




THEMATIC DOSSIER: Eurasian Ideology and Eurasian Integration

ТЕМАТИЧЕСКОЕ ДОСЬЕ: Евразийская идеология и евразийская интеграция

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The Global and the Nationally Distinctive in IR Theory

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Abstract. The article examines the issue of the international and nationally distinctive, which has been the subject of a new “big debate” in the science of international relations in the last 15 years. The authors show that despite the dominance of “universalist” positions within the Western academic mainstream, their criticism continues to grow. In this regard, an interesting project of the global IR theory by A. Acharya and B. Buzan is being discussed. In our view, with all the positive features of this project, it is informed by the outdated West-centric view of the world. The declared consideration of non-Western intellectual, socio-cultural and historical traditions in the formation of a global view of the world does not contain an understanding of the concept of identity, which is replaced by the concepts of regions and multiple agents-participants. However, without such an understanding, neither the historical reconstruction of the global, nor the understanding of its social and intellectual roots is possible. Any theory contains multiple levels and is based on important politico-ideological assumptions, which are national, and not universal. Any theory, including international theory, is also a product of time, place and social relations. Such theory is based on local specifics and conditions. Scientific concepts cannot be developed only from one part of the culturally pluralist world. Therefore, a condition for such development should be a socio-cultural and political dialogue between scholars representing different countries and parts of the world. For Russia, this implies the need to understand its own historical and cultural conditions and mobilize its own intellectual capital in their examination and development of national IR theory.

Key words: globality, distinctiveness, global theory of international relations, West-centrism, Russia

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Глобальность и самобытность в теории международных отношений

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Аннотация. Рассматривается вопрос о соотношении глобального и национально-самобытного, остающийся в течение последних примерно 15 лет предметом нового «большого спора» в науке о международных отношениях. Авторы показывают, что, несмотря на доминирование в западном академическом мейнстриме позиций западного «универсализма», продолжает усиливаться и их критика. В этой связи вызывает интерес развиваемый А. Ачарьей и Б. Бузаном проект создания глобальной теории международных отношений, учитывающий опыт незападных, в частности восточноазиатских, исследований. На наш взгляд, при всех позитивных чертах данного проекта за ним скрывается стремление вдохнуть новую жизнь в отживающий свое западнцентристский взгляд на мир. Декларируемая важность учета незападных интеллектуальных, социокультурных и исторических традиций самобытности в формировании глобального взгляда на мир не содержит осмысления самого понятия самобытности, а подменена понятиями регионов и множественных агентов-участников. Однако без такого осмысления невозможны ни историческая реконструкция глобального, ни осмысление его социально-интеллектуальных корней. Любая теория содержит в себе несколько уровней и строится на основе важных идейно-политических допущений, национальные различия которых едва ли удастся преодолеть в результате общенаучного диалога. Точно так же и теория международных отношений есть продукт времени, места, социокультурных обстоятельств и конкретных интеллектуальных усилий. Она по определению не может быть универсальной и должна выстраиваться исходя из местных особенностей и условий. Общенаучные понятия не могут быть выработаны и подтверждены лишь из одной части культурно противоречивого мира. Поэтому условием развития науки должен быть социокультурный и политический диалог ученых, представляющих разные страны и части современного мира. Для России это означает, во-первых, важность понимания собственных историко-социальных условий, во-вторых, необходимость мобилизации собственного интеллектуального капитала в их осмыслении и выработки на этой основе соответствующих национальным интересам подходов к изучению международных отношений.

Ключевые слова: глобальность, самобытность, глобальная теория международных отношений, западнцентризм, Россия

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The sources [of the theory and practice of international relations] are abundant and inexhaustible: Russian social thought, Russian folk feeling, traditions, and covenants of ancestors, an understanding of Russia's great past based on strict and careful study, warmed by love for her deep faith in her future destinies.

S.S. Tatishchev
(Tatishchev, 2016, p. 179)

Introduction

The contemporary theoretical literature on international relations is increasingly involved in another so-called great debate concerning the

contribution of the non-Western world to the formation of global knowledge about the world. Compared to the earlier debates about idealism/realism, the classical/scientific

approach, and rationalism/constructivism, the new debate takes the discussion and the discipline of international relations itself beyond its habitually Western arena of development.

Although the new controversy unfolded relatively recently — only in the last 10—15 years — many vital nuances and turns have already arisen in it. First, the Western and the universal concepts and boundaries are clarified. The question is raised about the possibilities of genuinely global knowledge, considering its national and regional roots and characteristics. The efforts of representatives of non-Western cultures and traditions, primarily China, are intensifying to create their schools to study international relations, including the development of their journals and publications in the country and abroad. Russian literature also discusses the possibilities of forming non-Western theories of international relations and global academic discourse in this area (Alekseeva, 2017; Lebedeva, 2017; Grachikov, 2019; Degterev, 2021; Istomin & Baikov, 2015; Fenenko, 2016; Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 2017). At the same time, active attempts are being made to revive Western knowledge under the guise of global knowledge that claims to be universal.

What is happening makes us think about the relationship between global and nationally distinctive in the formation of knowledge in general and the science of international relations. It seems that without a new clarification of these concepts and the nature of their relations at the present stage, it is difficult to raise the question of the formation of the Russian school of international relations, not to mention finding a satisfactory answer to it. Both the first and the second are necessary for Russia to maintain and develop an independent state with original values and a well-functioning system of national interests. Life itself pushes Russian international affairs specialists to advance in this direction. The world is moving from the Western-centric model of globalization

established after the Cold War to new regionalization and “nationalization.” The pandemic only consolidated this turn, sharpening the issue of finding new grounds for national survival and development.

In this article, we would like to offer, as a discussion, our understanding of the relationship between the global and the distinctive in contemporary developments and concerning the conditions and tasks of Russia. We believe that originality results from the interaction between the external and global, and the global is impossible without considering the original and without a constant dialogue with it. From this position, we critically analyze new attempts to formulate the concept of the global without considering the centrality of the original. In our opinion, behind these attempts lies the desire to breathe new life into the obsolete Western-centric view of the world. Finally, in this context, we return to the implications of this dispute for Russia.

The Global and the Nationally Distinctive

It seems that the global and the culturally distinctive are in their dialectical relation, as they said in the old Marxist times. One does not exist without the other, in interaction and mutual influence. Scholars have defined the global not as a product of one culture — Western or otherwise — but as an interaction, diversity, and pluralistic community of different cultures and civilizations (Alker & Biersteker, 1984; Inayatullah & Blaney, 2004; Jones, 2006; Hobson, 2012; Tickner & Blaney, 2012; Acharya & Buzan, 2017; Cheng & Brettler, 2019). Similarly, many contemporary theorists of the contribution of non-Western cultures to the world’s knowledge of international relations raise the question of the global.

As for the distinctiveness, this concept is developed much weaker and needs additional explanations. Let us clarify, in particular, that the imperial, the autarchic, and the national-ethnic are only separate manifestations of

distinctiveness. The latter concept is broader and richer in content and should be defined through the entire spectrum of socio-cultural varieties of identity and their implementation in the world. It is essential to comprehend both the ontological and epistemological dimensions of the concept. Ontologically, identity implies a set of unique conditions in which the country is placed — economic, technological, geopolitical, military-political, climatic, informational, etc. Epistemologically, the nationally distinctive is revealed primarily, though not exclusively, by the intellectual efforts of the country's best thinkers.¹ Who better than them, who have grown up and absorbed the juices of their native culture, express it in their native language, formulate the necessary concepts and fit them into the general national-civilizational context?

There are already many aspirations to combine the global and the nationally distinctive in the world. For example, Chinese researchers are actively working on forming their own nationally oriented theories of international relations, developing in dialogue with Western ones. Some call for going beyond the binary oppositions “us/them” on the paths of comprehending and representing the relational world order (Eun, 2018). In India, international scholars advocate overcoming the British colonial legacy and building on their intellectual history (Chagas-Bastos, Leite & Maximo, 2019). In the Muslim world, criticism was revealed not only of Western but also of non-Western projects. At the same time, as an alternative, some Islamic researchers suggest relying on Sufi philosophy (Shahi, 2019) as the basis for creating a global theory of international relations.² In general, non-Western theories tend to offer their own “cognitive

frames” close to them, which are fundamentally collectivist, holistic, and contextual, in contrast to Western, primarily American frames of methodological individualism, analysis, and objectivity (Cheng & Brettle, 2019).

Some of the indicated approaches are less than perfect for obtaining global knowledge. Often these approaches offer culturally loaded concepts and theories as potentially global ones. However, on the whole, it is impossible not to see the emerging movement of the discipline of international relations to its new state. The new considerable controversy is only just beginning to influence the global debate. However, it has already spawned evolving literature that reflects on the phenomenon of new cultural diversity and pluralism in the world (Reus-Smit, 2018). This dispute will inevitably develop and deepen, including the accompanying and reinforcing fundamental economic and military-political changes in the world. As the world moves towards multipolarity, a movement towards pluralizing social knowledge is inevitable.

Western Centrim and Attempts to Revive It

The new dispute pushed the positions of American-centrism and Western-centrism in international relations, which until recently seemed unshakable to many. Western experts note the stagnation of traditional research programs such as the democratic world, soft power, etc. They identify a relative decrease in the citation of Western realism and liberalism while pointing to the diversification of disputes within the discipline of international relations. Today, even scientists who call themselves rationalists and advocate the accumulation of knowledge about the world based on positivist methods of testing hypotheses are aware of the limitations of the West in the formation of a global theory of international relations (Colgan, 2019).

Of course, many do not see the marked crisis of Western centrism, speaking from their previous positions. The Western academic

¹ The notion of distinctiveness («самобытность») has been actively used by Slavophiles in their explorations of Russia's special development. See, for example: (Sukhov, 1998).

² A comparative understanding of theories of exclusivity in the United States, China, India and Turkey has been done, in particular in (Cha, 2015).

mainstream is dominated by those who would not like to revise the positions of Western “universalism” and continue to ignore its ethnocentric foundations. For theorists like J. Mearsheimer, the foundations of the science of international relations are in the West. They should not be questioned in the name of maintaining academic standards and the unity of the discipline (Mearsheimer, 2016). This position is also vulnerable today in American universities due to the spread of politically motivated struggle against racism. No matter how one looks at this struggle, it plays a part in displacing Western-centric stereotypes in social science.

Against this background, the voices of those who advocate overcoming Western dominance in the development of the global theory of international relations are increasingly heard. Supporters of this position largely agree with the critics of Western centrism and would like to win them over to their side in the movement towards a global theory. Therefore, projects for creating such a theory should take a closer look and try to understand their potential for accounting and integration based on sociocultural identity and historical traditions of identity.

One such project for a global theory of international relations has been proposed in a series of articles, speeches, and a recent book by A. Acharya and B. Buzan (Acharya, 2014; 2016; Acharya & Buzan, 2019). Being put forward by well-known researchers — a British and an American of Indian origin — the project involves rethinking the world experience from the standpoint of global, and not just Western history, the experience of regions and the diversity of state and non-state actors in international relations. A. Acharya and B. Buzan propose to comprehend the historical and intellectual experience outside the West and build a theory of international relations, guided by the experience of both Western and non-Western worlds. It would seem that this approach will allow integrating the global and

the culturally distinctive, moving away from the habitual and hindering the development of the discipline of Western ethnocentrism.

However, upon closer examination, the so-called global international relations theory is proposed to be built without regard for national and cultural identity. Instead, the theory stresses the concepts of regions and multiple agent-participants. However, the main problem is that the requirement for non-Western theories is to form hypotheses and knowledge that can be tested outside the regions in which they were formulated (Acharya, 2014). This requirement may be understandable from the point of view of general scientific standards. First, however, it implies an empirical-positivist centrality of knowledge with its characteristic insufficient consideration of the factors of the local and sociocultural context of knowledge production. Secondly, in this requirement, one can read the instructions for “local” researchers to prove themselves to those working in the West the potential of the non-Western to become scientifically universal. Why should non-Western ones prove to Western ones, and not vice versa? Who will judge and conclude their scientific character and universality? Is there a danger that based on excessive ideologization and insufficient verifiability non-Western studies will be denied scientific character? For example, which of the Western researchers today remembers the contribution of Soviet researchers to the study of international relations?

Meanwhile, during the Soviet period, much valuable research was created — their schools of system analysis at IMEMO and MGIMO, associated with the names of N.A. Simonya, L.I. Reisner and other theorists (V.I. Gantman, M.A. Khrustalev), as well as the theory of modernization synthesis, analysis of the cycles of world politics³ and much more (Reisner & Simoniya, 1984; Gantman, 1984; Zarubina, 1998; Pantin & Lapkin, 2006).

³ Khrustalev M. A. *System Modeling of International Relations: student book*. Moscow : MGIMO publ., 1987.

National Criticism of the New Globalism

The problem of the so-called global theory of international relations is connected, in our opinion, with the definition of the global as self-valuable and autonomous from the nationally distinctive without attempting to build a relationship between the global and the distinctive as ontologically equal, being in complex dialectical relations with each other. Instead, the status of ontological recognition is assigned in the global theory to the global. In this case, the global is defined not through a universal idea — like, for example, liberal democracy in the American mainstream or “good governance” in the European one — but by referring to a pluralism of regions and participating agents, including those outside the West. In this project, one can easily guess the criticism of the state and national statehood, which is already known to the scientific community in terms of the political orientation of the ideas of global peace, as “monopolizing” modernity and overly conservative institutions hindering the progress of humanity.⁴ In large part of it, the global is conceived here as a negation — and far from being dialectical — of the state and national identity.

Astute researchers have already drawn attention to the marked tendency of A. Acharya and B. Buzan to a dichotomous understanding of the global and the original. In particular, the German international relations theorists F. Anderl and A. Witt pointed out the need to problematize the global. They advocated moving away from understanding it as structurally unchanged and ontologically independent (Anderl & Witt, 2020). Their work did not limit themselves to theoretical and logical criticism, but also suggested ways to overcome the dichotomy of the two concepts. First, it is necessary to show the historical roots of the emergence and current conditions for

maintaining each “globalism.” Secondly, based on such thinking, it is necessary to analyze whose purposes and interests they serve (Anderl & Witt, 2020, p. 48). According to these researchers, if the global theory of A. Acharya and B. Buzan is destined to demonstrate the ability to be “less arrogant, less ahistorical, and less exclusive,” it will be vital to respond to this criticism (Anderl & Witt, 2020).

This criticism brings us back to the concept of the distinctive, without which neither the historical reconstruction of the global nor the understanding of its social and intellectual roots is possible. Furthermore, here we find that this concept is poorly developed theoretically and does not interest not only A. Acharya and B. Buzan, but also Western thought about international relations. Thus, in Western realism, the national-cultural is reduced to the state. For example, in a recent book criticizing liberalism, the leading American realist J. Mearsheimer does not make any fundamental distinction between realism and nationalism (Mearsheimer, 2018).

There is even less understanding of the national-special in Western liberalism, which mainly proceeds from the centrality of individual rights and freedoms and insists on the priority of liberal democracy. Liberals rarely care that liberal democracy does not take root everywhere and is by no means the only way to express national and cultural identity. Often it is expressed not by liberal but by traditional and conservative values (Keating & Kaczmarek, 2019). However, for representatives of Western liberalism, the global is mainly the Western. By the way, it seems that in this area, the project of A. Acharya and B. Buzan considered above is close to Western liberalism. Rejecting claims to cultural exclusivity, the authors criticize the notions of “Asian values,” “Asian human rights,” and Confucian values as associated with models of authoritarian rule, but do not mention the West’s claims to its exclusivity (Acharya, 2014; 2016).

Finally, constructivism has recently become less and less interested in forming the

⁴ For earlier work in this area see: (Falk, 1995; Cox & Sinclair, 1996; Linklater, 1998).

national. Instead, it is increasingly concerned with forming the everyday structure of meanings in the practice and interaction of various groups and actors, including within countries and elites (McCourt, 2016; Kustermans, 2016). In addition, theorists of international and global norms, who are not too sensitive to the perception of these norms by nation-states and societies, are influential within Western constructivism (Adler-Nissen, 2016).

National-original in Russian International Theory

Such a state of modern literature on global and national issues should be kept in mind by those who seriously set the task of national understanding of the changes taking place in the world. Any theory, including international relations theory, is a product of time, place, and specific intellectual efforts. Insofar as this is the case, by definition, it cannot be universal and must be built based on local characteristics and conditions. This position does not mean that it is unscientific and unverifiable — each theory must have an outlet in practice, confirm it or refute it — it only means the limitations of any theory and the importance of understanding its capabilities and limits.

For Russia, this means the importance of understanding its own historical and social conditions, and secondly, the need to mobilize its intellectual capital in its understanding. Russian political thought has been discussing issues of national identity and its quintessence, the Russian idea, for more than a century. Without discussing the Russian idea and relying on Russian thought and philosophy, one cannot build a Russian international relations theory. The Russian historian and diplomat S.S. Tatishchev, quoted in the epigraph, urged us to do this.

So far, Russian international affairs experts are moving in this direction rather intuitively, by feel, than based on a systematic understanding of modern world processes. In our opinion, the idea of a nation or an original

idea should be the starting point in building any theoretical explanation. The Russian idea is a synthesis of sovereign and other sociocultural attitudes, which were combined peculiarly at various stages of historical development. The ideas of any large nation are deeply original. The task of international affairs specialists is to understand and use them to form a scientific, nationally oriented theory.⁵

For Russia, as an established great power, it is also essential to consider the best achievements of realist theories of international relations, especially since realist developments are actively developing in expert and academic circles. Russian realism at its best showed sensitivity to manifestations of national identity, including the country's Eurasian position between Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, trans-ethnicity, the size of the territory, and the importance of a strong centralized state. Emphasizing the importance of a strong state, Russian realists, as a rule, are not opposed to individual freedom or civilizational originality. They only proceed because such a state is a part, basis, and protection of national-political identity from claims to it from the outside.⁶

We have already had to propose a sociological approach as the basis for studying and forming a nationally oriented theory of international relations.⁷ Among other advantages, this approach can synthesize the achievements of constructivism and realism concerning specific national conditions. The sociological approach recognizes the presence of certain universal, commonly-used concepts, methods, and techniques in science. However, such an approach also affirms the dialectic of the national and the global and proceeds from

⁵ One example concerning foreign policy analysis can be based on a synthesis of realism and constructivism see: (Tsygankov, 2020).

⁶ For our analyses of Russian realism, see: (Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 2017; Tsygankov, 2021).

⁷ Tsygankov A. P., Tsygankov P. A. *Sociology of International Relations: Analysis of Russian and Western Theories: Textbook for Universities*. Moscow : Aspekt Press publ., 2006.

the fact that general scientific concepts should be the product of global interethnic dialogue and cannot be developed and confirmed only from one part of the culturally contradictory world. Therefore, the sociocultural and political dialogue of scientists representing different countries and parts of the globe should be a condition for the development of science. Such a dialogue involves mutual learning and self-learning as understanding oneself through the perception of the other (and vice versa).

For Russia, such a formulation of the question means the need to be in constant dialogue with foreign colleagues and learn from them and be aware of the need to develop approaches to the study of international relations that meet national interests. Fencing off-world, including Western science as fundamentally alien to Russia, is the path to a non-dialectical denial of the global and, as a result, to the intellectual isolation of the country. National approaches in international relations theory must be based on knowledge of global trends and dialogue with representatives of other communities inside and outside the country (Tsygankov & Tsygankov, 2019).

Conclusion

In conclusion, we emphasize that efforts to build a global without fully considering a national identity cannot succeed. The global should not be built from top to bottom but grow as a dialogue of equal sociocultural

communities. The opposite is also true: any nationally oriented theory must not be isolated in itself but contain the concept of the global, its origins, and conditions for conservation and development.

It is also true that researchers should be guided by specific general methodological standards for obtaining knowledge valued in various cultural communities. Concepts and empirical findings are available for the development of such standards and mutually acceptable theories based on them (Anderl & Witt, 2020, pp. 48—55). They should be developed and multiplied by organizing cross-national and cross-cultural research projects. At the same time, it will be necessary to remember that any complex theory contains several levels and is built based on critical ideological and political assumptions, the national differences of which can hardly be overcome due to a general scientific dialogue. As S. Hoffmann rightly wrote, no matter how much researchers would like to see themselves as part of a free cosmopolitan community of scientists while denying their intellectual dependence on the conditions of their country, such dependence exists (Hoffmann, 1995, p. 225). Representatives of the national community must spell out this level of ideological and political assumptions revealing national identity. Otherwise, they run the risk of being inscribed in one or another global theory on the truncated rights of some “regional research.”

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