



<http://social-epistemology.com>
ISSN: 2471-9560

What is to be Done with Eurasianism—or the ‘Promised Heartland’—as Someone Who is a Real Eurasian?

Andrey Ivanov, Moscow School of Social and Economic Sciences,
ivanovandreysociety@gmail.com

Ivanov, Andrey. 2022. “What is to be Done with Eurasianism—or the ‘Promised Heartland’—as Someone Who is a Real Eurasian?” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 11 (6): 38-41. <https://wp.me/p1Bfg0-6Uy>.

The problem with ‘Eurasianism’ as an idea in Russia (Fuller 2022) boils down both to the words ‘Euro’ and ‘Asia’ and to their ordering. Do Russians actually identify themselves as a part of Europe or Asia? Do they have any ideology? ‘Ideology’ is a bad word they say after the collapse of Soviet Union. ‘Eurasianism’ is a separate ideology between Europe and Asia abandoned by the classical thinkers on the topic but revived as Aleksandr Dugin’s (2014) personal project. It’s the same issue intensified with Russia placed by globalization in middle of diverse cultures and religions. Although Russian politics implies balancing policy with structural ethnocentrism, the resulting perspective is ‘glocalization’ as a way out of accumulated contradictions.

Eurasianism

‘Eurasianism’ exists nowadays only in highly abstract marginal circles of Russia. The contemporary discourse about the immersive project between Europe and Asia was epitomized by Dugin’s intellectual adventurism and the unintended influence of US-based Russian streamer, Anatoly Mitzengendler.¹ Dugin’s ‘neo-Eurasianism’ deals with sophisticated ‘orientalism’ and reverts to hybridity and conspiracy theories, the essence of which is ethnocentrism (Umland 2017). This is true even among the populist democratic opposition seemingly far from such ideas (Laruelle 2014). Meanwhile, the core founders of classical ‘Eurasianism’ in a scientific manner in the early 20th century—S. Trubetskoy, P. Savitskii, and P. Suvchinskiy—were immigrants from the intelligentsia who wanted a kind of rebranding because of their ideology after the 1917 Bolshevik revolution.

The most interesting part is that Trubetskoy even supported the radical left movement on behalf of separation from ‘rational’ Europe. Therefore, the only element that somehow unites classic and neo idea of Eurasianism is Anti-Westernism. Afterwards, the main key figure Trubetskoy regretted his own project due to political speculations. For the current Russia, is defensive policy management for justification with raw materials, which is only a benefit in the post-truth politics (Fuller 2018)—but there is always a negative effect. The Mongol Empire, the Russian Empire, and the Soviet Union are great authoritarian narratives in the imperialistic sense. This sort of sequence does not bode well for the soft power influence of international relations. Now, there is a resentment-ish attempt to revive a ghost idea about ‘Eurasianism’ in the context of an identity crisis, where Russia is a very huge country in any terms.

It is a very personal story in this regard. I was born in regional capital city Yakutsk of Sakha Yakutia Republic of Russia, Far East, hard-mode of Siberia. Historically the Russian Orthodoxy caused the impact of Russian language as part of the sixteenth century expeditions to the Far East. I am native Russian speaker. I spoke the Sakha language only in the family. Nevertheless, when I grew up, Sakha people found me more rather Russian-ish than Sakha. In the Sakha language, it is called “Nuuccha” in slightly pejorative sense that means a “Russian”; and there is even a movie about ‘post-colonialism’ with the name of

¹ Anatoly Mitzengendler aka ‘UeberMarginal’ lives in the US but streams in Russian. He has several degrees in philosophy/social sciences and promotes eco-fascism.

“Nuuccha” (Gray 2021). The attitude gets worse if is applied to Sakha people by Sakha people, presumably that you have to know the language and the culture and so forth. Russians themselves found me too ‘progressive’ or too exotic as a foreigner. Therefore, it seems like I am neither Russian nor Sakha—and this is a striking ambiguity among ‘progressive’ people for any post-soviet regions and countries. Some of Russians, particularly from Moscow, do not even know where Yakutia is. Foreigners consider me as a hybrid Russian-Turkic-Asian-European mixture that is quite bizarre and idiosyncratic. The identity layer gets even more complicated with my philosophical-sociological background and way of thinking, since by the age of sixteen I had already read Kant and Nietzsche. At this moment, Stoicism to some degree is an interesting slice of method for self-therapy.

It is better to distinguish further questions such as (1) ethnicity, (2) geography, and (3) race into three following parts. These questions and issues intertwine with one another due to their complexity.

(1) Regarding Ethnicity

Once my professor of anthropology asked me in public where I came from. I was so embarrassed to tell where I came from that I just ignored the question. Back then, I did not know the answer only an intuitive rejection. Now, I can tell you exactly why. The first reason is that historically Sakha involves a traditional archaic way of living, including mainly cattle raising, that is far from ‘progressive’ values—however these are interpreted. The tension arises from lack of continuity. Very roughly speaking, you used to be herding reindeer and now you are reading contemporary philosophers and scientists. Is that not too fast for adaptation? This sort of issue arises in many areas in contemporary Russia in the wake of the Soviet era.

The second reason is that from the mid-seventeenth century to the mid-twentieth century, anti-establishment figures were repressed by deporting them to ‘Siberia’ (Yakutia), e.g. N. Chernyshevsky, W. Sieroszewski, A. Bestuzhev, S. Ordzhonikidze, and many others. In the Russian language, “katorga” and “ssylka” signify a form of banishment and punishment. Yet, it only takes a close look to see that the Sakha were already living in such an environment. Meanwhile, the authorities considered the Siberia as coercion settlement. Is it advantage or disadvantage? There are many interpretations, for example James Scott’s (2017) anarchistic counter-narrative of how nomadic peoples became settled. Ultimately, they are not convincing.

(2) Regarding Geography

Sakha Yakutia is a terra incognita with rich natural resources and virgin mysteries. It is pretty odd and surreal, but Dante Alighieri could represent my personal environmental concern about Yakutia in this inquiry. Dante, following Aristotle, described the nine circles of Inferno, and the last circle was dedicated to betrayals. It consisted of a frozen lake that is very comparable with permafrost condition in Yakutia. And so, from the Russian Empire to the Soviet Union, political leaders deported those “betrayers” to permafrost, i.e., the frozen lake “Cocytus”. The permafrost is a prison without bars. Escape attempts are a certain death because of the isolation, the vast territory, and the cold. Dante depicted the last circle of Inferno as if in anticipation of the modern version of Yakutia. The sharp continental climate

is not an entertainment but the incarnation of Dante's *Inferno*. The ecological effect of climate change influences in the Yakutian region (Czerniawska and Chlachula 2020; Doloisio and Vanderlinden 2020).

In 2021, the coldest inhabited region on Earth was burning the whole summer in an apocalyptic way by “wildfires” (Troianovski 2021). In this mythological vein, during the winter, you cannot properly breathe due to freezing cold air by permafrost and during the summer, you cannot managing to breathe due to the noxious smog caused by wildfires. One might ask for what reason people could choose to live in such an extreme sharp continental subarctic climate? One hypothesis is that the ancestors of the Sakha in thirteenth century migrated from southern Lake Baikal (current Irkutsk oblast and Republic of Buryatia) to the eastern basins of the middle Lena, the Aldan, and Vilyuy (current Republic of Yakutia) due to bloody violence of the rising Mongols.

(3) Regarding Race

The Russia Federation is indeed between Europe and Asia. To put it more in geopolitical congruence, it is between West and East. Is there any of Halford Mackinder's promised ‘Heartland’ in this regard?² Rising intricacy and instability in the “defense balancing politics” (Tsygankov 2012, 2) continue to disintegrate itself from the rest of the world. Setting aside Europe, Asia is a study in contrast. On the one side, there are ‘developed’ countries Japan, South Korea, China and so on. On the other side, there are countries from Central Asia, for example Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan.

People from Central Asia have been immigrating to Russia for mainly unskilled labour, resulting in negative stereotypes. Therefore, if you are an Asian person from Russia there is no middle status, you are either a “wealthy” foreigner or a “citizen from central Asia”. However, the problem is I do not represent either of the separations. The diverse Asian nation-ethnic people from both sides are often being confused themselves because I do not seem to be part of them. Asia is very versatile—and that is an issue for further exploration in a prospective agenda. The crucial phenomenon is not ubiquitous racism but social homogeneity and heterogeneity (Belamghari 2020, 7). Homogeneous groups communicating with each other—but what about the rest that do not belong to one or the other?

This ideological flatness is embedded with many cultural, religious, and social factors that require rough balancing policy management. There are two main ways to cope with this massive tension. The first—and short-term—is the fruitful rebranding of ‘Eurasia’ as a cornerstone for future development into a diverse ‘union’ which could be implemented within decentralized way to foster economic and cultural capital growth. The second—and long-term—is to accept the blurring of boundaries and adaptation as part of a fragmented identity management, that is, “process of becoming rather than being” (Belamghari 2020, 1). The crisis in identity is a worldwide trend caused by globalization. The application of the concept of being to identity is itself an atavism of modernity. Constructing identity as being

² Halford Mackinder (1861-1947) first proposed the idea of the Eurasian ‘heartland’ as the ‘pivot’ in geopolitics in a paper delivered to the Royal Geographical Society in London in 1904.

‘defended’ against threat, e.g. “the irony of aggression” (Bouzid 2020, 4), is not sustainable and cannot persist due to identity’s fragility.

Constructing becoming through local practices and communities across the world is likely to be more resilient as an anti-fragile method. This response to the crises alludes to “glocalization” (Belamghari 2020) proposed by Roland Robertson and Victor Roudometof. Glocalization refers the evolutionary process of deterritorialization that intensifies global and local interactions in the dynamic world. In the interim, the internal traits of disgrace, anxiety, and uncertainty as an iterative process in the silences in public space, as well as infinite discussion of truthiness, do not solve any issues. The civil external conclusion is that in some metaphorical manner of ‘Ozymandias’, Percy Shelley’s sonnet, no one can overcome time and the history is our evidence.

References

- Belamghari, Mohamed 2020. “The Fragmentation of Identity Formation in the Age of Glocalization.” *SAGE Open* 10 (2). doi: 10.1177/2158244020934877.
- Bouzid, Ahmed. 2022. “A Reply to Steve Fuller’s ‘Eurasianism as the Deep History of Russia’s Discontent.’” *Social Epistemology Review and Reply Collective* 11 (4): 1–4.
- Czerniawska, Jolanta and Jiri Chlachula. 2020. “Climate-Change Induced Permafrost Degradation in Yakutia, East Siberia.” *Arctic* 73 (4): 509–528.
- Doloisio, Natalia and Jean-Paul Vanderlinden. 2020. “The Perception of Permafrost Thaw in the Sakha Republic (Russia): Narratives, Culture and Risk in the Face of Climate Change.” *Polar Science* 26: 100589. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polar.2020.100589>.
- Dugin, Alexander. 2014. *Eurasian Mission: An Introduction to Neo-Eurasianism*. London: Arktos.
- Fuller, Steve. 2022. “Eurasianism as the Deep History Of Russia’s Discontent.” *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 54 (7): 1–4.
- Fuller, Steve. 2018. *Post-Truth: Knowledge as a Power Game*. London: Anthem Press.
- Gray, Carmen. 2021. “A Prison Without Walls: Yakut Drama Nuuccha Traces the Lives of Families Forced to Care for Siberia’s Exiles.” *The Calvert Journal*. October 1. Retrieved May 26, 2022. <https://www.calvertjournal.com/articles/show/13163/nuuccha-film-vladimir-munkuev-sakha-yakutia-russian-empire>.
- Laruelle, Marlene. 2014. “Alexei Navalny and Challenges in Reconciling ‘Nationalism’ And Liberalism’.” *Post-Soviet Affairs* 30 (4): 276–297.
- Scott, James C. 2017. *Against the Grain: A Deep History of the Earliest States*. New Haven: Yale University Press.
- Troianovski, Anton. 2021. “As Frozen Land Burns, Siberia Trembles.” *The New York Times*. Photographs by Nanna Heitmann. 22 October. Retrieved May 26, 2022. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/07/17/world/europe/siberia-fires.html>.
- Tsygankov, Andrei P. 2012. “The Heartland No More: Russia’s Weakness and Eurasia’s Meltdown.” *Journal of Eurasian Studies* 3 (1): 1–9.
- Umland, Andreas. 2017. “Post-Soviet Neo-Eurasianism, the Putin System, and the Contemporary European Extreme Right.” *Perspectives on Politics* 15 (2): 465–476.