
MODERN RUSSIA: IDEOLOGY, POLITICS, CULTURE AND RELIGION

ALEXEY KUZNETSOV. THE CRISIS OF COUNTRY STUDIES
IN RUSSIA: REASONS AND CONSEQUENCES

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Abstract. The article shows that foreign country studies, although rooted in geography, should be considered as a interdisciplinary social science that allows comprehensive study of modern countries. In Russia, the contribution of economists, political scientists and historians, especially orientalists, to the

development of foreign country studies is very great. At the same time, over the past 100 years, regional studies in our country has been greatly transformed. Exceptionally, due to subjective reasons and the general crisis of fundamental science in the country, multi-volume publications that provided a great material for comparative studies have become a thing of the past. The theoretical baggage of foreign country studies accumulated in the second half of the 20th century is almost not used, linguistic training in a number of areas has been curtailed. In modern Russia, the "supply" of scientific regional products due to the small-scale nature of geographers, the fascination with global issues of political scientists and economists, as well as the general shortage of specialists in the countries of the post-Soviet space and some other macro-regions does not meet the existing "demand". But the state and big business, which should form a solvent and long-term demand, also fail to cope with their role. As a result, regional studies are in a deep crisis, the exit from which it is necessary to look for as soon as possible, while the traditions of such studies are still alive. The lack of a precise practical orientation of scientific country studies has a detrimental effect on Russia's positioning in the world economy and the system of international relations.

In the 20th century, at least in Russia, there was a genuine boom in country studies, hundreds of monographs on different countries were published, including several well-known series dedicated to the whole world or its large macroregions. The post-socialist transformation in Russia, especially the opening of external borders for the majority of citizens, and the change in the world order after the end of the cold war, of course, had to change the requirements for country studies. However, in the 1990s, it was difficult to predict that instead of adapting country studies to solving new problems, there would be an increase in the training of relevant specialists in universities, and the authorities would rarely turn to professional consultants for

help, eventually making repetitive mistakes in the implementation of their policies. In-depth country studies are ever more often replaced in Russia by the preparation of guidebooks on foreign states, the production of low-quality journalistic reports, etc.

In this article we will offer our own view of the place of this complex science in socio-humanitarian research. Next, we will note the most significant achievements of the Soviet period in terms of a comprehensive study of a large range of countries (which are currently almost not conducted) and we will point out the main problems of modern country studies in Russia. Our concrete proposals aimed at meeting the “supply” and “demand” for knowledge about foreign countries and regions in modern Russia complete the work.

The Place of Country Studies in the System of Sciences

There is still no generally accepted classification of sciences. For example, anthropology (in the sense of socio-cultural, coupled with ethnology and ethnography) as an independent science appears in the UNESCO classification [UNESCO, 1988], but is absent in the OECD classification [OECD, 2007], representing a section of History (as well as in the list of specialties of the Higher Attestation Commission of Russia or the classifier of Russian Science Foundation). There is no country studies in these classifications at all, and the only widely used classifier where it found a place is the international bibliographic database *Web of Science: Area Studies* and *Asian Studies* are designated as separate categories (as a side note, the main competitor of this database – *Scopus* – does not have such headings). To some extent, these are analogs of country studies and oriental studies in the Russian scholarly tradition (but then the terms *Country Studies* and *Oriental Studies* would be correct).

At the same time, country studies are traditionally perceived as “their own discipline” by representatives of

economic geography (now usually called socio-economic or economic, social and political, and to be more precise – public one). Outstanding Russian economic geographers considered country studies one of the main directions of geography. It is enough to recall the book published in 1928 by Veniamin P. Semenov-Tian-Shansky (1870–1942) “District and Country”, the second part of which begins with the chapter “Conditions for the Independence of Geographical Science or the Science of the Country” [Semenov-Tian-Shansky, 2017, p. 28]. The famous scientist proposed in this work his own view on the boundaries and structure of the entire geographical science, known for its synthetic nature (after all, there are still disputes whether socio-economic and political geography should be attributed to the social sciences or defined in the rest of geography in the category of natural sciences). In a narrow sense, only chapter 21st, “The Sequence of the Geographical Study of the Country”, of the book is devoted to the study of the country itself. The analysis of approaches and achievements of famous thinkers and explorers begins with ancient and arabic names, and ends with representatives of historical geography and anthropogeography, which by the beginning of the 20th century led to the need for a “complete geographical synthesis on the basis of country studies” [Semenov-Tian-Shansky, 2017, P. 233–255]. Perhaps even more important is the position of the “foremost” leader of the national economic geography, Nikolai N. Baransky (1881–1963), who spoke about the role and place of country studies in 1946 on the pages of the then leading Soviet geographical journal, marking the beginning of the institutionalization of this science. However, Professor Baransky wrote about country studies as a third branch of geography which should fill a large gap between economic and physical geography for regional studies. He stressed that specialists in country studies should be trained in universities within geographical faculties but with comprehensive foreign language training and special courses in philosophy, politics, history and economy of separate countries. He offered

establishments of special departments (“chairs”) for research of 1) the United States, 2) the British Empire, 3) China, 4) Slavic countries, 5) Middle East (Turkey, Iraq, Iran and Afghanistan) [Baransky, 1946, pp. 14–17].

On the website of the Department of Economic and Political Geography of Capitalist Countries founded at Moscow State University in 1934 by N.N. Baransky together with Ivan A. Vitver (1891–1966) (now – Socio-Economic Geography of Foreign Countries) it is said that it is the leading center of scientific country studies in Russia.¹ The “Great Russian Encyclopedia” confirms the geographical affiliation of country studies. This is natural, since the author of the article about this subject was the head of this department. According to him, it is “a geographical discipline that comprehensively studies nature, population, economy, culture, social organization and features of the historical development of countries” [Fetisov, 2016].

Country studies abroad was also originally the “patrimony” of geographers first of all (although it should be clearly understood that before the beginning of the 20th century, the attribution of certain travelers or even armchair scientists to a narrow scientific discipline was rather conditional). As a vivid illustration, I mention the fundamental work “The Study of Europe”, written by the famous German scientist Alfred Hettner (1859–1941), a methodologist of geography and one of the creators of the chorological conception² and the second edition of the book, showing the new look of Europe after the First World War, literally in a few years after the publication, was translated into Russian (the first edition of the *Länderkunde von Europa* was published in 1907, the second – in 1922) [Hettner, 1925]. However, it is impossible to agree with such a “geographocentric” approach, especially if it is “Foreign country studies” that is understood by country studies (although, thanks to my basic university education, it is the achievements of geographers who are best known to me). First, in the 20th century, few domestic geographers studied oriental languages

(the exceptions were mainly related to Japan and China), so that the domestic oriental studies, which was engaged in country studies in Asia and Africa, can name only a few dozen geographers among many hundreds of researchers [Miliband, 2008]. Secondly, the complex nature of country studies presupposes deep knowledge not only of the geography of the country of study, but also of its economy, history, politics, culture, etc. Since scientists with different basic education may have a broad outlook, it is hardly surprising that there are not only orientalists, but also well-known researchers of Western civilization countries, along with country-studying geographers with a major specialization in the economy or the recent history of a particular state. Again, we will limit ourselves to just a few examples of those domestic country scientists whose authority is truly indisputable among specialists in the relevant countries: if the Americanist Leonid V. Smirnyagin (1935–2016) was a Doctor of Geographical Sciences, then the Indlogist, the winner of the J. Nehru Prize, Glery K. Shirokov (1930–2005) was a Doctor of Economics, and Robert G. Landa (1931–2021), an Arabist, the largest expert on the Maghreb countries, was a Doctor of Historical Sciences.

Of course, it was geography by the end of the 20th century that offered the most thought-out program of country studies, which is perfectly illustrated by the posthumous publication of the book “Complex Country Studies” by Yakov G. Mashbits (1928–1997). However, the author is more interested in the phenomenon of a comprehensive study of countries as a guarantor of the “integrity of Geography”, its “core”, and History, Ethnography, Economics Demography, Sociology and Political Science are assigned the role of “related disciplines” [Mashbits, 1998, pp. 24–51]. The outstanding Doctor of Geographical Sciences is not bothered neither by the fact that the country studies as a more or less established science at the time of writing the book remained only in Russia and Germany, nor by his own constant appeal to the analysis of his own, and not

foreign countries in the chapter “Supporting elements of complex regional characteristics” (with 18 maps of the USSR and its parts, there are only 4 maps of foreign countries and 5 maps of the world in the text) and much less the lack of dominance of geographers among the authors of the hundreds of regional monographs on foreign states mentioned by him, published in 1950–1990. After 20–25 years, the situation aggravated. There were almost no consolidated regional communities of scientists left in Russia, but those that have remained, even if they study Western countries, are almost not represented by geographers. For example, in the collection, which was published following the results of the 2nd All-Russian Scientific Conference of French Studies, organized jointly by the Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the RAS, the Institute of Europe of the RAS and the Higher School of Economics, there were 24 authors of the article, but no one with a geographical academic degree – only economists, historians, lawyers and political scientists [Klinova et al., 2018]. At the Institute of Latin America of the RAS, several employees, including the director, have a university geographical education, however, if you look at the academic degrees of the members of the Academic Council of the organization, there is not a single Candidate or Doctor of Geographical sciences among 15 people – only 6 economists, 5 politicians and 4 historians³.

In our opinion, “Country Studies” is a complex interdisciplinary science that allows a comprehensive study of modern countries. Again, it is emphasized that we are talking about a “Foreign Country Studies”, because the goals and methods of studying one’s own country will be different. The study of “others” in the general sciences is not identical to “self-knowledge”. The scope of application of the findings also differs in practice at home and abroad. The landings of the local representatives of the district school of geography, who tried to help some developing countries organize their space in an optimal way for the development of the economy, have

remained in the past. Now Russia is more interested in the critical borrowing of foreign experience in carrying out its own institutional transformations, as well as comparative studies that allow a deeper understanding of the fundamental historical processes going on everywhere, but having a bright “country” coloring (the changing role of the capital in the development of the country, modernization of socio-political structures, separatism, etc.). Undoubtedly, there remains the function of “understanding” partner countries to build constructive and mutually beneficial cooperation with them. At the same time, “modernity” should be understood as a temporary category, i.e. it should cover the current period and the necessary retrospective to understand the processes taking place in the country, their forecasting. In other words, almost everything that related to country studies, for example, in the 18th century, has long been transferred to the subject of historical science. Considering that the 20th century became the “golden age” of country studies, it is necessary, in our opinion, to include relevant studies of countries and macro-regions of the world since the turn of the 18th-19th centuries up to the present day in geography, economics in a broad sense (including demography), history, political structure, legal system, and culture.

Of course, there are certain research traditions that force us to draw rather arbitrarily the real boundaries of country studies as a science. In particular, its “legal” branch has never been considered by anyone as part of country studies, which is explained, first of all, by the well-known isolation of jurisprudence. Nevertheless, comparative law, as we see it, is a full-fledged discipline of country studies, which can be successfully developed only at the junction of other areas of country studies and legal sciences.

The linguistic and cultural approach deserves special mention. On the one hand, studying a country without knowing the language is flawed (although there are supporters of a different approach). On the other hand, the philological sciences

themselves have been developing apart from country studies for quite a long period. However, in the 1990s, a new science of “regional studies” began to be constructed in Russia in order to add additional value to linguistic specialties in higher education institutions in market conditions. Although by the end of the 2010s, the most widely cited textbook was a work written by famous geographers [Gladki, Chistobaev, 2016], the discipline “foreign regional studies” in the end was reduced mainly to the synthesis of studying a certain foreign language and mainly “politological” branch (students are taught translation of thematic texts about the socio-political structure of the corresponding country, about the main milestones of its history and art, etc.) or is generally aimed at preparing specialists for the tourist business. Not by chance in 2000 at St. Petersburg State University, where the Geographical Faculty was established for the first time in Russia (in 1925 as part of the General Geographical, Ethnographic and Anthropological departments), there was set up the Department of Country Studies and International Tourism along with the departments of Economic and Social Geography and Regional Policy and Political Geography (now all three are part of the Institute of Sciences of the Earth, representing the public geography) [Sevastyanov, Grigoriev, 2015].

At the same time, we emphasize that such a “practical” turn of country studies was not due to the previous development of this science. Among many other social sciences in the 20th century, country studies have always been one of the most focused on practical needs. In the first half of the last century, domestic country scientists provided the leadership of the country; first of all, with the necessary map of potential military opponents and allies, later the tasks of accumulating comprehensive knowledge about different countries of the world for the development of relations between the Soviet Union and them were added. Separately, it is necessary to note the role of domestic country scientists in the intellectual support of the fight

against colonialism and its consequences. Centuries later, relatively short for world development, a but very dramatic socialist experiment in Russia in a positive way will remain, probably, only as an impulse to de-install the colonial world order and the transition of the global world order to a fairer polycentric system, and without the help of Soviet specialists, many countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America would be unable to ease the severity of at least some of their postcolonial problems. The study of foreign countries made it possible for our country not only to borrow positive experience in the 1980s–1990s or to avoid other people’s mistakes, but also to work out on the material of a separate state a methodology suitable for fundamental research of other countries too, which was perfectly manifested, for example, in approaches to the zoning / regionalization of society [Smirnyagin, 1989]. However, by the beginning of the 21st century, we have to talk, rather, about the crisis of country studies in our country.

The Largest Projects of Soviet Country Studies

Country studies have often been accused of being overly enthusiastic about describing the countries under study in the absence of a deep conceptualization. To a large extent, this is an unfair reproach if we are talking about studying countries in leading universities and academic organizations. The main problem, in our opinion, was the inability of the leaders of the scientific discipline to consolidate the professional community around themselves (through scientific publications, associations, other institutional structures) and clearly articulate the dual nature of the country studies. After all, on the one hand, country studies begins with an in-depth study by the relevant scientists of one or several neighboring (usually having a common historical background) states. On the other hand, a thorough knowledge of only one country provides little material for science, which can remain the property of military strategists

during the cold war and representatives of the recreational country studies in peacetime. Long before the collapse of the bipolar system, solutions to this dilemma were found: V.M. Gokhman and Ya.G. Mashbits proposed the concept of problematic country studies [*Gokhman, Mashbits, 1976*], despite the fact that within the framework of large research programs, it is possible to identify and analyze common problems for countries of a certain type.

The approach to the global problems of mankind, proposed later by a number of economists-geographers, would seem to have consolidated the dominant role of geography in country studies, but in practice, this did not occur. The progress in the consolidation of the Russian scientific community looks particularly strange, given the historically high territorial concentration of relevant research and educational centers. The provision of information about the countries – foreign economic partners (and even more so potential military opponents), as well as the analysis of foreign experience – for the implementation of some achievements of other countries in domestic legislation and administrative practice with the general centralization of science in the USSR predetermined the “metropolitan” nature of country studies as a science. Almost all specialists were concentrated in Moscow and St. Petersburg (Leningrad), with the latter gradually losing importance as political, scientific and educational functions were concentrated in Moscow, and only separate centers of research were allocated outside the two capitals, mainly in border cities (for example, in Vladivostok or Kaliningrad).

If we talk about domestic geographical education as the basis of country studies, then first of all it is necessary to note the creation in 1918 by V.E. Den in the Northern Capital of a department now bearing the name of the Department of Economic and Social Geography of St. Petersburg State University – the foundation for country studies was created there primarily in the 1930s by the efforts of a Doctor of

Economics Sciences, the sinologist Viktor M. Stein (1890–1964), who for several years also headed the Eastern faculty⁴. Until the 1940s, Leningrad remained the country's leading center of Oriental studies in the sense of studying philology and history of various countries and regions of Asia. But already in 1929, the Department of Economic Geography of the USSR was organized at Moscow State University (even before the creation of an independent geographic faculty), where country studies courses were taught, and in 1934 the country's first department of economic and political geography of capitalist countries was dissociated from it. Until 1956, the department was headed by I.A. Vitver, and the next two years – Isaac M. Mayergoyz (1908–1975). The desire to study in more detail the countries that chose the socialist path of development after the Second World War lead to the division of this department into two parts – the Department of Economic Geography of Socialist Countries (which in the 1960s was thought of as having great prospects, and therefore was headed by I.M. Mayergoyz) and the Department of Economic and Political Geography of Capitalist and Developing Countries (it was headed by a young expert in the countries of Latin America Viktor V. Volsky (1921–1999), who later became Director of the Institute of Latin America and a correspondent member of the USSR Academy of Sciences).

MGIMO became the second scientific and educational center of foreign country studies in Moscow since the mid-1940s. The departments of economic geography of the Western countries and the economic geography of the countries of the East were established there; however, already in 1958 they were merged into the Department of World Economics.

At the same time, it is necessary to remember about the actual joining to MGIMO in 1954 of the Moscow Institute of Oriental Studies (created as a result of the integration of the Lazarev Institute and other educational institutions of Oriental studies in 1921). Thus, by the 1960s, MGIMO shifted the focus in

the country studies to the study of economics and history, and later also political science.

In the 1950s, there was also a consolidation of Oriental studies education within the walls of Moscow State University: in 1956, on the basis of the Oriental departments of the Historical and Philological Faculties, the Institute of Oriental Languages was created as a special faculty (some Oriental languages were also taught at the Military Institute of Foreign Languages by that time, but neither there, nor at MGIMO preparation of scientific cadres was practiced). Since 1972, this faculty of Moscow State University has been called the Institute of Asian and African Countries (IAAC), apart from the Historical and Philological departments, the Socio-Economic Department was established, despite the fact that since 1956 the Department of Economics and Economic Geography of Asian and African countries had already been functioning. In 1953, in order to consolidate country studies at the Faculty of Economics of the Moscow State University, two departments were created – the Department of Economics of Capitalist and Colonial Countries and that of Economics of Native Democracy Countries, but already in 1955 they were united into a single Department of Economics of Foreign Countries. With the help of the IAAC, language training for geographers and economists specializing in China, Japan, and Arab countries was carried out at Moscow State University.

In addition to universities, which, although they conducted scientific research, were still more aimed at training highly professional personnel, in the 1950s–1960s, several country studies institutes were created in Moscow within the framework of the USSR Academy of Sciences: Institute of Sinology (1956–1960s, since 1966 recreated as the Institute of the Far East which received new name in 2022 – Institute of China and Modern Asia), the Institute for African Studies (1959), the Institute for Latin America (1961), the Institute for the United States of America (1967, since 1974 – the Institute of the USA and Canada), to which the Institute of Europe was added at the end

of 1987. Country studies were actively developed in a number of multidisciplinary academic institutions: the Institute of Geography, the Institute of World Economy and International Relations, the Institute of Scientific Information on Social Sciences, the Institute of World History, the Institute of Oriental Studies, the Institute of Slavic Studies, and the Institute of World Socialist System Economy (under various names it existed since 1960, in 2005 it was integrated into the Institute of Economics of the Russian Academy of Sciences). Reputable scientific journals were founded on the basis of these organizations, most of which have survived to this day and are at least included in the RSCI database ("Russian shelf" on the Web of Science platform): "Soviet Oriental Studies" (since 1955, after several renamings since 1991 is called "East. Afro-Asian Societies: History and Modernity" / *Oriens*, 12 issues per year), "Asia and Africa Today" (since 1957, 12 issues per year), "World Economics and International Relations" (also since 1957, 12 issues a year, although for the sake of entry into the Web of Science and Scopus databases, the journal had to abandon the dominance of specific country studies articles in favor of general topics that could get more citations), "Latin America" (since 1969, 12 issues per year), "USA: economics, politics, ideology" (since 1970, since 1999 - "USA and Canada: economics, politics, culture" , 12 issues per year), "Problems of the Far East" (since 1972, now 6 issues per year). It was only in 1994 that the magazine for Europeanists "Current Problems of Europe" was added to them, and in 2000 - "Contemporary Europe" (on the basis of INION RAS and Institute of Europe RAS, respectively). In fact, among RSCI journals in the 21st century newcomers with a regional profile did not appear in Russia, except for the partial repurposing of the journal "Outlines of Global Transformations" after 2017, as well as the appearance of the only "status" non-Moscow journal "Baltic Region" (published in Kaliningrad jointly by Kant Baltic Federal University and St. Petersburg State University since 2009).

Separately, we mention the only ongoing publication that does not even have the status of a VAK (Higher Attestation Commission) journal, but has been published since 1971 by the Department of Social Economic Geography of Foreign Countries (until the end of the 1990s, together with the Institute of Latin America) and claimed a pronounced regional profile, – Issues of Economic and Political Geography of Foreign Countries. However, if in the first 22 years 13 issues were published, then after the resumption of publication of collections in 1999, only 7 issues were prepared⁵. In addition to powerful country studies directions for individual macroregions, presented by numerous articles in specialized journals and dozens of scientific monographs, the country studies of the Soviet period became famous for projects that are unique in scale. First of all, let us note the 20 volume edition Countries and Peoples [Countries and Peoples, 1978–1985], awarded the State Prize of the USSR in 1987. The editorial board was headed by the outstanding Russian ethnographer Academician Yulian V. Bromley (1921–1990). Among the leaders of individual volumes there were such famous scientists as the economist and Latin American geographer V.V. Volsky, European geographer V.P. Maksakovskii, ethnographer P.I. Puchkov specializing in Oceania, Afghan and Pakistani historian Yu.V. Gankovsky, arabist historian N.I. Proshin; etc. Nowhere in the world has it been possible to repeat such a comprehensive and, moreover, relatively time-limited series of 18 books with a geographical, ethnographic, historical, socio-economic and political description of all countries of the world, including the republics of the USSR (two more volumes are devoted to general issues: the first to the origin of man, the settlement of the Earth and the modern geography of the world economy, and in the latter – to global problems of humanity). More than 250 scientists worked on the publication, all books are supplied with a rich cartographic material of unique quality. At the same time, modern criticism of the 20-volume book (easily accessible to readers, for example,

thanks to Wikipedia) about the focus on the negative sides of capitalism and the idealization of the communist system can be regarded as motivated (if not envious) by anyone who has actually read this outstanding scientific work.

The second largest project is two series on socio-economic and political development and topical issues of developed capitalist countries, released respectively in 1972–1973 and the early 1980s. The first, 7-volume series, received the general subtitle “Economics and Politics of the Countries of Modern Capitalism”, and the second, already 8-volume series, was subtitled “Modern Monopolistic Capitalism”. To separate books on the USA [Anikin, 1982], Japan [Pevsner, Petrov, Ramses, 1981], the Federal Republic of Germany [Shenaev, Schmidt, Melnikov, 1983]⁶, France [Diligensky, Kuznetsov, 1982]⁷, Great Britain [Madzoevsky, Hesin, 1981]⁸ and Italy [Vasilkov, Kholodkovsky, 1983], as well as small countries of Western Europe [Yudanov, 1984]⁹ a volume about Australia and Canada as the two most characteristic countries of highly developed migrant capitalism was added [Lebedev, 1984]. In each monograph, the research was carried out according to a similar scheme – the country’s place in the modern world, characteristics of the productive forces and structure of the economy, concentration of capital and leading companies, state-monopolistic regulation of the economy, foreign economic relations, aggravation of socio-economic contradictions, social class structure, the situation and struggle of workers, party-political structure and internal political struggle, pivotal problems of foreign policy. This scheme was close to the one proposed by the geographer Ya.G. Mashbits in the program of problematic country studies, where special attention was paid to the pivotal problems of the studied countries (place in world economic relations, resource security studies, structural problems of the economy, social inequality, etc.), with the exception, perhaps, of issues of settlement and inter-district contrasts (however, we emphasize that in the country studies

series of IMEMO RAS, the role of geographers in the author's collectives was minimal).

Special attention should be paid to the work of country scientists on the preparation of popular scientific publications (for example, from the booklet series *At the World Map* which has been published for decades), as well as writing of encyclopedic articles, especially comprehensive country studies descriptions for the Great Soviet Encyclopedia. We will single out separately, both due to the pioneering nature and the depth of the research work presented, the two-volume encyclopedia "Latin America", published at the Institute of Latin America [Volsky, 1979-1982].

At the same time, in the second half of the 20th century, the Russian country acquired its own theoretical foundation, which allowed conducting comparative studies (although, it seems, some country scientists expressed regret about the lack of a more extensive set of concepts, without which, in fact, many scientific disciplines are successfully developing). First of all, we are talking about the typology of countries according to the level of development of capitalism by V.V. Volsky, which was first proposed for more than half a century in the back [Volsky, 1968], but noticeably modified by the end of the 1990s [Volsky, 2009, pp. 251-282], which allowed it to be successfully used in the post-bipolar period of world development. However, it is necessary to recognize the poor knowledge of this typology by domestic social scientists, as well as the cessation of its refinement in the 21st century, although a number of methodological problems have long been overdue, in particular: a clearer definition of the phenomenon of economically medium-developed countries, criteria for classifying countries as small ones, conducting a full-fledged study of African countries. Unfortunately, the achievements of V.V. Volsky's opponents, who proposed the concept of models of economic development as a foundation for country studies (for example [Gutnik, 2002;

Mikulsky, 2003–2005]), also by the 2010s had ceased to be popular with those who should have been engaged in country studies.

Problems of Modern Russian Country Studies

Unfortunately, in the post-Soviet period, in practice, representatives of any science did not try to lead complex country studies in the context of methodology. First of all, this function really should have belonged to economic (social) geography, since the country scientists of another educational tradition (primarily economists and historians) had the opportunity to combine the obtained achievements with a rich theoretical baggage of “their” sciences. In addition to the role of the consolidating personality in history (or rather, its absence among domestic geographers in the 1990s), the departure of economic geography from the bosom of social sciences in Russia was most likely a fatal blow (which, by the way, contradicted the experience of many foreign countries). The misunderstood unity of geographical sciences in modern Russia means that a geographer in a university diploma is determined as a specialist in geography (this is something consisting of landscape studies, geomorphology, glaciology, economic and social geography)¹⁰. A postgraduate student of economics and geography defends a thesis according to the rules of natural sciences, publishing his / her works in geographical journals, which, within the framework of the Russian Academy of Sciences, the mandatory numbers of which are delivered not to the INION RAN, but to the Library of Natural Sciences of the RAS. A successful specialist in social geography wins the competitions of the Russian Science Foundation (RSF) under the heading “Earth Sciences” (07), and not in the humanities and social sciences (08)¹¹. Of course, one can cry out about the need for interdisciplinary research, but the time of scientists-encyclopedians has passed, so, in fact, in the field of social sciences, Russian country studies had to rely mainly on economists and orientalists (mainly historians). But

here the country studies suffered an evil fate too. At the Faculty of Economics of Moscow State University, the Department of Country Studies was transformed into the Department of World Economics (moreover, there are now many such departments in various universities throughout the country, but their employees are engaged in common problems of world development and foreign economic relations, usually poorly representing the specifics of the countries involved in trade and investment relations). In the field of historical sciences, after the death of Yu.V. Bromley, on the wave of integration with the modern American and Western European mainstream, ethnography with its understandable research tools, potentially easily combined with country studies, gave way to socio-cultural anthropology and ethnology. The Oriental studies of historians suffered losses due to problems with their linguistic training. On the one hand, the teaching of basic Oriental languages has expanded (first of all, the UN languages – Chinese and Arabic, as well as Turkish – due to the relative ease of learning and Turkey's close ties with Russia). Training in three dozen state languages of Asian and African countries is maintained (albeit with an admission of students once in several years): MGIMO University even entered the Guinness Book of Records, offering students programs in 53 foreign languages, including more than 20 eastern ones.¹² About 20 languages are offered to students of IAAC at the Moscow State University. On the other hand, the teaching staff is rapidly growing old, so that the teaching of several languages has already been curtailed. The imbalance is increasing between language training and training of specialists in the field of economics and modern history.

The general deplorable state of academic science in the post-Soviet Russia could not spare the country studies. For example, in the early 2000s, an attempt was made to produce a new country studies series, similar to two multi-volume publications of the IMEMO RAS, taking into account modern realities, having studied the place of the economically leading

countries of the world in the global economy and world politics, national models of economic development and the specifics of state regulation, the peculiarities of the political life of countries. However, the project with the addition of a volume about China and the replacement of a consolidated monograph on small countries of Western Europe with a book where the reader could compare in more detail the characteristics of three such countries (Spain, Sweden and Ireland) failed, because for the publication of books initiated by the famous Europeanist Vladimir P. Gutnik (1954–2009) the research program of the Russian Academy of Sciences simply did not have the money. Subsequently, some developments related to the study of European countries were used by the Institute of Europe of the RAS to issue country studies monographs in the series “Old World – New Times” initiated by academician N.P. Shmelev (primarily on Spain [Vernikov, 2007] and Great Britain [Gromyko, 2007], and partly also small countries of Western Europe [Schweitzer, 2009], despite the fact that without the participation of IMEMO RAS employees who produced relevant country studies independently, some other books were published – on France [Rubinski, 2007], Germany [Belov, 2009], etc.). However, having found the money for the first books (including in RHSF), the Institute of Europe of the RAS quickly transformed the series into a brand for any fundamental books about Europe published in this organization. Thus, at the beginning of the 2020s, we can only talk about the revival of the 40-year-old socio-economic and political development of the leading countries of the world almost from scratch – now it is reasonable to make at least a 10-volume project (the Group of Seven Countries, China, India, Brazil), but it would be interesting to add, in our opinion, also an analysis for Spain, the Republic of Korea, Mexico, Australia and Indonesia.

Perhaps one of the failures of post-Soviet country studies was the inability to deploy qualified research on the former republics of the USSR as foreign countries. Unfortunately, the

illusion of the absence of linguistic and cultural barriers predetermined the penetration of a huge number of amateurs into this field of research. It should also be noted that in the 1990s, the scale of training of specialists in the countries of Central and Eastern Europe was significantly reduced, although their experience was very much in demand in the first two decades of market reforms in Russia. It cannot be said that the situation is completely catastrophic, since the actual liquidation of the corresponding department at the Faculty of Geography of Moscow State University (in its place in 1991 the Department of Geography of the World Economy was organized and only Professor E.B. Valev continued to train geographers with Eastern European specialization) was not accompanied by similar processes at the Faculty of History of Moscow State University (the Department of the History of the Southern and Western Slavs is still preparing specialists necessary for the country) or at MGIMO.

The problem of concentration on narrow subjects has become common for many areas of country studies. Most likely, this is due to the general negative trends in the Russian higher education and R&D sphere, usually justified by intellectual rapprochement with the West. In fact, in modern Russia, there is an unwillingness / inability of universities to train specialists in country studies on popular topics, and as a consequence, there is a shortage of teachers in country studies courses and vacancies of researchers in country studies in academic institutes that are not occupied by specialized specialists. This problem is already beginning to arise even when preparing comprehensive encyclopedic articles on individual countries for the "Great Russian Encyclopedia" and its electronic version on the scientific and educational portal "Znania (Knowledge)".

**Instead of a Conclusion.
How to Meet the Current and “Hidden” Demand
for Regional Knowledge in Russia?**

In my opinion, there is a painstaking work to be done to revive domestic country studies, and it should be done without delay, until in Russia there is still a sufficient number of specialists, even if they are often already of advanced age. Most likely, it is necessary to start with the parallel intensified development of two branches – “Western country studies” and “Oriental country studies” – but with their close interaction. The basis for “Oriental country studies”, most likely, can be the IAAC at the Moscow State University, although we should not forget about other Moscow, as well as St. Petersburg and other regional universities.

The problem of the base of the “Western country studies” is more complicated, but three metropolitan universities undoubtedly have the potential: Moscow State University (although at the moment no faculty is likely capable of solving such a task independently), MGIMO and the Higher School of Economics. The training of specialists (at first, apparently, at the master’s level, taking into account the existing diversity of geographical, historical oriental bachelor’s educational programs, as well as possible partnership with academic institutions) should be carried out with an eye to their employment in the specialty, for which the heads of faculties and departments should at least be interested in the needs of employers from the scientific and the expert-analytical sphere. You can also recall the Soviet practice of training specialists with a broad outlook on a particular country but with a deep knowledge of some subject area (for example, a Germanist is an energy specialist or a French specialist is a specialist in automotive engineering).

The demand for serious regional expertise is indicated, in particular, by the constant problems of modern Russia in a

number of areas of foreign policy and world economic relations. There is an obvious shortage of personnel trained to analyze the internal political situation in the post-Soviet republics and predict the change of elites, as well as the changes in relations with Russia itself associated with this process. The inability to take into account the specifics of numerous small and medium-sized countries of the global South regularly leads to the inability of our country to ensure the support of its initiatives in the international arena. Ignorance of potential economic partners in large developing countries, ignoring the real interests of local business-elites, including regional ones, leads to the fact that Russian business, even offering interesting conditions of cooperation, often loses out to rents. However, it would be naive to think that this demand can be satisfied only by the efforts of the scientific community with the passivity of officials: many issues, and this was perfectly illustrated by Soviet practice, are successfully solved only with the proper coordination of diplomats, intelligence services, representatives of large enterprises (and in market conditions their role has increased many times) and scientists. Unfortunately, both the government and business in Russia do not want to “play for a long time” yet, and the existing planning with a horizon of several months to 1–2 years, of course, will not be able to compete with the country studies education and the study of foreign countries at a high professional level.

At the same time, the entire infrastructure directly for the development of scientific activity in the domestic country studies is preserved: at least five specialized academic institutes (and even more organizations with country studies departments), a dozen journals with an index in RSCI, the presence of suitable items in the passports of several scientific specializations of the Higher Attestation Commission of Russia, etc. Rather, it is a question of incentives for truly revolutionary steps. In particular, how can a large Russian transnational business co-finance the systematic training of country studies specialists with specific

knowledge of the economic and political realities of countries where domestic companies seek to expand their presence in the market by winning the competition with the Americans, Chinese or Western Europeans? How to institutionally implement major country studies programs – both according to the proposals made in the previous section of the article to study a significant number of countries under a single program, and for a comprehensive study of countries that have now become *terra incognita* for Russia? For example, why do we have almost no specialists in Russia for the development of economic ties and knowledge of the domestic political situation in countries such as Indonesia, Iran, Taiwan Island, Thailand or Australia (and even in Europe there are “white spots”, such as Belgium and Ireland)? It is not clear what prevents Russian researchers from building a closer dialogue with scientists from the countries under study – from presenting our capabilities, as China does, for example, when conducting forums on cooperation with Africa¹³, to implementing joint research (including grants from the Russian Science Foundation under the section “humanities and social sciences”).

Of course, a lot of efforts, not related to the direct organization of publication of scientific papers will be required from the scientific leaders of country studies as a complex interdisciplinary field. First of all, we must note the tasks of convincing officials of the need for organizational and financial support for the study, to identify the “hidden” and at the same time solvent demand for country studies expertise from large Russian companies, and finally, to establish closer ties with partners in the countries studied.

Notes

1. Department of Socio-Economic Geography of foreign countries // Geographical Faculty of Lomonosov Moscow State University // <http://www.geogr.msu.ru/cafedra/segzs/>, accessed 01.12.2021.

2. Apparently, this concept became one of the arguments for the Leningrad country scientists who organized the translation of the book by the German scientist. According to A. Gettner, the main essence of geography is to clarify the spatial distribution of phenomena on Earth and explain the causes of such distributions, their significance for the country. To understand the current distribution, of course, some knowledge of their past is necessary, but such an understanding also gives some key to foreseeing the future, i.e. geography connects the past and the future, as it were. At the same time, the new country studies are reduced mainly to the distribution, interpretation and description of geographical landscapes (not only natural-scientific, but also cultural-historical and economic). All those objects of the earth's surface that reveal local features that can influence other areas and series of phenomena are subject to chorological study. In addition to geography as a chorological science, there is history, a chronological science, whose task is to identify the distribution of phenomena over time. Finally, the essences of the phenomena themselves and their classifications relate to the tasks of special, systematic sciences (geology, botany, etc., including meteorology studying atmospheric physics and other parts of physical geography) [*Berg et al.*, 1925, P. 4–7, 33–42; *Hettner*, 1925, P. 3, 14].
3. Page of the Scientific Council of ILA RAS: <http://www.ilaran.ru/?n=19>, accessed 01.12.2021.
4. In 1925–1934, at the Faculty of Geography of the Leningrad University, created as a result of joining the Geographical Institute to Leningrad State University, there was a separate department of country studies, which was created and headed by the future academician Lev S. Berg (1876–1950). At the same time, country studies (along with landscape studies) were understood by him in a chorological sense – as the fundamental principle of a unified geography, which naturally ended with the accession of the Department of country studies of the Leningrad State University to the Department of Physical Geography in 1934.
5. Publications of the department // Faculty of Geography of Moscow State University. M.V. Lomonosov // <http://www.geogr.msu.ru/cafedra/segzs/nauchd/pubs/>, accessed 11/30/2021.
6. M. Schmidt headed a team of co-authors from the Institute of World Politics and Economics of the GDR, whereas in the first series of the FRG it was completely written by Soviet scientists [Shenaev, 1973].
7. It should be noted that only in the case of France there was a change of the head of the author's team in ten years: in the early 1970s it was headed by Yu.I. Rubinsky [Rubinsky, 1973].

8. S.P. Madzoevsky is one of the pseudonyms of the famous Soviet intelligence officer Donald McLane, a former high-ranking British diplomat who lived in the USSR since 1955.
9. In 1973, the proposal of the famous economist Yu.I. Yudanov, who defended his doctoral dissertation on the capital investments of small Western European countries in 1967, to consider not only the leading, but also small countries when characterizing modern capitalism was revolutionary for Soviet science [Yudanov, 1972].
10. It is easy to get acquainted with the directions of training of modern domestic geographers on the website of the leading geographical faculty in the country – at Lomonosov Moscow State University: <http://www.geogr.msu.ru/education/vo/mag/>, accessed 30.11.2021.
11. Russian Science Foundation Classifier: <https://rscf.ru/contests/classification/>, accessed 30.11.2021.
12. Teaching foreign languages at MGIMO (schools) // MGIMO // <https://mgimo.ru/languages/teaching/>, accessed 30.11.2021.
13. Forum on China-Africa Cooperation. Research Institutes // http://www.focac.org/eng/lhyj_1/yjjg/, accessed 30.11.2021.

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