



RUSSIA BETWEEN EAST AND WEST: GEOPOLITICAL PREFERENCES OVERVIEW

Tatiana Gerasimenko¹, Natalia Streneva²

¹  ORCID: 0000-0002-5462-0884

Orenburg state University
department of Geography and Regional Sciences
13, Pobeda av., Orenburg, Russia;
e-mail: tanyag26@yandex.ru

²  ORCID: 0000-0002-1886-6115

Orenburg state University
Foreign languages department
13, Pobeda av., Orenburg, Russia;
e-mail: nstreneva@yandex.ru

Abstract: *The paper is devoted to the views regarding Russia's place in the global geo-cultural space. It's important in terms of geopolitical and geo-economic preferences. The arguments of «Westerners» and «Eurasians», as well as those who consider Russia to be a special, unique macro-region are analyzed. The author's point of view on this issue is expressed. The paper also gives some results of sociological surveys which one of the authors held at the middle of 2000 and in 2020. The surveys were devoted to the self-identification of the population in the Orenburg region. The situation has changed. It depends on new geopolitical and geo-economic vectors of Russian foreign policy. The number of people who consider Russia a European country has decreased, while the number of adherents of Eurasianism (and the country's uniqueness identity) has increased. Russia represents a special world in the system of cultural macro-regionalization. This country has a unique territory, integrity, unity of historical destinies, and this should be considered when choosing the ways of its further development. The situation is alike on a long stretch of the both sides of the state border. Trans-border strip has mixed population, similar cultural landscapes, uniform planning of settlements, language, mentality. Regional and state self-identification of the population is either ambiguous or not clearly expressed.*

Key words: *Russia, geo-cultural space, development vector.*

JEL codes: *F63, Z13, R11*

1. Introduction

By the beginning of the XX century, Russia had developed as a great colonial empire. It was not transoceanic, but continental country, which turned out to be a marginal (i.e. contact) bridge between the West and East civilizations. There wasn't sharp border difference, but a gradual transition from the metropolis to the colonies. Its peculiarity was the open border, suggesting special forms of interaction between the mother country and the colonies in comparison with empires which had extraterritorial colonies. Its frontier position on the open and mobile border of two completely different worlds led to the reciprocal influence and mutual enrichment of peoples who originally belonged to different civilizations, but developed in a single state, and formed a very peculiar Russian culture, which was nor "Western" neither "Eastern". This was due to the long historical and geographical development within the multicultural space and a number of other factors that led to the formation of a specific culture. The policy of the Russian state, the landscape factor, and the peculiarities of interethnic interaction played an important role in the formation of Russian culture.

What is Russia's place in the global geo-cultural space? From the point of view of geography, this is a question of cultural and geographical zoning and determining the belonging of our country to a particular civilization. This debatable theoretical problem is of great practical importance taking into consideration geopolitical and geo-economic conclusions. Fundamental differences in views suggest different ways of developing the country.

Undoubtedly, the geostrategy and geopolitics of a state should be determined in accordance with its national interests. The interests require a clear choice of a model for the further development of society, which, will ultimately affect not only the role of the country in the whole world, but also the level, quality and way of life of its inhabitants, especially on the threshold of new processes and changes taking place in the world during the period of globalization and the redivision of spheres of influence. Ultimately, according to S. M. Myagkov (2001), "we are talking about the viability of the ethnos and the state (since the ethnos is one of the main subjects of statehood), about its survival".

So, the question of the Russia's cultural space of and its place in the global geo-cultural space is of great importance.

2. Methodology and Data

From the point of view of geography, this is a question of cultural and geographical regionalization and determining the belonging of our country to a particular civilization. It is a theoretical problem which has a great practical significance and causes numerous arguments considering geopolitical and geo-economic conclusions. Fundamental different opinions suggest different ways of developing the country. The current situation is a point (moment) of bifurcation, when the future of the state depends on its choice.

To answer this important question, one should analyze different points of view represented in scientific sources, such as geographical, historical, social, political, economic, etc. The second important step is to use a large-scale sociological survey, including questionnaires and in-depth interviews, as well as expert assessments to determine the regional and civilizational identity of the population. We have conducted a number of surveys among the residents of the Orenburg region during middle of 2000 and in 2020, which allowed us to make some conclusions.

3. Results and Discussion

When trying to identify Russia with this or that civilization, subjective criteria are often used, which lead the authors to the opposite conclusions. Diametrically opposite points of view on the problem are represented by "Westerners" and "Eurasians". The first ones accuse the "Eurasians" for their attempts to follow Asian traditions and customs adhering to anti-Western position. Besides they express either separatist or pre-separatist views and actually offer to accept the fact that Russia has inevitably lost (in their opinion) a number of its regions.

The concept of the Eurasians, which has become popular again in recent years, has both its supporters and numerous opponents. The Eurasians at one time singled out Europe, Asia and Eurasia in the ecumene. They prove the unity of the Russian space (Eurasia) in the broad sense of the word. They support the idea that Eurasia is united by its "mestorazvitiye" ("territory development") and internal system connections. It is a space representing a natural-territorial complex, filled with interacting cultural content. Eurasia is separated from other worlds by the frontiers. These worlds are Tibet, the deserts of Central Asia, and Western Europe. Eurasians consider these territories to be fundamentally different and not complimentary to the Russian (Eurasian) world, although all countries interact with each other.

Some authors distinguish the unique Russian civilization as a special self-sufficient entity that does not belong to Europe, Asia, or Eurasia (Ilyin& Akhiezer 2000, Kaimanov 2003, Kulpin 1995, Leontiev 1992). They believe that the modernization of the country should be based on the identification of patterns of millennial historical development and the creation of its own ideology, as well as the selective use of world experience. However, this point of view seems to be an original one only at first sight. It traces the echoes of the transformed Slavophilism, but by and large, it is similar to the views of the "Eurasians". The followers of this point have in their mind just more compact Russian space. It is necessary to note that there are no supporters of the Asian way of Russia's development among the "Eurasians", there are only supporters of cooperation.

There are also Russophiles (those who worship everything Russian), whose point of view suggests that the place for "Russian" ("Slavonic») Russia is a kind of ghetto.

It seems that attempts to lobby for a dominant culture are inappropriate: this will lead to a deterioration of the socio-political situation and inter-ethnic relations. The Russian civilization is multicultural, the Russian people are multiethnic, and the Russian ethnic groups have many common cultural features, formed under the influence of the surrounding landscapes and the unity of historical destinies.

There are many scientists who think that Russia has its own unique, peculiar cultural world. It is identified in different ways: from the Russia's world, which actually represents a much smaller territory than our state today, to Eurasia in a broad sense (including the former Union republics and Mongolia).

Many researchers of different eras note the originality and some peculiar features of the Russian culture and civilization (Astafyev 2000, Kaimanov 2003, Kulpin 1995, Leontiev 1992, Lossky 1991]. They mark a lot of fundamental elements natural for this country. Thus, S. V. Kaimanov (2003) based on the analysis of a huge theoretical material, gives the fundamental elements of Russian civilization. They are communality, statehood power, the priority of spiritual and moral principles, the need for a high goal, super-idea. It is noted that the transition to the next stage of the technocratic development of the new market can only take place within the framework of the essential foundations of our civilizational model.

Many political and social scientists point out the differences between the model of public structure in Russia and in the West, or, to be more exact in the Anglo-Saxon lands. Thus, M. Chernov (2004) notes that Russian society does not accept competition and considers it to be a negative phenomenon that "awakens base instincts" and does not lead to an improvement in the

quality of products, but generates "severe aggression or sabotage". Moreover, the Russians are used to the idea that the entire "people" should have common interests, and the authorities give tasks to the population. In the Western tradition, the personal position is valued above all else, the individual "... does not have any 'obligations' either to society or to his ancestors." In the Russian system, "a person relates himself to some external system of values, thus he is more stable..." And finally, the Western model claims priority. "All the peoples conquered by the Anglo-Saxons are obliged to accept the civilizational mainstream and the rules of behavior... The Russian civilizational model... assumes the preservation of diversity, when all peoples have the right to live and to develop in their own way (Chernov 2004).

There is an opinion that the Russian consciousness has "aspatiality". L.V. Smirnyagin (2007) introduced this term which implies the people's lack of regional and local patriotism. Such people have no territory self-awareness, they are not proud of their homeland as a consequence they lack regional self-identification. Some authors write about Russian pathology. Still, in our opinion, it is better to talk about the Russian specifics, which even the Russians themselves do not understand perfectly well.

In this regard, the problem of the self-identification among the Russian population is urgent. The choice of the country's further development largely depends on it. There are a number of scientific publications devoted to this issue. (Andarova & Khussainova 2016 et al, Druzhinin 2020, Gerasimenko 2020, Gerasimenko & Gladkiy 2004, Gerasimenko & Rodoman 2017, Zhanguzhin 2013, Yilmaz & Changming 2018). The results of a survey conducted by one of the authors among the population of the Orenburg region in 2020 are very different from those obtained in the mid-2000s, when 56% of respondents considered Russia to be a Eurasian country. 25% thought this state to follow the European way. And only 19% believed that Russia had its own originality and did not belong to any civilization. There was no one who identified this country as an Asiatic one. Meanwhile, the clarifying questions showed something different: among those who classified Russia as a "European" country, 18% did not share European values. In 2020, Russia was identified as Eurasian by 86% of respondents. 6% considered the country as European, about 4% as original. All the rest found it difficult to answer. So, in Russia of the XXI century, the traditional worship of Europe is significantly reduced under the influence of a changed foreign policy and powerful propaganda.

The evidence of the "Westerners" is based on the Eurocentric worldview, the idea of European culture as the highest stage of development of society. They view other cultures as marginal, and in the most negative sense of the term. Now the idea of the "ladder of cultures"

and the superiority of the European technogenic civilization, which is ingrained in Russian people, as well as the formed inferiority complex regarding belonging to one's own country, is becoming a thing of the past. "As you know, non-Western cultures, such as the great cultures of the East, developed a different strategy, focusing not on technologies that transform the external environment, but on technologies that transform the inner spiritual world of a person, the system of self-esteem, aspirations and motivations». (Panarin 1996).

There are authors (for example, Kagansky 2003) who speak about the marginality of the Eurasian world. "Eurasians" understood marginality not as an outsider position of the Eurasian civilization, but as an interaction and mutual influence of cultures, which forms the consciousness of interaction and contacts and stimulates the development of a special, specific civilization. The marginality of the situation implies the formation of a marginal consciousness, i.e. the consciousness of interaction and contacts. (Kagansky 2003). This is a positive marginality. In this sense, marginality acts as a factor in the development of a special, specific civilization, which is a multicultural multi-ethnic community formed in a certain enclosing landscape under the influence of a number of historical, geographical, socio-political, demographic, economic and other factors. Russian culture is characterized by tolerant relations, which are still preserved, despite the wide-spread occurrence of nationalist views.

Russia has long developed not as a national state, but as a multi-ethnic community. Russians, like most nationalities living in this country are a genetically polyethnic people. This was facilitated by the formation of a community in the conditions of multiculturalism and polyethnicity. According to the "Eurasians", similar natural landscapes contributed to the convergence and formation of similar behavioral patterns, as well as to the mutual influence of cultures (Savitsky 1927, Trubetskoy 1920). We can agree with the opinion of a number of authors (Kotlyakov & Agranat et al 2000), who draw attention to the collapse of the "catch-up development" strategy. Recently, the idea of positioning Russia as a part of the Eurasian geo-cultural space has been actively promoted.

4. Conclusions

We think that Russia represents a special world in the system of cultural macroregions. Besides, the country has identity of territory, integrity, unity of historical destinies, and this should be taking into consideration when choosing the ways of its further development. At the same time, Russia as a marginal (boundary, contact) zone cannot have clearly defined natural boundaries, just as there can be no rigid cultural boundaries at all. They are mainly conditional (the authors

by no means do not call for redefining the political boundaries). Russia has long been developing as a multiethnic community.

Trans-border strip on both sides of the state border has mixed population, similar cultural landscapes, uniform planning of settlements, language, mentality. Regional and state self-identification of the population is either dual or not clearly expressed. The most important indicator of connections shows that the border areas of North Kazakhstan tends to the Russian territory. They are temporary migrations (trips to study, to work, visits their friends and relatives, shopping, etc.) Borders complicate existing contacts and interaction and are not accepted by the population. Apparently, this situation is an objective basis for integration, which has been artificially disrupted in recent years.

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