**DEVELOPMENT AND LEGACY OF EURASIANISM:**

**HISTORICAL AND SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS**

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**ABSTRACT**

This article investigates the evolution and enduring legacy of Eurasianism, a Russian ideological movement originating in the early 20th century and resurging in the late 20th century. Utilizing historical and socio-political analysis, the study examines the factors contributing to Eurasianism's emergence and its core tenets, including the rejection of Eurocentrism, emphasis on geographical determinism and cultural pluralism, and the centrality of spiritual values. The development of classical Eurasian thought in the 1920s and 1930s is traced, highlighting the contributions of key figures like Peter Savitsky and Nikolai Trubetskoy. The resurgence of Eurasianism in the late 20th century is then analysed, focusing on the impact of Lev Gumilev's theory of ethnogenesis and its implications for Russian identity and foreign policy. The article concludes by assessing Eurasianism's broader social and political impact, examining its role in shaping contemporary discourse and policy debates in Russia and the wider Eurasian region.

**Keywords:** Eurasianism, Russian identity, Cultural pluralism, Geopolitics, Nationalism

1. **Introduction**

**Emerging from the Russian Revolution and the tumultuous early Soviet period, the Eurasian movement represented a distinctive intellectual and philosophical response to the identity crises and political upheavals faced by Russian émigrés.** Disillusioned with both Western liberalism and Soviet communism, these intellectuals sought to forge a new path for Russia that would overcome the perceived limitations of both the European and Asian models. At its core, Eurasianism rejected the dominant Eurocentric worldview, which they saw as inherently biased and exclusionary, and sought to redefine Russia’s place in the world by emphasizing its unique Eurasian identity (Laruelle, 2008).

This Eurasian identity was deeply rooted in the vast geographical expanse of Eurasia, a territory stretching from Eastern Europe to Central Asia and encompassing a diverse mosaic of cultures, languages, and religions. Eurasianists, such as Nikolai Trubetskoy in his seminal work Europe and Mankind (1927), argued that this geographical expanse contributed to the formation of a common historical experience and a distinct cultural identity for the peoples of Eurasia that differed significantly from that of Western Europe. They imagined Eurasia as a unique civilization with its own values, traditions, and destiny.

Although Eurasianism initially flourished among Russian intellectuals in exile in the 1920s and 1930s, its influence spread far beyond this initial period. **The revival of Eurasian thought in the late twentieth century, led by figures such as Lev Gumilev, whose controversial theories of ethnogenesis and the biosphere sparked renewed interest in Eurasian identity (Gumilev, 1989), further strengthened its importance in shaping contemporary political and social discourse in Eurasia.**

This article aims to analyse the evolution of Eurasian thought over the course of the twentieth century, looking at both its classical phase and its subsequent revival. **It will examine the key elements of Eurasian ideology, the critique of Eurocentrism, the emphasis on geographical determinism and cultural pluralism, and the affirmation of spiritual values.** In addition, the socio-political impact of Eurasianism is assessed, emphasizing its role in shaping intellectual debate, cultural expression, and political decision-making in Russia and beyond, especially in the context of contemporary geopolitical shifts and the rise of new regional powers.

# Genesis of classical Eurasianism (1920s-1930s)

The birth of classical Eurasianism in the 1920s and 1930s was inextricably linked to the tumultuous historical and social context of life in the Russian émigré community. Displaced by the Russian Revolution of 1917 and the ensuing civil war, these intellectuals, many of whom had been prominent figures in pre-revolutionary Russia, found themselves in an alien world. They struggled with the loss of their homeland, a deep sense of cultural unsettlement, and a longing for a new identity that could reconcile their Russian heritage with the realities of exile (Glebov, 2017).

Peter Savitsky, a geographer and economist, played a key role in shaping the Eurasian worldview. In his seminal work *The Continent of Eurasia* (1921), he challenged the dominant Eurocentric view by emphasising the geopolitical significance of the Eurasian ‘heartland’. Savitsky argued that this continent, with its unique geographical features and diverse ethnic groups, had contributed to a common historical experience and cultural identity that distinguished Eurasia from Western Europe (Savitsky, 1921). He also developed the concept of ‘place development’ (mestorazvitie), which emphasised the importance of the natural environment in shaping cultural development.

After the split of the Eurasianist movement, Lev Karsavin withdrew from the mainstream branch of Eurasianism, while Peter Savitsky began to develop his own structural theological geosophy (periodic system of being, as Savitsky also called it) based on ontological structuralism in co-authorship with Nikolai Trubetskoy and Roman Jacobson. The basic idea of Savitsky’s concept was the notion that all levels of being are permeated by organisational ideas, or eidos, which allows us to consider action in the universe as a manifestation of a general periodic law. Savitsky’s ideas were deeply developed in the context of ontological structuralism and the influence of the ideas of nomogenesis of the anti-Darwinist Lev Berg, which was consonant with Eurasian views on the relationship between landscape and culture.

Nikolai Trubetskoy, a linguist and ethnographer, further strengthened the framework of Eurasianism by emphasising the cultural unity of Eurasia. In works such as *Europe and Mankind* (1927) and *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (1939), he argued that the diverse languages and cultures of the region shared common roots and historical interaction, forming a coherent Eurasian cultural sphere. Trubetskoy’s linguistic research, especially his work on linguistic typology, provided a strong intellectual foundation for the Eurasian movement, emphasising the interconnectedness of language, culture and identity.

Other prominent figures have also contributed to the development of Eurasian thought. Georges Florovsky, a religious philosopher, emphasised the spiritual foundations of Eurasian identity, often linking it to the traditions of Orthodox Christianity and the concept of collective symphonicity (sobornost), or spiritual community (Florovsky, 1937). Peter Suvchinsky, an art historian, focused on the artistic manifestations of Eurasian culture, emphasising its unique aesthetic traditions and their connection to the broader Eurasian worldview (Suvchinsky, 1992).

The concept of Eurasia emerged as the result of the collective work of scholars from various fields of knowledge, including history, music, geography, linguistics, religious and philosophical teachings, cultural studies, economics and the analysis of civilisations. Important sources for the development of this concept were the works of historians Sergei Soloviev, Afanasy Shchapov and Vasily Klyuchevsky, who emphasised the role of landscape and geographical factors in Russian history, as well as the theory of cultural-historical types of Nikolai Danilevsky and the ideas of the Slavophiles of the early 19th century. The founders of the Eurasian concept also looked to classical European scholars, including the works of Sir Mackinder, French linguistics and a civilizational approach close to the views of Oswald Spengler. Patrick Serio pointed out the relationship of the concepts of Nikolai Trubetskoy and Roman Jacobson to Platonic and Hegelian scholarship.

A sense of displacement and disillusionment with both Western liberalism and Soviet communism, as Bassin (2016) argues, created fertile ground for the emergence of Eurasian thought. Eurasianism offered an alternative, rejecting the perceived limitations of the European and Asian models and proposing a unique path for Russia based on its distinctive Eurasian heritage. At its core, Eurasianism was a complex and multifaceted concept that encompassed a wide range of ideas and perspectives

# Main elements of Eurasian ideology

Eurasianism has coalesced around several core ideological tenets that distinguish it from prevailing Western and Soviet ideologies, offering a unique perspective on identity, culture and geopolitics.

* 1. Rejection of Eurocentrism

A fundamental tenet of Eurasianism was a strong rejection of Eurocentrism, the belief in the superiority and universality of Western European culture and values. Eurasians such as Nikolai Trubetskoj argued in his work *Europe and Mankind* (1927) that Western civilisation, with its emphasis on individualism, rationalism and material progress, was not only inappropriate to the unique historical and cultural context of Eurasia, but actively harmful to its development. Instead, they advocated a Eurasian path of development that would draw on the diverse cultural traditions and historical experiences of the region, emphasising the importance of communal values, spirituality and harmonious relations with nature.

* 1. Geographic determinism

Eurasianism placed a strong emphasis on the role of geography in the formation of political and cultural identity. The Eurasian ‘heartland’, a vast expanse stretching from Eastern Europe to Central Asia, was seen as the geographical core of a distinct Eurasian civilisation. This centre, with its unique climate, topography and natural resources, was believed to have contributed to the formation of a common historical experience and cultural identity among the various people inhabiting it. Peter Savitskij, in his seminal work *The* *Continent Eurasia* (1921), developed this concept, arguing that the vast steppes and harsh climate of the central region had formed a nomadic culture characterised by stability, adaptability and a strong sense of community.

* 1. Cultural pluralism

While recognising the cultural diversity of Eurasia, Eurasians also emphasised the common historical experience and cultural interaction that unites different ethnic and religious groups. They favoured a model of cultural pluralism that would respect and celebrate the unique traditions of each group while fostering a sense of shared Eurasian identity. This approach contrasted with both Western assimilationist models that sought to impose European cultural norms on other societies and Soviet attempts to homogenise cultural differences within a single communist ideology. Trubetskoj’s linguistic studies, especially his work on linguistic typology in *The Legacy of Genghis Khan* (1939), provided a solid intellectual foundation for this cultural pluralism, emphasising the interconnectedness of language, culture and identity.

* 1. Spiritual values

Spirituality, often associated with Orthodox Christianity, played a central role in Eurasian identity. Eurasians believed that spiritual values such as communalism, compassion, and honouring traditions were essential to the well-being and prosperity of Eurasian society. They saw Orthodox Christianity as a unifying force that transcended ethnic and cultural differences, providing a common spiritual foundation for Eurasian unity. This is evidenced in the writings of Georges Florovskij, who explored the spiritual foundations of Russian culture and identity in works such as *Ways of Russian Theology* (1937). However, Eurasianists also acknowledged the importance of other religious traditions in Eurasia, such as Islam and Buddhism, and stressed the need for interreligious dialogue and cooperation. The emphasis on spirituality also extended to a broader sense of reverence for nature and a rejection of the materialistic values of Western capitalism.

* 1. Historical Mission

Eurasians believed that Eurasia had a unique historical mission in the world. They saw the region as a bridge between East and West, a place where different cultures and traditions could meet and interact. They believed that Eurasia had the potential to create a new civilisation that would overcome the limitations of the European and Asian models. On a philosophical basis, drawing mainly on geography, ethnography, linguistics and religion, the Eurasians created their own concept of Central Eurasia, in which the countries of the former Russian Empire had a natural unity. In their opinion, the period of the Tatar-Mongol yoke was positive for the development of the state and the preservation of Orthodoxy. In other words, they viewed such historical events as the Mongol invasion or the reign of Genghis Khan as the development of a unique “steppe civilisation” within Central Eurasia.

# Revival of Eurasianism (late 20th century)

The end of the 20th century was marked by a significant revival of Eurasian thought, largely fuelled by the controversial ideas of Lev Gumilev. A historian and ethnologist, Gumilev developed a theory of ethnogenesis that attempted to explain the rise and decline of ethnic groups through a combination of biological, geographical and cultural factors (Gumilev 1989). He postulated that the Eurasian steppe, with its unique ecological conditions and cyclical climate, played a crucial role in the formation and development of Eurasian ethnic groups, influencing their social structures, cultural practices and historical trajectories.

Gumilev’s ideas, although often criticised for their lack of scientific rigour, reductionist tendencies and the possibility of ethnocentric interpretations (Shnirelman, 1995), resonated with a growing sense of disillusionment/dissatisfaction with the Soviet ideology and a yearning for a new national identity in the late Soviet era (Laruelle, 2008). His emphasis on the historical and cultural uniqueness of Eurasia, as well as his attention to the role of charismatic leaders (‘passionaries’) and collective identity in shaping historical events, appealed to those seeking an alternative to the dominant Marxist-Leninist narrative, which was increasingly perceived as sterile and uninteresting.

In the post-Soviet era, Eurasianism gained new relevance as Russia faced the challenges of political and economic transformation. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent loss of superpower status led to a search for new ideological foundations for Russian identity and foreign policy. Eurasianism, with its emphasis on Russia’s unique Eurasian heritage, rejection of Western dominance, and emphasis on regional integration, offered a compelling alternative to the Western-centred liberalism that dominated the early post-Soviet years (Bassin, 2016). Eurasian thinkers such as Alexander Dugin developed these ideas, advocating the creation of an “Eurasian empire”, that would challenge the unipolar world order dominated by the United States (Dugin, 1997).

However, the revival of Eurasianism has also raised concerns about its ability to fuel nationalist and authoritarian tendencies. Some critics have argued that Gumilev’s theories, with their emphasis on the biological and geographical determinants of ethnic identity, could be used to justify exclusionary and discriminatory policies (Shnirelman, 1995). Others have expressed concern that Eurasianism could be used by political forces seeking to legitimise authoritarian rule and expansionist foreign policy, as seen in the rhetoric of some Russian nationalist groups and politicians (Laruelle, 2015). Despite these criticisms, Eurasianism continues to have a significant influence on contemporary Russian political discourse.

# The social impact of Eurasianism and its political implications

The influence of Eurasianism was deeply intertwined with both the social and political spheres, leaving an indelible mark on intellectual debates and policy decisions throughout the twentieth century and beyond.

5.1 Social impact:

In the early stages of its development, Eurasianism resonated primarily with Russian émigré intellectuals and cultural figures disillusioned by the consequences of the revolution. It provided them with a basis for understanding Russia’s unique historical and cultural trajectory, different from both Western Europe and Soviet communism (Glebov, 2017). By emphasising a shared Eurasian identity, it fostered a sense of community and purpose among these displaced intellectuals. Eurasian ideas also found some support in the Soviet Union, especially among those who felt alienated by official ideology and sought a deeper connection to their cultural roots, although this was often met with suspicion or outright hostility by the Soviet authorities.

The revival of Eurasianism in the late 20th century greatly broadened its social appeal. Lev Gumilev’s theory of ethnogenesis, with its emphasis on cultural identity and historical destiny, resonated with a broad audience searching for meaning and purpose amid the collapse of the Soviet Union and the social and political upheaval that followed (Bassin, 2016). Eurasianism has been the subject of lively debate in intellectual circles, influencing discussions about history, culture and national identity. It was also reflected in popular culture: Eurasian themes began to appear in literature, art and music, reflecting a broader interest in exploring and reclaiming Russia’s Eurasian heritage.

5.2 Political implications:

The political implications of Eurasianism were complex and varied. In the early twentieth century, its influence was largely confined to intellectual and cultural circles, and its direct political impact was limited. However, its critique of Western domination and emphasis on Russia’s unique Eurasian identity laid the foundation for subsequent political movements that sought to challenge the Western-centred world order (Laruelle, 2008).

In the late 20th and early 21st centuries, Eurasianism became increasingly influential in Russian political discourse. Its emphasis on regional integration, multipolarity and the Eurasian sphere of influence resonated with those who sought to resist Western hegemony (Laruelle, 2015). Eurasian ideas have been used to justify closer ties with Central Asian states, promote cultural and economic co-operation within the Eurasian Economic Union and argue for a tougher Russian foreign policy. In particular, Alexander Dugin, a prominent contemporary Eurasian thinker, openly advocated the creation of a ‘Eurasian empire’ that would challenge the existing world order (Dugin, 1997).

However, the revival of Eurasianism has also raised concerns about its potential to foster nationalist and authoritarian tendencies. Some critics argue that the emphasis on cultural identity and historical destiny can be used to justify isolationist policies and aggressive actions abroad, especially towards neighbouring countries with significant Russian populations (Shnirelman, 1995). The appropriation of Eurasian ideas by some political figures and movements, such as the nationalist Eurasian Party founded by Dugin in 2002, has further reinforced these concerns, leading to debates about the potential dangers of Eurasianism as a political ideology.

Overall, the social and political impact of Eurasianism has been significant and lasting. It has shaped intellectual debates, influenced cultural expression, and informed/ignited/reinforced political decision-making in Russia and beyond. Its legacy continues to be the subject of ongoing debate and analysis, highlighting its complex and multifaceted role in shaping the social and political landscape of Eurasia.

# Conclusion

Born in the crucible of the turbulent events of the early 20th century, the Eurasian movement left an indelible mark on the intellectual, social and political landscape of Eurasia. As this article argues, Eurasianism is not just a political ideology, but a complex and multifaceted worldview that has evolved and adapted to changing historical conditions, demonstrating remarkable resilience and adaptability.

From its origins among Russian émigrés seeking a new identity in the 1920s and 1930s, as elaborated in works such as Sergei Glebov’s *From Empire to Eurasia* (2017), to its revival in the late twentieth century, fuelled in part by the controversial theories of Lev Gumilev (Bassin, 2016), Eurasianism has consistently challenged dominant Western narratives. It offered an alternative vision of Russia and its place in the world, based on the unique geographical, cultural and historical context of the region and emphasising a ‘third way’ route from both Western liberalism and Soviet communism.

The basic tenets of Eurasianism - the rejection of Eurocentrism (Trubetskoy, 1927), the emphasis on geographical determinism (Savitsky, 1921) and cultural pluralism (Trubetskoy, 1939), and the centrality of spiritual values (Florovsky, 1928) - resonated with various social groups, from intellectuals to political leaders, and influenced political discourse throughout the twentieth century and into the present day. This enduring appeal emphasises the movement’s ability to tap into deep-seated anxieties and aspirations related to identity, belonging and historical destiny.

The importance of Eurasian thought for understanding the historical and contemporary political landscape of Eurasia cannot be overemphasised. As Marlene Laruelle argues in *In the Name of the Nation* (2008), Eurasianism allows us to understand the motivations behind various political movements, from nationalist and pan-Slavist groups to more recent geopolitical strategies such as the Eurasian Economic Union. It also sheds light on the cultural foundations of national identity in Russia and other Eurasian states, as well as the ongoing debate about Russia’s relationship with the West. By examining the evolution of Eurasianism and its impact on the social and political spheres, we gain a deeper understanding of the complex forces that have shaped the Eurasian region in the twentieth and twenty-first centuries.

Looking ahead, there are several potential directions for future research on Eurasianism and its legacy. These include:

# Further explore the intellectual debates within the Eurasian movement, investigating the different perspectives and disagreements among Eurasian thinkers.

# A more nuanced analysis of its social impact on different groups/classes, examining how Eurasian ideas were perceived and interpreted by different social groups in Russia.

# A critical examination of its appropriation by contemporary political actors, analysing how Eurasianism has been used in the modern world.

Comparative studies of Eurasianism with other regionalist and nationalist movements provide valuable insights into broader global trends related to identity formation, nationalism and regionalism in the face of globalisation and Western hegemony. By continuing to engage with the rich and complex legacy of Eurasian thought, we can deepen our understanding of the historical and contemporary forces shaping Eurasia and contribute to a more nuanced and informed dialogue about its future.

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