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Transformation and Reconstruction: Traditional Russian Values and Russian Modernization

Abstract. This paper aims to outline a theoretical and socio-psychological foundation behind Russia's modernization. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the rapid pace of social transformation created a need for new spiritual guidelines. In this process of change and reconstruction, traditional Russian values emerged in response to contemporary challenges, with their theoretical roots grounded in autocracy, collectivism, the idea of salvation, and hierarchy. The paper argues that the revival of neoconservatism and neo-Eurasianism, through their interconnectedness, will shape the future trajectory of Russia's transformation, influencing the role of traditional values in modern society.

Keywords: traditional values; modernization; Orthodoxy; morality; neoconservatism

The Necessity of Transforming Traditional Russian Values.

The collapse of the Soviet Union was accompanied by the decline of Marxist values, followed by a rapid erosion of Western political and cultural ideals, which paved the way for the resurgence of traditional values rooted in Orthodox ethics. These values serve as a spiritual foundation, transcending religious boundaries, and play a key role in various aspects of state and public life in Russia. However, the core of Orthodox ethics comes into conflict with modern concepts, hindering Russia's modernization process.

From the perspective of social values, it can be argued that after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Russian people, facing significant hardships, turned to Orthodox values as a way to restore order and address the crisis of faith in the country. Orthodox ethics, which includes humanism, patriotism, spiritual importance, and other core elements of traditional Russian culture, played a crucial role in the early restoration of social values in Russia. However,

these values often clashed with modern cultural values, market economies, and democratic political ideals, which hindered economic development.

Orthodox ethics emphasizes the purity of the soul, asceticism, the inseparability of spiritual and secular morality, as well as unrealistic religious ideals and apocalyptic aspirations. These features distinguish it from Western Christianity. Unlike Catholicism and Protestantism, Orthodox ethics is less focused on practicality and secular concerns in daily life, instead emphasizing transcendent values and downplaying the pursuit of practical goals. Additionally, it tends to oppose rational thinking and rejects the ethic of self-control valued in the West.

This spiritual orientation of Orthodox ethics sharply conflicts with the “spirit of capitalism”, as described by Max Weber. Capitalism is rooted in the concepts of vocation, strict rational calculation, and the belief that material wealth is a means to achieve personal value goals. As such, Russia’s modernization required a more pragmatic social value system – one that would foster a cultural environment conducive to democratic politics and a market economy.

In terms of economic development, Orthodoxy is the least adaptable of the three main branches of Christianity, remaining most committed to ancient dogmas. Throughout Christian history, Catholicism and Protestantism have continually updated and adjusted their doctrines, while Orthodoxy has made little effort to reform its teachings. Unlike Protestantism and Catholicism, Orthodox economic ethics is less conducive to economic development.

Orthodox ethics places a strong emphasis on monastic aspirations, often neglecting the practical concerns of daily life. This makes it less pragmatic in addressing real-world issues. Additionally, Orthodox ethics does not distinguish between monastic and secular morality, with all believers directed toward the monastic ideal. This view impacts the laity’s perception of economic activity, stripping it of religious justification and fostering confusion, as poverty is often equated with moral or spiritual virtue. In contrast, Catholicism clearly separates monastic and secular ethics, while Protestantism views wealth as a sign of divine favor, in direct opposition to Orthodox teachings.

Furthermore, when it comes to scientific knowledge, Orthodox ethics tends to oppose science, whereas the Catholic Church established a respect for science as early as the 1st century. Protestantism, similarly, has been closely associated with literacy and the embrace of new technologies. It is clear that the emphasis on knowledge and science in Catholicism and Protestantism has significantly contributed to economic development. Overall, Orthodox ethics does not align with the current needs of Russia's modernization, particularly in the context of fostering economic growth and embracing scientific advancement.

Thirdly, in terms of national policy, Orthodoxy has played a crucial role as a spiritual pillar in the creation and strengthening of the centralized Russian state. However, amidst significant historical shifts in both the Russian state and the Orthodox Church, Patriarch Kirill's revival of the "symphony" concept in 2009 reflects these evolving dynamics. He spoke of a traditional model of "harmonious interaction between the state and the church", which redefines their relationship by emphasizing the spiritual precedence of the church over the state. This concept can be seen as a response to democracy, but it does not align with historical realities or modern ideas of statehood in Russia.

In an era where the separation of church and state is increasingly seen as an irreversible trend, Russia cannot return to a traditional theocracy. The country's modernization will be more successful within the framework of a democratic state governed by law. Furthermore, Kirill's vision of "symphony" has an imperial nature: the full integration of the state and church, modeled after the Byzantine tradition, is not an ideal solution for managing church-state relations and fails to align with the progress of history.

Conceptual Framework Behind Traditional Russian Values. Traditional Russian values have endured throughout history, primarily within the framework of conservative thought.

First, autocracy and paternalism form the foundation of traditional Russian value theory. The Orthodox religious-political doctrine, viewing power as theocracy, imbued Russian absolutism with a sacred status. According to this doctrine, the monarch, representing the state, was directly accountable to God and served as an instrument of divine will in the secular realm, embodying order, morality, and faith. Even after the collapse of the Russian

monarchy in the early 20th century, conservatives continued to hope for the rise of a “strong leader”, even if that leader had to come from outside the traditional system.

Second, collectivism is a core element of traditional Russian values. Russian collectivism is deeply connected to the unique system of the rural commune and the Orthodox concept of *sobornost* (a spiritual unity based on a commitment to Orthodox values). The spirit of *sobornost* harmonizes the autonomy of the rural commune, state authority, and individual rights, fostering the development of Russian collectivism and its integration into the broader “Russian spirit”.

Third, the idea of salvation forms the basis of the imperial ideal rooted in traditional Russian values. The Orthodox concept of salvation and the idea of “Moscow – the Third Rome” are central to the anti-Western mindset and imperial aspirations. Within these beliefs, Russians are viewed as God’s chosen people, tasked with saving the world and continuing God’s mission on Earth, and thus Russia is granted spiritual and moral superiority over the West.

Finally, hierarchy is a fundamental principle that ensures the stability of traditional Russian values. The hierarchical system assumes that individuals at different social levels have distinct responsibilities, statuses, and rewards. This structure is crucial for preserving the conservative monarchy and maintaining social order. Conservatives support a strict hierarchy, believing that it safeguards political power and ensures social stability.

Amid social shifts influenced by liberal ideology, the traditional values that Russian conservatism seeks to preserve include autocracy, paternalism, collectivism, the idea of salvation, and hierarchy. These values form the foundation for creating a unique civilizational paradigm, providing a distinct path that counters the disruptive effects of Westernization on Russia. Within the broader spectrum of political conservatism, Russian conservatism contrasts with the classical Western model, yet their goals align: both seek strong governance and structured freedom, with meaningful limits and reasonable boundaries on elitism in political democracy. This approach reflects the revival and development of Russian conservatism after the collapse of the Soviet Union and outlines the goals Russia is pursuing as it adapts its traditional values to the demands of modernization.

Reconstruction of Traditional Russian Values. For over thirty years, traditional Russian values have been reinterpreted and adapted through various philosophical movements in response to social transformations. Each movement, following its own logical progression, has explored ways to implement the modern transformation of these values. Today, as Russia finds itself at another crossroads of social change, the revival of neoconservatism and neo-Eurasianism is shaping the future direction of the modernization of traditional Russian values. The primary goal of this revival is to rethink Russian civilization and redefine the state's role in the contemporary world.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the resurgence of “Russian thought”, the revival of Orthodoxy, and the rise of conservatism have mutually influenced each other in the realms of public values, religious faith, and political practice. This process gradually led to the reconstruction of traditional Russian conservatism and the emergence of neoconservatism, or modern conservatism. On the one hand, neoconservatism emphasizes the need to understand new aspects of modern civilization and integrate reasonable ideas from other movements. From the mid-1990s to the present, neoconservatism has coexisted with new Orthodox ideas, patriotism, neo-Marxism, and other intellectual currents, particularly absorbing elements of Orthodox consciousness, neo-Eurasianism, and nationalism – ideas deeply connected to traditional Russian values. Its goal is to blend tradition and modernity, renewing the foundation of Russian values. On the other hand, neoconservatism not only explores philosophical theories and reevaluates values but also manifests itself in political campaigns and the activities of political parties. In the era of globalization, the key mission of neoconservatism is to develop a philosophical methodology for rethinking approaches to the new world order.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the renewed recognition of the cultural heritage of Russian emigration, the philosophy of Eurasianism was revived in modern Russia. Amid social turbulence, this revival gave rise to a new form of Eurasianism that directly influenced social thought, politics, and Russia's international relations. Eurasianism, grounded in geopolitics and ethnology, seeks to address the uncertainty surrounding Russia's civilizational identity through the theory of Eurasian civilization.

With a solid philosophical foundation, Eurasianism advocates for the reconstruction of Russian civilization and the establishment of a new world order. It tackles fundamental questions about the nature of Russian civilization, its developmental trajectory, and its place within the global order. By uncovering Russia's philosophical essence, Eurasianism aims to build a value-based foundation for the Eurasian community and resolve the long-standing debate between the *Slavophiles* and *Westernizers* regarding the divide between Western and Eastern civilizations. It also emphasizes the unity of diverse civilizations in the global historical process, underscoring the interdependence of East and West while asserting the uniqueness of Russian-Eurasian civilization as a key pole in a multipolar world. This distinctive civilization offers an alternative model to globalization and a non-Western approach to modernization, rooted in historical, cultural, and ethical values. Ultimately, Eurasianism seeks to reimagine Russia's future development and establish a new world order, challenging Western civilizational dominance, liberal ideology, and the traditional political order led by the U.S. and Europe.

In conclusion, the modern reconstruction of traditional Russian values may unfold in two main directions: on the one hand, the synthesis of neoconservatism and neo-Eurasianism could foster a unique Eurasian identity, providing both a theoretical and secular foundation for rebuilding a "New Russia" and adopting a multipolar approach to challenge the dominance of Western civilization. On the other hand, by combining Orthodox ethics with neoconservative philosophy in a new cultural, philosophical, and political context, Russia could strengthen its historical continuity, highlight its Eurasian identity, and emphasize traditional values such as the spiritual primacy of Orthodoxy, collectivism, and patriotism. This approach aims to reconstruct Russia's "spiritual world" and potentially offer an alternative to Western values like freedom, democracy, and human rights, challenging the existing international order and pursuing a political mission to create a new world order.

While a clear and systematic new value system has not yet emerged in Russia, it seems likely that it will eventually take shape, rooted in tradition but distinct from it.