

УДК 372.893

THE CONTEMPORARY HISTORY TEXTBOOKS IN RUSSIA AS IDENTITY PROMOTION TOOL

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The principal objective of this paper is to demonstrate the use of history textbooks for identity promotion in the Russian Federation. The Russian government's new Concept of History Education and Concept of Common History textbook have become a growing problem over the past several years. The government tries to use textbooks as an instrument to promote Russian ethnic national pride and patriotism and textbook topics are political. The main mechanisms used to establish governmental control over the process of textbook publishing and approval are described in the first part of paper. The main subject matter of the current debates about new history textbooks are analyzed with a particular focus on the image of indigenous peoples (non-ethnic Russians inhabitants of Russia) and the place for their histories in modern Russian history textbooks and in the Concept of Teaching Russian History.

Keywords: history education, identity issues, non-ethnic Russians in the history of Russia, postcolonial studies, state policy, textbook analysis

In my paper I primarily focus on the topic of how contemporary secondary school textbooks in Russia are used for nonacademic reasons, such as indoctrination or promoting social or group identities and what is the main reason for this situation. I examine the textbook publishing and approval processes in Russia, the characteristics of mainstream historiography in Russia and the influence of these on history textbooks, the place for indigenous people's histories in modern Russian history textbooks, and current debates about the Concept of new history textbook. Whether a postcolonial approach applicable to present-day history education is applicable will likewise be analyzed.

I will not examine whether post-colonial theory is applicable to contemporary historical discourse in Russia – there are a number of publications on this topic. Suffice it to say that in Russia post-colonial studies exist only at the academic level in research institutes and universities and are not allowed with regards to secondary school's textbooks. This is because the mainstream direction of Russian historiography (actively promoted by the central government) denies the validity of postcolonial approaches to the Russian history.

Textbooks publishing and approving system in Russia

There are heated debates in contemporary Russia about the content of education resources in history, as well as with regards to the pedagogical and methodological approaches used in studying and teaching Russian history in schools (especially concerning the Soviet and post-Soviet periods). There are moreover different inclinations among historians (westernized “liberal direction”, patriotic, national loyalists, and different left wing (social-democratic, communistic etc.) [For more details see: 4]. But not all of these directions are present in modern textbooks. Just because of there is no free textbook market in Russia. One may print any kind of book and can call it a “textbook,” “manual,” “teaching materials,” etc., but it cannot be used in schools.

To print a textbook that can be used in schools, first one needs an official certificate from the Russian Ministry of Education giving permission to one of the four or five official publishing houses in all of Russia to print the textbook. Then, one needs an official approval of the textbook from the Russian Ministry of Education stating that it is “recommended” or “allowed for use in schools.” The ministry can provide this only after two experts review its content, and those experts must come from one of two institutions – The Russian Academy of Sciences or The Russian Academy of Education. (Both academies are under strict state control; the Russian president [24] and prime ministers [3] are the authorities that appoint the presidents of these academies). Thus, there is no chance for any approach except those officially approved by the government to be presented in textbooks.

The neo-conservative wave in Russia

It should be noted that mainstream historiography in Russia has developed under a strong conservative influence – especially that of patriotic, national loyalists (great-power nationalists, i.e., supporters of strong government authority). The new conservative (even reactionary) wave in Russian public opinion and historiography has become increasingly apparent and influential, and it is actively supported and promoted by the government.

The main characteristics of this trend, supported by A. Dugin,¹ S. Kurginyan,² N. Narochnitskaya, et al. can be described as follows:

- Anti-westernism and anti-globalism;
- Idealization of Orthodox Christianity’s role in Russian history;

¹ Aleksandr Dugin (born 1962) is a Russian political scientist, sociologist, philosopher-traditionalist, professor at Moscow State University and one of the most popular ideologists for the creation of a Eurasian empire that opposes “North Atlantic interests” through the integration of Russia with the former Soviet republics.

² Sergei Kurginyan (born 1949) is a political scientist, theater director, founder and leader of the Russian left patriotic social movement Essence of Time, which seeks to revive the Soviet Union on the basis not only of socialist and communist ideas, but also patriotic views and Orthodox Christian values.

- Apologism for strong centralized power [4].

Among representatives of this trend, postcolonial studies are absolutely unacceptable – they do not even recognize Russia as a colonial empire. If they compare the Russian Empire with the other colonial empires of the early modern and late modern periods (for Russia this covers the 18th–20th centuries) – they describe it as a special kind of empire which was very “kind” to the peoples it ruled or the “velvet, paternalistic empire,” which did not exploit the colonies but developed “incorporated territories,” bringing modern European knowledge, civilization to the “attached peoples of the west,” etc. The phrase “incorporation of new territories” into the body of the state is frequently used in official historiography, instead of colonial expansion or conquering. Some writers state that some “incorporated territories” even “have benefited from incorporation into Russia.”³ Such ideas can easily be traced to the books of Vladimir Medinsky⁴, an author officially responsible for the elaboration of the *Concept of new history textbook on Russian History*:

“The Russian Empire was built on entirely different principles from the European colonial empires.... Russia did not create a colonial empire, as the countries of “old” Europe did and did not acquire foreign lands so as to live at their expense. Russian has not enslaved people from other countries, not brought them from one part of its empire to another. It did not destroy the population of conquered countries in mines. It did not expel from their lands whole tribes and nations. The Russian Empire is not like the European colonial empires. The Russian state grew largely because the Russians were viable and active people.... Russia was always surrounded by sparsely populated zones, almost undeveloped lands.... The population of the colonized lands lost nothing by the appearance of Russians....The Russian Empire was at war? Yes, but usually fighting not with its future subjects, but with their sovereigns...Unlike the Europeans, the Russians were in constant contact with the people who were the part of the Russian Empire. On the contrary, the European nations were almost never in contact with the populations of their colonies. Therefore, Russians, unlike Europeans, knew well the non-Russians, who were part of the Russian Empire, and treated them without racial or ethnic prejudice.... And nothing was known about of any non-Russians’ uprising against the Russian Empire....The metropolises of the European colonial empires got fat at the expense of their colonies. But the Russian parent state shared [sources] with them [colonies] and

³ Because the postcolonial studies is not widely developed in contemporary Russian historiography, the terms “colony” or “colonization” are rarely used with regard to Russia. The majority of authors prefer to use the such terms as “incorporation of new territories”, “extension of boundaries” and “centre-periphery” or “center – provinces” or “national (ethnic) outlying districts”.

⁴ Vladimir Medinsky (born 1970) – Russian politician, political scientist, PR specialist and writer. He holds office of Minister of Culture of Russian Federation (since 2012) and elected as the first Head of the Russian Military Historical Society (2013).

often the situation [in the center] was not better but worse [than in periphery]...so Russia was that “crazy” empire... the empire which did not want (at least at the level of official foreign policy) to own colonies....The Russian Empire rather grew larger and stronger from new lands and peoples, but it is believed that these lands and peoples are equal participants in the great Russian orchestra” [8, pp.109–290].

For now, Russia pretends to have brought western civilization to the conquered / “attached” peoples but, at the same time, to oppose the West – stressing the uniqueness of Russia’s position between Europe and Asia. As Ewa Thompson writes, “Russia engaged in a massive effort to manufacture a history, one that stands in partial opposition to the history created by the West on the one hand, and on the other to the history sustained by the efforts of those whom Russia had colonized” [21, p.24]. In recent years, this trend has gained the support of the government officials at the highest level: “Russia cannot and will not blindly and mindlessly copy foreign models. We do not accept the political correctness reduced to an absurdity or Western pattern of multiculturalism” [1].

Our analyses of the main trends in the development of educational policy in Russia over the past several decades show that these ideas are already implemented in practice. For instance, multiculturalism is referred in some textbooks as a “bad thing” and “dangerous for Russia” [10, p.71]. As another example, from the 1990s until 2007, the republics and other regions (constituent territories) of the Russian Federation were allowed to publish their own regional textbooks that represented their own views of the country’s common history. But these textbooks were criticized by some experts for promoting “opposing national historiographies” and “slackening the national unity of Russia” [5, pp.39–48]. As a result of changes in Russia’s system of education, the regions lost this right.

Obviously, there can be no post-colonialism without decolonization. And Russia is still in the process of post-colonial and post-Soviet transition. The process of decolonization is unfinished and liberalization seems to have turned into its opposite – reactionary and retrograde policies.

Back in USSR?

Large numbers of citizens of Russia still have nostalgia for the Soviet past, and this nostalgia is actively promoted by the Russian authorities through textbooks and school curricula. For example, “The Soviet Union was not a democracy, but it was a benchmark and an example of a better, fair society for millions of people around the world.... For 70 years the internal policy of Western countries was adjusted in favor of human rights under the considerable influence of the USSR, a giant superpower, which had accomplished a social revolution and won one of the most brutal wars” [22, p.6]. The author means that World War II is the “most brutal war” in history and that the Soviet Union’s victory in that war is the greatest event in world history and national and military pride of Russia.

In Russia today, it is officially recognized that the education system in general [11] and history education in particular, should promote patriotic feelings among school children [6]. Recently, several politicians have called for a change to the part of the Russian Constitution that declares: “No ideology may be established as state or obligatory one” (The Constitution of the Russian Federation. Chapter 1. “The Fundamentals of the Constitutional System”. Article 13.2). And some even propose to revive the official state ideology [19] or write in the Constitution about “exclusive role of Orthodoxy” [9] or to declare only ethnical Russians as the “only state-building nation” with the special privileged position in the state [2]. Such ideas proposed not only by right wing radical nationalists, but also by the members of parliament from the “United Russia”⁵ and “A Just Russia”⁶ parties and supported even by Communist Party, but it’s was rejected by majority of Parliament Members and by representatives of some Christian and Muslim religious leaders.

To what extent are these ideas from conservative discourse promoted in history textbooks?

Current debates about the new history textbook

After Putin’s speech to the Presidential Council on Interethnic Relations⁷ (19 February 2013), in which he said that “only one history textbook is needed and it should be free from internal contradictions and dual interpretations” [13; 16], the old idea of unifying textbooks was brought back to life.

Newly appointed Federal Minister of Education of Russia Olga Vasilyeva told that textbooks in federal list of textbooks should be reduced in number [23]. The government assigned the recently restored Russian Historical Association⁸ and the Russian Military Historical Society⁹ (both directed by politi-

⁵ “United Russia” – current ruling centre-right party in Russia, supports Vladimir Putin and currently lead by Dmitry Medvedev.

⁶ “A Just Russia” – political party in Russia declared as social democratic, centre-left, or the moderate left, opposition party, but supported most of conservative initiatives of government.

⁷ The Presidential Council on Interethnic Relations is a consultative (deliberative) body established by President Putin on 7 June 2012 to discuss issues regarding the implementation of the Russian Federation’s nationalities policies.

⁸ The Russian Historical Association was created on 20 June 2012 to “form an All-Russian historical culture based on researching and popularizing national and world history, preserving national memory and promoting national historical education,” and is headed by Sergey Naryshkin, Chairman of the State Duma (The Russian Parliament). The new association was officially declared the successor of the Imperial Russian Historical Society (an Imperial Russian public organization founded in 1866 and dissolved in 1917). However, the Imperial Russian Historical Society was already restored as an NGO in 2004, with all old statuses and internal rules.

⁹ The Russian Military Historical Society was established on 14 March 2013 by the Federal Ministries of Culture and Defense according to a presidential decree signed by Putin on 29 December 2012, as a “public-governmental organization” for “research-

cians, not historians) to be officially responsible for the elaboration of *The Concept of new history textbook on Russian History* [7]. The Concept calls for using history education to promote patriotic feelings: “The aims of grounding historical narrative in patriotism are to teach the younger generation to be proud of their country and to be aware of its role in world history. In so doing, it is important to emphasize the country’s mass heroism in the wars” [7, p.10]. As a result, a “constructive pathos and positive attitude in the perception of the country’s history should prevail in school classes” [7, p.10]. Moral upbringing (almost indoctrination) is declared the first priority of education, as opposed to historical knowledge (especially in the first draft of the document).

After heated discussions, the Concept’s authors agreed to present Russian history in the broad context of European and global processes. However, there is still a gap between the world and Russian history narratives. In Russia, World History and History of Russia traditionally constitute two different research fields with their own textbooks, historiographies, and their own methodological approaches. Traditionally, departments of Russian history and World history are still separate in most Russian universities. It seems to be very difficult to combine these approaches. The Concept maintains the division between World History and Russian History, with national history still poorly integrated into the global context. The previously declared idea of an integrated school subject called “Russia in/and the World” did not implement in the new *Concept of Common history Textbook*. Some influence from post-colonial theory is apparent in some of the World History textbooks, but not in the topics dealing with the subject of Russian history and not in the textbooks on the History of Russia.

The most scandalous theories (“Sovereign Democracy” [22, p. 420–481], apologism for Stalinism, excluding communism and Stalinism from the framework of totalitarian regimes¹⁰; the creation of the Eastern Bloc as ‘Russia’s great achievement’; the idea of an exclusive role for Orthodoxy¹¹) actively promoted over the past several years by historians, political scientists, and politicians closely connected with the government, were not promoted in the final

ching national military history, promoting patriotism and the prestige of military service.” The society is headed by Vladimir Medinsky, Minister of Culture of the Russian Federation and declared as the successor of the Imperial Russian Military Historical Society (1907–1917).

¹⁰ “It should be mentioned that we are opposed to the concept of totalitarianism. This doctrine equates the Soviet Union to Nazi Germany. It was and is not an instrument of knowledge, but an instrument of ideological war. Nazi ideology and the ideology of Soviet Russia had nothing in common. The former was based on exalted, fanatical nationalism, the latter on the social revolt of the masses...socialism did not proclaim national exclusiveness, did not relegate other peoples to the lowest rank...did not generate haughty arrogance” [22, pp. 6–7].

¹¹ As it was suggested in the draft of “Proekt istoriko-kul’turnogo standarta”: “The History of Religions, first of all Orthodoxy, should runs through the entire content of the textbook” [20].

version of the Concept. Even so, the term “totalitarianism” is not mentioned at all in the Concept.

Officially, the new Concept employs the human dimension and a cultural approach in studying Russian history, but histories of wars and conflicts, and political history nonetheless prevail. Analyses reveals that culture and everyday life are still among the last chapters of the new textbooks that will be written according to the Concept. This reflects not only inertia in thinking among historians, but also the officially declared position of government. “The whole history of Russia is a history of endless military confrontation, defense, and military victories. And, of course, there is a need to learn from our ancestors to see how they defended their Motherland,” said Vladimir Medinsky [14].

The main goal of new textbooks is to serve to unify all the peoples living in the Russian Federation on the basis of Russian culture and an official ideology of étatism. The Russian government also plans to create a common history textbook for all post-Soviet regions,¹² but not on the basis of consensus or respect for others’ points of view and positions (Russia still does not respect and hardly appreciates the national historiographies developed over last two decades in the new independent states. “He [Nazarbayev] has made quite a unique thing: he created a state on a territory on which a state has never existed before. The Kazakhs never had statehood” [25]). Such initiatives seek to spread and reinforce Russia’s ideological influence as a means of providing integration into the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States), but they will scarcely be accepted by the majority of those countries (such as Ukraine, Georgia, the Baltic states, etc.) which aim to establish their own independent national ideas with their own national heroes and own concepts of national history.

“Can the subaltern speak?”

As Gayatri Spivak told in her essay “Can the subaltern speak?”: “in the context of colonial production, the subaltern has no history and cannot speak” [18, pp.82–83]. Can we apply this thesis to Russian history textbooks? In order to answer Spivak’s question in the Russian context, we must identify the place of histories of the indigenous peoples of Russia¹³ in contemporary Russian history textbooks and in the new Concept.

Actually, these histories are almost completely absent from the current textbooks. All topics related to ethnicity and interethnic communications primarily concentrate on:

¹² First of all, for the independent states on the territory of the former Soviet Union.

¹³ The Russian Federation is inhabited by more than 160 different ethnic groups (all together around 20% of the total population) and most of them are not migrants, but indigenous, autochthonous peoples who live in their own historical lands, which have been their habitats over centuries.

- “opening up” (“the development”¹⁴) of the new lands;
- settlement, peopling new territories¹⁵;
- connection with wars, invasions, revolts, and deportation;
- Russians’ civilizing mission.

Non-ethnic Russian inhabitants of Russia are presented in textbooks only as “objects of colonialist historiography” or as “subjects of insurgency,” hardly ever as equal subjects in a common history. Here is just one of example of how the “Russian colonization of Siberia” is represented in history textbooks:

Yermak’s march and subjugation of The Siberian Khanate. By the end of the reign of Tsar Ivan the Terrible, Russians had begun to make progress against the borders of the Siberian Khanate... here, in Western Siberia... Siberian Tatars, Khanty, Mansi... and other small peoples lived. All together no more then 200–220 thousand inhabitants... smaller in size and backward people, they often were targets for attacks and robbery by their neighbors... In 1582, Yermak’s troops came through the Ural Mountains and moved “now fighting, now without fighting”... at the end of October, the brave pioneer-soldiers came to Kuchum’s [last ruler of the Siberian Khanate] capital... the great battle happened near the city. Kuchum’s army (composed of Tatars, Khanty and Mansi) was defeated and scattered... locals started to pay tribute to Moscow... The eastern borders of the state were significantly extended. An influx of goods (furs, fish, etc.) came to the European part of Russia from Western Siberia [15, pp. 214–215].

It should be noted that subsequent to this fragment, there is hardly any information about Tatars, Khanty, Mansi or other non-ethnic Russian inhabitants of Siberia in the whole textbook. A similar picture can be seen in the majority of contemporary Russian textbooks.

Multiperspectivity is hardly represented in the textbooks. There is no place for “others” viewpoints (i.e., viewpoints of non-Russian inhabitants of Russia). A Russocentric concept of national history dominates and the political history of the state and its institutions prevail over cultural and social history.

One may observe almost the same with regards to the new Concept as well. There is a contradiction among the goals declared in the Concept’s introduction. It claims to be “providing the preservation of a plurality of opinions and appraisals in historical research” but at the same time “excludes the possibility of internal contradictions and conflicting alternative interpretations of historical events, including those which are sensitive for people living in Russia’s various regions” [7, p.3]. As a result, the authors decided to ignore “sensitive” topics (such as the Tatar-Mongol invasion, Horde Yoke, the subjugation of

¹⁴ The Russian term “development” [*osvoenie*] is used to describe the development of land, which is treated as “empty” and requiring settlement and acculturation, and the administration of territories already controlled by “other” peoples.

¹⁵ The term ‘colonization’ has been more recently used.

Caucasus, etc.) or to use euphemisms (“ordyntsy” instead of ‘Mongol-Tatars’ or “dependence on the khans” instead of “Horde Yoke”, or the “national operations of the NKVD”¹⁶ instead of “ethnic cleansing” [7, pp.17,53]) rather than allow alternative interpretations. The need to teach the history of multiethnic Russia was declared in the Concept’s introduction, but was not implemented in its main body. The Golden Horde and other “Tatar states” are still not an integral part of Russian history but treated as anomalies. Likewise with regards to other historical periods when the territories of present-day Russia were ruled by “others,” “states of other ethnic origins – the Grand Duchy of Lithuania and the Kingdom of Poland” [7, p. 15]. Tatar historians suggest showing in textbooks how Russia developed as a multicultural society from very beginning. “The Concept’s authors try to show the “Old Russian State” as a purely Slavic. But it is important to note that Russia was originally formed as a polyethnic society. It is obvious that the population of the ancient Russian state consisted of Slavic, Finnic, and Turkic tribes, who communicated cross-culturally and mutually assimilated. It would be correct to show interactions among Finnish, Slavic and Turkic peoples on two levels: as [relationships among citizens] within the state and as relationships among neighboring nations.”¹⁷ However, this position is not accepted by the Concept’s authors. Finally, the main text of the Concept still focuses on the Russian people – how they created the state and enlarged its territory. The history of the other peoples of Russia is only an addendum to the main narrative. The Concept presents narratives about indigenous peoples mostly as political history. The cultural aspects of others’ histories remain ignored. Such sensitive topics as the Holocaust, forcible Christianization, and Russification are likewise ignored.

Conclusion

Russian elites are currently trying to find their place in the rapidly changing global context. They are faced with a choice in the direction of their further development: toward self-isolation or toward an open society. This choice will determine the future of postcolonial discourse in Russia. Meanwhile, the Russian government seems to consider history education and textbooks as instruments to promote among youth an official ideology and idea of “united political nation in Russia” [12].

The federal government in Russia continues to use hegemonic vocabulary to describe “others,” following an imperial and colonial mode of thinking with pre-

¹⁶ NKVD is the Russian abbreviation for the People's Commissariat for Internal Affairs (1934–1946), which was responsible for mass extrajudicial executions, deportations, political assassinations, and the Gulag system.

¹⁷ The expert’s report was written by the Institute of History of the Tatarstan Academy of Sciences regarding the Concept of New Education on National History (September 11, 2013). Unpublished document from the author’s personal archive.

tensions to the role of “big brother,”¹⁸ not only with regards to the subjects of the Russian Federation, but also across the post-Soviet region. Russian authorities are now in a permanent struggle against the new national histories developed using a post-colonial approach in the Baltic States, Ukraine, and Georgia, etc. However, the Presidential Commission Against the Falsification of History (2009–2012), specially created for this purpose, was shut down after three years of failing to produce the intended result.¹⁹ It seems that the Russian government understands the futility of this endeavor and will sooner or later have to recognize the new national historiographies from the new independent states.

At the national level, by contrast, the situation seems to be more difficult. Postcolonial studies do not fit into the official ideology of promoting of Russian national pride and patriotism and postcolonial approaches are not allowed in secondary school textbooks. However, over the past several decades, in many places in Russia, independent schools of historiography (Tatar, Bashkir, Chechen, etc.) have arisen, and sometimes they are quite powerful and influential at the regional level. The federal center cannot just ignore their existence. Discussions of the Concept of history textbooks make this perfectly clear. In the end, alternative interpretations of our common history should be recognized and allowed to be used in Russian textbooks. The benefits provided by modern communication technologies and the development of an information-oriented society make this unavoidable.

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¹⁸ The concept of “big brother” was created in the Soviet Union in 1937 in order to explain the “special” leading position of Russians among of other nationalities of Soviet Union. “The peoples of the USSR are proud of their big brother – the Russians – who are the first among equals in the fraternal family of peoples.” According to this concept, other Soviet peoples were declared “younger brothers,” who, because of their ‘backwardness,’ should follow the example of “great Russian people” [17, p.26]. This could be called the Soviet interpretation of “White Man’s Burden.”

¹⁹ There was only one visible result: school history teachers became officially obliged to “struggle against the falsification of history,” without a clear understanding what that really means.

Gibatdinov M.M. The contemporary history textbooks in Russia
as identity promotion tool

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СОВРЕМЕННЫЕ УЧЕБНИКИ ИСТОРИИ В РОССИИ КАК ИНСТРУМЕНТ ФОРМИРОВАНИЯ ИДЕНТИЧНОСТИ

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Статья посвящена анализу того, каким образом современное историческое образование и учебники истории используются в России для продвижения официальных идеологических концептов, формирования групповых идентичностей и политики государства в данном направлении. Описываются меры государственного регулирования процесса разработки, рецензирования и издания учебников истории в России. Основное внимание уделено анализу актуальных тенденций в российской историографии и их влиянию на преподавание истории с акцентом на то, как история народов России представлена в федеральных учебниках истории. Анализируются дискуссии, связанные с разработкой историко-культурного стандарта, и отражение в нем поликультурного характера российского общества.

Gibatdinov M.M. The contemporary history textbooks in Russia
as identity promotion tool

Ключевые слова: историческое образование, учебники истории, формирование идентичности, концепция российской политической нации, постколониализм, история России, поликультурное общество

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