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The UK and US Academic Discourse on Russia and Eurasia: a Critical Enquiry

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Аннотация

The article analyses the development of English-language scholarship on Russia and wider Eurasia from the 1990s onwards. It is particularly concerned with the combined effects of the marketisation of higher education and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 for language-based inter-disciplinary Russian and East European area studies, which in the past generated in-depth knowledge on different aspects of life in the USSR. It argues that advancing market fundamentalism and, especially, the collapse of Communism interpreted by Western political elites as the end of global bi-polarity and the triumph of US-led political and cultural universalism led to a drastic reduction in funding of Russian and Eurasian Studies and their increasing dispersal within a number of mono-theoretical academic disciplines. Consequently, we now witness the academic dominance of political scientists who tend to detach research phenomena from their historical and cultural contexts and to 'dissect' them so as to fit whatever monotheoretical determinist model they happen to favour. They also prioritise deductive quantitative research methods over qualitative ones and rely on secondary sources in English as well as non-academic analytical reports, largely available online. A corollary has been a considerable overall deterioration in the epistemological quality of English-language scholarship on Russia and other countries of Eurasia, as well as its increasing politicisation.

Ключевые слова: USA, UK, Russia, Eurasia, East Europe, area studies, the Cold War, higher education, marketisation, research funding

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The UK and US Academic Discourse on Russia and Eurasia: a Critical Enquiry

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Abstract

The article analyses the development of English-language scholarship on Russia and wider Eurasia from the 1990s onwards. It is particularly concerned with the combined effects of the marketisation of higher education and the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991 for language-based inter-disciplinary Russian and East European area studies, which in the past generated in-depth knowledge on different aspects of life in the USSR. It argues that advancing market fundamentalism and, especially, the collapse of Communism interpreted by Western political elites as the end of global bi-polarity and the triumph of US-led political and cultural universalism led to a drastic reduction in funding of Russian and Eurasian Studies and their increasing dispersal within a number of mono-theoretical academic disciplines. Consequently, we now witness the academic dominance of political scientists who tend to detach research phenomena from their historical and cultural contexts and to ‘dissect’ them so as to fit whatever monotheoretical determinist model they happen to favour. They also prioritise deductive quantitative research methods over qualitative ones and rely on secondary sources in English as well as non-academic analytical reports, largely available online. A corollary has been a considerable overall deterioration in the epistemological quality of English-language scholarship on Russia and other countries of Eurasia, as well as its increasing politicisation.

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