

## POLICY OF CULTURAL-CIVILIZATIONAL TRADITIONALISM IN CULTURAL-HISTORICAL RETROSPECT

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### ABSTRACT

This study investigates the cultural-civilizational gap between traditionalism and modernization in Russian history, with a focus on how cultural-symbolic events during periods of crisis have influenced the nation's historical development. A multidisciplinary approach was used, combining historical analysis with cultural and philosophical perspectives. The study critically reviewed primary and secondary sources, including historical records and philosophical texts, to identify and analyze key cultural-symbolic events. The findings demonstrate that cultural-symbolic events have played a significant role in both preserving and transforming Russian cultural identity. The study concludes that traditional values continue to be a foundational element of Russian cultural identity. The proposed cultural-symbolic event model offers a new methodological framework for analyzing the continuity and change in Russia's cultural and civilizational development.

**Keywords:** Cultural tradition; Cultural modernization; Cultural civilization; Event; Cultural symbolism.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

The problem of cultural-civilizational traditionalism has never been deemed completely resolved. Moreover, in the form of the discourse of traditional values, it has recently acquired less of a scientific but rather ideological and propagandistic relevance. Therefore, when addressing the comprehension of traditionalism in the history of Russia (or the history of traditionalist Russia), it is important to understand



both the concepts used (traditionalism, modernity, etc.) and the phenomena that require appropriate understanding.

First of all, it is essential to outline what is understood by "the history of traditionalist Russia" and "traditionalism", which, according to the negative logical principle (apophatic logic), oppose modernization and modernity. The dichotomy "traditionalism – modernization" itself is abstract, not a product of a concrete-historical and concrete-abstract understanding of the essence of culture and the history of man and humanity. This primitive approach rejects cultural-historical complexity (especially in relation to the history of Russia). It simplifies the cultural-civilizational continuum of history, denying the existence of the diversity of different "traditionalisms" in history. It was formed in the dogmatic Eurocentric socio-humanitarian and philosophical discourse, which we justifiably criticized at some point (Ebrahimi et al., 2024).

"The next thing to note about the use of the concepts of traditionalism and modernization, which are currently quite trendy in Russia, is their genetic kinship with the Marxist concepts of primary and secondary formation, disguised under the terminology of cultural-civilizational methodologies or post-industrialist theories. Thus, quite often the dichotomy of 'traditionalism – modernization' undergoes an inversion and turns into the no less abstract scheme of 'East – West', which has effectively become an ideologeme in Western European culture. In this case, both the ancient forms of traditional society and the traditional Western European civilization (medieval) fall into the category of 'Western'" (Rimskiy, 1998, p. 25).

The approach proposed by M.K. Petrov is criticized for its abstractness. The scholar asserts that when "modernization" is substituted for "Europeanness" and identified with it, ancient, Greco-Roman cultural and civilizational systems, the medieval Catholic civilization, and the transitional revival are declared European as allegedly direct "parents" and "forerunners" of Western European culture and civilization. "Historical progress was not a linear process, yielding slow, explosive, and dead-end forms of development".

So far, the division of tradition vs. modernization implies or explicitly postulates another antinomy – developed vs. undeveloped (developed vs. developing countries, as a propaganda cliché). In his early days, Petrov (1973) noted, "If developedness is exhausted by the date of birth and everything arising later is bound to be more developed, then the European universal-conceptual type was and remains undoubtedly more developed. However, if development is determined by other criteria,



for example, by a society's ability to store and pass on a certain amount of knowledge and skills to the next generations, the situation changes. Until the 17th-18th centuries, before the first technological applications of science, the top stage of development was occupied by countries with traditional cultures" (p. 60). Petrov (1991, pp. 126-144), intuitively feeling his paradox in the trap of opposing "Europeanness" to the traditionalist type of culture, considered Western European culture and civilization (Modern) as a cultural and historical anomaly, that is, virtually a historical deviation on the natural traditionalist path of humanity's development.

What then characterizes modernization and the Modern itself as a cultural-civilizational type? How can it be labeled chronologically? There emerge scientific, automatic technologies, impersonal and unstable, relying on a contractual ritual, a universal conceptual sociocode, and science as an institution of renewal. One paradox should be noted here, which leads to different moral-ideological – pessimistic-critical and optimistic-apologetic – assessments of capitalist industrial civilization. This paradox lies in the fact that industrial civilization grows out of the preconditions accumulated by the entire course of development of traditional civilizations and cultures but simultaneously leads to a nihilistic negation of the very spirit of traditionalism itself (Rimskiy, 1998, pp. 35-36).

Thus, not only such obvious historical facts as the industrial mode of production and science, but also capitalism with the corresponding centralized state, with their rationalism, contractual ritual, and representative democracy should be added here as a marker. All this emerges predominantly only at the turn of the 16th and 17th centuries.

In an earlier paper, we proposed that "civilization can be defined as a holistic formation, whose universal basis is specific-historical forms of technology embodied through sociocodes, the institutions of tradition (family, religion, state), and the institutions of renewal, social memory and the forms of rationality, semiotic forms, and human beings in specific types of rituals and communication" (Ignatova & Rimskiy, 2012, p. 39). Everywhere, in all cultures and civilizations, we find something common (albeit abstractly common) that unites them: it is the presence of the institutions of tradition (family, religion, and the state) and the institutions of renewal (innovation).

The development of the family in Russian history is a process that reflects changes in the socio-cultural, economic, and political spheres over the centuries. The



Russian family had to go through many trials and tribulations, such as transformations reflecting the dynamics of social relations and values.

This gave us the grounds to argue that modernity itself, as a "civilization of time", which appropriated the cultural (and not only) capital of previous civilizations and cultural epochs, was itself developing its own traditionalism, the traditionalism of modernity (Rimskiy & Oleshchenko, 2023).

How can we overcome such a complex cultural-civilizational continuum when in real history we encounter not only a variety of "traditionalisms" but also modern traditionalism and a variety of "modernities"? This complexity is especially acute when we attempt to comprehend the traditionalism of Russian history and the transformation of the traditional cultural-civilizational system into the forms of modernity. We once argued that "these complex formative processes cannot be explained by the simple opposition of 'traditionalism – modernization' or the recognition of the Russian type of 'marginal civilization' with its constant 'socio-cultural split' (A.C. Akhiezer) or waves of 'reformation – counter-reformation' (A.L. Ianov)" (Rimskiy, 1998, p. 25). For this reason, we propose another methodological model of cultural-civilizational diversity – the cultural-symbolic event model.

## 2. METHODS

We employed a multidisciplinary approach to analyze the cultural-civilizational gap between traditionalism and modernization in Russian history. The research methodology combined historical analysis with cultural and philosophical inquiry. A critical review of primary and secondary historical sources, including chronicles, philosophical texts, and cultural studies, formed the basis of the investigation. The analysis focused on identifying and interpreting cultural-symbolic events that have shaped Russia's historical development, particularly during periods of crisis.

To conceptualize the dichotomy between traditionalism and modernization, the study critiques existing Eurocentric discourses and applies a culturally sensitive lens to the Russian context. This involves a comparative analysis of different forms of traditionalism within Russia and their interactions with external influences, such as Byzantine and Scandinavian traditions. The research also incorporates a philosophical exploration of key concepts, drawing on the works of M.K. Petrov, D.S. Likhachev, and M. Heidegger, to develop a nuanced understanding of cultural-symbolic events and their impact on Russian history.



### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Traditional Russian culture originated over 1,000 years ago on the vast expanse of the East European Plain and its multinational soil. Its main feature, as Likhachev points out, is the powerful influence of two cultures that did not merge completely: the Byzantine Empire and Scandinavia. The Byzantine Empire passed on to Russia its spiritual traditions, Orthodoxy, while Scandinavia gave its military-political tradition. According to Likhachev, the spiritual component of Russian culture dominated over the state component.

The historically established spiritual and moral values, such as family, humanism, and love for the homeland, are the foundation of Russian culture, and we believe they remain relevant in modern realities. Without traditional basic meanings, spiritual and moral values, and traditions of Russian culture, further sustainable development of the Russian state and society would be problematic (Petrov, 1973, 1992). In our view, traditions and traditional Russian culture can become the basis for a national idea.

Our study presupposes the fixation of the main cultural-symbolic "Events" that are different from the changeable "river of phenomena" in the processual evolution of mankind and introduce discrete system-structural ruptures into the historical continuum.

The concept of the Event (Ereignis) was introduced into a purely philosophical context by Heidegger in his temporal ontology. Terminologically, it is both the Event, Co-existence, Fore-existence, etc., emphasizing the historicity of being (its special time) and the timeless ontology of this phenomenon, captured conceptually (Heidegger, 2003).

Conceptually, the Event can also be found in psychoanalysis, in historical science (the Annales school – a crisis-based division of the civilizational temporal dimension of the "big time" in history), semiotics (Iu.M Lotman and others), and postmodernism, which largely evolved from Heidegger's mythologizing philosophy (Heidegger, 2023; Podoroga, 2010).

The Russian adherent of the latter, V.A. Podoroga (2010), defines this concept as follows: "Any phenomenon can be called the event, which, when it takes place, is individualized in its unique and inimitable essence and even acquires its name. The excessive power of the event is realized in an unlimited number of versions, each of



which is true but not complementary to the other. The event realizes itself (actualizes itself) in a multitude of interpretations, none of which takes precedence over the other. The event lasts and is unable to end as long as this swarm of interpretations persists" (p. 583). The special temporality of the Event is also utilized in our work as we present our interpretation of this concept.

Cultural-symbolic Events have a unique novelty and simultaneously are universal, yet personified (personally singular), receive the nominal names of historical or mythological (bylinic) personalities, or become historical characters like the Time of Troubles.

The Event history of Rus begins with the calling of the Varangians, the original cultural-symbolic Event. Without diving into polemics about the Varangian hypothesis, we shall only note that the Varangians most likely were not an ethnic group but a military class, a *druzhina* headed by a prince. The calling became a cultural-symbolic Event, although from the standpoint of modern science, there are some doubts about the interpretation of historical facts.

The baptism of Princess Olga became a symbolic preparation for the main cultural-symbolic Event in the history of Rus: Prince Vladimir's baptism of the land of Russia. In the Russian Primary Chronicle, we see the formation of the hagiographic canon in the literature of ancient Rus within the genre of chronicles, which would then prevail in many written texts (Adrianova-Peretts, 1996).

The fate of Prince Vladimir unfolds in the paradigm of his mother's fate: mythical violence is replaced by pure violence that establishes a new, Christian Law (see the denial of the "old covenant" Jewish law in the Sermon on Law and Grace by metropolitan Hilarion). This fact makes the Event. The values are represented in the cultural heritage, in the traditional culture of peoples. In the conglomeration of numerous forms of creativity that make up culture, of great importance are literary monuments, which most fully reflect national ideals. For example, the fairy tale as the most famous artistic form of folk art from the very moment of its inception becomes a means of education and the transmission of national values. Russian folk tales have preserved in their core and broadcast love for family, relatives, fatherland, and nature and the value of mutual aid, diligence, justice, kindness, mercy, courage, and many other qualities.

Today, the trend of traditionalism is characteristic not only of Russia. Scholars believe this to be a natural response to the cultural expansion of universal Western



values. Traditional culture helps to renew socially significant experiences. Culture without tradition does not exist, it contributes to the self-identification of individuals and communities, accumulating cultural energy for further development (Rimskiy, 2017).

Traditional culture, as noted by L.Iu. Yegle, is understood differently today, with such terms as "traditional", "folklore", "archaic", "peasant", and "everyday" culture being used interchangeably. Traditional culture is defined depending on the interpretation of the concept of tradition. We understand traditional culture as the culture that reveals the traditional values of the people, a meaningful collection of cultural texts, folklore, folk art, and all that is indigenous.

The subjugation of Rus by the Golden Horde and the agreement to pay varying tributes also became an Event of military-political and economic violence. It received the cultural-symbolic status of the Mongol-Tatar yoke more so in science since the 19th century than in real history itself. Whether this yoke itself was an Event in the self-consciousness of that epoch of the 12th-19th centuries or a typical feudal, military-political, and economic symbiosis of suzerain and vassal relations is a big question, which was raised by L.N. Gumilev and not rejected by Western historians (Fennell, 1989; Gumilev, 2008).

The most representative example of a cultural-symbolic Event in the history of traditionalist Russia was the *Smuta* (or the Time of Troubles) of the 16th-17th centuries, which acquired a cultural-symbolic status and in its archetypes still carries the meanings of civilizational ruptures, uncontrollable chaos, and extremism of cultural actors. These are specifically anonymous actors rather than conscious and self-conscious subjects of cultural creativity and action. Many phenomena have been nominated as *smuta*: peasant uprisings and revolts, the Decembrist uprising and *Narodnichestvo* (troublemakers), revolutions and revolutionary extremism of the early 20th century, the collapse of the Soviet Union in the early 1990s, and the actions of radical New Liberals.

For a long time, traditional culture was considered archaic and primitive, with polar opinions about it. S.I. Levikova writes that the notion that "belonging to Russian culture must necessarily be expressed in something like wearing *kokoshniks* and *sarafans*, playing *balalaikas* and spoons, as well as in carved platbands on windows, matryoshka dolls, fist fights, three horses, and 'fun games with bears'" first emerged and was maintained since the time of disagreements between Westerners and Slavophiles or even earlier.



This understanding of traditional culture is limited because it is not reduced only to external attributes and rituals. As V.A. Kutyrev notes, it acquired a relatively positive connotation in the 20th century. Today, this approach has been overridden, and traditional culture is considered primarily as a way of preserving and transmitting value meanings, as a phenomenon linking the past and the present, contributing to the arrangement of human life space. Any culture provides a communicative space for the exchange of value meanings.

The Church Schism of the mid-17th century with an unprecedented upsurge of religious extremism similar to the European Reformation was a cultural and symbolic event that determined the end of traditionalist Russia in its "pure form" and its transition to the modernization of society. The spiritual schism of the Church, like the Reformation, as a conflict between Catholicism and Protestantism, was interconnected with socio-cultural schisms in the economic, state-political, and cultural structure of society. The first Russian emperor Peter I had to act in this cultural-civilizational gap and chronotope, pushing Russia down the path of secondary modernization.

## 4. CONCLUSIONS

Traditional values constitute the foundation of society's spiritual culture. Their preservation and transmission are crucial for the sustainable development of society and the state, which is recognized at the highest level and enshrined in legislation. Despite the fact that today the functions of traditions have somewhat withered, traditional values and traditional culture as their carrier continue to be moral guidelines for society.

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