Russian state’s attempt to spur industrialization from above (90). Most notably, in the 1890s, minister of finance Sergei Witte proposed and fully implemented a crash governmental program, the “System,” that involved “heavy government expenditures for railroad building and operation; subsidies and supporting services for private industrialists; high protective tariffs for Russian industries...; increased exports; stable currency; and encouragement of foreign investments” (91). In absolute terms, the System was “brilliantly successful;” in historical terms, it succeeded in creating new classes (especially industrial proletariat), exacerbating social tensions, and tying Russian state (through huge increase in debt/loans) to Western Europe, all of which set stage for revolutions of 1905 (failed) and 1917 (91-92). In addition, “despite the impressive record of industrial expansion after 1880, especially in heavy industry, Russian economic development left the country still very far behind other nations with which it had to deal diplomatically and, potentially, militarily” (94). “The decisive problem was the low level of real growth in agriculture—which remained the preponderant sector of the Russian economy” (94). Thus, the state did not achieve its “strategic

objective of international parity” that had spurred it toward modernization and industrialization in the first place, nor did it manage to keep the political situation stable (new policies “reinforced social tendencies at home hostile to continued absolutist rule”) (94).

2. Russian Revolutions

- a. Skocpol argues that revolutions of 1905 and 1917 were very similar, whether one views them as having parallel development or as the second beginning where first left off. For key to understanding why one failed and one succeeded, must look at nature of previous war and degree of defeat. (94)
- b. 1905 revolution started during a losing war (this one with Japan). A revolutionary movement drawing from all classes of society gathered momentum and eventually forced tsar to agree to civil liberties and a legislative Duma (full demands were for liberal constitutional monarchy) in October 1905. Yet, by 1907, all gains had been lost as tsar ended *limited*, peripheral, and *short* (began 1904) war with Japan in 1905 with a peace treaty and brought troops home to deal with revolution, allowing him to roll back all constitutional concessions (95).
- c. 1917 revolution began during World War I. Russia could not remain aloof from this conflict, nor withdraw from once mobilized—war was to be *total* and defeat possibly massive. Once Russia entered in 1914, it had to begin *prolonged* struggle with the much better-equipped and better-supported German army; Russian military defeat and economic and administrative chaos was inevitable (96). “How did these conditions translate themselves into the revolutionary crisis?” See pages 97-99 for details, but in short:
 - i. dominant strata saw horrible war defeats and lost confidence in the autocracy
 - ii. lower classes suffered and became war-weary and rebellious
 - iii. wartime breakdown of barriers between state and social groups allowed political expression of near-universal denouncement of tsarist regime (discontent crystallized in the cities)In end, tsarist autocracy was toppled and state rapidly disintegrated (98).

Tentative conclusion: “**revolutionary political crises emerged in all three Old Regimes because agrarian structures impinged upon autocratic and proto-bureaucratic state organizations that blocked or fettered monarchical initiatives in coping with escalating international military competition in a world undergoing uneven transformation by capitalism...In all three cases, moreover, the ultimate effect of the impediments to state-sponsored reforms was the downfall of monarchical autocracy and the disintegration of the centralized administrative and military organizations of the states. Revolts from below**

might emerge and spread without the dominant classes having recourse to the accustomed backing of the autocratic-imperial states” (99).

D. *Japan and Prussia as Contrasts*

- a. By examining Japanese Meiji Restoration of 1868-73 and Prussian Reform Movement of 1807-15, can ask why these political crises were not proto-social-revolutionary but rather preludes to effective structural reforms instituted from above and thus can test Skocpol’s own hypothesis about crucial causes for successful revolutions in France, Russia, and China (100).
- b. Meiji Restoration (100-104) Take-away point: *absence of politically powerful landed upper class in Tokugawa Japan*—because economically powerful landowners kept separate from sources of political and military power (101)—allowed revolutionary leaders, the samurai (bureaucratic and military elite), to work within existing bureaucratic governing stratum without involving landed upper classes, to access independent resources to use against Tokugawa Shogun—who was ousted, and to pursue national salvation through political centralization (101-102). Samurai thus effected a “revolution from above” without destroying existing administration and without dealing with (protesting) peasants while responding to foreign military pressures (100, 102-103).
- c. Prussian Reform Movement (104-109) Take-away points: although Prussia had landed upper class (Junkers), *this upper class had only local political control*, and although individual members of landed elite were also part of bureaucracy, no groups were allowed to form that might foment discord within state ranks and individuals were kept in tight rein (106-107). In addition, *Prussian state was remarkably centralized and militarized* (“an army with a country” (106)) and thus had solid control over Prussian people and society, so Junker’s weak resistance to modernizing reforms post-defeat to Napoleon in 1806 was overridden by state and political conflict was kept “an affair of the upper ten thousand” with peasants simply objects of manipulation (105).

E. Summing Up

- a. **“Bourbon France, Hohenzollern Prussia, Tokugawa Japan, Manchu China, and Romanov Russia—all became subject to military pressures from more economically developed nations abroad, and all experienced in response social political crises. Yet only France, Russia, and China were plunged into the upheavals of social revolution, whereas Prussia and Japan, relatively speaking, adapted speedily and smoothly to international exigencies through reforms instituted from above by autocratic political authorities. The different fates of these agrarian monarchical regimes faced with the challenges of adapting to the exigencies of international uneven development can be explained in large part by looking at the ways in which agrarian relations of production and**

landed dominant classes impinged upon state organizations” as well as “severity of pressures from abroad with which each regime had to cope” (110).

- b. Russia’s big problem was severity of international pressure during World War I and resulting stress (110).
- c. France and China’s big problem was presence of institutionalized political leverage at extralocal levels vis-à-vis fiscal and military/policing functions (110).
- d. **Nonetheless, “the actual occurrence of social revolutions in these three countries depended not only upon the emergence of revolutionary political crises but also upon the conduciveness of the agrarian sociopolitical structures of the Old Regimes to peasant revolts”—thus, Chapter 3 focuses on bottom up perspective with emphasis on peasants (111).**

II. Chapter 3: Agrarian Structures and Peasant Insurrections

A. Introduction

- a. **“The peasants ... provided the dynamite to bring down the old building”** (Skocpol quoting her mentor, B. Moore; 112): Social-revolutionary transformations (as opposed to intra-elite squabbling that led to break-up/reconstitution of old/similar regime) happened in France, Russia, and China because widespread peasant [not urban worker!] revolts coincided with and took advantage of the “hiatus of governmental supervision and sanctions” (112).
- b. Urban worker revolts did make some difference in the Revolutions, especially French and Russian, by helping to shape conflicts (they “constituted intervening moments in the processes by which the French and Russian Old Regimes were undermined” [—whatever such “moments” are!!] 113) and outcomes specific to those countries (113). This is discussed more in Part II.
- c. **Peasant revolts of the French, Russian, and Chinese Revolutions were effective and unique because they (113-14):**
 - i. **“became at once widespread” (113)**
 - ii. **were “directed particularly against landlords” (113)**
and thereby “created decisive constraints at the societal level on the range of sociopolitical options available to elites contending for national power” (113).
- d. So how did these revolts transcend “spotty and localized unrest” and avoid takeover at leadership level by nobles (the typical historical patterns) (114)?
 - i. Skocpol’s explanatory hypotheses “give short shrift to” [i.e. ignore; poor, neglected Marx] (114):
 - 1. revolutionary *ideology*
 - 2. the simple presence of *exploitation*
 - 3. the acuteness of *relative deprivation*

because

1. peasants were struggling for same, *concrete* goals they had always been struggling for (114)
 2. exploitation was a constant, not a variable in peasant life (115)
 3. “relative deprivation is an aggregate-psychological state for which it is almost impossible to find genuine direct historical evidence,” though Skocpol does admit that “subjective exacerbation of specific grievances” “may well play a precipitating role, accounting for the timing of particular rebellious acts” (115).
- ii. Instead, must look for internal leverage of peasants that meant they were not completely impotent and that allowed them to become a collective force striking out against oppressors. Skocpol finds such leverage in “structural and situational conditions that affect” (115):
1. “the degrees and kinds of *solidarity* of peasant communities”
 2. “the degrees of peasant *autonomy* from direct day-to-day supervision and control by landlords and their agents”
 3. “the relaxation of *state coercive sanctions* against peasant revolts” (all emphases added)

And lest you think that Skocpol might have look at ideas when examining peasant solidarity and autonomy, know that for her, “to investigate a class structure means to look for the *historically specific institutional arrangements*” by which (1) relations of direct producers to each other, tools, and land and (2) relations of product extraction from producers by non-producers are established (orig. emph.; 116).

- e. And lest you forget Chapter 2, “[i]t was the breakdown of the concerted repressive capacity of a previously unified and centralized state that finally created conditions directly or ultimately favorable to *widespread and irreversible* peasant revolts against landlords...As soon as—and only when—that class, under international pressure in a modernizing world, had backed itself into a revolutionary political crisis, did the peasantry become able to achieve long-implicit insurrectionary goals. The conjunctural result was a social revolution” (original emphases; 117).

B. Peasants Against Seigneurs in the French Revolution (118-128)

- a. “Shocked and surprised by intensifying peasant resistance to the payment of dues and tithes and by mounting violence against chateaux and individuals, the men of property and privilege sitting at Versailles hastily decided to make unplanned concessions. Without the peasant revolution...[t]he Revolution might never have developed beyond constitutional reforms” and become a *social* revolution (118).
- b. French peasants controlled (through direct ownership or rental) the use of most of the agricultural land in France (118-19). Yet, they did so only subject

to heavy rental claims on production (claims ranged from 1/5 to 3/5 of gross income) (119). For the majority, well-being was insecure and agricultural income had to be supplemented through other means (119-120). Yet peasants were not “like so many potatoes in a sack;” they had (limited) economic solidarity through decisions about communal land-use and struggles against seigneurs for agrarian rights, as well as a substantial degree of self-government (120).

- c. Economic historian Labrousse has shown that “a crisis in the French economy precipitated popular uprisings at the end of the Old Regime” (121). In particular, in 1788, the grain harvest failed, with usual consequences on incomes, unemployment, and purchasing power (121-122). French urban and rural poor had an established formula for bread riots, which they implemented in 1789, but then they went further and attacked seigneurial system too (122). Main causes for expansion of revolt and its widespread nature:

- i. Peasants believed there was an aristocratic plot to starve them and had hopes for change because of convening of Estates-General (Jan 1789) (122-123).
- ii. They also sensed reform in air before Municipal Revolution (July 1789) and then took advantage of resulting weakened and disorganized army and police (122, 124).
- iii. Urban forces were attacking “the aristocratic reaction” which may have helped focus peasant action on symbols of aristocracy, like when rural peasants refused to pay dues/taxes (122-124).

It is important to recognize that this was a national phenomenon, not an aggregate of local or regional events and processes (125-126).

- d. For (seemingly irrelevant for our purposes) discussion of why peasants stopped short of seizing land and of how French Revolution did little to improve lot of poorer peasants, please see pages 126-128.

C. The Revolution of the *Obshchinas*: Peasant Radicalism in Russia (128-140)

a. The Emancipation

- i. allotted the peasants over one-half of the land and yet left them economically worse-off (129)—“continuous struggle for survival in the face of deepening poverty brought about by the coincidence of stagnant technology, poor market opportunities, and rising populations” as well as heavy taxes/exactions on peasant income (132)
- ii. left peasants yearning for liberation from exploitative obligations and for access to remaining lands of nobles, which peasants believed should be theirs (129)
- iii. “kept the bulk of the peasants on the land, at work in the old ways,” including mandatory participation in and control of production by the village commune in charge of land (controlled ownership and access), the *obshchina* (129-130); “Rentier relations [between nobles and

- peasants or nobles and obshchinas] were easily substituted for the traditional [noble-serf] relation of subsistence agriculture” (132).
- iv. freed peasant community “in most respects from political control by the nobility and its estate managers. The peasants were given rights of self-government under the supervision of bureaucratic agents of the Imperial State.” Overall, Emancipation increased “peasants’ collective handling of their own local political affairs and thus [rendered] the villages more *autonomous and solidary* against outsiders” (emphases added; 132).
 - v. These conditions were very conducive to agrarian revolution, and even better conditions occurred only when *coercive controls* failed, as happened in 1905 and 1917 (132-33). Unique success in 1917 occurred because army had disintegrated during World War I (soldiers often returned to villages to join rebellion) and was of little use to state in quelling revolts, whereas by 1906 army had returned whole from war with Japan and was primed to quell peasant revolts (136).
 - b. Peasant motivations in 1905 and 1917 were mainly economic, not political—rich peasants with individual farms, as well as noble estates, were attacked; revolts were more common in agrarian heartlands of central European Russia—and peasant agitation was often communal—whole *obshchina* revolted together (134-5).
 - c. For (again seemingly irrelevant for our purposes) discussion of the leveling outcome of the peasant land seizure and redistribution (most agriculture became activity of peasant smallholders), please see page 136-137.
 - d. For minor points of similarity and difference between French and Russian Revolutions regarding the peasant village assembly, please see pages 138-140.
- D. Two Counterpoints: The Absence of Peasant Revolts in the English and German Revolutions (140-147)
- a. “Both of these contrast cases had vigorous urban-popular revolutionary movements. Yet they failed as social revolutions in part for want of peasant insurrections against landed upper classes” (113). “This was true in large part because the agrarian class and political structures of the English and German (east of the Elbe) old regimes gave predominant power to landlords and not to peasant communities...English and German landlords could not be successfully challenged from below, even during revolutionary political crises” (140).
 - b. English Revolution of the seventeenth century resembled the French--both so-called “bourgeois revolutions”--but English was a political, not a social revolution (140-141). It involved a civil war within dominant landed class (with allies and supporters coming from all other classes) and ultimate reforms kept dominant class in power. Polarized rich and poor English peasants lacked common grievance (like seigneurial dues) as well as

collective organization base (like village assembly) (142-43)—had no unity or autonomy in face of county landed establishments (143).

- c. German Revolution of 1848-50 was a failed social revolution. It was “really a series of revolts centered primarily in the urban capitals of the various separate monarchies and principalities that comprised the loosely integrated Germanic confederation” (144); revolts which created a constitution and a Parliament, both of which Prussian king managed to decisively stop after a year because army had not dissolved (for detailed reasons—different peasant conditions in eastern army-recruiting lands—please see pages 146-47).

E. Peasant Incapacity and Gentry Vulnerability in China (147-154)

- a. Chinese peasants lacked “the kind of structurally preexisting solidarity and autonomy that allowed the agrarian revolutions in France and Russia to emerge quickly and relatively spontaneously in reaction to the breakdown of the central governments of the Old Regimes” (148)
- b. Basic unit of community was not the individual village but the marketing community (15-25 villages). Peasants were “largely isolated from and in competition with one another” unless brought together by and for purposes of gentry (150). Peasants also had rentier relations with landlords and faced heavy taxes/exactions (148).
- c. Previous riots, rebellions, and revolts always depended on peasant participation (and indeed pandered to their grievances), but were sooner or later led or infiltrated and influenced by non-peasants (150-51). Such oppositional movements inevitably fed renewal stage of dynasty life cycle (decline, rebellion, renewal) (151-52).
- d. “The grievances of the ever-increasing numbers who were displaced in the early twentieth century were acute, but no different and no more pressing than they had recurrently been, especially throughout recent Chinese history. Nor had any basic structural changes fundamentally altered the terms by which the peasants themselves could strike out at the causes of their troubles” (153).
- e. BUT, new and unique factor emerges for successful revolution: “A new kind of national political leadership, the Chinese Communist Party, operating in the context of political-military fragmentation, ultimately found it necessary to attempt to fuse its efforts with the forces of peasant-based social banditry [after 1927] ... Then, ... local politics was finally reorganized in a fashion that afforded Chinese peasants the collective leverage against landlords that they had historically lacked. Once this occurred—as it did in North China in the 1940s—peasants revolted violently against the remnants of the gentry and destroyed its class and power positions” (153-54). See Chapter 7 for more details, because Chinese case’s intertwining of peasant revolution and revolutionary elite is unique.

F. Summing Up (154-157)

- a. Chapters 2 and 3 presented a comparative-historical analysis of the *causes* of social revolutions in France, Russia, and China (effects in Part II). Argument is that:
 - i. “**state organizations** susceptible to administrative and military collapse when subjected to intensified pressures from more developed countries abroad” (154) **AND**
 - ii. “**agrarian sociopolitical structures** that facilitated widespread peasant revolts against landlords” (154)
“**were, taken together, the sufficient, distinctive causes of social-revolutionary situations commencing in France 1789, Russia 1917, and China 1911**” (emphases added; 154).
- b. Look at the nice, neat summary tables on pages 155-157 yourselves!

RELEVANCE:

Skocpol is in dialogue most explicitly with Marxist arguments about social change. While Marx would argue that relative deprivation and material conditions lead to formation of class consciousness and revolution, Skocpol argues that it is not grievances or material conditions *per se* but rather political opportunity (especially breakdown of state administration and enforcement mechanisms as well as agrarian sociopolitical structures) that leads to (successful) revolution. Also, successful social revolutions involve both peasants and dominant class on the same side (though not necessarily working together) against the ruling government, not just one or the other. She can also be taken as representative of the “structuralists” over and against the “grievance” people (e.g. Gurr) in the social change literature.

Skocpol is talking about social revolutions, which involve overthrow of most existing societal structures, and take place on a different level, one could argue, than social movements and cultural change. It would be interesting to put her in dialogue with the other authors though, just to see how they compare—can theories of social movements be fit to her somewhat sketchy details of how the dominant classes organized or the peasant revolts spread? What evidence for/against the resource mobilization perspective can we find in Skocpol’s historical detail? If we see these revolutions as “rapid,” what do they do to Ogburn’s hypothesis about relatively stable social trends? Try also putting Skocpol in dialogue with Ogburn’s account of cultural change or Thomas’s account of social disorganization or the disorganization of community.