

CIVILIZATIONAL THEORY IN RUSSIA – PAST, PRESENT, AND FUTURE

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ABSTRACT. *Russia may be justifiably proud of an illustrious, albeit uneasy, history of achievements in civilizational theory and thought. The names of Nikolai Danilevsky, Konstantin Leontiev, Pitirim Sorokin, Nikolai Berdyaev, Lev Mechnikov, Nikolai Kondratiev, Lev Gumilev, Boris Yerasov, Nikita Moiseev, Yuri Yakovets, and many others are well known to civilizational scholars throughout the world. This paper highlights contributions to civilizational thought of Russian and Russian-born scholars from the 18 to the 21 century.*

KEYWORDS: *civilization, scientific civilizational theory, civilizational science, philosophy of civilization*

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¹ International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC).

While other countries border
on each other, Russia borders with the sky.

Rainer Maria Rilke

Introduction

Russia may be justifiably proud of an illustrious, albeit uneasy, history of achievements in civilizational theory and thought. The names of Nikolai Danilevsky, Konstantin Leontiev, Pitirim Sorokin, Nikolai Berdyaev, Lev Mechnikov, Nikolai Kondratiev, Lev Gumilev, Boris Yerasov, Nikita Moiseev, Yuri Yakovets, and many others are well known to civilizational scholars throughout the world.

This paper highlights contributions to civilizational thought of Russian and Russian-born scholars from the 18 to the 21 century.

1. Russian sociocultural concepts in the 18 century

The Russian school of civilizational thought has its roots in the 18 century. Already A.D. Kantemir (1708–1744), V. N. Tatishchev (1686–1750), and A.N. Radishchev (1749–1802) critically evaluated contemporary social conditions, expressed various notions of philosophy of history, and proposed their concepts of sociocultural evolution.

In his fiercely critical essay “A Journey from St. Petersburg to Moscow” (1790) Alexander N. Radishchev called autocracy “most contrary to human nature” since under it a government is predisposed to create an unjust and oppressed society. The work, often described as a Russian “Uncle Tom's Cabin,” was a polemical study of social and economic problems in the imperial Russia. The author was especially disapproving of serfdom and the limits to personal freedom and liberty imposed by the autocracy; however he also fearlessly confronted the issue of overwhelming powers of the nobility, as well as grave problems in government, governance, and social structure.

The book had been immediately banned and Radishchev sentenced, first to death, then, after Radishchev has pleaded the empress Catherine the Great for his life, to exile in Siberia.

2. Russian civilizational thought in the 19 century

During the first half of the 19 century, following the Napoleonic Wars and a consequent exposure of the Russian society to the European scientific thought, interest in the country to philosophy of history and search of its place in the world has been continuously on the rise. As a consequence, multiple ideas about comparison of the historic way of Russia and of that of Europe were expressed and circulated, for instance, by M. P. Pogodin (1800–1875), P.Ya. Chaadaev (1794–1856), A.S. Khomyakov (1804–1860), I.V. Kireevski (1806–1856), K.S. Aksakov (1817–1860), and Yu.F. Samarin (1819–1876).

One of the intellectual giants of this period was P.Ya. Chaadaev, a brooding, Hamlet-like figure, who was proclaimed “insane” by the imperial government for his progress-oriented views and even became a prototype for heroes of several Russian

classic literary works. In his “Philosophical Letters” Chaadaev pointedly criticized stale and inertial *status quo* in the 19 century imperial Russia:

“One of the sad traits of our peculiar civilization consists in a fact that we still are discovering the truths which have become commonplace in other countries, and even among the peoples, who are in some respects are backward comparing to us. The truth is that we never walked along with other peoples, we do not belong to any of the humankind known families, neither to the West, nor to the East, and we do not have traditions of either one. We stand as if outside of time, with the world-wide development of the human race having not permeated us.” (Shitoeva, 2008: 638).

The very first work on theory of civilizations *per se* in the Russian empire appears to have been published in the city of Kharkov (present day Ukraine) already in 1839. It was a book by A.L. Metlinsky (1814-1870) “On the Essence of Civilization and the Meaning of its Elements.” (Metlinsky: 1839). Some researchers even consider this work to be the very first specialized volume on theory of civilizations in the world. (Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2006b: 500). In any case, appearance of this compact, 122-pages volume represents convincing evidence that research in the field of civilizational theory has started in Russia quite early, approximately in the same time period, as in the West.

The book is an impressive, even though concise, volume on philosophy of history. The philosopher defines civilization as a physical and moral development of the people, including their personal, social, and humanistic qualities, in the “communal conditions.” From this definition he deduces a “trinity of elements” of “civilization,” which includes: 1) people as “subjects” for development; 2) society as a form and condition of human development and betterment; 3) physical and moral development of a human as a product of the “civilizing process.” (Metlinsky, 1839: 15–16) As we can see, the thinking here goes very much along the lines of the 18th century understanding of “civilization” (in “singular”) as antithesis to “barbarism.”

From all forms of governance Metlinsky considers monarchy “an ideal for the social organization.” (Metlinsky, 1839: 64) Alongside with statehood, the scholar notes significance of religion (Christianity being the most “beneficent”) as a major “criterion of civilization,” and highlights importance of continuity of languages, arts, and traditions, as well as of the development of sciences and industries. The author supports his views and conclusions by copious quotes from works of the classics of philosophy of history, including Giambattista Vico, Niccolo Machiavelli, Montesquieu, Roger Bacon, Turgot, Nicolas de Condorcet, Francois Guizot, Johann Gottfried Herder, Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, Auguste Comte, Immanuel Kant, and others.

Preceding much later sentiments by Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968), a harmonious development of three main “forces” of human personality (physical, mental, and moral) seems to be for the author of paramount importance. (Metlinsky, 1839: 110–111) It is also said that Arnold Toynbee (1889-1975) took into consideration some of the notions of the Ukrainian-Russian scholar while developing his own theory of civilizations. (Antonenko, 2009:25). Alas, not having received

much recognition from his contemporaries and suffering from depression, Metlinsky committed suicide in 1870.

Subsequently, more works on philosophy of history appear during the second half of the 19 century by N.G. Chernyshevski (1828-1889), V. G. Belinski (1811–1848), A.I. Gerzen (1812-1870), N.A. Dobrolyubov (1836-1861), D.I. Pisarev (1840–1868), and P.L. Lavrov (1823-1900). Perhaps, not surprisingly, the Russian thinkers views on the historic way of Russia differed widely, and they formed various schools of thought, such as Westernizers, Slavophiles, Eurasians, and so forth.

In the 60s the word “civilization” gradually receives recognition among the general public and is being included into dictionaries. For instance, in the first edition of the “Explanatory Dictionary of the Live Great Russian Language,” compiled by a well-known lexicographer Vladimir I. Dal (1801–1872), it possesses the following definitions: “Civilization – a commune, civic consciousness, recognition of rights and responsibilities of a person and a citizen.” (Yerasov, 1998: 18)

Perhaps, one of the most significant contributions to civilizational theory during the 19 century was made by N.Ya. Danilevsky (1822–1885), who published his seminal book “Russia and Europe,” initially as a series of journal articles, in 1869. (Danilevsky, 2008) In this work the Danilevsky-Leontiev-Spengler-Toynbee-Quigley or what might be called a “socio-systemic” paradigm of civilizational thought appears to have been established in its essentials. Since a brilliant and an exhaustive analysis of the Dalilevsky’s theory has been given by Pitirim Sorokin (Sorokin, 1963, 1966), we will briefly outline only main points of the scholar’s approach.

Danilevsky suggests that history is not a linear development of events and ideas, and divides all peoples, past and present, into three main classes: 1) the positive agents of history, i.e. the peoples who created great civilizations or “historico-cultural types”; 2) the negative agents of history, i.e. the peoples and tribes who did not create great civilizations, but as “whips of God” delivered the *coup de grace* to the dying civilizations ; and 3) the ethnographic material, i.e. the peoples and tribes whose creative *elan* was for some reason arrested at an early stage of their development.

Only comparatively few peoples or tribes have been able to create great civilizations, says Danilevsky. His list of those “historico-cultural types” includes the Egyptian, the Assyro-Babylonian-Phoenician-Chaldean or Ancient Semitic, the Chinese, the Hindu-Indian, the Iranian, the Hebrew, the Greek, the Roman, the Neo-Semitic or Arabian, and the Germano-Romanic or European.

The scholar formulates the “laws” of their evolution, according to which the prerequisites for developing a civilization are: 1) the society must share a common language or a group of closely related languages; 2) the society must enjoy political independence; 3) the basic principles of a civilization of one historico-cultural type are not transmissible to the peoples of another historico-cultural type (Danilevsky admits, though, that some elements of one civilization are indeed transmissible to another); 4) ethnographic diversity is helpful for flourishing of a civilization; 5) the life-career of a civilization is similar to the life-course of the perennials, whose period of growth lasts indefinitely, but whose period of blossoming and fruitbearing is

relatively short and exhausts them once and for all. The ways of spreading civilization are: 1) colonization; 2) grafting; 2) fertilization.

The thinker also presciently introduces other important concepts of civilizational theory, for example, the much celebrated in later works of Spengler, Toynbee and others notion of “Indian summer” in the life-career of a civilization, the concept of “lead and lag” in various cultural spheres in a society’s life, and so forth. (Danilevsky, 2008: *passim*)

Although Sorokin recognizes theories of “socio-systemic,” (or as he calls it, “totalitarian”) paradigm as major achievements of sociocultural thought, he also famously notices some major inconsistencies in them. For example, according to Sorokin, those “socio-historical types” or “civilizations” are neither “closed systems,” nor they are systems at all, and therefore they cannot be born, die, or have a single, predetermined life-cycle. (Sorokin, 1963: 203–243) Furthermore, notes Sorokin, most of “civilizations” in question seem to belong to the entirely different social groups. (Sorokin, 1966: 214–240)

Almost simultaneously with Danilevsky’s theories appeared works of Konstantin N. Leontiev (1831–1891), who has created an original theory of civilizations, based on their cyclicity and multi-linear evolution. After offering a comparative analysis of life-careers of various biological and sociocultural phenomena, the thinker proposes the “law of cyclicity of historical development” according to which every historically significant human community proceeds through three stages: 1) initial simplicity; 2) flourishing complexity; 3) secondary simplicity. The average longevity of “states” is being suggested by the thinker to be 1000–1200 years long.

The scholar notes, that “cultures” and “civilizations” generally survive “states” to which they belong “by a long time” (Leontiev, 1993: 84), as well as precedes Spengler in the definition of civilization as a sophisticated, however ossified, “dead” stage of a culture development (Leontiev, 1993: 95).

Leontiev also expresses apprehensive views toward scientific and technical progress, which is capable to destroy the environment as well as cause other catastrophes and calamities. The thinker grimly and prophetically comments on calamitous and dangerous consequences of a fast-paced sociocultural experimentation: “On the pink water and sugar such fundamental upheavals are not prepared: they are offered to the humankind always by the way of iron, fire, blood, and weeping.” (Leontiev, 1993:111) Those fears, as the 20 century experience clearly illustrates, were far from unfounded.

Despite the fact, that the Leontiev’s highly conservative and monarchist theory had its share of contradictions and paradoxes, it remains a significant landmark in the evolution of civilizational theory in Russia.

Talking about other giants of the 19 century Russian civilizational thought, we certainly cannot omit the name of Lev I. Mechnikov (1838-1888), who advanced a version of “geographical” approach. Forever a rebel against all forms of social and cultural oppression, Mechnikov lived a life full of revolutionary adventure (at one point he even fought under Giuseppe Garibaldi). After extensive traveling throughout

the world, the thinker settled in Switzerland, where he produced (originally in French) his classic book “Civilization and the Great Historic Rivers.” (Mechnikov, 1995)

In it, the scholar addresses the question of origins and evolution of human civilizations. According to the thinker, those are “born” in specific geographic conditions, a synthesis of which is exemplified by the river, especially by a “great historic river,” i.e. Nile, Tiger, Euphrates, Indus, Ganges, Yangtze, and Huang He. Those rivers “turn the irrigated by them regions now into the fruitful granaries feeding millions of people for the labor of a few days, now into contagious marshes, covered by the corpses of innumerable victims... Under the fear of imminent death the bread-giving river made the population combine their efforts in joint work, taught solidarity, even if in reality the separate groups would hate each other.” (Mechnikov, 1995: 26)

Once being “born,” having “developed” the river and having made other changes in the native geographic environment, “civilization” inexorably moves first toward the inland seas (i.e. the Mediterranean), and then to the oceans. (Mechnikov, 1995: 337–339) Simultaneously with this geographic relocation of civilizations, grows the degree of freedom, from the “despotic unions,” grounded in coercion and duress, to the “subordinate unions,” founded on social differentiation and division of specialized labor, to the “voluntary unions,” based on mutual agreement. (Mechnikov, 1995: 258)

Thus, according to the scholar, civilization develops in the environment which is conducive to development of solidarity and cooperation, first because of fear and duress in the “river civilizations,” then on the basis of profit in the “sea civilizations,” and eventually, on the basis of free choice in a global “oceanic civilization,” and therefore, evolution of a “civilization” and of the environment, according to the thinker, is proceeding simultaneously. Accordingly, Mechnikov distinguishes three periods in history of civilizations: river-based (i.e. Egypt, Mesopotamia, India, and China); sea-based (i.e. Carthagen, Greece, Rome, etc.), and ocean-based (exemplified by the Great Britain).

The book is bursting with brilliant insights and penetrating observations from the author’s own extensive civilizational research and traveling experience. At the very end of the work, Mechnikov presents the reader with this amazingly prescient conclusion: “*Death or solidarity*, the humankind does not have any other choices. If it does not want to perish, people inevitably must use solidarity and the common collective labor to fight against hostile conditions of the physical and geographical environment. In it lies the great law of progress and the condition of a successful development of the human civilization” (Mechnikov, 1995: 443)

We also can observe civilizational terminology “in the making,” for example, Mechnikov talks about “the challenge” of great historic rivers demanding “the answer” in a way of cooperation of labor, appearance of statehood, and so forth.

Although it may appear that Mechnikov developed his “geographic theory of progress and social development” while ignoring impact of other factors, and therefore seemingly having deterministic views on the sociocultural evolution, the

scholar insists that he is not a defender of the “geographical fatalism” and only strives to establish a historic value of geographic conditions and the changes that they incur on the various stages of “civilization.” (Mechnikov, 1995: 323)

It would be perhaps also fair to note that the book was supposed to be a first installment of a much more substantial work in social philosophy. In the next volume entitled “The Goal of Life” the author intended to address the future of humanity, which ought to be built on the principles of justice, solidarity, mutual respect, and “scientific morality.” Unfortunately, work on this remarkable project was interrupted by the scholar’s untimely death from tuberculosis just a few days after he turned fifty.

3. Russian civilizational theories in the 20 century

Careful analysis of the Russian sources reveals what appears to be a ferocious intellectual struggle between the communist, or what could perhaps be called a “unilinear–formational,” and “civilizational” paradigms during and after the Russian October Revolution of 1917.

The appearance of the Spengler’s civilizational classic “The Decline of the West” caused a wave of intellectual debates in Russia and, as a part of those, an anthology of scholarly articles about the Spengler’s book has been published in 1922 (Berdyayev, 1922). The Russian translator of the 2010 edition of the Spengler’s monograph testifies: “Lenin was enraged by the release of the anthology in which the publications of F.A. Stepun, S.L. Frank, N.A. Berdyayev, and Ya. M. Bukshpan were included. A reprisal has followed, which is customary to connect exactly with that anthology: ab[out] 200 suspected in disloyalty to the Soviet power scholars with families were loaded into a steamboat and sent to emigration.” (Spengler, 2010: 975)

Multiple other sources attest to this infamous episode with the so called “philosophers’ ships,” when about 160 scholars and intellectuals together with their families were put aboard the steamboats and forced to emigrate. Among the expelled were: Nikolai Berdyayev, Nikolai Lossky, Sergei Bulgakov, Ivan Ilyin, Semyon L. Frank, Fyodor Stepun, Yuly Aikhenvald, Lev Karsavin, Mikhail Osorgin, and Alexander Kizevetter. Others were transported in 1923 by train to Riga, Latvia or by boat from Odessa to Istanbul.

Among the “expellees” of the exact same period was the Russian-American sociologist, historian, philosopher, and first president of the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC) Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889-1968), who later devoted a great deal of time and efforts to civilizational theory. Having analyzed most of his major works (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2011b, 2009), we could briefly summarize the scholar’s contributions to civilizational thought as follows:

- 1) by developing his theory of the sensate, integral and ideational cultural supersystems, Pitirim A. Sorokin made a seminal contribution to studies of the macro-level sociocultural phenomena and the long-term sociocultural processes; 2) by thoroughly analyzing the contemporary theories of civilization and other large-scale cultural entities and systems, placing them within the framework of culturology, and

developing a systemic classification of culturological theories, Sorokin decisively brought the civilizational theory and research into and made it a part of the framework of science; 3) over the span of almost 30 years, the Sorokin's views on the phenomenon of civilization underwent a significant evolution, thereby "elevating" civilizations from the status of "cultural and social congeries" to that of "vast cultural entities" and "cultural supersystems," as well as irrevocably bringing the esoteric "philosophies of history" into a systemic, if "culturologically-biased," scientific paradigm; 4) although the scholar has never considered civilizations as anything but vast cultural entities, nor he entertained a notion, that this multifaceted phenomenon may be studied in the context of a new interdisciplinary field, by shaping the scientific paradigm of civilizational studies, Sorokin's prescient analysis has been instrumental in establishing the methodological foundations of civilizational science. (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2011b)

Another formidable Russian contributor to civilizational thought was Nikolai Berdyaev (1874–1948). After having undergone the "philosophers' ships" ordeal, this Ukraine-born philosopher settled in France. Although the thinker has not offered a consistent theory of evolution of civilization, he did express a number of prescient insights on the subject (Berdyaev, 2002, 1922), particularly on the Russian culture and its relationship with the West.

Berdyaev, for example, writes: "Russia is standing in the center between East and West, as if connecting two worlds, two different arrangements, two forms of religious confessions. The fate of the world history depends on unification of East and West, however for that East and West must renounce their narrow-mindedness, they must learn from each other. Each of the parts of the world must realize their destiny in a whole. Only then Russia will be great when she will accomplish its calling as a mediator between East and West." (Berdyaev, 1998:130, 132)

According to Berdyaev, civilization is mostly concerned with the humans physical survival, while culture aims at their intellectual and spiritual development. The thinker notes that "in a certain sense civilization is older and more primitive than culture, culture takes stage later. The invention of technical equipment, even of the most elementary tools by the primitive man is civilization, just as civilization is the whole civilizing process." (Berdyaev, 1939: 122)

Since Pitirim A. Sorokin (1889–1968) has given an excellent analysis of the Berdyaev's civilizational legacy, we will mention only the main points of the thinker's "philosophy of history":

1) a mere description of singularistic historical events, persons and objects results in a "historical corpse"; 2) the thinker rejects all forms of the linear interpretation of historical process and all linear theories of progress; 3) all great cultures are simultaneously mortal and immortal, i.e. they contain temporal as well as eternal principles; 4) independently of and possibly even earlier than Spengler, Berdyaev regarded Western culture as having passed its barbaric, medieval, Christian, and modern

humanist secular phases, and, being in the transitory period from the dying humanist phase to the emerging phase of the “New Middle Ages”; 5) culture evolves into civilization – an ossified, dead shell, devoid of creativity. The quality tends to be replaced by quantity, such is the dialectic of the decline of creative culture into an uncreative civilization; 6) another way out of decline is a spiritual transfiguration (rendered for example, unto the “dying” Roman civilization by Christianity) (Sorokin, 1963, 1966).

If the lives of scholars and thinkers, who were expelled by various means and ways from the Soviet Russia in the 20-s, were often uneasy, incomparably harder was usually the fate of those who remained. For example, Nikolay D. Kondratiev (1892-1938), a distinguished scholar and an organizer of science during the turbulent years of the Russian Revolution, has been executed by a firing squad during the Stalin’s “great purge” at the age of 46.

The scientist’s many contributions to a better understanding of the socioeconomic processes may be exemplified by his conclusion, that free-market economies demonstrate the long-term (50 to 60 years) cycles of boom followed by depression. These business cycles are now called the Kondratiev waves or cycles.

The Russian scientist’s ideas influenced important Western civilizational scholars, for example, that of a prominent French thinker Fernand Braudel (1902–1985), who incorporated the Kondratiev’s waves into his description of interaction of historic development cycles. Braudel elucidates: “If to combine... the centennial tendency and the Kondratiev cycle, then we would possess “music” of the long-term conjuncture, which sounds with two voices... Adding their movements to the rise or descent of the centennial tendency, the Kondratiev cycles magnified or softened it.” (Kuzyk, 2008: 57).

Kondratiev also noted, that social turbulences, wars and revolutions tend to appear on the wave of social problems, first and foremost of the worsening economic conditions. They usually occur during a period of violent pressure induced by new economic forces and are accompanied by increased tempo and tension of conjunctures of economic life, as well as by the aggravation of economic competition for markets and resources. (Kondratiev, 2002: passim)

Among the most outstanding Russian civilizational scholars of the 20 century we should certainly name Lev Gumilev (1912–1992) who spent most of his youth, from 1938 until 1956, in various branches of the Soviet “Gulag” system. When the scholar was eventually released from imprisonment and successfully defended a second doctorate dissertation in geography, the reaction of the “partocracy” has been quite predictable. It is said that he was asked a “loaded” question: “So, what are you now, a historian or a geographer?” and the dissertation has been subsequently “tabled” along with a membership in the prestigious national academy of sciences.

Lev N. Gumilev is considered to be the founder of “passionarism theory” of civilization. The scholar has offered a complex of original methods of studying the ethnogenesis which consists of parallel studies of the historical data about climate,

geology, and geography of a relevant landscape together with the relevant archeological and cultural sources. At the basis of the author's concepts was an original theory of ethnogenesis which is said to explain the "laws of historical process."

The scholar explained the waves of nomadic migration that rocked the great steppe of Eurasia for centuries by geographical factors such as annual vacillations in solar radiation, which determine the area of grasslands that could be used for grazing livestock. According to the scholar, when the steppe areas shrank drastically, the nomads of Central Asia began moving to the fertile pastures of Europe or China.

To describe his ideas about the genesis and evolution of ethnoses, Gumilev introduced the concept of "passionarity," which may be explained as the level of vital energy and power characteristic of an ethnic group. Based on his research of life-cycles of 40 different ethnoses, he developed a generalized "ethnogenetic curve" which lasts about 1500 years and includes the following "phases of ethnogenesis":

1) "phase of rise," which includes: a) "passionarian push"; b) "incubation period" of the phase of passionarian rise, creation of a new ethnos; c) "obvious period" of the phase of "passionarian rise," beginning of a transition to the "acmatic phase;" 2) "acmatic phase," with development of a "super-ethnos" and its expansion within the borders of its landscape range; 3) "phase of a break," with a sharp decrease in the super-ethnos's passionarity; 4) "phase of inertia," with a gradual decrease of the super-ethnos's passionarity; 5) "phase of obscuration," with a sharp decrease of passionarity and a destruction of systemic connections; 6) "memorial phase," which seems to lead either to a) "regeneration," or to b) "relic phase," with a loss of unity of the ethnic attribution and transformation of cultural tradition, as well as a complete destruction of the ethnos's relics. (Gumilev, 1989; 2001)

The phases are being distinguished according to the number of the so called "passionaries," active, self-denying personalities, whose very existence is connected with the "conglomerations of cosmic energy." It is during the "acmatic" phases, when the national "passionarity" reaches its maximum "heat," that the great conquests are made. The contemporary state of Europe, for example, the thinker described as deep inertia, or "introduction to obscuration." On the other hand, "passionarity" of the Arabic world, according to the scholar, is still high.

The Gumilev's theory may appear somewhat deterministic since the forces of historic process seem to be placed almost completely outside of the influence of humans. Also, despite his criticism of "socio-systemic" theories (Gumilev, 1989: 28, 147-150), the thinker's cyclical schema of the "ethnoses evolution" resembles that of Toynbee, Quigley, and other representatives of the "socio-systemic" civilizational paradigm. Last, but not least, in our works we have clearly demonstrated that these types of rigid cyclical schemas are applicable only to a limited number of cases, and offered a significantly more flexible, multi-variant model, involving a wide variety of scenarios of a society's evolution. (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2011a).

4. Contemporary “civilizational revolution” in Russia

In Russia, where the society has aborted after 1991 what might be called the “unilinear- formational” paradigm (primitive communism – slave society – feudalism – capitalism – socialism – communism), there has been recently nothing less than a gigantic explosion of interest to the civilizational paradigm. Hundreds of books and textbooks on civilizational theory are being published, dozens of dissertations are being defended, centers for academic research are being created, and multiple scholarly conferences are being held. With libraries and bookstores bursting with new publications and studies, the country appears to be “swimming” in literature on civilizations.

One of the most noticeable signs of those exponential changes is tremendous interest of Russian scholars and society as a whole to the works of civilizational classics, such as G. Vico, N. Danilevsky, K. Leontyev, N. Berdyaev, O. Spengler, A. Toynbee, F. Nietzsche, A. Kroeber, A. Schweitzer, Z. Freud, K. Jung, F. Braudel, P. Sorokin, L. Mechnikov, B. Russell, I. Wallerstein, L. White, L. Gumilev, J. Ortega y Gasset, A. Toffler, Yu. Yakovets, Yu. Lotman, S. Huntington, N. Moiseev, B. Yerasov, and many others. In addition, the International Society for the Comparative Study of Civilizations (ISCSC) publications are being copiously quoted in dissertations, scholarly publications, and electronic sources.

The civilizational studies and research are also rapidly becoming a part of the academic discourse in Russia. A number of academic centers of civilizational research are actively conducting the civilizational research, for example, the P. Sorokin-N. Kondratieff International Institute under the leadership of Yuri V. Yakovets, the Institute for Economic Strategies under the direction of Boris N. Kuzyk, and the Sorokin Research Center at the Syktyvkar State University in the Republic of Komi in Russia (the Pitirim Sorokin’s native land) under its founder Pavel P. Krotov.

In one of the most substantial developments in contemporary social sciences the mandatory courses of a new scientific discipline – culturology were introduced in every Russian school, every college and every university. Since this new field of expertise is using the category of civilization as a main unit of analysis, it would be fair to say, that those courses are based on the works of civilizational theory classics.

Civilizational scholars in Russia are actively summarizing and circulating the wealth of civilizational thought accumulated in Russia and elsewhere in the world. An anthology “The Comparative Study of Civilizations,” for instance, contains most of the civilizational theory classics, including works of the ISCSC members. (Yerasov, 1998). In addition to dissemination of civilizational thought, the editor of the anthology Boris S. Yerasov (1932–2001) also published a seminal monograph on structure and dynamics of the evolution of civilization. (Yerasov, 2002)

There is an obvious tendency toward studying the phenomenon of civilization scientifically. In the book entitled “Civiliography – a Science of Civilization” Ye.B. Chernyak alternatively defines civilization either as a self-developing system of essential relationships between the large collectives of people, or as a number of

socioethnic communities united in a self-developing entity or a system². The author differentiates the notions of a “local” and a “world” civilizations, with the “world” civilization being a conglomerate of the “local” ones, as well as analyzes their relationships and evolution. (Chernyak, 1996)

The field of “civiliography” is also being actively explored by the school of Russian cyclism under the leadership of the Ukraine-born economist Yu.V. Yakovets. (Yakovets, 1997, 2003, 2011; Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2006a, 2006b, 2008, 2009) According to these scholars, “civiliography” is a part of macrosociology, defined as “the summit of social disciplines, which synthesizes the achievements of civiliography, futurology, history, economics, politology, culturology, and other social sciences.” (Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2009: 413)

Since “macrosociology” is one of the “macrosciences” of civilizational science, then it would be logical to assume that “civiliography” is also a part of the framework of civilizational science. This fundamental multi-paradigmatic, multidisciplinary field encompasses all valid civilizational approaches and studies all valid definitions and manifestations of the global phenomenon of civilization. (Alalykin-Izvekov, 2011)

The approach which Yu. Yakovets and his school of thought are developing appears to be a synthesis of several already existing civilizational paradigms. They offer a “mixed” socio-techno-noospheric paradigm, which attempts to consider structure and dynamics of the phenomenon of civilization from several different perspectives. Accordingly, the scholars simultaneously use three main definitions of civilization: 1) “local civilization; 2) “world civilization”; and 3) “global civilization.”

“Local” civilizations seem to be more or less equivalent to the ones familiar to a Western reader from the Danilevsky-Toynbee-Spengler-Quigley paradigm. While Toynbee and other representatives of the “socio-systemic” paradigm researched three generations of “local civilizations,” the Russian scholars propose to increase their number to five (Kuzyk, Yakovets: 2009: 500). We are being presented, for example, with dynamics of evolution of twelve “local civilizations” of the “fifth generation,” their interaction in the conditions of globalization, and so forth. The scholars do not think, that the “local civilizations” would lose their diversity or “dissolve” at any time in the near future, as well as doubt the inevitability of their “clash.” (Yakovets, 2003)

The “global civilization” appears to be a conglomerate of the “local” civilizations, while the “world civilization” seems to be an approximate equivalent to the Alvin Toffler’s “wave of progress.” (Toffler, 1980: passim) Based on these diverse concepts, the history of humankind is presented as a “rhythmical” change of “civilizational cycles.” The school proposes what appears to be a fairly rigid combination of those, from one-thousand year-long to 30-40 year-long to ever more

²*Editor’s note.* In general, the absolute majority of the Russian civilizationists (mentioned in this article) strongly follow the common aetiological and anthropological (socioculturological) foundations of their scholarly endeavors, thus relying mainly to the inherent telic (intrinsic goal-driven) causes, so called by Pitirim Sorokin “the immanent causality”. On the contrary, the latter (immanent causality – teleodrive forces) are rejected and forbidden (in principle) in the Modern Western aetiology and science as a whole.

shorter ones. That brings to mind a prescient warning of the great Russian-American macrosociologist Pitirim Sorokin:

Rising and falling tides of any one of the main currents have occurred within very different spans of time... To insist upon the recurrence of any uniform mechanical periodicity in these crescendos and diminuendos is to impose upon reality a uniformity which it does not possess. History repeats itself, but its themes recur in variations ever new – with changes not only in content but also in rhythm and tempo. As a great artist, history provides creative, not monotonously mechanical variations. (Sorokin, 1937: 201–202)

Perhaps, as one of the ways to alleviate this rigidity of their paradigm, the Russian scholars formulate the “law of compression of the historic time,” according to which the length of the “civilizational cycles” inexorably shortens. (Kuzyk, Yakovets 2009: 373)

The dynamics of emergence of the “post-industrial civilization” are further being highlighted. Alternative scenarios of a transitional period from the industrial to the “humanistic and noospheric post-industrial civilization” are delineated, and multiple tools for measurement of the “civilizational development” are presented. (Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2006b)

The authors then propose based on a “new paradigm” radical transformations of the economy and the society in the first half of the 21 century, and substantiate the ways of solving a cluster of global problems on the basis of a “high wave of the epochal and basis innovations” with the goal of achieving the “postindustrial humanistic-noospheric civilization.”³ (Yakovets, 2011: 11) A new “global strategy” of sustainable development on the basis of “partnership of civilizations” is also proposed. (Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2009: 375)

The global economic problems are to be solved in the process of creation of the “integral humanistic-noospheric economic system.” (Yakovets, 2011: 211) As a condition for achieving this goal, the scholars suggest a “radical innovational renewal of the world economic system.” (Yakovets, 2011: 274)

As far as Russia is concerned, the thinkers envision two possible scenarios for its development toward the year of 2050: 1) “innovative,” and 2) “inertial.” The technological breakthrough would be realized on a path of increased responsibility of the state and the business community for the technological level and the competitive ability of the economy, choice of a limited number of the strategic priorities and concentration of resources on their realization. Scenarios of both the “innovational” and the “inertial” development are presented. (Yakovets, 2011: 276)

³ *Editor’s note.* The notion “postindustrial humanistic-noospheric civilization” is rightly a form of the Integralist type of sociocultural organization, for it equally uses the means of the polar (types of) civilizational organization: Sensate and Ideational (in Sorokin’s terminology); and AKosmist and RealKosmist (in the Biocosmological approach).

In the works of N.I. Moiseev (1917–2000) an extensive analysis of theory, history and the future of “civilization” is presented. The scholar contemplates mentalities of various civilizations, highlights contemporary global problems in education, economy, environment, ethics, technology, ecology, and advances the notion of sustainable development. He also espouses a “natural” role of Russia as a geopolitical and civilizational “bridge” between East and West.

The thinker also prophetically warns about imminent dangers of the unstoppable technological and informational progress as well as of the incoming ecological crisis. Developing further theories of the Russian scholar V.I. Vernadsky (1863–1945), the French thinkers Le Roy (1870–1959) and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881–1955) and others, Moiseev posits the “ecological imperative” as a solution to maintaining homeostasis of the Earth biosphere and to the survival of the human race. Highlighting a precarious balance between the exponential development of technology and the need in equilibrium in nature, Moiseev, for example, presciently notes: “Civilizations ... will have to walk on the edge of a razor – using achievements of scientific and technological progress (and) developing technology, to preserve humanity from their dangerous consequences, which violate the logic of nature.” (Kuzyk, Yakovets, 2006a: 320)

With the aim of accomplishing the gargantuan tasks facing humanity, the thinker promulgates the “ascent of reason,” simultaneously underscoring a decisive role of spiritual world in formation and dynamics of civilizations, however, disagrees with Arnold Toynbee on the all-important role of religion. The ultimate way out of the humanity’s problems the scholar sees in the change of “civilizational paradigm” and creation of a “noospheric civilization” whereby the biosphere and the society would develop as one whole organism. (Moiseev 1998a, 1998b)

Various views on the phenomenon of civilization are being generated and circulated also in the works of such authors as A. S. Akhiezer, B.V. Aksyumov, I.V. Bestuzhev-Lada, S.A. Danin, S.I. Filippov, V.P. Fofanov, V. A. Friauf, E.T. Gaidar, I.A. Gobozov, V.L. Inozemtsev, I.N. Ionov, S.G. Kara-Murza, O.Yu. Konik, D.S. Likhachev, M.K. Mamardashvili, M.M. Mchedlova, N.V. Motroshilova, I.B. Orlova, N.Ye. Osipov, A.S. Panarin, Yu.V. Popkov, G.P. Prokofieva, N.S. Rozov, L.V. Savrasov, L.I. Semennikova, O.S. Sergeeva, V. F. Shapovalov, V.S. Styopin, S.N. Sukhonos, V.Ye. Udovik, A.A. Zinoviev, and many others, not even mentioning a book on “new civilization” by Mikhail S. Gorbachev (Gorbachev, 1995).

The Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) presently includes 10 member-countries (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, Russia, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) with Ukraine as an un-official member. A number of the CIS countries are presently participating in the UNESCO’s initiative “Dialogue of Civilizations” and over the years have hosted several relevant international conferences.

Among those countries, Ukraine seems to be embarking on a path of especially active civilizational research. For example, in addition to works dedicated to the heritage of A.L. Metlinsky, a book by Yu. V. Pavlenko “A History of the World Civilization: Sociocultural Evolution of Humankind,” (Pavlenko, 2001), a monograph

“Civilization on the Crossroads” edited by Yu.M. Pakhomov. (Antonenko, 2009: 25), and other works have been published recently.

Conclusions

1. Russian civilizational theory has a very rich and distinguished, even if at times tormented history. Some of the most fundamental ideas of modern civilizational theory were and are being produced by the Russian and Russian-born scholars and thinkers. The 18 century witnessed promising beginnings, followed by the 19 century’s remarkable flourishing of civilizational thought in Russia. The 20 century proved to be a very difficult for many of the Russian civilizational scholars and thinkers, especially for those, who remained in the Soviet Russia. Nevertheless, advanced theories of sociocultural evolution were developed by the Russian and the Russian-born scholars through the years, culminating in a veritable “explosion” of civilizational research in the final years of the second and in the early years of the third millennium.

2. Civilizational theory and research in Russia and in its neighboring countries became in recent years an advanced interdisciplinary field of sociocultural studies, displaying and projecting onto the future the following prominent characteristics and tendencies: 1) active accumulation, dissemination, and development of the extensive experience of Russian and international civilizational research; 2) obvious tendency to study the global phenomenon of civilization scientifically; 3) appearance of multiple new paradigms, approaches, and schools of civilizational thought, for example, civilizational science (цивилизационика), culturology (культурология), civiliography (цивилиография), civilizational science being the most fundamental of the three; 4) civilizational paradigm not only swiftly enters all levels of academic and scholarly system in Russia in the “shape and form” of scientific paradigms, academic disciplines and courses, scholarly works, and academic conferences, but seems to be well on its way to becoming the prevalent paradigm of sociocultural thought and rapidly replacing the defunct “unilinear-formational” one.

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