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**CULTURAL POTENTIAL OF EURASIAN INTEGRATION**

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*Abstract*

The authors of the article demonstrate the relevance of Eurasianism which is considered as an ideological basis of the integration process being an alternative to the European process. The urgency of the study is determined by the fact that today's reality is characterized by crisis in the economic, political, and spiritual fields of the society. This is evidenced by the continuous economic, informational, political and other conflicts. The cold war world of civilizations has begun. It is the harmony which is to be found to survive. Consequently, the process of integration results in the harmonization of relations. The author proves the fact that Eurasian integration becomes one of the most promising integration projects in the post-Soviet space.

The importance of cultural potential in the process of Eurasian integration is revealed. The argument is made that the integration process is not limited to political and economic areas, but also affects the cultural aspects. It is shown that Eurasian integration has not only an economic basis, but also a unity of mental attitudes that were formed in the process of long intercultural interaction between Russians and the peoples of Central Asia. On the basis of the results of the associative experiment, the conclusions were drawn about the perception of Russian students by young people in various regions of Tajikistan. After all, the success and effectiveness of the integration depends on the involvement of young people in this process. Therefore, the study pays a special attention to the educational aspects of the integration process. The example of the Republic of Tajikistan shows the significance of the Russian language as a language of interethnic communication in the post-Soviet space. Based on the analysis of the results of sociological surveys among students of the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University and the National University, the place and role of the Russian language in the youth environment and the problems of its study are revealed. The prospects of the integration process in the field of education are described.

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**Keywords:** Neo-Eurasianism, mindset, Russian language, education integration, dialog.



## **1. Introduction**

### **1.1. Introduction to the Problem**

The meaning of Eurasianism is the achievement of coherence of diversity and contradictions. An interest in Eurasianism in the 80s of the XX<sup>th</sup> century was closely related to the growing popularity of ideas of Gumilev (Nikolsky, 2010; Iskandarova, Ladygina, Shambezoda, Zolotukhin & Abdukhamitov, 2017). The following ideas can be considered as the conceptual foundations of Eurasianism which still retain their significance: there are many original cultures; Eurasia represents a special integrity not only as geographical, but also as political, economic and cultural; Eurasia develops on the basis of experience of interaction of the Eurasian peoples.

In the early 2000s, the ideology of neo-Eurasianism began to develop in the scientific environment seeking to adapt its provisions to modern society and removing contradictions between tradition and innovation. The union of tradition and contemporaneity is regarded as an impulse that encourages creativity and development, which is consistent with the universal characteristic of any culture (unity of tradition and renewal). This gives grounds to consider neo-Eurasianism as a new worldview platform of mutual understanding and cooperation of various powers, states, peoples, cultures, as a process which makes social development more complicated. Within the framework of this paradigm, a new cultural product is created as a result of interaction based on national traditions.

### **1.2. Importance of the Problem**

The urgency of studying the issues associated with Eurasian integration is determined by the need to oppose a unipolar globalization based on Eurocentrism to the project of multipolar globalization that involves a transition from the paradigm of the conflict of cultures to the paradigm of complementarity.

## **2. Problem Statement**

A commonality of economic and political interests is formed on the basis of common cultural values. Therefore, the Eurasian integration process has various aspects and is not limited to the political and economic fields. According to V.D. Ruzin, ‘an attempt to put integration into purely pragmatic economic rails is doomed to failure’ (Ambassadors of the Russian language, 2018; Ruzin, 2018). It means that the effectiveness of the integration process depends on the cultural and information space being created. Meanings and values accumulated into ideas are formed within this space. According to V.D. Ruzin, ‘when the mind is closed to the perception of new ideas, no material prerequisites can contribute to the progress development and all the efforts will be in vain’. This means that after the idea is formed it is necessary to move on to social action, which implies popularization of the idea of Eurasian integration through the media and art (Ambassadors of the Russian language, 2018). The enlightenment helps to expand the limits of consciousness. In this connection, the development of public opinion based on awareness and articulation of common understanding of the goals of Eurasian integration becomes an urgent task.

### **3. Research Questions**

The research carried out is an attempt to study issues concerning the cultural foundations of Eurasian integration in the post-Soviet space. These issues are considered on the example of the Republic of Tajikistan. The determination of cultural potential of the integration process will help define its opportunities.

### **4. Purpose of the Study**

The main goal of this study is to identify the cultural potential of Eurasian integration.

The goal is achieved through the solution of the following tasks:

- to identify the bases for the formation of the Eurasian mentality;
- to study the attitude towards the Russian language among students in Dushanbe on the basis of a sociological survey;
- to describe the problems of functioning of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space on the example of the Republic of Tajikistan;
- to determine the opportunities for the Eurasian integration process in the field of education.

### **5. Research Methods**

The principles of synergetics which consider the society as a complex self-organized system that develops nonlinearly underlie the theoretical basis of the study. This allows, on the one hand, to consider Eurasian integration as a process which makes the social being more complicated, and on the other hand, it is one of the ways of society development, harmoniously combining the whole (order) and the parts (chaos) on the basis of the recognition of common bases for mutually beneficial cooperation of these parts.

When the cultural potential study of the Eurasian integration was carried out, there were used various methods of observation. Besides, the interviews were conducted; content analysis and analysis of statistical data were performed.

### **6. Findings**

The Eurasian idea is based on objective groundings among which are economic (including infrastructure) relations; similar institutions; century-old common past due to which the values have become pretty much similar. In the process of internal colonization of the Eurasian space Russians did not manage to conquer the land in bloody wars. Continuous links with other peoples provided an invaluable experience in the field of communication; deep knowledge of life contributed to the development of such forms of interethnic communication, where there was a manifestation of its unique identity. This circumstance contributed to the development of a sense of charity and national tolerance. The Russians moved to the East, showing their goodwill. Therefore, they easily got on with other peoples although the process of rapprochement of cultures did not go smoothly. It was an ideological idea of collecting diversity and uniting themselves and others on the basis of collective interaction.

When the Central Asian peoples had joined the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union as a result of an intensive intercultural interaction they acquired the features of European culture without losing their ethnic and cultural traits. This allowed T.A. Aizatullin and S.G. Kara-Murza to describe the peoples of Central Asia as Eurasians.

A positive experience of communication is an important condition ensuring the effectiveness of the integration process. This is proved by the results of an association experiment the participants of which demonstrated an exceptionally positive perception of Russians in the Sughd region. The students of the Khatlon region also showed a good attitude and respect for the Russian people; there were almost no negative reactions. Some respondents noted that the Russian people can be compared to the family members who can be trusted (Iskandarova, 2016). The results of this study are confirmed by numerous conversations with the young people from Gorno-Badakhshan region which took place during the ethnological expedition in July 2017. Young people are aware of the role played by Russian servicemen in saving the Pamirs from genocide at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century and the date of the annexation of Gorno-Badakhshan to the Russian Empire.

The Eurasian idea is based on the spiritual and moral unity, values, as well as cultural and historical interaction of peoples living together on the same territory. Nikolsky (2010) states the following fact about the mindset of the peoples of Eurasia: ‘...for the Russian cultural tradition the priority of presentational and emotional perception, as well as the cognition of the world over its rational cognition (the primacy of ‘the heart and soul’ over ‘the mind and rationality’) was, somehow, a defining feature of the mentality of representatives of different peoples of post-Soviet space’. The priority of collective interests, the importance of spiritual component of life, tolerance, openness to diverse influences, hospitality could be added to the list of the features\characteristics of the Eurasian mentality. Describing the people’s ideal of modern man, Spirin (2016) emphasizes the fact that it is closely connected with such personal components as responsibility, the ability to overcome difficulties, fulfill certain duties, show strong-willed character traits (patience, perseverance, and hard work), love of the Motherland, respect for other cultures. Kydyralina (2018) describes the Eurasians as bearers of a special mindset. She notes that they ‘show tolerance for other people’s opinions, beliefs, behavior and possess a keen sense of justice’. Thus, these features of the Eurasian mindset have an objective basis and are of supranational geocultural character. However, the commonality of mental attitudes should not be seen in absolute terms, as well as it should not be oversimplified because the Eurasian integration is not a process of generalization, but a search for rapprochement and synthesis of cultures.

The intercultural synthesis can be found at a simple level and in the economic life. During the international study conducted in Tajikistan in 2017 which was devoted to the study of people values and interethnic communication, the respondents (Russians and Tajiks) identified these spheres of life as the priority areas in the process of mutual influence. And homespun carpets made by women from the villages of Pendzhikent, districts of Zimtud, Guitan and Voru provide the evidence of the ancient cultural contacts with the nomadic peoples under the influence of which the Tajiks acquired the tradition of carpet making. The close proximity of diverse groups and nationalities, their economic ties and constant communication resulted in the emergence of common features, both in carpet weaving techniques and ornamentation. A

vivid artistic image of the synthesis of Russian and Tajik cultures was created by the film director S. Soliev in his movie 'Calendar of Expectation'.

The Russian language is an example of mutual influence of cultures. The etymology of many words, among which are 'bogatyř' (epic character, hero), 'sarafan' (sleeveless dress worn by Russian peasant women), 'bazar' (market), 'kutia' (boiled rice, wheat, etc, with raisins and honey eaten at funeral repast), 'kudesnik' (wizard) points to their Turkic roots.

According to Fomenko, Leksin and Shvetsov (2012), it is easier to cultivate the cultural and linguistic affinity of elites and peoples rather than to cultivate the memory about common Soviet past. A common language information environment in the Eurasian space is formed due to the Russian language. Therefore, its support and popularization should become a supranational task. A.V. Fomenko notes that the Russian language can be shifted from the space of everyday life and situatedness into the space of cooperation and solidarity only with the participation of all interested countries, individuals, and institutions. To popularize and promote the Russian language and the Russian culture, it is not enough to get the support of the Russkiy Mir Foundation and the Russian Center for Science and Culture. In the opinion of A.V. Fomenko, this urgent task should be solved by special international organizations that are able not only to structure the Eurasian space on the basis of the Russian language, but also to protect it as a common language of science and culture of the Eurasian space. For example, Fomenko, Leksin and Shvetsov (2012), names the International Association of Russian-language Universities and Departments which can be established on the basis of The Peoples' Friendship University. As a result, the necessary infrastructure for the intercultural dialogue would be created.

Despite the fact that the Russian language is not widely used in the independent states, it still preserves its significance as a means of interethnic communication, creating favorable conditions for both trade and investment activities. It is one of the main languages of the media. Besides, the representatives of the political elites in the Eurasian space are fluent in the Russian language.

As a result of the 2010 census in Tajikistan, the number of Russians living in Tajikistan is insignificant and amounts to 35,000 people, which is less than 0.5% of the population of Tajikistan. Compared to 2000 the Russian population of the Republic has decreased by 7 times, while the Russian language proficiency indicator has decreased by 1.8 times (Status decline of the Russian language in the post-Soviet space, 2016). On the other hand, the study conducted in 2015 by the Eurasian Monitor showed that a quarter of young Tajiks under the age of 25 do not speak Russian, and, compared to 2000 the use of the Russian language at the official events and at home was reduced by half. At the same time, 70% of young Tajiks have a need to learn Russian (What is the legal basis for the Russian language operation in Tajikistan, 2018).

A student poll which was held at Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in 2016 confirmed the interest of young people in the Russian language and culture: 97% of the respondents believe that the knowledge of the Russian language is in demand and its study is necessary. These conclusions correlate with the results of the questionnaire which involved the students of the National University whose education is performed in the Tajik language: 100% of the respondents are convinced that, nowadays, it is necessary to have a good command of the Russian language. At the same time the respondents explain the necessity by the fact that most scientific literature is published in Russian.

According to the survey, a high proportion of the Tajik citizens believe that the study of the Russian language at schools of Tajikistan should be expanded (What is the legal basis for the Russian language operation in Tajikistan, 2018) despite the fact that the study of Russian (at Tajik schools) is compulsory. Therefore, it shows the dissatisfaction of the residents with the conditions for studying the Russian language in the country.

According to the Ministry of Education and Science of the Republic of Tajikistan, at the end of the academic year of 2014-2015 the number of children enrolled in Russian classes reached 59,000, which is 3.5 thousand more compared to 2013-2014 (Tajik News, 2014). However, for these students, due to the lack of teachers of the Russian language, neither the additional Russian schools nor the additional Russian classes were opened. For this reason schoolchildren have to study in crowded classes. In particular, there is a noticeable shortage of teachers who specialize in enhanced education in Russian at schools. There was developed a project aimed at solving the problem of personnel shortage according to which 29 teachers from Bashkortostan, Tatarstan, Dagestan, Orenburg, Kemerovo and Kostroma regions came to Tajikistan. They will teach Russian language and literature, as well as other subjects in Russian in the regions of the republic for the period of one year.

The lack of textbooks and teaching materials in Russian is also solved by their delivery from Russia. By an order signed by the Head of the Federation Council Matvienko 20 tons of textbooks and teaching materials were sent to the republic by 1 September 2017. This is approximately 52 thousand copies of books (Gaisina, 2017). However, neither the project nor the systematic sending of textbooks can solve the problem of the shortage of specialists and textbooks. To solve problem new Russian language schools have to be opened.

According to Rossotrudnichestvo as of 1 September 2017 there are about 30 educational institutions in the country whose educational process is organized in Russian. The number of students studying in those institutions amounts to 17,000 (Ambassadors of the Russian language, 2018). This number of institutions includes HEIs among which are Russian-Tajik Slavonic University, branches of Moscow universities (Lomonosov Moscow State University, Moscow Power Engineering Institute, Moscow Institute of Steel and Alloys). The most prestigious Tajik universities such as the State National University, Engineering University, and Medical University have established the Russian language groups.

Regular measures are being taken to promote the Russian language and the spiritual values of the Russian culture in Tajikistan. According to the results of the project Peculiarities of the Formation of Public Opinion in the Tajik Society held in 2006, the respondents from Tajikistan are interested in Russian movies, theaters, artists, film directors (65.1%), peculiarities of the country (41.2%), historical sites (40.4%), music, composers, and singers (40.4%) (Report of Korshinos, 2016). In 2006, in Dushanbe the nationwide public movement Friends of Russia took place the main goal of which was to strengthen and expand social and political, economic and cultural ties between Tajikistan and Russia (IA REGNUM, 2006).

Setting a task for the scientists and workers of culture, Ruzin writes that it is necessary 'to show the dynamics of the synthesis of traditional and new forms of popular culture and creativity', to record an ethnographic diversity of cultures of the peoples of Eurasia (RIA News, 2015). This task was solved during the ethnological expeditions of the Department of Cultural Studies of the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University which were undertaken in 2016 and 2017. Lev Gumilev Center with its branches throughout the territory

of Eurasia also aims at solving this problem. Such organizations contribute to the development of an important cognitive attitude which helps determine how the representatives of different cultures of the Eurasian space can be united (Lavrov, 2016).

## 7. Conclusion

The large-scale cultural and educational projects aimed at exchanges of schoolchildren, students, graduate students and teachers, as well as coordination of educational programs and mutual recognition of diplomas will ensure the effectiveness of the integration process. It is important to create an academic mobility program similar to Erasmus Mundus, which can cover the Eurasian space. Wide involvement of young people in the integration process will contribute not only to its development, but also to a long-term development. The formation of readiness and ability to live in the multicultural environment, as well as mastering of such notion as 'joint living' becomes the main task for the educational process, which involves not only the heritage of the native culture, but the diversity of the world culture in which the achievements of different peoples are combined. Only in this case the multicultural environment will be understood.

In this context, the experience of the international volunteer program Ambassadors of the Russian Language in the World initiated by Pushkin State Russian Language Institute is of great importance. Its goal is to promote the Russian language, culture and literature in Russia and abroad, as well as to develop and strengthen both inter-university and international partnerships, to promote cultural values of tolerance and to establish a dialogue of cultures. The program provides opportunities for the internships of students and graduate students in Russia and abroad. For several years, the students of Russian universities have been trained in the Russian-Tajik Slavonic University in the form of the educational expeditions in the framework of this program. The establishment of mutual understanding can be achieved through the cooperation in the field of liberal arts.

The development of a mindset based on the principles of equality and respectful attitude towards each other is becoming a key prerequisite for an adequate response to the challenges of our time.

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