

“Cultural Branch” of Human Geography in Contemporary Russia: Genesis, Main Peculiarities, and Priorities of Development

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Abstract—This paper presents an overview of the historical origins, specific features, development trends, and key issues, as well as priority areas and prospects for development, of the cultural and geographic branch of Russian human geography. In the global academic landscape, this discipline is known as cultural geography. Two concepts are used on the national research scene: geography of culture or cultural geography. The relationship between these two concepts is discussed. The paper analyzes how anthropological and cultural traditions inherited from the pre-Soviet period of Russian geographic science and the research approaches of anthropogeography of the early Soviet period have influenced the field of cultural geographic research in Russia. The consequences of the period of oblivion of humanistic traditions in Russian anthropogeography, which marked the end of the 1920s—beginning of the 1930s, for the development of economic geography in the USSR are investigated. The orientation of national human geography toward the cultural geographic dimension at the end of the last century is explored. Key features and development trends that were characteristic of Russian geography of culture or cultural geography over the past quarter-century are discussed. Statistical data on dissertations in the field of geoculture between 1995 and 2012 in Russia are aggregated and analyzed. Special attention is paid to the assessment of major problems and priority areas of cultural and geographic 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 should be developed further. In addition, research in this area is highly fragmented and suffers from a lack of coordination and dissociation with other areas of human geography. The authors point to the rise of “neoculturalization” in national geographic science, which is based on a closer relationship of geography of culture and cultural geography with other disciplines of human geography.

Keywords: human geography, culture, society, cultural geography, Russia, spatial and regional studies, cultural turn in geography, cultural space, cultural regionalism, cultural landscape

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INTRODUCTION

In recent decades, *cultural geography* has been one of the most dynamic areas in global geography. In Russia, different authors refer to this discipline as *geography of culture* or *cultural geography*. The development of this discipline is based on a close interaction between two large branches of science: *geography* and *cultural (social) anthropology* (in Russia, primarily as part of interaction between geography, ethnography, and cultural studies), as well as a number of other related scientific disciplines. The purpose of this article is to analyze the origins, characteristics, trends, and prospects for the development of the cultural geographic branches of Russian human geography in the context of the national scientific and geographic traditions and modern issues of sociogeographic research.

DEVELOPMENT OF CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY IN RUSSIA: ORIGINS AND HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT TRENDS

The understanding (and recognition) of the need to “develop” cultural problems has been immanent to Russian scientific traditions, including in the field of geography. In prerevolutionary Russian geography (and even in early Soviet geography), anthropological approaches were very actively used [59]: the national anthropological geographic school of the early 20th century (embodied in the works of P.P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky and V.P. Semenov-Tyan-Shansky, V.I. Lamanskii, D.N. Anuchin, and L.D. Sinitskii, etc.) was on par with the famous foreign anthropogeographic schools of continental Europe that emerged earlier: the German Anthropogeographie and the French géographie de l’homme. At that time,

culture analysis of different regions and localities and their ethnographic features was an integral part of research pursued by Russian geographers, including those who did not position themselves as genuine “anthropogeographers” (e.g., see the works of the outstanding Russian zoologist and geographer L.S. Berg [3]). In this period, two of the most famous fundamental anthropogeographic multivolume works about Russia were published [19, 46].

Unfortunately, at the end of the 1920s—beginning of the 1930s, the anthropological approaches and traditions of prerevolutionary Russian geography were largely abandoned. The few exceptions, such as the outstanding work of V.P. Semenov-Tyan-Shanskii *Region and Country* [51], which was written in the humanistic traditions of anthropogeography, as well as certain other anthropogeographic works [4, 28, 49, 50, 52, etc.], could not fundamentally change the situation. Since the early 1930s, Soviet economic geography focused primarily on studying the distribution and territorial organization of production forces and, thus, largely distanced itself from the broader discussion of human and cultural issues. Even such a discipline as geography of the population and settlements was developed primarily in the framework of the general “mainstream” economic geography. However, top minded and innovative geographers (such as the classic Soviet economic geography researcher N.N. Baranskii) wrote about the need to incorporate the phenomenon of culture into subject areas of geography. At the same time, geography of culture was interpreted rather narrowly.¹

After the Second World War, the outstanding Soviet researcher R.M. Kabo introduced the concept of sociocultural geography. This discipline focused on the study of the “relationship between nature and man” [24]. However, his novel, productive ideas about sociocultural geography as a scientific discipline, which would be almost parallel to and on par with economic geography in the family of human geographic sciences, were not acknowledged by the professional community of economic geographers. Interest in these ideas was rekindled at the beginning of the last quarter of the 20th century. Furthermore, Yu.G. Saushkin convincingly demonstrated during the postwar period the extent to which the development of cultural landscape studies is productive for economic geography (earlier in Russia, cultural landscape issues had mostly been studied by physical geographers). After the publication of his “program” work [47], the ideas of this coryphée of Soviet economic geography marked an important point of departure for the cultural landscape field of study in Russian cultural geography.

¹ Specifically, Baranskii defined geography of culture as a promising (i.e., highly relevant, but only just emerging) research area focused on studying successful examples of cultural national development and specific features of culture and people’s lifestyle in the Soviet Union [2].

The consequent orientation toward cultural geographic research problems stemmed from the evolutionary logic and increasingly sophisticated structure of social geography in the 1970s—1980s, where socio-cultural processes became more prominent in the study of regional development [1, 32, 38, 62]. The works of V.M. Gokhman [7, 8, etc.] provided further impetus to the rise of the cultural-geographic branch of national human geography. Gokhman grounded his theoretical research on a multidimensional model of society and culture, which became widespread in national social and cultural sciences in the late Soviet period (E.S. Markaryan’s concept [37], etc.). According to Gokhman, human and social activity can and should be considered primarily from three different angles. First of all, *who* specifically is an actor, i.e., who are the actors of such activity (collective and individual)? Second, *what* is the focus of such activity, what is the real object, the area of human activity, and specific areas of social practices? Finally, *how* is this activity implemented, and what are the ways, forms, and means of its implementation? The distinction between these three research foci in contemporary social sciences provides a methodological basis for the separation of the three most important complex research areas in *human geography*, i.e., its three major parts.² According to Gokhman, these are broadly *social geography* (the study of territorial aspects of developing social structures), *economic geography* (the study of territorial aspects of economic life) and *cultural geography* (the study of territorially differentiated cultures and their changes over time).

Program papers that marked a systemic targeted shift toward the study of cultural-geographic reality were published in Russia at the end of the 1980s—beginning of the 1990s [5, 10–12, 43, etc.]. By the mid-1990s, the first dissertations were defended in the field of geography of culture in Russia (including those for the academic degree of doctor of geography [13]). A series of research works on the geography of Russian culture was performed [61]. The rise of new scientific

² No doubt, as any serious and profound theoretical concept this three-dimensional model is debatable. First, in Markaryan’s theoretical works, which served as a starting point for the Gokhman’s concept, the *positioning of human activity* itself is not totally clear. There are actors, areas, and means of implementation of such activity, but what is its place in the model? Second, an equal relationship between *all areas of human activity and the economic life of a society* is doubtful. Furthermore, the place assigned to the long-established human-geographic disciplines in the three-dimensional structure of human geography, according to Gokhman, is not quite clear. For example, it is unclear whether political geography in “Gokhman’s triad” is a part of social, economic, or cultural geography, or whether it lies at their intersection. One should draw attention to the fact that in modern Western human geography, preference is mostly given to four-dimensional models. Such models equally prioritize social, cultural, economic, and political geography. The analogy with models of T. Parson and other top Western anthropologists, where society, culture, economy, and political life are viewed as “equal” elements of social life as such (which, by the way, has also been criticized by many authors).

areas (broadly corresponding to the logic of “sociologization” and “humanization” of geography, its differentiation, and fragmented orientation toward general geographic synthesis) was thus initiated. To date, almost a quarter of a century later, the results of this process impress, inspire, and at the same time, disturb; therefore, they require a multisided (critical) analytical approach.

Having overcome the uneasy stage of development for Russian science during the crisis and postcrisis years at the threshold of the 20th and 21st centuries, the cultural branch of national geography was accepted and further developed by the research community. It was also enriched with a set of new theoretical methods, representing a variety of subject areas and methodological approaches. This discipline has not only matured, it has also been associated with a positive development trend (unlike other areas of human geography).

Since the late 1990s, nearly 50 monographs have been published in the field of cultural geography and similar topics in Russia [14, 20, 21, 25, 26, 29–31, 35, 36, 40, 45, 53, 65, etc.]. Numerous dissertations were prepared (e.g., 15 doctoral dissertations were published within the academic specialization 25.00.24). The key infrastructure for the reproduction of this scientific area has been built. Thus, created in 1992, the Russian Research Institute of Cultural and Nature Heritage was established as a full-fledged cultural research center. In 2004–2010, this institute published a six-volume almanac called *Humanitarian Geography* [9]. The almanac contained the works of top researchers in Russia, representing all of the most important research areas in Russian cultural geography. In 2012–2013, the institute initiated the publication of several issues of a specialized electronic journal called *Cultural and Humanitarian Geography*.

Over the last 25 years, nearly 150 representatives of the professional geographic community took part in the development of cultural-geographic ideas and research approaches (including in the field of ethnic cultural studies, which is highly important for Russia). (This figure is rather significant, given the fact that there are only 700–800 human geographers in Russia [64]). At the same time, the number of researchers specializing in this field is significantly smaller. Even more insignificant is the group of those who consider themselves representatives of *cultural geography*. Despite this, the creative core of researchers in the field of cultural geography has emerged by the early 21st century in Russia, which is one of the most important (but not sufficient) prerequisites for successful and progressive development of this relatively new scientific discipline for Russia. However, the research developments in the community of cultural geographers are unfortunately highly fragmented, insufficiently coordinated, and (in our opinion, unjustifiably) distanced from other areas of human geography. Some positive changes have been observed though. Specifically, a collective monograph called

The Phenomenon of Culture in Russian Human Geography was published under the auspices of the Association of Russian Human Geographers in summer 2014 [66]. Top Russian and foreign experts in cultural geography authored several chapters and sections of this monograph. Hopefully, the publication of this book will become an important milestone for the integration of various cultural geographic areas and subdisciplines and will thus create broad opportunities for implementing important large-scale scientific projects.

GEOGRAPHY OF CULTURE OR CULTURAL GEOGRAPHY?

The two-stage development of the field of cultural geography in modern Russia was influenced by a number of objective and subjective factors, which took place *in parallel* to the drastic transformation of the emerging methodological approaches. This is duly reflected in the existing historical overviews [41, 58], as well as in the retrospective analysis of profile scientific publications and theses.

Originally based on the methodology of Soviet economic and social geography and primarily focused on highly relevant ethnocultural problems (for more details, see [55]), the national *geography of culture* (this name of the cultural branch in geographic science dominated until the end of the 1990s) was significantly “reformatted” at the end of the 20th century based on the active adoption of foreign achievements in the field of *cultural geography*.

One of the authors of this paper previously wrote that the concept of geographic space for people and culture, which is key for world cultural geography, has been traditionally discussed from various methodological angles. It is possible to distinguish between at least four different paradigms [56]: the *metaphysical paradigm*, which a priori acknowledges some scientifically unverified (supraexperimental) principles and statements; the *scientist paradigm* based on an objectivist and rational value-neutral methodology applied to causal and functional relationships between the properties of the geographic space and cultural phenomena; the *phenomenological paradigm*, covering the “field” of cultural-geographic interactions where human consciousness merges with the understanding of space; and the *perception paradigm* focused on the perception of geographic reality in different cultures and cultural contexts.

Global cultural geography is dominated by two opposite worldview paradigms: scientist and phenomenological. The metaphysical paradigm, which had a large impact on the development of the problem field of cultural geography before the institutionalization of the latter (K. Ritter, A. Guyot, etc.), has lost its importance to date, being represented by single works. The perception paradigm manifested itself as self-sufficient in the geography of the 1960s–1970s. At that time, it was primarily embodied in behaviorist

Table 1. Distribution of dissertations with dominant cultural profile within specialization 25.00.24

| Years | All dissertations | Incl. | | | | | | | | |
|---|-------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------------|------------------|------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------|---|----------------------------|
| | | ethnocultural processes | quality of life and lifestyle | mental geography | confessional geography | geography of innovations | cultural heritage | traditional nature management | geocultural situation, geospace, and social cultural development of territory | cultural landscape studies |
| 1995–1997 | 6 | 3 | 1 | 1 | – | 1 | – | – | – | – |
| 1998–2000 | 6 | 4 | 2 | – | 1 | – | – | – | – | – |
| 2001–2003 | 21 | 5 | 4 | – | 1 | 4 | 1 | 3 | 3 | – |
| 2004–2006 | 19 | 3 | 6 | 1 | 1 | 1 | 2 | 1 | 2 | 2 |
| 2007–2009 | 16 | 4 | 4 | 2 | – | – | 3 | 1 | – | 2 |
| 2010–2012 | 5 | 1 | 2 | 1 | – | – | – | – | 1 | – |
| In total, over period between 1995 and 2012 | 73 | 19 | 19 | 5 | 3 | 6 | 6 | 5 | 6 | 4 |

schemes (stimulus–reaction, challenge–response). The basis for the modern perception approach is gestalt psychology, which is close to phenomenology in terms of its worldview origins.

Recent decades were marked by enhancement of *postmodernization of geography* in general and cultural geography in particular. In the late 1980s, a number of works viewed as postmodernist program manifestos in human geography were published in the West [69, 70]. Stipulating the general rejection of truth, postmodernists argue that the text does not reflect reality but creates one a new (virtual) reality. Rather the text engenders multiple different realities. Symptomatically in this respect, many theoretical and methodological geographers prefer talking about different “geographies” rather than one “geography” in the context of the postmodern transformations. As there are many geographic realities in the postmodernist age, it is more logical to use the word “geography” in plural [68, 70]. Several authors [e.g., 45, pp. 29–30] consider appropriate to refer to the postmodernist approach as a *special new paradigm* in geography in general and cultural geography in particular. We believe such a viewpoint is legitimate since the postmodernist trend in the development of human geography at the threshold of the 20th–21st centuries strongly manifested itself. At the same time, it is necessary to emphasize that postmodernism is not unified. From this viewpoint, it is difficult to consider this approach on par with the scientist and phenomenological paradigms, which offer universal worldview programs, despite being based on completely opposite ideological beliefs.

Initially, the scientist research methods (spatial cultural analysis, the study of territorial organization

and structure of culture, and the relationships between its elements, “cultural morphology” of the earth’s surface) were largely common in the cultural branch of Russian geography (geography of culture). However, by the early 21st century, the situation had significantly changed: concepts such as “perception of space,” “geographic image,” “historical and cultural heritage,” “cultural landscape,” and “identity” have started to dominate the cultural branch of Russian geography. In parallel, the thematic content borders of subdisciplines have expanded (at the same time becoming more blurred). In addition to the declared mainstream areas, certain other implicit cultural geographic problems persisted (they were not always considered as intrinsic by everybody), including those which have traditionally been discussed as part of human geography: spatial differentiation of the quality of life and lifestyle, traditional use of nature, localization of ethnic groups and cultures, innovations, etc. These problems (according to the statistics collected by the Higher Attestation Commission on dissertations defended under the 25.00.24 specialization) prevailed in the 1990s and remained popular among the new generation of graduate students at a later stage (compared to the growing number of dissertations devoted to mental geography, landscape, and other areas) (Table 1). However, this process was unveiled regardless of any conscious cooperation with the thematically transformed cultural branch of geography.

S.B. Lavrov wrote in the 1980s that “Transformation of the object of study inevitably entails transformation of the discipline” [33, p. 31]. The validity of this statement is reconfirmed in the studied context. The multiple changes resulted in a sort of *rebranding* of the scientific field, which was first mentioned in the

Russian scientific literature in 1984 [7]. Since the early 20th century, the concept of *cultural geography* started to prevail over the earlier popular expression *geography of culture*³. In this respect, the threshold of the 20th–21st centuries is a turning point, despite the fact that both terms were still used in following years by first-generation cultural geographers (e.g., A.G. Manakov [36]). The cultural branch of Russian human geography has overcome the objective historical and methodological limitations of the former geography of culture and was later completely transformed contentwise in its evolution, which required the renaming of this area of research and stimulated the adoption of the term cultural geography in the Russian scientific geographic community.

Indeed, being increasingly focused on the *space of content*, the cultural branch of Russian geography significantly transformed: new research areas have emerged within this discipline, including image geography, mental geography, sacral geography, mythos geography, cognitive geography, etc. Many Russian authors believe that the range of such research areas can be referred to as *humanitarian geography*, which is a variety of closely interconnected areas of geography that study development trends of ideas about geographic space, according to which people organize their activity on a particular territory” [23, p. 151]. The concept of *humanitarian geography* is uncommon, unlike such terms as *humanistic geography*, which was at the peak of development in Western geography in the 1970s–1980s and focused on the study of specific features and human understanding of geographic space, as well as *human geography*, which refers to the entire social (in a broader sense) branch of geography in the English-language literature. In other words, humanitarian geography as an *institutionalized set of methodologically close research areas* is a purely Russian invention that has no analogs in foreign or, more specifically, Western geography.⁴

One should note that the term *humanitarian geography* has been interpreted differently in national geographic science. The use of this term is highly variable. In the first monograph of Russian cultural geographer D.N. Zamyatin, which is dedicated to humanitarian

geography [20], the latter is understood as a system of theoretical and methodological approaches and methods primarily focused on the study of *geographic images*. Interpreted in such a way, humanitarian geography can indeed be regarded as *an area of cultural geography*. However, in one of his later works, Zamyatin notes that “geopolitics (geographic political science) and political geography, as well as economic (socioeconomic) geography and geoeconomics, are parts of the scope of humanitarian geography” [21, p. 4]. This is a broader interpretation of the thematic scope of humanitarian geography, which, however, raises the issue of criteria that could bring some (but not all) highly diverse human-geographic disciplines under one umbrella. In many articles published in the abovementioned almanac *Humanitarian Geography*, the latter is understood very broadly as an *interdisciplinary field lying at the intersection of geography and different research areas of the humanities*, varying from cognitive psychology to philology and literature studies, rather than just a branch of geography separated on the basis of some specific criteria. On the other hand, Yu.N. Gladkii suggests the term “gumanitarnaya geografiya” in order to refer to all “nonphysical” geography [6], since this Russian term is the closest analog of the English concept of human geography. Such an interpretation of “humanitarian geography” is broader in its scope than “cultural geography”. Other interpretations of the concept also exist. For example, they are presented in the works of A.A. Sokolova [54], E.M. Kovalev, and Yu.N. Golubchikov, etc. However, detailed analysis of such interpretations is beyond the scope of this paper.

CULTURAL-GEOGRAPHIC RESEARCH IN THE CONTEXT OF TRENDS, PROBLEMS, AND PRIORITIES OF THE CONTEMPORARY RUSSIAN HUMAN GEOGRAPHY

The analysis of the evolutionary trends of Russian cultural geography over the last decades raises the following dilemma: either the logic of cultural geography has exhausted itself given the rise of humanitarian geography or, on the contrary, the scope of the cultural part of geography has been intentionally narrowed. In this context, a certain “neoculturalization” of geography is necessary, particularly, its human-geographic element. We believe the latter statement is true, and we consider it possible (and relevant) to achieve an in-depth and broad expansion of cultural-geographic studies based primarily on their closer connection to the other areas of human geography.

D. Harvey rightly pointed out in his major work *Explanation in Geography*, which was published in 1969 and translated into Russian in 1974, that “the new paradigm can offer highly efficient methods of research; at the same time, this concentration of efforts results in the shrinking scope of the problem” [67, Russ. Ed., p. 34]. The Russian “cultural geogra-

³ There are different views on the preference of one of these concepts in the description of the cultural branch of national human geography. On the one hand, *geography of culture* is more common and linguistically more appropriate to describe the subject of the related discipline. On the other hand, the title *kul'turnaya geografiya* is closer to the English concept of cultural geography, rather than geography of culture (to the German concept of *Kulturgeographie* rather than *Geographie der Kultur* as well, etc.). The expression geography of culture (similar to geography of services, tourism, or transport) focuses on the territorial aspects and the object research perspective of this discipline. None of these are dominant in global cultural geography [56, 60].

⁴ For example, I.I. Mitin argues that the development of an interdisciplinary research area, which is specific in its conceptual apparatus and thematic scope, has been one of the key features of cultural geography in post-Soviet Russia [41, p. 23].

Table 2. Number and share of dissertations in field of geography of culture in total number of dissertations defended in Russia within specialization 25.00.24 in 1995–2012

| Years | Total number of defended dissertations | Dissertations in field of cultural geograph | Share of dissertations in field of cultural geography in total number of defended dissertations, % |
|---|--|---|--|
| 1992–1994 | 45 | 0 | – |
| 1995–1997 | 73 | 6 | 8.2 |
| 1998–2000 | 92 | 6 | 6.5 |
| 2001–2003 | 140 | 21 | 15.0 |
| 2004–2006 | 215 | 19 | 8.8 |
| 2007–2009 | 144 | 16 | 11.1 |
| 2010–2012 | 108 | 5 | 4.6 |
| In total, over period between 1995 and 2012 | 772 | 73 | 9.5 |

phy” was subject to metamorphosis and at the same time generated original instrumental approaches. Thus, on the one hand, it has become an important “playground” for transfer of various innovations and one of the hotspots in modern geography. On the other hand, it has been highly fragmented, thematically unbalanced, and has focused on several (though highly important) aspects. However, the culture “potentially being everywhere, cannot be reduced to a certain type of natural or social being” [39, p. 322]. As a result, there was a replacement of the whole by its part; the research potential across many faces of real geographic culture has only been partially realized, whereas cultural geography as a research area remains significantly underdeveloped in Russia. We believe that the most striking manifestation of such a transitional state of this subdiscipline is reflected in the lack of established general theoretical propositions, or internal “agreement” about the concepts, or a deficit (except for issues of “natural, historical, and cultural heritage”) of logical, verifiable, and replicable research tools.

All of the above contributes to the increasing distance between cultural geographers and the rest of the professional geographic community (manifested in the desire to place cultural geography as a research area separate from human geography [41]). The penetration of geocultural approaches into other parts of human geography is growing more complex, which hampers the development of this science in general and its cultural subdiscipline in particular.

Based on the dissertation statistics (which is a formal indicator of research activity and thematic preferences), the popularity of mainstream modern Russian cultural geography (the study of geographic images and territorial identity, cultural landscape analysis, and cultural heritage issues) among the new generation of young researchers (and, certainly, their scientific supervisors, who are members of dissertation

councils) is rather insignificant. Over the last 18 years, only 15 dissertations, i.e., less than 2% of the unbelievable abundance of 772 candidate and doctoral dissertations defended under the 25.00.24 specialization (which is a great number given the very modest size of the professional community of geographers) were dedicated to cultural geography. The early 2000s were the peak years (in terms of “frequency” of defenses). Later, interest in cultural problems started to shrink (Table 2), which, however, indirectly points not so much to a crisis in this particular subdiscipline, but to the challenges facing Russian human geography as a whole.

Four decades ago, Saushkin, a brilliant theoretician in economic geography, argued that in the long term “territorial systems will become more multifaceted and dynamic than at present” [48, p. 511]. At the turn of the 1990s, Russia was suffering from losses and had experienced a shock, having entered a turbulent period of its history. The country’s social and geographic context appeared to be many times more complex and continues to mutate rapidly under the influence of a complex set of global and regional determinants.

Specifically, one should emphasize the fact that the constant impact of global geoeconomic, geopolitical, and geocultural trends on the social geographic area of Russia (a country with a multineighborhood geographic location, according to A.I. Treivish [63]) is accompanied by deepening polarization and fragmentation underpinned by a number of ethnocultural factors, the growing influence of adjacent “power centers,” as well as countries and regions that act as immigrant donors. Suffering from absolute and, to an even bigger extent, relative depopulation (in the period between 1900 and 2013, Russia’s share within its modern territorial framework in global population has decreased from 4.5% to 2%; by 2050, this figure will unlikely exceed 1.5% [17]). At the same time, serving

as a country actively colonized from the outside (practically every tenth person who took part in the last census in 2010 is an immigrant of the post-Soviet period), the Russian Federation will face the real prospect of a large-scale ethnocultural transformation in the course of the 21st century. A globalizing and, to a large extent, “westernizing” country is steadily reproducing its Eurasian ethnic and demographic composition and, at the same time, enhancing its Islamic component [18], which multiplies the situations of ethnocultural substitution and generates the effect of “cultural proximity” (when the same space is utilized in two different ways and has two different appearances [34]). Top Russian cities are intensively embedding themselves into the global hierarchy of urban networks. At the same time, the large Russian periphery, which in the post-Soviet period vividly manifested itself and expanded its borders (according to T.G. Nefedova, 70 and 15% of Russian territory can be attributed to the outer and inner periphery, respectively [42]), is developing a *polydependent* character (in geoeconomic and geocultural terms). At the same time, both in the Russian Federation and worldwide, territorial competition is growing more intense at all taxonomic levels (ranging from settlement to metaregional levels). The success of this competition is increasingly predefined by the “quality” of the population, the economy, infrastructure, and social and economic institutions. In parallel, the role of innovation and information is increasing [27], so that images of space gain the ability to directly affect economic relationships and decision making [22]. The geocultural dynamics is polyvector and multipolar. As a result, it is more strongly projected on geoeconomics and geopolitics and serves as their total result, acquiring the properties of a basic factor, pivotal element, and target vector in the evolution of social and geographic reality.

One should note that national human geography (either its research tools or the selected structural and thematic priorities) cannot follow these changes [15, 16]. The image of the Russian geographical space remains very simplistic among the population, decision makers, and, unfortunately, the overwhelming majority of geographers [44]. Unfortunately, “culturalization,” which so far has been implemented with regard to specific aspects, has not yet contributed to solving Russian geography’s important dual problem of its “humanization” and “geographization,” i.e., focus on a variety of factors, parties, properties, and structures of territorial organization of the society in general and its culture in particular. Focusing on the rationale, identification, and design of multiple geographic images and concepts (and, thus, solving the relevant, novel, but still fragmentary task), cultural geography in its current form is excessively localized organizationally and thematically. It is certainly exciting, but not always productive to wander in the “Kingdom of Crooked Mirrors,” which poses many risks associated with the detachment of Russian science

from reality or the underestimation of its major determinants. The current situation requires careful social and geographic (including geocultural) monitoring, assessment, conceptual validation, and forecasting, which is a problem and a challenge for the entire professional community. The unresolved status of the basic fundamental problem endangers not only Russian human geography, but also the entire country, thus complicating the key understanding of its modern location, as well as the appropriate geostrategic choice.

Therefore, it is not only necessary to largely orient Russian science towards the contemporary Russian context, but also to further culturalize it, among other things, by overcoming the counterproductive, and to a large extent, artificial distance between cultural geography and other branches of national geographic knowledge. The transfer of social and humanitarian ideas, including the embedding of new mental geographic approaches into traditional and relatively recently delineated areas of human geography (among others focused on the study of immaterial, supersensible, and subjective sides of reality), must be accompanied by a reasonable balance between subject–object and subject–reflexive methodological foci in cultural geographic studies [57, pp. 132–133; 60]. Thus, we believe that the cutting-edge and, to some extent, already partly emerging problem-oriented interdisciplinary field of research, which can be called *geocultural Russian studies* can serve as a basic platform for implementing integrated approaches. This field should be focused on identifying spatial factors, specific features, trends, and prospects of development of Russian culture, as well as its interaction with other ethnic and cultural complexes, including in a Eurasian and global context. In this respect, such aspects as the post-Soviet (globalization-dependent) reconfiguration of the national geocultural space, and codevelopment of traditional and novel components could become a priority. It is important not to limit ourselves to observing illustrating the spatial dynamics, but also to attempt a cultural and moral assessment of the continuing degradation of the Russian countryside, as well as the concentration of resources supporting innovative development (including human capital) of several major metropolitan cities. The analysis of such dominant processes for post-Soviet Russia as deindustrialization and deagriculturalization, naturalization of landscape, and the shadow economy require diverse cultural-geographic expertise. The study of the impact of labor migration on the geocultural situation (including the almost ubiquitous phenomenon of seasonal work), as well as recreation and localization of ethnic diasporas, also deserves special attention. The genuine development of Russian cultural geography requires qualitative geographic expertise on various components of spatial organization of society. Given the continuation, and in many cases, worsening of environmental and economic problems, geographic studies of ecological culture acquire special importance.

The orientation towards a deeper and more detailed understanding of the human dimension of social and geographic structures and processes also defines the extent to which the average representative of the territorial community is free or not free of the restrictions imposed by institutional, structural, rental, transactional, transport, and other spatial-economic factors (in view of the sociocultural, ethnic, and religious specificity). It is also important to consider the impact of culturally determined (and geographically localized) modes of reproduction and socialization of new generations, as well as the economic organization of everyday life, on polyethnic territories within the areas of crossborder contacts. In parallel, the problem of the generation, identification, and convergence of a variety of forms and images of social-geographic reality is becoming very important. Specifically, in view of the developments in the above areas, the polyethnic dimension of Russian cultural geography, the wider geographic palette of ethnocultural complexes (viewed from “inside”), and the development of polyvariant images of the Russian geocultural space (viewed in the context of various ethnic communities and cultural areas) are very necessary. Certainly, it is necessary to continue studies (including insider ones) on the specific features of the national religious landscape and the evolving ethnic and cultural boundaries of Russia.

For Russia, the 21st century will most likely be uneasy, largely transformational, and full of challenges, risks, and changes. Against the background of economic, social, demographic, and other challenges of the country’s present and future existence, such cultural topics as the immanent Russian ethnocultural dimension, including its core and the “carrier element,” Russian culture, acquire fundamental importance. This determines the target vector for the development of national human geography (including cultural studies), thematic priorities, and the imperatives of interdisciplinary integration.

CONCLUSIONS

Considering the cultural geography as one of the most important “poles of growth” in Russian geography, taking the ever-growing social demand for the immanent cultural geography perspective into account, and being convinced of the positive development outlook of cultural geography, we believe that the latter requires much more active (compared to the current) support of the human-geographic community. We are not talking about the need for human geographers to ultimately “shift” from the highly important modern research areas (e.g., the study of regional systems of settlements, the economy, and territorial and spatial political systems) to some relevant geocultural themes and trends, or to abandon traditional, well-established scientific research paradigms. Support for cultural geographic areas is, first of all,

associated with the adoption of humanistic (cultural) targets and use of human-oriented methods in geographical research in its entirety. Geocultural approaches can (and should) provide a basis for modern regionalization of Russia. They can help expand the criteria for assessing the efficiency of the spatial organization of a society (which still remains excessively “economic”); they also embed themselves into basic sociogeographic categories, namely, geographic location, spatial organization of a society, territorial socioeconomic systems, socioeconomic regionalization, etc. At the same time, *cultural geography (geography of culture)* must ultimately develop as an *independent area* integrated into the system of human geography.

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