

## **Searching Identity seminar**

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# Arctic circumpolar civilisation

One of the coming seminars in April will discuss the theory of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation presented in the book titled “Arctic circumpolar civilisation” co-authored by the Russian scholars Uliana A. Vinokurova and Yuri V. Yakovets (Novosibirsk Nauka, 2016). Uliana Vinokurova is a doctor of sociology, a director of the circumpolar civilisation centre at the Arctic State Institute of Culture and Arts in Yakutsk, Russia. Yuri Yakovets is a doctor of economics, a founder and leader of the Russian school of civilisation studies, the president of the Pitirim Sorokin-Nikolai Kondratiev International Institute in Moscow, Russia.

Uliana Vinokurova first formulated and introduced the concept of circumpolar civilisation in 1994–1995 basing on the ideas of Russian scholars K.I. Shilin, developed ecosophy theory, Yu.V. Yakovets, one of the founders of the Russian civiliography and I.A. Argunov, employed an interdisciplinary historical and sociological approach to the study of the indigenous peoples of Sakha (Yakutia).

Once viewed as local in nature and impact, today the Arctic issues are becoming global. Since the end of the Cold War, there has been an increased interest in pan-Arctic cooperation. The Arctic Council, an intergovernmental organisation founded in 1996, unites eight Arctic states, sometimes referred to as ‘Arctic 8’: Russian Federation, Finland, Sweden, Norway, Denmark, Iceland, Canada and the US. However, the Arctic means much more than geographical and political region far in the north — for the Arctic peoples it means first and foremost a homeland.

The comprehensive and challenging book of Vinokurova and Yakovets focusing on the Arctic as a distinct civilisational entity supports this position: how often do we take the insider perspective to the Arctic? The authors challenge the established perspective on the world as the East-West axis and the Arctic as a mere geographical location. They employ the so-called indigenous methodology, developed by the indigenous scholars worldwide, such as Linda T. Smith (Australia), Margaret Kovach (Canada), Jelena Porsanger (Norway) and others.

This methodology aims to enrich the science with indigenous experience and knowledge, to ensure a better understanding and acceptance of indigenous peoples as actors in their history, with a rich cultural and intellectual heritage, not as objects of science, colonisation and post-colonialism.

In line with this approach, the authors understand the Arctic not as an ‘empty’ frontier, but a distinct civilisation which combines the local Eurasian, Western European and North American civilisations. The core of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation is the value system of the indigenous peoples who have inhabited the Arctic millennia ago, and not only succeeded to adapt to its severe environment, but created a rich and lively culture.

The authors pay special attention to Russia in their discussion of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation. They claim that being a northern country with half of its territory located above the Arctic Circle, Russia does not acknowledge its northern position. They argue that the northern perspective of Russia incorporated into East-West duality will create new opportunities for pluralistic development scenarios and will pave the way for interaction among civilisations and set it free from both Eurocentrism-Atlanticism.

According to the authors, the Arctic circumpolar civilisation will become a model for sustainable co-existence of modern technologies and economy with natural environment. The Arctic will emerge as a territory of dialogue of civilisations and countries, between the Pacific and the Atlantic, East and West.

Notably, the “Arctic circumpolar civilisation” is not a scientific monograph, but a textbook, designed for teachers, students and researchers. It suggests questions after each module and a list of recommended reading along with sample topics for research. Altogether, the textbook consists of nine modules which subsequently explore the Arctic circumpolar civilisation from different aspects.

*The first module, titled “Arctic circumpolar civilisation in geocivilisational area”* discusses the typology of civilisation developed by Yu. Yakovets and places the civilisation of the circumpolar Arctic within this typology and defines the Arctic as an area of interaction of three civilisations: Eurasian, Western European and North American. *The second module, “The cradle of civilisation in the Arctic”* examines the genealogy of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation tracing it back to 20.000 years ago when the land bridge across the Bering Strait made migration from Eurasia to North America possible. *The third module, “Natural and ecological basis of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* discusses the fundamental values of the Arctic peoples, represented in coevolution with the Arctic geo-climatic conditions. The system of these values

creates a special ideology — ecosophy, rooted in the concept of deep ecology developed by Norwegian scholar Arne Naess in the 1970s. *The fourth module, “Demographic characteristics of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* discusses the sustainable development of local Arctic communities which can be reached in the partnership with the state. The human sustainability thus should be a priority for the state. *The fifth module, “Sociocultural system of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* claims that the paradigm of the Arctic as a source of natural resources should be changed. It is important to preserve culture, as it offers basis for identity and self-dignity. *The sixth module, “The Economic system of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* argues that the policy must initiate a complex, resource-saving economy with regard to the interests of future generations in line with a concept of “green economy”. *The seventh module, “Innovative technological development of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* offers an ecosophic approach to the development of Arctic technologies with focus on innovative thinking. There should be a balance between economic consumption and sustainability of the Arctic ecosystem. *The eighth module, “Geopolitical features of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation”* develops the geocultural and ethnocultural criteria for definition of the Arctic boundaries, which challenges the ‘outsider’ definitions based on sole geographical criteria. And finally, *the ninth module, “Future scenarios for the Arctic”*, examines possible development scenarios, namely pessimistic, optimistic and realistic. However, all scenarios show that the role of the Arctic in global energy, environment, economy and geopolitics will increase significantly in the long term.

In our presentation we will discuss the ways we choose to employ the theory of the Arctic circumpolar civilisation and the related concepts in our research projects. We will reflect on the overall impact of this theory on understanding of our topics and development of our research agenda.

By discussing the Arctic civilisation theory, which involves the alternative view on the globe, the seminar will contribute to our understanding of the modern world and expand our knowledge on the civilisation theories which are being developed today in Russian academia.

