By contrast the ethnocentric and somewhat uncultured Manchus demanded the imposition of strict vassalage relationships complete with traditional tribute, the k'ou-t'ou, etc. Miasnikov's message throughout is that the Manchus were unwilling to negotiate or incapable of negotiating and settling matters on peaceful and reasonable grounds of equality, and constantly turned negotiation into farce by insisting on such "strange procedures" as k'ou-t'ou. Even an experienced and cock-sure fellow like Milescu (Miasnikov concedes that he was "difficult") failed to dent the Manchu stubbornness.

Consequently, the K'ang-hsi emperor turned to military force to bring the Lo-ch'a to bay and ordered the preparation of an army to attack the small Russian settlements, particularly Albazin, in the Amur River valley which had been built in a region close to the Manchu homeland, but empty of Manchus earlier and devoid of governmental authority on a regular basis. Characteristically resorting to naked force, the Manchus developed a "strategic plan" to encroach on these peaceful Russian settlements, to "seize Russian Priamur'e." This amounted to sheer territorial expansionism, to imperialism in order to create "a certain spatial zone [to separate] the distant approaches of the Manchurian domain from Russian dominions." It was the "diplomacy of onslaught," the "blackmail of strength."

The outcome of the successful attack on Albazin was the Treaty of Nerchinsk, clearly now a settlement forced on the Russians by the belligerent and deceitful Manchus. As a legal document, Miasnikov concludes, the treaty "is absolutely inadequate." The territorial delimitation was both vague and incomplete, much of the territory poorly known at best to both sides, and the demarcation never finished. Furthermore, although both sides affirmed the agreement, it was never formally ratified by special acts. And the arrangements it made for trade proved by the 1710s to be insufficient for the considerable number of caravans which journeyed from Siberia to Peking in the years intervening. The Treaty of Nerchinsk was not therefore a model of early accommodation between two expansive empires to the distinct advantage of both and productive of a long period of amicability between them. It was, we are to believe, something close to the opposite, evidence of mutual ignorance and major differences in motivation, style and manner of diplomacy.

Miasnikov's argument is always compelling but not always persuasive. The Manchus are invariably blackened and their policies for that matter linked to those of earlier Chinese dynasties, the Ming and even the T'ang. Yet Miasnikov does not examine closely Russian motivations in its eastward thrust: were they so very different from the expansionist designs of the early Ch'ing administration? If the Manchus so obstinately refused to try to understand Russian (and Western) habits of diplomacy, trade, and intercourse, were the Russians or their emissaries so openly magnanimous toward Oriental modes? What gave Russia's cossacks the exclusive right to build ostrogi in the Amur valley close to Manchu lands, even if we concede that the settlements were outside of the palisades? And finally was there such a thing as a "strategic plan" couched in terms which allow the use of modern terminology? This is a very important book drawn from half a lifetime of devoted scholarship. It proposes a radical re-interpretation of early Sino-Russian relations. It deserves close attention among Western scholars.

Clifford M. Foust

University of Maryland


This is a book whose genuine virtue is nearly totally obscured by sloppy editing, impenetrable prose, poor organization, and a visibly wobbling structure of historical
explanation. The author needs to burn his prose style down to the ground, and build again with the help of a fierce and uncompromising editor. These two hundred pages seem like two thousand.

Surely this is the work which began life in 1973 as a doctoral thesis draft under the wholesome and modest rubric, "Cultural Value Changes Among Certain Russian Writers." Retention of that precisely descriptive title would have saved anyone seeking information about Catherine the Great, or bureaucracy, a wasted trip.

The subject of this book is no more than the evolving social-political thought of three men: Denis Fonvizin, Nikolai Novikov, and their somewhat unequal yokefellow, Ippolit Bogdanovich. The theory of the book is that these three (dubbed by the author "the Fonvizin group"), after swallowing a stiff draught of German natural law theory in their schooldays, were inspired to embark on bureaucratic careers; that before long they were brought to crisis by Catherine's violations of their image of the just ruler (partition of Poland, Turkish war, favoritism), and so were compelled to make a major adjustment in their political philosophy. The nature of this adjustment is said to be a transfer of political loyalty from the person of the monarch to the nation. Finally, the method of the book is to mine the literary productions of the Fonvizin group for evidence of this evolution.

We have then a transposition of a familiar Richard Wortman melody (The Crisis of Russian Populism) into an eighteenth century key: a trio of ideologues are brought up short of harsh reality and forced to take flight in a new direction. But there are important differences between the books. Gleason's protagonists all undergo essentially the identical experience (hence, the "Fonvizin group"). In the Wortman book, each of the thinkers was treated individually; neither the faith, the crisis, nor the flight was precisely the same in every case. This looser organization helped to allow Wortman's intellectuals to stand for a whole generation; readers of his book felt that they were being given an important insight into populism in general; the agony of a whole generation was on display, and large consequences flowed from the processes described. It is impossible to feel that way about the Fonvizin group, who are carefully shown to be different from everyone else around them—even from their own brothers and friends who underwent almost identical experiences at school, and in the bureaucracy.

If the Fonvizin group does not represent its own generation, then our interest in them must be legitimized in some other plausible way. We might grasp at their legacy to the future, but the author does not examine that aspect; he only makes some fleeting, extraordinarily obscure claims in the last chapter which would need considerable development to avoid the appearance of flagrant contradiction. No, our interest must flow from the fact that these men, after all, were giants in their day. Previous interpretations of their political philosophy are in error, and the author manages to demonstrate that quite well. But since this demonstration proceeds in dribs and drabs scattered through the chapters, the interested reader must pursue the story by means of the index, which is itself desperately unreliable, full of errors of omission and some of commission. A unified and comprehensive statement of the case would have helped the reader perceive the author's achievement.

I would not quarrel much with the general theoretical interpretation. It is plausible, consistent, attractive, realistic and arises out of a massive amount of critical reading. The author's familiarity with this part of the forest, his intellectual sensitivity and his unusual honesty are all notable, and were duly noted by me. What I find highly defective is the process of historical argument by which he passes back and forth between his theoretical structure and the sources. If these are the best arguments that can be made, his theory remains in the realm of speculation, because it certainly has not been proved.

To let this allegation stand without support would be unjust; to treat it in extenso impossible, within this small space. Let us lift one corner and examine a part of the argument.