The arctic in the Russian socio-humanitarian discourse of the XXI century and political geography

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Abstract. The article analyzes the transformation of the Russian socio-humanitarian discourse of the Arctic in the last two decades in connection with the political course of the Russian Federation. The article considers the reasons and grounds for the demand for Arctic issues among Russian humanitarians, as well as changes in the image of the Russian North itself. Based on a combination of principles and methods of historiographical research and discourse analysis, the paper highlights key discursive strategies and categories, themes and subjects of scientific events and publications dedicated to the Arctic. The main problem points of the Arctic problem are highlighted and the dynamics of research priorities over the past two decades in the context of Russia's political geography is traced. The author concludes that the Russian socio-humanitarian discourse considers the Arctic region based on a number of highly popular themes and motives that are set by the authorities and are key components of the narrative and symbolic complex of the Russian Arctic. It is argued that the observed growth of interest in the region is largely artificial, and the latest socio-humanitarian historiography of the Arctic is determined primarily by the official position of the state, which affects the overall level of research.

1. Introduction

The topic of the Arctic is now in demand among Russian researchers as never before. The Arctic zone of the Russian Federation appeared as a new eldorado with an inexhaustible potential for opening up the next reserves of nature and humanity. But at the end of the last century, few people remembered about the Arctic [1], and the region itself in the conditions of economic ruin added to the list of abandoned suburbs of the country of Soviets. The Arctic represented an unwanted legacy of the soviet era, an object of irrevocable budget expenditures, rather than a promising region. Further development was out of the question, and geographical research was in the hands of historians, who habitually leafed through the pages of the past in the history of discovery and conquest of the northern borders.

However, at the beginning of the millennium, the image of the Russian Arctic begins to change. Of course, the official media were the first to take the path of transforming the Arctic, which was designed to restore interest in it, turning it, at least in the eyes of citizens, not just into a priority area of state policy, but also into the sphere of new achievements [2]. Russian humanitarianism followed the official guidelines and turned with surprising zeal to the problems of the territories beyond the Arctic Circle, giving the issues of its further development and control an unprecedented significance. The number of publications devoted to the Arctic has steadily increased, and the topic itself has become
increasingly popular in the context of scientific and popular events at various levels: conferences, round tables, forums and meetings.

The paper is devoted to the transformation of the Russian socio-humanitarian discourse of the Arctic, its representation in the domestic scientific space and the connection of these changes with the official political course of the country in relation to the Arctic zone. The methodological basis of the work is a combination of the principles and methods of classical historiography (comparative-historical method, method of logical analysis, retrospective method, method of actualization, etc.) with discourse analysis as a set of analytical methods for interpreting the products of speech activity.

2. Methods and materials

The analysis is based on the rich materials of conferences, round tables and forums (official documents, texts of reports, presentations and summaries of participants’ speeches) that took place in Russia over the past two decades and on the array of Russian-language scientific publications published in the new Millennium (periodicals devoted to the Arctic, including separate, specialized issues of other journals, collections of articles, monographs).

In search of a turning point and the beginning of a qualitative growth in the interest of a wide range of domestic humanitarians in the Arctic, it is most justified to highlight 2001, when the President of the Russian Federation signed the “Maritime doctrine of the Russian Federation for the period up to 2020”, in which the Arctic direction was one of the main directions of the state’s Maritime policy. In the following year, 2002, the Council for The far North and the Arctic under the government of Russia decided to develop a Concept for the sustainable development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. And in light of the increasing attention of government to the Northern borders, as well as of campaign for the protection and stabilization of the situation on the Northern borders of the country in the official media since 2001 the number published by the Russian Humanities scientific texts, the titles of which appeared the word “Arctic”, was noticeably increased.

3. Results

Today, the number of periodicals devoted to the Arctic, including separate, specialized issues of other journals, collections of articles, and research projects that have been carried out and are being implemented, can be quite surprising. And the number of scientific publications on this subject seems simply incalculable. As a result, it turns out that over the past two decades, scientific publications on the Arctic have been published even more than in the previous few centuries of its development. Moreover, such a sharp increase in scientific interest in the Arctic is practically not subject to scientific analysis, researchers are not interested in the causes, nature, and key trends of socio-humanitarian understanding of the problems associated with the fate of this region. Instead of explanations, the verified statements are repeated from time to time that the Arctic, the world's richest territory in natural resources, plays an increasing role both in the life of the Arctic States themselves and the world community as a whole [3]. And the conclusions are successfully replaced by a statement of success and, above all, impressive prospects for the development of Russia's Northern borders.

Meanwhile, the Russian socio-humanitarian historiography of the Arctic is full of reviews of events and reports of conferences, round tables, forums, schools and other events dedicated to the Russian North. Analyzes the rhetoric of the representation of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation in political and public discourses [4, 5, 6], much less frequently, but raise issues reflect the official positions of political leadership in scientific fields. Meanwhile, such works, with rare exceptions, are devoid of criticism, often have an extremely abstract, and sometimes openly opportunistic nature, reflecting the interests of event organizers (conferences, forums, round tables, etc.), certain power structures at the regional and central levels, or the desire to conform to the general official position of the political leadership.

The direct dependence of research interest, both in terms of its quantitative and qualitative indicators, on changes in the attitude of the country’s political leadership to the Arctic is quite obvious. If since 2001 there has been only an initial increase in attention to the Arctic zone of the Russian
Federation, the first mass surge of interest in the Russian North should be recorded as a result of the design of the concept of development of the Arctic zone in the “Fundamentals of state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period up to 2020 and beyond” approved in 2008.

The next significant increase in the relevance of this issue was observed after the approval in 2013 of the “Strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period up to 2020”. Already in 2014, at least six conferences and three round tables on the socio-humanitarian study of the Arctic were held: All-Russian scientific and practical conference “Development of the Arctic and circumpolar regions” in Yekaterinburg; “National interests of Russia and the economy of maritime communications in the Arctic. Murmansk. 2014” and the XIV international conference of students and postgraduates “Problems of the Arctic region” in Murmansk; the Interdisciplinary conference of students, postgraduates and young scientists “Cooperation and competition in the circumpolar region: history and modernity”, as well as the all-Russian scientific and practical conference “Sustainable development of the Arctic: legal aspects” in Arkhangelsk. At the conference “World economy in the XXI century: global challenges and development prospects” in Moscow, one of the main topics was “the Arctic as an object of interests of States with different levels of access to its development”. In the same year 2014, three round tables were held in St.Petersburg and Vladivostok on “the Arctic in modern world politics”, “Innovative development of the Arctic” and “Legal policy in the field of security in the Arctic”. In the following years, at least five or six conferences of various levels were held on the Arctic and the problems of the Russian North. We should not forget that in Russia the number of representatives of socio-humanitarian knowledge who actively participate and publish in non-core conferences and scientific journals is only increasing. The Arctic theme is no exception, especially since the beginning of the all-Russian race for citation indexes.

The consequences of the approval in 2016 are significant in the updating of Arctic issues. “Action plan for the implementation of The strategy for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and ensuring national security for the period up to 2020”. There may have been other reasons, but the most “fruitful” socio-humanitarian scientific events related to the study of the Arctic should be considered 2017, when more than 30 scientific conferences, round tables and forums were held in Russia. Among them, at least seven scientific conferences were distinguished by a clearly defined humanitarian profile: two each in Severodvinsk (“management Theory and practice: Arctic horizons” and “management of innovative development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation”), Arkhangelsk (“Interethnic relations in Russia: history lessons and modern challenges”, “Development of the North-Arctic region: problems and solutions in the humanitarian sphere”), Saint Petersburg (“the Arctic: History and modernity”, “Current state and prospects of studying languages, folklore and literature of indigenous peoples of the North, Siberia and the Far East of the Russian Federation”) and one in Syktyvkar (“Culture and art of the North: the view of the young”). And this is not counting the five international forums held in the same year in St. Petersburg (“the Arctic: present and future”, “Conservation and sustainable development of the Arctic: legal aspects”), Arkhangelsk (“Arctic projects - today and tomorrow”, “the Arctic - the territory of dialogue”) and Murmansk (“Creative industries of the Arctic region: experience and prospects for development”), as well as the visiting session of the St. Petersburg international economic forum “Regions of Russia: new growth points - the Arctic course”.

In 2018 and 2019, the indicators of conference activity decreased slightly, but there is reason to assume that the situation will return to the previous increasing trend in the current year. Still, on March 5, signed the presidential Decree No. 164 “On state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period until 2035”, and in many cities, including Moscow and St.Petersburg declared the Arctic Days. Conferences are held even despite the conditions for preventing the spread of a new coronavirus infection on the territory of the Russian Federation. An example is the Fifth international scientific conference “the Arctic: history and modernity”, which was held at SPbPU in a remote format.
The prevailing topics of conferences, reports, publications, materials of the same conferences or scientific journals are very indicative. If you look at the review of news in the media related to the Arctic and its development, compiled by the Information and analytical center under the State Commission for Arctic development (“IAC GCA”) [7], the most popular topics are international relations, science, culture and education, defense, security and, first of all, socio-economic development of the Arctic. A similar gradation of popular topics is observed in the scientific texts of Russian humanitarians. Of course, we can say that the media and scientific spheres are considering the most pressing issues of the Russian North, but this unanimity is alarming. Even more alarming is the consensus of official position of authorities, media and scientific fields, because the texts of the Humanities, terms, turns, plots and conclusions are consonant with the official documents determining policy and the national interests of the Russian Federation in respect of the macro-region. Moreover, the most large-scale scientific events-conferences, round tables and symposiums, whose names include the cherished word “Arctic” or its derivatives, increasingly involve the support of central or regional state authorities, and sometimes the participation of their representatives in various forms. Moreover, the designated support and participation to a certain extent determine the status/prestige of the scientific event [8].

In the Russian socio-humanitarian discourse, the Arctic region is considered according to a number of the most popular narratives [9], which are set not by representatives of the scientific space, but by power structures. Browsing on the Arctic literature published in Russia over the past two decades, it seems that officially-policies define the themes and subjects that are rendered with different proportion of variability in the scientific community. No less formal are the basic directions of research practices, which have a high degree of institutional demand with the further design of research centers and the organization of conference events. In fact, a narrative and symbolic complex of the Russian Arctic, set by political authorities and resistant to the results of research practices, has been formed. Depending on the transformation of the political situation and, above all, on changes in the view of the political leadership of the country on its northern borders, themes change, some subjects are updated, others recede into the background, but their complex remains almost unchanged.

The core of the designated complex was the official installation that declared the Arctic at the beginning of the new millennium as an economically undervalued region, a certain northern el dorado and an important component of the resource base of the Russian economy. With the light hand of domestic officials, the Arctic was presented in the new millennium as almost one of the main economic and geopolitical hopes of the Russian Federation, whose control and security were considered among the primary tasks of the state. So, before, the heavy legacy of a bygone era, which must be maintained against common sense and the principles of market pragmatism, was at the center of public and political debates and turned into one of the key prospects for Russia’s development. Russian researchers, who took the path of glorifying the Arctic, often did not know anything about it and presented it as a “new region of the world” with amazingly wide “opportunities to maintain the balance on the Earth and open the reserves of humanity” [10], or even the point of its bifurcation [11], and, ultimately, “... a concept area where humanity will now hone its abilities for international compromise and mutual agreement” [12].

This unprecedented interest in the Arctic is prosaic and should not seem surprising. However, the consistency of assessments of official and scientific spheres is striking, when researchers outperform officials in representing and openly praising the government's stated strategies for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation. In scientific articles, Frank political curtsies or strange in their expression arguments for the dramatic transformation of the Arctic vector of Russian policy following the approval by the President of the Russian Federation of the next strategic tasks for the development of the Arctic are not uncommon. “The Arctic breakthrough of Putin’s policy” [13] - this is how some Russian researchers sometimes evaluate Russia’s rather modest achievements in solving the problems of the Arctic region.

One of the most common signs of loyalty to the government of the Russian representatives of social and humanitarian thought we should recognize the widespread references in their texts to
official government documents such as “principles of state policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic for the period till 2020 and further perspective”, “strategy of development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and national security for the period till 2020” or “state program on Socio-economic development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation for the period till 2020”. It seems that decrees and speeches of the President of the Russian Federation, normative legal acts of the Russian Government, materials of the State Commission for the development of the Arctic, the Maritime Board and other administrative departments or officials are of primary importance for socio-humanitarian research in the Arctic.

Many of the works of Russian humanitarians on Arctic issues suggest that the socio-humanitarian discourse is not so much closely related to the officially declared parameters of the development of the Arctic region as it is related to borrowing. We are talking about borrowing official trajectories and plots of development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, which in the scientific space are then filled with heterogeneous factual content, conclusions and recommendations. As a result, the most popular topics in socio-humanitarian discourse of the Arctic are international relations and national interests of Russia in the Arctic; the debate about the boundaries of the region and effective management of the Arctic territories, the transportation industry in the Arctic zone, and only after them, with a noticeable lag, followed by themes of ecology and environmental risk issues related to the situation of indigenous peoples of the North and the lack of skilled workers in the Arctic.

Official documents not only set the list of topics being developed, a kind of hierarchy of problems and issues on the “Arctic agenda”, but also confirm the basic range of lexical tools and categories that are used in the domestic scientific space to build the socio-humanitarian discourse of the Arctic. In fact, the outlines of official rhetoric emerge from all the basic lexical phrases that Russian humanitarians use so confidently, whether it is the full protection of national interests, which has become a universal designation of the political interests of the state, or the requirements for ensuring security. Whether the security concerns nature protection or territorial borders, the security guarantee is usually the discursive equivalent of a guarantee of a scenario that benefits the current political regime. At the same time, the praises of Arctic solidarity each time position strategic guidelines for the development of the Russian region and the development of its richest resources with the defense of the competitive advantages of the Russian Federation. Under the guise of reasoning that the existing and projected Arctic resources of any country are difficult to develop alone, and that without integration, combining the resources of almost all of humanity, the Arctic will be almost impossible to develop, Russia’s privileged position is being defended. Who but Russia will point the way and become the driving force for the harmonious development of such important territories for the world? Thus, in the Arctic problem, Russian messianism is reviving again.

A lot of publications on the issues of sustainable development of the Arctic, regional security, prospects for development and management are designed to emphasize the consistently positive or improving state of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, coupled with officially declared principles of sustainable development. However, excessive use of the category sustainable development often leads to partial or complete “weathering” of its conceptual content: the phrase begins to be used to denote the General vector of the state's creative policy or the stable development of the region. Excessive use of label vocabulary and programmed conclusions about the need for sustainable development, security, advance planning, and measures to prevent negative impact should be considered as a sign of the conventional language of socio-humanitarian discourse in the Arctic, tacitly approved due to its proximity to the language of normative documents.

The creation of a favorable and positive background for Arctic issues is increasing as the quantitative indicators of conference events and publication activity increase. The growth of specialists in the far North among Russian humanitarians is almost frightening. Of course, in this region in the new Millennium, all responsible countries have increased their presence, and there is a noticeable increase in real interest in the region of non-Arctic States. Everything is so. However, the interest of Russian humanitarians in the problems of the North is caused, first of all, by the factors not listed that increase the geopolitical significance of the region in the modern world.
In any case, the number of political scientists, sociologists, philosophers, historians and economists who have been writing knowledgeably about the challenges and prospects of the development of the Russian North in recent years cannot be explained by the actualization of Arctic problems. The Arctic is, of course, a multi-layered and multi-dimensional space that requires versatile analysis by specialists in various fields of scientific knowledge, which will affect the physical and geographical, administrative and legal, geopolitical, environmental, geo-economic, and geocultural aspects of the macroregion. But the surprise is not multidisciplinary study and quantitative indicators, since, judging by the published texts in scientific magazines, collections of articles and materials of conferences, round tables, etc., in Russia over the past two decades, suddenly appeared thousands of experts on diverse issues of the North. If we take only the conferences on the Arctic held at SPbPU, then every year they are attended by 300-400 people, including almost a hundred representatives of socio-humanitarian knowledge [14].

4. Discussion

Given the scale of publication activity that is being implemented, in most cases the superficial nature of research practices is unavoidable. This is especially noticeable in the socio-humanitarian scientific literature. Moreover, a significant part of it is “development” in nature, it is the reporting literature on grants and competitions, closing gaps in the development of funds. In other cases, publications are prepared in a hurry in the desire of the authors to get to the next “status” conference with indexing of articles in the Scopus or Web of Science databases, to have time to use the moment and succeed in their compliance with current trends, and sometimes to please official orders. In General, the obsequiousness of the Russian socio-humanitarian thought to the official position of the political leadership, at least in the context of the analysis of problems related to the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, can be frankly puzzling. The consistency of the government's line with the General interests and attitudes of researchers can be seen in everything: the points of view, conclusions and conclusions coincide, the tasks outlined and the prospects drawn.

Articles and reports, appealing generally to the most in-demand topics such as prospects of development of the Arctic, priorities, associated public policies, the issues of security and national interests of the Russian Federation in the Arctic, political conditions and legal regulation or the sustainable development of the region, as a rule, very similar to the official line of the government not only conclusions but also in nature. It is noteworthy that the tasks and activities outlined in the documents that define the concept of state policy in the Arctic are formulated very generally and vaguely. This was noted by many researchers [15]. Often, the texts of many representatives of socio-humanitarian thought that publish their works on the fate of the Russian North are much more vague and abstract. The same declarative and abstract rhetoric with the absence of clear targets for the planned development and development of the macroregion, characteristic of official documents and the rhetoric of official media, is indicative of many recent scientific works. Here, the evidence base, reasonableness of conclusions and conclusions, originality of approaches gives way to an impersonal set of repeated official lexemes applicable to all spheres of activity and regions: renewal, provision, modernization, development, improvement, improvement, optimization, etc.

It is difficult to speak about the scientific value of a significant part of such literature. How difficult it is to convince yourself of the scientific novelty of standard conclusions about the necessary connection of further development of the Northern territories with measures to preserve the natural environment and ecological balance of the Arctic basin, or about the transformation of the Arctic into a “territory of dialogue” [16]. In scientific texts of this kind, documents and literature, information about natural, human, and socio-cultural resources move from one work to another, creating the effect of a publication relay. The same interpretations are repeated endlessly, supported by standard scenarios of international relations development in the region, descriptions of tasks to ensure the security of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, and projects for the development of the Russian North that are far from the original developments.
Against the background of popular Pro-government conclusions about the geopolitical and socio-economic prospects for the development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, the usual and justified geographical and ethnographic directions of studying the region are somehow lost. Even new post-Soviet objects of interest related to the Northern territories, such as the Arctic continental shelf, circumpolar civilization, extreme tourism, ecology, and the fight against environmental pollution, remain peripheral subjects in the domestic socio-humanitarian discourse. However, publications that vary political goals and prospects are built outside of geographical and ethnographic factual information. On the contrary, the latter, like real economic or historical data, is an extremely inconvenient component in the basis of far-reaching forecasts and prospects. How inconvenient are the topics of the continuing aging of the Arctic fleet and aviation, problems of navigation, supply and depopulation of the Far North regions, loss-making of the Arctic infrastructure, etc. Instead of these questions, the most striking forecasts of the use of the socio-economic potential of the North of Russia, the prospects for the development of the Northern sea route, far-reaching strategies for the formation of a new order of international relations, and many other projects come to the fore.

If desired, it is not difficult to find a lot of positive points in the current situation. Nevertheless, funding and encouragement of relevant research activities are increasing, and favorable conditions are being created for studying the region, which is becoming more and more attractive, at least in the eyes of researchers, which is reflected in the unprecedented growth in the number of publications. We hope that under the general growing noise of protecting state interests and foreign policy threats, distant economic prospects and close geopolitical realities, the study of the culture of the indigenous peoples of the North, the current environmental situation, real problems of the institutional environment of the Northern territories and other, really urgent and very real problems, and not declarative and distinguished only in dubious prospects of strategic tasks, will expand and deepen. After all, when discussing the problems of the Arctic in Russia, it is often ignored that the practical implementation of many projects related to the extraction of raw materials can be achieved only in a few decades, and even then, subject to technical and technological progress [17].

5. Conclusion
Turning to the position of the Arctic theme in the domestic socio-humanitarian discourse, we have to record a striking solidarity of researchers with the political course of the Russian government in the Arctic zone. Apparently, Russian socio-humanitarian thought feels comfortable in the “official framework” that the key documents describing the principles of Russian policy in this region have set for the Russian Arctic discourse. The concrete factual and theoretical-methodological levels of research are intertwined with political realities, the current geopolitical situation, the legal status of the macroregion and the territorial claims of the Arctic States. And state support for the actualization of Arctic issues in the scientific space determines the modality of scientific analysis and pushes researchers to ideologically verified conclusions and veiled defense of national interests. As a result, the abundance of studies of the author analysis models, practical suggestions on the prospects of Arctic exploration and development of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation, for the countless variants of the generalized conceptual understanding of the geopolitical situation and international conflicts in the region show the general contours of state policies, goals and objectives that are spelled out in key documents, representative sample of the political course of Russia towards the Northern frontiers.

The unprecedented growth of publication activity on the problems of the far North in recent years in the socio-humanitarian scientific space is due, rather, to the registration of state-supported points of accumulation of funds and preferences and strict requirements for increasing the scientific citation index. It is noteworthy that such a full-scale increase in the interest of Russian humanitarians in the Russian North did not lead to a qualitatively new level of scientific study of the region. However, a significant part of scientific publications, which set the tone for the current socio-humanitarian discourse of the Arctic in Russia, serve not as a scientific study of the region, but as a kind of support for state policy, discursive approval of the Arctic zone of the Russian Federation and articulation of
the symbolic right to its management and control. This is confirmed by the marked convergence of the “unofficial” (informal) and “official” (formal) Arctic discourses, which today not only significantly affect each other, but are becoming increasingly indistinguishable. In this sense, the evolution of the views of even such a radical geopolitician as Dugin, who gradually moved from the glorification of hyperborea and arctoea to neoeurasianism, close to the "official" discourse, is characteristic.

We can only hope that, although artificially created and in line with the official political discourse of the Arctic, the surge of scientific interest in recent years has largely contributed to overcoming the negative reputation of the region, which was fixed for the latter in the 90s. While rhetoric and abstract speculative constructions prevail in the scientific study of the Arctic, which in turn contributes to the state tactic of its symbolic appropriation and “approximation”. The scientific study of the Arctic continues and is only strengthened thanks to the new state priorities, along with the semi-official publications, a growing number of original, substantive work. But will they not be lost in the General flow of near-scientific journalism and will the unhealthy excitement around Arctic issues lead to the opposite effect - discrediting this scientific direction as a whole?

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