The Unity of Spiritual Values of Russian Nations as the Common Platform for the Construction of Russian Identity

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Abstract

Purpose of the study: In this study we consider the problem of search for consolidating values of Russian society in conditions of deep socio-cultural split. The absence of common spiritual guidelines system is accompanied by development and reproduction of social anomic that threatens spiritual security of Russian society and may lead the country to disintegration. In this regard, there rises a problem of Russian identity formation in order to integrate the society on the basis of common spiritual values. Methodology: The methodological basis of this study is provided by civilizational approach to identify the system of spiritual values that will become the basis for construction of Russian identity. Geopolitical approach is methodologically significant to study the specificity of Russian identity. This approach also has some grounds for consolidation of Russian society. According to geopolitical approach the citizens’ views on the status of the country in international community and its role in international politics are the basis of Russian identity. Results: We conclude that the basis for the modern Russian identity formation in its national and state dimension should be not only an appeal to the heroic past of the country, but also to the pride of the present and clear idea of the future. The modern system of spiritual values capable of consolidating the Russian society should be, first of all, based on the values of citizenship, justice, and welfare of the population. Applications of this study: The results show that overcoming the socio-cultural split of the Russian society is quite a complex process, which involves rethinking the cultural imperatives of state’s political system functioning, formation of trust in political institutions, transformation of the citizens’ ideas about the state, revival of national history, and understanding of the country's role in the modern world. Novelty/Originality of this study: The increased attention to the problem of Russian identity construction takes place due to the serious challenges of the present, including preservation of national sovereignty and integrity of the country, ensuring its spiritual security, overcoming the prolonged crisis of the Russian economy, formation of new political and civil institutions. To actualize the search for spiritual integrators able to become a powerful resource for consolidation of the modern Russian society we need to understand that development of the country is possible only on the basis of clear collective understanding of its past, present and future.

Keywords: Spiritual values, Russian identity, Sociocultural split, Civilizational approach, Geopolitical approach, Civic culture, Social trauma, National state identity

1 Introduction

The actualization of the problem of the construction of Russian identity is caused by the search for an idea that would be able to consolidate society which has been developing solely in the context of a sociocultural split resulting from prolonged social transit and the presence of various, often antagonistic, value systems, over the last decades (3, 7, 10, 13, 15, 21, 33). The absence of all-Russian system of spiritual reference points is accompanied by development and reproduction of the state of social anomic which aggravates the spiritual and moral crisis that can lead to the split in society. The spiritual and moral crisis leads to the devaluation of traditional values, relativization of social standards, growth of
social phobias, loss of the vision of the future, deepened sense of mutual stageness. Such a state of society comes laden with grave risks associated with the difficulties of construction of All-Russian identity both at the personal level and at the social level. The comprehension of this fact makes politicians, researchers, public figures turn to the search for integrators able to consolidate modern Russian society and become the basis for the construction of Russian identity. Spiritual vacuum that has formed in Russian society was the result of prolonged destructive processes in the spiritual and cultural life of the country (22,27,28). The comprehension of the depth and social significance of this problem requires a search for new approaches to solving problems of development of common cultural norms and senses which can become the basis for the construction of all-Russian identity.

2 Research Methodology

Several methodological approaches suggesting various grounds for Russian identity have formed in academic literature. Civilizational approach to the comprehension of specific character of Russian identity is implemented in the discourse of Westerners and Slavophiles about the future of Russia. In the XIX century, Russian philosophical thought becomes that form of ideological and cultural reflection through which intellectuals tried to designate the vector of development of the country.

P.Y. Chaadaev (1991), was one of the first thinkers who turned to the analysis of cultural and civilizational peculiarities of Russia (5). His ideas created a new paradigm in the study of specific character of Russian identity which determined the direction of further development of this topic in the philosophical discourse. Based on the ideas of P.Y. Chaadaev (1991), Slavophils distinguish Orthodox Christian world view, community, loames personality type, domination of “truth” over law as cultural and civilizational grounds for Russian identity (18,19). According to their approach, Russian society is a unified and balanced “composite personality” which lies at the heart of spiritual unity that is based on the values of Orthodoxy. This is what defines a special path of development of Russia and its global problem. I.V. Kireevsky (2007), matched the high potential of spiritual development of the Russian people against the spiritual decline of the West, believing that the prevalence of material values over spiritual values in Western civilization inevitably leads to a loss of faith, growth of individualistic tendencies and, accordingly, to the atomization of society (19). Based on the basic principles of Orthodox dogma — love, national unity, free spirit, pursuit of creativity — Russian society can lay a new foundation for enlightenment which defines the future of the country.

The modern authors which stick to this approach within the meaning of spiritual unity of Russian nations point out that it is the national unity has always served as the basis of Russian identity in its various incarnations (patriarchal, faith-based, secular) (24). This is evidenced by the entire Russian history: the community was the basis of integration in pagan Rus, the Church was the basis of integration in Orthodox Russia, the party was the basis of integration in Soviet Russia since it really “represented all social groups and categories, all nationalities and all territorial entities. The accommodation of interests, the search for compromises and the resolution suppression of conflicts — coordinating all parts of the state system — occurred inside this cathedral” (17). Within the scope of this approach, Russian identity is based on the concept of “national identity” that includes its specific features as “an arch of Russian history, its goal and sense, special type of personality and its corresponding special aspects of sociopolitical order, cultural and civilizational identity, and, ultimately, social consciousness, which should be representative of all of the above” (31). As can be seen from the above, from the perspective of civilizational approach, Russian identity is based on the idea of the national unity which is a spiritual bond of the Russian nation in its past, present and future.

The academic discourse on the topic of specific character of Russian identity has made it possible to develop a geopolitical approach which suggests its grounds for the consolidation of Russian society. The representatives of this approach associate specific character of Russian identity primarily with citizens' visions of the status of their country and its role in world politics. Considering the geopolitical aspect of Russian identity, researchers point out that the latter is based on the people's perception of its affiliation with a specific geographic and political space, in the context of which national selfconsciousness, mindset, historical memory, political myths and cultural symbols are formed (14). From this perspective, not only territorial and political space, but also a number of cultural signs, characterizing the uniqueness of the country, its history and spiritual priorities, serve as the basis for spiritual unity of Russian society.

A number of authors, analyzing the structure of Russian identity from the perspective of geopolitical approach, pay special attention to its spiritual and mental grounds, which include geopolitical codes, images and values (16). These are the factors that have always defined the vector of political development of the country. According to researchers, rooted archetypes of the past, preserving and conveying memories of political history of the country, form the basis of the modern geopolitical reference points of the Russian Federation (29, 40).

This position is developed in papers of A.A. Kara-Murza (1998), who pays attention to the dualist nature of Russian identity as a whole (17). Moreover, its dualism is manifested in a complex synthesis of civilizational and geopolitical identity. It is these types of identity and their dynamics that define the specific character of political history of Russia. According to the researcher, Russia experienced its “hours of triumph” exactly when its civilizational (European) identity and geopolitical (Eurasian) problems turned out to be harmonized – for example, in the course of implementation of the European cultural “mission” with regard to own Russian East” (17). Thanks to the balance of these identities, Russia has for centuries secured itself a leading role in the Eurasian space, including among foreign nations who recognized its cultural and political authority in the world order. In contrast, the reduction or loss of leadership of Russia in the international community were due either to a misalignment of its civilizational and geopolitical problems, or by the attempts at their artificial, declarative synthesizing (17).

In general, the approaches towards the specific character of Russian identity that have formed in the academic discourse to date, are complementary in terms of methodology, since they do not ignore the problem of formation of spiritual reference points which are able to consolidate Russian society that is split nowadays (6,35,38,39). What is more, both sacral
meanings and political history of the country are quite reasonably suggested to be used as spiritual integrators within the scope of these approaches.

3 Results

Overcoming the sociocultural split in Russian society seems to be a rather complex process which requires reconsideration of cultural imperatives of functioning of political system, construction of the culture of trust to political institutions, the transformation of citizens' visions of the state, revival of national history and understanding the role of the country in the contemporary world. It has been established that periods of social transit are accompanied by the clash of values, or, according to the vivid expression of Maximeilian Weber, “axiologi poliethism”, often resulted in the clash of identities. If the balance of identities is maintained by the normative order in a stable society, then the state of prolonged crisis provokes their conflict.

Having taken the road of radical transformations at the end of the XX century, the country is still in a state of severe sociocultural crisis, which is manifested, in particular, in the split of Russian identity. The collapse of the Soviet Union was followed by a fundamental change in the vector of sociocultural and political development of the country, collapse of former social institutions responsible for the processes of socialization and reproduction of spiritual values. Disintegration of the Soviet Union which was unique in its ideological set course led to the dissipation of such a unique social ideological construct as “Soviet people” which served as a spiritual bond of multi-ethnic Russia.

Despite the fact that “peaceful image” of a Soviet man was greatly confabulated, this construct has nevertheless effectually stabilized the mindset and behavior of people. And if in the Soviet period of Russian history the unity of spiritual values was ensured by the dominating ideology which constructed social reality in continuum (the past, the present, the future), explained it, determined the place and role of man in society, mobilized the population for the solution of major problems, then currently Russia exists as an amorphous assembly of people united only territorially, but having a vague idea of the past, the present, and the future of the country.

Analyzing the modern split of Russian society, researchers point out that modern identity crisis is manifested not so much in the fact that “the monistic perception of self-identity has been lost and pluralism has prevailed, but rather in the fact that there is no pluralism in terms of harmonious attitudes, while prevailing fragments of self-comprehension not related to each other, predominate” (11,12). In such a situation, it becomes necessary to put together the separated elements of Russian identity on the basis of the common transparent system of spiritual values shared by the majority of citizens of the country.

Particular attention to the topic of the Russian identity is due to serious challenges of the modern era, which include the preservation of national sovereignty and integrity of the country, overcoming the prolonged crisis state of the Russian economy, formation of new political and civil institutions etc. (36). The comprehension of the fact that development of the society is only possible on the basis of a clear collective vision of one’s past, present and future, it actualizes the search for spiritual integrators capable of becoming a powerful resource for the consolidation of modern Russian society.

The concept of spiritual values in Russian mindset is intimately connected with morality and ethics, the essence of which is embodied to the maximum extent in Orthodox dogma. In Russian history, Orthodoxy with its system of norms, traditions and symbols has for a fairly long time exercised the function of identification marker which consolidated people on a common spiritual basis. However, modern Russian society is not distinguished by either monoconfessional or monoethnic traditions; quite the opposite, Russian identity is being developed in a multicultural environment, bound by the intensification of migration flows, total ethnic self-determination. In such a situation, the revival of Orthodoxy as a spiritual basis of Russian identity does not seem possible (29).

Today, one of the vectors of the process of the search for spiritual integrators for Russian society consists in an appeal on some “higher” values which are often perceived as rather abstract. These values are mainly associated with “heroic” past of people, which in the absence of other integrators becomes “the only form of self-identification that is comprehensible to mass consciousness” (8).

In the context of the modern crisis of Russian identity, it is the history that “becomes a particular existential space in which a personality finds its identity, the essence of its existence, the basis for merger with community” (8). It is the view of the past that forms the view of the future explaining the essence of the ongoing processes to mass consciousness. This is due to the fact that the heroic past of the country appears to be more attractive than its present, which makes people look for spiritual support exclusively in chapters of Russian history.

The second vector is focused on the search for ideological basis for the construction of all-Russian identity. Assessing the state of modern ideological space of modern Russian society, researchers point out that it is “mosaic and fragmented, which is due to <…> the absence of social control mechanisms and formation of social interests, the marginalization of part of the community-minded population and the closeness of the elite in relation to the social well-being of the population” (38).

Iedical situation that has been formed in the country results from a deep disruption of internal social communication, construction of absolutely inconsistent and conflicting images of Russia.

It is important to emphasize that the present attempts at construction of Russian identity on the basis of the formulation of the common ideology are purely pragmatic in nature and are aimed either at legitimizing the existing political regime or at justifying the political ambitions of a particular personality or group.

In the process of construction of a new ideology, political actors appeal on historical events of national history, highlighting the necessary key points and at the same time giving their assessments of particular historical events. In other words, historical events are selectively used in the process of the well-targeted construction of Russian identity, having both positive and negative effects on development of the community. Such insinuations are analyzed in academic literature in the terms “chosen common trauma” and “chosen common glory” (37).
This activity results in the “simultaneous existence of several different real historical events of national history, sometimes antagonistic in their assessments, having their own periodization, their own heroes and enemies, and, as a result, their own view of the patterns of historical development of modern Russia” (8).

The purposeful activities of the institutes that are responsible for the processes of socialization of the younger generation, for the “return” of historical images and symbols that make it possible to create a comprehensive view of the national history as both heroic and dramatic process, “in which a modern person can find substantiation and justification for their own existence both as a personality and as a citizen”, into mass consciousness, into consciousness of young people, seems to be the most constructive in the formation of the unified system of spiritual values which are able to consolidate Russian society (8).

The implementation of this vector is possible only through the joint efforts of academic community and political leaders of the country. The construction of Russian identity should become the primary objective of state historical politics of which should be implemented in concert with the state youth policy. Researchers point out that “the competent youth policy making, management of youth outreach, education of civic consciousness and patriotism as integral personal qualities through the medium of educational institutions and media can only be effective when it is based on the comprehension of peculiarities of mindset of modern young people, specific character of their attitude towards themselves and towards others” (26).

At the same time, in our opinion, there is a need to develop civic culture, which, according to the classical authors of the modern political ideas, is able to “unite modernity with tradition” (2). Civic culture is “an organic unity of political, legal, moral, aesthetic and cultural values which serve as a basis for the person's perception of civil rights and obligations to the society and the state, forming a cultural image of a citizen together with other traits” (20). From this perspective, civic culture includes political and legal knowledge as well as moral values (duty, responsibility, dignity, conscience, patriotism, humanity) which are used as a basis for building up the relationship between a person, society, and state. The formation of a personality with a legal political competency and moral responsibility, realizing its affiliation with a particular society and state, is only possible in the space of civic culture.

In addition, one should breathe new life into such value of Russian culture as justice, not only in theory, but also in practice. We can agree with the authors' position that “justice as a reference point of politics and life implies not only equality in a number of economic and legal matters, but also a worthy reward for feats, and punishment for crimes. Honesty of the judicial system, elaborated and adequate law, the presence of means of social mobility for the hard-working and talented. If justice serves as a real value which is followed by power, then everyone will consider it their duty to display this quality in those situations about which they must estimate” (41).

The living standards or the well-being, both material and social, of Russian citizens, can become yet another value that is able to consolidate our society. Even Aristotle wrote that happiness cannot exist without economic security. It is likely that wellbeing is not a particular value for the population of economically developed countries, but for Russia which met with a number of political and economic disasters in the XX century, the quality of life and the living standards of people should become the most important value and problem.

At present, there is a growing comprehension of the fact that the idea of social well-being is a universal panhuman value that is “inseparable from the life-purpose orientations of every person who always wants to live peacefully, safely and happily. It is really ensured by the social orientation of the economy and politics of the state, the observance of the rights and freedoms of citizens, fundamental change of attitude towards the social sphere of society, all its social structures, material and spiritual well-being of the popular majority” (25).

4 Discussion

There is no understanding of the modern split of Russian identity outside the context of social trauma and sociocultural crisis caused by the processes of post-Soviet transformations which had a negative impact on all spheres of Russian society. In this respect, the concepts of “social trauma” (32) and “sociocultural crisis” (8) seem to be the most effective for the comprehension of the causes for the upset of a unique identity of Russia.

According to P. Sztołmpka (2001), social traumas caused by negative consequences of social transformations destroy collectively shared senses and symbols and radicalize local identities, provoking the outbursts of intergroup hatred, conflicts and wars (Sztompka, 2001). This creates an extensive space for the growth of separatist and nationalistic sentiment posing a threat to the integrity of the state (32).

Sociocultural crisis of the society is manifested in the deformation and devaluation of the former system of values, norms, traditions, beliefs, that is, in the destruction of the former national cultural identity and ambiguity of the present national cultural identity. Researchers describe this situation as “identity crisis” which is manifested in the “destructive tendency towards the breakdown of axiological, conceptual and symbolical foundation of social relations, accompanied with the appearance of a variety of substitutional identities” (9). This “substitution” results in the territorial fragmentation of the Russian political and cultural space.

A number of authors place an emphasis on both the processes of “deglorification of Russian history from within” which have begun in the 90s, and “the challenge of national histories from outside destroying traditional beliefs and confessions of the Russians” as possible causes of the collapse of unique national state identity of the country (42).

A unique situation has developed at present: the existence of a state the population of which is characterized by fuzzy identity. Researchers point out that “most people of the country recognize themselves as citizens of Russia at the level of political and ideological constructs, whereas identification is fairly irregular-shaped and multivariate at the level of everyday mass consciousness” (1). This is due to the contradictory nature of the processes occurring in society. In addition, the violation of the unified national identity is due to a deep social stratification of Russian society, not only for economic but also for other reasons: ideological, political, generational, regional.

Recently, the discourse on the national state dimension of Russian identity has gained wide popularity. A number of
researchers define national state identity as “a result of construction” of sociopolitical senses and their internalization into social consciousness” (4). Within this meaning, the national identity is constructed purely within the scope of such political institution as a state that fully commands all the resources for the consolidation of society on the ground of common goals, interests or values.

Certain researchers emphasize the significance of historical memory in the construction of national state identity which shall mean “a set of visions of the past of political community, of historical events which are important for citizens and for their perception of their own political solidarity which mainly serves as an object of construction carried out by political and intellectual elites” (34).

At the same time, researchers point out that “in the process of implementation of the projects of national construction in Russia, it has become clear that the national identity results not only from its construction by the subjects with nominal power, but also from sociocultural inclination of individuals towards perception of imposed views of imagined communities as a basis of this identity” (23). Within the scope of this approach, identity which forms national self-consciousness is intrinsically associated with national history and culture of the people.

In addition, some authors point out that it is the “civil identity based on the identification of an individual with their fellow citizens, responsibility for the fortunes of a country” that serves as the basis for the formation of a stable national solidarity in Russian society (30).

5 Conclusions

Particular attention to the problem of construction of the Russian identity is due to serious challenges of the modern era, which include the preservation of national sovereignty and integrity of the country, provision of its spiritual security, overcoming prolonged crisis state of the Russian economy, formation of new political and civil institutions in society. The comprehension of the fact that development of the country is only possible on the basis of a clear collective vision of one’s past, present and future, it actualizes the search for spiritual integrators capable of becoming a powerful resource for the consolidation of modern Russian society.

It appears that the modern system of spiritual values which are able to consolidate Russian society must be primarily based on the values of civic consciousness, justice and well-being of the population. Moreover, not only a look back on the country's heroic past, but also a pride for the present as well as a clear view of the future should become the basis for the construction of modern Russian identity in its national state dimension.

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