
Cultural Geography in Russia: Scientific Background, Development Trends and Research Priorities

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Abstract

The paper presents an overview of the historical origins, specific features, development trends, key issues and prospects for the further development of cultural geography in Russia. Establishing of cultural geography in Russia took place in the course of close interaction between geography, ethnography, social and cultural anthropology.

The understanding (and recognition) of the need to "develop" cultural problems has been immanent to the Russian scientific traditions, including in the field of geography. In the pre-revolutionary Russian geography (and even in the early Soviet period geography), anthropological approaches were used very actively: the national anthropogeographic school of the early XX century (embodied in the works of P. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky and V. Semyonov-Tyan-Shansky, V. Lamansky, D. Anuchin, and L. Sinitsky, etc.) was on a par with the famous foreign anthropogeographic schools of the continental Europe, which had emerged earlier: the German Anthropogeographie and the French géographie de l'homme. At that time, the culture analysis of different regions and localities, and their ethnographic features was an integral part of research pursued by Russian geographers. The scientific works of L. Berg were among the first in the world to focus on cultural landscape studies.

Unfortunately, at the cusp of the 1920–1930s, the anthropological approaches and traditions of the pre-revolutionary Russian geography were largely abandoned, when the Soviet human geography was narrowed to economic geography alone; sociocultural priorities in human-geographic research were mostly ideologically suppressed. The few exceptions, such as the outstanding work of V. Semenov–Tyan–Shansky called "Region and the Country", which was written in the humanistic traditions of anthropogeography, could not fundamentally change the situation. Since the early 1930s, the Soviet economic geography focused primarily on the study of settlement and territorial organization of the productive forces and, thus, largely distanced itself from the broader discussion of human and cultural issues. Even such discipline as geography of population and settlement was developing primarily in the framework of the general "mainstream" economic geography. However, top broadminded and innovatively thinking geographers (such as the classic researcher of the Soviet economic geography N. Baransky as well as his followers Yu. Saushkin, R. Kabo, L. Ioffa, V. Gokhman) wrote about the need to incorporate the phenomenon of culture into the subject areas of geography.

The revival of Russian cultural geography began actually only in the late Soviet period (in the 1980s). Two concepts are used on the national research scene: geography of culture or cultural geography. The relation between these two concepts is discussed. The consequences

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of the period of oblivion of the humanistic traditions in the Russian anthropogeography, which marked the cusp of the 1920–1930s, for the development of economic geography in the USSR are investigated in this paper. The orientation of the national human geography towards the cultural geographic dimension at the end of the last century is explored. Key features and development trends that were characteristic of the Russian cultural geography over the past quarter of a century are discussed. Statistical data on dissertations in the field of cultural geography between 1995 and 2016 in Russia are aggregated and analyzed.

The following directions of cultural-geographical research reached the prior development in Russia at the end of the XX - early XXI centuries: 1) cultural geography of ethnic groups; 2) confessional geography; 3) the studies of the urban-rural cultural-geographical distinctions; 4) cultural-landscape studies; 5) the studies of regional identity; 6) the studies of geographical images (with their modeling, representation and classification) and perception of geographical space by various cultural groups; 7) the integral regional cultural geography (focused on studies of cultural regions and investigation of regionalism as phenomenon of culture).

Special attention is paid to the assessment of major problems and priority areas of cultural-geographical research in view of general trends and prospects for the development of modern human geography in Russia. It is concluded that the potential of cultural geography in Russia has not yet been fully tapped into. The theoretical and methodological framework of cultural geography has to be further developed. In addition, research studies in this area are highly fragmented and suffer from the lack of coordination and dissociation with other areas of human geography. The paper points to the rise of the phenomenon of "neoculturalization" in the national geographic science based on a closer relation between cultural geography and other disciplines of human geography.

Keywords: cultural geography, Russia, cultural space, cultural regionalism, cultural landscape