This book is a unique comparative account of the roots of Communist revolution in Russia and China. Steve Smith examines the changing social identities of peasants who settled in St Petersburg from the 1880s to 1917, and in Shanghai from the 1900s to the 1940s. Russia and China, though very different societies, were both dynastic empires with backward agrarian economies that suddenly experienced the impact of capitalist modernity. This book argues that far more happened to these migrants than simply being transformed from peasants into workers. It explores the migrants’ identification with their native homes; how they acquired new understandings of themselves as individuals and new gender and national identities. It asks how these identity transformations fed into the wider political, social and cultural processes that culminated in the revolutionary crises in Russia and China, and how the Communist regimes that emerged viewed these transformations in the working classes they claimed to represent.

Revolution and the People in Russia and China

A Comparative History

S. A. Smith

The Wiles Lectures for 1998
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Acknowledgments

This book originated in an invitation by the School of History at Queen's University, Belfast, to deliver the Wiles Lectures in 1998. These lectures, founded by Mrs Austen Boyd in 1953 in memory of her father, Thomas S. Wiles, with the encouragement of Sir Herbert Butterfield, set the lecturer the daunting task of relating his or her historical research 'to the general history of civilization' or to 'reflection on the wider implications of more detailed historical studies'. I cannot claim that the four lectures that constitute the central chapters of this book go anywhere near to meeting the challenge set by the Wiles Trustees. However, the invitation provided me with an opportunity to think afresh about the roots of revolution in Russia and China and to try out a somewhat unusual style of comparative history. The Wiles Lectures are a wonderful institution that allow the lecturer to present ambitious ideas to an informed audience, consisting of members of Queen's University, members of the wider community in Belfast, and half a dozen invited scholars of his or her choosing. I would thus like to thank the Trustees and the School of History for the invitation to give the lectures, and my audience for their thoughtful and critical responses to my rudimentary efforts to sketch out my ideas. I would also like to thank the School of History for its magnificent hospitality, especially Professor David Hempton, then Director of the School, now of the School of Theology at Boston University, and the late Professor Peter Judd, who organized some memorable trips for myself and my guests, including tours to the Northern Ireland Assembly at Stormont and the Ulster Folk Museum. For their patience and critical engagement, I would like to thank my guests, who included Gregor Benton, Delia Davin, Henrietta Harrison, Catriona Kelly, Diane Koenker, Rana Mitter, David Moon and Chris Ward, and Ian Kershaw and Terence Ranger, both then Wiles Trustees. Gregor Benton and Chris Ward deserve additional thanks for providing me with critical feedback on the manuscript of the book. Finally, my longstanding colleague,
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