

## The Exploring of Contemporary Approaches to the History of Psychiatry in the Russian Empire

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**Abstract:** The study is devoted to research optics in historical science in the realm of history of psychiatry in the Russian Empire, in the framework of relevant today historiography of modernity. The study presents the main critique of this historiography. Thanks to multiple-actors method and entangled history, genealogy of M. Foucault and transnational approach fundamental questions about how you want to study the process of institutionalization of psychiatry in the Russian Empire and what can be the specificity of the object of study in the framework of these approaches are problematized. In today’s historiographical situation formulated in the Journal *Ab Imperio* and by a number of other leading historians, confessional and multi-ethnic phenomenon of Nouveau “empire” can no longer be studied in terms of the national unidirectional teleology. This in turn implies the creation of complex, multi-level and wide construct of a specific “imperial” reality that goes beyond national boundaries, where the empires are closely bound, exchanged ideas and confronted each other. Thus, the researcher in such an approach is interested in a network of relationships of such actors and transnational, comparative analysis of their interactions. The researcher proposes to consider the process of formation of scientific knowledge (psychiatry) and professionalization of scientific societies (psychiatrists) in the Russian empire not from the perspective of the traditional institutional history, where the leading role is given to one actor the state as the main organizing force but from the position of a plurality of separate rival and joint teams: emerging psychiatric community, provincial and provincial zemstvos, different medical models of hospitals (for example, a district madhouse and a modern district hospital Kazan, Tomsk, Vinitzskaya and others. Transnational approach should pay great attention to “inter-imperial” scientific communities of psychiatrists and international psychiatric congresses, in order to understand how to build an international scientific network and form conventional knowledge of the “science of the soul.” In conclusion, the researcher comes to the idea that it is correct rather to talk about “the institutionalization”, rather than of some singular and universal draft reform of psychiatry in the Russian Empire at the end of XIX century.

**Key words:** The institutionalization of psychiatry in Russia, XIX century, theory of multiple actors, Michel Foucault’s genealogy, transnational approach

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### INTRODUCTION

The history of the institution of psychiatry has already attracted the attention of historians, because it relates to actual issues in historiography of “modernity”, the development of a scientific and legal state “disciplinary society” in M. Foucault term. The main objective of study is to show the most influential directions and approaches in the study of the history of psychiatry in the Russian Empire in contemporary historiography. From here organically follows another important state of the study: what new paths we can chart in exploring the history of psychiatry, being in the context of dominant historiographical tradition of “modernity studies”.

The first Foreign study on the history of psychiatry in the Russian Empire was a dissertation, entitled “The Professionalization of Russian Psychiatry: 1857-1922” by Brown (1981). One of the most crucial works that explored the legal situation of marginalized people in the late imperial Russia was “The Keys to Happiness: Sex and the Search for Modernity in end of century Russia” by Engelstein (1992). American historian boldly asserted that the role of the power elites and scientific communities in the formation of the disciplinary model of society” in the Russian Empire was not as obvious as, for example, in contemporary European states. According to Engelstein, the project of “Russian modernity” as an interaction between scientific community and disciplinary legal state failed early and ended completely with the

establishment of the radically anti-liberal Soviet regime. Through, the case of modernity in late imperial Russia, Engelstein not only questioned the explanatory model of M. Foucault in the Russian context (and as a consequence, it's also in Western Europe) but once again provoked discussion about the possibility of a special Russian path (a "Sonderweg") which was different from that of Western Europe (Koshar, 1993).

Despite its sweep and normative assumptions, Engelstein's framework became one of the most influential narratives with which many historians interested in the period agreed. British historian, Beer (2008) was one of the first who attempted to challenge Engelstein's position in "Renovating Russia: The Human Sciences and the Fate of Liberal Modernity, 1880-1930". Yet in arguing against the conclusions that Engelstein drew, British scholar accepted many of her assumptions. Taking Engelstein's idea of the Manichean role of industrialization and urbanization of everyday life which damaged the population of the Empire, Prof. Beer argues that "the fate of liberal modernity" did not die with Tsarist Russia, but, on the contrary, was embodied in the revolutionary project of the Soviet regime. The Bolsheviks as well as the modern scientific elite of the Russian Empire used the common arsenal of progressive liberal ideas lies in belief that human material, can and must be renovated after the devastating effects of capitalism (Beer, 2008). Through, analysis of the transfer of the Western ideas of the "degeneration", "moral contagion" and "microbes in the mind" (from B. Morel, M. Nordau, E. Kraepelin, F. Galton, etc.) which have been widely developed in the "biomedical human sciences" in imperial Russia (in criminology, anthropology, psychology, psychiatry) scientist shows the direct influence of the medical discourse of the professional scientific community on the idea of the social recovery (ozdarovlenie) of society. This formula became popular in the powerful political circles of the Russian Empire in that period. Thus, Beer not only challenges Engelstein's concept of the discontinuity of the modernity project in Russia, but also returns a model of Foucault's "disciplinary society" to the Russian reality on the turn of the century, which ultimately denies Russia's "Sonderweg".

In his research Prof. Beer opened a "Pandora's box" of subsequent public debates and criticism, as notes an expert on the history of physical anthropology in the Russian Empire Mogilner (2010). In her review of the book, Prof. Mogilner asks a few key questions that cast doubt on two main aspects of Beer's concepts:

- On what sources, we have to rely on when we take the courage to unequivocally assert the dependence of socio-political discourse upon the scientific and not vice versa? Perhaps, it is more productive to talk about degrees of hierarchy and levels of distinctions of the discourses, rather than about the "unanimity" of scientific medical knowledge
- How we can think about "modernity" of the Russian elites through the institutional history of the scientific communities and not to fall into the "pit of essentialism" in which Beer got stuck with his vague definition of late-imperial Russian liberalism

Indeed, is the analytical category of "modernity" worthwhile (especially, if it uses with no less essentialist definition of "Western Europe") if we do not take into account particular features of modernization? Maybe, Prof. Mogilner is right that initially we need to create a thin and a composite narrative of scientific and medical discourses through the contextualized "solid" fates of biographies of scientists, institutional models and socio-political conditions of the functioning discourses? (Mogilner, 2010). Perhaps, after all of it we are able to discuss about "modernity" or "multiple maternities" to eventually recognize a diversity of "liberalisms" that included late-imperial Russia? (Eisenstadt, 2000; Volker, 2006).

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

**Problemization:** We presume that mainly previous historiography did not attempt to problematize the question how we can conceptualize "modernity project" in the Russian Empire? Instead, most historians try to demonstrate the applicability or non-applicability of a Western model in the Russian context. It is worth noting that even when challenging the concept of Engelstein in 1992, many approaches to the history of psychiatry continue to formulate questions under the influence of an idealized, essentialist "Western model" of the subject. Another equally important issue arises from this approach is that in looking for Western civil modernity in Russia, most scholars write and think about the Russian Empire as a nation-state.

Our first state begins with the idea that the Russian Empire was a diverse and complex entity which coexisted with different practices of borrowing and management, construction and submission (Gerasimov *et al.*, 2009; Nathans, 2002). Since, we are studying the institutional development of psychiatry in wide-empire context, a multi-ethnic and multi-confessional region (for example, in Kazan Province), it is crucial to note the entirely new

forms of the organization of social behavior (*obshezhitie*) and the treatment of patients that emerged. Thus, here we prefer to look on the explanatory model of history of the Russian psychiatry through the lens of the “New Imperial History” (represented, for example by historians from the “*Ab. Imperio*” journal M. Mogilner, I. Gerasimov and also A. Miller, J. Burbank, P. Holquist, B. Nathans, etc.). The “new imperial history” attempts to study the phenomenon of “empire” as a complex, contradictory narrative involving varying degrees of hierarchy and always two or more actors. At the global, level, this might be the interactions of two or more empires and at the local-between state, institutions, communities and others. We confidently affirm the need to reconsider the institutional history of psychiatry from the standpoint of a composite “New Imperial” approach.

Following to this approach, we assume that the study of the institutionalization of psychiatry in the Russian Empire cannot be of a monolithic and monosyllabic process emanating from one actor, the state, but as the history of multiple actors-constructing various competing and collaborative institutional projects between the authorities, ministries, professional psychiatrists, “*zemstva*”, church institutions and courts. Perhaps, only in this entangled story between different actors and distinctive levels of hierarchy of discourses it is possible to consider fundamental questions of the subject in empire-wide context: institutionalization of psychiatry, genealogy of the daily practices of treatment of the mentally ill and transnational perspective of the study.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**New approaches:** The second half of the 19th is the time of development Russian Psychiatry at the experimental stage and absolute independence, both in theoretical and practical terms. For example, in 1869 in Kazan a completely new type a modern institution was founded in the empire, the district hospital where treatment was organized on the European manner (the English “non restraint” system, occupational therapy, medication treatment) and patients were divided into groups according to the degree of their diseases and estate (*Soslovie*), education or religious (Muslim, Orthodox, Catholic, etc.) and ethnic affiliations. By the end of the century, similar hospitals were opened in other cities (Vilnius, Warsaw, Tomsk and so on.) but at the same time they were in contradiction with other models the original “*Zemsky*” hospital-colonies and metropolitan houses for the insane (*Preobrazhenskaya* in Moscow, *Obukhovskaya* in St. Petersburg). In fact, we know very little about the system of treatment in all of these hospitals (even though their legacy can be found

in Russian psychiatric hospitals today’s). It is necessary to understand how the establishment and development of the “institutions” of psychiatry in imperial Russia occurred. Which differences and similarities can be identifying between these models of treatment? Maybe, we need to determine the main types of mental health facilities, their goals and objectives in charity patients, professionalization models in dealing with the mentally ill? How was established a dialogue between metropolitan and provincial experience in building psychiatry projects? And the most important question in this case, what new can we say about the urban space of the “empire” through the reconstruction of these important “marginal” institutions as a rule excluded from it?

Psychiatrists were aware of special, domineering role of the Institute of Psychiatry at the end of the XIX century and comparing and even placing it above the power of the emperor (Kandinsky, 1911). It is obvious that any institution cannot exist without the practical establishment of his will, expressed in the control and subordination of its order. For this purpose, it is necessary to understand how newborn “institutions” of psychiatry implemented themselves in practice. We need to figure out how certain practices of constructing everyday life of mentally ill allowed power in alliance with the young community of psychiatrists to implement various projects of control and subordination of the “public body”, thus legitimizing notions of normal and deviant behavior (Dreyfus, 1983). What are the objectives pursued by the authorities and psychiatrists in the organization of space and time of everyday life mentally ill in the central and provincial hospitals of the Russian Empire? At the same time, we are not speaking on behalf of one actor, a hospital or a psychiatrist, but also on behalf of the patient, the overseer, maids and so on. In other words, it is necessary to understand how the interaction of different factors formed diverse types of dialogues with the patient (which implies not only a revolt against the loop system-hospital) and how in these dialogues various types of “subjectivity” of the patient were produced (Foucault, 1982; Kotkin, 1995). Ultimately, problematization of these questions leads to the main point: what new explanations we can give to the social history of the “empire” through the study of the everyday practices of treatment?

Here we are, most likely, talking not about the wide comparative analysis of the Russian Institute of Psychiatry with the Habsburg Empire or, for example, with the Hohenzollern but about the need to inscribe the Russian Psychiatric scientific community in Western European Model of the functioning of psychiatry at the turn of the century which still has not been done

in historiography (Roelcke *et al.*, 2010; Anonymous, 2010). The approach of the “New Imperial History” offers the optics through which we can consider the Russian Empire not with a national teleology but as a comprehensive and sustainable political unit. Therefore, the primary objective of the research in the future should be an attempt to inscribe the Russian imperial experience of constructing the “reality of deviant’s” in the comparative context of the Hohenzollern, Habsburg and Ottoman empires with the goal to discover fundamental similarities or differences in the case of creating marginalized spaces. It is necessary to understand why and how some practices of social control of the population, successfully borrowed and realized by the Russian Empire while others did not survived? How did the network of scientific (psychiatric) communities of the empires function? How we can argue about the extent of their actual conventional interaction? All these questions could be considered through the method of imperial biography (Foucault, 1982). For example, the first Director of the Kazan District Hospital A.U. Frese was trained abroad with the ultimate goal to study treatment practices of patients, methods of charity, architecture of hospitals in the German, British empires and France and at the same time imagined his own private reflections to the question how will be creating institute of psychiatry in Russia. These reflections were elaborated in the project of the first modern psychiatric institution in the Russian Empire Kazan District Hospital. The question of Russia’s “Sonderweg” is not relevant for this issue. We recognize the need for transfer of ideas in the traditional sense: how theories and practices were borrowed from abroad but reinterpreted in relation to a new socio-political context.

**Summary:** Thus, the history of the Imperial Institute of Psychiatry cannot be considered only in the context of the development of the institution itself. We presume that the study of the institutionalization of psychiatry in the Russian Empire, as part of above composite approach, includes a variety of actors and discursive contexts. It allows to develop an adequate model of the scientific knowledge in the specific “imperial situation” and as a result display a motley picture of reality. The example of the Kazan District Hospital can serve as an illustration of such “institute-network” which on one side was a Volga region centre serving regional needs of the Russian Empire and on the other side went globally beyond its jurisdiction. We still have to develop far more thoughtful analytical language for understanding how this imperial network of the Russian psychiatry institute was formed.

## CONCLUSION

An attempt of all-Russian imperial experience of marginal institutes formation being written down into a comparative context of Hohenzollern, Habsburg or Ottoman empires must become another, important from a methodological standpoint research task in the future in order to find the common space of practices shared by all modern states in the area of population policy. It will be also important to answer a question, how and why were some practices of social control of population successfully borrowed by the Russian empire and how and why did the others disappear?

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

The research is performed according to the Russian Government Program of Competitive Growth of Kazan Federal University.

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