

Prospects of Russian studies and Russian regional studies as new disciplines in higher education system

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Abstract

One of the important and multifaceted areas of modern Russian and international humanities is so called "Russian studies". The conceptual formation of the domestic Russian studies ("otecheststvedeniye") refers to the 1990s. In that period researchers turned to the study of Russian civilization as an integral and independent scientific object. Russian studies explore the socio-cultural, political, economic and many other aspects of "civilization portrait" of the country, thereby forming a multidisciplinary knowledge of the Russian different historical eras. The article is devoted to the analyses of prospects and problems of "Russian Studies" and "Russian regional studies" as disciplines in the Russian system of higher education. In addition, the authors tried to define transformations of the concept "Russian studies" during the past two decade. Institutionalization of Russian studies as a new research direction was at the turn of 20th and 21th centuries. It was connected with the organization of scientific centers of Russian studies and the implementation of higher education discipline "Russian studies" which is taught within the master's programs. The authors concluded that objectives and educational results of "Russian studies" and "Russian regional studies" as academic disciplines are still not clearly marked, as well as not determined definitively the status of these courses and programs. Nowadays there is no bachelor or master educational programs on "Russian studies", and the corresponding center in the Russian State Humanitarian University trains masters in history, political science and philology.

Keywords: Russian studies, higher education system, regional studies, multidisciplinary knowledge, international humanities, civilization approach.

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1. Introduction

One of the important and multifaceted areas of modern domestic and international humanities is Russian Studies. The conceptual emergence of Russian studies (“otecheststvedeniye”) refers to the 1990’s. In that period Russian researchers turned to the study of Russian civilization as an integral and independent scientific object.

Russian studies explore socio-cultural, political, economic and many other aspects of Russian “civilization portrait”, thereby forming a multidisciplinary knowledge of the Russian different historical periods. In this regard, historical knowledge is a kind of “backbone axis” in Russian studies, and historical discourse is a mandatory attribute of this research area (Rossika, 2010).

Institutionalization of Russian studies as a new research field was at the turn of the 20th and 21st centuries. It was connected with the establishment of scientific centers of Russian studies and the implementation of disciplines “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” in higher education system. These courses are taught within the Master’s programs. The close interaction of scientific and educational activities was initially formed in the field of Russian studies. For instance, tutorials contain the latest scientific findings and the recently published monographs and collections of works are actively used in training courses.

The aim of the study is to determine the role of such disciplines as “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” in the system of modern Russian higher education. The authors attempt to identify the differences between these educational courses and traditional historical and cultural courses such as local history, regional history, area studies and others. Problems and prospects of the implementation of “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” in bachelor’s and master’s educational programs are considered through the prism of the transformation of “Russian Studies” concept in Russian socio-humanitarian knowledge in 1990s and 2010s.

2. Literature Review

Russian studies appeared in the national humanitarian education in 2001. Today there are a number of textbooks for this discipline at the higher education level (Sumush, 2005; Shapovalov, 2003; Shapovalov, 2001) as well as for schools (Barulin, Knyazev, Knyazev & Chyubays, 2004). Historiographical aspects of Russian studies were reported in the two textbooks, edited by Bezborodov and published in 2013 (International Russian Studies, 2013; The History of the USSR and the Russian Federation in the context of modern Russian Studies, 2013).

The textbook on the international Russian studies provides the analysis of the current state of scientific research in this field in different countries such as the United States of America, the United Kingdom, France, Germany, Austria, Poland, China, and Turkey. The publication covers such issues as the establishment of Russian Studies scientific centers abroad, the history and the current state of the Archive Rossika, Sovietological concepts (International Russian Studies, 2013). The textbook “The history of the USSR and the Russian Federation in the context of modern Russian studies” attempts to uncover Russian studies aspects of modern global studies, as well as outlines the problems of post-Soviet countries. Authors of the textbook analyze historical model of interaction of government and society in the USSR during the transition period of Perestroika and transformations in Post-Soviet Russia (The History..., 2013). Despite the significant base of primary sources and historiographical basis, both textbooks does almost not extend beyond the chronological framework of the 20th and 21st centuries.

Russian studies issues are investigated in Russian State Humanitarian University (RSHU) in the framework of the Annual Humanitarian Readings and Interdisciplinary project “Russian studies” started in 2008. The project is aimed at the systematization of historical and documentary heritage of international Russian studies. Due to this project, the typology of Russian foreign archival heritage has been developed. In 2011, Russian State Humanitarian University presented scientific achievements on the topic “Modernization projects in Russia: Past and Present” for public discussion. To characterize recent trends in Russian studies, it is relevant the publication of the book series “Rossika. Rusistika. Russian Studies” which publication was began by RSHU in 2011. As part of this series, the most significant translations of international Russian studies in recent years are provided as well as classical works, previously unpublished in Russian or translated anew. Edition of the book

“Language. History. Culture” opened the series. Each of three mentioned sections is associated with the main lines of Russian Studies research: linguistic, historical, and cultural (Rossika, 2010).

3. Results and Discussion

The term “Russian studies” has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. At the end of the 1990s the term refers to the study of “features of modern Russian civilization in its difference from other civilizations, in past and present” (Shapovalov, 2001). A decade later, the Russian humanities confirmed understanding of Russian studies as a branch of interdisciplinary knowledge that studies “the basic parameters of the Russian cultural field without the purpose to indicate “the exclusivity of Russian way”, but to obtain new keys to understanding contemporary trends of global development” (Rossika, 2010). Currently it dominates the view, according to which Russian studies is a complex multidisciplinary study of the Russian civilization as a “living interethnic unity on the basis of the world traditions of the civilization approach” (Bolshakova, 2009). The starting point for the study of Russian studies is a recognition of the need to rehabilitate the country and overcoming the crisis of national identity, receive “real scientific knowledge about Russia” (Ageev & Ageeva, 2015). Nowadays, the major Russian national centers of fundamental research in Russian studies are the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences and Russian State Humanitarian University. The disciplines “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” are presented in many bachelor’s and master’s educational programs (see Table 1). The results of analysis demonstrate wide range of aims and scope of these two disciplines in Russian universities.

Table 1. Description of the courses “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” in Russian higher education system.

	Higher education program	Level (semester)	Study time allocation	Aims of course: Students will be able to demonstrate knowledge and understanding of...
Russian State Humanitarian University (the discipline “Russian studies”; Master’s program “Russian Studies”)	History; Specialized Master’s program “Russian Studies”	Master’s degree in history	17 hours per week	Main trends of Russian historical, political and cultural development
The Lomonosov Moscow State University (the disciplines “Russian studies”, Russian regional studies)	Foreign Regional studies; Russian regional studies	Master degree	17 hours per week	Main stages, trends and dynamics of Russian regional development; the socio-cultural development of Russian regions.
Tomsk State University (the discipline “Russian regional studies”)	History; Record Management	Bachelor degree (3 semester)	144 hours	Main stages, trends and dynamics of Russian regional development; territorial organization of Russian society; the peculiarities of Russian political regionalism; Russian economic regions; interregional relations; the socio-cultural development of Russian regions.
Chelyabinsk State University (the discipline “Russian studies”)	Legal studies	Bachelor degree (1 semester)	108 hours	Civilization approach to the Russian history; features of Russian culture and mentality; Russia’s geopolitical role in the world community
Vladivostok State University of Economics and Service (the discipline “Russian studies”)	Linguistics	Master degree (2 semester)	72 hours	Main trends of Russian historical and cultural development; main features of Russian political development

Extremely wide subject field of Russian studies allows studying both historical and present-day Russia in all its diversity and changeability. Russian studies as a field of scientific knowledge is intended to “contribute to the establishment of the Russian society as a subject of history, overcoming all sorts of social myths: from “the peculiarities of Russian historical path” to “totally heroic Soviet past” (The History, 2015; Ageev, Zinovyev, Netesova, Ageeva & Mironova, 2015). According to the Hungarian historian Svak, “Rossiyevedenie” is “something similar to Russian studies adopted in Western universities, but it is more comprehensive, covering more areas and more focused on the present.”

One of the current trends in the development of the domestic Russian studies is the increased emphasis on regional studies and local history issues. Historiographical interest in Russian local perspective contributed to the expansion of Russian studies subject to the history of a particular city or architectural monument. Regionalism as a field of Russian studies research comes from the fact that the major trend of country development not only directly or indirectly affect the fate of a region, but they formed themselves to a large extent in regional communities (Erygin, 2010).

Simultaneously with the development of regional research in Russian Studies there is the formation of Russian-studies expert knowledge which aims at “the forecast situation”. For a long time growing interest in Russian studies was observed in Russia in the periods of active reform efforts while international actualization of Russian studies was during the international confrontation or conflicts. Today Russian study are becoming more practice-oriented, implementing both scientific and applied problems (International, 2013, p. 75). Russian academic community actively cooperates with politicians and businessmen. Examples of the institutionalization of the expert community in the field of Russian studies can be considered as the Russian Institute of Strategic Research, Information and Analytical Center for the Study of Social and Political Processes in the post-Soviet space, based at the Department of History of the CIS countries of the Historical faculty in Moscow State University as well as Effective Policy Foundation. One of the most dynamic areas of contemporary historical Russian studies can be justly regarded as a foreign Russian studies, which is characterized by close attention to historiographical approach developed by Western research traditions of Russian Studies (Russian history, 2010).

4. Conclusion

Summing up the review of the trajectories of contemporary Russian studies, it should first be noted that at present the domestic Russian studies in a much greater degree than before, is integrated into the world Russian studies. Modern domestic works in Russian studies characterize the variability of estimates of historical events, the desire to get away from the politicized interpretations of certain events of Russian history. Current educational trends in the field of Russian studies include an appeal to cultural history, regional studies, micro-history, the study of Russia as a civilizational phenomenon. Serious attention is paid to the problems of Russian foreign policy and international relations. The problems of Russia’s relations with the countries of the former Soviet Union and Russia’s status in the system of relations in the post-Soviet space are studied actively. It should be concluded that objectives, training materials and educational results of “Russian studies” and “Russian regional studies” as academic disciplines are still not clearly marked, as well as not determined definitively the status of these courses and programs. Nowadays there is no bachelor or master educational programs on “Russian studies”, and the corresponding center in the Russian State Humanitarian University trains masters in history, political science and philology.

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