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Russian Mentality and Economy: A Historian's View

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In modern competition at the global arena economy plays a special role. Whereas in Soviet times its perspectives were determined by the balance of productive forces and industrial relations, today's scholars of post-Soviet origin are considering other approaches. Interdisciplinarity is applied often, particularly in exploring the phenomenon of mentality. It influences all spheres of civic life, including production, exercised by people of certain mentality. The economic history of humanity witnesses that national character can either favor economic progress or hamper it. At the present stage the most important challenge to all countries is that of modernization, innovative development. Respectively, the researchers' interest is aimed at the specifics of national mentalities and their capability of adequate response to the challenges of time.

Russia has always been positioning itself as a majestic state. Analyzing its history, one can notice that its economic force is quite weak for a number of reasons. The first place belongs to the natural and climatic factors that have determined extensive technology of production that, in turn, has determined a communal type of civilization with respective modes of organizing the political and social being. Those circumstances have been moulding the national mentality, to influence the economy in its own turn. Examining its main features, one can conclude on "impracticality", disguised by the particular "spirituality" of the Russian people, whose historic destination is pointed out as messianism. In fact, despite attempts at modernizing breakthroughs in different times, the Russian society keeps returning to the accustomed, traditional way of living, which is a manifestation of archaization. The traditionality of its mentality causes Russia's triple or quadruple underachievement in comparison with developed countries of the world that Russia is trying to compete with. Nevertheless, neither the country's government, adequate to the mental tenets of the overwhelming majority of its population, nor the populace itself are far from needing the transition to an innovative path of development. Instead of adequate reaction to change, Mocsovia is opposing itself to the world, attempting to extend its existence, draining on the natural resources as long as they have value, without realizing the value of human capital.

Російські менталітет і економіка: погляд історика

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Ключові слова: історія, економіка, менталітет, модернізація, інновації, традиційність, архаїзація.

У сучасній конкурентній боротьбі на міжнародній арені особливе значення має економіка. Якщо за радянських часів її перспективи визначалися співвідношенням продуктивних сил і виробничих відносин, то нині науковці пострадянського простору беруть до уваги інші підходи. Активно використовується міждисциплінарнарність, зокрема в дослідженні феномену «менталітет». Він впливає на всі сфери суспільного життя, у тому числі і на господарство, яке створюється людьми з певним менталі-

тетом. Економічна історія людства свідчить, що національний характер може або сприяти економічному поступу, або перешкоджати йому. На сучасному етапі найважливішим викликом для всіх країн є виклик модернізації, інноваційного розвитку. Відповідно дослідницький інтерес спрямовується на особливості національних менталітетів та їхній спроможності давати адекватні відповіді на виклики часу.
Росія споконвіку позиціонує себе як велична держава. Аналізуючи історію, можна побачити, що її економічна потуга є вельми слабкою через низку обставин. На першому місці – природно-кліматичні фактори, що визначили екстенсивну суспільно-виробничу технологію, яка, в свою чергу, зумовила комунальний тип цивілізації із відповідними способами організації політичного і соціального існування. Під дією цих обставин формувався національний менталітет, який, в свою чергу, впливав на економіку. Досліджуючи його головні риси, можна дійти висновку про «непрактичність», яку має замаскувати особлива «духовність» російського народу, історичним призначенням якого визначається месіанство. Насправді попри спроби модернізаційних проривів у різні часи російське суспільство повертається до звичного, традиційного способу існування, що є проявом архаїзації. Традиційність менталітету зумовлює відставання від розвинених країн світу, з якими намагається конкурувати Росія, у три-чотири рази. Однак ані керівництву країни, яке відповідає ментальним настановам переважної більшості населення, ані самій людності, перехід на інноваційний шлях розвитку зовсім не потрібний. Замість адекватної реакції на зміни, що відбуваються, Московія протиставляє себе світові, намагаючись подовжити своє існування, вичерпуючи природні ресурси, поки вони являють собою цінність, не розуміючи цінність людського капіталу.

Today Ukrainian scholars keep discovering approaches from the global arsenal that are still new to them. New opportunities in understanding the past and the present of each country are offered by analytical history. The analysis of the world history of cc. XX – XXI reveals the main challenge – that of modernization, taken differently by every community and even every individual. In the current world, competing are several development models: American, European, Chinese, Russian. Each of them is promoted by economic and social achievements ensured by certain government policy. Having set out on the path of independent development, Ukraine is picking examples of forming its own political, economic, social, cultural spheres. Despite having taken the vector of eurointegration, Ukrainian society at different levels is in certain ways affected by the orientation towards the Russian model, evidencing the significant civilizational influence. In the European civilizational code rationalism is an important factor. The Ratio is fundamental to science, hence, currently the task of a historical analysis is giving a rational answer to the following questions. Does the Russian model of development fit Ukraine? Can Russian society get modernized in general, and economy-wise in particular? How does Russian mentality influence the productive life of the country?

After decades of denying many achievements of world science, the post-Soviet space has experienced interest to developed directions of foreign historiography, particularly, to social history, including the history of mentalities. The opportunities of historical analysis, together with those of other social sciences and humanities, began to be employed in studying different spheres of civic life, for societies and individuals, that is consistent with the global trend of interdiscilpinarity. In the direction of the topic mentioned, most prominent manifestations came from economists and psychologists. Historical investigations are way fewer. Ukrainian historical studies demonstrates certain results, particularly reviewing the problem of "mentality – economy" [1,2,3,4]. But Russia's case is still a gap.

In Russian Federation itself there was a period of scholarly interest in the issue [5,6,7,8]. Certain publications were dedicated particularly to Russian mentality and economy [9,10,11]. Other authors focused on defining the essence of economic mentality / mentality as such and their implementation in Russia's productive life [12,13]. Russian social scientists sought to define the perspectives of reforming the national economy in view of national mentality [14, 15, 16, 17, 18]. Noteworthy is that the language has two liberally interchangeable notions of mentality, though there may be attempts at discriminating between them, like that of O.Sokolina, a Ukrainian: «Mentalitet (paradigm, psyche) – a traditional attitude of a person, nation, people,

determined by the historic experience and national culture; mentalnist (stamp of mind) – a set of principles and proclivities of an individual or a social group to act, to think, to sense and perceive the world in a specific way, distinctly different from those of other social units» [19]. In publications of Russian edition, "mentalnost" seems to be used incorrectly, as the context suggests that "mentalitet" was actually meant [8, p.26].

The concept of mentality was first introduced into the scholarly discourse by R.Emerson in 1856. Ever since it is broadly applied in exploding and analyzing various aspects of civic life: economy, politics, ideology, etc. Mentality is foremost a term with national contents (sometimes used synonymously with "national character"). It is reflected in all speres from myths to rules of statesmanship, implemented in economic activities, forms and mechanism of economic behavior by the society in general and by an individual in particular. Despite the variety of views voiced in the analyzed publications of Russian authors, undeniable is «the evident influence of an accustomed way of thinking and acting on the economic behavior and decisions of economic entities, which ultimately determines the efficiency and well-being of the latter» [8, p. 25].

The topic of the national character (mentalitet) has been explored by Russian researchers of various branches for almost two centuries and can itself make a topic of a historiographic research, which is beyond the goals of the present study. One may summarize that Russian authors, from writers to philosophers, analyzing the specific features of the national character, most frequently highlighted its contradictory nature: on the one hand – sublimity, exceptional spirituality, mercy, kindness, a strife for justice, on the other hand – social passivity, inaction, irresponsibility, indiscrimination, laziness etc. Sometimes extreme views occurred, emphasizing prevalently either positive or negative traits. This actually manifests one of the features of Russian national character in the authors themselves – an inclination to extremes, maximalism. This study aims at revising the influences of mentality on the economy in the historical aspect, without the exaggerations widespread in Russian historiography.

It would be practical for this analysis to refer to the resources of historical geography. Particularly, the characteristics of natural and climatic conditions of Russian civilization's existence, its economic foundations and mental structures. Russia's phenomenon is largely determined by the fact of being the coldest and the vastest, though unevenly populated, country of the world. Throughout almost all its history, Russia was suffering from scarcity of resources. For ages the population, except the innumerous elites, has been adapting to eternal misery, moulding the national features of patience and low expectations. Likewise, that was forming poverty as a type of culture where have-nots were treated with compassion and even respect (consider the special attitude to holy fools and paupers). Poverty was given moral priority, even its agreeability to God was emphasized. Let's note such folk bysays: "Poverty is a holy cause", "Rich but crooked, poor but straight", "The rich one wonders what the poor one's living off – by God's help", "to have-nots God gives".

The habitus of poverty is formed, that is, a system of established acquired inclinations, developed by the objective social environment. In our time it prevents the poor from future fulfillment of social and individual opportunities that emerge (e.g. squandering the charity money or get stuck in consumer credits for some prestigious things). Motivation for labor and living is fading away. The childish fope for a folk-tale miracle predominates. One of such gifts of fortune was the discovery of colossal deposits of combustible resources behind the Urals in the XX c. This seemed to have changed the situation, but the "Dutch disease" of economy took place of the expected increase of general well-being, as an evidence of inefficient utilization of resources and the continual poverty of the majority of Russian populace.

Since time immemorial, the conditions of Russian people's existence have been causing the necessity of communal organization of living with continual redistribution, particularly of land, for the sake of "higher justice" – equality for everyone. "Equality in poverty" descended from the Tzarist into the Soviet times, missed by many current compatriots. Communality is considered one of the bearing pillars of Russian civilization, collectivism – a leading feature of its mentality. To them the values of individualism, that have facilitated the rise of the West, proved inacceptable. A rhetoric question: does collectivism help the weak survive, or prevent the strong from self-fulfilment?

By the studies of F.A. von Hayek, an Austrian economist and a Nobel prize winner [20], the scarce population of a territory hampers voluntary specialization and division of labor, and consecutively, the efficient exploitation of available resources, development of exchange mechanisms and increase in the profitability of labor. If specialization favors increasing individual productivity, better transfer of information, and the processes of social-economic differentiation, then, contrarily, lesser density of population blocks the development of such

processes. Whereas the intensive urbanization of the West has facilitated the individualization of civic life, in Russia the underdevelopment of cities, the prevailing share of subsistence economy and non-monetary exchange have conserved collectivist forms of organizing people. With prevailing natural economy, the populace had to live from hard labor, using primitive methods of cultivation and primitive forms of exchange. Hence, to live in the regime of survival, and survival was easier in the collective, communal, peasant mode.

The peasants never knew individual private property and usually maintained negative attitudes to trade, particularly to the possibility of its turning into a decisive economic factor of life. A predisposition against entrepreneurship still remains in the Russian society. Despite significant urbanization, the agrarian mentality has its influence, as the growth of urban population was foremost cause by rural people moving to the cities, without breaking up with the "small motherland" for a long time. One may forget one's rural ancestors and still profess the same values, like, trusting only the closest ones, preferably relatives or friends. That's why nepotism is so widespread in Russia.

The reverse of the coin is that Russia has not developed a bourgeois conscience. The peasant conscience in the countries of South-Eastern Europe and Russia has largely persisted through the Byzantine heritage. In the countries of Byzantine-like Christianity the bourgeoisie as an economic and political class began to form at least five centuries later than in Western Europe. A certain role belongs to the prerequisites of bourgeois conscience destroyed by the Tatar-Mongol invasion, and then by the Moscovia copying a typical Oriental despotic model, based on the "power-property" system. That is, the property belonging to those possessing power, and those without power being devoid of property. The agglomeration of power and property, on the one hand, and the people's lack of property, as well as ignorance of having, handling, using and disposing of it, on the other hand, is called one of the "basic constants of Russian being" by a native of the town of Kommunarsk, Luhansk oblast, now a researcher of the Institute of Philosophy of the Russian Academy of Sciences, S. Nikolsky, Ph.D. [21, p.135]. Another constant is autocracy: "The power of an autocratic empire could be safeguarded by property in the hands of the ruler, by its selective distribution or by the subjects' lack thereof. Only such an autocrat wielded the full sway of power, who accumulated the leverages of control over all property in his hands, that is, who had a violence-guaranteed access to them at any moment and by any reason" [21, p. 136].

For centuries, one of the characteristic features of Russian economy was poor protection of private property. The state has always had the implicit right to expropriate, this determining high risks of economic activities and a narrow horizon of planning by those involved in them. Low reliability of property rights and contracts protection caused low levels of trust in the society, an unfavorable investment climate, resource drain, repatriation of profits, underinvestment, and the government's chronic lack of resources for implementing its intentions. A vicious circle emerged, with instability leading to lack of resources, and the need for finding additional resources had to secure the government's right to "squeeze" from a proprietor at a time chosen, changing the rules of the game at its own discretion [12, p.73]. The aforesaid facilitates an understanding of «historical reasons» to un-industriousness in the Russian national character, for everything that one had gained could be taken away at any moment, so why bother? Generally, a Russian has certain contempt of own and the other's property alike. Riches and the rich often received negative evaluation in Russian culture. According to the bysays: "Praise to God, glory to Christ, curse to the richy rich"; "A rich one's food is sweet, but sleep is bad. The less money, the sounder the sleep"; "Riches are kin to conceit", "A rich one can't buy conscience, but ruins his own"; "Tears are pouring through gold", etc. No wonder, with property giving more freedom, though limited in every way in Russian conditions.

Private property is the basis of freedom. Practically throughout its entire history, Russian people had to exist without freedom (under Tzarism, them Communism, and is there freedom in Putin's Russia?) Lack of freedom has put an imprint both on the mentality and the economic development. Even now attempts at building a free and developed market economy are failing. This is actually not desired neither by the rulers nor by everymen. True freedom is the freedom of choice. An individual's right to choice is one of the foundations of the European civilization. But choice and its consequences are followed by responsibility. One of the traits of Russian mentality is irresponsibility, contempt of laws at any level. The arbitrary power, standing "above the law", made the grassroots strongly accustomed to that. Speaking of the current situation – corruption, the bribery of judges and law enforcers, selective justice, raiderism, continual change of bylaws, etc., have led to everyman's sensation of unprotectedness by the law and the resulting attempts

at acting in circumvention. Deception is a common thing: "No cheating, no sale". Swindlers are generally admired, not condemned.

The "broad Russian soul" tolerates no limitations, yet is capable of "breakthroughs". Unique things may be manufactured in the country, but the efficient mass production of cars, TVs, refrigerators, etc. at the level of global standards is impossible. That can be explained by the Russians contempt of rules and standards, causing the persistent law quality of labor in Russia. The produce of Russian enterprises still has no demand at global markets, except raw materials and products of primary processing. The current productivity of labor in the Russian Federation is three to four times lower than in the countries it's competing with. Economists underscore that this low productivity is caused by the Russian mentality [22]. It largely determines not only the quality of Russian labor, but also work ethics, entrepreneurial ethics, the level and quality of human capital [23].

A.Sergeeva's book "The way we, Russians, are: a reading on Russian national character" has a chapter called "What is Russian work", with the following paragraph: "Labor in Russia is distinct with disorganization, inefficiency, insufficient scrupulousness of performance, that cannot be compensated even by wit. In Russia, everywhere one comes across ungroomed, unsettled life and routine. Many villages look as if constructed blindfold, haphazard, slapdash from scrap. Poor houses, litter, tilted fences and posts, dors creaky and unshuttable, smelly hallways – don't surprise anyone in Russia, as it does not depend neither on the political nor on the economic system. Certainly, Russians demonstrate examples of top professionalism – in space, ballet and music. But most often this relates to the creative and scientific intellectuals. But speaking of the traditional Russian archetype, based on the popular attitude to work, one has to admit, unfortunately, that working "Russian style" is one of the forms reflecting this archetype" [24].

Numerous Russian bysays register the traditional attitude to work: "Work kills horses", "Working makes you not rich but hunchbacked", "Work likes fools", "Work is no wolf – won't flee to the woods". This can be explained historically: by ages of forced labor, worse than slavery, because the master had to feed a slave, and a Russian serf or a worker of "five-year plan construction" had to provide for himself. Even now employed labor is connoted negatively in a set phrase "working for an uncle". This is aggravated by the natural climatic factor, the unfavorable climate being the curse of Russia throughout its history. The continual instability of climate, its unpredictable changes had reduced a Russian's tendency to consistent systematic work which, in most countries following the path of modernization, were the necessary prerequisite of a positive result.

As history shows, the efficiency of a nation's economic progress largely depends on the national character's reaction to the advanced foreign experience – rejects it, processes it in a creative way, or imports blindly [25, p. 43 - 48]. The economic "miracle" of Japan was largely caused by the Japanese openness to foreign innovations, their capability of combining Western technology with the national spirit. The economic history of Russia, from Peter the Great to Boris Yeltsin, witnesses a succession of attempts at importing and copying Western experience, or rejecting it. "External forms" were borrowed without essential change in the system of values, in mental structures.

Early 1990s opened "windows of opportunity" for liberalizing Russian economy. The "young reformers" oriented themselves at the values, most of which were alien to the Russian mentality. Namely, decreasing the role of the government in the economic domain, free market, privatization and the appearance of private property, freedom, the right to choose, etc. That did not take into account the mental characteristics of Russian population, the society's psychological un-readiness to abrupt change, negative attitudes to the aforementioned values. The methods employed for modernization did not connect with the national mentality. The liberal reforms were not, and still are not supported by the majority (experts estimate the number of adherents to liberal and neoliberal reforms at no more than 15% [26] and those are fleeing abroad massively). The rest has accustomed to the order now established in the state. A small group of the rich, close to the summit of the power structure, the bureaucrats "seesawing the budgets" and feeding from bribes, the law enforcers profiting from pressure on entrepreneurs, and approximately 2/3, if not more, of those "eating from the hands of the state" – the military, the branches financed from the budget, the retirees with their families, replete with paternalistic attitudes and fears of "thins to get only worse". The so-called "garage entrepreneurs", involved in the patriarchal economy, do not require reform, being accustomed to paying bribes instead of taxes.

In the opinion of some Russian economists who are still objective in their estimates, Russia resembles Eastern countries, whose specifics date back to c. VIII. Any liberal reform in a country of this type

are doomed to failure. The limit of such a society is an industrial society, that is, the stage surpassed by the developed countries of the world already in the past century. Inclining to this model, it's impossible to transcend into a post-industrial (informational) society [26]. Nor is this goal set, despite the declarations of the importance of mastering artificial intelligence and creating state-of-the-art weaponry.

The general trend of contemporary Russian development can be characterized as archaization, meaning the return to the traditional society. The "fallout from modernity" is taking place. Certainly for Ukraine, oriented at the future, this is no variant. Russia, going on feeding from the sale of energy carriers, has entered the state of continual economic recession. Widespread are moods like "Have been worse times, we shall endure!" The favorite Russian "mayhap", though not so common in the current discourse, are still playing their part, imprinted into the Russian mentality. This means fatalism, counting on luck, disgust for planning ahead and targeted effort accounting change that takes place in the world.

History shows that a society's survival depends on the people's ability to perfect their reaction to the complication of the world and the problems to be solved. The Russian mentality is long marked by love of simplicity and disgust for

History shows that a society's survival depends on the people's ability to perfect their reaction to the complication of the world and the problems to be solved. The Russian mentality is long marked by love of simplicity and disgust for any complications. The traditionalist system is rigid to innovation. The population of Russia mostly lingers in the state of psycho-historical depression, the public fears standing in the way of progress. Russian population is gradually dying away, unable to withstand the weight of its own mentality and the pressure of global challenges [27]. At the same time, contemporary ideologists reiterate: "We believe that the power of Russia is based on the specific and unique traits of the Russian character, such as industriousness, strength, kindness, energy, openness, patriotism and generlsity; Russians possess specific latent capabilities that seldom come to practice, such as consolidation in danger and emergency" [18, p. 21]. Pretence to exclusivity reinforce the Russian government's strife for autarchy, seclusion, isolation from the world. They have no understanding of the laws of synergetics: in a closed system, striving to maintain simplicity and not reacting to changes in the environment, the processes of entropy amass, that ultimately can lead to its destruction. In the modern globalized world, the consequences would be felt everywhere.

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