

Cultural Identification Processes in the Modernizing North Caucasus

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Abstract

The article analyzes the sociocultural space of the Russian North Caucasian community, which is a complex open system. In the context of strengthening of the Russian (national) identity in the North Caucasus, we aimed to rethink the features of formation and functioning of the modernizing North Caucasian society. Addressing this problem is due to the need to identify the inconsistencies in the identification space of the North Caucasian society, which will allow detecting the possibility of harmonious relationships between the national, regional, and ethno-cultural identities.

Keywords: North Caucasus, sociocultural system, identity, modernization, tradition, innovation, synergetic approach.

1. Introduction

The North Caucasus is a complex, historically formed geographical, economic, political, social, and ethnocultural system. An important role in its functioning belongs to the ethnocultural diversity. During the analysis of the region modernization in the current conditions, it was found that the roots of ethnic identity changed slowly, especially the standards of cultural identity, which form value-related and ideological references of a person and his worldview. Therefore, there is a problem of preservation of the ethnocultural diversity in a united civil nation.

In the context of strengthening the Russian (national) identity in the North Caucasus, it appears necessary to reconsider the features of the formation and functioning of the modernizing North Caucasian society. Our appeal to this problem is due to the need to identify inconsistencies in the identification space of the North Caucasian society, which will allow detecting the possibility of harmonious correlation between the national, regional, and ethnocultural identities. In this regard, we would like to highlight a number of issues relating to the features of the North Caucasian society, certainly without claiming to provide exhaustive answers.

2. Materials and Methods

Studies of foreign and domestic scientists on the issue of the correlation of modernization and traditionalization, and the interrelation of the national, regional, and ethnocultural identities (Gorshkov, 2013; Drobizheva 2013; Semenenko, 2013; Tishkov, 2013; Benhabib, 2002; Giddens, 2004). The research is of interdisciplinary nature: the philosophically systemic, sociocultural, and synergetic approach, as well as the comparative method were used.

In order to identify the characteristics of the processes of identification among the North Caucasian youth, we performed an empirical study—a survey by questioning (N = 640, the study covered young people aged 15 to 29 years, representing six regions: the Adyghe, Kabardino-Balkarian, and Chechen Republics, the Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Rostov Regions).

3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Description of the North Caucasian society

In the circumstance of the North Caucasus' functioning as a complex system, the social factor plays an important role. It seems that the social changes of recent years in the region can only be understood in the context of the overall process of Russia's modernization. But it is important to take into account the other side, that is, to reveal the common in the different—the peculiarities of the formation and functioning of the North Caucasian society. We find this work possible if we analyze the sociocultural reality that would allow us to understand the ethnic factor and lifestyle.

It seems that the study of traditional values prevailing in the sociocultural space and of changes in the multiethnic society is essential in order to determine the typical parameters of the order and existing sociodynamics, as well as for the formation of non-linear thinking in managing a self-organizing multiethnic system and strengthening of the Russian national identity in the North Caucasus.

We regard the North Caucasus as a homogeneous space having physical and geographical, cultural, and linguistic commonality, as well as the commonality of economic structures and a common historical destiny, the combination of which creates the uniqueness of the region. It is important to emphasize the fact that the North-Caucasian region coincides with the sociocultural taxonomy. This also justifies the use in the study of the sociocultural approach to the region under study.

The characteristics of the sociocultural space of the regional community within the framework of the systematic and philosophical methodology enables its holistic understanding, the understanding of its specific forms of existence, the structure, functioning, and development. And what is very important—it allows revealing the peculiar features of the identification essence of the North Caucasian society.

In the North Caucasus, a rather distinctive sociocultural space has taken shape in the course of history, the genesis of which space goes to the historic roots of the Caucasian ethnic groups' appearance on Earth. Despite the integrity of the regional community, every ethnic group has its own cultural model of existence—an ideological picture that determines the nature of a person's relationship to the world. As we set ourselves the task of revealing the specifics of the sociocultural space, and hence the identification essence of the regional community, we consider it possible to define the heterogeneous elements, from which they have been formed as an integrity.

The starting position of our discussion is the fact that the North Caucasus, as well as the whole Caucasus, is a mountainous area and the house of very original and valuable civilizations. The exceptional natural conditions, in which the population of the region has been living, have formed the relation between the human and the nature, constituting the basis of the whole civilization: the nature of culture, the type of relationship between the human and the society.

The Charter of Mountain Peoples notes that the myths generated by these civilizations, the values, on which they are based, their social and economic structures have a deep imprint of the geographic location. They also gave rise to cultures, original and long-term, as a result of territorial isolation, due to which their isolated development has taken place (Charter, 2000).

Considering the correlation of the human and the nature in the region, it is necessary to note two provisions. First - this correlation can be expressed in a number of paradigms: the human attachment to the natural environment, human friendliness to the nature, and humane treatment of the nature. Here, the cultural and ecological peculiar feature of the mountain lifestyle of the Caucasian peoples and environmental outlook of highlanders were formed. The type of human relationship to nature is historically determined. This feature of the Caucasian mentality determined the respect for the nature, the revered attitude in the sense of the Earth cult, and the respectful attitude and affection for it, for all living things, which should be strongly protected.

The value of the past in the Caucasian minds that traditionally ranked high in the value priorities of a Caucasian determined the dialog between the nature and the human and shaped the environmental outlook of the Caucasian peoples.

The second provision is the interrelation of the bio- and ethnic sociocultural diversity. The natural diversity affected the formation of the structure of the social system of the Caucasus region. This largely explains the ethnic sociocultural diversity that has formed in the circumstances of the mountain and foothill areas of the Caucasus.

Thus, the Caucasian society and sociocultural space formed, of course, under the influence of certain geographical conditions. At the same time, it does not mean that their formation is due only to the peculiarity of the natural features.

So what is the historical basis of the genesis of the North Caucasian commonality? And another question arising from it: What made a person a Caucasian?

This can be understood based on the following methodological scheme, which is, in our view, sufficiently

substantiated. It is associated with the concept of "ethnic structures of the everyday life" that are the phenomena specific for each ethnic group, familiar and recurring in people's direct experience. This level of everyday life forms the deep foundations of the national identity, national uniqueness of a person, and is the basis of the general sociological category "lifestyle," giving it an ethnic slant [Boronoev, 1993]. It is the Caucasian way of life that engendered the Caucasian mentality, the spiritual values and predefined all sides of the Caucasians' essence and existence: outlook, attitude, traditional world order, etc. Moreover, on this basis, the mechanism of mutual understanding, cooperation, and interaction of Caucasian ethnic groups was formed. This was the basis of functioning of the North Caucasian society.

It should be noted that the life itself, the lifestyle of a Caucasian formed the core of the value system of not only the regional community, but also the identity of the human in it. The sociocultural environment formed social communications, the specific type of human relations, and the sociocultural institutions. The prevailing values and vital senses included a special understanding of the human and his place and purpose. It is the basic system of values that was the basis of the Caucasian culture that formed the attitude to identification: the dichotomy "us" and "them" was contoured. The notion "Caucasian" filled with the identification content appeared.

It should be noted that foreigners and Russian thinkers who had visited the Caucasus, described their ambivalence about the way of life of the highlanders—it is the "wild freedom" that is an integral part of their natural rights and values, and the outlook, in general. At the same time, a typical demeanor was noted, which was called "chivalry," meaning the medieval Western European mentality, the peculiarities of the lifestyle, behavior, and ethnic psychology of Caucasians—the love of freedom and the pride, which created a special world order (Bell, 1974; Dubois de Monpere, 1974; Spencer, 1837).

In this regard, we would like to mention one methodological feature: the traditional values in the Caucasus belonged to the type of culture, which coincided with neither the Russian, nor the European one. Therefore, it was difficult to understand the essence of the cultural identity and of the Caucasian culture itself.

So, comprehension of the cultural identity through the "way of life" and "lifestyle" allows us to understand the behavior of the mountain peoples and the specificity of their mentality, as well as the formation of a single "territorial community" and territorial identity, filled with the meaning of the sociocultural environment in the North Caucasus.

Philosophical understanding of the posed question is related to the key concept "system," which includes, along with other subsystems, the social groups, ethnic groups, ethnic cultures, etc. In the self-developing systems, namely, the sociocultural space, special information structures—codes are formed (the "experience" of previous interactions) that fix the peculiarities of its interaction with the environment, which are important for retaining the integrity of the system, and determine the reproducibility of the system as an integrity. Modern science recognizes culture and its basic values as such information structures in social systems.

As for the North Caucasian sociocultural space, the following question is inevitable: Can we refer to the culture as a single one (or the culture's integrity) if it consists of several ethnic cultures?

We need to note that in the ethnic space of the North Caucasus, the natural historical process of development and interaction of various ethnic cultures based on their mutual complementarity has been taking place for a long time. Ethnic cultures have been existing here for more than one century, interacting with and penetrating into each other. But it is important to note one feature—they (ethnic cultures) do not lose their main differences.

The postulation of the unity of the regional culture in the diversity of ethnic cultures is certainly not an end in itself. The main thing, in our view, is the understanding that culture is a semantic basis of the whole life. Taking into account the cultural sensitivity is important also because the ethnocultural traditions and ethnocultural identity form the basis of identity are the backbone and most stable elements, parameters of the order, due to which the self-development of the system takes place. They have formed the sociocultural environment of the regional community.

3.2 *The interaction of traditions and innovations*

As a result of changes in the North Caucasian community, of course, the regional identity changed, as well as the basic system of values of the regional identity, which was based on the culture (ethnic cultures). Despite the modernization of the North Caucasian society, the ethnic factor continues to play an important role in the region. The value of the essence of the cultural identity resides in its social potential. That is why in the current situation, it is important to understand the heuristic potential of ethnic cultures and its practical use. Cultural traditions form the basis of uniqueness; they are the backbone and most the stable elements, thanks to which the self-development of the multi-ethnic society as a system takes place.

Recognizing the legitimacy of opposing tradition to innovation, we consider the latter in the context of a more general concept—"development." The traditions themselves are not static, they are dynamic. From the standpoint of the

dialectical concept, a tradition becomes a party to the process of development, or, as they say, the dialog of "the new" to "the old." This ensures the uniqueness of the change and development process itself. Within the process, the tradition means revival, giving a new sense of life to old patterns and values. In the aspect of spiritual renewal, traditions bear the relevant spiritual load and their conservation is possible not in a pure, but imprinted form.

The compromise position on the polarity "tradition –modernity" was suggested by Giddens. According to him, traditions have not been removed by the modernization, but are involved in a symbiotic link with the modernity and continue to live in the most modernized societies. The "deal" between the traditionalism and modernity originated in a compromise between the public and private spheres. The socio-political (public) sphere—democracy, economy—has gone far from traditionalism, and it has only aggravated in the private sphere—family, sexuality (Giddens, 2004).

We consider traditions as a key to comprehension and understanding of other values of the North Caucasian society, as well as the basis of innovation. Each culture (depending on the degree of openness) adopts, transforms any new forms that can take roots in the mental basis of an ethnic group. Innovation can assert itself through cultural traditions. This determines the place, role, and power of ethnocultural traditions in a multiethnic society. Tradition as a way to preserve the sociocultural experience and innovations, as the process of its updating can coexist on the principle of subsidiarity. The interaction of cultural traditions and innovation should not be accelerated or restrained, but guided, with creation of conditions for mutual enrichment in a self-organized social system.

Obviously, the identity, the basis of which is a traditional component cannot be a full-fledged criterion for the modernity of a society, but its different elements can independently evolve in line with their inherent logic.

Research has always fixed the hardly modernizable nature of the North Caucasian ethnic groups. It seems that the North Caucasian society cannot be clearly defined as a traditional, and particularly as a modernized one. It exists and self-develops in the "traditionalism –modernity" space with different force tending to a particular pole with its individual sectors. However, the measure of the sociocultural transformation—the ethnic—is the space that to a greater extent than others embodies the traditionalist paradigm of existence. As we have noted, the stability of ethnic patterns of the traditional culture increasingly reinforces the uniqueness of the process of "modernization" of the North Caucasus, as a form of sociocultural transformation.

3.3 *Multi-level identity in the region (on the example of the North Caucasian youth).*

The fruitful, in our view, matching of traditionalism and modernization is possible in consideration of identity as a multi-level hierarchical establishment in the "tradition - modernity" continuum, which is implemented through the co-existence of traditional sub-ethnic, ethnic, regional, and modern national identities. These phenomena can be most indicatively analyzed on the example of the youth.

Young people live in the traditional and modern spaces at the same time. The modern is the many things that have been brought to life by the 20th and 21st centuries: from universal literacy to computers and mobile phones, and the traditional is what it has been possible to conserve in the circumstances of these fleeting changes. One area of consideration of the interaction of traditions and innovations in the North Caucasus is the identification space.

Within the framework of the concept of social development of young people (Chuprov, 2006), one of its functions in addition to the reproduction of the social structure, social experience, is the innovative function associated with the improvement of this structure and expertise (innovation). Innovation is implemented through the new identifications. as well, typical of each new generation of young people, which grow in quantity and transform in quality. For example, a more adult cohort in the young generation has had and has a fundamentally different form of national identity. Socialization of today's young people aged 26-29 was not burdened by the Soviet identity on the one hand, and on the other hand, it proceeded in the absence of national, civilian targets. The new experience of understanding the "Homeland", identification with it did not work out for the whole Russian society, and the children of that time (the 1990s) did not have worthy examples to follow. This is manifested in the peculiarities of manifestation of the national identity by this cohort today.

An analysis of the identification space in the North Caucasus uses the concept of multilevel identity, the structure of which is expressed with several levels: ethnic, regional, national, and civilizational, which are interdependent. The concept defends their ability to complement each other, to co-exist, and to have differently actualized certain levels, depending on the social context (Jade, 2006; Hunagov, 2015).

These findings are confirmed in the comparative cross-national research, which finds the ways for "reconciliation" of the ethnic and national identities, balancing between different groups of population (Masella, 2013; Zimmermann, 2012). Thus, to a large extent, the conflict between the "traditional" ethnic and "modern" national identities is offset. Hence, the specificity of the identification processes in the given region and the state of national identity occur.

In order to identify the peculiar features of the processes of identification among the North Caucasian youth, we performed an independent empirical study of young people aged 15-29 who represented 6 regions of the North Caucasus—the Adyghe, Kabardino-Balkarian, and Chechen Republics, the Krasnodar, Stavropol, and Rostov Regions.

In general, the entire array of surveyed young people demonstrates the high level of ethnic solidarity. The focus on the ethnic identity still distinguishes the region from the nationwide picture. However, the local identities (the commonality with the urban and rural community, compatriots), the interest-based identification (commonality with people of the same life views) are still relevant and have similar values. The Russian national identity is inferior to the popularity of the mentioned preferences, but is still in significant demand. These trends were found in all studied subjects, the Russian-speaking regions are characterized also by relatively high values of ethnic identity, its predominance.

In the structure of the youth's identification space, there are age-specific features. A decrease in the degree of identification with the citizens of Russia in the most senior and youngest cohorts was detected. The highest rates of solidarity with this community were found in the group of 18-25-year-old persons. The explanation can be found in the fact that the civic identity is constructive in nature—it is the result of purposeful educational activities of the society and the state as opposed to the ethnic identity, which is formed in the process of socialization and is of ascriptive, primordial nature. Thus, it can be assumed that the youngest people (aged 15-18) have not experienced this educational influence to a sufficient extent. The senior group are the young people who, as a rule, have determined their life references and have felt short of the patriotic charge by the state.

The youth's emotional perception of the national identity in general is positive. However, it is less pronounced among young people in the republics (except for Adyghea), where the number of those experiencing a sense of detachment, alienation, resentment, and humiliation from the feeling that they are Russian citizens reaches 20% (the highest number is in Kabardino-Balkaria). As a whole, the positive emotional perception of the national identity made up of the sense of pride for the country, dignity, and belonging is typical of respondents aged 15-25 years. The oldest segment shows slightly stronger negative feelings, associated with the testing of the sense of alienation and detachment (15.5%), as well as insult and humiliation (9.9%).

The uniform configurations of multi-level identities were not found in the studied regions in any ethnic group. The specified heterogeneity of the identification space of the North Caucasus proves the mosaic structure and overdetermination of the identification processes in this region.

The space of operation of a multi-level identity in different regions of the North Caucasian society was diagnosed. As already noted, no uniform configurations of multi-level identities were not found in the studied regions for any ethnic group. Rank distributions showed different hierarchies of identities in the main ethnic groups studied. The hierarchies are represented as follows (by priority): in the Adyghe—the Russian national, republican, North Caucasian, and ethnic identities; in the Balkars—the ethnic/national, republican, and North Caucasian identities; in the Kabardians—the North Caucasian, national, ethnic, and cosmopolitan (citizens of the world) identities; in the Russians—the national, ethnic, republican, and cosmopolitan identities; in the Chechens—ethnic, national, national, and cosmopolitan/North Caucasian identities.

An analysis of the configurations of identities of the North Caucasian ethnic groups makes it possible to disagree with the researchers who highlight the competitive nature of the ethnic and national identities in the North Caucasus, emphasize the confrontation of the local characteristics of identity to the all-Russian ones (Avksentyev, 2010). According to Smith, the civil approach to the concept of a nation, as a rule, is defended by the government, political elite, and ethnic majority. In turn, minorities typically interpret a nation in terms of ethnicity, especially when there is a threat to the existence of the society or the loss of cultural symbols. Therefore, each nation contains elements of both civil-territorial and ethnic commonality (Smith, 1986). Rank distributions of identities among young people demonstrated such a type of self-organization, at which all the basic components of the Russian ethnic identity are in the relationship of complexity and nonlinearity: the ethnic, regional (North Caucasian and republican/regional), cosmopolitan, and religious forms of identity.

These studies reflect the level of the self-organization processes in the identification space of the region. Its complexity is a response to social instability, which results in young people's design of their own model of the sociocultural space.

4. Summary

The research is of interdisciplinary nature: the philosophically systemic, sociocultural, and synergetic approach, as well as the comparative method and the method of mass survey (questionnaire) were used.

In the context of the North Caucasian society modernization, the ethnic factor continues to play a significant role in

the region. Ethnocultural traditions, which are the basis for cultural identity, remain the most stable elements in the system under study. This thesis is substantiated by the empirical data of the performed sociological study of the identity of the North Caucasian youth. The interaction of tradition and innovation in the North Caucasus is considered on the example of identity, as a multi-level hierarchical establishment combining traditional and modern types of identities: the ethnocultural, regional, national, and civilizational identities. Based on different values, these types of identities are not mutually exclusive but complementary and reinforcing.

The authors conclude the following:

1. The functioning and social living placement of peoples is actively influenced by the maintenance of the traditional factor. The link between traditions and ethnicity in the North Caucasus is quite natural, since the latter here almost completely corresponds to the matrix of the traditional sociocultural system.
2. A new sense of the cultural identification space of the region was revealed in terms of modernization: the ethnocultural and Russian national identities are not mutually exclusive, but coexist on the principle of complementarity, mutually enriching each other. The diversity of identities is considered as a condition for the harmonized coexistence and sustainable development of the region.
3. The study of the contradictory nature of the correlation between traditionalization and modernization in the regional community, which reveals the mechanism of interaction between tradition and innovation in the new paradigm, as well as the rationale for the need for search of creativity in the space of traditions and innovations, have led to the following conclusion: the strengthening of the unity of the Russian nation/Russian national identity and the modernization of the multi-ethnic society are possible with conservation of the ethnocultural diversity.
4. The functioning and social living placement of peoples is actively influenced by the maintenance of the tradition factor. The link between traditions and ethnicity in the North Caucasus is quite natural, since the latter here almost completely corresponds to the matrix of a traditional sociocultural system.

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