

ECHOES OF THE EVENTS

First Readings in memory of Y. V. Chesnov “Philosophical-anthropological approach to folk culture: problems and perspectives of development”

(reviewed by V. Akaev, M. Pronin, T. Selina)



Yan V. Chesnov (16 October 1937, Grozny – 28 December 2014, Krasnogorsk) was a prominent anthropologist and philosopher who founded the anthropology of anthropocenosis. He was admitted to the History Department of Moscow State University where he specialized in the department of Ethnology. He studied folk cultures of China, India, and Indochina. His first expeditions were to Turkmenistan,

Kazakhstan, and Belarus. After he graduated from the University in 1961, he was accepted to the postgraduate program in the USSR AS Institute of Ethnography. He presented his dissertation thesis on folk cultures of south-eastern Asia in 1965. His eastern studies are summarized in *Historical ethnography of countries of Indochina* (Moscow, 1976; in German – Berlin, 1985).

Since the 1980s, he undertook a thorough targeted research in Caucasus. He led a lot of long expeditions to Abkhazians, different groups of Georgians, especially highland – pshavi, khevsurians, Abazins, Circassians, Kabardians, Ossetes and others. However, he put his energies mostly into studying the civilizations of Chechens and Ingush.

Since the 1990s he started teaching, supervising postgraduates, giving lectures in MSU, RSUH, URAE, and Universities of USA (Brown University, Providence, Rhode Island). His course of lectures is published in *Lectures on historical ethnology* (Moscow, 1998).

In 2001, he began studying the anthropocenosis and the ethnocultural component of the Russian human potential during his personal field studies in different regions of the country: in the North Caucasus, Kostroma and Kaluga oblast, science cities and Moscow. His works give a new philosophical-anthropological picture of Russian ethnocultural space.

Since then his studies were mostly dedicated to the philosophical grounds of anthropological sciences (anthropology itself, ethnology, folklore studies). He presented the first philosophical-anthropological analysis of the *virtual-existential reality*, in which he revealed its agonical-binary qualities thus being able to prove the anthropological disciplines to have a *philosophical core*. (*Virtualistics: philosophical-anthropological analysis*. Saransk, 2008).

In 2006, the philosopher changed his scope of inquiry and became interested in the transitional zone between inner anthropological articulations and the outer phenomenological world. He gave a special attention to historical forms of mind and thinking, and also to corporeal problematics (corporeal anthropology of norm and pathology, corporeal-mental existences), including biomedicine, problems of bioethics, vitality and health, and also embryology, juvenology, gerontology, ecological environment (cultural landscapes) and aristocratism (*Human corporality: philosophical-anthropological approach*. Moscow, 2007).

A combination of extensive knowledge both of specific anthropological and ethnological kind (especially on the peoples of Caucasus) and a unique philosophical-anthropological method of understanding this knowledge is characteristic of Chesnov's interdisciplinary approach. The approach he discovered in anthropology was named the anthropology of antropocenosis (*Folk culture: philosophical-anthropological approach*. Moscow, 2014).

According to the Intelros rating "Sofia 2008-2013", Y. V. Chesnov is one of the 30 most estimated Russian intellectuals who work successfully in the human and social fields of knowledge and influence the intellectual landscape of Russia.

The first readings in memory of Y. V. Chesnov "Philosophic-anthropological approach to folk culture: problems and perspectives of development" took place in the Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences on December, 8. The readings were organized by the Institute of Philosophy at the Russian Academy of Sciences, the State Institute for Art Studies at the Russian Federation Ministry of Culture, the Complex Research Institute named after Kh. I. Ibragimov at the Russian Academy of Sciences, Chechen republic, and Murmansk Arctic State University.

During his scientific researches, anthropologist and philosopher Y. V. Chesnov (1937–2014) studied different regions of the world, with folk culture remaining the main purpose of his scientific interest invariably. His researches covered the Southeast Asia and Siberia, the Central Russia and the Caucasus. He studied the ways of folk culture both in the country and in modern cities, in different age, social and gender groups; he studied the material, the visual and mental forms, everyday and ritualized practices of folk culture. All this he conceived with a philosophic-anthropological approach.

The first readings in memory of Y. V. Chesnov are aimed to problematise the scholar's philosophic and scientific achievements in order to develop a program to study his legacy, especially the line which permeates his entire works and is connected with the philosophical-anthropological approach.



The readings have covered a wide range of topics:

1) The archive of Y. V. Chesnov as a problem of the scholar's legacy

Y. V. Chesnov has left a large scientific and philosophical legacy: over 300 published works and the archive of the scholar. This is of great interest: it includes 5 unpublished books, 182 diaries that Chesnov kept during his life, some preparatory materials for the monographs and papers, and materials of his field expeditions.

2) Research of folk culture as a philosophical heritage of a nation: Chesnov's approach

According to Chesnov's legacy, folk culture is, first of all, an ethnic memory which holds original values of a nation, concealed in cultural tradition. Life changes but the principles of faith and the language of honour with which peoples provides us remain unchanged. Embracing the entire way of ancient development, folk culture has preserved for us the "philosophical heritage of a nation: its soaring mind, its mental set, and ethnic mentality". Without this, there is no self-identity for a modern man as related to the ethnic tradition.

3) The initial principles of Chesnov's "original methodology" in regard to anthropology and ethnology (ethnography).

The case of thinking and knowledge being antinomic or paradox was fundamental for the scholar. It provided him with a ground to develop his methodological position: firstly, he problematised the foundations of ethnography, then – those of ethnology and anthropology; he reconstructed the suggested folk anthropologic mind, criticised the language development and creation of new terms. Y. V. Chesnov was a celebrated thinker and anthropologist who left us with a problem of folk culture thinking. This is why his works are so interesting and fascinating. His works are aimed at a mass thinking audience not without reason.

4) Problems of transdisciplinarity in regard to human anthropology

The general line of Chesnov's research was to create a "Big, metaphysical anthropology" using the knowledge of various fields (ethnology, cultural and social anthropology, sociology, logics, ethics, aesthetics, mythology, psychoanalysis, folklore studies, regional ethnography, sacral geography, virtualistics, Heidegger's phenomenology, hermeneutics, existentialism, quasi-historic studies of thinking etc.). In fact, Chesnov has worked in the field of transdisciplinarity and formed his own techniques, methods and ways to describe the thinking of folk culture; he has created a new language of transdisciplinarity that has a great heuristic potential for cultural anthropology, ethnology, folklore studies and the entire corpus of human sciences.

5) Philosophical and methodological core of Chesnov's anthropology

We believe, postnonclassical anthropology stems from Chesnov's works. One cannot reflect on his legacy in terms of conventional paradigms of ethnology. One has to discover the foundation of so thorough a transformation in anthropology (ethnology) as a discipline; one has to find out what was the bifurcation point that changed the attractor of ethnology's development and allowed to create a philosophical-anthropological approach to folk culture. It is important to indicate the place which theory and approach take in the conflict of paradigms that occurs during the shift to the postnonclassical anthropologic rationality and science.

6) Mind technique and the object of folk culture in Chesnov's legacy

Y. V. Chesnov had succeeded in reconstructing folk culture by means of philosophical-anthropological approach; this was never achieved by either of other scholars before. The ground for Chesnov's success lies in the fact that his mind technique was different from the entire phenomenological tradition of anthropology (D. E. Durkheim, L. Levy-Bruhl, M. Mauss, M. Mead). The distinction of Chesnov's anthropological thinking lies in a set of technical methods he uses, in the "exploring thinking-activity" he employs. To answer the question "What are the unique features of Chesnov's mind technique?" one should use not the technical terms, but the terms of the subject, that is, the complex reality of folk culture.

7) Human-anthropological thinking in the perspective of modern technologies and challenges of the time.

It is necessary to create a general notion of anthropological thinking in perspective of technology basing either on the particular experience of Y. V. Chesnov or on the traces of his anthropological thinking. This would settle the following problem: how can one generalize and transfer those mind techniques, developed by the anthropologist Chesnov while dealing with the complex subject of folk culture, on other types of situation, i.e. on other objects and other tasks – philosophical, theoretical, methodological and practical tasks in the field of human sciences.

The problems of philosophical-anthropological approach in the legacy of Y. V. Chesnov were discussed by philosophers, cultural studies scholars, experts in virtualistics, methodologists, art historians, folklorists, managers of innovative educational practices, university professors, tutors, postgraduates, and young scholars interested in problems of human anthropology.

