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Internationalization Legacies and Collaboration Challenges: Post-Imperial Hybrids and Political Fallouts in Russian Higher Education

Abstract This study conceptualizes the internationalization of higher education as a legacy-bound response driven by geopolitical, cultural and economic dependencies. It examines the Russian case, and considers how Russian academics deal with complex sets of dependencies and rivalries, while sorting European, Asian and Soviet drivers in university positioning and partnership-building. The paper re-evaluates the path dependence perspective in the higher education literature by arguing that, notwithstanding the constructs and conveniences they are predisposed to select, academics have a choice to either comply with, or defy the governmental and institutional legacies imposed on them. The prevalence of one choice over the other, as well as an inconsistency of choices, shapes a complicated trajectory that can be referred to as “hybrid” development. This paper illustrates the progression of “hybrid” development by reflecting on the Russian legacy of imperial ambitions affecting the fragility of the global architecture of knowledge, policy development, cooperation and rule of law.

Keywords higher education, internationalization, Russia, Eurasian perspectives, Soviet legacies

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many Russian universities made notable efforts to reach out to the global community of science, and incorporate new forms of governance, teaching and learning, as well as competitive research (Salmi & Froumin, 2013). However, over the course of the reforms, the openings in the higher education system appeared to run up against a number of closures, as radical

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systemic and institutional changes caused some academics to protect their entitlements by obstructing the introduction of challenging globally- oriented standards (Johnson, 2014). Moreover, local reformers faced the inescapable reality of pervasive corruption, bureaucracy and Soviet legacies that often breed complacency, a sense of supremacy and resistance to transformations (Osipian, 2012; Esyutina, Fearon, & Leatherbarrow, 2013; Chirikov & Gruzdev, 2014).

To overcome the challenges and advance the transformative effort, Russian higher education reformers resorted to engaging foreign human and institutional agencies (Gounko & Smale, 2007). The number of English language study programs, cross-border collaborative programs, and student exchanges increased markedly over the last two decades (Frumina & West, 2012). However, while some Russian universities and disciplinary fields succeeded in building useful linkages abroad (Pislyakov & Shukshina, 2014), the vast majority of university communities remained confused about the roles and values of internationalization in higher education (Yudkevich, 2014, see p. 1469). Indeed, the Russian transformational context was littered with political contradictions, economic disparities, and cultural divides that were a legacy of the Soviet past, and which hindered clear-headed decisiveness among university authorities regarding outreach to the world (Daniels, 1985; Graham & Dezhina, 2008).

Hesitations and ambiguities are understandable if one looks into the historical legacies of Russian higher education. Russian scientists confronted numerous political and economic adversities over the last three centuries: e.g., tight security oversight during tsarist times; the Soviet Red Terror against professor-returnees; and intensive colonization of universities in the occupied and controlled territories of the Caucasus, Central Asia, Eastern Europe and East Asia in the subsequent decades (Graham, 1993; Connelly, 2000; Druzhilov, 2012; Rannut, 2012); the post-Soviet pauperization of science resulting from economic decline and brain drain (Graham & Dezhina, 2008); as well as enhanced security oversight under Putin's regime (Chernykh, 2014, September). The developmental path of Russian higher education has been under strict governmental control almost without exception. Political authorities not only limited academic choices with regard to international outreach, but also imposed strict accountability schemes that correlated with the central government's policies on relations with the outside world. What emerged in the process of various political and cultural convergences in Russian higher education was a post-imperial hybrid product that mixed soft and hard power, and as such, had little appeal locally or globally.

Russian history of state surveillance over higher education at home, as well as intervention in political developments abroad (Connelly, 2000), are a significant element of internationalization developing along hybrid lines. Previous studies on internationalization of higher education presented a variety of perspectives on the political, cultural, economic and academic purposes of modern university outreach (de Wit, 2002, 2004; Knight, 2004). A number of publications dealt specifically with the contextual complexity facing Russian academics, as they encountered global higher education (Goukko & Smale, 2007; Johnson, 2014). However, what has been lacking is an examination of the legacy-bound responses to globalization, and the emerging hybridity of academic choices in cases when human and institutional agencies are torn between the past and the present.

This paper conceptualizes the legacy-led development in the internationalization of higher education as a conflict between institutional path dependence and personal choice-making trajectories, shaped by political interventions. The following sections outline the conceptual framework for examining how deliberate and random choices emerge in higher education structures. Next, the paper outlines some findings from previous studies on the international engagements of academics and political tensions experienced in the Russian Federation. The concluding part offers some deliberations for subsequent studies in this area, as well as implications for the impact of the country's legacies on various cross-border linkages and transnational alliances, such as that of the BRICS.

Internationalization: Legacy and Choice-Making in Higher Education

Internationalization has been variably described in the higher education literature as a process and an outcome of systemic and institutional responses that evolved over a long historical period, but ultimately came to be attributed mostly to globalization (de Wit, 2004; Knight, 2004). In the process of internationalization, universities and academics tend to incorporate cross-cultural and/or international dimensions into their curricula, research frameworks, and institutional governance. Some of the responses are devised in view of growing contextual pressures, and dealt with as part of a wider strategy of global outreach; others may appear as reactions to fleeting trends and are implemented sporadically. Environmental conditions determine the varying positions of communities of interest, among which some have more power and legitimacy to mitigate (or

preserve) the “nested tensions” in the policy-making and organizational constructs of higher education systems and universities (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2010; Pinheiro, Geschwind, & Aarrevaara, 2014). While universities and academics try to identify the best fitting options among competing influences, they cannot disregard the traditions and cultures of their institutions, as well as the resource dependencies emerging from stakeholder interactions and demands (see for example, Froumin & Salmi, 2009).

The theorists of path dependence point to a certain DNA code, which is formed over the course of organizational evolution, and which begins to frame institutional policies and strategies in predetermined directions over time (Christensen & Eyring, 2011). While some of these codes may indeed play foundational roles in university development, the literature has also shown that predetermined choice-making can be radically reprogrammed by forceful individuals, either academics or administrators, who resist compliance with contextual and institutional norms (Clark, 1998). The reprogramming appears to be particularly conspicuous in situations when universities and their units face environmental threats, and have to implement radical survival measures.

At the same time, university transformations are characterized by numerous embedded divides, applicable to multidisciplinary multiunit campuses. International collaborations appear to be subject to the defining characteristics of various disciplines, institutional departments, and status positions that exhibit distinctive sensitivity to external pressures, and have different perspectives on the urgency of change and the need for institutional responsiveness (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2010). Even in the same faculty boardroom, professors, administrators and students hold various interpretations of partnership, origins, priorities, and implementation schemes (Oleksiyenko, 2008; Goodall, 2009). Among other choices, procrastination or non-decision can evolve into a convenient response, especially when individual freedoms may be compromised by change-makers (Clark, 1972).

Collaborative choices can be affected by significant political asymmetries embedded in the systemic differences. Not all academic environments are predisposed to tolerance and consideration of opposing values and perspectives through open-minded debates and critical interactions. Historically, some societies have shown a tendency to slide into political apathy or support of despotic regimes. While initially suppressing the freedoms of minorities (ethnic, intellectual, gender, sexual), such environments eventually move on to similar measures against the

majority. A collection of studies on *Universities under Dictatorship*, by John Connelly and Michael Grüttner (2005), describe a range of political and cultural developments in which universities ended up repressed, restructured, and pressured to curtail free-thinking and dissent. Indeed, political parties and governments can steer academics into intellectual and organizational frames that serve the needs of the privileged elites and their ideologies. Certain regimes may not only control and constrain national environments, but also impose totalitarian frames on colonized neighbor-states. For example, the Stalinist regime advanced the political and cultural domination of the former colonies of tsarist Russia, and later, the occupied parts of Eastern Europe (initially the Baltic states, and then East Germany, Poland, and Czechoslovakia) and allied states in East Asia (China, Mongolia, and Vietnam). The Soviets used repressive forms (e.g., indoctrination, surveillance, dissent suppression), while internationalizing higher education systems in the so-called “friendly socialist regimes” in the “near abroad” and elsewhere (Connelly, 2000; Baker, Köhler, & Stock, 2007).

In the context of broadly defined or competing dimensions of various global flows and their impacts (e.g., political, economic, cultural; Marginson & Sawir, 2005), internationalization as an institutional response can emerge as a legacy-driven series of convenient, sporadic, or determined epistemic initiatives, which are attractive to some academics and abhorrent to others. Past practices and lessons learned, as well as allegiances to certain cultural norms, strongly influence individual engagement in boundary-crossing initiatives, but also contribute to the formation or dissolution of institutional policies with regard to collaborative environments (Jones & Oleksiyenko, 2011). Governments may apply various policy instruments to generate compliance with all or some of these policies. They may also leave it up to the academic strategists to base their decisions on precedents, if these suit governmental expectations.

Personal choices regarding engagement and disengagement may conceal a threat of violating academic freedom, if positioned against the opposing choices of others, although the range of choices across a wide institutional spectrum, as well as the right to make such choices, predisposes academics to practice freedom. Studies on academic freedom point to numerous tensions that arise when local communities experience discrepancies in attitudes and cultural legacies (Tierney & Lanford, 2014). Interpretations of freedom may become problematic, when the notion and its implications are either boxed-in or over-contextualized, as may occur in the process of institutional strategizing. As academic partnerships become subject to

governmental and institutional regulations, collaborative choices are inevitably affected by how universities define their previous achievements. The tensions that result from stakeholders choosing between legacies and innovations are further discussed in the subsequent sections.

Legacies and Hybrids: Russian Experiences

Periods of modernization in Russian higher education and science were usually short and coincided with radical political and economic reforms (e.g., Graham, 1993; Froumin & Salmi, 2009; Androushchak, Kuzminov, & Yudkevich, 2013). The periodic openings of the system, and ensuing modernization efforts, seemed to make Russian higher education more competitive in the global context. Looking at a longer historical time span, however, it is apparent that the Russian higher education system has become a hybrid product, highly dependent on political circumstances and vicissitudes in government-university relations. Furthermore, the development of higher education has often been driven by strong personalities, who either stood alone or organized a critical mass of supporters to sway the developmental paths toward progression or regression. These personalities could engage foreign players in collaboration or competition, to pave the way forward on their desired course. Often, their approach involved the merging of various cultures and theories to justify the imperial expansion of their country. Alas, some became victims of the hybrid ideologies and political regimes that repulsed talents and generated brain drain.

Several examples of the post-imperial hybrid products and related tensions are provided below. Some of the cases and references were stimulated by “crucial conversations” (Patterson, Grenny, McMillan, & Switzler, 2012) with Russian higher education stakeholders, which were held between 2012 and 2014. These conversations illustrate some of the challenges that confront modern change-makers in Russia, and their collaborators abroad.

Scientists as Political Hostages

The history of Russian science and academic modernization goes back to the 18th century, when Peter the Great engaged German scientists to establish the Academy of Sciences in St Petersburg, and had them train local youth, enabling the Russian talents to reach out to the frontiers of contemporary science. The life-story of Mikhail Lomonosov, the founder of the Moscow State University

(MSU; 1755) and an iconic Russian figure, illustrates the emerging challenges for local academics, who were being urged to adopt foreign standards. Huntington (1959) provides a colorful depiction of a gamut of emotions that surrounded a young scholar taken from a repressive environment and endowed with freedom. Huntington describes Lomonosov's cross-cultural experiences during his time studying abroad in the following way:

In Marburg Lomonosov pursued his studies with enthusiasm and made a most favorable impression on the faculty. In this, the Age of Enlightenment, when science and the humanities had not yet been divorced, a wide range of interests was possible, and in Marburg Lomonosov became acquainted with the best in contemporary European thought. From his association with German students, he also learned much, and the beautiful student songs, which he came to know by heart, were not without influence upon his studies of versification... Unfortunately, Lomonosov's head was turned by the "academic freedom" of the German university student. A powerful, good looking young man, with a crude peasant background, closely supervised all his life, and just graduated from the poverty and austerity of a monastic school, he found himself suddenly in a delightful, strange country with a pocket full of money. Unrestrained by the German student's innate sense of order and of the bounds of merrymaking, he and his two companions abandoned themselves in their leisure hours to drinking, brawls, and riotous living marked by an overwhelming fondness for the fair sex. When at last their course was finished and they were leaving for specialized study in Freiburg, a swarm of creditors descended with claims amounting to 12,000 rubles!¹ Professor Wolf tolerantly settled the debts out of his own pocket and was later reimbursed by the Academy of Sciences. Lomonosov wept openly in shame.... Lomonosov learned metallurgy at the School of Mines at Freiburg, but after a year he decided that he had had enough, and he was finally authorized by the Academy to return to St Petersburg. (p. 298)

In addition to the humiliation he experienced in Germany, Lomonosov had difficulty getting back to Russia—as Shiltsev (2012) notes "Lomonosov left Freiberg and spent a large part of 1740 chasing the Russian ambassador through Germany and Holland in search of funds to return to Russia" (p. 41)—a circumstance that fueled his resentment of Germans and foreigners in general. This resentment only deepened upon his eventual return to St Petersburg, where a poor educational environment was being blamed on "continual budget issues" (p. 41),

¹ An amount that is ten times larger than the annual stipend paid to the Russian students in Germany at that time.

and the mediocrity of foreign scientists in St Petersburg, who “at the best,... were punctual employees, at worst... were making fortunes in various ways” (Lebedev, 2011, p. 1144). Some argued that this environment was the cause of Lomonosov’s quarrels with his German supervisors in St Petersburg, as well as of the house arrests that were imposed on him as a result of brawls with the foreign academics. These incidents remain, however, in the realm of corridor discussions at the MSU that bears Lomonosov’s name, rather than in-depth analytical debates among historians of science. Some Russian researchers consider them trivial gossip, others point to their significance as precursors of the closures that could be generated by a powerful individual, capable of unifying local forces for resistance to outside intervention, which paved the way for “patriotic science” in the university as well as across a wider spectrum of Russian higher education.

Lomonosov’s advocacy of “patriotic science” could have been a response to the problems he faced with a distributive hierarchy controlled by foreign scholars. Lebedev (2011) argues that Lomonosov had to beg for six years to get a small grant from the Academy in order to establish a “scantily furnished chemical laboratory, where he could begin teaching and working” (p. 1144). The hierarchy and budgetary mismanagement could be attributed to the problems. However, one could argue that Lomonosov benefitted from the budgetary mismanagement in the Russian Academy that caused many German scientists to leave St Petersburg, as this opened an opportunity for his promotion to the post of academician, and later to the academy’s triumvirate chancellery (Shiltsev, 2012). Lomonosov used the authority he gained to increase “the number of scientific publications and lectures in Russian, as opposed to Latin or German; recruiting more Russian interns and students to the academy’s gymnasium; and by 1765 bringing the number of Russian-born faculty up to 10, including 7 academicians” (Shiltsev, 2012, p. 41). Indeed, Lomonosov became a trendsetter and prime mover of “patriotic science,” determined to control the level of exchange with researchers from rival Europe. He assembled research teams of likeminded people, who would coalesce around his choice of resisting foreign intervention or projection of cultural supremacy. Alas, upon his death, Lomonosov was

forgotten in his homeland, in the city where he lectured and worked.... Russian treatises on navigation, mineralogy, and geology were published, which made no mention even of Lomonosov’s name, despite the fact that he had achieved and published much more in these areas than these Russian textbooks contained. (Lebedev, 2011, p. 1146)

Whatever the reasons that motivated tsarist officialdom to consign his name to oblivion, Lomonosov's star ascended again when the Soviet regime was looking for a heroic figure to inspire the masses. Lomonosov's image fit in nicely with Soviet ideology. First of all, his story (conveniently lacking reference to the high status and relative wealth of Lomonosov's father) was that of a commoner moving up in the academic world, and as such it spoke to the socialist ideal of social mobility. Lacking some inconvenient context, Soviet researchers were inspired by Lomonosov, a man they viewed as overcoming the poverty, and humiliation associated with his humble origins, to make significant progress in learning, and contribute to Russian scholarship. Moreover, Lomonosov was portrayed as making achievements despite foreign rejection of his genius: According to the myth, he learned from the much stronger Germans, but overcame them in scientific prowess. This narrative was a perfect metaphor for Soviet Russia, which saw itself as triumphing over global capitalism, and served as a useful propaganda tool before the Second World War. In 1940, the MSU was named after Lomonosov. Over the years, the Soviet propaganda machine worked hard to reinforce his heroic image through a set of hagiographic movies and books. In 2011, Russian officialdom and academics dedicated a number of films, lectures, and books to mark the 300th anniversary of Lomonosov's birth, thus actively reviving the Soviet myth.

Graham (1993) presents a number of narratives about Soviet scientists whose reputations were demolished and then resurrected, and then ruined again by the changing imperial regimes. The Soviet state manipulated academics and their careers by fragmenting universities, purging the professoriate in social sciences and humanities, controlling cross-border exchanges of scientists, and isolating those who worked for the military-industrial complex. Ironically, foreign engagement was used amid all the repressions to position Russian anti-western change-makers against the ruling elites at home, as well as in strong opposition to the scientific powers abroad. As Huntington (1996) remarks, the Russian revolutionaries made use of the imported ideology of Marxism to oppose local advocates of the West and to "challenge Western power, to mobilize their people, and to assert the national identity and autonomy of their [country] against the West" (p. 53). Moreover, Russian authorities learned over the centuries how to skillfully engage "useful idiots" (as Lenin defined them) from abroad to create the illusion of Russia as a constructive and rational global player, regardless of what was happening inside the country (Pimenov, 2000; Galeotti, 2014, October).

On the other hand, Western support was sought by scientists who desired to break

out of the isolation, repression and discrimination imposed by the Soviet regime. Thousands of scientists fled the Soviet Union and Russia in the 20th century. Some exceptional individuals dissented against the abuse of human rights at home, as a consequence destroying their academic careers and losing their privileged social and administrative positions. The cases of the Soviet scientists Sergey Kovalyov and Andrei Sakharov exemplify intellectual resistance to the belligerent political regime that was suppressing human rights and freedoms in the Soviet Union and its spheres of influence (Gilligan, 2004; Council of Europe, 2010).

The political fallouts leading to increased disorientation and tensions in Russian academic circles continue to this day. The case of tensions between Zubov and Migranian—two professors at the Moscow State Institute of International Relations (MGIMO in the Russian abbreviation, a creation of Stalin’s Soviet Russia)—makes it possible to delve further into the complex correlations between science and politics. As explained by Yaffa (2014, March), Andrei Zubov, a renowned scholar and senior professor at MGIMO, stood up against Putin’s annexation of Crimea in March 2014 by publishing an op-ed in *Vedomosti*, the country’s most respected daily newspaper. Under the headline ‘This Has Already Happened’, Zubov compared the Russian seizure of Crimea, justified by the Kremlin as a defense of Russian-speakers there, to Hitler’s annexation of Austria and the German-speaking Sudetenland in 1938 and 1939. Everything seemed “radiant” for Hitler at first, Zubov wrote: After all, he had expanded the Reich “without a single shot, without a single drop of blood—is the Fuhrer in fact not a brilliant politician?” Putin’s aims, Zubov later said, were not like Hitler’s, but just as Germany eventually paid the price for its conquests, so would Russia. “Our politicians are drawing our nation into a terrible, horrifying venture,” Zubov wrote. “We should not buy into this, as the Germans bought into Goebbels and Hitler’s promises” (para. 2). MGIMO fired Zubov for the publication, calling his act of dissent an “immoral act” (Yaffa, 2014, March).

Not surprisingly, given historical precedents, MGIMO dispatched another professor, Andranik Migranian (the director of the New York office of the governmentally-sponsored Institute for Democracy and Cooperation, an agency collecting evidence on Western democracy abuses), to confront Zubov. Migranian went all out in his public defense of Putin and accused Zubov of skewing historical interpretations of Hitler. Conceptualizing Hitler as a “Dr. Jackyll and Mr. Hyde” figure, Migranian praised the good Hitler, “a politician of the highest order,” who annexed neighboring lands “bloodlessly” (Migranian,

2014, April). The good Hitler turned bad, once he unleashed the Second World War, argued Migranian. In his rival *Vedomosti* op-ed, Migranian shamed Zubov for taking a treacherous position, and stood behind the MGIMO administrative decision to dismiss his colleague, referring to a long (albeit unelaborated) list of western scholars who were expunged for taking “academic freedom” too far.

Responding to Migranian’s interpretation of Hitler, the young Cambridge-educated historian and journalist Kara-Murza (2014, April) wrote in the *World Affairs Journal*: “Perhaps someone could remind Andranik Migranyan and his Kremlin overseers of the track record of this ‘politician of the highest order’ and ‘gatherer of German lands’ prior to 1939—including the establishment of concentration camps and the public burning of books; the purges of ‘non-Aryans’ and the creation of the Gestapo; the closure of newspapers and political parties and the establishment of a one-man dictatorship; the Nuremberg racial laws and Kristallnacht” (para. 4). Likeminded MGIMO professors, students and alumni reacted to Zubov’s dismissal by staging protests and collecting 13,000 signatures on a petition urging the administration to reverse the decision. Under pressure, the authorities reinstated Zubov for the few more months that were left in his pre-retirement contract. Several Russian academics also supported Zubov’s “apology letter” to the Ukrainian people and called for a unified stand against the Kremlin’s aggression. Cases of academic dissent and dismissals were reported in several peripheral cities and universities of Russia (Berzin, 2014, April). Meanwhile, Zubov was offered employment at leading Ukrainian universities, and became an honorary doctor of the National Research University Kyiv Mohyla Academy, viewed by some as the first higher education institution in the Russian empire (see for example, Smolentseva, 2003).

These incidents offer glimpses of the political pressures faced by Russian scientists amid enduring political reforms and reversals in Russia. Reflecting on these pressures and academic responses, one can argue that the choices made by Russian academics hinge as much on moral fibre, as they do on expertise, seniority, life experiences, institutional affiliations, professional restrictions, and civic positions. Personal bravery in confronting Russian political regimes and/or institutionalized legacies plays a leading role in numerous cases throughout the country’s history. Some academics spoke up in defense of “patriotic science” and others advocated for openness and closer linkages with global science. While academics rely on their conscience to choose one direction or another, their institutions may emerge as ambiguous organizations, an optimal survivalist

strategy in a place where hybridity and unpredictable conditions are shaped by manipulative political regimes.

Eurasia: More Europe or More Asia?

Some Russian academics have argued that choices with regard to outreach to the world can be ambiguous as a direct result of imperialist expansionist legacies. The Russian empire produced a vast Eurasian territory, conquered militarily and maintained through suppression of cultures, languages, religions, and indigenous histories. The complex history of conquests and imperial colonization muddles the foundation story of the Russian Federation: It is either viewed as a derivative of the European principality of Kyivan Rus', or a descendant of the Golden Horde and the Mongol Empire (Ostrowski, 1998). Some researchers point out that it was Peter the Great who changed the name of the Grand Duchy of Muscovy to that of Russian Empire, appropriating the name from Kyivan Rus' as a reflection of his desire to anchor Russian history in the European context, while moving his country out of the rubble of the Mongol empire. These days, highly politicized debates on this subject resonate in the walls of major universities, such as MSU, and spill out into public polemics. In an effort to reconcile major geopolitical and cultural divides, Russian academics often appear to stand behind controversial measures of russification (Rannut, 2012), or movements such as Slavophilia, "Eurasianism," "the Russian World," etc. (Riasanovsky, 1952; Walicki, 1975; Stein, 1976; Barbashin & Thoburn, 2014, March). Intellectual debates on the subject of identity have proven to end in either political stand-offs (as witnessed in the days of Peter the Great and Mikhail Lomonosov) or military conflicts (as demonstrated by the regimes of Joseph Stalin and Vladimir Putin).

The concept of the exceptional "Russian world," which Khodorkovsky describes as "an ideological brew that borrows from every corner of the repressive and outdated world of Slavic nationalism, isolationism and anti-Westernism" (Khodorkovsky, 2014, October, para. 10), is a product re-created and re-packaged by several MSU faculty members. Regretfully, it has been driving policies that have resulted in tragic loss of life, torn territories, and embittered interethnic feelings in the former Soviet republics of Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine (Barbashin & Thoburn, 2014, March). The idea of Russian exceptionalism and superiority has spilled over into various economic, political and military constructs that have threatened stability and order in Russia's "near abroad," and also undermined the

international architecture of peace agreements built in Europe after the Second World War. Russia's current imperial revisionism under questionable historical pretexts, but in the name of historical justice, is validated by the Kremlin as a need to consolidate the country in view of internal political rivalry, as well as "Western meddling" in the "near abroad," which Russian officialdom views as its own zone of national interest and security.

In this context, academic strategists contemplating the best choices in terms of global outreach are often paralyzed. The tradition of top-down control drives policies that often disregard what Russian peripheries actually want and need, while making university administrators follow what the Kremlin decides is most important. For example, a Siberian contributor to this study questioned to what extent pro-European choices made in Moscow (e.g., in support of the Bologna process) have relevance to his university, which is, after all, located in Asia. Indeed, having joined the Bologna Convention on Higher Education in September 2003, Russia provided opportunities for its universities to change the local credentialing process by moving away from a five-year specialist diploma system to a four-year Bachelor degree system, followed by two years of Master's degree studies. Part of the deal was that the local universities could also engage in mobility schemes allowing Russian students to join EU programs. However, it was not made clear how universities located 12 thousand kilometers away from Brussels would seek adjustments to the European framework. Neither was justification provided as to why linkages with partners in the West should be prioritized over those that could be successfully established in the Asia Pacific region.

While geographical and cultural proximity allow universities in Russia's Far East to embrace eastern alliances, some regional decision-makers doubt that the traditionally heavy-handed federal government would allow sufficient local flexibility to make them workable. Independent choices in the regions are closely monitored by the Kremlin, which is wary of the incipient demands for autonomy in the Asian part of the country, a valuable source of oil, gas and precious metals. Local observers in the Khabarovsk region, for example, noted the need to be cautious when building cross-border relations with universities in the increasingly powerful China. According to them, Russian security forces have been particularly concerned about the inflow of Chinese students, seeing their presence as a threat of possible territorial ambitions on land that was annexed from China by imperial Russia. One of the observers reported, for instance, that local universities were required to take special precautions and house Chinese

students in “special residences” (i.e., with enhanced security) on Russian campuses in the areas adjacent to the border. There are some indications that official attitudes may change, however, given the Kremlin’s shift toward greater economic collaboration with China, in response to western sanctions and the expulsion of Russia from the G8 (now again the G7).

As both the country and its higher education system are divided along territorial and geopolitical lines, the advancement of new courses in Russia’s hybridized Bachelor degree programs has been reportedly slow: Only 19% of all the courses in the higher education system worked in accordance with the new Bologna scheme in 2008 (Telegina & Schwengel, 2012). The new Bologna-type inserts in the old Russian diplomas were largely viewed as exotic superfluties, provoking consternation among inexperienced teachers and staff, who were unable to do the appropriate mapping of the new courses. According to commentators, the recognition of such courses was immersed in heavy bureaucracy, involving complex structures, wastage of time and paper-consuming procedures, which often put a significant strain on faculty time (Makarova & Solomennikov, 2008). In keeping with policy dualities elsewhere in its higher education system, the Bologna-related innovations were promoted without removal of the previous credentialing system, thus further confusing academic choices.

The reformist forces in the Russian government tried to implement a number of measures that would allow for more autonomy, at least among a limited number of universities. Since 2008, nine federal universities have been identified (including one in the occupied Crimea, which was added to the list in August 2014) as institutions tasked with equipping academics with the resources to address the needs of particular regions. Moreover, the Kremlin differentiated a group of 23 research universities with the aim of boosting Russia’s standing in the world university ranking leagues. While such differentiation could in theory help foreign collaborators to target potentially better-focused and financially stronger academic places in Russia, most western and eastern partners remained perplexed by the complexity of Russia’s legacies, and its organizational and cultural constructs in higher education. A country of “172 designated ethnic or indigenous groups, in addition to many other as yet undesignated groups,” the Russian Federation often promotes a simplified version of itself as a place with one language and one culture, leaving most foreigners unaware of such local concerns as “nationalist rhetoric,” “discrimination,” “cultural and linguistic loss” (Minority Rights Group International, 2014). These are explained below.

The Failure of the “Russian Brand”

By trying to meld and forcefully russify a vast array of philosophies, cultures and learning patterns, the Russian Federation has developed a brand that is neither attractive abroad, nor at home. Although hybridity appeared to be useful for the survival of geopolitical and institutional constructs of post-imperial Russia, hybrid institutions, lifestyles and interethnic relations fail as a means to consolidate what Russia promotes as the “Russian world.” Likewise, the approach has been unsuccessful in attracting and retaining top local or international talent.

Some examples further elucidate the challenges faced in this regard by Russia’s higher education. Its appeal has suffered from neglect of human security issues in the international student mobility of the 2000s. According to Aref’ev (2005), 77% percent of students from Asia and Africa who were studying in Russian universities expressed concern about “their own safety, because of rising nationalism and racism” (p. 50). Students representing visible minorities reported frequent harassment by police, who were “checking their documents, looking for narcotics or weapons, and so on, for the purpose of extorting money” (p. 51). Plaksii (2009) identified the problem of “verbal abuse and other forms of routine nationalism and racism,” and also pointed out that “the foreign students [were] puzzled as to why local bodies of authority, the school administration, and the police [did] not take action, why they fail[ed] to put a stop to such abuses and [did] not ensure the students’ personal security” (p. 69). Given pervasive discrimination, Asian and African students tended to drop out faster than other student categories. According to Aref’ev’s (2005) data, one out of five international students in their final year would advise their peers to avoid studies in Russia: e.g., 29% from India, 21% from sub-Saharan Africa, 20% from Latin America, 18% from the Near East and North Africa, 14% from Turkey, and 11% from China.

While some Russian municipalities acted on the criminal situations and tried to reduce abuses of foreign students by enhancing security in their locales, systemic change has been slow and limited. Pastoukhov (2014, October) explains the difficulty of countering the legacy of thuggery in the Russian social context, which cultivated attitudes of proletarian supremacy in Soviet times, and experienced increasing pauperization and criminalization of the economic sphere in the post-Soviet era. Efforts to minimize acts of racially-motivated harassment and violence in an environment that rewards stigmatization of certain minorities (e.g., ethnic, religious, or sexual minorities), has made little impression on the affected

foreign students, and largely failed to prevent negative recommendations from being broadcast in the affinity networks in the students' home countries and internationally.

Also damaging to the higher education system is the failure by Russian policy-makers to undertake serious measures aimed at encouraging academics working abroad to return to Russia on a scale similar to the talent return rates in China (Oleksiyyenko, 2014). In the view of one Moscow-based scientist, Russian graduates rarely hold aspirations similar to their Chinese counterparts, who feel obliged to return home upon graduation and contribute to their country's modernization. The unwillingness to come home is attributed to a pessimistic outlook on the quality of life and sustainability of reforms in Russia, as well as the fear of potential discomfort and uncertainty related to any new migration (Innovation Bureau Expert, 2009). Russian academics also worry about political repression and marginalization in cases of dissent, as was practiced in tsarist and Soviet times (Finkel, 2003; David-Fox, 2005; Minakov, 2013). The reluctance by western-educated graduates to run a "hopeless marathon of self-reintegration" seems to be borne out by the fact that institutional transformations have been stymied by the legacies of the academic profession, creating a situation in which a dominant group of "patriotic scientists," raised in the protectionist Soviet system, remains indifferent to the appeal of foreign language studies, international publications or global performance evaluation criteria, leaving the newcomers at a disadvantage (Yudakevich, 2014).

In the process of international collaborations, Russian reformers have become more mindful of the much higher standards promoted by global competition, which is led by much stronger western economies. As they compare higher education developments in the West and in the East, the Russian scholars are keenly aware that neither the current systems of knowledge development, nor the existing industrial infrastructure can allow them to compete on equal terms with their counterparts in the G7 or in China (see tables in Oleksiyyenko, 2014). Russia's hostile political climate, rampant corruption, low salaries, resistance to innovation, red tape and deteriorating welfare often emerge as key drivers of severe human capital flight from Russia (Narizhnaya, 2013), as well as de-motivators of cross-border collaborative arrangements. While the government tries to reverse the trends by enhancing salaries and improving the legal frameworks on corruption, making the adjustments viable across Russia's vast territory and diverse federal units requires a much longer period of time and greater political will than is currently on display in Russia.

Concluding Remarks

Russian higher education is a hybrid product, and as such it displays a lot of ambiguity that can be difficult for a foreign collaborator to penetrate. Those in power have played a significant role in creating political fallouts that contributed to the twisted image of Russian science and education over the last three centuries (Graham, 1993). The openings after the imperial collapses occasionally provided opportunities for new generations of scientists to engage with global academic communities and achieve some outstanding breakthroughs in science. However, the developmental paths were also obstructed by legacies of repression, political meddling, as well as excessive emphasis on the powers of “patriotic scientists.” In the long run, Russian academics often ended up as political hostages, serving the manipulative regimes of the day, a circumstance that frequently led to suppressed academic freedom, lack of sufficient critical inquiry and subsequent catastrophic outcomes, such as revolutions, wars and state failures.

Internationalization in Russian higher education is a legacy-led response. As Russian academics look back on their history, they understand that, among other things, resistance by intellectuals to excessive governmental framing of cross-border collaborations is important in driving change. However, intellectual resistance can be manipulated by scientists and political authorities alike, aiding their rise to power in their respective spheres. Dated back to Lomonosov, “patriotic science” has emerged as a hybrid, resulting from various political and cultural struggles, as further described in the literature on Russian Westernizers and Slavophiles (Stein, 1976; Zimmerman, 2005). Given his prominence in Russian “academic mythology,” the limited historical analysis of Lomonosov’s legacy of cross-cultural interactions undoubtedly narrows our understanding of the role of personality in forming “patriotic science” as a construct that is the result of a multiplicity of tensions between local and foreign agencies in Russia. However, even the scant research in this area gives rise to a number of interesting questions, among them: To what extent do formative international experiences influence distinguished scientists’ protective/insular or open/collaborative attitudes, and the choices that they make with regard to subsequent collaborations?

The long range of fragmentations and discontinuities in the Russian archives, which have been controlled and occasionally purged by repressive political regimes, may prevent finding answers to this question in Lomonosov’s case, and

hence leave the foundations of “patriotic science” somewhat murky. Indeed, Russian historians are often unable to integrate uncensored versions of events for coding and release to the general public (see Ruud, 1982; Dewhirst, 2002), and leave them instead to linger in popular memory and continue as oral history or “organizational sagas” (Clark, 1972), accumulating new connotations over time. However, the current globally-observed and discussed narratives, such as the Zubov case, make it possible to accumulate data that elucidates how academics make choices under political pressure involving a mix of local and global forces. This data will undoubtedly form a rich source for significant future research.

From a policy perspective, it would be worth exploring any hopeful cases in which Russian education reformers succeed in mitigating tensions between the West and the East, while enriching and empowering all involved. For example, it would be worth monitoring, describing and analyzing developments in critically-minded multi-lingual and multicultural spaces and constructs of higher learning in Russia, when such places emerge. The promise is there, as there are several Russian universities that serve the new elites, which are deemed to aspire to a more open trans-boundary space, so as to move their capital far and wide (to the East and to the West), while influential academic networks can be a driver for the country’s re-integration into the global community.

To gain access to the world’s newest ideas, technologies, and innovative processes, Russian universities are likely to look for new ideas in governance, research, teaching and learning. However, if these emerge as centrally-imposed and controlled hybrids, the results are unlikely to impress: Historical precedents clearly indicate that, in the long run, these models lack local support, relevance, and ownership-driven responsibility. Given that Russian innovators are often short of confidence in the hierarchical and politically-suspect higher education system, it would be worth exploring what can strengthen institutional and individual discretion to engage either the western or the eastern developmental approaches for a significant revamp of higher learning across Russia’s vast territory and diverse ethnic constituencies.

While a positive step forward, it may not be enough for Russian academic leaders to simply recognize the limitations of their own higher education systems and institutions in comparison with those operating under EU or U.S. standards (Plaksii, 2009), or in present day China (Oleksiyenko, 2014). It is increasingly important to take a critical look at the real value of international engagement and question to what extent collaborations with the West or the East can help fix local

problems that contribute to Russia's deteriorating global attractiveness. Rethinking the integrity of Russia's position in such international higher education arrangements as the Bologna processes, world university ranking tables, or emerging alliances with BRICS members, can be another important step. Decentralization and empowerment of local decision-makers is most likely to help reduce the irrelevance brought on by hybridization, the resentment of local academics and their foreign collaborators, as well as opposition to modernization and the introduction of higher performance standards. It may also protect those members of the Russian scientific community who become hostages of the government's confrontational politics, and are pressed to compromise academic freedom, while working in international domains.

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