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## **Aksjologiczne funkcje pojęciowe „świata rosyjskiego” (Russkiy mir): mitologem, kulturem i ideologem**

**Streszczenie.** W artykule analizujemy pojęcie „Russkiy mir”, które pomimo rosnącej popularności w różnych dyskursach, nie osiągnęło jeszcze ostatecznego zrozumienia jako konstrukt poznawczy. Brak tej jasności jest dodatkowo komplikowany przez jego socjokulturowe, mitologiczne i ideologiczne wymiary, zwłaszcza promowane przez rząd rosyjski. W ramach badania prezentujemy krótką analizę różnorodnych interpretacji pojęcia wraz z jego konceptualizacją uwzględniającą trzy aksjologiczne funkcje: mitologem, kulturem i ideologem. Mitologem „Russkiy mir” jest postrzegany jako system przekonań leżących u podstaw relacji wartości w społeczeństwie, kulturem jako zbiór wiedzy kulturowej aktywnie kultywowanej przez jej zwolenników – mianowicie rosyjską inteligencję, oraz ideologem regulując politykę krajową i międzynarodową państwa rosyjskiego. Podkreślając te funkcje ujawniamy złożone warstwy pojęcia „Russkiy mir” oraz jego rolę w kształtowaniu złożonych tożsamości i dynamiki społecznej.

**Słowa kluczowe:** aksjologiczne funkcje pojęciowe, ideologem, koncept „Russkiy mir”, kulturem, mitologem

### **The axiological conceptual functions of the “Russian World” (Russkiy mir): mythologeme, cultureme, and ideologeme**

**Summary.** In this article, we analyze the “Russian World” concept, which, despite its growing prevalence in various discourses, has yet to achieve a definitive understanding as a cognitive construct. This lack of clarity is further complicated by its sociocultural, mythological, and ideological dimensions, particularly those promulgated by the Russian government. Within the scope of this article, we present a brief analysis of the diverse interpretations of this concept, along with our conceptualization, by dividing it into three axiological conceptual functions: mythologeme, cultureme, and ideologeme. The “Russian World” mythologeme is considered a system of beliefs underpinning the value relations within society, the cultureme as the aggregate of cultural knowledge actively

cultivated by its adherents – namely, the Russian intelligentsia, and the ideologeme that regulates the domestic and international policy of the Russian state. By highlighting these conceptual functions, the study reveals the intricate layers of the “Russian World,” emphasizing its role in shaping complex identities and social dynamics.

**Keywords:** axiological conceptual functions, ideologeme, the “Russian World” concept, cultureme, mythologeme

Nowadays, the “Russian World” (*Russkiy mir* in Russian) concept is progressively prevalent across diverse discourses. However, a definitive characterization of this concept as a cognitive construct remains elusive. This ambiguity may partly arise from an insufficient comprehension of the phenomenon, encompassing its sociocultural significance, mythological aspects, and ideological and political dimensions as promulgated by Russian governance.

In academic discourse, the superiority of definitions attributed to the “Russian World” characterizes it as a distinct civilization (A.G. Dugin (2000: 295), P. Eberhardt (2005: 173), N.A. Narochitskaya (2015: 13)), a collective of individuals who identify themselves as Russian (V.Yu. Darensky (2005: 42), V.A. Nikonov (2014: 18-22)), Russian expatriates and compatriots living overseas (V.A. Tishkov (2007: 42), S.N. Gradirovskiy and B.V. Mezhuyev (2006), V.L. Inozemtsev (2014)), a community bonded by the Russian language (E.M. Astakhov (2011), L.Ye. Krishtapovich (2017: 72)) or the Orthodox faith (A. Curanović (2010: 215), J. Wilfried (2016), V.M. Mukhanov, M.A. Volkhonsky (2019: 61)), an expression of Russian international outreach (A. Wierzbicki (2015: 125-126), M. Suslov (2017: 16), O. Wasiuta (2017), M. Delong (2020: 62)), and as a form of soft power (M. Gorham (2011: 23-24), M. Laruelle (2015: 10), M. Van Herpen (2015: 35), N.A. Kozlovtsseva (2017: 284), R. Łoś (2017: 568-570)).

The review of definitions reveals a degree of incomprehensibility surrounding the “Russian World” concept, characterized by an absence of standardized criteria for inclusion and a notable reliance on governmental discourse for its interpretation. It must be acknowledged that this represents merely a cursory overview of the extant research, given that a comprehensive exploration of this matter exceeds the scope of the present article. Let us briefly indicate that in the 1990s and early 2000s, research emphasized the Russian diaspora, particularly in the post-Soviet space, highlighting the necessity of creating conditions to maintain connections with it and preserve its identity. However, post-2014, the focus shifted towards the political, or more precisely, the ideological component of the “Russian World”. It started being portrayed as a political strategy to preserve and expand Russia’s global influence, particularly in its immediate vicinity.

The main question that arises from the consideration of the problem is whether the “Russian World” is a sociocultural reality or whether it is primarily a worldview, philosophical, cultural-civilizational, or ideological concept.

In any case, the answer to this question requires, in addition to philosophical understanding, also interdisciplinary study, primarily conceptualization. The discrepancy between interpretations, opinions, and definitions indicates its complexity, which does not lend itself to simple formalization and one-dimensional categorization. Discussions about the semantic core of the “Russian World”, its components, periphery, signs of belonging, borders, ethnic composition, mentality, and genesis continue and are far from over.

Upon conducting a preliminary synthesis of the outcomes derived from our undertaken conceptual analysis, it becomes evident that the “Russian World” notion as an integrated concept epitomizes a multifaceted construct, encompassing three pragmatic conceptual functions: the mythologeme, the cultureme, and the ideologeme (Starodubtseva 2022). Each of them, functioning as distinct systems of values, possesses the potential to act as a foundational organizing principle for specific social collectives – that is, the entities that embody these functions. It is based on two approaches: the approach of discursive text analysis (Leszczak 2008) and the conceptual-axiological approach (Leszczak, Stefański 2022). As a result, this analysis elucidates the existence of three intrinsically diverse sociocultural communities.

### **1. The “Russian World” mythologeme**

Initially, let us delve into the “Russian World” concept as a mythologeme, that is, as a myth or a kind of belief system. This myth functions as a foundational construct, enabling the establishment of a comprehensive system of value-based relationships. Myths serve as “a nuanced category for the articulation of diverse phenomena within the collective consciousness of modern societies” (Szacka 2009: 71). They wield a significant influence over societal structures, provoking specific reactions that, in turn, shape behaviors, mentalities, and cultural norms. Moreover, there exists a reciprocal relationship between society and myth; societal influences can modify the myth, leading to its evolution and perpetuation through time. In the framework proposed by Szymon Czupryński, myth is conceptualized as “a cultural construction or a communicative form that pertains to the social reality, engaging a particular social group or community” (2015: 10-11). This modern interpretation illuminates the profound significance and pervasive impact of myth within the sociocultural domain of the “Russian World,” highlighting its deep-seated influence.

We consider the “Russian World” as a mythologeme, not in the sense of fiction or pure idea, but as a socio-historical, cultural reality of consciousness in which a person lives and which holds special significance for them. Thus, it emerges within the synergy of the cultural-civilizational field of the collective experience and is solidified in everyday, socio-ethical, and economic activity models, primarily through language, customs, and traditions that transcend

strict national boundaries. The daily life, imbued with mythology and its conscious or unconscious implementation, constitutes a solid foundation for the “Russian World” mythologeme. This concept is not perceived merely as a figment or an abstract notion but as a socio-historical and cultural reality of consciousness in which individuals (i.e., the bearers of this mythologeme) live and which holds particular significance for them.

In the exploration of pivotal narratives articulated by the “Russian World” mythology, this construct advocates for the presence of a *vast, cohesive Russian civilization* underpinned by *the spiritual unity* among Belarusians, Ukrainians, and Russians. This unity is purportedly based on a shared adherence to *the Orthodox faith* and *the Russian language*. The “Russian World” mythologeme is delineated as an embodiment of a society rooted in *traditional familial and cultural values*, positioning itself in stark opposition to the values of *Western liberalism* and *democracy*, which are not merely received with skepticism but viewed with overt antagonism. It is a world of centralized power, and the head of state is endowed with patriarchal and leadership qualities. Through this mythological and historical discourse, the lineage of the quintessential “Russian World” is traced from its nascent stages in *ancient Kyivan Rus* and *the sanctified city of Kyiv*, advancing through the epochs of *Moscow as the Third Rome*, the Russian Empire, the Soviet Union, and extending into the contemporary fabric of Russian society, inclusive of its diaspora, especially in the near abroad.

This mythologem constructs a coherent system of worldview. Many individuals view the “Russian World” simply as a belief in a specific mythological sequence. On the one hand, this can represent a worldview shaped from early childhood within a social environment through traditions, behavioral patterns, and everyday discourse. It encompasses elements that are not consciously recognized but have become ingrained as habitual behaviors and thought patterns — stereotypes of thinking, that is, aspects that are simply believed in — the mythologeme.

For the preponderance of its adherents, the “Russian World” notion is regarded as an innate and axiomatic reality, obviating the necessity for empirical substantiation. It also facilitates self-identification and addresses the existential queries of individuals regarding their identity, belonging, and the purpose of their existence (the meaning of their life as members of a given society). Affiliation with the “Russian World” mythology, even on a mundane level, enables individuals to find their place in the world, a sense of belonging to an inevitable global community unified by a common ideology through narratives of *spirituality*, *ancient traditions*, *the call of ancestors*, *glorious history*, and *great victory*. Today, affiliation with the “Russian World” provides its members with a more complex civilizational identity that transcends mere ethnic, linguistic, or cultural dimensions. They continue to embrace the myth of the “Russian World,” even though it sometimes clashes with contemporary political and economic realities and carries numerous negative connotations.

## 2. The “Russian World” cultureme

The subsequent integral component of the “Russian World” concept pertains to the cultureme, which constitutes a compilation of cultural knowledge with which its adherents consciously align and which they fervently cultivate and advance (as opposed to a mere assortment of synergistically assimilated, unconscious habits and skills acquired from childhood, as observed with the mythologeme).

Extending the concept of culture to encompass “the entirety of cultural life, a cultureme signifies a cultural marker with linguistic expression, where the linguistic sign acts as the signifier and the cultural reality as the signified” (Гак 1998: 142). This concept covers everything related to culture, including objects, functions, customs, and behavioral facts. The definition of a cultureme sometimes narrows to “value-significant elements of culture, devoid of political extensions, emphasizing its role as a linguistic unit linked to value designations” (Купина 1995: 61-63).

This cultureme can be discerned as a distinctive social stratum within the Russian ethnicity or in broader Russian society (or, more broadly, within the Russian-speaking milieu), with the principal proponents being members of the Russian intelligentsia functioning within a cybernetic, multiethnic sociocultural domain. It is delineated by its linguistic, social, and individual interactive dynamics among participants.

Russian intelligentsia has effectively crafted an entire stratum of culture encapsulated in a condensed form within the “Russian World” cultureme. This group primarily engages in the realms of culture, education, science, art, the service sector, information technology, management, and, to some extent, the administrative and socio-political spheres, often emanating from the political opposition. Since the inception of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, this faction has predominantly opposed the invasion. It includes diaspora members and individuals who have relocated from Russia due to the country’s aggressive stance towards Ukraine – a process initiated with the annexation of Crimea in 2014 and particularly associated with the events of 2022. It is this cultureme that has proliferated as a concept in other countries, and it is with this that the overwhelming majority of cultural and political elites associate Russia as a country and its people, along with their history – a mistaken association.

The “Russian World” cultureme is fundamentally grounded in Russian culture, individual moral decision-making, and the act of self-identification with *Russia as a nation* and its *spiritual ethos* rather than its political governance. Accordingly, the “Russian World” cultureme should be delineated as a cybernetic entity: individuals automatically become adherents to the “Russian World” mythologeme by their heritage and the traditional socialization mechanisms. Alignment with the “Russian World” cultureme mandates intentional scholarly

pursuit and the investment of substantial personal intellectual and ethical endeavor. For an individual within the Russian intelligentsia, the “Russian World” transcends the status of an unexamined mythologeme, evolving into a deliberately embraced cultureme, namely, a cultural paradigm. Nevertheless, it is imperative to acknowledge that the “Russian World” cultureme does not equate to the “Russian World” mythologeme, albeit there is an occasional convergence on specific narratives inherent to this mythologeme.

The hallmark attributes of the “Russian World” cultureme’s proponents primarily include *a pronounced conscientiousness* — that is, the adherence to moral principles that surpass *conventional societal mores* — coupled with educational attainment and the capacity for critical analysis. A further notable trait within the Russian intelligentsia is the perpetual contemplation of the dynamics between Russia and the Western world. Consequently, this engenders either a fascination with Western culture or, conversely, cognizance of *a unique trajectory*, that is, an aspiration towards differentiation and resilience. In either scenario, the West and its cultural paradigms serve as *perpetual reference points*, necessitating ongoing engagement. Additionally, there exists a consistent stance of *opposition towards any form of Russian governance*. Frequently, this opposition escalates into a broader antagonism towards Russia at large and all aspects of Russianness in particular.

It is crucial to specify that the Russian intelligentsia constitutes an exceedingly non-monolithic social group, and we categorically do not ascribe all its representatives to the carriers of the “Russian world” cultureme. Historically, the Russian intelligentsia’s stance towards power has been split into three unequal segments: a small fraction entered into the service of governance and became its informational “rear guard”; an equally small fraction engaged in active opposition, either emigrating, while the main bulk, rejecting reality, retreated into “internal emigration,” becoming introspective. Moreover, engagement in intellectual and cultural work does not ensure “the ability to analyze conceptual ideas, develop or reject them, as well as propose their own” (Поляков 1996: 17). Thus, among the representatives of the intelligentsia, there are carriers of the “Russian World” mythologeme and, importantly, those who support and declare the slogans of the current political regime in Russia, i.e., bearers of the “Russian World” ideologue.

### 3. The “Russian World” ideologue

The *ideologue* term is frequently utilized to analyze the discourse of not only totalitarian regimes but also to describe the broader language of political power. This concept, particularly prevalent among Soviet and Russian scholars (M.M. Bakhtin (1981), N.A. Kupina (1995), G.Ch. Guseinov (2004)), reflects its extensive application in the USSR and the subsequent ideologization of Russian societal life. Similarly, Ye.G. Malysheva defines an ideologue as “a multi-level

concept with ideologically marked features, embodying the collective, often stereotyped, and even mythologized perceptions of power, the state, and societal institutions among native speakers” (Мальшева 2009: 35).

The designation “Russian World” as a nomenclature for the pertinent ideogeme, delineating the political trajectory of modern Russian governance, was inscribed into the lexicon of Russian-speaking public discourse by V. Putin during the latter half of the 2000s. Nonetheless, the ideogeme itself – that is, the ideological construct advocating for *the cohesion of the populace under robust autocratic leadership, the distinctiveness of the Russian civilizational trajectory, and the preeminence of Russian messianism* – predated Putin’s ascension to political prominence, albeit articulated under various narratives.

Its origins can be traced back to at least the era of the Moscow Kingdom, with concepts such as *autocracy, Holy Russia*, the ambition of *consolidating Russian territories*, and the assertion that *Moscow is the third Rome*. Furthermore, these narratives were perpetuated in the Russian Empire through the imperial notion of *Russian irredentism*, the belief in *the divinely chosen Russian people*, and the Eurasianists’ advocacy for *a third way*.

The exigency for the “Russian World” ideology subsequent to the disintegration of the USSR was precipitated externally by the imperative to forge and sustain connections with the extensive network of Russian compatriots and Russian-speaking communities, particularly in border regions, to facilitate and manage reciprocally advantageous diplomatic and economic engagements with the nations hosting these compatriots.

Additionally, a pivotal rationale for the articulation of the “Russian World” ideology was the Russian governmental need to formulate a strategy enabling the preservation of its sphere of influence within the post-Soviet expanse, a region of significant geopolitical interest to global powers such as the USA, China, and Turkey. Consequently, the “Russian World” ideology was posited as a strategic instrument to navigate and address these complex international dynamics.

In analyzing the rhetoric employed by Putin and the incumbent authorities, as well as the discourse propagated by Russian state-aligned media where this ideology is manifest, it becomes apparent that it is intertwined with the notion of *establishing a unified domain and the renewal of historical connections* (the resurgence of the imperial concept), *resistance to Western ideologies* (namely, opposition to democratic and liberal principles), as well as *consolidating national strength* (encompassing militarization and the centralization of authority).

The “Russian World” ideology as outlined by its proponents weaves together on several foundational elements. At its core, it intertwines *the sanctity of Homeland or Motherland*, capturing the essence of Holy Rus, which evokes a sense of sacred space, unity among compatriots, and a shared narrative stretching from the past into a collective future. It is not merely about geography but encapsulates a spiritual and cultural legacy defined by shared history and collective

memory. The *state's* role is seen as pivotal, embodying power and leadership that are deemed essential for maintaining the nation's sovereignty and greatness. It includes a hierarchical governance structure, with a significant emphasis on the figure of a national leader who acts as both a guardian of the constitution and a symbol of the nation's unity and strength.

This ideology posits *a distinct path for Russia*, marked by a perceived moral and civilizational mission to offer an alternative to the Western model, characterized by terms like *sovereign democracy* and the notion of Russia as *an ark of salvation*. This path is imbued with a spiritual dimension that champions *traditional values, Orthodoxy, and a commitment to fostering a society* that is both morally upright and compassionate. Central to this worldview is *the Russian language*, which is more than a means of communication; it is a cultural carrier and unifier in the Russian-speaking world. Putin's public addresses have played a crucial role in articulating and promoting the "Russian World" ideologeme, framing the Russian language not merely as a linguistic medium but as the foundation of a broader "Russian World" encompassing a vast community beyond Russia's borders. This narrative has been instrumental in justifying geopolitical strategies and reinforcing Russia's stance against perceived Western encroachments and ideologies. Meanwhile, *the relationship with the West* is framed in terms of contrast, where Western influences are often depicted as antagonistic, challenging Russian cultural and spiritual values.

By weaving together these elements, the "Russian World" ideology forms a complex narrative that seeks to define a distinct Russian identity and global role, emphasizing spiritual and moral principles, cultural unity, and a sense of historical destiny.

## Conclusion

Thus, we propose to terminologically distinguish three axiological conceptual functions of the "Russian World", namely mythologeme, cultureme, and ideologeme. They significantly differ in content, in form, and, most importantly, in pragmatics (they have different tasks). Each function is defined by its own intrinsic value system, articulated through specific narratives and concepts, and can become the organizing principle for a specific social group. While these values may exhibit varying degrees of overlap - encompassing narratives such as *Great Russia, Russia's unique trajectory, distinctive values, and opposition to the West* - they may also be embedded across all three functions, thereby facilitating their amalgamation under the general term "Russian World."

It can be asserted that the presence of these three aspects of the "Russian World," on one hand, hinders the formation of "national unity," its consolidation into a single community that forms a nationwide panculture, but on the other hand, paradoxically, does not prevent the self-identification of representatives of



all these three “worlds” as Russians. It is also important to note that intellectuals often confuse the “Russian World” ideologeme underlying the imperial policy of the Russian authorities and the transcendent philosophy of Russian exceptionalism with entirely different manifestations of the “Russian World,” such as the mythologeme and the cultureme.

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