Bridger casts her net widely, as she should, to explore the personal, cultural, and political dimensions of women’s lives in the countryside and to probe women’s responses to the status quo. She draws from an amazing array of sources including Soviet surveys, academic studies, the rural press, and occasionally, her own observations and conversations with Soviet women. She scrupulously distinguishes regional, ethnic, and religious differences, and compares rural with urban women. One can learn a great deal about all Soviet women, as well as Soviet life, from this book.

In the introduction Bridger briefly discusses the consequences of agricultural "modernization" for Third World women. The intention of the book was to examine whether the Soviet experience offers something better than the deterioration and marginalization experienced by Third World women under capitalist development. It is a pity that Bridger let this theme drop. The reader is left to sort out the similarities and differences between Soviet and Third World women on the basis of the tantalizing but brief information provided in the introduction. Similarly, Bridger is not sufficiently bold in pulling together a considerable number of interesting and important suggestions about Soviet women that pervade the text. These are minor flaws. This book is a valuable contribution for students and scholars of Soviet society and an important chapter in the analysis of the present condition of rural women.

Rose Glickman


One of the hazards of compiling a book of essays evaluating the impact of leadership change on Soviet policy is that the Gorbachev regime has proven to be much more energetic and flexible than many observers predicted. The Soviet Union in Transition originated as a symposium organized by the Japan Institute of International Affairs in late 1985 when Gorbachev had been in office only six months. Writing from this vantage point, most of the contributors—leading Japanese, European and American Sovietologists—were skeptical of the ability of the newly emerged General Secretary to introduce meaningful reforms. For example, in the lead essay Seweryn Bialer states that no serious changes are likely to occur without structural reform and further implies that such reform is unlikely.

Some of the Japanese and European participants were somewhat more optimistic. Hiroshi Kimura notes important changes in Gorbachev’s style and his impressive record of making personnel changes, but indicated that it is too early to judge his success in making policy changes or undertaking systemic reform. Boris Meissner argues that the increasingly emergent
pluralistic interests coupled with economic necessities will likely propel Gorbachev to undertake reform, but also notes that such reforms must overcome the formidable opposition of status-quo oriented state bureaucrats. Meissner's analysis seems to have more accurately predicted events than those of the other contributors. He notes that the process of reform in the USSR will inevitably unleash powerful forces that could become manifested in a number of ways troubling to the leadership, including increasingly bold demands by dissidents and nationality groups.

Several chapters assess Soviet economic performance and the lack thereof. Marshall Goldman, in a detailed assessment of Soviet energy policy, foresees few major changes in Soviet energy utilization. The Soviet economy will remain heavily dependent upon the exploitation of natural resources and built-in deficiencies of centralized planning are likely to result in continued inefficient use of those resources. However, like many other participants in this volume, he anticipates the Gorbachev regime will "muddle through." Peter Knirsch's assessment of Soviet trade with Eastern Europe and its implications for East-West trade stands out from most of the other contributions to this volume because it is less an essay and more a carefully researched study. He demonstrates that East-West trade generally complements intra-CMEA trade and that the prime factors explaining the decline in East-West trade during the early 1980s were economic, rather than political.

Virtually all of the contributors to the volume address the foreign policy implications of changes in the USSR. The range of opinions extends from decidedly pessimistic to somewhat optimistic scenarios. Generally, the American participants see Soviet-American conflict as inevitable, although as Bialer points out, the conflict is manageable. The European and Japanese participants for the most part see a less threatening Soviet Union under Gorbachev and one with whom cooperation is possible. Tsuyoski Hasegawa, in an excellent assessment of the military factor in Soviet foreign policy, rejects the "essentialist" position and favors a pragmatic approach to the USSR that maintains options for both cooperation and competition.

Much has been written in recent years about the emergence of the USSR as a Pacific power. Three chapters are devoted to exploring Soviet policies in the region. Donald Zagoria notes that, the statements of Gorbachev notwithstanding, Soviet options in East Asia are quite limited. Young C. Kim argues that Soviet interest in Korea is largely a function of Soviet concern with U.S. strategic potential in the north Pacific region. Despite the Soviet Union's official position on Korean reunification, the Soviet leadership in fact recognizes the existence of two Koreas. Finally, Kazuyuki Kinbara charts the development of Soviet-Japanese economic cooperation in the development of Siberian natural resources. He argues that the future of such economic cooperation depends to a great extent not only on eco-