

# National Cultural Traditions of Russian Psychology How ‘Creative Heritage’ can Influence the Future of a Global Science

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**Abstract**—In the context of an important objective, i.e., the construction of a worldwide scientific information base, an important question regarding the significance of ‘creative heritage’ has been raised. How can the creative heritage of a specific scientist in an established scientific field be integrated and valuable to modern research as the scientific community attempts to build a globally embraced foundation? In particular, this question is directed toward the famous Russian scientist, G.I. Chelpanov, and his theoretical and methodological contributions to the development of a modern worldwide scientific psychology. This paper presents the results of a psychological reconstruction of prognostic trends in Chelpanov’s philosophical and psychological doctrine while identifying critical characteristics of this scientist’s national and cultural heritage. This analysis regarding the significance of cultural heritage emerged by using a synthesis of humanitarian and natural science methodologies for studying the inner life of a personality, including the historical, cultural, and spiritual elements. This approach exams how the integration of Chelpanov’s creative heritage overcomes a methodological reduction of the metaphysical integrity of human beings - and is a necessary component for the development of an inclusive study of a global psychology that can contribute to worldwide scientific developments in the understanding of our common humanity.

**Keywords**—*psychology, education, scientific information, perception of space, globalization*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Today the problems caused by certain globalization trends have affected all spheres of human life, including its social development, education, science, and culture [1, 2, 3]. Many international intellectuals are now voicing their concerns and they are joined by the concerted and conscious protest of their citizens against the many imposed forms of globalization. Understandably, there is a search for other variants that promote an integration of humankind – variants that reject the emergence and triumph of a unipolar “global state of the collective West”, and instead aspire toward the unification of our common humanity. These new approaches emphasize the values and achievements of national cultures, and the contributions they can / have made to the global future of humankind. An urgent, but widely underestimated issue, is the ongoing attempt at a global manipulation of people’s consciousness.

This is especially true for the cultural, spiritual and moral spheres of people’s lives, as well as the religious, educational, and even scientific projects of their respective nations.

In this article we focus on an important issue – modern science’s developmental goals, and in particular, its noticeable trend – the creation of a *global science*. In relation to this trend, a considerable constellation of assessments is visible – from unconditional acceptance to categorical rejection. One of the reasons for a cautious assessment of this trend is understanding the danger for any specific scientific project to lose its national historical integrity in the course of attempting a global unification of the world and “erasing all boundaries”. Formation of scientific views, especially in humanitarian knowledge, is never free from the influence of the specific worldview of the carriers of this knowledge such as the personal beliefs/cultural heritage /etc of an individual scientist. For example, the dependence of modern humanistic, social, political, and personal psychology originating from a liberal ideology is very apparent to observers who hold more orthodox / conservative views – of course the reverse is also evident. These, or any other biases, may interfere with the contributions of national cultural traditions toward the development of a world / global psychological science. Thus, it is difficult to create any new psychological or scientific paradigm since creativity does not eliminate the professional predisposition, even an unspoken mandate, to adhere to the “generally accepted” or currently adopted theories.

At the same time, there is a positive momentum and imperative to create a global science that can exist and advance a more comprehensive understanding of the world and its diverse humanity. This project is exemplified by the establishment of a unified scientific information base formation. Thanks to this trend, all achievements of science can one day be available to scientists all over the world.

Despite this grand vision, the problems of including a *national-oriented perspective that is available and integrated into a universal scientific knowledge base is still at the forefront of needed development*.

The history of scientific psychology development in China, for example, indicates the possibility of

implementing a strategy for the integration of western scientific knowledge and its own civilizational tradition. Trained in Germany in the laboratory of V. Wundt and steeped in the values of Western methodology, Cai Yuanpei was the creator of the first National Institute of Psychology at Peking University. He was also an advocate for the idea of integrating China's cultural and psychological tradition into modern scientific psychology. The achievements of Western science incorporated into the creation of Chinese scientific psychology have been skillfully applied by graduates of leading American universities (for example, Heqing Chen, Yao-yang Zhang, Xiaohong Xiao, Shu Pan, Zhiwei Lu, Yue Tan, Guohua Sun, Renjuan Guo, Xiangeng Zhou).

## II. CONTRIBUTION OF RUSSIAN PSYCHOLOGICAL TRADITION

The history of Russian psychology also has the powerful potential for contributing to the methodology of worldwide scientific information base. Let us highlight the contributions to psychological science from the extraordinary and salient philosopher, psychologist, and organizer of science *Georgy Ivanovich Chelpanov* (1862–1936). Chelpanov was a major contributor during the dramatic history of Russian psychology at the beginning of the 20th century. Due to well-known negative socio-cultural reasons (i.e., social / cultural revolution and political upheaval within Russia in 1917), the theoretical model of Chelpanov's psychological ideas are not well known to the world's scientific audience.

The fate of this great psychologist's legacy is that in Russia it was not fully appreciated or even fully understood until recently. Fortunately, current studies in the history of Russian psychology have aimed at overcoming the distorted interpretations of the formation of Russian science and have returned the name of Chelpanov to its place of honor - and he is now generally acknowledged as the founder of the scientific tradition in Russian psychology, organic to the basis of national culture.

Today it is becoming increasingly apparent / valued that the ontological meaning of ideas of this prescient scientist – for human life and society, for understanding the true and transient in history of scientific thought in general, and in particular, the importance of this issue for psychological science on global scale – these attributes are being recognized as seminal components of an integrated psychology able to address the complex issues that our global humanity is struggling to comprehend and resolve in peaceful, cooperative, and personally meaningful and positive ways.

G. Chelpanov belongs to the rare category of people who are distinguished by having many diverse and exceptional talents. He was a theorist and methodologist, a master of experimental research, an organizer of science, a brilliant teacher, an educator and popularizer of psychological knowledge.

Chelpanov as a *scientist* laid the fundamental foundations of Russian psychology: It should be a scientific, independent, academic discipline, with its own subject and methods of research. Psychology as a science should include scientific results from humanitarian and natural science. Chelpanov persistently pointed out that experimental and rational analytical methods are not mutually exclusive. They not only have the same right to exist, they are fully and necessarily compatible and complementary [4].

Equally important, let us note especially that for Chelpanov psychology, at its core essence, belongs to the *philosophical sciences comprehending the Spirit in human life*. Therefore psychology is called upon to study human spirituality and the higher existential condition that defines the human soul.

That is why Chelpanov prioritized the humanitarian meaning of goals and objectives of Russian psychology as a science regarding the innermost depths of human soul – and then he advanced the idea that ethical and moral requirements for experimental studies of our personal inner lives must be acknowledged, defined, and adopted by researchers and therapists.

In connection with the topic of this article it is critical to note that Chelpanov spoke about a necessary synthesis of the following methodological approaches: Fundamentally humanitarian; Characteristic of Russian intellectual traditions; and integrating the natural-scientific analysis typical of the Western European intellectual tradition.

This is the uniqueness of Chelpanov's creation, also the peculiarity of ideological and methodological foundation on which he built a new Russian psychology scientific school. Thanks to this methodological foundation, Chelpanov not only synthesized the methodological experience of a world science, he was also one of the first in the field of the newly developing professional psychological environments, who evaluated the prospects of scientific psychology as an important component of global knowledge. In particular, this allowed him to see the perspectives of a new psychological branch for that time (beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century) — social psychology [5].

It is noteworthy that formation of his own vision of psychological science future was preceded by an analysis of all the known theoretical principles in various scientific schools at the time. This is a vivid example of Chelpanov's approach to the formation of a theoretical research model – a model aimed at identifying the cognitive meaning of each theory including the basic content and “determining the place of each theory in a general explanatory system” [6, p. 161].

As the *organizer of science*, Chelpanov was the creator of Russia's first center of scientific psychology - the Psychological Institute in Moscow (1912).

At that time, for the scientific psychological institutions in Europe and America, the question of the optimal ratio of scientific-theoretical and educational activity was extremely relevant. For example, organization of work at German psychological laboratories was due to recognition of the absolute importance of basic research while American institutions were principally characterized by a focus on practice-oriented psychology and educational work.

In Russia, due in large part to Chelpanov's works and efforts, a unified system of scientific psychology and scientific psychological education has been created. This system organically uses the institutional and structural achievements of the West to solve problems of national science and culture. The Psychological Institute has become a special institution with the aim of developing a scientific psychology and professional dissemination of knowledge in this field.

Chelpanov provided scientists in the Psychological Institute with a technical base corresponding to the best world standards [7]. Professor E.B. Titchener (from Cornell University), for example, noted that the laboratory equipment of the Russian Psychological Institute not only competes, but also surpasses foreign laboratories in many respects [8]. It is not by chance that the results of experimental psychological studies of Russian psychologists were reflected in world publications.

Chelpanov, as a *teacher*, was able to convey to audience his passion for psychology, to accurately determine the specific scientific interest of his students, to arouse in them love for scientific truths and respect for practical skills. It may be that his most important role was that he created the first Russian scientific and psychological school and brought up a galaxy of scientists selflessly devoted to psychology.

The activity of Chelpanov, as *popularizer of science*, is evidenced by a large number of journal publications, reviews, and essays. His books were reprinted several times. We also note the invention of scientist's unique psychological tool - the "Russian universal psychological apparatus". With its help psychological measurements could be carried out in everyday and out of laboratories conditions [9].

Until recently, studying of the Chelpanov's scientific heritage was a difficult task – since his doctrine (at its core it is idealistic) only in its experimental psychological part could be analyzed by using methods of materialistic psychology (that dominated Russian science since the late 1920's.). But today, with the formation of new methodological trends in world psychology, it is now evident for the necessity to include in these studies the holistic manifestations of psyche, and there is an opportunity to authentically consider the theoretical and methodological heritage of Chelpanov. [10, 11].

In particular, we would like to note his study regarding the connection of the problem of perception of space with

ideas about apriority and innateness. Thus, the process of forming an image and concept of space is not only determined by objective conditions, but is also a product of activity of consciousness itself. From these positions the internal conditions of perception of space and the mechanisms of complication of its forms are described by him.

### III. SOME GENERALIZATIONS AND PROSPECTS

Chelpanov's doctrine is undoubtedly a significant contribution toward solving fundamental problems of psychological research. Let us note the following main facets of this contribution.

The integrative "spiritual-physical" nature of psychological phenomena is substantiated. It is the result of consciousness activity – both non-empirical and empirically conditioned.

The psychological model of perception of space is significant for knowledge of mental reflection and regulation. The underlying schematic for the functional role of various systems of the perceptual complex of personality in the process of forming images of space (visual, auditory, tactile, etc., modalities) has been developed.

It is shown the existence of consciousness apriori (independent from empirical experience of human being) has psychological elements having a spiritual and creative nature (for example, in form of ideals). These elements act as necessary prerequisites for perception, as ideal elements of knowledge. Such elements correspond only to one important cognitive ability - faith.

Respectively, the perception of space is an integrative, dynamic phenomenon, a creative act of reconstruction (through symbolism) and manifests the psychological image of infinity and unity of absolute being [6].

The concept of an inextricable connection of higher spiritual functions with the totality of the processes of mental life (psyche) and body (physical processes) is postulated.

The philosophical basis of scientific psychology is designated – the "ideal-realism" principle (or transcendental realism). Psychology as a science should be based on conditions and tenets that integrate the internal integrity of spiritual and physical nature of human being (this corresponds to the basics of traditional Orthodox culture).

Returning to the heritage of Chelpanov, we are amazed at its innovation and relevance in that he essentially initiated the modern approach to identifying and understanding the scale of ontological possibilities for scientific and psychological research.

The development Chelpanov introduced, i.e., engaging both the philosophical and theoretical foundations of psychology as a fundamental science, must be directed

towards current and future studies if psychology is to remain relevant. Today, psychology is increasingly losing its scientific and fundamental orientation. In the public's consciousness, it is increasingly identified only with its applied areas, and in fact turns into a service sector that responds to the momentary request. And it does not matter at what level this request is formed – at the level of everyday interests, at the levels of social structures, at the level of civilizational and global challenges.

Historically the world has previously faced these challenges and threats – as Chelpanov wrote a hundred years ago. Now, maybe as never before, it is critical to realize that a process for addressing the global psychological problems of humankind is possible only with a fundamental scientific psychological basis. In the today's scientific world there is a growing awareness that we need pivotal change - a paradigm shift. The process of formulating of a new way of thinking is underway and it must be capable and adaptive in order to understand and engage a rapidly emerging new world consciousness.

In this regard, the scientific works of G. I. Chelpanov is a promising resource and provides meaningful material for the creation of a compelling foundation to address the challenges of research as well as writing the next chapters needed for the development of a scientific-theoretical psychology for the third millennium.

#### ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This research was financially supported by:

- (1) State assignment in 2019-2021 of the FGBNU "Psychological Institute", Moscow;
- (2) Institute of psychology, Russian Academy of Science – theme No. 0159-2019-003 "Personality in modern Russia: psychological characteristics, social manifestations, factors of formation".

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