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Dichotomy of the Basic Aspects of the Image of Power in Russia: Traditional and Modern Models

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ABSTRACT

Social and cultural characteristics of any country form a certain image of power in the minds of its representatives. The image of power is treated in this work as a set of perceptions about power, which is determined by the sociocultural specifics of a particular political culture. In this article, I discuss contradictions between the traditional model of the image of power inherent in the Russian political culture and the modern democratic model. A conclusion is made that today's Russia is characterised by the reproduction of the traditional model of the image of power.

KEYWORDS

image of power, traditional model, modern model, source of power, personification, autocracy, centralization

Image of Power as a Sociocultural Phenomenon

Citizens' perceptions with regard to what power is, what duties and functions it performs, of which structural elements it consists, what actions it undertakes in various situations – inclusively combine into a certain image of power. This image is characterized by a number of culture-specific features.

The concept of the image of power was developed in my previous work (Romanovich, 2009). In a nutshell, it is the system of perceptions about power within a given society, which includes both basic (concept, functions, form,

duties, etc.), and contextual (expectation of specific socio-political actions from a particular government) aspects. While the former are more connected with semantic interpretations, the latter are in essence the reflection of objective reality. In this work, I focus on basic aspects, since “political perception is mainly aimed at semantic and evaluative interpretations of political objects, rather than reflection of objective reality” (Palitaï, 2018, p. 152). It is the basic aspects of the image of power that are formed as a sociocultural phenomenon of a particular society depending on the historical context of its development.

The historical developmental paths of Eastern and Western cultures have led to differences in the system of power relations. These differences were manifested in the political cultures of Western countries and Russia and affected the populations’ attitude towards the concept of power. As a result, the image of power has obtained its own sociocultural specifics in each society. Thus, the Russian image of power is based on such characteristics as personification, autocracy, centralization and hierarchy (Romanovich, 2009, p. 272). According to political scientists, “unlike perception as such, political perception is determined by political and historical contexts, the socio-cultural peculiarities of historical processes” (Palitaï, 2018, p. 154). Therefore, different political cultures will indispensably have different basic characteristics of the image of power. In this work, I set out to consider the basic characteristics of the image of power in Russia, as well as key differences in the perception of power in Russian and Western political cultures.

Traditional and Modern Models

The perception of power in Russia is significantly different from that typical of the population of Western countries. These differences have been repeatedly noted by philosophers, publicists and ordinary people. In particular, over 100 years ago, Sciarchimandrite Varsonofy (Plikhankov) claimed in his “Cell Notes” (1892–1896):

The devotion of Russian Orthodox people to their tsars cannot be compared to the loyalty of Western people to their sovereigns. According to modern Western concepts, the sovereign is nothing more than a representative of his people. Western nations love their representatives and willingly obey provided the sovereign faithfully fulfils his/her duties. In the West, people love only themselves in their sovereigns. In the case when the king, due to his/her personal traits, is not capable of fulfilling the people’s aspirations, ideas and passions, then his/her will be limited by means of the Constitution. If the king does not give in to these efforts and is unable to succumb to the taste and character of his subjects, then he loses not only people’s love, but also the throne, as was the case both with Charles X, Louis Philippe and the Sardinian king Albert. In Russia, the situation is completely different: our tsar is the representative of the will of God, rather than that of the people. His will is sacred to us, as the will of the anointed of God; we love him because we love God (Plikhankov, 1991).

Let us refer to this model of the image of power, the characteristics of which are based on a special loyalty of people to their sovereigns as the *traditional* or Russian model, since it originated and was formed along with the birth and foundation of Russia.

The image of power includes reference, structural, functional, evaluation, and other characteristics that are logically interrelated. In particular, the image of power comprises such a feature as the idea of *servicing*. In the traditional Russian model, it is interpreted as follows: “power” is something, to which you need and should serve. Soldiers in the tsar army greeted the tsar with the words: “I serve the tsar and the fatherland”. In the eyes of the people, the tsar was the representative of God on the Earth, the immediate spokesman of the divine will. Therefore, to serve the tsar and to serve God was almost an equal virtue. In the traditional Russian model, a charismatic attitude towards the supreme ruler prevailed over a rational assessment of his/her personal qualities.

Unlike the traditional Russian model, for example, the American model of relations between the people and the authorities suggests the opposite direction of *servicing*. The highest representative elected by the people serves the people, and never vice versa. Therefore, the attitude towards the authorities and its supreme representative is calm, without any admixture of mysticism, to some extent resembling the attitude towards maintenance staff. This attitude towards the ruler is characteristic of the democratic idea and represents its logical consequence. Such a characteristic is immanent to *the modern model* of the image of power. It should be noted that the contradiction between the *traditional* and *modern* models is considered in this work in the framework of a classical approach, as the opposition *Gemeinschaft/Gesellschaft* formulated by F. Tönnies. This opposition is considered without taking into account an extended socio-philosophical interpretation, but rather as localized within the framework of power relations.

According to formal indicators, the modern model of power relations is dominant today in developed countries. That is how the model acquired its name.

The democratic concept of development has brought the *modern* model of the image of power to Russia, where it contradicts the *traditional* Russian model. For Russia, following this new model means using Western models of power relations and setting a task of catching up with the West (or the US) in the cultural and civilizational perspectives. The modern model of the image of power conflicts with the original Russian model of the image of power. In fact, these contradictions are not contradictions between the past and the present, as it may seem from the dichotomy of the concepts of traditionalism and modernity; rather, these contradictions are those between the East and the West, which have existed along the entire observable Russian history.

It might seem that, if some institutions of power in different political cultures are identical in name or arrangement, then they are identical in content. However, for example, the monarchy in pre-revolutionary Russia had inconspicuous, at a first glance, but rather significant differences from the monarchy of Western countries. According to modern political scientists, some elements of today's democratic institutions were borrowed from the monarchist ideology. Thus, the political scientist M.V. Il'in argues that the concept of “*predstavitel'stvo*” (i.e. representation of the people in Duma and

other institutions through elections) was not invented by democrats; rather, it appeared as a medieval institution of the monarchical and aristocratic rule. According to him, “*predstavitelstvo*” was fundamentally opposite to direct participation in decision-making, i.e. democracy itself, being its logical antithesis. “Indeed, authoritarianism in its logic is a consistent implementation of the principle of representation, delegation of authority to authority, that is, its alienation from the majority and its transmission to few or even to one person. In the limit, it is autocracy implying the deprivation of each and every subjectivity in favour of a single autocrat” (Il’in, 2003, p. 158). This conclusion may be true for the monarchies of the Western type. However, autocracy in the Russian version is not at all a kind of representation, nor the delegation of power from the people to the tsar. Instead, it is something completely opposite. In Russia, the people did not endow the autocrat with authority, but rather recognized his/her authority. The tsar was recognized, because God himself was believed to have given authority to the monarch. In Russia, the tsar reigned not on behalf of the people, but on behalf of God. In the Russian case, the vector of delegation of power is directed from the top to the bottom: from God to the tsar, and further to the people. In the context of representation (“*predstavitelstvo*”), power is distributed from the bottom to the top, i.e. from the subjects to the monarch. It then follows that, although the forms of governing were equally called monarchy both in the West and in Russia, they had significant ideological differences, which predetermined further ways of their transformation. It is not surprising that representation, which sprouted from the monarchy of the Western type, has eventually turned into its “logical antithesis”, as Il’in called democracy. Having a visible logical contradiction, these two concepts have an invisible essential similarity, i.e. the same direction of the vector of power, which is one of the basic characteristics of the image of power.

Presented in the form of a geometric figure, power relations in Russia are a pointed pyramid, with the top and the bottom being respectively the ruler and the people. This pyramidal form is adequate to the monarchical idea. The higher the pyramid layer is, the more concentrated the power becomes. The democratic idea can be represented in the form of an inverted pyramid, where the people are the top, thus symbolising that it is the people who are the main actor of power. The ruler then is at the bottom, to whom the people descend their orders. These characteristics of the two models of the image of power demonstrate convex and almost visible ideological differences between the Russian monarchy and Western democracy, thus predetermining a system of state institutions appropriate for each model.

V.I. Rossman, a philosopher currently residing in the US, also refers to these differences between Russia and the West (Rossman, 2005, pp. 31–38). He believes that the ideological confrontation between two ancient philosophers – Plato and Aristotle – has not yet been completed. Both of them tried to create their own concept of the state. According to Rossman, Plato’s concept of the state and his main ideas had been absorbed by Russia. Since then, they have been constantly resurrected in various elements of the state structure in this or that exotic form. And “Plato’s pyramid of power,” he argues, “is an inverted pyramid of the power of Western society” (Rossman, 2005, p. 199). In Plato’s “State”, the leading role belongs to philosopher-kings armed with the correct ideology and absolute knowledge; they are followed

by warriors' guards intended to ensure the safety of citizens; but only after them go artisans and merchants. In the Western "capitalist" society, merchants (CEO of major corporations) are located at the top of the pyramid, followed by artisans (including engineers and programmers, mechanics and accountants) and the military, with the underlay of society belonging to philosophers and other scholars. Rossman notes that "in contrast to the Western pyramid of power, even the post-Soviet Russian hierarchy retains some loyalty to the Platonic idea of ideocracy and reproduces the Platonic pyramid in bizarre modifications" (Rossman, 2005, p. 40). Some strange modifications are also characteristic of democracy: in the Russian version, it transforms into "managed democracy", "sovereign democracy", etc.

Thus, it can be seen that the characteristics of the image of power, such as the source of power, vector orientation and the so-called power pyramid, confront each other in the two models of the image of power – traditional and modern. This confrontation is reflected in the contradictions between the views of the population on power and the content of official documents. Formally, Russia has adopted a modern model of power relations, which is formulated in the Constitution of the Russian Federation. It is curious that the current Constitution proclaims the modern model of the image of power, while the traditional model dominates public opinion. Thus, for example, according to a survey by VCIOM,

the *main source* of power and the carrier of sovereignty in our country is not the people, as it is written in the Constitution, but the President [...] 55% of the population are convinced that the head of the state and the sovereignty are one and the same. Formally, only 23% of the participants in the all-Russian survey believe in Russian democracy and believe that power in our country belongs to [...] the people (VCIOM, 2014).

The power in Russia is therefore personified with the head of the state, since it is he, in the opinion of the people, who is *the source of power*.

Sergiy Bulgakov, in his philosophical essay *Svet Nevechernii* ("Unfading Light"), trying to determine the religious and mystical nature of power, argues:

Obviously, power has to do with the very essence of the human spirit, and we must, first of all, reject the rationalistic inventions of "enlightenment" that claims that power and law were invented by someone, occurred as a result of "social contract" or "free agreement" [...] Power radiates involuntarily and arises organically and specifically as historical power [...] It is inherent in all humans and is comprised of the ability to command and to obey, of authority and loyalty, which are only two poles of power [...] True power belongs to God alone, earthly power is a symbol of God's omnipotence (Bulgakov, 1917).

In the traditional Russian model of the image of power, the source of power has a sacred nature; therefore, power is personified with the name of the supreme ruler of the state as the carrier of this sacred power.

Personification

The original Russian model of the image of power includes such an underlying characteristic as *personification*. Personification of power implies the perception of power not as a political institution, but as a specific person, in whom this power is embodied. The personal qualities of a representative of power are given a greater importance than law-making actions.

The perception of power imprinted in centuries-old socio-cultural Russian traditions is not simply different from the modern democratic model of the image of power, but logically opposes it. And one of such battles is the confrontation between the concepts of personification and de-personification of power.

Debates on the role of the person in history have long been continuing. There is a belief that the personality of a representative of power should not affect the functioning of the society. Otherwise, the stability of such a society can be undermined. The democratic concept reflected in the modern image of power promotes the idea of the de-personification of power. A person invested with power seems to be something like a necessary detail in a well-established mechanism. This detail should be changed, say, every four to five or six years. The control scheme is constructed in such a way that the system works regardless of who occupies particular positions. The modern model of the image of power is aimed at solving the following problem: to minimize the influence of an individual on history, to unify the management system, securing it from any unexpected situations resulting from the individual traits of people. Within the framework of such an approach, the key thing is the law that determines the control system and specifies its functions.

However, the role of the person in power has been traditionally given key importance in the Russian mentality. For Russian thinkers, the personality is the cornerstone of state-building. Thus, Il'in insisted,

it is the best people of the country that should rule the state; however, people often choose not the best, but flatterers that please them and unscrupulous demagogues that excite them", and threatened: "Democracy, which cannot distinguish the best, does not justify itself: it destroys the people and the state, therefore, it must fall (Il'in, 1993, p. 246).

The concept of personality is the starting point of N.A. Berdiaev's philosophy. Personality, according to Berdiaev, "is an ontological reality, it is included in the hierarchy of ontological realities. Personality assumes the reality of other personalities and the reality of which is higher and deeper than it. In nominalistic individualism, the personality decays and disintegrates" (Berdiaev, 1990, p. 199). Berdiaev discerned the internal contradiction between the personal and democratic principles:

Democracy is not favourable for the appearance of strong, bright and creative individuals. Democracy creates a levelling social environment that seeks to completely absorb the personality and subjugate it. Your democratic opinion is

the most terrible of all tyrannies, it depresses the human spirit, undermines its wings (Berdiaev, 1990, p. 199).

Many modern researchers agree that power in Russia is perceived as personified by the population. This has become commonplace. For example, Iu. S. Pivovarov states this fact in an axiomatic form: “Russian power implies a personification mode” (Pivovarov, 2006). In connection with the personification regime, “the Russian political tradition presupposes the presence of a clearly designated leader” (Malinova, 2006, p. 122). When a new person comes to power, the people expect changes: “A new violin plays in a new way”. In other words, there is a kind of legalization of the fact that the specifics of governing, and sometimes its form, can be determined by the character and personal traits of a particular representative of authority. During elections, it is not so important for the population to carefully study the programmes of the candidates: it is much more important to see the face of the person they choose. Russian voters are much more interested in the character traits and particular actions of the future government representative than the concept of development that he/she proposes. The logic of the population is rather simple: judging by appearance and actions, people try to “guess” what actions can be expected from the candidate, how good he/she is, what ideals he/she adheres – since all these things may cardinally differ from those declared.

Russian people do not think of power as a collective phenomenon, the image of power is always directly connected with a certain actor. According to A. I. Solov'ev, the political space in Russia is marked by “a mutually conventional attitude towards parliament as an “unreal, secondary, ostentatious power” on the part of both elite and non-elite social layers (Solov'ev, 2006). Therefore, the population considers the elections of the President to be the only “real elections” or elections of the real power, unlike elections to the State Duma or local legislative bodies. The latter institutions are recognized by the Russian society as secondary, and of little significance. Thus, Russian citizens have frequently ignored legislative elections (especially at the local level) as opposed to their more or less massive participation in the elections of the President and governors.

Moreover, Russian people increasingly believe that the State Duma and the Federation Council are simply superfluous, unnecessary organs:

The number of Russians who believe that the country can do without the State Duma and the Federation Council has been recently growing very significantly: from 29% in 1997 to 40% in 2016. At the same time, the number of those believing that Russia does not need a multiparty system slightly exceeds 50%. Only 12–13% of the respondents are convinced that these institutions are ‘extremely important’ and that the country’s political system could not function effectively without them (Petukhov, 2016).

This data raises an important question concerning the problem of law-making in Russia. Who will develop laws if the State Duma were abolished? Do Russians consider law-making to be a sort of luxury? Attitude to laws in Russia is

not unambiguous. It is not that Russians do not respect the rule of law. However, a Russian person is annoyed by the very case when “extreme law” turns into “extreme injustice”. This gives grounds for Il’in to render the verdict: “Formal, literary, pedantic application of law is not law, but its caricature” (Il’in, 1993, p. 199). Rejection of purely formal legitimacy transforms formalized structures as well. “The spirit of Christian love has also penetrated, in Il’in’s opinion, into Russian jurisprudence with its search for justice” (Il’in, 1993, p. 317).

It is common knowledge that the ideal of the Western image of governing is the power of law, rather than the power of any subject of power. In Russia, law traditionally gives way to the head of the state. That is why the personal characteristics of the representative of higher authorities are so crucial for Russia. Such a state of affairs in Russia is being predictably criticised in the West. In an attempt to defend the to self-determination and the regime of power personification, Russian researchers also criticize Western societies for being “impersonified” by the liberal democratic idea. For example, according to A. N. Fatenkov, “the fundamental flaw of liberalism lies in the desire of one impersonal structure (anatomically interpreted as individual) to restrict another, even more impersonal, structure. As a result, the liberal project appears in the figurative expression of V. F. Odoyevsky as ‘a city without a name’” (Fatenkov, 2005, p. 165).

Personification of power includes a set of logical consequences, which are presented in the form of the structural characteristics of the image of power: *autocracy*, *centralization* and *hierarchy*. The defining characteristics of the image of power form its structure. In a nutshell, using the patristic saying: “The spirit makes forms for itself”.

Autocracy

Autocracy implies the transfer of all power in the state into the hands of one person. This has been the historical tradition of Russia for many centuries. Even when a general secretary or a president replaced an autocratic tsar, it was only the name of the position that changed, not the very essence of power.

The concept of autocracy is not only opposite to democracy; rather, the former destroys the latter. The fundamental idea of democracy is the restriction of autocracy by separating powers. It is assumed that the ruler, no matter how good he/she is, must be controlled. The democratic system of checks and balances was created to destroy autocracy. For democratic consciousness, the highest sedition is the idea of transferring power to one person.

In modern Russia, the results of sociological surveys have proven the inclusion of the concept of *autocracy* in the Russian image of power. According to a study undertaken by the Institute of Public Opinion *Qualitas* (as part of a public opinion monitoring being carried out by the Institute from 1998 to the present, which every year covers from 600 to 1,000 inhabitants of the city of Voronezh using the method of personal interview), the majority of the population do not have anything against the prospect of transferring all power in the state to one person. In January 2018, when answering the question: “Which of the two opposing judgments do you agree with:

we should not allow the power in Russia to be given into the hands of one person or there must be a host in the country – our people need a strong hand?”, most of the respondents (63%) supported the latter statement about “a strong hand”. Only 26% of the respondents expressed concerns with this regard (Romanovich, 2018). Moreover, every tenth respondent had no their own opinion on this matter. At the same time, the immutable laws of democracy impose a “taboo” on the concentration of power in the hands of one person. This “taboo” is supported by the system of separation of powers, the limitation of the term of the government and other institutions. However, it seems that Russian people’s idea concerning what kind of power it should be radically diverges from fundamental democratic principles. The survey was conducted three times for Voronezh residents: in 2001, 2008 and 2018. Changes in the perception of power over this period are shown in Figure 1.

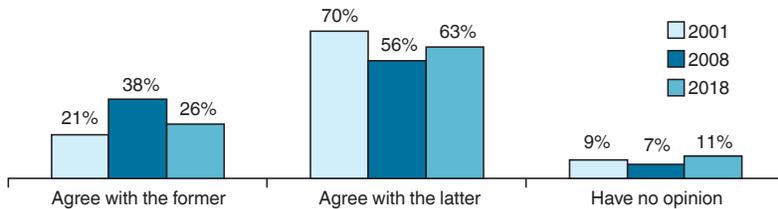


Figure 1. Which of the two judgments do you agree with:
 “We must not allow the power in Russia to be concentrated in the hands of one person”
 or “We need a host in the country, our people need a “strong hand”?”

In 2001, at the beginning of V. Putin’s presidency, after the democratic experiment of B. Yeltsin, the people’s longing for a strong and authoritative power was particularly great. At that time, 70% of the respondents wanted to see the true “host” as the head of the state. In 2008, the people’s thirst for a strong government was somewhat satisfied by the personality of V. Putin. As a result, the number of those who wished a “strong hand” decreased to 56%. However, the need for stability and the fear of losing it raised the number of autocracy supporters to 63% in 2018. It should be noted that Voronezh is not an exception; the preponderance of judgments in favour of autocracy has an all-Russian scale. According to FOM polls, about 50% of Russians would like power to be transferred into the hands of one person, with only 38% being against it (Kertman, 2006, p. 122).

The mentality of people determines the actions of the authorities. It was not by chance that power began to be concentrated in the hands of the President of the Russian Federation: “The principle of a presidential republic was entrenched in the new Constitution, and the president was vested with enormous rights, comparable only to the power of an autocrat” (Pantin, 2007). Researchers argue that the form of the current state system in Russia resembles a constitutional monarchy by formal indicators. A comparative analysis of the main state laws issued April 23, 1906 and the 1993 Constitution conducted by the Russian historian V. Startsev (2002) showed that the powers of the constitutional monarch and the president differ only in three positions: unlike the monarch, the president of the Russian Federation has no right to

pass his/her position by inheritance, mint his/her own portraits on coins and dispose of the “property of the court” by his/her own will (Startsev, 2002, p. 6).

The autocracy is inscribed in the ideological schemes of Russian citizens. By being a characteristic feature of the image of power, autocracy sets regulatory parameters that cause transformation of power structures in accordance with the expectations of the population. The *traditional* image of power inherent in popular beliefs transforms the imposed stencil of the *modern* model. The basic aspects of the original Russian model of the image of power are reborn as a phoenix from the ashes. It is interesting to note that a book by a modern Russian researcher of the system of government, the philosopher V. D. Popov, was entitled “The Flight of the Phoenix Bird [...]” (Popov, 2007). The Phoenix bird, in Popov’s interpretation, is the nature of the Russian government, which is reviving again and again, despite reforms, revolutions, wars and other social cataclysms.

Autocracy as a basic aspect of the image of power implies the existence of another its aspect – *centralization* of power.

Centralization

Centralization of power as a basic aspect of the image of power implies a system that is controlled from a single centre and is typically personified with the name of the head of the state.

The *modern* model, which has not so far been able to overcome the *traditional* Russian model of the image of power, has begun to transform itself into something else adapted to the Russian realities. Many Russian analysts and public politicians claim that today’s Russia is characterised by the regime of managed democracy. V. Surkov coined the term “sovereign democracy” for this concept. The vector of power directed from the top to the bottom logically corresponds to the idea of power centralization. Being deeply rooted in the Russian mentality but not necessarily declared or clearly manifested, this idea should be treated as a fundamental structural characteristic forming the image of power as a whole.

The modern image of power, which is embodied in the democratic idea, immanently implies the *decentralization* of power. One of the fundamental principles of democracy – the principle of separation of powers – is directed against power centralization. At the same time, “power centralization is underway, and it is not yet clear who can stop it” (Chirikova, 2008, p. 109). Such a conclusion is drawn by the sociologist A. E. Chirikova, who conducted a survey devoted to studying the opinions of both representatives of the Russian elite and ordinary citizens. According to her analysis, “the forms of federalism in Russia are determined not only and not so much by the actions of the centre, but rather by the behaviour of the population [...]” (Chirikova, 2008, p. 110). In other words, the centralization of power is the answer of the authorities to the expectations of the population. Thus, centralization is not so much the will of the centre, but rather the will of the Russian population. Some Russian researchers argue that the social environment in Russia favours the reproduction (on a national and regional scale) of centripetal, and even authoritarian, tendencies (Mironiuk, 2003, p. 105).

The hierarchical centralized model of governance in Russia has developed historically due to its efficiency and social demand. In the course of the *knyaz* (prince) power evolution across the Russian territories, a hierarchically built monocentric governance model was gradually forming during the 12th – 14th centuries. This model, according to researchers, allowed such a vast country as Russia to be protected from enemy attacks and destruction (Fëdorov, 2006, p. 4). Thus, A. Iu. Fëdorov sees reasons behind the collapse of the USSR in *the destruction of the traditional (for Russia) model of interaction between the central and regional leadership* (Fëdorov, 2006, p. 15). Centralization is inscribed in *the traditional model* of the image of Russian power as a structural characteristic. Decentralization *belongs to the modern model* of the Western-type power.

In the West, the view is dominated that decentralization leads to more efficient public administration. However, is that so? The real situation never repeats the forecasts of scientific theories. According to Russian political scientists, decentralization has not created any prerequisites for improving the efficiency of the public sector. If governmental levels begin to compete with each other for economic resources, power and popularity in the eyes of voters, the result of decentralization can only be a decrease in the efficiency of the public sector. “In this case, we actually enter a game with a zero or even negative sum, where the only source of gain is the loss of the competitor” (Nechaev, 2005, p. 199). According to V. D. Nechaev, a similar picture was observed in many developing countries that had embarked on the path of modernization. Attempts to install models of local self-government based on Western models, as a rule, led to a decline in governance efficiency, conflicts between new and traditional institutions, and the spread of corruption (Nechaev, 2005, p. 199).

In the most recent Russian history, one can also find many examples of this kind. The struggle between the governors and the mayors of capital cities and regional centres in the 1990s is quite indicative in this respect. For example, in an attempt to remove a regional mayor from office by demonstrating his inefficiency in solving economic problems, a regional government resorted to a targeted limitation of the budget of a regional capital. At the same time, according to V. D. Nechaev, it is important to remember that the municipal reform of the second half of the 19th century led to similar consequences. As V. Bezobrazov brilliantly demonstrates in this essay “Zemstvo Institutions and Self-Government”, the removal of Zemstvo institutions from the state power system had indeed turned into a decline in the effectiveness of public administration, which was manifested in the weak coordination of efforts of the state bureaucracy and Zemstvos, in their mutual distrust and competition, resulting in an increase in the tax burden (as cited in Nechaev, 2005, p. 199). A natural conclusion would be that the reasons for the emergence of zero-sum games in relations between autonomous levels of government are not personal, but systemic, institutional, political and economic in their nature.

“Power-centredness”, according to Yu. S. Pivovarov, is a key characteristic of Russian political culture. “Power-centredness” implies building a “vertical” of power. The process of centralization of power began under the first President of the Russian Federation. “The centralization of power in the hands of the president,” I. K. Pantin

notes, “was not the expression of Yeltsin’s ambitions and his entourage, although they had enough ambitions [...] It was not the mistakes and the evil will of the rulers that pushed for the centralization of power” (Pantin, 2007, p. 121). The general trend of the social attitude latently, but inevitably, was transforming power structures. The abolition of direct governor elections in 2004 was predetermined by a combination of social, political and economic reasons, as well as by such a characteristic of the image of power in Russia as *centralization*.

It should be noted, however, that the current postmodern space cannot be characterized by a centre in its original sense. Trying to comprehend the system of power relations in a conceptual manner, Michel Foucault concludes that, in a modern society, power no longer has a single centre, being spilled across the whole. According to the German sociologist N. Luhmann, contemporary people live in a society without a peak and without a centre. As a result of functional differentiation and centrifugal social processes, it is no longer possible to conceive unity within society.

However, people still have a strong psychological need for the centre and the spatial-social hierarchy. The vitality of this concept, according to philosophers, is associated with a deeply rooted psychological need – a kind of the instinct of centre and the instinct of the sacred. The mechanism of centring a person appears as an opportunity to save him/her from everyday alienation and loneliness. “In traditional civilizations, the centre opened the road to heaven, i.e. a vertical of life. In modern civilizations, the heaven is so distant that the understanding of the very concept of the centre of the world requires considerable effort from contemporary people. After all, where there is polycentrism, there is no more rotation along single orbits and no sense of sacredness. Modern culture is not a culture around, but a culture about” (Rossmann, 2008, p. 57). The postmodern space is structured a-centrally, and non-hierarchically. Nevertheless, rumours about the “death of the centre” are greatly exaggerated.

According to the results obtained by A. E. Chirikova, centralization will increase in the future, “because there are many supporters of this idea both among elites and among the population” (Chirikova, 2008, p. 199). The process of centralization, in her opinion, “opens up possibilities for administrative control, replacing political communication channels with hierarchical ones” (Chirikova, 2008, p. 109). A consequence of any centralization process is hierarchy.

Hierarchy

The hierarchy of power is “a system of consistent subordination of the structural units of social power from the lower to the higher level” (Kravchenko, 2004, p. 131). A number of historical documents are extremely curious in this respect. In particular, the conversation that took place on December 12, 1927 between Metropolitan Sergius and a delegation of four diocese representatives – Bishop Gdovsky Dimitry (Beloved), Professor Archpriest Vasily Veryuzhsky, Archpriest Viktorina Dobronravov and the layman Alekseev representing the believers – was remarkable. The delegates brought a letter to the Metropolitan, which, among other requests and suggestions, contained an insistence: “Cancel the order [...] on giving prayers for civil authority”.

The delegates justified this requirement as follows:

- From the religious point of view, our rulers are not power.
- How so, not power? – Metropolitan Sergius was amazed.
- Power is hierarchy: when not only someone is subordinate to me, but I myself am subordinate to someone standing above me, and so on, and it all goes up to God, as the source of any power.
- Well, this is a subtle philosophy, – Metropolitan Sergius observed with irony.
- The pure in heart simply feel it. Since the question is new, deep and complex, we should formulate it subtly, as a subject of conciliar discussion (Tsybin, 1999, p. 150).

The refusal of the representatives of the Orthodox people to call the Soviet government “power”, since it did not constitute a hierarchy, is very symptomatic. This reflects the very ideological background of the “source of any power”. However, despite the fact that the ideological background in the minds of Russian people has begun to erode, the principles of hierarchy in power structures have stood the test of time as immanent to the concept of power in Russia.

Communist ideology, rejecting the priesthood as a class, could not, however, abandon the idea of hierarchy in power relations. Moreover, the communist ideology fostered this idea as something immutable and sacred. Some researchers have drawn attention to the rigid hierarchy within the ruling Communist party. In particular, A. Brown, an honorary professor of political science at the University of Oxford, writes: “Ideology was given such importance (especially as justifying the rigidly hierarchical internal structure of the communist party and its monopoly on power) that any changes in theory entailed deep political consequences” (Brown, 2007, p. 72). The Russian professor B. I. Kashnikov notes that a hierarchical society is usually called upon to serve a great idea (Kashnikov, 2004). The millennial idea of “holy Russia” demanded a hierarchical structure of earthly power, in accordance with the power of heaven. The great idea of building communism, that is, the “kingdom of God on the Earth”, also reproduced the hierarchical structure of power. Despite the fact that the place of God in the USSR became vacant, the perceptions about power among the population remained the same, which contributed to the revival of the traditional hierarchical principle in power structures. The Soviet society, according to B. I. Kashnikov, should be understood as a hierarchical society, a variation on the theme of the perverted ideal of Holy Russia. Moreover, “the modern Russian society”, the philosophers conclude, “is still a hierarchical society” (Kashnikov, 2004, pp. 40–43).

Although the current post-Soviet society, despite repeated attempts, has not been able to spawn any great idea, the traditional hierarchical structure is being reproduced in power again. Why is that? Because it is precisely such a structure that is present in the Russian image of power, the structure has survived its ideological background. *Hierarchy* is a structural characteristic of the original Russian model of the image of power.

Hierarchy as a structural characteristic of the *traditional* Russian model of the image of power contradicts the *modern* democratic model, which is aimed at destroying any hierarchy. The re-election of the President of the Russian Federation after the period established by law implies that any representative of the nation can become the President. Consequently, although the hierarchy exists, it exists exclusively as a convention. A frequent change of the President “helps” to destroy the hierarchical ladder again and again, as soon as it begins to form.

The democratic concept has set the positions of the President and the governor on one level, thus equalizing them by means of nation-wide elections. Since governors in Russia (up to a certain time) had been elected by the people, they were also on the same level as the President in the hierarchy. The absence of a hierarchical ladder, as a rule, excludes the mode of subordination. Therefore, Vladimir Putin had a reason to carry out a reform aimed at strengthening the “vertical of power” in order to increase the effectiveness of governance in the country.

The principle of separation of powers into *executive*, *legislative* and *judicial* in a democratic scheme does not imply any hierarchy between them. All three branches of government are on the same level, none of them is any higher or any lower than the others, they have an equal degree of power, although in different spheres. However, the results of sociological surveys show that there is no equilibrium between these three branches of power in the minds of Russians, with “the executive branch being perceived as the only true power” (Shestopal, 2005, p. 40).

Sociologists note that building hierarchical relations at the level “federal centre – regions” contributes to the extinction of conflicts: “Our comparison of the opinions of the elites in 2004 and 2006 clearly showed that the relationship between the centre and the regions over time loses its sharpness, turning into a relationship of hierarchical subordination” (Chirikova, 2008, p. 111). According to the results of regional public opinion polls of the Institute of Public Opinion *Qualitas*, the population builds a hierarchy from the President to the governor and then to the mayor, believing that a strict subordination regime takes place in the relations between these levels. Moreover, the legislative power is included in the unified hierarchy of power. Therefore, *the power structure is conceived by Russian citizens exclusively as a hierarchical structure*.

Russian authorities are reproducing the hierarchical structure, despite the proclaimed principle of separation of powers, not because they are full of authoritarian ambitions, but rather because hierarchical schemes are intertwined with the Russian image of power. It goes without saying, any professional politician feels obliged to make use of national schemes; otherwise he/she will lose the trust of the people. That is why Russian democracy acquires the features of manageability and hierarchy.

Conclusion

In the process of social interaction, people form the image (perception) of power, which specifics is determined by value-normative attitudes inherent in this particular culture. Using Florenskii’s and Kireyevskii’s words, “the grain of a cultural idea” (Florenskii, 1994, p. 357) germinates, having its own logic of development, and, being “an all-

defining cultural principle” (Kirievskii, 1979, p. 256), sets parameters of the image of power for a given culture. The dynamics of the internal logic of the development of a cultural idea serves as a “motor” (Ionin, 2000, p. 8), whose work reproduces a certain image of power from generation to generation and manifests it in everyday practices of social interactions.

The *traditional* model of the image of power in Russia, which was formed in other sociocultural conditions, contradicts the *modern* model in terms of their basic aspects (the idea of service, the vector of power, the pyramid of power, personification, autocracy, centralization, hierarchy, etc.). The current invisible political landscape in Russia is characterized by a struggle between the two models – traditional and modern – of the image of power. The outcome of this struggle is the reproduction of the characteristics of the image of power belonging to the traditional Russian model. According to modern political scientists, “the complex process of value transformations in Russia has led to the differentiation of value orientations. However, 25 years later, a certain fundamental vector can be traced: the underlying values that are immanent to the political and cultural life of Russia are reproduced even in times, when the country goes through such drastic transformations as adoption of modernization values (Mchedlova, 2016, p. 181). The traditional image of power is the catalyst that allows the Phoenix bird to continue its flight over Russia.

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