

**«WEST – EAST» OPPOSITION IN RUSSIAN LITERATURE AND
PHILOSOPHY OF 1830–1850S: SEARCH FOR CIVILIZATIONAL
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Abstract: The article is devoted to the problem of determining the basic parameters of the cultural and civilizational identity of the Russian national character (the “Russian soul”) on the basis of literature and philosophy of the 30–50s of the 19th century. This period was not chosen by chance: in it, with the greatest strength and clarity, the leading trends in the development of Russian social (socio-philosophical) thought were identified, which had a direct and indirect influence on the literary process of the 19th century. In this transitional era, for certain reasons, objective conditions were created for the development of cornerstone ideological programs that became the subject of intellectual polemics, sometimes sharp

and fierce, in subsequent times and which have not lost their relevance until now, as can be judged by modern book production, developing at the philosophical level, the most important questions of the future of Russia as a civilizational “mainland”, and on those very topical discussions that are conducted in the media space (television, no). One of the vivid exponents of this dispute was Petr Chaadaev, whose views on the cultural and civilizational identity of Russia were distinguished by a deep originality, which was in contrast with the official world outlook trends of the era. In the 1830–1850s, a discussion arose between “Slavophiles” and “Westerners”, which was also conducted on the pages of fiction. Due to this, a

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deprived of monolithic, rather contradictory picture of the perception of the West and the East as civilizational landmarks of the “Russian soul” has developed in the Russian consciousness. So, the East acted not only as a standard of high and refined culture, a role model, but also as a synonym for ignorance and inertness – all that is recorded in the capacious word meaning “Asian”. In the same way, the West was both a model of enlightenment and technocratic progress, and a kind of form of spiritual dependence associated with the decay and decay of the national. Such judgments were characteristic not only of the Russian society of the 1830–1850ss. In one form or another, they met in previous periods of Russian history, and in those countries of the world where the modernization process was coupled with the westernization of the cultural environment.

Keywords: West, East, Russia, Russian literature, Russian philosophy, cultural paradigm, civilizational identity.

Introduction

In the 1830–1850s, Russia was trying to identify itself civilizationally, that is, to determine the essence and

401
purpose of its own model of cultural and civilizational development. A significant event of this was, in particular, the famous “Philosophical Writing” of P.Ya. Chaadaev, published in 1836 in the journal “Telescope”, which stated the isolation of Russia from world civilizations. (Note that implicit love for Russia, pain for her and faith in her great future, which were then openly expressed in his Apology of a Madman) were implicitly present in this letter. Chaadaev’s challenge, thereby, helped to take shape and dissociate itself in three main areas of Russian social thought: 1) Westernism, 2) Slavophilism, and 3) So-called “official nation” (a doctrine that was popular in government circles).

The main ideologists of the concept of “official nationality” were S.S. Uvarov, S.P. Shevyrev, M.P. Pogodin. The concept of this direction expressed by S.S. Uvarov, the Minister of Education, in the formula “Autocracy – Orthodoxy – Nationality” proved to be stable. Moreover, it remained in service with the authorities throughout the nineteenth century, being especially in demand during the years of reaction. In the program article “Russian View on the Modern Education of Europe” by S.P.

Shevryev we read: “The West and Russia are facing each other! Will he captivate us in his worldwide aspiration?.. Or will we resist our identity?” (Shevryev, 1841).

However, the main nerve of the era, which gave a unique flavor to the 1830-1850s, was the confrontation between the Slavophiles and the Westerners, who, in general, especially at first, each in their own way, in their own worldview, opposed the Uvarov ideology of the “official nation”. Undoubtedly, both Westerners and Slavophiles were the Russian intellectual and spiritual elite of the 30–50s of the 19th century. Both those and others loved Russia, and those, and others were formed on the European ideas. However, they set priorities differently. “Slavophilism,” – is the first attempt of our self-consciousness, the first independent ideology. For a millennium, Russian existence continued, but Russian self-consciousness begins from the time when Ivan Kireevsky and Alexei Khomyakov boldly raised the question of what Russia is, what its essence is, its ... place in the world”. At the same time, he further noted, the Chaadayev westernism “was as much a

national feat as the Slavophilism of Kireevsky and Khomyakov”.

N.A. Berdyaev, in addition, believed that the central interest of all Slavophil thought was the problem of East and West, that it was around this problem that the Slavophil philosophy of history was created. However, it should be said that this problem itself has been known for a long time, since the time of the Greek historian Herodotus. It is not something new in broad and principled coverage, but it would be all the more important and interesting to understand what meanings the figures of these social and literary movements put into the cornerstone for national identification dichotomy; in other words, in what light did they interpret the images and concepts of the West and the East – not only geographical, but also cultural-historical, socio-political, civilizational-worldview poles.

There is no need to specifically explain how topical this problem is today – both for Russia and for those many countries of the world in which modernization processes included such an element as the westernization of spiritual life, which provoked the emergence of urgent, not at all abstract

questions about the status of national culture, about the right, the organic correlation of “one's own” and “another's”, about the ways of harmonious development, ensuring the preservation of centuries-old traditions with a powerful technological breakthrough, which is associated with the concept of modernity.

Methods

The fundamental research method was a system-integrated approach. He combines several “tricks”. Three of them have the greatest value:

- 1) historical and literary,
- 2) structural and semantic,
- 3) hermeneutic.

The content of the first method is that the study of a literary work involves, as far as possible, an understanding of a specific historical era. The era is made up of people, their reflection, often proceeding in the form of disputes on socially significant issues. As for the second method, its essence is reduced to taking into account the whole palette of intra-text relations. The text within its borders is conceived as a system of signs, a special model of

reality. The third method is based on the art of interpreting meanings. The starting point of hermeneutics is the process of understanding the “alien”. Understanding is not limited to rational sphere and logical operations. It allows the participation of intuitive aspects of consciousness. In every text there are many meanings, explicit and hidden, lying on the surface and hidden between the lines. The meaning of the statement is not only the meaning embedded in it by the author, but also what the interpreter was able to extract from it, that is, the researcher in our case.

We point out that the article takes into account the results of modern studies that used methodological developments close to us (Spirchagova et al., 2018; Ozerova & Bekmetov, 2018; Smirnova et al., 2016; Yuzmukhametova et al., 2018; Nigmatullina et al., 2017), as well as the classical works of Western Slavic literary scholars (Leatherbarrow & Offord, 2010; Hamburg & Poole, 2010; Pipes, 2007; Bova, 2015; Borenstein, 1996; Christoff, 2019).

Results And Discussion

P.Ya. Chaadaev in his Apology of a Madman stated: “The world was

originally divided into two parts – East and West, it is not only a geographical division, but also an order of things ..., two principles ..., two ideas embracing ... the life order of the human race. Concentrating, deepening, closing in on himself, the human mind was created in the East; scattering outside, radiating in all directions ... it develops in the West” (Chaadaev, 1989).

The East in the reception of the Russian person embodied, as it were, its two images. The first image coincides with the Chaadayev interpretation. This is contemplation, silence, deep and wise thought, outstanding discoveries, self-deepening, a peculiar, mysterious and significant understanding of the world, as well as oneself in this world, and, finally, these are the origins of human civilization. Such an East was associated primarily with the geographically distant India, China, Japan, Persia, and the Arab world. It is known that each of these countries founded its own civilization within the framework of the eastern worldview.

Another image of the East is savagery, backwardness, ignorance, aggressiveness, inertness – in a word, all that was called "Tatar" and "Asian". This

East was associated primarily with the Turkic and Mongolian ethnic groups that make up Russia, and Ottoman Turkey, which included the Slavic peoples of the Balkans. Here it is necessary to pay attention to the fact that the East–West opposition is not completely identical to the Asia-Europe opposition. The first opposition absorbs a philosophical understanding of a person, his life, while the second still dominates the everyday, somewhat mundane, civilizational correlation.

To which world did Russia belong, according to Russian intellectuals in the first half of the 19th century: to the West or East, Europe or Asia?

Representatives of the “official nationality” as the material we have examined, show that they completely dispensed with the concept of "East." Instead of the West-East opposition, they broadcast a new one: West–Russia, and it, of course, was filled with the corresponding ideological content. As V.A. writes Koshelev, the antithesis was built up: “rotten”, “selfish” West – “mighty”, “Orthodox” Russia (Koshelev, 1994).

By P.A. Chaadaev, Russia does not apply to either the West or the East. Another Westerner, V.G. Belinsky, argued that "Russia did not belong ... to Asia: it constituted ... a separate phenomenon; Tatars ... should have been akin to her with Asia; they succeeded ... with external ties to connect her with her ... but spiritually they could not, because Russia is a Christian power. Peter acted ... in the spirit of the people, bringing his fatherland closer to Europe and eradicating what the Tatars of temporarily Asian brought into it" (Belinsky, 1979). As can be seen from the above quote, the Russian critic actualized the opposition "Europe–Asia", and not "East–West", emphasizing the organic nature of the European choice made by Peter I.

I.S. Turgenev, who called himself an "incurable Westerner," insisted that Russia was a member of the "European family of peoples". L.V. Pumpyansky wrote that "Turgenev always thought that Russian people are (in his own words) homo europeans, ... that in order to influence world culture, Russian culture must take shape on ... the paths of world education" (Pumpyansky, 1940).

I.A. Goncharov was not a classic Westerner. In his views, he was a Westerner of a special warehouse. He was attracted by the domestic, technical side of Western civilization. Of course, I.A. Goncharov was sincere, declaring that he could not live outside Russia for long, but he loved to live and work in the West. "There orders are better, calmer ... living" he admitted to N.I. Barsov (Barsov, 1891). Most precisely, the character of Goncharovsky Westernism was described by D. Elagin: "He was ... a Westerner rather narrow. He was captivated by European civilization ... He liked the rational and active life of the West, ... there ... technical progress" (Elagin, 1892).

However, the antinomy of personality I.A. Goncharova was also recognized by his contemporaries: "According to ideas, according to mentality, he was a Westerner, and according to mentality and life, he was a native Russian" (Golovin, 1897).

Perhaps this is precisely what allowed him to become more acutely aware of the "split" of Russian consciousness. The concept of "fragmentation" is used here in accordance with the theory of S.

Huntington, who considers states “split” as “in which there is no agreement on the question of which civilization they belong to” (Huntington, 1993). “Internal schism” may be inherent in a single person. The author of *Oblomov* was sure that, despite the soreness of the European choice, Russia has no other way. The controversy “Western efficiency and progress – the Russian patriarchal idyllism” is the content of I.A. Goncharova.

It is clear that Westernism gravitated toward Europe. However, the Slavophiles did not attribute Russia to Asia. On the contrary, they did not hide sympathy for the West. A.S. Khomyakov in the poem “Dream” called the West “the country of holy miracles”; I.V. Kireevsky admitted: “To be frank, I still love the West ... I belong to him with my upbringing, ... with my controversial mentality” (Kireyevsky, 1911); K.S. Aksakov said: “I am free here, in this German element, ... of all nations, only one German can be so close” (Aksakova, 1898). Therefore, it is not surprising that the concept of Slavophilism is not without features of Eurocentrism. Everything in one way or another significant in their teachings correlated

with the West. In the opposition “East – West” among the Slavophiles, the first was understood to mean Russia, but this was, as V.A. put it Kosheleva, “East of Europe” (Koshelev, 1994), that is, the East belonging to Europe. The traditional East was of little interest to the Slavophiles; it seemed to have fallen out of the historical process, therefore Russia takes up the oppositional functions of the East in the antithesis of “East–West”. The West and the East divided, according to the Slavophiles, not so much geography as religious affiliation. The West embodied Catholic Protestant Christianity, and the East – Orthodox. There were, of course, other differences. However, the most fundamental is the difference in faith.

The ambivalence of the Slavophiles attitude towards the West was determined by another factor. The fact is that catch-up development, as a rule, determines the confrontation with the leading country.

Thus, the basis of the concept of Slavophilism, built on the correlation of Russia and the West, is objectively subject to the universal law of development of modernizing societies.

As for the East Asian beginning in Russia, it only slips in the remarks of the Slavophiles. So, I.S. Aksakov, who joined Slavophilism after the death of his brother, shared an observation in one of the letters: “I am also surprised at how little Russian people are wild about what is alien to themselves; and ... the Asian is less wild than the German”. And then the conclusion: “The East ... is more akin to us than the West” (Aksakov, 1988). However, within the framework of Slavophilism, these trends did not find development, although later they led to the emergence of Eurasianism as a stream of thought.

True, there is another aspect of the problem. N.M. Zernov in lectures about A.S. Khomyakov wrote: “Russia as a state entity is much closer to India, China and the countries of Islam than to modern Western states” (Zernov, 2010). It is known that A.S. Khomyakov, in comparison with the West, highly valued Indian civilization and the Chinese state, while Russian culture, in his opinion, was formed under the influence of East Iranian (Indian) education.

How to explain the apparent inattention to the East by the Slavophiles? Perhaps the fact that the

West was in the prime of its civilization, and therefore it was from him that a real threat to the national identity of the Russian person came.

Summary

Thus, there is a “split” of Russian consciousness in the mid-19th century. Both Slavophilism and Westernism have European origins. With some exceptions, for the Slavophiles and Westerners, the East is of little interest. In this case, self-identification, the choice of the path of development of Russia was decided in different ways. Westerners considered Russian Europeans, for various reasons, lagging behind in development, but this gap, with the right approach, can easily be closed. The Slavophiles perceived Russia as the “East of Europe” and were ready to confront it civilizationally.

Conclusions

It is noteworthy in the light of the foregoing that if, in the well-known concept of E. Said, “the East helped Europe (or the West) determine its own image by the principle of contrast” (Said, 1979), then for the Russian intellectuals of the mid-19th century the West,

Europe played such a role. Such a view is born in the process of analyzing the numerous philosophical, journalistic, epistolary and artistic statements of the Russian Westerners and Slavophiles of the 1830–1850ss.

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