THE CONCEPT OF CANADIAN NATIONAL CHARACTER IN NATIONAL DISCOURSE OF CANADIAN FEDERATION AFTER 1867

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The article is devoted to the national discourse in Canada and the problem of defining semantic content of its central concepts as “nation” and “national character” in the second half of XIX - early XX cent. The main attention is given to the three important aspects of Canadian national ideology formation. First, historical conditions, events and processes that affected the appearance of Canadian nationalism. Several factors can be mentioned as the most important ones. They are the formation of the Canadian federation in 1867, the struggle for its centralization, the federal government policy of overcoming the isolation and disintegration of provinces, economic development of the Dominion of Canada, national market formation, demographic trends. Secondly, it studies in depth popular political and racial theories of that time and defines the specificity of their perception by Canadian elites during national discourse formation. All this allows us to get close to the main problem solution - to define key concepts of the Canadian national discourse semantic content and its influence on the development of Canadian nationalism and Canadian national identity.

Keywords: history of Canada, Canadian nation, Canadian national character, nationalism, National Discourse, Discourse Analysis, Nordic theory, racism, multiculturalism.

The image of a nation usually takes central place in the system of values and worldview of any national ideology. It is often interpreted as a collective portrait of a nation’s typical representative – “average” Russian, American, German, French, Canadian, etc. – which can be created on the basis of certain bright appearance features or character traits that are postulated as the characteristic of a nation as a whole. This image of a nation performs two important functions. First, it can be used as the basis for creating imaginary boundaries between “ours” and “theirs” and helps to define the scope of the national community, and thereby to justify its right to exist. And secondly it helps nation builders to create the nation as a conceptual construct with specific essential features, details, symbols and myths that make it possible to substantiate and perceive a nation as a real, meaningful and objective phenomenon of social and political life.

To construct an image of a nation is the first step in the creation of any national ideology. And the experience of the New World states was so rich with original concepts and approaches, many of which are widely known and remain popular until now. This significant example of modern nation building was bound with the history of British North America. Here in 1867, in the atmosphere of fierce debates the Dominion of Canada was created – the first confederation of self-government colonies in the British Empire. The founders of the confederation argued for its existence by the need to eliminate borders between the provinces for big business, and reform the imperfect political system of 1841 by adopting a new constitution. Their arguments were supported by plans of achieving greater autonomy for Canada within the British Empire and strengthening the defense of confederation against possible US expansion. Thus, there arose many hopes assigned to the Dominion of Canada [Federalism, P. 62].

However, the opponents of the federation had also strong arguments. Representatives of small and medium-sized businesses feared competition from magnates of Ontario, local political elites did not want to reduce their influence and move the political decision-making center from provincial capitals to Ottawa, and many people did not express much enthusiasm for joining the new and unfamiliar confederation. In particular, the people of Nova Scotia and New Brunswick even did not call themselves “Canadians”, instead of it they used the word “novoscotian”.
The conferences in Charlottetown in 1864 and in Quebec City in 1866 were milestone stages of the discussion. During these negotiations “Fathers of Confederation” suggested transferring the national debt of Maritime Provinces to the federal government account, providing a subsidy for New Brunswick and Prince Edward Island in the amount of $150,000 and $200,000 respectively, and building a railroad from Montreal to Halifax at the expense of federal government. The importance of financial concessions to “Antifederalists” was so obvious that even contemporaries spoke about “buying” the opposition by businessmen from Toronto.

The uniting of self-government colonies of British North America into the Dominion of Canada in 1867 foreshadowed a lot of difficulties in establishing real connections among the provinces which numbered seven in 1873: Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Ontario, Quebec, Manitoba and British Columbia. The first Prime Minister John Macdonald and the Conservative government relied on the so-called National Policy, the main components of which were protectionism, nationalism and railways. The first two of them were supposed to develop economic relations among the regions, and the last one was to create an ideological basis for the existence of the Canadian confederation. “We are engaged in a very difficult task—the task of wielding together seven Provinces which have been accustomed to regard themselves as isolated from each other, which are full of petty jealousies, their Provincial questions, their local interests”, agreed with conservatives Edward Blake, the future leader of the Liberal party, in his famous speech at Aurora, Ont., on 3 October, 1874. And he continued: “How are we to accomplish our work? How are we to effect a real union between these Provinces? Can we do it by giving a sop now to one, now to another, after the manner of the late Government? By giving British Columbia the extravagant terms which have been referred to; by giving New Brunswick $150,000 a year for an export duty which cannot be made out as worth more than $65,000 a year? Do you hope to create or to preserve harmony and good feeling upon such a false and sordid and mercenary basis as that? Not so! That day I hope is done for ever, and we must find some other and truer ground for Union than that by which the late Government sought to buy love and purchase peace. We must find some common ground on which to unite, some common aspiration to be shared, and I think it can be found alone in the cultivation of that national spirit to which I have referred.”

In the 1870s Canadian nationalism entered a period of rapid development. The concepts of the Canadian nation, national interests, and national unity were actively involved in the social and political life of the country. Nationalist societies like “Canada First” made plans for enhancing Canada’s status within the British Empire and even for confederation development for decades to come. The nationalists promoted the idea of Canadian nation as a community of all Canadian inhabitants irrespective of their origin, language or religion and as the ground for the Dominion to be united. The national policy, new railways and industrial development made their arguments stronger. But despite the integrating potential of civic nationalism it required much more time to be introduced into the mass consciousness.

In addition, the image of the nation had not formed by that time. Politicians and intellectuals argued how a “real Canadian” looked like, with whom people could relate themselves. During these discussions five main approaches to define the image of the Canadian nation were formed.

Normans of the New World

One of the most popular conceptions linked the “national character” of Canadians with the geographical features of the country: the cold climate, vast expanses, wildlife and plenty of undeveloped land. Based on the ideas of geographical determinism, which was common with the Enlightenment theories, and backed up by the latest achievements of the evolution theory, it postulated the idea of the relationship between climate and national character. This theory claimed that the harsh northern latitudes were suitable for only volitional and freedom-loving people with a high degree of endurance and intellectual development, and that northern Canadian climate was usually the main condition of natural selection of settlers. As for lazy and weak emigrants, they were either forced by climate to leave the territory of British North America or not to arrive at all. That’s why the Canadian character was getting stronger and stronger with each generation [Berger, P.5]. And this gave reason to call Canadians “Normans of the New World”, and the country itself - “the reservoir of pure northern blood of all mankind.” [Berger, P.6,9]

Thus, geographical and climatic features confirmed the ideas of Canadian nationalism and the notion about special “mission” of Canadians to preserve the Nordic type of people. These circumstances were considered as proof of their equality with “Normans

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1 Correspondence of Sir John Macdonald / ed. by Joseph Pope. Toronto, 1921. P. 70.

of the Old World” - the Britons, and, at the same time, as a sign of moral and ethical superiority over the United States people, who, as the theory told, were spoiled by the influence of the warm climate and cohabitation with the black race [Berger, P. 17,18].

Through the relationship between cold, snow, harsh environmental conditions and physical strength, health and the moral purity was repeatedly conducted in Canadian literature. “It is a glorious climate. Miss Kexford; it is a glorious country”, said the heroine of one of the late XIX century Canadian novels. “The depressions and fears that grow up with one’s life in the Old World fall away from one in this wonderful air, with the stimulus of a new world and a strong young nation all around. This snow is not cold; it is warm. In this garden of yours it is just now acting as a blanket for the germs of flowers that could not live through an English winter, but will live here, and next summer will astonish you with their richness. Nor is it cold for you; it is dry as dust; you can walk over it in moccasins, and not be damp: and it has covered away all the decay of autumn, conserving for you in the air such pure oxygen that it will be like new life in your veins, causing you to laugh at the frost.”

However, “normannism” opened opportunities for uniting the English and the French Canadian population. All of them having been subjected to “ennobling” influence of the severe nature of North America for more than a century. So it was logical to talk about the equality of dignity and rights to participate in the creation of the Canadian nation. “In the meantime, while this confederation is fighting its way out of its political difficulties, and resolving wealth and refinement from the original and rugged elements of a new country, it is for the respective nationalities not to stand aloof from one another, but to unite in every way possible for common intellectual improvement, and give sympathetic encouragement to the study of the two languages and to the mental efforts of each other,” wrote John Bourinot, the well-known historian and supporter of the theory of the Canadian “normanism” in 1893. It is interesting to notice that the French Canadians and their French ancestors perceived by English Canadians as a northern, Nordic “race”, while in Britain they were referred by nationalists to the south type of “races” or to the so-called “Gallic race”, weak in character and inferior to the virtues of “northerners”.

In addition, Canadian intellectuals invented a concept of national sport. Ice hockey took this place of honor. It was one of the most “Nordic” sports in the end of the XIX century. The rough play on the cold ice expressed “national spirit”, and as many Canadian writers and publicists wrote, trained a strong, courageous character of players. Moreover, historians argued that exactly students of McGill University began to play hockey for the first time in 1875. And this invention of modern Canada was very valuable in a lack of historical achievements of the new confederation [Mangan, P. 163; Gruneau, Whitson, P. 3, 25, 67-68].

Young Canada

One more approach to the definition of the national image of Canada emanated from the historical “youth” of the state. PolITICAL cartoons and illustrations to literature often pictured the Canadian nation as a young girl whose name was Canada or somewhat similar. Sometimes she appeared being accompanied by her “mother Britannia” and “cousin Jonathan” who represented USA.

“Youth” as a trait of national character meant a lot for nationalists. On the one hand, since the past and present did not give many reasons to be proud of the young Dominion of the British Empire, it was possible to move the “golden age” of the nation to the future. From this point of view the vast territories and rich natural recourses were considered as evidence of the right of Canadians for the national existence as the complete and self-sufficient community capable of providing itself with all the things needed. “Canada has been modest in its history, although its history has been heroic in many ways. But its history, in my estimation, is only commencing. It is commencing in this century. The nineteenth century was the century of the United States. I think we can claim that it is Canada that shall fill the twentieth century”, told Wilfred Laurier in his famous speech in the Canadian club in 1904.

On the other hand, the youth meant progressiveness and readiness for the future. Canadian politicians, writers and journalists liked to emphasize the fact that their country was founded by colonists – people who were ready for changes, active, enterprising and laborious, who left behind all sins of the Old World to start a new life. Therefore, the “Young Canada” was often represented as the contrast to the ossified, stagnant, apathetic and rigid nations of the Old World. In particular, in his articles the renowned journalist Goldwin Smith opposed the “progressive”,

“republican” and “democratic” spirit of the people of North America to the “medieval” and “aristocratic” militant imperialism of the Old World.

The concept of “young Canadia” was associated with the idea of “normanism” and often embodied in the image of a full of strength lumberjack or a farmer who cleared a dense forest to cultivate virgin soil and was able to cope with any difficulties and get his own happiness by himself. The modern researcher Adam Smith proved convincingly that there was even a particular Canadian concept of a self-made man. Like an US analog, it was a character of social myth and many literary works, he achieved success in life “from the ground” only thanks to his abilities and dedication. But his way of life, as a rule, was connected with rural areas, not the city, and was associated with heavy physical labor, struggle with severe nature conditions and often ended with no material success but happy family life on the farm or in the village.

The heirs of the American Loyalists

The creating of a nation image usually combines positive and negative features of national identity in the mass consciousness. The image of common enemy, commemorative practices supporting the collective memory of wars and tragedies, victims and losses, bring people together no worse and sometimes even better than myths of common origin and destiny. In the case of Canadian national ideology there was no more convenient opposition object to Canadians than people of the neighboring United States.

In the historical memory of British North America’s inhabitants the relationships with “cousin Jonathan” were hopelessly ruined by two wars, in which the USA tried to subdue “young Canadia” - in 1775 and 1812. Politicians, journalists and also professional historians created the original image of enemy from the US during the second half of the XIX century. Several dozen works devoted to wars of 1775-1783 and 1812 were published. The main theme of these works was the glorification of Canadian militia and Canadians in general, and the formation of the negative image of invading Americans - rebels and adventurers with flattery but deceptive speeches. “The Spartan bands of Canadian Loyalist volunteers, aided by a few hundred English soldiers and civilized Indians, repelled the Persian thousands of American invaders, and maintained the virgin soil of Canada unpolluted by the foot of the plundering invader,” wrote a well known historian of the time. “Yet, upon the whole, the war did much good to Canada, apart from the success of its arms; it tended to cement the people together as one family; English, French, Scotch, Irish, and Americans had forgotten former distinctions and jealousies, and had all become Canadians, with increased devotion not only to the land of their nativity or adoption, but to the glorious mother country which had become the victorious champion of the liberties of Europe, and leader in the civilization of mankind.”

Canadians perceived southern neighbors as the exact opposite to themselves under the influence of historical and political literature. Writers and commentators portrayed Americans warlike, greedy for foreign lands and property and ever dangerous. The USA origin itself was perceived as the result of treachery and illegal breaking with the British Crown. The press and literature represented the migration of Loyalists to Canada after the War of Independence as exodus of the most noble and honest people [Francis, P. 93-95]. Accordingly only selfish, greedy and deprived people stayed there in the US and built the state that mired in corruption and criminality, as many Canadian writers and publicists were convinced. Even the common language, culture and historical origins couldn’t prevent alienation.

The belief in extremely ideological motives of migrated loyalists’ allegiance was an integral part of the national ideology. It allowed not only to believe that the main imperatives of Canadians’ behavior in the end of XVIII century were so highly respected in Victorian society values such as duty and morality, but there also emerged a beautiful legend about the origins of the Canadian nation, which was quickly adopted in textbooks and fiction.

Thus, the image of their enemy remained associated exclusively with the United States in the political discourse of Canada throughout the second half of the XIX century. The war with the southern neighbor became a popular subject for not only historical, but also futuristic novels in which characters met bravely the invasion of Americans in the XX century. It is interesting to notice today that no one in Canada did not even suspect that the Dominion could have any other enemy at the end of the XIX century.

The Part of Greater Britain

One of the key components of national ideology was the idea of Canada as an integral part of the

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British Empire and Anglo-Saxon world, which the famous British nationalist Charles Dilke named “the Greater Britain”. It was typical for the inhabitants of the Empire’s “white” colonies of XIX century to feel a sense of pride and patriotic enthusiasm about belonging to the greatest power of that time [Saukova, P. 104-117]. Canadians considered themselves to be members of two communities: the imperial and national, the authority of the first increased the importance of the second. The word “imperialism” was often used in the political discourse of the time as a synonym for sense of unity and solidarity with the “mother country.”[Groudzinsky]

However, there was a contradiction in the coexistence of “Canadian” and “imperial” identity components. It was not apparent in the 1870-1880s but it started to attract more attention with time. The problem was in the fact that each nation should have its own state. It was accepted by all recognized national theories of the time. And empires and imperialism could only act like opponents of national aspirations as it was in the case of Austria and Hungary for example.

Initially the ideologists of Canadian nationalism solved this problem through the statement that Canada lacked needs for an independent state while the status of an autonomous colony met all its needs. But later the ambitions of Canadian nationalists and the elite were getting bigger, they cherished the idea to give more value to the dominions within the structure of “Greater Britain” and to develop mechanisms for their participation in decision-making process. The implementation of these ideas was planned within the framework of the Imperial Federation. It was the theoretical model of a Union on the German model in which all parts of the empire could have created and protected a common market, coordinated actions in the defense policy, and finally established a close political cooperation which could have allowed the representatives of the colonies to influence the whole imperial policy. Thus, the nationalists saw the highest recognition of the Canadian nation as the willingness of “mother country” to consider Canada as an equal partner, not a colony.

The Imperial Federation project remained extremely popular in Canada throughout the 1880-1890s. It was promoted by the Canadian branch of the Imperial Federation League with its headquarters in London, and many politicians identified themselves as supporters of the imperial reorganization idea on basis of mutual advantage. However, the last word to solve this important issue rested ultimately with the UK. And Joseph Chamberlain and his colleagues could not manage to prove the need for reform [Groudzinsky]. Contemporaries realized that the problem was not in Canada but only in the reluctance of the British elites to abandon the policy of free trade. That’s why Canadian nationalists were left no hope that the views of British would change.

The imperialists tried hard to attract the attention of the “mother country” to Canada. In 1894 the Canadian government organized a conference of representatives of the self-governing colonies on the development of the telegraph and steamship service among the parts of the empire. In 1897 Ottawa provided benefits for Great Britain under the new Customs Tariff at the rate of 12.5 % compared with France and other colonial empires. In 1899 Canada enthusiastically joined the Boer War, and in 1914 it supported Britain in the First World War without doubt. Some of contemporaries even thought that Canadians were much more interested in strengthening of imperial ties than the British authorities. And this impression was not deceptive. Imperialism was a form of Canadian nationalism existence. And the fact that it belonged to the Empire did not interfere with the development of national identity but even stimulated it.

Canadian “race question.”

The concept of “race” had a very complex content in social and political discourse of the British Empire in the end of the XIX century. On the one hand, it was associated with biological characteristics such as the color of skin and hair, the shape of a head, different facial features, the structure of a body, etc. That allowed proving “scientifically” the existence of fundamental differences between “ours” and “theirs” in a broad imperial context. On the other hand, purely biological signs of “races” could be added by social characteristics: patterns of everyday behavior, mentality, language, traditions and many other things for a more profound differentiation between people who looked like “ours” but were “theirs”, for example, “white” Europeans except British. Thus, the map of Europe was painted by Teutonic, Gallic, Celtic, Slavic and other races forgotten by then. Eventually the racial theories served only one purpose – to legitimate the dominant position of one of the “races” by identifying with it such “objective” characteristics that allegedly proved it highest dignities [Jacobson, P. 39-90].

The dominant position in the hierarchy of the British Empire’s “races” was obviously occupied by

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the Anglo-Saxon “race”. English nationalists characterized the representatives of this “race” as strong, brave, athletic, self-sufficient, freedom-loving, adventurous, commitment, fair, punctual, honest, true to their word, peaceful, highly moral - in other words, it contained all the virtues of the Victorian era. It was also considered that the Anglo-Saxon mentality lay at the root of Canada’s “national character.” But in practice the situation was not so simple. For contemporaries it was clear that a significant contribution to the Canadian nation-building was made by many European races: so-called Gallic from France, Celtic from Ireland and Scotland, Teutonic from Germany, Slavic from the Russian Empire. And it appeared to be a real problem because the racial theories of the time denied the possibility of peaceful racial coexistence. According to very popular social Darwinist theories of the time, the most powerful “races” had to dominate and assimilate the others. When and how it would happen – that was the “Canadian race question.”

Many nationalists believed that there would be a distinctive Canadian “race” in the future that would combine the advantages of all the European “races”. “In Western Canada there is to be seen to-day that most fascinating of all human phenomena, the making of a nation. Out of breeds diverse in traditions, in ideals, in speech, and in manner of life, Saxon and Slav, Teuton, Celt and Gaul, one people is being made. The blood strains of great races will mingle in the blood of a race greater than the greatest of them all,” wrote Ralph Connor in the preface to his novel “The foreigner” in 1909.

Through the creation of their own race Canadians could overcome the differences and conflicts among themselves and form their own original national image. According to the prevalent view of politics and intellectuals, the Canadian nation had to be not a “melting pot”, as US nation was, but a mosaic of the best traits of cultures and peoples from all over the world. Thus, Canadian “race question” could be resolved to mutual satisfaction. This theory of the new Canadian “race” was one more form of Canadian nationalism in the beginning of XX century and provided the basis for policy of multiculturalism in the second half of XX century.

Such an approach to the question of migrant assimilation can be explained by the demographic structure of British North America. In fact, the Anglo-Saxon “race” could hardly pretend to be the “melting pot”. In particular, according to the 1901 census, of the 5.4 million Canadians, only 1.3 million were immigrants from England, 1.6 million indicated their origin as French, 1 million – Irish, 0.8 million – Scotch. None of the “races” had superiority but in relative terms the primacy was kept by the Celtic race, next was the Gallic one, and Anglo-Saxons took only third place.

Summing up, we should emphasize the swiftness with which Canadian nationalism developed. The process of Canadian national ideology creating started with the formation of the Canadian confederation in 1867. But by the beginning of XX century the image of the Canadian nation and national character had acquired a set of expressive and specific features. In the national discourse typical Canadians were portrayed as young and strong farmers and woodsmen with physical strength and unshakable morality, they were characterized as tough, freedom-loving, active, adventurous, and ready to overcome any difficulties and obstacles. The future promised them to become residents of the richest and most developed country in the world. And at that point they stood on the border of the civilized world and the wildness where they built their new life enthusiastically. In contrast to Americans, they possessed honesty, law-abiding, peacefulness and a sense of duty and recognized clearly the difference between themselves and southern neighbors. Canadians were proud to belong to the powerful British Empire and were waiting for the time when “mother country” will be ready to treat their country not as a colony but as an equal partner and ally. They could no longer call themselves Anglo-Saxon because their identity changed gradually to something else: a mosaic of cultures, a collection of the best features of the great European “races” as it was called in the beginning of XX century. This extremely attractive image of the nation increased public interest to the national ideology which strengthened the unity of Canadian society and became the basis for a dialogue among the representatives of its numerous ethnic groups.

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Статья посвящена изучению национального дискурса в Канаде второй половины XIX – начала XX вв. и раскрытию смыслового содержания таких его центральных понятий, как «нация» и «национальный характер». Основное внимание уделено трём основным аспектам формирования канадской национальной идеологии. Во-первых, изучению исторических условий возникновения канадского национализма и определению повлиявших на него событий и процессов. Важнейшие из них – это образование Канадской федерации в 1867 г., борьба за её централизацию и преодоление замкнутости и разобщенности провинций, экономическое развитие доминиона Канады и формирование национального рынка, демографические тенденции. Во-вторых, большое внимание уделяется анализу популярных политических и расовых теорий того времени и определению специфики их рецепции общественно-политическими кругами Канады при формировании национального дискурса. Всё это позволяет подойти к решению главной проблемы – определению смыслового наполнения ключевых понятий канадского национального дискурса и его влияния на развитие канадского национализма и национальной идентичности канадцев.

Ключевые слова: история Канады, канадская нация, канадский национальный характер, национализм, национальный дискурс, дискурс-анализ, нордическая теория, расизм, мультикультурализм.

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