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Russia as Civilization-State: New Methodological Projections in Representing the Course in Russian History

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Abstract: The author substantiates the necessity of transitioning from the evolutionist-modernization paradigm to the civilizational approach in representing the course in Russian history, while correlating this shift with the state and societal demand for strengthening sovereignty and a unified identity. The methodological framework of the study is revealed through the comparison of the core content of the current course in history with the fundamental principles of civilizational theory and their logical projections onto Russian historical material. The author traces the formation of the civilizational discourse in contemporary Russia at the state level and its reflection in educational processes. The author also proposes a set of methodological recommendations related to the transition to examining Russian history through the prism of characterizing Russia as a civilization-state. Recommendations are provided for introducing corresponding adjustments in: the representation of state genesis, the identification of the driving forces of Russian history, historical periodization, assessment of reforms, the determination of the nature of social crises, explanation of external conflicts, and the role of ideology and identity systems. The practical result of the research lies in outlining guidelines for updating school and university courses in Russian history within the unified framework of a civilizational approach.

Keywords: methodology, historical process, sovereignty, Fundamentals of Russian Statehood; identity, traditional values, civilizational genesis, civilizational wars, civilizational crises, civilizational constants

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Россия – государство-цивилизация: новые методологические проекции в репрезентации курса российской истории

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Аннотация: Обосновывается необходимость перехода от эволюционистско-модернизационной парадигмы к цивилизационному подходу в репрезентации курса российской истории, соотнося этот поворот с государственным и общественным запросом на укрепление суверенитета и единой идентичности. Методологическая база исследования раскрывается в сопоставлении осевого содержания действующего исторического курса с фундаментальными позициями теории цивилизаций и их логическими проекциями на российский исторический материал. Прослеживается формирование цивилизационного дискурса в современной России на государственном уровне и отражение его в образовательном процессе. Предлагается пакет методологических рекомендаций, связанных с переходом к рассмотрению российской истории через призму характеристики России как государства-цивилизации. Даются рекомендации по внесению соответствующих коррекций в отражение процесса государствогенеза, выявления движущих сил российской истории, ее периодизации, оценки реформ, определения природы социальных кризисов, раскрытия оснований внешних конфликтов, роли идеологии, системы идентичностей. Практический результат проведенного исследования состоит в выстраивании ориентиров для обновления школьных и вузовских курсов истории России в единой рамке цивилизационного подхода.

Ключевые слова: методология, исторический процесс; суверенитет, Основы российской государственности, идентичность, традиционные ценности, цивилизационногенез, цивилизационные войны, цивилизационные кризисы, цивилизационные константы

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Introduction

Relevance. Addressing the civilizational approach and the positioning of Russia as a civilization is presently caused by a increasing demand to strengthen, and, in part, to restore Russia's state sovereignty. The issue of sovereignty is a key one in the discursive logic of Vladimir Putin's policies. The concept of sovereignty is interpreted much more broadly and comprehensively than in the classical sense, dating back to Jean Bodin. It encompasses various components – political, economic, financial, technological, educational, food, linguistic, value-based, and other forms of sovereignty. One of the most important components is conceptual sovereignty¹.

¹ A.G. Dugin, “Westernology: towards a sovereign Russian science,” *Bulletin of the State University of Education. Series: History and Political Sciences*, no. 3 (2024): 7–21, <https://doi.org/10.18384/2949-5164-2024-3-7-21>

Various social science approaches relate differently to the task of preserving sovereignty: some objectively lead to its diminution, while others, on the contrary, contribute to its strengthening. This fully applies to historical science, whose conclusions can have an ambivalent direction².

With the onset of the social science revision of the late 1980s, it was the notion of the universality of global development based on the idea of “universal human values” which became the dominant narrative. Essentially, this meant positing the universality of the West’s historical path. This approach logically led to the interpretations condemning anything that implied claim to be a non-Western development path. Since Russia’s actual history did not fit well into Western molds, it was discredited. Soros’s educational literature was a clear illustration of this approach. Russian President Vladimir Putin acknowledged that it had a destructive impact on the consciousness of young people³.

Another request was caused by the issue of ensuring Russia’s state unity and the related question of forming a unified identity. After enduring the threats of disintegration and eliminating hotbeds of separatism, the Russian Federation needed a new representation of state unity. The value of national unity has been a key pillar of Vladimir Putin’s rhetoric.

The solution to this dilemma was the advancement of the concept of Russia as a civilization-state, presented as a counterpoint to the nation-state. This type of state presupposed two levels of identity-ethnic and civilizational. It also implied the presence of a civilizational core, by which for the Russian people were – the state-forming, and therefore the civilization-forming people. At the same time, all other peoples uniting around it created a single civilizational community – the People of Russia.

Elaboration of the problem. It was the emergence of scientific works on the development of the civilizational approach in the context of the contemporary rethinking of the representation of Russian history that have reflected the state demand and challenges of modernity. However, it should be noted that, despite the fact that the civilizational approach initially developed within the field of history, scientific and historical discourse lags significantly behind other social science subjects. There also persists the tendency to view the civilizational approach primarily with regard to ancient and medieval civilizations.

Contemporary research on Russian historical development can be divided into two groups. The first group is devoted to analyzing the potential of the civilizational approach and whose inquiry is methodological in nature⁴. The second group presents its direct application to individual stages of Russian history. The number of works in the second group is significantly smaller, which demonstrates the methodological complexity of the transition

² “Malysheva: istoricheskii suverenitet obespechivaet smysly dlya natsional’nogo soznaniia [Malysheva: Historical sovereignty provides meaning for national consciousness],” TASS, accessed September, 6, 2025, <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/23099331>

³ “Putin soglasilsya, chto negativnoe vozdeistvie uchebnikov Sorosa na molodezh’ bylo [Putin agreed that Soros’s textbooks had a negative impact on young people],” TASS, accessed September, 6, 2025, <https://tass.ru/politika/25095713>

⁴ V.I. Zhukov, “Civilization: from Hypotheses, Legends and Epics to Legal Certainty,” *RUDN Journal of Russian History* 24, no. 2 (2025): 249–263, <https://doi.org/10.22363/2312-8674-2025-24-2-249-263>; E.Yu. Kovalev, “The influence of the civilizational approach to history on the formation of the national identity of society in the process of globalization,” *MCU Journal of Philosophical Science*, no. 1 (2022): 108–121, <https://doi.org/10.25688/2078-9238.2022.41.1.10>; K.A. Feofanov, “The Concept of “Civilization State” as a Direction in the Development of Civilizational Theory,” *Outlines of Global Transformations: Politics, Economics, Law*, no. 17 (2024): 122–135, <https://doi.org/10.31249/kgf/2024.04.08>; A.V. Shishigin, “Civilizational approach as a methodological basis for teaching the discipline ‘fundamentals of Russian statehood,’” *Humanitarian Studies. History and Philology*, no. 19 (2025): 40–48, <https://doi.org/10.24412/2713-0231-2025-19-40-48>

from understanding history as a process of change in order to understand it as a process of reproduction⁵.

There have been attempts to incorporate the civilizational approach into history textbooks. However, the presence of relevant sections and references does not yet indicate the full implementation of this methodology: the included elements remain poorly integrated into the overall narrative, which is constructed within a different paradigm⁶.

The review reveals a severe shortage of dissertations devoted to examining Russian history from a civilizational perspective. To date, there has been found only one dissertation specifically aimed at identifying the origins of Russian civilization⁷. At the same time, so far not a single historical period in Russia has become the subject of a special dissertation analysis from the perspective of the civilizational approach.

This state of affairs can be characterized as a gap between the state historical policy and research practice, indicating the need to develop new research schools and programs focused on developing the civilizational approach in Russian historical studies. The proposed methodological recommendations could serve as a prelude to such future research.

The purpose of the study is to develop methodological recommendations aimed at rethinking the course in Russian history within the logic of the civilizational approach. This objective determined the choice of *research methodology* based on a comparison of the core content of the course in Russian history with the fundamental tenets and logical projections of the theory of civilizations. This approach allows identifying structural and conceptual inconsistencies between the current model of history teaching and the civilizational understanding of the historical process, as well as outlining ways to correct them methodologically.

The source base of the study is a corpus of contemporary historical narratives on the course in Russian history, as currently established within the educational model of the Russian Federation. This includes selected facts and personalities that form the core of the representation of the Russian historical process⁸. However, the fixation of the discrepancy

⁵ A.I. Apanovich, “Vzglyad na SSSR cherez prizmu tsivilizatsionnogo podkhoda [A look at the USSR through the prism of a civilizational approach],” in *K 100-letiiu obrazovaniia SSSR: uroki istorii: materialy kruglogo stola kafedry politologii iuridicheskogo fakul'teta Belorusskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta* (Minsk: BGU Publ., 2023), 13–17; V.V. Kovalev, “Baptism of Russia in 988 and its significance for formation of features of the Russian civilization,” *Caucasian Science Bridge* 3, no. 4 (2020): 24–30; S.V. Perevezentsev, *Russkie smysly: Dukhovno-politicheskie ucheniia Rossii X–XVII vv. v ikh istoricheskom razvitii* [Russian Meanings: Spiritual and Political Teachings of Russia in the 10th–17th Centuries in Their Historical Development] (Moscow: Kvadriga Publ., 2023).

⁶ *Istoriia Rossii. Uchebnik dlya neistoricheskikh spetsial'nostei i napravlenii podgotovki* [History of Russia. A textbook for non-historical majors and programs of study] (Moscow: Nauka Publ., 2024), 13–20.

⁷ O.D. Shemyakina, “Civilizational approach to the history of Russia as a fact of historiography and a method of cognition,” PhD diss. (Moscow RUDN University, 2011).

⁸ “Istoriko-kul'turnyi standart [Historical and cultural standard],” accessed September, 6, 2025, chrome-extension://efaidnbmnnnibpcajpcglclefindmkaj/https://history.ru/uploads/media/default/0001/33/e13218e2e0721acfe82d567de933f1659d3d6673.pdf; N.M. Arsenyev, A.A. Danilov, I.V. Kurukin, *Istoriia Rossii. 8 klass. Uchebnik. V 2-kh chastyakh. Chast' 1* [History of Russia. Grade 8. Textbook. In 2 parts. Part 1] (Moscow: Prosveshchenie Publ., 2021); M.M. Gorinov, A.A. Danilov, I.S. Semenenko, *Istoriia Rossii. 10 klass. Uchebnik. Bazovyi i uglublennyyi urovni. V 3-kh chastyakh. Chast' 2* [History of Russia. 10th grade. Textbook. Basic and advanced levels. In 3 parts. Part 2] (Moscow: Prosveshchenie Publ., 2021); A.S. Orlov, V.A. Georgiev, N.G. Georgieva, T.A. Sivokhina, *Istoriia Rossii. Uchebnik* [History of Russia. Textbook] (Moscow: Prospekt Publ., 2025); A.N. Sakharov, N.V. Zagladin, Yu.A. Petrov, *Istoriia. Konets XIX – nachalo XXI v. 10–11 klassy. Chast' 2. Uchebnik. Bazovyi i uglublennyyi urovni* [History. Late 19th – Early 21st Century. Grades 10–11. Part 2. Textbook. Basic and Advanced Levels] (Moscow: Russkoe slovo Publ., 2022); A.N. Sakharov, V.A. Shestakov, A.N. Bokhanov, *Istoriia Rossii s drevneishikh vremen do nashikh dnei. Uchebnik* [History of Russia from Ancient Times to the Present Day. Textbook] (Moscow: Prospekt Publ., 2025).

between the interpretation of this outline in the educational space and the request for its rethinking in the logic of the civilizational approach determines the inclusion of the second source component – works presenting a view of history from the position of the theory of civilizations, from the classics to modern followers of the corresponding methodological direction⁹.

Civilizational approach in the state-authority discourse of Russia's policy in the field of historical education

The demand for a civilizational approach was formulated at the highest state level, as it entered the president's discourse.

A crucial milestone in shaping the new agenda for examining the historical process was Vladimir Putin's article "Russia: The National Question," published in 2012 ahead of the presidential elections. In the article, for the first time, it was publicly declared in Russian discourse that Russia was a civilization-state, should be viewed as a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional state built around a Russian civilizational core. The mission of the Russian people was manifested in holding Russian civilization together. In substantiating his theses, Putin cited the "Sermon on Law and Grace," the "Primary Chronicle," and the works of V.O. Klyuchevsky, F.M. Dostoevsky, and I.A. Ilyin. In the article Putin characterized the current type of Russian statehood as historical, implying that it developed as a result of historical experience. Methodologically, this also meant considering it as the axis of the national historical process¹⁰.

The concept of the civilization-state was further included in the 2012 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly, which gave it a system-forming character due to the strategic status of the Presidential Address. The civilization-state was contrasted with the nation-state, implying the difference of historical trajectories that led to the formation of these types of statehood¹¹.

The most detailed presentation of the civilizational approach was given by Vladimir Putin in his speech at the Valdai Forum in October 2023. In the president's interpretation the civilizational approach was contrasted with the universalist one, which he described as colonial and, in essence, racist. The president emphasized that civilizations cannot be "higher" or "lower," and that the imposition of development models, like any unification, contradicts the very nature of civilizational diversity¹².

Vladimir Putin identified the distinctive features of civilizations – their uniqueness, internal complexity, and self-sufficiency. At the Valdai Forum, which took place on Sep-

⁹ N.Ya. Danilevsky, *Rossia i Evropa* [Russia and Europe] (St. Petersburg: Glagol' Publ., 1995); O. Shpengler, *Zakat Evropy. Oчерki morfologii mirovoi istorii* [The Decline of Europe. Essays on the Morphology of World History] (Moscow: Mysl' Publ., 1993); A.J. Toynbee, *Tsivilizatsiia pered sudom istorii: Sbornik* [Civilization before the Court of History: Collection] (Moscow: Rol'f Publ., 2002); A.S. Panarin, *Pravoslavnaia tsivilizatsiia* [Orthodox Civilization] (Moscow: Algoritm Publ., 2002); Sh. Eisenstadt, *Revolutsiia i preobrazovanie obshchestv: Svravnitel'noe izuchenie tsivilizatsii* [Revolution and Transformation of Societies: A Comparative Study of Civilizations] (Moscow: Aspekt-Press Publ., 1999); O.A. Sergeeva, "Theoretical models of the civilization concept," Doc. diss., Moscow State University, 2002.

¹⁰ V.V. Putin, "Rossiia: natsional'nyi vopros [Russia: the National Question]," *Nezavisimaa Gazeta*, accessed September, 6, 2025, https://www.ng.ru/politics/2012-01-23/1_national.html

¹¹ "Poslanie Prezidenta Federal'nomu Sobraniuu [The 2012 Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly]," *Kremlin.ru*, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/17118>

¹² "Zasedanie diskussionnogo kluba «Valdai». 5 oktyabrya 2023 g. [Valdai Discussion Club meeting, October 5, 2023]," *Kremlin.ru*, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/72444>

tember 29 – October 2, 2025, he presented a virtually shaped worldview concept, in which the civilizational approach was combined with the idea of sovereignty, a system of traditional values, and its geopolitical dimension.

In his speech, the president argued with S. Huntington, the author of the “Clash of Civilizations” concept, by emphasizing the indeterminacy of conflict scenarios and the possibility of dialogue between civilizations. Among the factors underlying the genesis of civilization, he named history, culture, religion, ethical norms, and geography - as sources for the formation of value systems, traditions, and civilizational self-awareness.

Vladimir Putin’s statements allow us to conclude that presently, at the highest government level, there has now been a formulated a coherent worldview — the concept of Russia as a civilization-state, serving as the methodological basis for its historical representation. The question today is how this vision will be included in the actual practice of historical education and the process of understanding national history¹³.

The concept of “civilization” has been included in the high-level government regulations. The first in this series of documents was the “Basic Principles of State Cultural Policy,” approved by the President of the Russian Federation in December 2014. These documents set the goal of preserving the country’s civilizational identity and the intergenerational transfer of the values, norms, traditions, and behavior patterns of Russian civilization¹⁴.

The definition of Russia as a civilization-state was first enshrined at the doctrinal level in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation. This concept’s presentation in the context of foreign policy was developed in three aspects: upholding Russia’s civilizational identity, the diversity of the world’s civilizations development, and Russia’s right to be one of the poles of a multipolar world¹⁵.

The inclusion of the provision on the civilization-state in the “Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Historical Education” directly pointed to the civilizational methodological approach, from the position of which the narratives of history were supposed to be constructed in the spheres of education and enlightenment¹⁶.

By order of the President of the Russian Federation, “Basic Principles of Russian Statehood” was developed and launched in September 2023 as the first subject with the goal of shaping the worldview of Russian students. The methodological basis of the course was the civilizational approach. Of the five topical units, two were directly related to the development of civilizational theory: the second, “The Russian Civilization-State,” and the third, “The Russian Worldview and the Values of Russian Civilization.” There were pub-

¹³ “Zasedanie diskussionnogo kluba «Valdai». 2 oktyabrya 2025 goda [Valdai Discussion Club meeting. October 2, 2025],” Kremlin.ru, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78134>

¹⁴ “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 24.12.2014 g. [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of December 24, 2014 № 808],” Kremlin.ru, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/39208> “Ob utverzhdenii Osnov gosudarstvennoi kul’turnoi politiki [On approval of the Basic Principles of State Cultural Policy],” Kremlin.ru, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/39208>

¹⁵ “Ukaz ob utverzhdenii Kontseptsii vneshnei politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii [Decree on approval of the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation],” Kremlin.ru, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/70811>

¹⁶ “Ukaz Prezidenta Rossiiskoi Federatsii ot 08.05.2024 g. № 314 ‘Ob utverzhdenii Osnov gosudarstvennoi politiki Rossiiskoi Federatsii v oblasti istoricheskogo prosveshcheniia’ [Decree of the President of the Russian Federation of May 8, 2024 No. 314 “On approval of the Basic Principles of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Field of Historical Education],” Kremlin.ru, accessed September, 6, 2025, <http://www.kremlin.ru/acts/bank/50534>

lished several textbooks by different groups of authors on a common methodological platform, but with different emphases for various areas of study¹⁷.

However, during the course's implementation, there emerged a problem of unconformity between its methodological principles and the teaching of other social sciences and humanities, above all history. The contradiction lay in the fact that historical education continues to rely heavily on the logic of modernization theory, whereas the “Basic Principles of Russian Statehood” course is built within the paradigm of the civilizational approach and value-anthropological continuity.

The emerging contradictions were resolved by the revision of the methodological foundation of the social sciences and humanities, aimed at bringing them to a common standard, which turned out to be traditional Russian spiritual and moral values and the civilizational approach. This process is still in its early stages, which necessitates the identification of appropriate benchmarks for the ongoing systemic review.

Methodological criteria of the civilizational approach in teaching history

When developing new versions of history textbooks for both school and university students, the difficulty of transitioning from the logic of evolutionism to the methodology of the civilizational approach is apparent. It is important to identify the specifics of presenting historical material through the prism of the civilizational approach.

First, the civilizational approach emphasizes constants rather than historical variability. According to it, history is understood as a process of value-civilizational reproduction. In this regard, Ancient Rus', the Tsardom of Muscovy, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and modern Russia represent the forms of a continuous and reproducible civilization-state.

Second, the civilizational approach emphasizes the unique historical path of each individual community. In this context, Russia's foundations of value and its system of life is viewed as civilizationally distinctive and not subject to description through the prism of foreign civilizational experience. Extrapolating the institutions and formulas of other civilizations (in the Russian case, it is the Western one) can only lead to a systemic crisis. The prohibition of civilizational extrapolations was formulated, in particular, in N.Ya. Danilevsky's third law (“The principles of civilization of one cultural-historical type are not transmitted to peoples of another type. Each type develops it for itself with greater or lesser influence from alien, preceding, or contemporary civilizations”)¹⁸. However, this does not mean a refusal to borrow technologies – as long as they do not conflict with the value constants of one's own civilization.

Third, civilization-states rely on civilizational values, which are traditional for a given community. Traditional values are those that ensure the viability of a civilization.

¹⁷ T.V. Evgenyeva, I.I. Kuznetsov, S.V. Perevezentsev, A.V. Selezneva, O.E. Sorokopudova, A.B. Strakhov, A.R. Boronin, *Osnovy rossiiskoi gosudarstvennosti: uchebnoe posobie dlia studentov, izuchaiushchikh sotsiologičeskie nauki* [Fundamentals of Russian statehood: a textbook for students studying social and humanitarian sciences] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom “Delo” RANKhiGS Publ., 2023); A.D. Kharichev, A.V. Polosin, A.V. Selezneva, *Osnovy rossiiskoi gosudarstvennosti* [Foundations of Russian Statehood] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom “Delo” RANKhiGS Publ., 2024); A.P. Shevyrov, V.V. Lapin, S.V. Rogachov, A.V. Tutorskiy, P.Yu. Uvarov, A.A. (ieromonakh Rodion) Larionov, V.S. Eremin, N.Yu. Pivovarov, O.A. Efremov, Ye.A. Makovetskiy, Ye.A. Ovchinnikova, D.A. Andreyev, V.V. Bulatov, O.A. Chagadayeva, *Osnovy rossiiskoi gosudarstvennosti: uchebnoe posobie dlia studentov estestvenno-nauchnykh i inzhenerno-tekhnicheskikh spetsial'nostei* [Fundamentals of Russian Statehood: A Textbook for Students of Natural Sciences and Engineering Specialties] (Moscow: Izdatel'skii dom “Delo” RANKhiGS Publ., 2023).

¹⁸ N.Ya. Danilevsky, *Rossii i Evropa* [Russia and Europe] (St. Petersburg: Glagol' Publ., 1995), 77.

Anti-values, on the contrary, are guidelines that reduce viability to the point of its loss, leading to the death of a civilization. The sovereignty of a civilization-state is derived from civilizational values. In turn, a civilization-state protects these values, ensuring the historical reproduction of the corresponding civilization. The connection between the existence of civilizations and state sovereignty is revealed by N.Ya. Danilevsky's second law: "For a civilization characteristic of a distinctive cultural-historical type to emerge and develop, it is necessary that the peoples belonging to it enjoy political independence."¹⁹

Fourth, civilizations are self-sufficient and capable of existing as independent social systems. In this respect, a civilizational approach can be combined with the concept of world-systems, as well as with geopolitical theory. Russia, as a self-sufficient civilization, represents a "world of worlds" and feels no need to integrate into other world-systems.

Fifth, history of a civilization-state cannot be described within the logic of the right and left political spectrum. Civilizations are neither "left" nor "right." Viewing history from the perspective of ideological divisions leads to destructive consequences, as it reproduces the syndrome of civil division as a model of historical consciousness. The civilizational approach, by contrast, emphasizes the correspondence or non-correspondence of the actions of historical actors and the nature and value structure of a given civilization.

Russian history in the light of theory of civilizations

Let us further consider what changes should be made to the course in Russian history in connection with the transition to civilizational approach and the consideration of Russia as a civilization-state.

Russia's state genesis

Within the logic of the presented approach, Russia's state genesis should be viewed simultaneously as a process of civilization genesis, which implies the separation and self-determination of an emerging civilization community in relation to other civilizations. In the history of Russian civilization there can be identified three key acts of such separation: from the West – Western Christian civilization, later from Europe, from Byzantium – the old Eastern Christian civilization, and from the civilization of the Great Steppe – the Mongol-Eurasian world-system²⁰.

Emphasis on events such as the Norman Conquest in Rus, for example, is incompatible with the civilizational approach. According to the logic of the civilizational approach, statehood is formed on the basis of an internal, civilizational identity foundation, rather than through external borrowing or forced transfer of political forms. The position that the Normans established the state in Rus' contradicts the methodological foundation of civilizational analysis and correlates with the Western-centric interpretation matrix that reduces the historical process to an external impetus from the West.

According to P. A. Sorokin, civilizations begin with the development of logical and worldview integrity²¹. It was Orthodoxy which became the worldview foundation of Russian civilization. In this regard, Orthodox Christianity serves as a civilization-forming religion for Russian civilization, ensuring its semantic, cultural, and spiritual continuity.

¹⁹ N.Ya. Danilevsky, *Rossia i Evropa* [Russia and Europe] (St. Petersburg: Glagol' Publ., 1995), 77.

²⁰ L.N. Gumilev, *Ot Rusi do Rossii* [From Rus to Russia] (Moscow: AST Publ.; Astrel'. Ermak Publ., 2003), 26–31, 41–43, 86–87, 114–119, 122–123, 275–280.

²¹ P.A. Sorokin, *Sotsial'naiia i kul'turnaia dinamika* [Social and cultural dynamics] (Moscow: Astrel' Publ., 2006), 40–42, 50–51.

It's important to initially identify the differences between the civilizational phenomena of “country” and “state”. Translating these concepts as equivalent, as is often the case, fails to capture their civilizational specificity. Transferring the characteristics of a “state” to the Russian historical process leads to significant methodological and semantic distortions. One of the consequences of this transfer is the juxtaposition of state and society as two autonomous and competing institutions.

In Russia, the concept of a “country” was conceptualized differently – not as a political and administrative structure, but as a social shell embodying the universality and organic unity of the people. In this sense, society and state were not opposed but represented different forms of the same civilizational entity. Their separation was seen as a symptom of a crisis leading to the destruction of the organic bond between the authorities and the people.

From this perspective, V.O. Klyuchevsky's authoritative statement “The state was becoming fat, but people were wasting away” requires a certain correction²². As Klyuchevsky demonstrated, throughout Russian history, all social classes served the state, which testifies to the deep involvement of society in the system of public service. The ethic of service to the state was a universal, all-class imperative. Therefore, the crisis of state in Russia never meant the liberation of society from the pressure of the authorities, as it often happened in Europe; on the contrary, it resulted in a humanitarian catastrophe affecting the entire social body of the civilization.

Periodization of Russian history: constants and pseudomorphoses

For the civilizational approach, the scheme of linear progress (as well as regress) is unacceptable. The logic of historical cycles seems more adequate, but even it does not fully reflect the specific nature of civilization development. The civilizational approach emphasizes not the succession of stages, but the mechanisms of civilization reproduction. Forms and political language change historically, but the value foundations of a civilization-state remain and are reproduced in new contexts.

According to O. Spengler, in history there is often evident the phenomenon of historical pseudomorphosis – a situation where previous cultural and historical entities continue to exist under new external forms and terms. An example of such pseudomorphosis in Russian history was the transition to the Petrine and later Soviet models of statehood. In both cases, ideological and institutional forms changed, but the civilizational core ensuring the continuity of Russian statehood was preserved²³.

Showing that the Soviet Union represented an emanation of the Russian civilization-state during the stage of modernity is one of the key methodological challenges in studying the Soviet period of Russian history. In this sense, the civilizational approach allows overcoming the dichotomy of the “gap” between the imperial and Soviet stages, viewing them as different manifestations of the same civilizational type²⁴.

Accordingly, the periodization of Russian history within the logic of the civilizational approach is defined not by political but by civilizational milestones – the moments of shifting historical pseudomorphoses. Each transition was preceded by a civilizational crisis,

²² V.O. Klyuchevskiy, “Kurs russkoi istorii. Lektsiia XLI [Course of Russian History. Lecture XLI],” *Istoria*, accessed September, 6, 2025, <https://www.istoriya.ru/book/klyuchev/kllec41.php>

²³ I.V. Leonov, “Pseudomorphosis as a form of intercultural interaction: based on “The decline of the West” by O. Spengler,” *Tomsk State University Journal of Cultural Studies and Art History*, no. 47 (2022): 71–73, <https://doi.org/10.17223/22220836/47/6>

²⁴ S.G. Kara-Murza, *Sovetskaia tsivilizatsiia* [Soviet civilization] (Moscow: Algoritm Publ., 2008), 327–359.

functionally equivalent to the concept of the “Time of Troubles” – the period of disintegration and subsequent renewal of the value-based foundation of Russian civilization.

Driving forces of history: challenge and response

According to A. J. Toynbee, the driving factor in civilizational dynamics are existential challenges. These challenges alter the conditions of civilizational existence and create threats to the very existence of civilizations. As Toynbee acknowledged, the main historical challenge for Russian civilization was aggression from the West²⁵.

Russian history demonstrates the persistent operation of a “challenge-response” system, within which external threats became a source of internal mobilization and civilizational expansion. Thus, the dual Lithuanian and Tatar threats were met with the formation of the centralized Russian state. The Livonian War made Ivan the Terrible establish the oprichnina model of state mobilization. The Polish-Swedish intervention prompted the re-assembling of the Tsardom of Muscovy under the Romanovs.

The Great Northern War with Sweden became the impetus for Peter the Great’s modernization of Russia. The Napoleonic Wars and the Patriotic War of 1812 led to the subsequent ideological inversion of the reign of Nicholas I. The response to the Entente’s intervention and the blockade of Soviet Russia was the creation of an autarkic system of the Soviet economy and a mobilization-based political model that operated under a state of emergency. The threat of World War II became the impetus for accelerated industrialization in the USSR and the ideological inversion of the pre-war years. The threat of World War III and US nuclear strike on the USSR led to the Soviet nuclear and space breakthroughs, which thereby allowed the USSR to achieve the status of a “superpower.” Each of these situations is an example of Russia’s historical breakthrough, demonstrating the mechanism of a civilizational response to external challenges²⁶.

The special military operation and hybrid warfare waged by the collective West also clearly spurred a process of modern mobilization in Russian society. Appealing to traditional Russian spiritual and moral values is one of the results of Russia’s modern response.

Ideology

According to the theory of civilizations, the key factors in civilization genesis and state genesis are natural-economic, military, ethnocultural, linguistic, and value-worldview factors. The value-worldview factor shapes the civilizational logos. Accordingly, civilizational versions of Russian history should place particular emphasis on the ideology of the Russian state. Following this logic, one should begin the examination of the corresponding historical periods with ideology²⁷.

Based on civilizational value constants, a set of ideas was formed that were embodied in state-building and development of social processes²⁸. The presence of the value-

²⁵ V.I. Ukolova, P.P. Shkarenkov, “Russia and the West: a horizon of challenges, responses, and threats in the conception of A.J. Toynbee,” *The New Historical Bulletin*, no. 65 (2020): 56–78.

²⁶ G.D. Ramazanly, “The concept of “Challenge-and-Response” by A. Toynbee in the history of Russia,” *KANT*, no. 1 (2024): 183–187, <https://doi.org/10.24923/2222-243X.2024-50.33>

²⁷ *Russkie kody* [Russian Codes] (Moscow: Nashe zavtra Publ., 2022), 5–7, 8–9, 370–371.

²⁸ R.S. Uortman, *Stsenarii vlasti: mify i tseremonii russkoi monarkhii. Tom 1: ot Petra Velikogo do smerti Nikolaia I* [Scenarios of Power: Myths and Ceremonies of the Russian Monarchy. Volume 1: From Peter the Great to the Death of Nicholas I] (Moscow: OGI Publ., 2004), 17–28; R.S. Uortman, *Stsenarii vlasti: mify i tseremonii russkoi monarkhii. Tom 2: ot Aleksandra II do otrecheniia Nikolaia II* [Scenarios of Power: Myths and Ceremonies of the Russian Monarchy. Volume 2: From Alexander II to the Abdication of Nicholas II] (Moscow: OGI Publ., 2004), 17–34.

worldview component necessitates a dual consideration of each historical period - from the standpoint of reality and from the standpoint of social ideals.

Introducing an ideal component will allow, in particular, reconsidering the hypercritical attitudes that persist in certain periods to more clearly understand the history of the period. Studying both real Russia and ideal Russia simultaneously makes it possible to explain the motivations of the Russian state and society based on the ideals and social dreams they espouse.

Civilizational wars

According to the theory of civilizations, interstate conflicts can take the form of civilizational wars. However, a distinction should be made between intra-civilizational and inter-civilizational wars, which are often found to be combined within the same conflict. Civilizational wars are a clash of values, rather than wars over resources. It is civilizational identities, and often civilizational existence that are at stake in civilizational wars.

As S. Huntington argued, the civilizational approach does not mean a predetermination to war²⁹. Civilizations are capable of coexisting through dialogue and interaction. Wars are caused by one civilization's desire to establish dominance over another as well as by claims to universalize its own values and development models. Historically, Russia has opposed such attempts, playing a key role in deterring global aggressors and thereby ensuring the preservation of humanity's civilizational diversity.

Many of Russia's conflicts with Western countries have had the character of civilizational wars. The history of Russia's relations with the West includes twenty-nine major wars, which have become the axis of the historical narrative. The special military operation can be seen as the thirtieth such conflict.

It is appropriate to examine from the perspective of civilizational wars such events as: the Livonian War, the struggle against the Polish-Swedish intervention in the early 17th century, the Patriotic War of 1812, the Crimean War, the Entente intervention, the Great Patriotic War, the Cold War, and the hybrid warfare of the special military operation period. The Great Patriotic War had a civilizational character, which does not exclude the presence of a component of intra-civilizational conflict within Western civilization.

The Soviet Union faced a virtually unified continental Europe. The hostilities in the East, unlike on the Western Front, were declared by the enemy to be a war of annihilation. The enemy's goal was to eliminate Russian civilization as such. In this regard, the Nazi war of annihilation in the east is proposed to be defined as "civilizational genocide."³⁰

From the first days of the war, people considered it to be practically a holy conflict. In this war Soviet people fought for their existence and values. In this context, the Russian President's statement that the victory was achieved through reliance on traditional Russian spiritual and moral values, despite the fact that during the Great Patriotic War the concept was not used in this form is still fully justified historically.

State reforms

The shift to the civilizational approach requires reconsideration of the assessment and interpretation of state reforms. In historical and public consciousness there has developed a stereotype of a positive interpretation of most reform initiatives. The very concept

²⁹ S. Khantington, *Stolknovenie tsivilizatsii* [Clash of Civilizations] (Moscow: AST Publ., 2003), 27, 117–118, 193–194, 281, 323–325, 407–409, 412–413.

³⁰ V.E. Baghdasaryan, "The Great Patriotic War as a Civilizational War: Scientific and Methodological Recommendations for New History Textbooks," *Bulletin of the State University of Education. Series: History and Political Sciences*, no. 2 (2025): 7–25, <https://doi.org/10.18384/2949-5164-2025-2-7-25>

of “reform” has acquired positive connotations, despite the fact that the goals of reform have often proven wrong and the results disastrous³¹.

In many cases, reforms in Russian history have been imitative, reflecting the desire of some elites to adopt Western models of life. According to the logic of the civilizational approach, such reforms could not end in anything other than failure, giving rise to a crisis of profound consequences.

In this context, the entire formula of Europeanization and Westernization specific to various historical eras requires reconsideration. At the same time, there is a need to reassess what has traditionally been defined as counter-reforms. In many cases, it was counter-reforms that expressed the logic of civilizational self-preservation and were natural rejection of external extrapolations contradicting the value foundations of Russian civilization.

Civilizational crises: the phenomenon of the “Times of Troubles”

Civilizational crises in history are explained, from the perspective of the theory of civilizations, as the result of the state and society’s retreat from their traditional values and identity constants. In Russian, civilizational crises are called “Times of Troubles.”³² The “Time of Troubles” of the early 17th century can be considered one, but not the only, of the periods of Russian turmoil. Civilizational crises can be described by a general framework comprising nine stages.

I. The initial stage is characterized by the state of a mobilized society united by a common idea. This functions as an ideocratic model, within which this common idea is the highest organizing principle. Society acts as unified whole, focused on the implementation of the value-based goals.

II. At this stage, ideocracy gradually loses its spiritual content. A process of objectification and bureaucratization begins, during which semantic and value-based guidelines are replaced by formal procedures. Social energy weakens, and mobilization potential declines.

III. Institutions lose the ability to effectively perform their functions. Society enters a phase of stagnation and begins to stall, with increasing signs of managerial and ideological inertia. Internal fatigue within the system increases.

IV. Awareness of crisis gives rise to a desire for renewal. The idea of social renewal arises, which is then realized through a turn to an external model. A pattern of borrowing begins – a search for solutions in external experience and other civilizational models.

V. Elements borrowed from a foreign civilizational context are introduced into the system. They create an effect of novelty, which is perceived as progressive movement. However, this effect is short-lived, since the introduced components conflict with the internal foundations of civilization.

VI. At this stage, external forces and the cosmopolitan-oriented part of the elite actively support reforms. A split in identity arises: the elite begins to focus on external values, whereas people remain committed to their own civilizational foundations. At this point of development, there is internal tension between the authorities and society.

³¹ E.L. Saraeva, “The content and forms of Europeanization of Russia in the 18th – first half of the 19th centuries. In the context of Westernizing doctrine,” *Vestnik of Kostroma State University*, no. 6 (2006): 143–147.

³² V.P. Buldakov, *Krasnaia smuta. Priroda i posledstviia revolyutsionnogo nasiliia* [The Red Troubles. The Nature and Consequences of Revolutionary Violence] (Moscow: ROSSPEN Publ., 1997); P.P. Marchenya, S.Yu. Razin, “‘The Study of Troubled Times’ as a ‘Gordian Knot’ of the Russian Studies: From Empire to Strife, from Strife to..?’” *Russia and the Contemporary World*, no. 4 (2010): 48–65.

VII. The imported elements of a foreign civilization begin to erode the internal social and value foundation. A systemic crisis arises, manifested by a loss of control, ideological unity, and spiritual integrity. The Time of Troubles begins – a phase of disintegration and civilizational senselessness.

VIII. In response to the destruction of identity, the forces of civilizational rejection intensify. A struggle arises between patriotic and cosmopolitan strata over a cleansing society of alien influences and restoring traditional foundations.

IX. The final stage is associated with the revival of civilizational integrity. Identical meanings are restored, and ideocratic mobilization is renewed. Society returns to its value foundations, and civilization enters a new phase of its historical cycle.

Civilizational unity and ethnic diversity

Given the fundamental differences between a civilization-state and a nation-state expressed in the existence of two levels of identity (ethnic and civilizational), a corresponding adjustment to the historical narrative is required. Russian history should be presented as history of a single civilizational community, encompassing a diversity of peoples united around the Russian civilization-forming core³³.

It is necessary to shift the emphasis toward demonstrating the common cultural codes of the peoples of Russia, their shared understanding of good and evil, their unity in addressing historical challenges, and their joint struggle against external threats. Such a civilizational narrative should define not only national, but also regional understanding of history. It is unacceptable to replace regional histories with ethnic histories of individual nations, which leads to the disintegration of historical space.

At the same time, it is important to demonstrate the contribution of each ethnic group to Russia's state-building and civilizational victories, fostering a holistic perception of the historical process as the joint creation of nations of a single civilization.

Russian statehood on the Eurasian scale should be viewed not as the result of military conquests, but as natural unification of historical space, shaped by the tasks of territorial economic development, ensuring economic coherence, a cultural and educational mission, and the need for protection from external enemies. This approach allows restoring a holistic perception of Russia as a historic civilization-state, which has developed according to its own logic and on its own value foundations.

Conclusion

The transition to the civilizational approach and to viewing Russia as a civilization-state in teaching Russian history requires not just some adjustments, but a fundamental shift in the methodological paradigm of historical education. This does not mean abandoning the use of other research and interpretation models - economic, formational, cultural, or political-institutional. However, their application should be subordinated to a holistic civilizational framework that defines the overall semantic contours of historical analysis.

At the same time, this transition does not involve a mechanical combination of various methodologies. An attempt at an eclectic combination of civilizational, modernization, liberal-progressive, or Marxist approaches leads to logical contradictions and a loss of the integrity of historical thinking. Each methodology relies on its own system

³³ V.I. Spiridonova, “‘Civilizational State’ versus ‘Nation-State’ as a Reflection of the Crisis of the Neo-liberal Order,” *Knowledge. Understanding. Skill*, no. 27 (2022): 103, 106, <https://doi.org/10.17805/zpu.2022.2.7>

of categories, values, and ideas regarding the goals of the historical process, and mixing them makes any interpretation internally inconsistent.

Therefore, consistency in the application of the civilizational approach is a prerequisite for the academic validity of the course. Accordingly, it is necessary to explain its application to each historical topic and each historical period. It is necessary to demonstrate how the events, processes, and individuals under consideration relate to value-civilizational constants, and how they facilitated or, conversely, hindered the reproduction of Russia's civilizational core.

We will further list the proposed revisions arising from the methodological shift to the civilizational approach and to the concept of Russia as a civilization-state.

First, it is necessary to reinforce in the curricula the concept of Russian history as a continuous process of value-civilizational reproduction, where all historical forms (from Ancient Rus' to the present) reflect a single line of the development of the civilization-state.

Second, it is necessary to reflect the uniqueness and specificity of Russia's historical development, and the irreducibility of its civilizational experience to external schemas.

Third, it is necessary to reveal in history courses the relationship between traditional values and the potential for the viability of Russian civilization.

Fourth, it is necessary to develop through the study of history a concept of Russia as a self-sufficient civilization - a unique "world of worlds," open to dialogue, but not in need of subordination to external world systems.

Fifth, one should abandon the interpretation of Russian history through the struggle within the left-right spectrum, evaluating historical events and figures not by the categories of "right" and "left," but by the degree to which they correspond to the value-based nature of Russian civilization.

Sixth, it is necessary to demonstrate the state genesis of Russia as a process of civilization genesis involving civilizational separation – separation and self-determination in relation to other civilizations – while emphasizing a civilizationaly identical religious core, which was Orthodoxy.

Seventh, it is necessary to construct a new periodization of Russian history based on historical pseudomorphoses, reflecting the stages of reproduction and renewal of the forms of representation of Russian civilization.

Eighth, one should reconsider the presentation of Russian history within the logic of the "challenge-response" system by showing how external threats became a source of Russia's internal mobilization and historical breakthroughs, while the key challenge throughout the centuries has been aggression from the West.

Ninth, it is necessary to shift the emphasis to the significance of the value-worldview factor in Russia's development, prioritizing the state's ideology during relevant periods, as reflecting both the actual state of society and its ideals.

Tenth, the category of civilizational wars should be included in the interpretation of military history, demonstrating that Russia's most significant conflicts were characterized by a clash of values and were a struggle to preserve Russian civilization in the face of external expansion.

Eleventh, it is necessary to reconsider the assessment of state reforms, viewing them not as a unconditional manifestation of progress, but through the prism of their compliance with civilizational values, and to overcome the position of a priori positive assessment of the course of Europeanization/Westernization.

Twelfth, Russia's historical crises should be reconsidered as the result of the separation from civilizational values and the borrowing of alien civilizational elements.

Thirteenth, greater emphasis should be placed on presenting the multifaceted unity of ethnic groups as a single Russian civilizational community, which is united around the civilization-forming Russian people.

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