

## Russian World View: Using the Cultural Experience of the East and the West

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**Abstract:** The author reflects on the prospects of the use of cultural experience of the East and the West in the outlook of citizens of modern Russia. The juxtaposition of the two types of culture is based on the fact that they determine man's place in the world and human origins in different ways. The Eastern tradition has overcome anthropomorphism inherent in the Western worldview. Man is seen as part of nature. Western culture is characterized by rationalism and individualism in a relationship with the world. A different type of thinking is cultivated by Eastern culture where non-rationalistic mechanisms of cognition dominate. Personality subordinates its interests to common interests. The author concludes that economism inherent in the Western world view has become all-pervasive in a modern life. This leads to tragic consequences, the growth of spiritual impoverishment, the alienation of people from each other and consumerism. That is why Russia needs a critical approach to Western tradition. The advantage of oriental culture according to the author is its role of incentive for personal self-improvement, besides it suggests a reverent relation to the national culture, nature and human. But this way is also unacceptable to Russia because of our inherent distinctive traditions and social experience. Russian philosophy of XIX - early XX centuries has absorbed all the best from the spiritual development of the West and the East. The author is confident that the policy of Russia in XXI century will be based on the world view that combined the best experience of two cultures.

**Key words:** Philosophical and cultural concept • Socio-cultural type • West • East • Anthropocentrism  
• Rationalism • Irrational and mystical approach • Cosmocentric views • Extrovert type of culture  
• Introvert type of culture • The idea of reincarnation • The non-rational mechanisms of cognition  
• Empathy • Passive contemplation • Rational and economic way of thinking • Total economism  
• Non-rational view of the world • Universal and organistic (holistic) thinking

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### INTRODUCTION

The division of the world into East and West, of course, is conditional and the least actual in terms of geography. This, first of all, has the philosophical and cultural nature and represents two fundamentally different worldviews and ways of cultural development. The basis for this division was largely the opposing paradigm underlying the West European and East Asian cultures. In its classic form the generalized socio-cultural type of the West was formed in the era of Modern times and was expressed in the global ideological orientations to strict anthropocentrism and rationalism. The standard of the eastern type of culture may be Ancient India (in particular, Buddhist religious and philosophical system very common in the East), which managed to formulate the cosmo-centric views and irrational and mystical approach to man, society, nature and the cosmos.

Carl Gustav Jung, studying the world view of the East and the West, came to the conclusion that these two centers of culture may be considered in terms of extroversion and introversion. Extrovert type of culture and human means "turning outside" and is aimed at transforming the world; introvert type, in contrast, is turned inwards. It is difficult to disagree with Jung: indeed, for centuries we have seen active and energetic character of the West, seeking to subjugate the world and to impose its own "rules of the game." In the East, the dominating principle is prohibition of a hierarchy of life elements: everything in the world is of equal worth and is one and indivisible space. When an eastern person is facing the contradictions between the self and the world around him, he is guided by the rule "change yourself."

The trend to a different perception of the world and to the definition of man's place in the system of being was formed in as far back as in ancient times and may be

clearly seen in the mythological consciousness of Eastern culture and the ancient world, which can be regarded as a forefather of modern Western civilization. Whereas the Vedic tradition rather quickly overcame the anthropomorphic ideas and personification of God, in the ancient culture both became the foundation of the world picture. While the Eastern world used complex transcendent concepts solving the question of the relationship between space and the individual soul, the ancient world created a pantheon of gods, like two peas in a pod, similar to humans. It is appropriate to remember the words of Voltaire: "God created man in his image and likeness and the man paid him the same."

The man in the eastern outlook has always remained a part of nature which is proved by the idea of reincarnation. The myths of the origin of man in the non-European countries emphasize the idea that people have nothing that would allow them to rise above nature, or to consider themselves as superior value. Moreover, for non-European mythology even some human dejection is typical: according to Egyptian mythology a man is born from the tears of Ra; in the ancient Indian version he arises from the remains of a dead human body of titan Purusha; and the Chinese mythology suggests that man evolved from vermin crawling over the body of the dead god Pangu. The ancient Greeks proclaimed that man is the result of purposeful activity of the gods and arose, neither more nor less, from the ashes of the titans.

As far back as in the first half of the XIX century Chaadayev and, after him, theorists of Slavophilism saw and theoretically thought over the fact that the civilizations of East and West perceive and learn the world in different ways. Since the era of Modern times, Western civilization has been built on the principles of rationalism, which leads to individualistic bias in the questions of relationship between man and the world [1, 2 and 3]. Hence there is the peculiar hierarchy of values, where the supreme is the individual's being. Hence there is the dynamic and agile character of Western society that allowed achieving unprecedented success in science, technology and production.

In the East, non-rational mechanisms of cognition and perception of the world prevail. Based on these mechanisms the distinctive oriental culture was created. Here individuality is absorbed by the universe and the person's being is focused on the subordination to the interests of the whole - the community, the state, the macrocosm. Eastern worldview rests on other categories: knowledge is often opposed to understanding, learning – to empathy, active thinking – to passive contemplation and reflection – to experience.

Two ways of thinking are two cultures, in many ways the polar opposite. Russia, however, according to Slavophiles, is no stranger either to the West or to the East and therefore is able to accumulate all that is valuable in these two so dissimilar civilizations. Hence, Slavophiles concluded about a special place of Russia in historical process and its special way of socio-political development.

Analyzing the contemporary spiritual life, we can say that today, the political, legal and interpersonal relations are based on a comprehensive implementation of the rational and economic way of thinking. But, strictly speaking, the so-called "economic thinking" has already gained the upper hand not only in politics, but also at all levels of the spiritual life of mankind. According to the principle of mutual benefit the states implement their foreign and domestic policies. Countries of the former Union focus on the priority of economic interest. Even in the sphere of interpersonal relationships this principle from the category of necessity is steadily turning into a dominating one. By itself, economic thinking, of course, is not something sinful. On the contrary, as a result of centuries-old practice, it is the greatest product of the rationalistic mind and as a regulator of social relations, of course, carries a tremendous constructive charge. The trouble is not that economism has entrenched in our minds. The trouble is that economism having penetrated in our consciousness has become total. In theory, the economic way of thinking is just one of the ways of thinking in general and, therefore, is nothing more than a manifestation of the "abstract principles". And any abstract principle, raised to the absolute, because of its hypertrophy is inevitably doomed to self-denial. In practice, such a self-negation is observed even today and it becomes quite clear that the civilization of the XXI century will either exist on different foundations, or will not exist at all.

The history of the twentieth century has taught mankind a vivid and tragic lesson: as long as the mind is based on the principles of absolute rationalism, comprehension and creation of an essential part of the spiritual life and hence, the main representative of the spiritual principle – man, inevitably falls out of the functions of policy. On the basis of economic rationalism it is possible to build the economic world or the law-governed state, but never – the moral or perfect one. For it is already a sphere beyond rational.

**The Question Arises:** what alternative can be offered by the ideas of Slavophiles? Is it to push the thinking on the path of irrationalism and to give the policy to the power of

emotions, intuition and religious mysticism? Is it worth abandoning the proven logic of Western civilization while solving the most important political issues?

Of course, without logic and common sense can be neither thinking nor any activity at all. Call for irrationalism as a way of doing politics would be the height of folly. It is a different question: you can not build a policy on the basis of total rationalism, on the basis of absolute rule of logic and the notorious "common sense." According to Odoevskiy, "Sooner or later the experience will make people abandon the strange phantom, called reason, understanding and so on; people began to notice that as imperfect word, syllogism is nothing but the killing of thought; one is no longer able to play the toy, which amused the ancient Sophists and scholastics; and he feels that behind syllogism there is something else that neither satisfies the human soul, nor fills it" [4, p. 81]. N. Berdyaev asks, "How do we know that the truth can always be proved and the lie can always be refuted? Perhaps lie is far more demonstrative than truth. Evidence is one of the temptations which shields us from the truth" [5, p. 83]. And in fact, fascism had not only its own ideology, but also its own logic, to some extent very compelling. Stalin's repressions and concentration camps were also in their own way a very logical embodiment of the "scientific" theory of amplification of the class struggle. But morality, on the contrary, cannot be understood solely by means of logic; the rationalized ethics inevitably degenerates into law, which, as the experience of social and political life shows, is an imperfect regulator of interpersonal and international relations.

**The Scripture Says:** "Thou shalt not kill," "Thou shalt not steal." Few people take the responsibility to refute these commandments. But when the rational mind approaches the issue, it turns out that killing and stealing is not only possible, but necessary, if required by some higher, well-established target. Similar situation occurs with aesthetic values: the rationalized art turns into such ugly phenomena as social realism, social art and conceptualism and, ultimately, leads to the collapse of the ideals, taste, to the realm of disharmony.

We must frankly admit that the important moments of people's existence have the meaning beyond rational. And ignoring them today has become the cause of a number of global crises. After all, a policy based on rational and economic way of thinking, turns not only individuals, but the entire countries and continents into parasitically minded consumers. One and a half centuries ago, Duke V.F. Odoevskiy warned mankind: "Just financial

education, the formation of one mind, one calculation, without any regard to the instinctual (i.e. non-conscious, non-rational - auth.), involuntary impulse of the heart, in short, a science without religious feelings of love can achieve the highest degree of development. But having developed in a selfish direction, constantly meeting the needs of the people, anticipating all their physical desires, it will deprave the person and the flesh will master the spirit..." [6, p. 70]. Ecology, global security, the "third world" countries, in short, the whole mankind are sacrificed to calculation (or progress).

The economic way of thinking is a kind of the result of keen rationalism. And this approach to understanding and creation of reality will inevitably lead to ignorance of the whole layers of the spiritual life of people. Since the policy has played a huge role in the organization of social life and can have a direct influence on the spiritual climate of the society, the right choice of a certain style of political thinking is especially important. Incomplete, one-sided analysis of the actual processes and political program created on its basis is fraught with unpredictable and often irreversible consequences. Economic rationalism, like any total rationalism, has never led to the desired objectives, whatever the strong reasoning was behind it. All the time it was like turned inside out, bringing the policy of "common sense" to the obvious absurdity. And there are plenty of such examples in history.

The lecture "The Spiritual Crisis of the Russian Intelligentsia" more clearly expressed the reason for degradation of our morals: it is an imitation of the West and adulation. I.A. Ilyin noted: "This crisis has been brewing for a long time; it was born in the early XIX century, when the Jacobin revolution in France produced some ideological seeds and a great European war with Napoleon scattered them across Europe and Russia; and when the Russian intelligentsia in dialogue with Europe breathed in the air of Rousseau and Voltaire, Byron and Parny, so that, having accepted their charge, they could then help the left Hegelians, Hugo and Louis Blanc, Lassalle, Marx and Engels. And... we imitated and idolized until one half of us was slaughtered and the other was forced to dance around the golden calf of communism..." [7, p. 42].

We have witnessed at first glance paradoxical phenomenon. The theory of the communist transformation of society has been developed. On its humanistic orientation there is nothing equal. It accepted a man, his spiritual and physical perfection as the main objective and at the same time the value. More than one thousand volumes were written in support of this theory

and its logical consistency. In practice, however, this theory has cost millions crippled destinies, has led to the complete degradation of both spiritual and material life of the people, to a burst of unprecedented cruelty and to the disappearance of the person. And it seems that the problem is not a logical fault and not the original "depravity" of Marxist ideology. Indeed, the currently observed crisis does not fit into the framework of a particular social system. Even in places where the level of life is high and where everything seems to be done to human well-being, even there the degree of alienation of individuals has become alarming, the number of suicides is increasing, general state of depression and loneliness have become a norm and moral nihilism has reappeared. There is a world process of impoverishment of the spirit.

However, it would be wrong to assume that the modern world has been steadily moving towards its collapse and it is absolutely inappropriate to fill the historical process with eschatological content. Western civilization is doomed only so far as it is a purely economic civilization.

Structure of the Russian soul, according to N. Berdyaev, "contains the polar poles and holds in the middle with difficulty" [8, p. 108]. He denied the Russian people of the ability to think rationally, talked about the sharp antipathy of Russian spiritual type to formalism and legal approach in culture, to authority in religious life, to rational basis in thinking, to the predominance of external organization over internal organic life. That is why Western culture is alien to the Russian people.

But who said that the Western way of development is the only possible way? We have just had a look at the West and now it is very time to look at the East.

Eastern culture in general is based on the non-rational view of the world and a man of this culture has always been alien to the one-sided rationalization and even more so, economization of thinking as its extreme manifestation. At that we should bear in mind the close unity of material and spiritual sides of the human psyche. In this context, the following statements of Erich Fromm are very true: "If a man was merely a disembodied intelligence, he would have achieved his goal of having at his disposal a vast system of thought. But since it is a unity of mind and body, he must respond to the dichotomy of existence, not only by thought, but by the whole process of life, feelings and actions. Therefore, each satisfactory orientation system includes not only intellectual elements, but also elements of the senses and perception, which are shown in relation to the object of devotion" [9, p. 482].

At any contradiction between the individual and his environment, eastern philosophy gave unequivocal advice: change yourself. Such a principle, cultivated for centuries, of course, raised the public's sense of social passivity. But not only passivity. It gave a huge incentive for self-improvement, for a disinterested attitude to nature, society and people. While Western rationalist science was building the capacity of knowledge, Eastern culture has learned to understand the world. While the West was going to the "post-industrial society", sweeping away everything on its way, the East carefully and patiently listened to the existence, trying to understand its meaning at non-rational level. As a result, at appearance of an urgent need to transform the economic structure of society, the East was able, without going through a long and torturous Western way, to achieve fantastic results. It is no accident that the economic breakthrough became possible precisely in Japan, China, Taiwan, Korea, that is, in the countries with non-traditional outlook. Careful preservation and multiplication of irrational non-economized ways of development of the world has allowed the East to benefit from the development of the world civilization without the horrendous costs, which would be inevitable in the case of a simple duplication of the Western model. Japan, for example, did not set the task to lift its economy at any cost, by any means (as it was in Europe, or, say, as it happens in our country). And in the end, the phenomenal growth of material well-being takes place here on the background of reverential attitude to the national culture, nature and man. The trend towards dehumanization in culture has wonderfully intertwined with the birth of a society of true humanism.

However, we should not idealize the eastern world and raise it to the power of unquestionable authority. It is also unacceptable to us as an ideal or a model of potential development of Russia for the simple reason that we have our own unique culture, tradition and finally, the experience of social order. And the ideology of suppression of the individual principle in the name of the whole for a Russian man is a moral death (that is evidenced by all the "Soviet" period of our history.) The phenomenon of the eastern breakthrough in the economy is worth considering not to replace the cult of the West with the cult of the East. The above example is only a clear confirmation of the idea that the Western path of development may have an alternative; that the economization of thought is though straight, but not the best road to a healthy economy; that the non-rational means of the world development have constructive elements; and that, finally, respect for the own culture and

Careful study of the foreign experience can sometimes prove to be more productive than the mindless copying of other people's schemes.

Knowledge is not only the possession of information on the origin, rise and fall of a civilization, but also the ability to use it. To know means to own [10].

In fact, what can we expect in the future, if we still focus on the West and, therefore, continue to economize our thinking? Obviously, in this case, we condemn ourselves to a long and painful road, not escaping the further exacerbation of society; and moral and aesthetic values will remain in the background for a long time. The distance between us and the West will inevitably continue and therefore, any competition with the West on a purely economic basis would be meaningless. We take a risk of entering into the XXI century as an economic power in which different cultural values will be dominating. We risk remaining the embodiment of the past for a long time.

I.A. Ilyin argued that the crisis of Russian culture in the XX century is deeper than the crisis in the domestic economy and politics, as it affects the fundamental basis of our spirituality. However, he said with surprising optimism: "I deeply and firmly believe that the Russian people will cope with this crisis, restore and revive their spiritual strength and resume their glorious national history" [11, p. 629].

Thinking of the twenty-first century must become more universal and organic. It must fit into a single socio-cultural environment, based on an overall picture of the world that goes far beyond the rational-economic sphere. Truth can not be separated from axiology, moreover from the truth of practical political action. Russian philosophy of XIX - early XX centuries has absorbed all the best of

the spiritual development of the West and the East. It combined the rationalism and irrationalism, having created a global organic theory based on a real spiritual experience and distinctive style of thinking of the Russian people. This way of thinking has not been in demand among modern politics yet. Although perhaps it is what embodies the thinking of the XXI century.

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