

THEORY AND METHODOLOGY

Integrative and isolationist tendencies in contemporary Russian psychological science

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Contemporary Russian psychology faces an uphill battle in joining the international mainstream after decades of isolation. Among Russian psychologists today, we can see traces of the “globalist” (integrative) and “counter-globalist” (isolationist) tendencies that first manifested during the Soviet period. At that time, Russian psychology was shaped as a mono-methodological trend; it addressed fundamental theoretical problems, was based on Marxist philosophy and was oriented to reflect the standards of the natural sciences. In the post-Soviet period, fundamental social changes shifted the development of psychology as a science and different standards were adopted. Contemporary Russian psychology is substantially diversified. When searching for “the optimum level of integration” with global peers, it is necessary to take into account the theoretical and methodological orientations of the scientists, as their motives and constraints with respect to integration can be substantially different. Here we explain in detail how the different theoretical understandings and predilections of Russian psychologists determine their interests, ideals and constraints with respect to integration with the mainstream.

Keywords: Russian psychology, international science, Activity theory, Christian Orthodox psychology, psychology in Russia in Post-soviet period

Introduction

Hardly any of Russian psychologists today can stay indifferent to the question of the place and significance of Russian psychology in the world science and concomitant issues of integration into the global mainstream. The more so that formal evaluations of the work of Russian scientists are more and more determined by the presence or absence of their publications in foreign scientific journals and reference systems. The adequacy of such evaluation criteria and in general of that straightforward focus on the mainstream raise debates among Russian psychologists and demand analysis which is presented in a number of publications (Akser

and Saveljeva, 2010; Mironenko, 2005; Mironenko, 2007b; Sirotkina and Smith, 2008; Yurevich 2008a; 2008b; 2009; 2010a; 2010b; Yurevich and Tzapenko 2010; Yasnitsky, 2011). We particularly note the works of A.V. Yurevich where the problem of the integration of Russian psychology into the mainstream and the applicability of the above-mentioned criteria for the evaluation of the work of Russian scientists are considered in the broad context of social processes in the professional community.

A.V. Yurevich notes, that among Russian psychologists today we can trace both “globalist” (integrative) and “counterglobalist” (isolationist) tendencies: “Straightforward orientation to Western standards, prescribing Russian science erasing national specificity comes along side with the same straightforward denial of the need to adjoin to the world mainstream “ (Yurevich 2010b, p.55).

Moreover, at present “counterglobalist” tendencies in the Russian psychological science are strengthening: “Patriotic wave of the last few years, as it is typical for Russia, brought anti-Western attitudes to the integration of Russian science into the global mainstream. The most radical of these show up, for example, in statements, that we need not seek to join the Western science - on the contrary, the latter should pay more attention to the Russian science; that we should not learn foreign languages to be published in international journals, but on the contrary, foreign scientists should learn Russian to read Russian scientific journals, etc.” (Yurevich 2010b, p.55).

One cannot but agree with the conclusion of A.V. Yurevich that “the obvious inadequacy of both two extreme positions and the need to preserve most prolific national features of Russian science on one hand and on the other hand, the need of integration into the global mainstream, makes feasible the compliance of the principle of *optimum integration*” (Yurevich 2010b, p.55).

But what should be this *optimum*, what issues should be considered in order to define this optimum — these remain debatable, and this I would like to discuss.

What for are Russian psychologists seeking integration into the mainstream? Who and why needs it (or does not need) in the heterogeneous contemporary Russian professional community? What motives bring forth the “globalist” and “counterglobalist” tendencies?

Current tendencies

Let us try to reveal groups in our professional community within which interests and ideals of the participants seem to be more or less the same in concern to integration with the mainstream.

Our assessment we shall base on theoretical grounds and predilections within the groups. To reveal those let us consider the situation in which contemporary psychological community was formed.

Contemporary Russian professional community was formed on the remains of the paradigm of Soviet psychological science. Soviet psychology had been, in a measure forcibly, kept within the framework of a mono methodological trend, oriented to standards of natural sciences and based on Marxist philosophy, with a priority of fundamental research. During the Soviet period psychological practices were restricted and research centers were scarce. There were only few units provid-

ing applied psychological research in big clinical centers, in war industry central institutions, etc. Universities were the main centers providing psychological research and education, and there were only three universities in Russia (eight all together in the USSR), where psychology faculties were: Moscow (MSU), Yaroslavl (YarSU), and Leningrad university (LSU). University faculties were more research centers than educational institutions, say, LSU graduated each year about 50 full-time students, YarSU was smaller, MSU graduated a hundred and smth. All education was free, the entrance on a competitive basis. There were fully equipped laboratories, where all the students got profound training. And these faculties were doing research for the government, very well financed. The faculties and the departments were headed by well-known researchers who maintained the investigations for which the faculties got their money from the state.

When perestroika began financial support of science and education was seized. Researches had to find some new sources for living. Many Russian specialists in mathematics and physics went abroad. For psychologists this appeared to be not so easy because of the language barrier and because of their specific theoretical background. But another powerful source of finance sprang up: the “customer demand” for practical psychology. Three product areas opened where psychologists were called for and very well paid:

- Politics. Elections, gubernatorial and others. Politicians believed that psychologists could help them to exert influence upon the voters.
- Young and wild Russian business. “New Russians” believed that psychologists could help them to sell their products and to raise labor productivity.
- Psychological education. People were interested in psychology. They believed that it could help them to get reed of their stresses and inner conflicts and to be influential. Psychological education became very popular, and it was provided at all levels, from short time courses up to university diplomas.

So, psychology has been boosted in Russia since “Perestroika”. The number of graduated psychologists has increased dramatically. In 2003 there were about 300 institutions of higher education in psychology in Russia from which about 5000 students annually graduate. You can guess that these universities were very different from the old ones. The “farther” University faculties also changed to meet the situation: now they were making money not on fundamental research, but on “educational services”.

Totalitarian government during the Soviet period had treated psychology as a gardener shaping his tree: letting only those branches grow which fit his plan. Any deviation was illegible. With the fall of the Soviet state ideological barriers to the development of Russian psychological science were removed. Many of older psychologists were just tired of sticking to the old theoretical “rules”. The majority of the newly graduated psychologists had little knowledge of what the theoretical basics of Soviet Psychology were and no interest to know about it. Most rapidly developing areas of contemporary Russian psychology were those which had been being virtually abandoned during the Soviet period: counseling psychology, social psychology etc. Naturally, Western psychological theories were generally recog-

nized and widely employed. Lots and lots of textbooks translated into Russian had no references to Russian authors whatsoever.

Thus, the majority of the contemporary Russian psychological community does not at all refer to the paradigm prevailing in Soviet psychology.

What part of the contemporary professional community masters theories of Soviet psychology? A very small one. That knowledge had to be transmitted directly from teachers to students, particularly taking into account the role of oral tradition in psychological education in Soviet Russia. There were no tutorials and classbooks for future psychologists. Their studies were based on monographs and papers, which were written in “Aesopian” language. The texts of our classics require hermeneutics, require reading together with the teacher.

That theory is mastered today by a very small part of the professional community, by those who have been specially trained and educated. Moreover, not all of these people cling to the old theoretical positions, so that this group size gradually decreases.

However, the first group, which we denote is a group of followers of the Soviet psychology traditions, let us call it “Activity theory (AT) trend”, as this is the most frequently used label for Soviet psychology in the mainstream. This group is not numerous, but that does not diminish its significance in the context of the problem being discussed.

What other groups should be singled out?

In the 90’s with the collapse of the Soviet psychology paradigm, against a combination of processes of blurring of boundaries between the national and the global science and those of disintegration of the national professional community, a focus on foreign theories dominated in Russian psychology. Scientists who cling to those we shall call here “Pro-Western Developments” and assign them to a particular group, the second one in our analysis.

As for authentic trends that have developed in Russia in the post-perestroika period, we can denote Christian Orthodox Psychology, or Spiritual-Philosophical psychology, that is developing vigorously now, continuing a tradition that existed in Russia in pre-Soviet period. This research we shall call here “National Authentic Developments” and assign the scientists to a new group.

Of course, our classification is unilateral and symbolic, it does not appeal to the substance of the theories, very different theoretical orientations we put here in the same group (behaviourists, psychoanalytics, humanistic psychologists are all ascribed to “Pro-Western Developments”), because here we take into account only one aspect — how the theoretical approach developed in Russia in Post-Soviet period: continuing the development of the paradigm of Soviet period (AT); following contemporary Western traditions (“Pro-Western Developments”); Authentic developments (“National Authentic Developments”). And of course, very rarely we can see a pure brand in reality. Yet the classification is very easy to use — just look into the reference lists in papers.

Thus, three groups of scientists result:

- “Activity theory” (AT),
- “Pro-Western Developments”,
- “National Authentic Developments”.

Note that the structure of scientific community, to which our analysis has lead, to a large extent resembles the one in Russia in the pre-Soviet period, as described by V.A. Koltzova (Koltzova 1997; 2002):

- “Experimental” psychology, closely linked with Russian physiologists (I.M. Sechenov, I.P. Pavlov.), which became the basis for the development of science through the Soviet period;
- “Empirical” psychology, which is characterized by the orientation to European concepts and methods (followers of V. Vundt);
- Religious and philosophical psychology, based on the ideas of Russian theological, spiritual and philosophical thinkers.

Let us consider the problem of interests, ideals and constrains in concern of integration with the mainstream separately for the groups we denoted in Russian professional community.

Pro-Western developments

“Pro-Western Developments” include those who focus on Western theories: behaviourist, psychoanalytic, humanistic, etc. Globalist tendencies are naturally inherent here. This group accounted for the bulk of the avalanche increment of psychological community in the 90’s, due to massive emissions of translated foreign books on psychological education market, the latter growing rapidly at that time.

The growth of counterglobalist tendencies in modern Russia to certain extent results from the disappointment of many of these people which befell them when they tried to enter the mainstream. Their research is of no interest their, their papers are not published in the journals. The point is not that the West is not interested in the life in Russia they assess, as A.V. Yurevich writes. It is the level of their work which does not meet the requirements of the mainstream. This is not surprising, since a substantial part of this group of scientists studied foreign theories by translations and retellings in textbooks, they do not read contemporary Western journals and therefore can not meet the requirements of the discourse. One can agree with A.V. Yurevich when he states that “hidden” from the West Soviet psychology was more interesting for the international community than contemporary, “wide open to the West”, but the reason for the presence or lack of interest is not in secrecy or openness, it is in the quality of production that we show to the West.

Many of those who were oriented to Western theories in the 90’s today are seeking new ideals.

However, there are many examples of successful integration of “Pro-Western Developments” to the international science, especially those from leading universities, and as for the evaluation of the quality of work of a scientist; in respect to “Pro-Western Developments” publications in international journals seem an appropriate criteria.

National authentic developments

The other part of the professional community, which we have designated here as “National Authentic Developments” is rapidly growing since the beginning of the XXI c. Christian Orthodox, Spiritual or Philosophical psychology develops the tra-

ditions rooted in the pre-Soviet period of Russian psychology. This is an entirely authentic trend, closely related to Russian culture, focused in practices on a vast Russian market, based on Russian authors and appealing to the Russian mentality.

Representatives of this group show no globalist tendencies, counter-globalist tendencies are strong.

Publications in foreign journals, of course, are no adequate indicator of the quality of work of these scientists, and the necessity of a “breakthrough” into the mainstream for them it is far from obvious.

At the same time, in the long term it seems quite possible. It is well known that representatives of Russian spiritual and philosophical thought, who had been expelled from the country in 1922 (N.A. Berdjaev, M.I. Vladislavlev, etc.), had a significant influence on the development of world science, in particular, on the development of existentialism.

Successors of the Activity theory trend

What determines the globalist and counter-globalist tendencies in this group of scientists?

Let us consider their reasons “for” integration.

First of all, it is this trend that meets the expectations of foreign colleagues. It is recognized that for western colleagues Russian psychology is, above all, represented by the works of classics of the Soviet period: “... the representation of Russian / Soviet psychology in the West. ... can be assessed as the idea that Russian psychology is the works of such luminaries as Vygotsky and Luria” (Yurevich, 2009, c. 79).

And it is to this trend that there remains a steady and even growing interest in the international science. The analysis of literature indicates that as time passes, the interest in international psychology to Vygotsky’s work is only growing, as reflected in the growth of index of citations of his work. According to this indicator in recent years Vygotsky moved ahead of many classics of foreign psychology (Yurevich, 2009, Karpov, 2005). The interest in classics of Soviet psychology can promote an interest in the work of successors.

Thus, first, foreign colleagues are willing to hear scientists working in the AT trend. Secondly — the latter have something to say. These Russian psychologists have every reason to be involved in the dialogue with the West.

Behind the iron curtain psychological science was lively developing and many talented scientists contributed to it. The ideas of L.S. Vygotsky and I.P. Pavlov inspired new theoretical reasoning and empirical research alongside with ideas still unknown to the international community. Classical theories of Soviet psychology, known in the West, first of all the theory of L.S. Vygotsky, were developing on the native soil, and this development was different than in the West.

In addition to the development of the theories well-known to foreign colleagues there are other theories, which remain obscure for the West. First of all, I would name here B.G. Ananiev theory (Ananiev, 1961; 1968; 1977). B.G. Ananiev’s theory remains obscure for the foreign scientific community. His name is not mentioned in modern foreign encyclopedias or journals. Few of his works that were translated into foreign languages, were not duly understood and appreciated by the psychologists’ community because of the specific notional and conceptual structure used

by B.G. Ananiev. The conceptual structure of the theory, the issues discussed, do not directly correlate with the categorical structure of the modern international psychology, hence, this theory cannot be understood by Western scientists without special efforts. At the same time, B.G. Ananiev's methodology and theory seem to be fruitful within the intensively developing areas of the world's psychological science provided the categorical system he used would be adequately explicated (Mironenko, 2007a; 2009). Among such areas of research and topical issues may be named personality impact on psycho physiological functions, life-span human development and age dynamics of psycho physiological functions in maturity.

Thus, the AT trend seems to be a welcomed contribution to the mainstream.

Would this integration be useful for Russian science?

I dare say that AT approach can keep on developing only if it is integrated into the mainstream. There is no future for the development of the AT but in the bosom of international science. I believe Russian psychology is now lacking every type of resources and lacking social demand to provide for isolated development of the AT trend in Russia.

Perhaps we are the last generation that has been taught to understand those texts, who masters that language, that conceptual apparatus. After us the layer thins rapidly. Are there many among Russian psychologists wishing to study AT approach today? I do not believe that best students queue to study AT even in the prime universities which have preserved the teaching staff mastering the theory and methodology of the AT approach. This trend was actual in another country with a different culture and a different mentality, in different universities.

If we do not ensure integration of the AT developments into the mainstream, the concepts that have not yet been integrated are likely to share the fate of artifacts of a dead civilization. I believe that the integration it is a matter of professional viability for scientists developing AT approach, and their duty to their teachers.

However, it would not be true to say that in the AT group of scholars integration tendencies are domineering.

The point is that the integration strategy for AT group encounters the maximum constraints and tactical difficulties. The language problem, the problem of translation, turns up a problem of hermeneutics here, bringing forth a necessity to relate the conceptual system of Soviet psychology, conceptual system so complex and sophisticated, with the conceptual system of the mainstream.

Consider for example the difficulties in translation of a key scientific term of AT — *subèkt*. Translation of this word as “subject” (unfortunately, it happens often) immediately renders a text meaningless because of the mismatch of semantic fields, because of the difference of the meaning attributed to the term in the texts of Russian scholars and meaning of the word “subject” in English texts. *Subèkt* means somebody whose activity is generated by his own needs, who is choosing and pursuing his own aims, serving his own purposes: a self-determined and self-actualizing agent. And in English “subject” means the opposite — it is something or somebody who is put under some pressure, exposed to some action, subjected to some impact... This difficulty of translation of the notion of *subèkt* into English could probably account for the fact that AT approach caused more interest in Germany and in Scandinavia than in the English speaking countries.

A special hermeneutics is needed for the integration of AT texts into the mainstream. So, the tactics of the movement towards integration for AT trend should be discussed by itself, but the necessity of the strategy for integration seems obvious.

Conclusion

The question of the place and significance of Russian psychology in the international science is not limited to the formal parameters of evaluation of quality of scientists' work. This is a key point today for professional self-identification for Russian psychologists, who from the very beginning of their professional education are actively assimilating production of foreign science, while at the same time, the vast majority of them are able to speak and write only in Russian.

Let us specify that by "international science" we mean the mainstream of scientific knowledge, which shaped in the West after the World War II, and which is an objective reality of the contemporary world, where psychological practices have become a mass profession with more or less universal standards, where people live, study and work, moving from country to country.

Meanwhile the "Russian psychology" can be understood in different ways. By "Russian psychology" we can mean the psychological theories generated and developed in Russia. At the same time we can mean by "Russian psychology" the contemporary professional community in Russia.

Russian professional community has grown in number thousand times in the 90's. Such rapid quantitative growth naturally was accompanied by decline in the quality of education (in average) and — in average — by change of preferences from complex fundamental theoretical concepts of Soviet science to Western theories, presented in an accessible form in translated textbooks and addressing the demands of psychological practice. For "Westerners" in the Russian professional community this time is a period of growth, accompanied by problems natural for developing countries.

At the same time, Russian psychology as one of the great schools of the twentieth century is going through a dramatic crisis. Speaking about Russian psychology as scientific knowledge, the question of its place in the international science is, first, the question of the impact on the development of the world science of Russian theories that had been integrated into its context, like Vygotsky's and Pavlov's, and secondly, it is the question of the causes and consequences of other Russian theories remaining obscure for the international science, not integrated in the context of the mainstream.

The tendency towards a kind of "partial isolation" from the mainstream, showing itself in "counterglobalist" attitudes, emerging in recent years, withdrawal of participation in the English language mainstream, are dangerous for the AT trend. Can such a science exist in contemporary world outside of mainstream? For how long? Won't a "partial isolation" turn up an ivory tower, cut off from sources of livelihood, from the influx of new blood also from psychological practice and education in Russia?

The answer to the question of the "optimum integration", the optimal combination of national specific and global traits in Russian psychology, cannot be universal and overall, and it cannot be formal. In search of "the optimum integration" it

is necessary to take into account theoretical and methodological orientations of the scientists, as the motives and constraints in concern of the integration can be substantially different. It is hardly reasonable to push those who develop Russian Orthodox Psychology to publish in international journals same way as those who follow Western traditions. I believe it would be a big mistake to evaluate publications in high-rank Russian journals lower than international publications. And my main concern here is the necessity of all possible support to internationalization of the AT trend, which is a highly challenging task. I believe the classification presented here can be a useful tool in determining “the optimum integration” for different types of developments in contemporary Russian psychological science.

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