



Book Review: Theda Skocpol “States and Social Revolutions: A Comparative Analysis of France, Russia and China

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In “*States and Social Revolutions: A comparative Analysis of France, Russia, and China* (1979), Theda Skocpol presents a comparative-historical analysis of social revolutions by looking beyond the existing social-scientific theories that explain the causes and outcomes of successful revolutions. Skocpol presents a contrast to the prevalent theories of social revolutions from a comparative historical analysis by presenting valid associations of potential causes within a given phenomenon. The author focuses on the structuralists’- perspectives to the causes of social revolutions in agrarian society with intense focus on the influence of transnational relations in the emergence of social-revolutionary crises that lead to basic social-structural transformations and the collapse of state organizations of old regimes.

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Skocpol develops her alternative approach and hypotheses at analyzing social revolutions from a non-voluntarist, structural perspective, attending to international and world historical, as well as international, structures and processes by adopting a method based on a comparative historical analysis. The author argues that the comparative historical method developed is to test, and refine causal, explanatory hypotheses about events or structures integral to macro-units such as nations. Skocpol emphasizes further that comparative historical analysis, is the mode of analysis to which one resorts when there are too many variables and not enough cases to explain a phenomenon. In presenting her comparative historical analysis to establishing valid associations of potential causes with the phenomena, Skocpol examines two processes to establish potential causes with phenomenon. First, the author proceeds to establish that several cases have in common a phenomenon and also have in common a set of causal factors, although, they may vary on other ways that might have seemed causally irrelevant (Method of Agreement). Secondly, the author argues

that one can also adopt an approach of comparative historical analysis by contrasting a case in which the phenomenon to be explained and the hypothesized causes are present to other cases in which the phenomenon and the causes are both absent, but which are otherwise as similar as possible to the positive case (Method of difference).

Skocpol argues that the Method of Agreement is more powerful in establishing valid causal associations provided one can find suitable negative cases for the required contrasts. But the author stresses that but in practice combining several positive cases along with suitable negative cases as contrasts is desirable in comparative logics. Skocpol presents an in-depth comparative historical analysis from interdisciplinary comparative literature review of various prevalent theories to explaining causes and outcomes of social revolutions to update the reader’s intellect and understanding. To make the materials very informative and challenging to the reader in the light of the prevailing theories of social revolutions, Skocpol contrasts her hypotheses on the three

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revolutions by looking at the similarities and differences within the three revolutions understudy and also contrasts them with other revolutions. Skocpol's alternative approach to social revolutions is very clear as she lays down the various variables that she uses in her hypotheses on the processes and outcomes of social variables in the form of tables to simplify and tease out the readers understanding of the relationship between the causal factors and the events.

As a way of making critical inferences to her hypotheses and historical events, Skocpol relies heavily on historical and chronological timelines and maps of the various case studies to stimulate the reader's interest in following the pattern of events that led to the remote and immediate causes of all three revolutions. Skocpol presents her major argument on the comparative historical analysis of social revolutions in France, Russia, and China with emphasis on the emergence of political crises centered in the structures and situations of the old-regime states. The author argues that the revolutionary crises developed when the old-regime states became unable to meet the challenges of evolving international situations resulting from institutional relationships between the monarchies, the agrarian and the upper classes on the other. Skocpol examines how international situations contributed to the emergence of revolutionary political crises by arguing that prerevolutionary autocratic monarchies in France, Russia, and China's failure to implement reform to promote economic development was worsened with intensifying military competition with nation-states abroad that possessed relatively much greater and more flexible power based on economic breakthroughs to capitalist industrialization or agriculture.

Skocpol presents her arguments for the causes and outcomes of social revolutions in autocratic monarchies of France, Russia, and China in a timely and logical manner. The author makes her argument by focusing on the development of the revolutionary situations in an Old-Regime, identifying the objectively conditioned and complex intermeshing of the various actions the diversely situated groups and how international pressures came to bear on the emergence of the revolutionary crises as a result of the failure of the old autocratic monarchies to undertake reforms. Moreover, Skocpol develops her other logical argument on the causes of social revolutions with emphasis on the emergence of

the revolutionary crises by going beyond the complexities of the institutional determined situations and relations of groups within society but focuses also on the interrelations of societies within world-historical developing international structures. Skocpol's alternative arguments for the explanation of all social revolutions in modern times draw from a myriad of sources beginning with a critical analysis of the prevalent literatures on the causes of revolutions.

Skocpol commences her hypotheses with a critical analyzes of various theorists' explanations of the causes of social revolutions and the state as a political arena where conflicts are fought by drawing on the works of Marxist-structural perspectives and another non-structuralist theorist- Charles Tilly's, Ted Gurr, and Chalmers Johnson. The author also draws upon various theorists' assertion on the use of comparative historical analysis as a means of establishing valid associations of potential causes with a given phenomenon with the work of John Stuart Mill. The sources of evidence that the author draws upon to support her alternative approach to explaining the causes of social revolutions in France, China, and Russia could be interpreted if the various theorists have taken into consideration the causal conditions for the emergence of the revolutionary crisis. Skocpol's alternative explanations to the causes and outcomes of all social revolutions from a structural perspective are very intense, condensed and intellectually challenging to scholars of comparative politics. It requires a strong, effective, in-depth and challenging desire to analyze modern social revolutions with emphasis on the comparative historical analysis putting into perspective the role of international pressures in shaping the emergence of revolutionary crisis.

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