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The History of Education

Social Portrait of Foreign Professors in the Universities of the Russian Empire (1755–1835)

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Abstract

Currently, the European education system is changing drastically. That depends on the institutional infrastructure shifts and access to education itself. Ukraine possesses such features as well, which confirms its constant belonging to European educational traditions.

The scientific questions and problems actualized in this manuscript, to some extent, fill the existing gaps in the system of knowledge about the actual issues of formation and development of higher education in the Russian Empire.

The purpose of this manuscript is to comprehend the history of formation and development of higher education in the Russian Empire. We have analyzed the biographies of foreign professors invited to the imperial Russian universities. Their teaching and research activities implemented the university idea into the system of higher education of the Russian Empire in accordance with the values and ideals of the European educational space.

It is them who marked further ways of the university education development. At the stage of founding Russian universities, foreign professors (usually, German ones) performed a significant role. They unfolded new institutions, created textbooks and curricula, founded scientific schools, conducted fundamental research in separate branches, which was a good example for future academic generations. Such an activity is needed to adapt and revise the European university idea in the new culture context. Therefore, this problem has a specific topicality.

Keywords: education, universities, education reform, educational governance, educational policy, higher education, foreign professors.

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1. Introduction

The analyzed biographies of foreign professors provide a scientific portrait gallery of the European science in its “golden age”. We are going to trace a personal contribution of separate researchers to the cultural heritage of the Russian Empire. In general, the represented biographical analysis offers a basis for further studies.

For example, the above-mentioned may investigate how academic life emerged and evolved in the autocratic Russian Empire. Also, it can probe into intellectual awareness, norms and class privileges existing within state and local authorities. Altogether, interrelations between Russian and foreign scientists become obvious. There is an interesting question to answer: how deeply did foreign professors of the first Russian Empire universities influence the academic mind and behavior in future?

With university foundations, new spheres of spreading and developing culture emerged. In this case, it is foreign scientists who mediated as much as possible. Via their own interest and influence, they promoted the higher education change when new prospects opened and more valuable people entered the academic community. In the second part of the 19th century, universities became available for many students. Consequently, that shifted the status and image of intellectuals.

The bibliographical analysis results make us not only reconsider fate and heritage of foreign professors. We may also compare categories of European knowledge history, their filling and social context. Initially, the Russian Empire higher education developed as an open system with ideas coming from Europe. Such a European “university idea” was gradually implemented in the Russian Empire. It adapted in contact with local traditions, social and state reality.

Within this “academic transfer”, a typical feature of all Russian universities in their first existence decades was the vast presence of foreign professors. Since the Russian university constitution of the 18th-19th centuries was originated in Europe, it was Europe where carriers of these principles came from. Such scientists could embody the university order similar to the European one. The lack of specialists in separate branches mattered as well. Here, the general organizational transfer of European academic principles combined with the scientific school transfer. Subsequently, own research schools were established.

Such an academic transfer included an obvious contradiction: university as a European idea construction had little to do with needs of the Russian society in that time. Respectively, foreign scientists coming to work at these universities were alien to society as well. Moreover, their European habits, mentality and activities contradicted the Russian autocratic policy. That caused sharp conflicts and prevented professors from succeeding in their teaching and research. Therefore, it happened quite often that their skills were not realized to a full extent. In each separate case, there was a combination of different factors determining the fate of a foreign professor. His activities are a rich field of investigation for researchers of higher education history.

2. Materials and methods

The professors’ staff of Russian imperial universities is regarded as a specific phenomenon in the home higher education history. The chronological research frame is defined by its historical context. The initial point is the middle of the 18th century since foreign professors appeared in Moscow after foundation of the first Russian university in 1755. The final point is the 1830s (adopting the New University Charter in 1835; assigning S. Uvarov to the education minister post).

S. Uvarov promoted a new academic policy. In particular, he refused to invite many foreigners to teach at home universities. Instead, he insisted on European training of own Russian professors who headed departments when the New University Charter came into effect (the 1830s). Later, they were assigned to Russian academic posts rarely. Therefore, they were not treated as a separate historical phenomenon anymore.

In this article, we analyzed the professors’ staff of four imperial institutions (founded before the New University Charter adoption in 1835). They were the Moscow Imperial University, the Kazan Imperial University, the Kharkiv Imperial University, the Saint Petersburg Imperial University.

Into our study, we did not include the universities in Dorpat and Vilna that belonged to the Russian Empire in the first third of the 19th century. Managed by the Education Ministry, their local educational traditions were different (the Polish ones at the Vilna University and the German ones at the Dorpat University). Development trends of these institutions differed greatly from traditions of the so-called “Russian home universities”. Similarly, we omitted the Saint Volodymyr Kyiv University. It was founded and upgraded in the full swing of the Uvarov Reforms.

Let us explain what principle we used to identify foreign professors. We included their birth place and citizenship. All professors born outside the Russian Empire during the given period were regarded as foreign. As foreign scientists, we did not treat their children (who were born in Russia, acquired the Russian citizenship and became university professors). Another requirement to identify foreign researchers was their assigning to the academic posts at one of the above-mentioned Russian universities till the middle of the 1830s.

Totally, we analyzed biographies of 105 foreign professors. They worked at the Moscow Imperial University (37 persons), the Kazan Imperial University (28 persons), the Kharkiv Imperial University (28 persons), and the Saint Petersburg Imperial University (12 persons). That confirms a great contribution of foreigners to the academic development in the Russian Empire.

3. Discussion

The history of higher education in the Russian Empire can be considered in terms of both general trends and prospects for the development of the bureaucratic system of the Russian state (Degtyarev, 2012; Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021b and etc.); the development of "university space" and corporatism (Andreev, 2009; Andreev, 2006; Maurer, 2015; Maurer, 2003; Ocherki istorii..., 2011 and etc.).

It is appropriate to analyze the formation of the system of higher education in the Russian Empire in the context of the establishment and development of the Imperial Russian Universities and their contribution to the scientific and social life of the country (Bagalej, 1906; Imperatorskij Moskovskij universitet, 2011; Ocherki istorii..., 2011); their structural subdivisions (Fiziko-matematicheskij fakultet, 1908; Istoriko-filologicheskij fakultet..., 1908; Lebid, 2023; Lebid, Shevchenko, 2021a; Medicinskij fakultet..., 1905–1906; Yuridicheskij fakultet..., 1908) and their teaching staff (Biograficheskij slovar..., 1904; Biograficheskij slovar..., 1902–1903; Biograficheskij slovar..., 1855; Feofanov, 2013; Lebid, 2022; Lebid, Degtyarev, 2023; Lebid, Lobko, 2022; Lebid, Stepanov, 2023; Niks, 2008; Volkov, Kulikova, 2003; Volkov i dr., 2003).

It is also important to study the peculiarities of the initial stage and formation of university education in the Russian Empire. At this stage, a significant influence on the process of formation of university education in the Russian Empire was exerted by foreign professors invited to Russia as carriers of the European university idea (Andreev, 2006; Bajer-Toma, 2003; Bedoeva, 2020; Feofanov, 2011; Inostrannye professora..., 2011; Kunc, 2002; Maurer, 2015; Petrov, 1997; Yakushev i dr., 2004).

A. Andreev investigates the development of university education in the Russian Empire in the context of the spread of European university education. His scientific works show the formation of the idea of Russian universities at the turn of the XVII–XVIII centuries. The historian pays special attention to the reform of Alexander I, during the development of which the experience of German universities was taken into account. He traces the influence of the model of "classical university" (Andreev, 2006; Andreev, 2009).

As D. Bedoeva notes, "in the first quarter of the 19th century, Russian universities lacked professors. Therefore, they were invited from Germany". She identified the reasons for the relocation of German professors, studied their living conditions. The contribution of German professors to Russian science and the development of university education was analysed (Bedoeva, 2020).

The works by V. Volkov and M. Kulikova study the main milestones in the life and activities of professors of the Imperial Moscow University. In the works by Volkov V. and Kulikova M. the main milestones in the life and work of Moscow professors from the 18th to the beginning of the 20th centuries are studied (Volkov, Kulikova, 2003; Volkov i dr., 2003).

E. Kunc's study analyses the contribution of the Imperial Moscow University in the context of the functioning of European universities. It shows the educational activities of the Moscow University in the last third of the 18th century, as well as the role of foreign university professors in the reforms of public education in the early 19th century (Kunc, 2002).

Maurer T. investigates the formation of the teaching staff of Russian universities in the nineteenth century. His works consider the problems of self-determination of universities in the conditions of state building. (Maurer, 2003; Maurer, 2015).

The study of the social portrait of professors of the Imperial Moscow University is made in the works of N. Niks. The author's research is based on sources of personal origin and numerous statistical materials. The researcher shows the role of Moscow University professors in the formation of science and higher education in the Russian Empire, as well as in the formation of

cultural ties in Russian society at the turn of the century (Niks, 2008). F. Petrov devoted his research to the history of German professors at the Imperial Moscow University (Petrov, 1997).

A. Feofanov's works analyse the number and social composition of professors of the Imperial Moscow University in the second half of the 18th – first quarter of the 19th century. The author studies the age, marital status, career, social status and other issues of professors. The biographies of foreign professors of Russian universities are analysed and as a result it is shown that they made a significant contribution to the development of university education in the Russian Empire (Feofanov, 2011; Feofanov, 2013).

As A. Yakushev and other researchers note, "due to the opening of new universities in Russia, the problem of scientific and pedagogical personnel became acute" (Yakushev i dr., 2004). In this regard, the Ministry of Public Education and universities were forced to invite foreign scientists and professors. These were mostly representatives of German universities, who were engaged in professional training of specialists and scientists in Russian universities (Yakushev i dr., 2004).

4. Results

At the first stage of the existence of universities in the Russian Empire, a significant part of their teachers were foreign professors, who had to be attracted to create educational institutions of European scale. Such qualified personnel were absent in the higher educational institutions of the Russian Empire. Thus, it was German universities that served as a source of personnel for the newly formed universities (Andreev, 2006; Petrov, 1997).

Most of the foreign professors invited were from Germany by their origin or nationality – 80 out of 104. It was German educational traditions and models that became a reference point for Russian reformers of the higher education system. I. Shuvalov acted in this way when recruiting professors for the Imperial Moscow University, and later the trustees of the Kazan and Kharkov Universities. Apart from Germans, foreign professors included Frenchmen invited to teach French (Feofanov, 2011; Inostrannye professor..., 2011: 11-24).

All invited foreign professors at Russian imperial universities can be conditionally divided into three groups. The first group includes 23 professors of the Imperial Moscow University in the second half of the 18th century. The second group consists of foreign professors who were invited to Russian universities during the university reforms of the early 19th century – 70 persons. The third group of foreign professors consists of scientists who taught in Russian universities in the first third of the XIX century – 11 persons (Inostrannye professor..., 2011: 11-24).

As the analysis shows, the average age of professors of the first group at the time of their invitation to Russian universities was 30 years. The duration of their work at the university was on average 15 years. Six professors taught for more than 20 years (the record-breaker was Professor I. Rost, who had 34 years of experience at the Imperial Moscow University).

The age of professors of the second group was lower, which may indicate the Russian reformers' bet on young people. The duration of their stay in Russian universities was also shorter and did not exceed 10 years, and some – even 5 years. Many professors, unable to withstand the conditions of life and labour, died. Many, having worked in Russia for a short time, returned to their homeland and continued teaching there.

By the middle of the 20s of the XIX century in 4 imperial universities – Moscow, Kharkov, Kazan and St. Petersburg – only 8 out of 70 invited professors remained. This indicates their short-term influence on Russian universities, although the number of professors in this group was significant (Bedoeva, 2020: 65-72; Yakushev i dr., 2004: 159-162).

The influence of foreign professors on the system of higher education of the Russian Empire depended on many factors, in particular, on the positions they held in the university hierarchy. Thus, there were 9 university rectors and 38 deans.

Foreigners became rectors and deans least often at the Imperial Moscow and St. Petersburg Universities, and more often at Kharkov and Kazan Universities. This can be explained by the fact that the Imperial Moscow University had already formed its own (domestic) corporation, from which representatives of university management were elected. The corporations of Kazan and Kharkov universities were just being formed. That is why administrative posts were occupied by foreign professors. At the Imperial St. Petersburg University its management was represented by a small number of foreign professors due to their insignificant number in the university itself in the period from 1819 to 1835. The longest administrative position was held by Professor I. Geim of the Imperial Moscow University: in 1805 he was elected Dean of the Faculty of Letters, and in 1808–

1819 he was elected Rector. – rector ([Imperatorskij Moskovskij universitet, 2011](#); [Biograficheskij slovar..., 1904](#); [Biograficheskij slovar..., 1902–1903](#); [Biograficheskij slovar..., 1855](#); [Volkov, Kulikova, 2003](#); [Volkov i dr., 2003](#)).

In addition, many professors held other administrative positions: director of the institute, member of committees, librarian, and others.

From the point of view of teaching activity of foreign professors, most of them (26 professors) were invited to the historical and philological faculties. They taught philological historical sciences, geography and statistics ([Istoriko-filologicheskij fakultet..., 1908](#)).

Twenty-three professors taught at the physical and mathematical faculties of universities. They taught physics and mathematics, chemistry, astronomy, zoology, botany, etc. At the philosophical-legal faculties/departments 18 foreign professors taught: jurists, economists, philosophers ([Fiziko-matematicheskij fakultet, 1908](#)).

Often professors taught at several faculties or moved from one department. Everywhere the visiting professors taught a particular academic discipline for the first time, which was the purpose of their teaching activities in Russian universities – to expand the list of lecture courses in accordance with European traditions and standards.

Visiting professors made a significant contribution to the development of university science in the Russian Empire. Thus, Professor M. Bartels in his lectures outlined the latest mathematical achievements of European science, contributed to the formation of scientific views of N. Lobachevsky – an outstanding mathematician.

The establishment of chemical science in the imperial universities was also greatly promoted by foreign professors: Professor F. Giese at the Imperial Kharkov University.

The Imperial Moscow University was famous for its research in botany and zoology, conducted by foreign professors: G. Fischer and G. Hoffman. The latter, among other things, also educated his student – botanist, writer, historian, the first rector of the Imperial University of St. Vladimir in Kiev, M. Maksymovych.

The influence of foreign professors at the faculties of history and philology was limited. Their activity had little influence on the teaching of legal sciences – they were developed thanks to domestic professors. The influence of foreign professors in the field of philosophical disciplines was significant: I. Boulet at the Imperial Moscow University and I. Schad at the Imperial Kharkov University. Lectures on the philosophy of Schelling, Fichte, Kant, etc. were professionally delivered at the philosophical departments of the universities. Their own philosophical theories were discussed ([Bagalej, 1906](#); [Istoriko-filologicheskij fakultet..., 1908](#)).

The Philology Faculties of the imperial Russian universities had few foreign professors compared to other faculties and departments. This was due to the fact that "own" professors were naturally employed to teach Russian literature and history. The exception was ancient languages, which were taught at a high level by visiting professors.

With regard to the participation of foreign professors in university and public life, it should be noted that scientific and educational societies were founded at the Imperial Moscow University, in which German professors played an important role, in particular I. Schwarz, a philanthropist and Freemason ([Biograficheskij slovar..., 1855](#); [Inostrannye professora..., 2011: 11-24](#)).

The ideas of foreign professors were reflected in their speeches in connection with solemn occasions and anniversaries of universities, in which scientific and social, as well as ethical and political views of scientists were presented: Professor G. Grellmann in his speeches spoke out against serfdom. Professor E. Knorr argued about the usefulness for science for life. Professor G. Corritari made some remarks on the relation of the experimental sciences to philosophy. Professor X. Rommel made a speech on the importance of enlightenment ([Biograficheskij slovar..., 1904](#); [Bagalej, 1906](#); [Istoriko-filologicheskij fakultet..., 1908](#)).

Many foreign professors were members of various societies and organisations: Free Economic Society, Russian Archaeological and Russian Geographical Society, Bible Society and others.

At the same time, invited foreign professors founded scientific schools in Russian universities, leaving behind their students: P. Chebyshev, O. Somov, N. Nadezhdin, I. Davydov, N. Lobachevsky, G. Hess-de-Calve, A. Dudrovich and others.

5. Conclusion

Thus, the review and analysis of sources and materials have shown that foreign professors of imperial Russian universities made a significant contribution to the development of higher

education in the Russian Empire. Occupying high administrative positions, foreign professors in some way determined the policy of management and development of universities, as well as the spheres of scientific activity of higher educational institutions.

It was foreign professors who, for the first time giving lectures at imperial Russian universities, brought the teaching of these subjects closer to European standards. Also, the scientific ideas of the visiting foreign professors had a significant influence on the formation of the academic community of the imperial Russian universities. In this regard, there was undoubtedly a transfer of the European university tradition into the sphere of Russian higher education of the Empire period.

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