

The British Myth of Siberia. Is its Shattering Possible?

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Abstract: The paper studies the specificity of intercultural interaction between Great Britain and Russia through the prism of heteromorphic creations. On the basis of study of periodicals of Siberia, the history of the formation of the "myth of barbaric Siberia" in the view of foreigners is traced, and the socio-economic basis of this process is indicated. The British interest in Siberia was initially based on economic benefits, especially after the construction of the TRANS-Siberian railway in the late XIX century. Gradually interpenetration of cultures was carried out – Siberians began to get acquainted with samples of British literature, painting, equipment and life. The process of the cultural patterns borrowing was complicated by the dissimilarity of mentalities, which resulted in the formation of stereotypes of the two nations about each other. Modern relations between the two countries are characterized by political ambiguity; however, joint exhibitions, conferences, symposia, seminars, competitions are held. The factors of consolidation of people are actively manifested in sports and cultural events. The authors have come to the conclusion that joint socio-cultural projects are a unique tool for the formation of intercultural dialogue between the people, despite the difference in mentalities.

1. Introduction

The study of the correlation between Russia and Britain is associated with the need to gain prospects and contours of relations in the bilateral format. In Russian humanitarian science, there exists an urgent need for comparison of differences and similarities of national mentalities to solve the problems of modern unstable geopolitical situation. Based on the material of regional periodicals, which is first introduced into scientific circulation, the authors show the creation of complex contradictory relations between the countries in question. Investigation of the mechanisms of formation of the myth of "barbarian" Siberia", allows finding the way to solve the problem of negative heterostereotypes through the organization of social-cultural projects.

2. Methodology of Research

The results of the process of intercultural communication are recorded by cultural borrowings. At the end of the XIX century there appeared diffusionism as a way to study the peculiarities of the spread of cultural

phenomena through contacts between people – trade, resettlement, conquest and others. Diffusionism emerged as a counterbalance to evolutionism, which asserted the autonomy of cultural development. F. Ratzel, a German ethnographer of the XIX - early XX century, the founder of diffusionism identified two ways of moving the elements of culture: acculturation-almost complete transfer of a cultural complex, rather than individual things, from one culture to another; the second method – the transfer of individual phenomena and components. Such well-known researchers, as L. Frobenius, F. Groebner, C. Wissler, G. Elliot-Smith, W. James Perry and others were engaged in the development of the diffusionism concept.

The authors of this article believe that acculturation of foreign cultures in question in Siberia did not happen and could not happen due to various factors, including their extreme remoteness, complex ethnic and religious composition of Siberian population, involving the displacement of many cultural traditions, the difference in mentality, the lack of the diasporas, rooted and permanently living in Siberia. However, the transfer of certain forms of British culture has been carried out and is still being carried out in Siberia, which shows the presence of a process of intercultural communication.

3. The Formation of British “Barbaric” Siberian Mythology in the Early 20th Century

In Russia, the interest in Great Britain increased in the 1930s and 1940s. The nobility got interested in English life, literature, economic theory, political organization, methods of teaching and language. According to researcher V.A. Milchina, the "matrix of European perception" [1] had been fully developed by the end of the 1830s.

Under the rule of Emperor Nicholas I, British culture extended to the middle layers of educated officials, clergy and burghers. The preparatory role of Decembrists was invaluable in education and formation of Siberian intelligentsia, development of musical culture, and such sciences as ethnography, geography, economy, agriculture [2]. Long before the uprising of 1825, the attention of the Decembrists to Siberian region had been demonstrated. Some of them (K. Ryleev, G. Batenkov, D. Zavalishin and others) even became members of the Russian-American company.

At the turn of the XIX and XX centuries, the Siberian region, economic and cultural centers of the area, attached to the Yenisei River were of particular interest for Britons. The fundamentals of knowledge related to the set of sciences of Russian philology and culture were laid by the publications of John Geddie ("Russian Empire", 1882), Bernard Pares ("Russia and Reform", 1907), Maurice Baring ("The Origins of Russia", 1914), Daniel Wallace, William Morfill, R. Spence Watson, highlighting the issues of history, literature, public life, reforms, and revolutionary sources. The study of Siberian problems from a critical point of view was depicted in the works of Henry Lansdell ("Through Siberia", published in London in 1882), George Kennan ("Siberia and the Exile System"), Harry De Windt ("Siberia As It Is", 1889). The last author in the list gave an impartial assessment of Siberia "...the word "Siberia" in England sounds worse than in Russia. ... Siberians, as a rule, are ignorant and vulgar. They usually have one topic of conversation – money; two entertainments – cards and drinks. None of the books are known to them. They do not see European newspapers and do not want to see them" [3].

Thanks to the construction of the TRANS-Siberian railway (1895-1899), the exposition of which had received the Grand Prix at the world Paris exhibition in 1900 "for services to ensure relations between the Asian East and the European West...", the Yenisei province turned out to be mostly involved in the orbit of Russian–British economic and cultural relations. Mutual acquaintance between Russian and English-speaking cultures could have been carried out through travelers. Back in 1829, a "Guide for English Travelers in Russia" had been published. Later, one of them – an American publicist George Kennan, who had made an expedition from the Cape of Okhotsk to the Bering Strait, studied the system of Russian exile, and for this purpose he visited prisons and places of penal servitude. After that, he wrote a two-volume book called "Siberia", which was published in St. Petersburg [4].

In the English presentation of Russian culture the mythologized image of the barbarism of Russians was formed before the beginning of the XX century. Dramatizing the issue of exiles in Siberia and the

conditions of their detention, British writers gave a "novel" character to their descriptions to attract the reading public. The positive result affected the public response and the revision of repressive policies.

4. Russians and Britons: Heterostereotypes

The review of Siberian periodical press, communication forms in the towns and cities showed that diffusion phenomena of English culture had taken place in the region. The interest of the English audience in Siberian territories shifted to resources, international trade and social issues. Aspects of relations in the economic, social, cultural sphere were presented in magazines, newspapers, widely distributed among enlightened readers. Siberian media was characterized by a great diversity. In the XIX century more than eighty periodicals were published, among them: "Bulletin of Europe", "Russian Vedomosti", "Russian Thought", "Siberian Newspaper", "Siberia", "Eastern Outlook", "Siberian Life", "Siberian Leaf", and "Yenisei Thought".

Siberian readers could find news in libraries, existing since the XVIII century. The first county public library in Krasnoyarsk was opened in 1784, in Irkutsk - in 1789, Minusinsk – 1877, Yeniseisk – 1884. The last two libraries were attached to museums. Yeniseisk was considered to be a reading city: its population subscribed to 112 magazines and newspapers. Four libraries served the population of ten thousand inhabitants. One can also find the following statement disputable: "...an American cannot imagine a village, a city without a library. It... is a common phenomenon, like a tavern in Russian life." In Siberian cities there were libraries and books of scientific content of domestic scientists such as M.V. Lomonosov, N.M. Karamzin, I.I. Lepekhin, I.S. Gmelin, foreign educators and philosophers: M. Voltaire, C. Linnaeus, J. Rousseau, etc., but readers preferred magazines.

From the construction of the TRANS-Siberian railway (the end of the nineteenth century) to 1917, scientific and journalistic English publications were characterized by increasing emphasis on economic life, resources, industry, investment and social life in Siberia. Initially, the British laughed offensively at the ability of Russians to participate in the TRANS-Siberian transport project. This fact even enraged the English military diplomat in St. Petersburg. He believed that the entire British energy should be better directed at obtaining orders for the production of rails. An English magazine "The Engineer" in its publication of 1897 noted the contribution of Russian specialists to the construction of TRANS-Siberian railway: "...Russian engineers rapidly rose to the level of the best engineers in Europe" [5].

As a rule, the British represent the Russian as reckless, irrational people, using alcohol as a means of solving all problems, which further alienates them from civilization. The Russians' unpredictability and incomprehensibility of the "broad Russian soul" for the British was supported by anxiety about the Russian foreign policy activity.

British politicians were alarmed by the active advancement of Russia to the East, and were interested in expanding the spheres of influence and placement of English capital. Professor W. Morfill, diplomats, economists, managers, sales agents, journalists S. Turner, A. Home, M. Baring, E. Dillon and others have made a contradictory assessment of the socio-economic and cultural development of the region ranging from condescension and superficiality to an in-depth and objective analysis.

Domestic Siberian journalism was not characterized by obsequiousness and obliging courtesy in the press because of special traits of Siberian character. R. Hingley tried to define precisely the ambivalent relationship between Russian and British cultures: "The British ...were the object of love and hatred of Russians." Russians do not like English coldness, brought almost to perfection the cult of self-control, stiffness, the opinion of British about themselves as the elite of the world; they believe that in their country it is better than in others (place of residence outside the country is considered an exile),... they have little curiosity towards those who live outside of England.

The Russian and British book "The Soul of Russia" (1916), created jointly by political and public figures, scientists, writers (G.K. Chesterton, R. Seton-Watson, H.I. Careev, P.N. Milyukov, I.V.

Shklovsky, P.G. Vinogradov, V.M. Bekhterev, A.F. Koni, Z.N. Hippus, N.A. Kotlyarevsky, I.Ozerov, N.K. Roerich, I.F. Stravinsky) and "Provincial Russia" by H. Stewart (1913) painted by F. De Haenen addressed the problems of mutual understanding and interaction of cultures, their penetration into the national character, life and traditions.

For the liberal-aristocratic and commercial-industrial Siberian public, the ethno-cultural image of an Englishman in the periodical press looked objectively multifaceted, endowed with mythical features. The most accurate attitude to this issue was expressed by F.M. Dostoevsky, revealing human national stereotypes and prejudices "...every Englishman is an eccentric and a funny person" and an objective vision "...all Britons are respected" [6].

5. Socio-cultural Projects as a Means of Forming an Intercultural Dialogue

Modern Russian and British relations in the political sphere are ambiguous. The absence of positive dynamics in relations, the presence of mutually exclusive opposite signs - the commonwealth and rivalry do not prevent a dialogue in the social, economic and cultural spheres. Treaties, agreements and declarations signed in the 1990s - 2010s between the governments of the United Kingdom and the Russian Federation, address the importance of relations, exchange and cooperation in the field of education, science and culture (1994), scientific and technical cooperation (1996), peaceful use of nuclear energy (1997), knowledge-based partnership for modernization (2011) [7].

Meanwhile, trade and economic cooperation mainly comes down to the commodity market. The Russian-British economic partnership is most actively developing in the oil and gas, chemical and mechanical engineering industries. Low level of political Russian-British relations has a negative impact on other sides of interaction.

Positive aspects in social and cultural projects are formed due to the unity of the development of artistic space-time in the field of network technologies, international exhibitions, biennale and friendly professional contacts. The large-scale task of mutual acquaintance with cultural heritage of the two countries was announced at the initiative of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and the British Council during the cross-year of culture of Great Britain and Russia in 2014. The project, under the sign of "The year of language and literature of Great Britain and Russia" (2016), was dedicated to the 400th anniversary of William Shakespeare, the influence of his work on world culture, "...where Shakespeare ... became almost a Russian playwright" [8].

The project under the sign of the cross-year of education and science of Russia and the UK (2017) with activities of scientific, educational, cultural and educational nature continued the cultural dialogue of the past years. Unique and bright events were accompanied by projects, exhibitions: "Golden Age of Russian Avant-garde" (2014), "Design 007: 50 Years of James Bond Style" (2014), "Russia and Art. The Era of Tolstoy and Tchaikovsky" (2016), "From Elizabeth to Victoria" (2016), the exhibition of the artist-expressionist Francis Bacon, the works of Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the porcelain factory of Wedgwood, the festival "New British Cinema" (2016), the participation of soloists of the Bolshoi and Mariinsky theatres, the Royal ballet of Great Britain. In addition, educational courses, video lessons, competitions, seminars, competitions for the best translation of works of modern British writers were held, a special project "British Scientists" for translators of British literature. Cultural cooperation has been carried out against the background of cooling political relations between Russia and Great Britain.

Sports activities, as a result of social development and part of cultural progress, are endowed with social functions. Significant sporting events of recent years in Russia, which include the Olympics (2014), the World Cup Championship (2018), the World Winter Universiade in Krasnoyarsk (2019), have solved educational, communicative, socializing and spectacular aesthetic functions. The rich cultural program of the Universiade in Krasnoyarsk included an exhibition of paintings by V. I. Surikov ("Taking a Snow Town"), supplemented by paintings and graphic works of the artist from the museums of the country, a photo exhibition "Pristine Russia", the performance of the Siberian men's choir of the cultural-historical

center, Krasnoyarsk chamber orchestra, Krasnoyarsk choral ensemble of soloists "We Are Singing for You", presentation of the Governor's theatre of dance "Siberian Kaleidoscope", a theatrical performance of the ethnic folk dance ensemble, cultural theme programs in the open air, etc. In the sporting event of the Commonwealth among representatives of the 58 countries there were students of the UK.

In sports and cultural events, factors of consolidation of people are actively manifested "...the championship of surprises, and almost all of them are pleasant. Championship of changed views..." [9], which solved the problem of international, intercultural and interpersonal communication.

6. Conclusions

Ambiguous relations between Russia and the UK in the political arena have a positive dynamics in the socio-economic and cultural spheres. On the basis of mutual tolerant perception, integration processes there is an open participation and understanding, intercultural communication between Russia and the UK. In the Siberian region, intercultural dialogue has been formed on the basis of mutual national interest and the perception of Russian and British society. Attention to ethnic, social-cultural projects has provided an equitable and civilized way to co-exist and interact in the modern world.

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