

POLITICAL AND SOCIO-CULTURAL PRINCIPLES OF THE FORMATION OF THE RUSSIAN IMPERIAL IDENTITY IN THE CONDITIONS OF THE NORTH CAUCASUS REALIA IN THE FIRST HALF OF 20TH CENTURY

The Russian Imperial Identity and the North Caucasus

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Abstract: The article throws light on the principles of the Russian imperial identity and ways of its formation in the North Caucasus region at the initial stage of the incorporation of the North Caucasus into the Russian Empire. As the Russian Empire represented a model of the universal civilization that united a multitude of ethnic groups and cultures, to reveal the ways of the formation of the common imperial space and its institutions the authors used an interdisciplinary set of instruments that combine the elements of the approaches of political science, sociology and history. The characteristic feature of the manifestation of the Russian imperial identity was not the ethnic or cultural principles, but the etatist principle which primordially predetermined the condition of the multi-ethnicity of the imperial world that was creating the imperial “supernation” and was giving a chance for the existence of the cultural invariance. By its nature the Russian imperial identity was initially formed in the conditions of the polymorphism of ethnicity, confessionalism, culture and polylinguism which gave it the opportunity to find, after all, a common language with any new other ethnic identity that would emerge at the border of its approach and bring it into its ambivalent world without any specific damage to the newly converted. Not being a socio-cultural monolith, having failed to finally overcome its internal contradiction potential, the imperial identity was consolidated by a sufficiently strong fastener – the monarchy which did not prevent the traditionality of all kinds loyal to it from co-existing and developing as an element of the imperial world. Therefore within the framework of the imperial monarchism all the constituents of the Russian imperial identity acted as mutually complementary even when they were mutually antagonistic in the course of the historical adjustment.

Keywords: Russia, identity, empire, universal civilization, construct, cultural invariance, ethnic tradition, monarchy, frontier, confession, mountain-dwellers’ communities, lifestyle.

INTRODUCTION

When embarking on the interpretation of various aspects of the formation of the Russian imperial identity in the North Caucasus region it needs emphasizing that this problem in former times has not only failed to become the central object of research in the indicated light, but the Russian Caucasus-related historiography has never formulated it as a problem.

Even when the revealing of the essence of identity as a phenomenon of the socio-cultural existence became sufficiently fashionable, contemporary domestic researchers practically never touched upon this phenomenon with reference to the

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North Caucasus. In this connection this article claims the priority in this kind of research.

At the same time sufficiently diverse material is accumulated which to a greater or lesser degree enables us to reveal the different sides of the complicated process of the formation of the Russian identity in the inhabitants of the North Caucasus.

The authors defend the hypothesis that the phenomenon of the imperial identity was used by the imperial authorities as a political and socio-cultural instrument by means of which they persuaded different Caucasian ethnic groups in their unity, that they formed a special group – the imperial “supernation”, and the internal differences did not matter in the conditions of their adoption of the idea of common good under the protection of the Russian monarchy.

Having offered the imperial set of tools for the subsequent construction of the imperial identity Russia did not demand absolute rejection of the fundamental principles of the tradition but it only demanded that those principles be correlated with and subordination to the imperial etatism.

Besides, paternalism as an essential manifestation of the Russian etatistic institutions typical of the Russian imperial world was clear and did not cause rejection on behalf of many peoples who this way or another became part of the imperial “supernation”. The etatistic paternalism could even appear as a specific compensation for the weakening or belittling of traditionality.

Here one has to pay attention to the functional aspect of the Russian imperial world. Russia never positioned itself as an oriental despotism characterized by the total regulation of the social life and striving for uniformity. Russia was a “metaethnic” community ruled not by a national monarchy but by a specific “civilized monarchy” tolerant towards the pluralism of lifestyles, beliefs, ethnic traditions” (Kondakov *et. al.*, 2011; Panarin, 1995).

Besides this “metaethnicity” was built on the estate-based principle which enabled the entire ethnic elite to form part of the imperial elite. It was just this special feature of the Russian world that gave a chance for all the ethnic identities to become part of the imperial existence with the minimal losses by accepting these or those forms of the imperial innovations even in the way distorted by the local ethnicity.

In connection with the fact that the North Caucasus, as part of modern Russia, evokes close attention of the researchers of all directions including politicians, diplomats, administrators, military men – the research into the subject matter in question can contribute to the understanding of the causes and mechanisms that either promoted or hindered the formation of the universal imperial identity needed for the peaceful and constructive coexistence of the numerous peoples of the North Caucasus territory within the single Russian state. At the same time the problems declared require further elaboration as the presented article just laid the foundations

for the research into the essence and ways of the formation of the imperial identity in the Caucasian region.

The authors of this article have selected and analyzed the documentary sources of the corresponding time (The national liberation struggle of Dagestan and Chechnya under the leadership of Imam Shamil, 2005), the works of the precursors (Bliiev, 2004; Bobrovnikov, 2002) and contemporary domestic researchers of the Caucasian old times, the works of Russian and foreign authors of general theoretical character, which enabled them to propose their own interpretation of the processes that were under way in the remote past.

In this connection one can mention a number of works of the early 21st century where their authors indirectly touch upon the problems of the identity of the Caucasian peoples in the conditions of their incorporation into the Russian Empire – Ailarova S.A., Kobakhidze E.I. “The future children of Russia...”: The problem of the integration in the administrative practice and public consciousness (The Central Caucasus of the end of 18th – early 20th cc.); Bliiev M.M. Russia and the mountain-dwellers of the Great Caucasus. On the road to civilization, 2004; Gordin Ya.A. Why Russia needs the Caucasus. Illusions and Reality, St. Petersburg “Zvezda” magazine”, 2008; Gudakov V.V. The North-West Caucasus in the system of interethnic relations from the ancient times to the 60s of 19th century, St. Petersburg University publishing house, 2007.

Besides, the works of some representatives of foreign historiography concerning the role and the ability of the imperial discourse for the creative construction of the socio-political and cultural space served as a context for this research. Among them are: the Russian Empire in foreign historiography. The works of the recent years. Anthology. Compilers P. Vert, P.S. Kabytov, A.I. Miller, 2005; Brubaker R., Cooper F. Beyond “Identity”. Theory and Society, (2000); Hosking G. Russia: People and Empire, 1997; Russian Empire: Space, People, Power, 2007.

To this or that degree the aforesaid researchers deny the imperial structure to have a creative set of instruments by virtue of its primordial undemocratic nature and authoritarianism. Disagreeing with such premise the authors of the article are trying to refute the absolute negativism of the imperial discourse characteristic of many western studies devoted to the Russian Empire.

The authors insist on the fact that due to the doctrinal approaches the aforesaid researchers do not wish to see the civilizational peculiarities of the Russian imperial structure, do not wish to accept the circumstances under which the Russian imperial world as a special world of worlds was capable of the positive junction of any polymorphism.

The problem however was that the Russian polymorphism seen as the world of worlds was the polymorphism of universality while the world of worlds of the Caucasus was the polymorphism of traditionality that appeared not as a

multidimensional unity but as a multitude of the singleness, which gave rise to the initial (fairly long) strain and splash of conflict potential.

The authors of this article attempted to reveal both the fundamental peculiarities of the Russian imperial identity and to show that this kind of identity was an important instrument of the formation of the common imperial structure which included along with all others the ethnic communities of the North Caucasus. The authors consider that by means of the principles put forward by them they succeeded in achieving the goal set and in substantiating their hypothesis.

METHODS

The specific feature of the problems of the article in many respects conditioned the interdisciplinary character of this work. Pursuing the goal of tracing the history of the acceleration of the imperial identity in the socio-cultural space of the peoples of the north Caucasus, the authors had to overstep the boundaries of the historical science proper and resort to the assistance of other socio-humanitarian sciences and, first of all, to sociology, as identity as a phenomenon of sociality was to the greatest degree interpreted in sociological studies.

At the same time by virtue of the fact that every society has its own history, “in the course of which there emerges its specific identity” (Lyube, 1994), historical memory not only preserves this identity but also repatriates it from the past into the present. Therefore the connection between history and sociology seems legitimate and essential for the most accurate and comprehensive reflection of such socio-cultural phenomenon as identity.

For this reason the authors used the combination of the main sociological and historical methods, in the first place the method of concrete analysis, synchronic and diachronic analysis, synthesis, historical-comparative and historical-genetic analyses. In the course of the research all the listed methods were used in various combinations that took into account the peculiarities of the individual constituents of the topic under study.

The study of the available sources and the historical facts by the methods of the synchronic and diachronic analysis enabled the authors to follow the dynamics and character of the reforming activity of the Russian authorities in the North Caucasus for a certain temporal period.

These methods also revealed the properties and functions of various approaches as the set of tools through which the work of involving the North Caucasus in the general imperial world of the Russian society was built.

The historical-genetic method enabled the authors to reveal the sources and conditions under which all the reforming strategies of the Russian authorities as well as the stages of the origin and manifestation of the specific features of the general imperial identity in the environment of the local mountain-dwellers' communities

was realized. In this connection the authors of this research got the opportunity for building their hypothesis tied to the realia that existed in the North Caucasus region in the period under investigation, which they extracted from the corresponding historical documents and evidence of the contemporaries.

RESULTS

The results of the research enabled the authors to ascertain the following:

- Russia as a socio-cultural phenomenon is a synonym of the notion of “civilization” which is often connected with the notion of “empire” where the imperial essence plays the role of the civilizational foundation with its specific traits that distinguish the Russian imperial world from all other imperial entities relying upon the principles of the European or eastern civilizational paradigm (Kondakov *et. al.*, 2011).
- The empire is the receptacle for many peoples, their cultures and confessions. Such state of affairs took shape due to the fact that in the history of the formation of the Russian political system it is extremely problematic to separate the imperial complex from the civilizational identity (Panarin, 1995). The imperial construct preserved stability and gained strength as long as the peoples that accepted it believed in the status of the idea articulated by the central imperial institutes – the empire is common good and the protector of the weak from the encroachment of the strong.
- As soon as the peoples who were offered this or that way of becoming part of the Russian empire and asked to agree to try on the imperial identity started to experience the positive results of the membership in big and strong state the rejection or non-acceptance of the imperial principles weakened and if not completely eliminated they became less acute and were ousted from the proscenium of the socio-cultural interaction.
- A specific feature of the Russian imperial identity was that the empire while exploring new geographical and socio-cultural areas was forming new zones of the frontier and what is more it was carrying in itself the inherent frontier that was determined by the coexistence of the Russian ethnic and cultural meanings together with the cultural and confessional specific features of all other peoples who were creating the imperial world but never became one.
- The initial complexity and heterogeneousness of the cultural basis, where the elements of the Slavonic, Ugro-Finnic, Turkic, Mongolian, Jewish, Byzantian and Western culture had always been present, served as the foundation and platform for the unification of each and all vectors within the framework of the imperial structure, despite the availability of the contradictory and multivectoral accents and interpretations.

- The Russian imperial identity unlike the traditional mountain-dwellers' identity was more flexible and open by virtue of its heterogeneous nature. This enabled it rather efficiently to accommodate all other local identities preserving the principles of their traditionality.
- The heterogeneous identities in the imperial envelope in some odd way despite the contradictions and opposition were attracted to each other. This circumstance offered the chance for all to coexist under the imperial umbrella without asking for the imperative and immediate unambiguity as it was the case with all other variants of identity that were present in the socio-cultural space of the Caucasus, for example, in the Turkic-Islamic or Persian-Islamic identity.
- The conflict potential which from time to time used to come to the fore of the historical development of the Russian imperial structure can be called "stable contradiction" (Kondakov *et. al.*, 2011). As long as it was developing within the framework and under the aegis of the ambiguity cemented by the universality of monarchism this conflict potential was just the manifestation of the processes of the historical adjustment of the constituents and newly-acquired elements of the imperial civilization followed by their gradual correlation.
- An important element of identity is historical memory is chiefly organized with the aid of the linear time, whose line always contains the axis point which divides the line of the historical time into two parts: before and after it (Hall, 1990). For the peoples of the North Caucasus such a point was the appearance in the region of the exponents of the essential principles of the Russian Empire. As this axis point played the role of the crucial moment then everything that was before it, lost its relevance, and this relevance shifted the to events that were taking place after such a point of count.
- The emergence of the Russian Empire in the socio-cultural space of the North Caucasus began to change the meanings and contexts of the existence of the mountain-dwellers' communities. The mountain-dwellers were offered new historical horizons they were too distanced from not only by the entire former course of the historical development but often by the essential meanings of their socio-cultural foundation.
- The internal institutional social norms and the external environment that determined the multivectoral development of the peoples of the North Caucasus, promoted the formation of specific identity where militaristic motives were dominant. These were the communities born by the war and for the war. There were no other forms of existence during the centuries-old history of the mountain-dwellers not because the latter were remarkable for their exceptional disposition to aggression, but because aggression from the

side of the external environment forced the world of the mountain-dwellers to exist in the conditions of a permanent war (Khavzhoko, 1994).

- In the natural habitat of the initial existence of the peoples of the North Caucasus the need for modal identity is historically predetermined by virtue of the circumstance that the entire history of the North Caucasus is the history of permanent social instability and uncertainty, whose tension fluctuates but never dies down. Identity in such a socio-cultural space meant mobilization and the only possible form of defence against the external threats.
- Identity in the conditions of permanent social instability that was caused both by the internal course of the socio-economic and cultural development of the mountain-dwellers' communities within the framework of their feeding landscapes and by the external interference of the frontier peoples and states, took the form of the emergency protection and the instrument of value-based orientation, instrument of self-preservation. By virtue of their identity the mountain-dwellers' environment was characterized by internal tension and constructed by social norms, ideas and collective meanings that affected all the sides of interaction between any outside world – alien family, alien clan, alien village, alien class group, alien ethnos.
- The collision with the new, for example, with the emergence of communication between the Caucasus and the Russian Empire, was always accompanied by a set of innovations that propounded the question of the local identity. Each social innovation promoted the crisis of the initial identity as the innovation weakened and undermined the principles of the traditional prospects and orientations.
- The basic principles of the local mountain-dwellers' identities – the recognition of the primacy of the monarchy, the general use of the Russian language and spiritual renewal connected with the Orthodoxy, the imperial legal procedure and the imperial system of law, lifestyle and everyday life and also with the change of landscapes through the activities of the troops and colonists. The coming of the Russians to the mountains began to be accompanied by the unaccustomed and onerous for the local people ways of everyday life whose forms were radically changing the former mountain-dwellers' communal life (Gasnov, 2013).
- The mountain communities often did not understand the essence of what was going on but they suffered a great many problems and demands contrary to their traditional lifestyle which easily aroused practically universal anti-Russian sentiment. This attitude was particularly noticeable in the period of the administration of the Caucasian affairs under Prince P.O. Tsitsianov, and then under lieutenant-general A.P. Ermolov (Klychnikov, 1999).

In different parts of the Central and North-East Caucasus there were outbursts of armed clashes between the imperial troops and the Caucasian emergency volunteer corps led by the local chiefs (The national liberation struggle of Dagestan and Chechnya under the leadership of Imam Shamil, 2005). And though such rebellions that were taking place in Avariya, Mekhtula, Khaitag, Kazi-Kumukh, Tabasaran and other parts were relatively easily suppressed (Gasnov, 2013), they became a vivid display of the non-acceptance of the innovations the imperial authorities were trying to inculcate in the local mountain-dwellers' mode of life, thus changing its meanings and ignoring the local tradition.

- The acuteness of the confrontation and non-acceptance of the Russian imperial identity reached its apogee in the first half of the 40s. Only the extraordinary military, diplomatic and administrative efforts, the intellect and adroitness of Prince M.S. Vorontsov (Zakharova, 2001; Lazaryan, 2014), that were continued in the actions of Prince A.I. Baryatinsky (Mukhanov, 2007), that changed the whole situation in favor of Russia. Princes Vorontsov and Baryatinsky prepared the conditions, showed the mountain-dwellers, if not to all of them, at least to those who were capable of and willing to see, the ways of the positive coexistence with the Empire. By the 60s 19th century when the Russian Empire had managed to prove to the mountain communities that its presence in the space of the Caucasian world was assuming a lasting character all other civilizational and cultural alternatives were deprived of the opportunity of being its competitors.
- The political and legal measures institutionalized those innovations that the Empire had inserted into the life of the local peoples. It had to overcome the resistance of the traditionality that was not always able to fit into the parameters set by the Russian statehood. By adopting a flexible approach and gradualness, the authorities were able to find the solution acceptable for the sides in the most essential spheres of socio-cultural life. This in its turn formed the conditions for the organic acquisition by the mountain-dwellers of the elements of the imperial identity.
- The mountain-dwellers' traditionality gradually began to open itself. According to N.A. Dobroljubov, the inner life of the mountain tribes became more accessible for the Russian observation (Dobroljubov, 1859). Due to those circumstances one can maintain that the mountain dwellers' traditionality was assuming the type of the construction similar to that when one type of a fruit-tree is engrafted with the grafts of the trees of a different type, likewise this construction was engrafted with the imperial meanings turning it into the hybrid identity. Such identity was not steady, contained a great number of the traditional gradations of locality and novations that

had a difficult choice of self-determination – the choice that was chiefly realized at the individual (family) level.

DISCUSSION

The scientific significance and practical need for further research on the problems raised in the article is determined by the fact that the latter analyzes the historical experience of the organization of the Caucasian territory that used to be the problem territory of the Russian Empire. Many approaches and methods of the solution of the tasks of the past have not only failed to appear outdated but they are acquiring new vibes by virtue of their actualization towards the beginning of 21st century.

At the same time if the topicality of the problems under study has not been diminished for at least 150 years, hence, either the process of the adaptation of the traditional mountain-dwellers' world to the imperial meanings did not receive its completion, or the approaches used were imperfect, or the people in charge of their realization did not tend to completely apply them without subjective distortions.

Besides the very notion of “identity” widely used in the scientific discourse and increasingly perceived as the natural phenomenon of sociality in reality lacks uniqueness and in modern socio-humanitarian sciences its universal interpretation does not exist.

The content side of the term “identity”, or what the researchers put into it, has historical forms and is subject to change. As Peter L. Berger and Thomas Luckmann note, identity is maintained, modified, or even reshaped by social relations. The social processes involved in both the formation and the maintenance of identity are determined by the social structure (Berger & Luckmann, 1967).

In this connection the authors adhere to the opinion that due to the fact that all the societies, ethnic communities have histories, their identities are formed in the process of their realization. Identity itself in such understanding is the result of the historical process, the point in the social, ethno-cultural and personal development.

Here it needs emphasizing that the essence of any social group is set in its history, history itself is the meaning-characterizing definition as in the course of history the specific character of the ethnic identity is formed. Besides the function of the imperial identity was also determined. Its role was to “homogenize”, to make it homogeneous, to saturate it with shared interests and perceptions.

The authors consider that the search for a more adequate understanding and interpretation of the social essence of the term “identity” can become the continuation of their research connected with the general direction towards the search for the answers to the question: in what way and form did the imperial identity absorb the ethnic traditionality of the North Caucasus peoples.

CONCLUSION

Thus proceeding from the aforesaid one can state that the Russian imperial identity had a heterogeneous and explicit polymorphic foundation that opened up the opportunity for the coexistence to many ethno-social first principles under the patronage of the imperial monarchism.

The authors of this article hope that the presented material will enable all the interested people in any way related to the Caucasus or the Russian-Caucasian relations to see the processes of the past in a new light and appreciate the processes of the imperial construction in the North Caucasus region avoiding the bias of the ideological and political prejudices. In the end this will promote the understanding of the fact that Russia succeeded in winning over to its side a major part of the Caucasian society.

At the same time it should be stressed that in the future the authors of the article will have to extend both the corpus of the historical facts and their interpretation to get the answer to the question of how the Russian authorities succeeded in channeling the initial irreconcilability of the part of the North Caucasus with the Russians towards the constructive coexistence; what socio-cultural changes in mountain-dwellers' communities accompanied the reformatting of their lifestyles.

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