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FUNDAMENTAL CIVILIZATIONAL SHIFTS FROM THE POINT OF VIEW OF THE METHOD OF POLITICAL ECONOMY¹

Abstract: the world civilization is currently facing not only problems caused by profound shifts in the global balance of economic and political forces, but also the growing need to resolve universal issues, including a dangerous aggravation of the ecological crisis, the erosion of human self-identification, and the growth of military confrontation as well. At the same time, technological progress bears the possibility of alleviating the resource strains on the natural environment, developing the creative content of human activity, and of reasonable consumption limitation on its own. The nature of social relations in which scientific and technological progress develops determines the choice between these two tendencies. Ultimately, the solution of the issue lies in the transition from economic rationality to rationality based on the criteria of reason and culture. However, as long as we remain within the boundaries of an economic society, it is necessary to learn how to single out those economic relations and institutions that will contribute to a gradual transition from a self-destructive orientation towards economic rationality and the solution to the civilizational crisis. The study of these relations and institutions is the subject of political economy, which makes it possible to reveal the fundamental foundations for the development of the socio-economic structure of society.

Keywords: balance of economic and political forces, methods of political economy, planning, public relations, socio-economic institutions, civilizational shifts, ecological crisis, economic rationality.

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从政治经济学角度看基础文明发展

摘要: 世界文明正在遭遇全球政治和经济力量深刻变化带来的问题, 也同时遇到了必须解决的共同问题, 包括环境危机加重、自我认同模糊、武装冲突加剧等; 科技进步减轻了能源对自然的破坏, 为人的创造力的发展和自觉地限制消费带来了条件。科学技术发展所依赖的社会关系决定两种趋势的消涨。最终, 解决这一问题的出路在于从追求经济合理性过渡到追求理性和文化的合理性。然而, 现在

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我们仍然处于经济社会阶段,我们必须学会区分出那些有利于逐步远离自我独立地追求经济合理性,即有利于走出文明危机的经济关系和制度。这些关系和制度是政治经济学的研究对象,政治经济学能够揭示社会的人文和经济发展根本基础。

关键词:经济力量和政治力量平衡、政治经济学方法、计划、社会关系、社会经制度、文明发展、生态危机、经济理性。

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Introduction

Anticipation of fundamental shifts in development of the human civilization captured minds of many scientists in the early 20th century. There were both such well-known ones as, for example, Vladimir Ivanovich Vernadsky and Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, and those that did not leave significant imprint in science among them. However, all of them agreed upon the same: the times were coming when the role of the human intellect in the historical development and, eventually, in the fate of the Earth itself, would be decisive [Teilhard de Chardin, 1956, pp. 91-92; Vernadsky, 1924, p. 342; L'exigence Idéaliste et le Fait de L'Évolution, 1927].

However, though the said premonitions as it is worth emphasizing turned out completely right, they did not contain the answer to the question on how the humanity should suddenly leap from the age of spontaneous development filled with conflicts, dead-ends, sacrifices and confusions into the era where the world-wide mind reigns. And what will the world-wide mind look like? Can one be graciously sure that this mind will undoubtedly lead us to the life in Truth, Kindness and Beauty?

The attempts to make assumptions on the matter at the time, in the first third of the 20th century either were too vague or led to mysticism.

Now, we can already understand why it was not possible then to provide a more or less clear theoretical insight into the process of transition to the so-called age of the noosphere reign – the epoch of human intellect and human spirit's dominance. Within the prescribed period, some prerequisites for such a transition – certain ones and fixed in the academic researches – already arose. However, these were just prerequisites, but no solid grounds for such a transition were identified.

Where shall one look for such fundamental grounds to settle the issues regarding a transition to the age of the human reason dominance, regarding the way this dominance will be exercised, and the changes the human intellect itself has to endure for the matter? This paper will focus on just one aspect of these challenges – the search for social and economic prerequisites of the forecasted shifts in the role and nature of the human intellect.

Methods

It is necessary to develop the correct methodological approach to start solving the raised issues. It should be noted that it was the scientists that specialized in examination of the interconnections of the human public relations with their material bases rooted in the conditions of the societal production that managed to succeed more than others in their understanding of the

upcoming shift patterns in the history of the human civilization. What is meant here is the Karl Marx's prognoses made in the second third of the 19th century. He predicted that the humankind would exit the direct production process and the production process would turn into an "experimental science, material creative and objectifying science" [Marx, 1969, p. 221] which would serve as a basis for the transformation of "the production process from a simple labor process into a scientific process which involves the forces of nature to serve it and makes them act to cater to the human needs" [Marx, 1969, p. 208]. However, Marx could not predict the exact material grounds for this to happen or to provide a certain view of the public relations that would serve as a context for such a transition.

The shifts happening during the 20th and in the early 21st century in the humanity production forces, development of science, equipment and manufacturing technologies allowed accumulating sufficient knowledge about what might underlie the transition to the production and society based on the intellect principles and criteria. At the same time, deep conflicts and risks arising along with the development and posing a threat for the human civilization as such were acknowledged. In the end, comprehension of the accumulated sum of knowledge about these processes resulted in formation of noonomy as a concept [Bodrunov, 2018; Bodrunov, 2020].

The noonomy theory is built upon the research of the impact the modern shifts in production material bases have on the change of the public structure of the production. The science and the cognitive process are becoming an integral part of the production process turning the innovations into a constant flow. An individual is consistently relieved from direct involvement in the production. The technosphere acquires some features of autonomy, and an individual controls its functioning and development strictly from beyond. "At the noophase, the nooproduction while separated from people, from the society, shall remain subordinate to the society in terms of its goals and objectives," *The Noonomy* emphasizes [Bodrunov, 2018, p. 180].

These shifts are determined by increased opportunities to satisfy the human needs and, at the same time, by the change of the mechanism of their generation. The needs imposed by the capitalist production system in chase of the maximum sales extension are replaced by the needs defined by the criteria of the intellect and culture. The humans start focusing on the objectives of self-improvement, not the increased amounts of goods consumption. "When creative amateur talent activities become the main kind of activity, and ensuring comprehensive individual development and public relations it is achieved through turns into the greatest treasure, it is self-improvement in the process of creative activities and the luxury of communication that become the individual's biggest needs" [Kolganov, 2012, p. 442]. The consumption turns not into a goal in itself, but a minor element which ensures the process of the human creative activities. This, along with the technological possibilities for reduction of the production's resource intensity, allows decreasing the pressure on the environment. Both termination of a thoughtless chase after the amounts of consumed goods and the use of possibilities for synergy of technologies in the new technological modes can significantly reduce the need for resource consumption while increasing the satisfaction of the human needs. "...With the broadened scope of human participation in the creative activities, their *involvement into the process of world cognition* is extended, and their knowledge about where the bounds of the rational in the manufacturing activities and in the consumption lie is deepened (*henceforward the quotations are marked in italics by the Author of the paper*)" [Bodrunov, 2019, p. 16]. As S.D. Bodrunov notes, there is also "a growing number of opportunities to satisfy human subsistence needs, the satisfaction of these

needs to the extent when the fight for their satisfaction and a fear of under-consumption cease to be a priority problem” [Ibid.]

The liberation of people from direct participation in the production process and a shift of their focus to creative activities along with the liberation of people from a need to fight for means of subsistence constantly remove individuals from direct production relations and eliminate the economic form of the production process. “...Noonomy is a way to satisfy the needs in the society where “the light of reason” exists; where there are no relations to the production and production relations; where there is no relation to the property and no property relations; where there is no economy and the economy is not possible” [Bodrunov, 2019, p. 16].

As the movement in this direction starts today already, it happens in the context of economic relations’ reign. This is why the main issue at the modern stage of noonomy formation is what social relations, what social and economic institutions will enable the movement in this direction. The spontaneous movement of the market and the focus on profit maximization already cannot even support the production stability. The inability of economic systems of most developed countries to ensure the required conditions of public development is only growing. So, what are the social and economic relations and institutions that can be relied upon in the process of a transition from economy to noonomy?

When the question is raised like this, the answer should be primarily looked for in the field of political economy. Currently, it is the science that examines the fundamental patterns of formation and development of social and economic systems, as well as the transition from one kind of systems to another. It is the political economy that researches the impact of the technological shifts on the change of public relations and the contradictions that arise in respect thereof. That is why the method of political economy shall be the main one to solve the aforementioned problems.

Results and discussion

The modern changes in development of scientific and technical progress that happen in the framework of the established social and economic system reflect multidirectional trends. Some of them express a focus of the modern economic order on the use of technological solutions in the chase of the economic rationality, i.e. ultimately, of making as much profit as possible and, therefore, inability to subject the solutions of the scientific and technical progress to the criteria of reasonable rationality. And the opposite trends are consistent with progressive shifts in the public culture that occur inevitably under the impact of the cognition process and technological development.

As for the first trend, the scientific and technical progress has either direct or indirect impact on aggravation of global contradictions. The extension of the technological development process to a few previously backward countries in the periphery of the world capitalist economy has led to the changes in the balance of forces between the center of the world economy and its periphery and aggravation of the contradictions between them. The issue on whether certain countries’ dominance as a center of the world economy is preserved shall be put in question. “Development of the global economy in the early 21st century was marked by tectonic movements regarding the forces of leading economic centers of power. Some countries previously included in the Global Periphery started to obtain the economic power and geopolitical significance that had never been typical for them before, while the traditional Center of the globalized economy started to lose at least some of the leverages used to control the global economy that had been previously in their unconditional possession” [Abramova, 2014, p. 139].

According to the IMF data, currently, developed countries already produce less than a half of the global GDP, and 58.21% of the global GDP calculated by the purchasing-power parity accrued to developing countries and emerging markets in 2022¹. Moreover, in 2022, China produced 18.58% of the global GDP calculated by the purchasing-power parity in 2022², while the USA – only 15.47%³. According to the experts of the RAS Institute for the U.S. and Canadian Studies, “The second decade of the 21st century has provided new confirmations that the USA are losing their status of the world hegemon” [Prihodko, 2020, p. 33]. Thus, there is a geographic shift in centers of power and economic activity.

The process of capitalist globalization which still has not grown into an all-permeating and crucial one, has now slowed down, so the actual agenda includes de-globalization already. Multiple countries of the world, specifically those that have strengthened their economic positions over the recent decades, do not mind using the opportunities provided by the globalization. They do not want to stay its passive objects and try to resist the globalization model aimed primarily at the benefits of the transnational capital (including financial capital) stationed in the most developed countries.

“The global economy has entered a de-globalization stage, which is absolutely new for it”, the experts claim. “Nowadays, the global trend is to protect the national market by protectionist measures that are more or less strict by nature depending on the country. The efficiency of these measures becomes one of the crucial factors that define the development of national production. The global “fashion” of protectionism provides the governments with efficient tools to re-distribute resources in the interests of certain economic sectors which allows increasing their competitiveness and growing a share of the global market” [Komolov, 2021, p. 44]. The positions of other experts are warier, though they also state that the forms and scopes of globalization development have changed: “The processes currently happening in the global economy testify that the global megatrend if it has not particularly turned around, then it has slowed down a little bit to find itself on a crossroad of sorts” [Feigin, 2021, p. 8]

These changes in the economic world order are considered extremely deep, up to being the era changing features. The urgency of contradictions arising meanwhile adds to the urgent crisis nature of development: “Development of the global economy in the early 21st century has been marked with a few processes and upheavals indicative of the current changes of fundamental nature. The paradigms of development and relations between the subjects operating within this economy have existed for decades, and now they are subject to deep changes. If the elimination of long-accumulated imbalances and contradictions is delayed unreasonably or peaceful evolutionary transformation starts to seem impossible, the contradiction between the old and the emerging new strives to be resolved through the crisis <...> Multiple researchers of global processes from various academic schools, representatives of various methodological approaches almost absolutely agree that the ongoing processes signify a change of epochs” [Fituni, Abramova, 2012, p. 3].

A shift of the economic balance inevitably leads to a change of the geopolitical situation: “The geopolitical situation in many regions of the world starts changing due to the activation of the

¹ IMF (2022a). International Monetary Fund. Emerging market and developing economies. Datasets. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/OEMDC>

² IMF (2022b). International Monetary Fund. China, People’s Republic of. Datasets. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/CHN>

³ IMF (2022c). International Monetary Fund. United States. Datasets. <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/profile/USA>

main global actors. A specific impact has been caused by new trends arising in the Asia-Pacific Region toward which the main economic and political global processes have shifted” [Nikulin, Ramich, Kuklin, 2021, p. 17]. Here, though, the statement regarding changes in the geopolitical situation and a shift in the balance of powers is not followed by the answer to the question: what does this change constitute and where does a shift in the balance of power lead to? Much more specific answers to this question are given by the experts specializing in the international affairs during the discussion arranged by *Russia in Global Affairs*. Four years before the start of the military operation in the Ukraine, they already spoke about rapidly growing geopolitical tensions without excluding the possibility of military conflicts. The start of a new militarization and armaments race wave was already outlined at the time.

Thus, Pavel Tsygankov clearly announced: “The escalating tensions carry the threat of a great war” [A Rapidly Changing Reality, 2018]. His word were echoed by Chas Freeman: “Bluster, bullying, boycotts, subversion, sabotage, and bombing supersede comity and negotiation as means for resolving disputes between nations” [A Rapidly Changing Reality, 2018]. Scott Carpenter adhered to the same position: “...We live in the pre-war period” [Ibid.] Lanxin Xiang who was warier with his wordings, however, noted: “The postwar “liberal international order” is imploding” [Ibid.].

However, it is not only the current geopolitical situation caused by a shift in the economic balance of power that the experts consider a threat. They are also worried about more fundamental threats associated with an irrational model of the modern civilizational development. The attempts of developing countries to catch up with the more advanced counties using this model result in an unbearably high load on the environment. The alarm in this regard was raised by Huang Jing who mournfully forecasted: “...the model of achieving modernization through industrialization, which means massive consumption of natural resources and rampant urbanization, is by no means sustainable. Should China and other Asian countries accomplish their modernizations with this industrialization-led model, the human being would be doomed” [A Rapidly Changing Reality, 2018].

The upcoming global environmental crisis has been worrying the analysts for a long time, since the moment of the report for the Club of Rome. Still, the authors of ongoing researches on this topic (see, e.g. [Borzova, 2005]) do not note any disturbing patterns yet. The warnings that it is the deed of the humankind to find themselves played into the corner when the ecological balance is disturbed, the natural resources are exhausted, the environment is unbearably and dangerously polluted, and the biological diversity is decreasing sounded multiple times. “However, the main focus has always been – and still is – on the economic growth, production increase and increase of consumption of material goods. The world goes on moving in the direction opposite to the sustainable development. As a result, the hopes for a quick change of the trajectory of the civilization development have not been justified yet” [Klaptsov, 2012].

The situation is aggravated further, because the modern economic systems of developed countries, while chasing for market expansion and the increased sales volume, turn to various means of imposing delusive, fake needs to the consumer. Here comes the process of production of simulative goods, simulant commodities that just serve as symbols of pretend needs satisfaction. This phenomenon was noted in the 1970s already [Baudrillard, 1972; 1981; Jameson, 1990]. As a result, the load on the environment and exhaustion of resources receive an extra impulse under the impact of economic interests and economic criteria of rationality that are obviously inconsistent with the criteria of reasonable rationality. “Today’s pressure is put on the nature for the reasons

far from good causes. The pressure is significantly determined by satisfaction of fictional needs imposed by fashion and advertising based on the “consumption for the sake of consumption” principle, and the self-absorption of these deeds shows their complete and utter pointlessness” [Il’yin, 2016].

The manifestations of humans’ denial of their own humanity, a thoughtless interference into their own nature for the sake of the overreach of their individual Self, of their egocentrism brought to the absurdity and built upon the hedonism as the main principle of existence are becoming more appalling.

All these phenomena bring inevitable increase of conflicts – both social ones that lead to the social split, and individual ones that destroy human personalities from the inside.

There are also the opposite trends, though. The progress of science and technologies leads to the growth of a proportion of creative functions in the human activities. Though the technological progress often simplifies labor functions, this is just an intermediate step to the automation of these simplistic functions and a chance to relieve individuals from them. The modern production is already unthinkable without development of the large-scale development of the scientific cognition process, researches and know-hows. Innovations are literally almost turning into a constant process, which makes creative functions even more sought-after.

The progress of technologies expands the opportunities to satisfy the needs while reducing the resource intensity of their satisfaction. An aspiration to self-limitation in material goods possession develops opposed to the chase for increased consumption volume. New trends arise: they manifest in such phenomena as a sharing economy and crowdsourcing that are indicative of the blurred property relations. At the same time, the concept of “responsible consumption” is spread. As noted in the report of the research group of the SKOLKOVO Institute for Emerging Market Studies (IEMS): “The trend toward responsible consumption is growing globally. It is one of the most outstanding manifestations of the individual proactive stance. People are consciously opting for products and services with less negative impact on the environment and society” [Responsible Consumption, 2017, p. 8].

So what will outweigh? The answer depends on the social conditions the technological progress is to develop in and its fruits are to be applied, as well as on the “social order” provided by the society for researches and developments. Will this order be aimed at fishing another dollar from the consumer’s pocket or at rearrangement of the society based on principles of reason that exclude any self-destruction of the human civilization?

The technological progress as such is a necessary, but insufficient condition to solve the problems of the human civilization. However, it is a critical tool in the life of a human society, and the way this tool is used defines settlement of both immediate and more long-term contradictions in our routine lives. It is not an accident that the global economic contradictions are turning into some fight for technological leadership more and more. Unfortunately, the Russia’s position in this fight for the technological leadership leaves much to be desired. And before setting an objective to take leading positions in the field of high technologies or to increase a proportion of the cutting-edge technological modes, Russia needs to settle a more urgent issue – to ensure its technological independence.

For this purpose, the country needs to restore its own independent scientific and technological core which implies significant (at least by twice) increase of expenditures in R&D and education within the GDP. In general, a significant increase of investments into human development

is required. Besides, there is a need for a leap in development of basic sectors that define the technological level of the rest of production – machine-tool building and instrumentation engineering, manufacturing of an elementary base for microelectronics – and modern chemical and biotechnologies (pharmaceuticals in particular). These branches along with other high-tech industries should create a sort of nurturing environment that can shape a need for innovations and ensure their acclimatization. A special challenge is a need for massive replacement of outdated and non-competitive equipment and a many-fold increase (3-4 times) of a low capital-employment ratio in the Russian industry [Digitalization and IoT..., 2018]. It is the insufficient technological level of industry and a low capital-employment ratio that are the major factors of the gap between us and the developed countries in terms of labor efficiency [Zaitsev, 2016, pp. 17-20].

How can this be accomplished, specifically given that the geopolitical and geo-economical positions obviously do not leave us much time to solve these problems?

It should be reminded that execution of fast and deep structural shifts in the economy has never been managed without adding state-planned methods to the market mechanisms over the recent century. That is why a resort to the state-planned control of the economy becomes highly sought again. However, one shall never limit themselves to acquisition of a new development tool set only. If the purposes of our development and the criteria of rationality in our activities remain the same, the technological progress will be just a way to accelerate our movement to the dead-ends of the environmental crisis, to “dehumanizing” of the humans and increased conflicts pregnant with the global Armageddon.

Conclusions

The way to overcome the crisis of the human civilization lies not only through the achievement of higher levels of the technological progress, but through respective improvements of the public relations as well. Ultimately, the transition to the reign of a human intellect is seen as a withdrawal from the economic ways to support the human activities [Bodrunov, 2018]. However, as long as we remain within the framework of the economic society, to identify the required changes objectively for the purposes of rational production activity and along with respective criteria is the exact objective of researches in the field of political economy. In the most general terms, the short-term solution of this problem is seen as setting the goals and identification of the needs of human development based on the criteria of economic rationality that remain associated with everyone’s choice of ways to satisfy their needs, but are completed with the limitations resulting from the society’s goals (environmental, socio-cultural, etc.).

Human needs for food, clothes, housing accommodation, cultural development, etc. hardly arise from the economy, but rather from the considerations of the economic benefit. Still, the capitalist era in its development has led to the position when generation of needs and the society’s goals they determine are under great pressure of the economic criteria. The food is made and sold based on its profitability only while, let’s say, the considerations of a rational meal structure are taken into account just because they can be used as an excuse to obtain greater profit. Production of cultural goods is focused not on their value-based significance, but on the profitability of their sales, etc. Ultimately, the economic considerations have led to establishment of a huge industry where the consumers are manipulated, so that their needs could be distorted in such a way as to make it possible to obtain as much profit as possible through special illusions created for satisfaction of the imposed needs.

That is why it is the establishment of the human development criteria in the field of needs generation and society's goal setting despite the considerations of the economic benefits that shall become the first step in generation of reasonable criteria. Obviously, it is easier said than done. However, what might help here is gradual interference of non-market institutions into the area of production control (starting from state planning and finishing with involvement of institutions of civil society into production regulation).

Thus, first of all, the transitional relations and institutions combining both economic and non-economic elements will be shaped. Examination of the evolution of these transitional relations and institutions is a promising research objective that can also be resolved with the methods of political economy. It is a socially-oriented state that can become one of such transitional institutions. Its social focus serves not as a claimed goal, but as a result based on the entire system of support structures that ensure both generation and achievement of the social goals. Another important element of such a social state is the ideology of the social solidarity that serves not as a preaching of the common brotherly love, but as an imperative to ensure actual changes in the social relations.

It is the economy's focus on human potential's development and reduction of material inequality till the rational level that serves as a required material basis for this solidarity.

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