

# ***The History of Russian Nationalism from the 15th Century to the Present***

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**Abstract:** Russian nationalism has continuously developed with historical development since the 15th century and it remains an important issue on contemporary Russia. This paper explores the major nationalist ideas in Russia, including Greater Russia, Pan Slavism, and the National Separation Movement. The paper also examines its content, origin, development, and impact of Russian nationalism. Despite a desire to move closer to some western countries, Russians have always had a strong sense of power, national pride and pride throughout history. By providing a better understanding of Russian nationalism, the paper contributes to research on Russian domestic affairs and international diplomacy. To comprehend the behavior of the Russian government, its relationship with the West, and its future direction, it is crucial to examine the dynamics of Russian nationalism.

**Keywords:** Russia, nationalism, Pan Slavism, National Separation Movement

## **1. Introduction**

In Russia, there are several major nationalistic ideas, which together constitute Russian nationalism. They refer to the Greater Russia, Pan Slavism, and the National Separation Movement.

### **1.1. The Great Nationalism of The Russian**

The origin and historical description of Russian nationalism is an important content of research on Russian nationalism by Western scholars. “The Russian Empires – From Ivan Raidi to the Pre-Revolution” by Henry Hertanbach and others discusses the aggressive Russian nationalism that emerged as imperialism during the Tsarist Russia period [1]. The great nationalism of the Russian nation and its reflection on national relations. Also known as Great Russian National chauvinism, Great Russian chauvinism. In the era of Tsarist Russia, the Tsarist government endeavored to make the Russian nation enjoy privileges, discriminated against, oppressed, and ravaged other nations, even instigated ethnic relations and instigated ethnic killings. Therefore, Czar Russia was a prison for all ethnic groups in the country. Greater Russianism also meets the needs of Russia’s foreign aggression and expansion policy. The Great Russianism of the Tsarist Russian government has rapidly expanded, advocating that the Russian nation is superior, and the conquered non-Russian nation should be dominated by it. The great nationalism of the Russian nation and its reflection on national relations. It is also called Great Russian National chauvinism and Great Russian chauvinism. In the era of Tsarist Russia, the Tsarist government made every effort to make the Russian nation enjoy privileges,

discriminate against, oppress and ravage other nationalities, and even instigate ethnic relations and instigate ethnic killing. Therefore, Czar Russia is the prison of all ethnic groups in the country. Greater Russianism also meets the needs of Russia's foreign aggression and expansion policy. The Great Russianism of the Tsarist government has expanded rapidly, advocating that the Russian nation is superior, and the conquered non-Russian nation should be dominated by it [2].

## 1.2. The Pan-Slavism

In order to discuss the transformation of Pan-Slavism into Russian-style Pan-Slavism, we should first make a distinction between Pan-Slavism, Slavism and Russian Pan-Slavism. It is generally believed that Pan-Slavism refers to the pursuit of Slavic independence and the union between Slavic ethnic groups; Slavism is the theory of the cultural characteristics of the Russian nation and the development path of Russia put forward by the Russian theorists in response to the western ideas; Russian Pan-Slavism is essentially different from the former two. It advocates the unification of all Slavs by Russia. This theory is obviously fundamentally different from the early Pan-Slavism, and is different from the idea that Pan-Slavism requires national independence and unity. In fact, Russian Pan-Slavism is the conquest and domination of other Slavs other than Russia.

Russian pan-Slavians tried hard to persuade the Slavs to accept the theory of Russia's unification of all Slavs. Russia's Pan-Slavism has deviated from the spiritual essence of resistance, equality, unity and mutual benefit of the Slavic peoples pursued by the early Pan-Slavists. In the view of the Russian Pan-Slavists, Russia should become the ruler of all Slavs, rather than an equal communicator. According to their ideas, the political concept of Slavs in Central and South-Eastern Europe under the rule of the Ottoman Empire and the Austrian Empire should be changed from accepting the rule of the Ottoman Empire and Austria to accepting the rule of Russia.

The emergence of Pan Slavism also precisely catered to the Tsar Russia's expansionary ambitions.

In the first half of the 19th century, major countries such as Britain and France had successively entered the era of the industrial revolution, while Russia was still a backward agricultural country at this time. This strong contrast has led to a strong dissatisfaction among the Russian people with the Tsarist rule, and the debate over Russia's future development path has also arisen. The supporters of the Slavic faction have expanded their criticism of their own Westernization faction to attack the entire Western civilization, sparking a struggle against the West. The failure of the Crimean War provoked a strong response from the nationalists of the Russian people. The Czar quickly realized that Pan-Slavism was an effective tool of public opinion that could be used. Pan-Slavism finally became an outside lobbying force and began to influence government decisions [3].

## 1.3. The National Separation Movement

The national separation movement within the Russian Empire is relatively complex, including both the situation of resolutely demanding to break away from Russian rule and the weak sense of national separation, and the indifferent attitude towards breaking away from Russian rule. The former are mainly the Baltic peoples and Poland, who are ahead of Russia in the level of national development and are greatly influenced by western culture. Their national separation position is strong, especially Poland's demand for national independence is very firm, because it has been following one another for more than 100 years, and has risen up many times to resist the autocratic rule of the czar by force.

Although the performance of the three Baltic countries was not as fierce as that of Poland, it eventually became the key factor leading to the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Although they have been ruled by the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union for a long time in history, they have never accepted the influence of Russia in spirit and continue to fight against it, even in the most severe period of Stalin's rule. By the 1980s, when Gorbachev's reform began, the Soviet Union's policy had

just loosened, the three nationalities immediately launched a national separation movement, and eventually became the first batch of former Soviet republics to break away from the Soviet Union, which became the precursor of the disintegration of the Soviet Union [4].

## 2. The Origin and Development of Russian Nationalism

As a community of shared destiny, nations have existed for thousands of years in human history; However, as a political community, nations are closely linked to the birth of modern European nation states, with a history of only two to three hundred years. With the formation of modern nation states, nationalism has gradually become an ideological theory and political ideology. Compared to the “endogenous” nationalism in Western Europe, Russian nationalism is “exogenous”. Endogenous nationalism, which is naturally generated on the basis of the growth of industry and commerce, is an inevitable product of the capitalist mode of production that is increasingly breaking through feudal relations and territorial barriers. Exogenous nationalism is a defensive or reactive nationalism, a weapon used by backward societies to compensate for their psychological inferiority complex and sense of backwardness in the face of more advanced culture [5].

The early Russian nationalism came into being with the formation of the Russian nation, and the formation of the Russian nation is also the formation of a unified Russian state. Faced with the armed aggression and colonial rule of different nationalities, the scattered Russian tribes have the demand to unite and resist foreign aggression. Under the cruel oppression of different nationalities, under the conditions of awakening of Russian national consciousness and increasing economic and cultural exchanges among various tribes, the Principality of Moscow, which occupies favorable geographical and political conditions, has become the political, economic and cultural center of Russia, and thus the embodiment of the unified thought and leader of the unified action of all ethnic groups in Russia. The leading position of the Principality of Moscow was established in the struggle to get rid of the colonial rule of the Mongolian Tatars.

At that time, the Grand Duke of Russia after “about 20 years of patient work”, Ivan III defeated the army of the Golden Horde Khanate on the bank of the Ugra River in 1480, ending Mongolia’s rule over Russia, marking the formation of a new Russian nation different from the previous one. The significance of this military victory is more than that. More importantly, it also established the status of the savior of the Eastern Orthodox nation in North-Eastern Europe of Russia, and made the Russians begin to feel that they bear different responsibilities from other tribes. This unique sense of mission was precisely a significant sign of the awakening of Russian national consciousness.

Almost at the same time as the formation of the unified Russian nation, the Orthodox Church in the 15th century compiled the “Royal Genealogy”, which praised Liurik, the ancestor of the Principality of Moscow, as the descendant of the great Roman emperor Augustus, and introduced the third Roman doctrine. The third Roman doctrine affirmed the Russian nation and its national consciousness from the religious spirit. Since then, the Russian spirit was deeply imbued with a special sense of mission, that is, the Russian nation was born with a special responsibility for the world. This strong sense of national self-administration is linked with the great achievements of the Russian nation in founding and expanding its empire. Russia was on the path of imperial expansion, which was also an important driving factor for the development of Russia’s nationalism.

From the middle of the 16th century to the end of the 17th century, it was the first stage of Russian colonial expansion and the formation of the tsarist autocracy. With the establishment of the czar autocratic system and the centralized system, the ambitions and selfish desires of the Russian czar and the ruling class have been extremely inflated, and the pace of the expansion and colonization of the Russian state has accelerated. Russian nationalism is increasingly showing its aggressive momentum. Russian nationalism has gradually lost its progressiveness in resisting foreign aggression and safeguarding legitimate national interests, and has gradually degenerated into nationalism with

the purpose of territorial expansion, political slavery and economic plunder, and for the narrow interests of its own nation or individual interest groups at the expense of damaging the interests of other nations. During this period, the Russian state continued to expand, with larger land, more population and continuous victories, which confirmed the “correctness” of Russia’s special development path, thus further strengthening Russia’s Messiah consciousness. From the 17th century, Russia’s national consciousness began to transcend the altar of religion and become the common spiritual pillar of the whole nation.

In the following hundreds of years, Russia experienced two large-scale shocks of Western thought brought back by Peter the Great’s reform and the Czar’s army invading France during the War of Patriotism in 1812. At the beginning of the 19th century, the westernization trend of thought that obliterated the particularity of Russian civilization and opposed the Russian messiah consciousness rose in Russia. As the product of its opposition, the Slavic thought came into being. One of the outstanding manifestations of Slavic ideology in this period was the great Russian doctrine. Samarin believed that the goal of Russia’s Slavic movement was to improve Russia’s status in the Slavic world, rather than seek Russian spirit with other Slavs. Samarin looked down upon him very much. For Slavic peoples other than Russia, he said, “I don’t think Russia can get anything new from Slavic peoples that it has never tasted”. He asked other Slavic peoples to “eliminate their prejudice” and regard the selflessness of the Russian spirit as the “essence of all Slavs”. To achieve this transformation, only under the leadership of Russia can we complete it. Dostoevsky also believes that the Russian nation is a superior nation, “not only individually but also as a whole above other Slavs.” Because of this, Ai Kai pointed out that Dostoevsky is a nationalist, “consistent with the international ambitions of the Russian state.” In short, the formation of Slav ideology marks the completion of the theoretical evolution of Russian nationalism.

Because this nationalism permeated the whole nation, even the collapse of the empire and the collapse of the czar government did not bring about any substantial changes in Russian nationalism, which played a significant but not positive role in the subsequent history. The Great Russianism in the Soviet Union emphasized the leading position of the Russian nation among the various ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, created ranks among the various ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, beautified Russia’s rule over other ethnic groups in history, implemented the Russianism policy, took Russian culture as the representative of the Soviet culture, suppressed the development requirements of other ethnic cultures, and so on. It can be seen that after the establishment of the Soviet Union, Russian nationalism has deteriorated in the process of continuous utilization. It can be said that the policy of ethnic proximity implemented by the authorities has actually allowed more ethnic groups to be Russianized. The rhetoric glorifies the historical contributions and social status of the Russian people, while in fact destroying Russia’s cultural heritage.

Brezhnev inherited the legacy of Stalin and Khrushchev and firmly believed that the Soviet Union had formed a new culture of communism, ignoring the impact of national culture and religious heritage. As a result, some visionary intellectual elites emerged in society. In order to defend the interests of one of the largest ethnic groups in the Soviet Union, the “Russian Movement” and the famous “dissident movement”, they proposed theories such as “the return of Slavic nationalism”. Intellectuals in various fields present the ideas of Russian national culture through their own works connecting politics and declaring that the Russians should return to the most essential and primitive Russian national culture [6]. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, with the rise of nationalist sentiment and the diversification of ideology in Russia, the original nationalist concepts in the academic community have changed, and the research on nationalism has become more active.

Over the past decade, a large number of scholars on nationalism and Russian nationalism have emerged in Russia, publishing a large number of academic works and articles. Scholars have paid attention to and introduced Western nationalist theories, and also focused on constructing and

reviving Russia's nationalist discourse tradition. They have used Russian ideas formed over the centuries to unite society and re-establish and strengthen the national identity that is essential even in modern society. It is within this framework that Russian scholars can face up to the reality of nationalism within the Russian Federation and the entire post-Soviet region, making the study of Russian nationalism a theoretical tool for connecting and solving the "Russian problem" [7].

### **3. The Influence of Russian Nationalism**

#### **3.1. In Terms of Internal Affairs**

The influence of Russian nationalism has both positive and negative effects. On the one hand, nationalism has promoted the transformation of Russian society from "chaos" to "rule" by making up for the vacuum of Russian social ideology, uniting the people, improving the support of the people to the government and integrating social resources [8]. As a tool for integrating society, nationalism continues to promote the development of Russian society towards a more stable state [9]. On the other hand, under the influence of the trend of extreme nationalism, the ultra-nationalists attacked non-Russian nationalities under the banner of patriotism, which plunged the Russian society into a state of extreme chaos, and had a very bad impact on the social stability and economic development of Russia [10].

It should be noted in particular that in contemporary Russian society, there are various forms of Russian nationalist discourse in the form of political pamphlets or tabloids. For example, the representative of extreme Russian nationalism and the chairman of the Liberal Democratic Party, Zhirinovskiy, have issued quite a number of political pamphlets [11]. These slogans and viewpoints, which are more emotional than ideological, can only be used as the object of research on Russian nationalism [12]. Nationalist research itself inevitably exhibits a nationalist tendency, but after all, nationalist thought itself is far from serious nationalistic academic research. It is from this perspective that the study of Russian nationalism has a stronger social function in serving the political reality of the nation state in the new era, and in practice, it also helps to rebuild the ethnic and cultural identity of the main ethnic group, the Russian nation. Although the study of Russian nationalism by Western modern nationalist theories is also not far from reality.

#### **3.2. In Terms of Diplomacy**

First, as an ideology, great Russianism is consistent with Russia's national interests, so the formulation of Russia's national strategy and the choice of its foreign policy are greatly influenced by the ideology of great Russianism and the views of its foreign policy, which are not only reflected in history, but also in Russia's current foreign policy. Second, Russian nationalism not only provides Russia with values, but more importantly, it provides the Russians with a unique set of thinking to observe and deal with international affairs. For example, Russia's pursuit of absolute security in history makes its foreign policy manifest as a desire for the territory of other countries and the pursuit of extreme power, and presents a traditional way of thinking of power politics. Third, Russia's national separatist movement, such as the Chechen conflict, has become an important factor affecting Russia's diplomacy, and has also posed great challenges to Russia's future development [3].

### **4. Conclusion**

Because of its unique connotation of patriotism and national spirit, the nationalism trend of thought has greatly healed the sense of loss in the heart of the Russian people and has risen rapidly in the Russian society. Putin realized that this trend of thought is of great significance for the unity of the

people and the integration of society, so he integrated it into his own thought of governing the country, and gradually rose to the national will in the development history of Russia for more than ten years.

Through the study of the nationalist trend of thought during Putin's reign, it is not difficult to find that any kind of thought has two sides, and will have either positive or negative effects on the internal and foreign affairs of a country through different characteristics. Therefore, only by making proper use of the role of ideological trend and displaying it in domestic and foreign policies that are suitable for the development of the country, can it really play a positive role in the development of the country.

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