

UDC 930:321.091“17/18”  
DOI 10.24919/2519-058X.39.364997

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**Bibliographic Description of the Article:** Sytnyk, Yu. & Sytnyk, O. (2026). The Transformation of Russian Imperial Expansionist Policy (the 18th – mid-19th Centuries): A Historiosophical Reassessment of the Ukrainian Context. *Skhidnoieuropejskyi istorychnyi visnyk [East European Historical Bulletin]*, 39, 164–178. doi: 10.24919/2519-058X.39.364997

**THE TRANSFORMATION OF RUSSIAN IMPERIAL EXPANSIONIST POLICY  
(the 18th – MID-19th CENTURIES): A HISTORIOSOPHICAL REASSESSMENT  
OF THE UKRAINIAN CONTEXT**

**Abstract.** *The purpose of the research is to reassess the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionist policy from the 18th century to the mid-19th century, with a particular focus on the historiosophical dimension within the Ukrainian context. The methodology of the research is grounded in the principles of historicism, dialectics, system analysis, and objectivity, employing both general scientific methods (such as analysis, synthesis, abstraction, generalization) and specialized historical methods (comparative historical, historical genetic, historical typological, among others). Scientific Novelty.* *There has been provided an in-depth analysis of the Russian imperial expansionism transformation during this period, for the first time in domestic historiography, while accounting for the historiosophical aspect of Ukraine's experience. Conclusions.* *There has been concluded that it is required to conduct deeper and more critical analysis regarding the transformation of the Russian*

imperial expansionist policy from the 18th to the mid-19th century, in light of contemporary realities. This particularly concerns the historiosophical aspect of the process of integrating representatives of the Ukrainian national elite into the Russian state and society. The policy of the Russian Empire in Ukraine during the latter half of the 18th to the mid-19th century underwent a significant evolution – from unification measures, generally characteristic of any empire's legal framework, to overtly discriminatory actions against the Ukrainians. These actions were driven by a chauvinistic orientation that accompanied the formation of the Russian political nation. Consequently, the Russian imperialism was inherently chauvinistic and expansionist. This made it especially aggressive toward peoples, who embodied alternative values such as democracy, republicanism, and a strong sense of freedom. In contrast to the autocratic imperial model of Russia, the Ukrainian society – rooted in the traditions of democracy and republicanism and sustained by the historical memory of the Cossack self-governance and the Cossack-Hetman state – was able to resist the Russian chauvinistic policies for a considerable time. It is no coincidence that the Ukrainian nation and its statehood became primary targets of the Russian expansionism and Russification. Furthermore, the Ukrainians were among the most active in opposing the Russian imperial policies. Therefore, there is a pressing need to challenge various Russian great-power myths about “brotherly peoples” and the so-called “civilizing mission” of the Russian Empire. The policy of the Russian imperial expansionism during this period clearly demonstrated a profound disregard for the rights of all peoples, especially the Ukrainians. Moreover, imperial policy aimed to nullify the cultural distinctions between the Ukrainians and the Russians, ultimately seeking to destroy the Ukrainian national identity.

**Key words:** Russian imperialism, expansionism, transformation of politics, historiosophy, identity, Cossack elders, despotism.

## ТРАНСФОРМАЦІЯ ПОЛІТИКИ РОСІЙСЬКОГО ІМПЕРСЬКОГО ЕКСПАНСІОНІЗМУ (XVIII – СЕРЕДИНА XIX ст.): ІСТОРІОСОФСЬКЕ ПЕРЕОСМИСЛЕННЯ УКРАЇНСЬКОГО КОНТЕКСТУ

**Анотація.** Мета дослідження полягає в переосмисленні трансформації політики російського імперського експансіонізму впродовж періоду XVIII – середини XIX ст., з акцентом на історіософській складовій українського контексту. **Методологія дослідження** базується на принципах історизму, діалектики, системності, об'єктивності; при застосуванні загальнонаукових (аналізу, синтезу, абстрагування, узагальнення тощо) та спеціально-історичних (порівняльно-історичний, історико-генетичний, історико-типологічний тощо) методів. **Наукова новизна.** Поглиблено аналіз трансформації політики російського імперського експансіонізму впродовж періоду XVIII – середини XIX ст., з урахуванням історіософської складової українського контексту цього явища. **Висновки.** З'ясовано, що аналіз трансформації політики російського імперського експансіонізму впродовж XVIII – середини XIX ст., з огляду на сучасні реалії, потребує ґрунтовнішого переосмислення. Зокрема це стосується історіософської складової процесу інтеграції до Російської держави її суспільства представників української національної еліти. Політика Російської імперії в Україні впродовж другої половини XVIII – середини XIX ст. відзначалася істотною еволюцією – від уніфікаційних дій, загалом, притаманних правовій природі будь-якої імперії, до відверто дискримінаційних кроків проти українців, зумовлених шовіністичним спрямуванням, що супроводжував процес становлення політичної російської нації. Варто наголосити, що російський імперіалізм мав шовіністичний та експансіоністський характер. тому він був особливо агресивний стосовно народів, які демонстрували інші цінності: демократизм, республіканізм і волелюбність. На противагу практиці імперського самодержавства Росії, українське суспільство, сформоване на традиціях демократизму й республіканізму, завдяки історичній пам'яті про козацьке самоуправління та козацько-гетьманську державу тривалий час змогло протистояти політиці російського шовінізму. Не випадково саме українська нація та її державність опинилися під головним ударом російського експансіонізму та політики зросійщення. І саме українці чи не найактивніше протистояли російській імперській політиці. Власне з огляду на це, постає необхідність спростування низки російських великодержавних міфів щодо “братніх народів”, “цивілізаційну роль” Російської імперії тощо. Адже політика російського імперського експансіонізму впродовж

*XVIII – середини XIX ст. яскраво продемонструвала повну зневагу до всіх народів, особливо – щодо українців. Водночас імперська політика була спрямована на нівелювання культурних відмінностей українців і росіян, а отже – знищення української національної ідентичності.*

**Ключові слова:** російський імперіалізм, експансіонізм, трансформація політики, історіософія, ідентичність, козацька старшина, деспотизм.

**Problem Statement.** The contemporary Russo-Ukrainian War has vividly demonstrated not only the historical continuity of the Russian imperial expansionism but also the threat posed by the Kremlin regime to European stability and democracy. Simultaneously, the policy of the Russian neo-imperialism systematically continues the traditions established by its founders in the 18th century, which have consistently aimed at distorting history and deforming historical memory. Specifically, the Russian imperialism sought to nullify the Ukrainian historical thought and deprive the Ukrainians of their own identity. To this end, the imperial state apparatus employed a wide range of means to incorporate the Ukrainian elite into its orbit and eliminate the historical memory of the Cossack self-governance and the Cossack-Hetman statehood.

There is an ongoing discourse regarding the origins and evolution of the Russian imperial expansionism in contemporary Ukrainian historical scholarship. This includes the so-called “New Imperial History”. For instance, V. Gorobets in his work on this issue in January 2022, examined it within the context of the modern Russo-Ukrainian War. The scholar posed the questions: “How is the image of Ukraine changing in historical research on the Russian Empire?” and “What exactly is this ‘New Imperial History’?” (Gorobets, 2022). Adequate responses require not only an analysis of all available historical material concerning the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionist policy toward Ukraine but also a certain reassessment of the historiosophical component of this issue. It is also important to consider that the paradigm of contemporary the Russian neo-imperial expansionism was established as early as the 18th century through an imperial policy aimed at destroying the national identity and consciousness of all peoples subjugated by Russia, while simultaneously exploiting their potential for further wars of conquest.

**Review of Recent Research and Publications.** The theme of the Russian imperial expansionism is widely represented in historiography and contemporary academic discourse, notably finding reflection in the studies written by the Ukrainian scholars.

M. Doroshko and Iu. Tsyryfa conducted a comprehensive analysis of the works of K. Marx and F. Engels regarding the historical circumstances of the formation of Muscovy-Russia’s expansionist foreign policy course. They specifically drew attention to the authors’ devastating criticism of the foreign policy of the Russian state formations from the 13th to the 19th centuries, which was directed toward achieving world domination (Doroshko, & Tsyryfa, 2023, p. 77). This provides a genetic analysis that helps establish the origin and nature of Muscovite autocracy. Consequently, due to the systematic genetic approach, it is possible to determine the conditions for the formation, development, and transformation of Muscovite autocracy into the Russian imperialism.

Yu. Harari focused on the categorical and terminological definition of the concept of empire, identifying two main characteristic features: 1) uniting several peoples under one authority; and 2) territorial flexibility and cultural diversity. Using the method of critical analysis, Harari attempted a historiosophical reassessment of the significance of empires. He stressed out that the existence of empires lacks historical perspective because it is

impossible to rule effectively a large number of conquered peoples for an extended period. Even the possible resurgence of some neo-empires is unacceptable, given that empires are a source of aggression and exploitation and contradict the right of every nation to self-determination (Harari, 2019). There was drawn attention to certain issues of definitions by I. Verkhovtseva and O. Kondratenko. In particular, they refuted the thesis of “historical Russia” within the Russian Empire as inherently anti-scientific. That is, the concept of “historical Russia” is defined as a manifestation of Eurasian colonialism (Verkhovtseva, & Kondratenko, 2024, p. 166). L. Zaliznyak revealed fairly thoroughly the historical roots of Russia’s imperial policy and aggression against Ukraine (Zaliznyak, 2016; Zaliznyak, 2017). H. Turchenko studied the circumstances surrounding the emergence of the Russian imperial project “Novorossia” in 1764 (Turchenko, 2016). Furthermore, F. Turchenko and H. Turchenko (Turchenko, & Turchenko, 2021; Turchenko, & Turchenko, 2015) conducted a theoretical and historiographical analysis of the “Novorossia” project as a dominant manifestation of the Russian imperial expansionism. There was provided a thorough theoretical and methodological understanding of such essential phenomena in Ukrainian history as the frontier and multifrontier – understood as the “crossroads of borderlands” – including in the context of the colonial past in the collective study the “Ukrainian Multifrontier” (Ukrainian Multifrontier, 2024). P. Hai-Nyzhnyk traced the succession of the Russian Empire to the Russian Federation in its expansionist policy and the aggressive imposition of the idea of the so-called “Russian World” (Hai-Nyzhnyk, 2016, p. 50). Based on the systemic crimes of the Russian Federation during its full-scale aggression against Ukraine, V. Telvak, V. Ilnytskyi, V. Starka, and M. Haliv traced the general tendency of the Russian imperial expansionist policy toward terror and genocide (Telvak, & Ilnytskyi, 2023, pp. 249–258; Telvak, Ilnytskyi, & Telvak, 2024, pp. 217–218; Ilnytskyi, Starka, & Haliv, 2022, pp. 43–55). M. Gaukhman’s research is particularly noteworthy, linking the policy of the Russian expansionism to the introduction of the doctrine of Cameralism by the Russian emperors as a guarantor of large-scale aggressive wars (Gaukhman, 2018).

Professor Serhii Plokyh, a Ukrainian historian, who joined the corporation of the American academics at Harvard University, also contributed to the study on the Russian imperial expansionism transformation actively (Plokyh, 2015). He pointed at Russia’s historical claims during its expansion into neighboring countries. S. Plokyh advocated the view that the rise of the Russian state, the Russian nation, and its great-power status was predominantly secured owing to Ukraine (Plokyh, 2020). The above-mentioned study necessitates the application of a systemic approach, which is appropriate for studying the political system of the Russian imperialism in the entire complexity of its interconnections.

There should be highlighted the contribution of Professor Vera Tolz (University of Manchester) among foreign authors. She noted that the Russian political and media establishment rejects the very possibility of assessing the Russian cultural heritage critically. Furthermore, Putin uses Dostoevsky’s ideas about Russia’s messianic role in the world. The Kremlin justifies the war in Ukraine with rhetoric from the mid-19th century: “where the Russian imperial flag has been raised once, it must remain the territory of Russia forever” (Tolz, 2022). Due to the systemic analysis, it is feasible to delineate the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionism into the current aggression of the Russian Federation against Ukraine within the historiosophical dimension.

Most works concerning the Russian imperial expansionism only reveal separate aspects or are limited to a specific chronological period. Therefore, there is a need for a more comprehensive

reassessment of the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionist policy (the 18th – mid-19th century), taking into account the existing Ukrainian historiographical context.

**The purpose of the research** is to reassess the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionist policy from the 18th century to the mid-19th century, with an emphasis on the historiographical component of the Ukrainian context.

**Research Results.** The process of the formation of the Russian Empire, starting from the beginning of the 18th century, led not only to the territorial expansion of the Russian state but also to the intensification of autocratic, despotic governance. Consequently, the policy of the Russian Empire was distinctly expansionist. It was manifested primarily in the Russian state's foreign policy course aimed at extending and consolidating its dominance over other countries. In addition to its ideological and economic manifestations, the Russian imperial expansionism had a clear military political expression in the form of armed expansion and the occupation of neighboring territories. Thus, the Russian imperial expansionism had an Eastern type, where the imperial expansion occurred at the expense of the adjacent territories. However, this type differed from the classical colonial variant of expansionism. It was possible to become the part of the Russian Empire usually under conditions of patronage and protectorate. Thus, even in these cases, aggressive and violent methods and means of subjugating neighboring peoples predominated.

The peoples, who fell under the Russian rule were deprived of the opportunity for self-expression. The statehood that was beginning to emerge among them in the new era was violated and interrupted by annexation to the Russian state. This primarily concerns Ukraine, Lithuania, Georgia, Armenia, the Azerbaijan Khanate, the early state formations of the North Caucasus, the states of Central Asia, and the Tatar Khanates of Volga region and Siberia. Some people were never able to embark on a path to state development. Russia seized ancient states, medieval early state formations, and tribal enclaves. The Russian Empire sought to absorb virtually all neighboring peoples, regions, and civilizational complexes. As a result, a vast multinational state was formed, where elements of diverse civilizational orientations coexisted. At the same time, the closest countries were subjected to the greatest oppression. This primarily concerns Ukraine and Belarus. The Russian authorities attempted to unite the Orthodox population under the aegis of the Russian Church and state, denying the Ukrainians and the Belarusians the right to the national distinctiveness.

Developing the concept of the Southern Ukrainian frontier during the 18th–19th centuries, Ya. Vermenych asserted that throughout this period, the Russian Empire managed to absorb many peoples with the most diverse cultural and historical heritage – ranging from the “Western” Swedes of Finland to the “Asian” Tatar and Nogai hordes of the Black Sea region (Vermenych, 2024, p. 385). Following a rapid expansion into new territories, the Russian imperial regime had to broaden the ideological and historiographical basis to legitimize these conquests. For example, after carrying out the hybrid occupation of the Crimean Khanate between 1772 – 1783, the Russian authorities, among other things, deprived the Crimean Tatars of their written and historical heritage. The history of the Crimean Khanate, left without a documentary basis, quickly became a hostage to the historiography of the Russian Empire. Imperial historians in Russia interpreted the history of the Crimean Khanate in a version that suited the conquering country.

The Russian imperial government sought to extend its military political system to neighboring lands. This led to a moral and political crisis in the Ukrainian society toward the end of the 18th century (Popovych, 1995, p. 178). According to A. Miller, the abolition of the

Hetmanate institution in Ukraine during the reign of Catherine II was partially compensated by privileges for the Cossack starshyna, who were granted rights equal to those of the Russian nobles (Miller, 2015, pp. 314–315). Consequently, the transformation of a segment of the Cossack starshyna into the Ukrainian nobles and their merger with the Russian nobility began at the end of the 18th century. Simultaneously, the Little Russian Governor-Generalship was converted into an ordinary hubernia of the Russian state. Other countries were also transformed into the Russian hubernias (provinces) during the second half of the 18th century. This included the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, which was partitioned during its three divisions (1772, 1793, and 1795) and divided among the Habsburg Monarchy, Prussia, and the Russian Empire.

The Russian historiography interpreted this process as the return of territories that once belonged to the state of the Rurikids, which encompassed all lands of the Eastern Slavs – subjects of the Kyivan kniazis (princes) (Filiniuk, 2020, pp. 136–137). By these means, the Russian imperial authorities sought to establish the historical expediency of their participation in the partition of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, emphasizing their original rights to the lands inhabited by the Eastern Slavs. In this paradigm, the Russians, the Ukrainians, and the Belarusians were viewed as a single Orthodox people of the same faith, unlike, for example, the Catholic Poles. Thus, it was acquired both ethnic and religious grounds for the Russian state in order to participate in the struggle for the Polish legacy.

According to O. Kondratenko, the idea of the reunification of all Russian lands under Russian tsarist rule gained even greater ideological significance in the 19th century. This was driven by the imperial regime's attempts to justify the right to establish a single Russian nation through the "reunification" of the Russian, Ukrainian, and Belarusian peoples under the designations of Great, Little, and White Rus'. These three components were seen as the foundation of the Great Russia, representing the final stage of gathering the East Slavic lands around the imperial center (Kondratenko, 2023, pp. 65–66).

S. Plokyh believed that the Russian state, by participating in the three partitions of the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth, aimed not only to expand its borders but, above all, to suppress the ideals of the Great French Revolution that had already spread in Poland. As a result, Catherine II forgot her own interest quickly in the ideas of the Enlightenment and adopted reactionary methods against anything that could pose a threat to autocracy (Plokyh, 2020, pp. 60–61). Thus, despite all attempts by the Russian monarchs to give their empire a more civilized, the European appearance, the Russian state remained despotic and autocratic, as it had been during the Middle Ages. It is particularly important to emphasize that from the second half of the 18th century until the mid-19th century, the Russian Empire effectively played the role of the Gendarme of Europe, brutally suppressing all national liberation movements.

The system of state institutions in the incorporated territories was implemented in accordance with the traditions of state life in the Russian Empire. The local elite, which valued the political and material benefits of its status, was not removed from ruling its own territories upon entering Russia; instead, it received this right as privileges granted by the Emperor (Shandra, 2005, pp. 47–48).

The doctrine of Cameralism was intended to contribute to this to some extent. The Russian authorities borrowed it from the German scholars of the 18th century, primarily from the works of J. H. G. Von Justi. Unlike European mercantilism, German cameralism focused much more on population growth, the general good, and the happiness of every individual and society as a whole. It is evident that such an approach from the Russian state might have

appealed to the Ukrainian Cossack-starshyna elite. The Russian Empire possessed virtually all the main characteristics of a “cameralist” state, including a large bureaucratic apparatus, active development of mining, the arms industry, and so forth already in the 18th century (Gaukhman, 2018). It should be noted that due to tools like Cameralism, the Hetmanate was quite rapidly incorporated into the political and legal system of the Russian state. Consequently, the Ukrainian Cossack army was intensely utilized by the imperial authorities in the empire’s numerous wars, and the representatives of the intellectual and religious elite were used in the process of building imperial institutions, the church, education, and so on.

According to V. Shandra, for a long time, the descendants of the Cossack starshyna, who did not reconcile themselves to the conditions of their transfer to the status of the Russian nobility continued to defend their legal status (Shandra, 2001, pp. 12–13). There arose a movement among them demanding that starshyna ranks be recognized as sufficient grounds for granting nobility. The patriotic opposition manifested itself in the collection of the royal, hetman, and tsarist charters, the study of their own history, and the writing of historical and polemical works on the Ukrainian issues. This process led to the awareness of the distinct history of the small homeland, ethno-national identity, and ideas for the restoration of autonomy. The memory of the Cossack self-governance was best preserved in those Ukrainian lands of the Russian Empire that enjoyed varying degrees of political autonomy until the second half of the 18th century – Sloboda Ukraine (until 1765), Zaporizhzhia (until 1775), and Left-Bank Ukraine (the Hetmanate until 1785).

This memory manifested on two levels. At the level of the common people, the Cossack traditions continued to be preserved among the serf peasantry, for whom references to the Cossacks were primarily the memory of the rebellious Zaporizhzhian Sich with its unique order and irreconcilability to the social, national, and religious oppression. At the level of the new Ukrainian nobility, descendants of the Cossack starshyna, Ukraine’s glorious past was associated with the memory of the Cossack state – the Hetmanate. The expatriates from the former Cossack elite (represented by a whole pleiad of scholars, writers, and political figures) became the leading creators of the ideological concept of the Ukrainian national revival. It was primarily due to the historical memory of the Cossack legacy that Ukrainian society was able to resist the policy of the Russian imperial expansionism for a long time.

A gradual transition of a portion of the former Cossack starshyna to the Russian nobility (primarily the bunchukovi tovaryshi – standard-bearers) inevitably caused a split within the Ukrainian elite. The part of the starshyna that could not attain the noble status (viyskovi and, especially, znachkovi tovaryshi (badge comrades) – military and less military brothers-in-arms) was forced to choose between continuing their service – now within the Black Sea Cossack Host – or adapting to the new realities of the imperial society. Naturally, under these conditions, a major part of the Ukrainian gentry and Cossack starshyna viewed education and science as one of the most acceptable paths for self-realization.

V. Kravchenko claimed that the idea of education was quite widespread among the representatives of the Ukrainian elite. After 1783, the expatriates from the Cossack starshyna, who lost the right to nobility increasingly traveled abroad to study at Western European universities (Kravchenko, 2011, p. 92). Simultaneously, the spread of the Russian state-legal system in Ukrainian lands throughout the 18th century caused a corresponding reaction from progressive thinkers and public figures, especially those originating from the Cossack starshyna. The vast majority of the Ukrainian elite were forced to adhere to the imperial ideology in one way or another.

It should be highlighted that the process of the Cossack starshyna's entry into the Russian nobility was quite complex. For a long time, the Cossack elite representatives were in opposition to the imperial reforms. This situation was provoked by St. Petersburg itself, which was not very willing to recognize the noble rights for the Cossack starshyna. Furthermore, the Cossack starshyna's representatives sought to obtain the rights and privileges enjoyed by the Polish gentry. In 1767, there were held elections for the Russian nobility to the commission for drafting the "New Code" (a code of noble rights). H. Poletyka, a descendant of an ancient Cossack family from Poltava region, who showed himself to be a supporter of the Hetman state's autonomous rights in Ukraine, was elected as a Deputy from the nobility of Lubny Regiment. However, the oppositional sentiments among the representatives of the Cossack starshyna gradually faded during the 1780s, becoming particularly noticeable after H. Poletyka's death in 1784.

The process of the Ukrainian people's national self-determination, especially starting from the 17th century, intensified society's interest in the universal foundations of European civilization – the Antiquity, the Christianity, and the Enlightenment. In this era, the imperative of the time manifested not only in the intensification of the struggle for the national independence but also in the founding of Kyiv Mohyla Academy and other educational institutions, the commencement of using pan-European educational programs, and the creation of the "republic of the spirit" among the European scholars, about which H. Skovoroda wrote. The Ukrainian spiritual heritage of the 17th – 18th centuries underwent the ideological influence of the Russian colonialism, was assimilated, and subsequently appropriated by the Russian culture. Nevertheless, in the second half of the 17th century, and especially during the 18th century in Ukraine, new cognitive orientations, ideologically aimed at affirming progressive social ideals in the citizens' consciousness, were established, primarily due to the activities of Kyiv Mohyla Academy. The above-mentioned manifestations can be found in the contemporary Ukrainian political-legal and ethical thought, which was aimed, first and foremost, at cultivating "social political virtues" and the legitimacy of adhering to earthly values in the consciousness of the Ukrainian people.

The study "The History of the Rus or Little Russia" was significant for the national self-awareness of the Ukrainians, which was inspired by the ideas of independent development of the Cossack knightly branch of the imperial nobility. Its supporters were continuators of the ideological and political tradition of the Pereiaslav Agreement and did not forget that it was supposed to be an agreement of the 18th century. "The History of the Rus or Little Russia" was a well-camouflaged (written on two planes: externally loyal to the empire, and internally pro-independence) collective work of members of a Ukrainian secret society, created between 1815 and 1828. Its authors, the descendants of the Cossack starshyna operating both in St. Petersburg and on the territory of the former Hetmanate, viewed Ukraine's past as that of an independent nation (History of the Rus or Little Russia, 1991, pp. 94–95).

Z. Kohut noted that "The History of the Rus or Little Russia" should be considered the apotheosis of the Ukrainian concept of "Pereiaslav", which presented the image of Ukraine as a state that had never been conquered and whose existence was determined by the "eternal rights and liberties" of its people (Kohut, 2006, pp. 294–295). Furthermore, V. Kravchenko remarked that the interpretation of the Pereiaslav Agreement in the "History of the Rus or Little Russia" is marked by the historiosophical novelty, as the author of this work first called the Pereiaslav Agreement a treaty between equal states, a union of "equals with equals and free with free" (Kravchenko, 2011, pp. 216–217).

In general, “History of the Rus or Little Russia” is considered a multi-layered political pamphlet with a rather pronounced state-political subtext. Simultaneously, according to M. Skrynnyk in the “The History of the Rus or Little Russia”, the source of the eternal and infinite is not absolute spirituality, but the spirituality of the nation. The luminous abyss is transformed into the idea of the nation. The idea of the nation is by nature a form of the archetype of the Clan in the culture of 18th – century Europe. According to the concept of “The History of the Rus”, only certain individuals can grasp that the nation is a form of God’s manifestation in humanity. These individuals are revealed that the form of the existence of the nation, God, and spirituality is one and the same: freedom. And if the nation and spirituality are in a state of unfreedom, those to whom the truth is revealed must lead the nation from unfreedom to truth, which is freedom. They must do this because it is the will of God, and they are only the elect of this will; for the world of people, they are heroes. The birth of the national idea runs parallel to the formation of the idea of the individual in the national mentality. The emergence of the idea of the nation and the idea of the individual requires a high degree of mentality and a corresponding level of the people’s historical maturity (Skrynnyk, 1993, pp. 122–123).

Alongside this, V. Potulnytskyi argued that the “History of the Rus” contains two main ideas: the Ukrainian nation has the right to enter into any international political coalition; and the Cossack officer class, which originated in the 15th century, gained its estate privileges, like other nobility and chivalry of Western Europe and the Polish gentry, by its own saber through struggle on the battlefield (Potulnytskyi, 2001, p. 84).

According to Z. Kohut, the Ukrainian elite, which functioned as the gentry, was formed during the Hetmanate. It emerged after B. Khmelnytsky’s revolution and was incorporated into the Russian nobility at the end of the 18th century. However, “as bearers of certain historical traditions, the gentry of the Hetmanate preserved at least a shred of historical continuity from the time of Khmelnytsky to the modern era” (Kohut, 2004, p. 29). Nevertheless, due to the intensification of the Russian imperial policy, this Ukrainian elite was never able to become a national cultural elite. This occurred, among other reasons, due to the lack of adequate national self-identification among Ukrainians. They usually identified themselves as “rus’ki”, “rusyny”, “cherkasy” (the Cossacks), or were forced to accept the exonym “Little Russians” (malorosy) imposed by the Russian great-power policy.

There took place a process of involving the Ukrainians in the development of the Russian institutions starting from the end of the 17th century, and especially during the stage of the Russian Empire’s consolidation, which the authorities attempted to develop by analogy with Western European states. Generally the Ukrainians were more educated than Muscovites and significantly closer to Western civilization and showed both a desire to maintain a certain social status (primarily the Cossack starshyna) within the imperial hierarchy and a tendency to implement their ideas and potential at a new state level (primarily the representatives of the clergy and intellectual elite). Consequently, as early as the turn of the 17th–18th centuries, the Russian state began the intensive absorption of the Ukrainian human resources: the most intellectual, socially active, and multi-talented Ukrainians, including those with military talent. This was necessary for the Russian Empire to carry out its expansionist policy, wage constant colonial wars, and conquer neighboring territories.

David Saunders drew attention to the fact that in the second half of the 18th century, in accordance with the imperial plans for educational centralization and the unification of newly annexed territories to the Russian state, a process of the Ukrainians outflow to St. Petersburg

and Moscow began. This was because, at that time, there were significantly better prospects for the students to obtain education and the for teachers and the scholars to pursue career advancement there (Saunders, 1985). Thus, virtually the entire powerful Ukrainian spiritual and cultural-educational potential was utilized for the educational and cultural enlightenment development of Russia. According to V. Potulnytskyi, it was the expatriates from Ukraine, who began to occupy almost all positions in the Russian Empire that determined the strategic course of the evolution in the European direction of the development of culture, science, and even the system of the state and church administration (Potulnytskyi, 2002, pp. 214–215).

From the end of the 18th century, the Ukrainians began to be subjected to systematic Russification in the Russian Empire. This issue particularly intensified in the 19th century in the Ukrainian lands that were part of the Russian Empire. By the mid-19th century, the imperial chauvinistic policy of the Russian imperialism sought the total destruction of the Ukrainian national identity (Sytnyk, Drogomyretsky, Sytnyk, & Sizarev, 2023, p. 303). Under these circumstances, when one part of the Ukrainian national elite – the Cossack starshyna – was preoccupied mainly with preserving its own rights, and the other part – the intelligentsia – was increasingly oriented toward Moscow and St. Petersburg, the Ukrainian ethnic group seemed doomed.

However, in 1805 the establishment of Kharkiv University became an important factor in the Ukrainian national revival. According to I. Lysyak-Rudnytskyi, Kharkiv University, led by V. Karazin, played a key role in the initial, nascent stage of the formation of the modern Ukrainian nation (Lysyak-Rudnytskyi, 1994, pp. 205–208). Consequently, the concept of the national distinctiveness emerged within the walls of Kharkiv University. The key ideological guide became the concept of “peoplehood”. Following I. Kotliarevskyi with his “Eneida”, the Ukrainian historiography initiated the process of transforming the Ukrainian language into the main marker of the national identification. However, the Russification of Ukraine and the policy of the cultural assimilation of the Ukrainian people, carried out by the administrative and the police means of the Russian government, found moral support and ideological justification from the Russian intelligentsia and the Russian science. A vivid exponent of this Russian great-power ideology was, for example, the Russian writer V. Belinsky, who promoted not only the linguistic Russification of the Ukrainians but also their complete assimilation into the Russian culture and merger with the Muscovite nation.

One of the instruments of denationalization was education. The Russian authorities created state schools with uniform organization, identical programs, and requirements aimed at the Russification of peoples. Consequently, all schools, from higher to lower, in Ukraine had Russian as the language of instruction. It was not permitted and was even forbidden to use the native language. The textbooks dealt exclusively with the Muscovite-Great Russian people, their history, customs, etc. The Ukrainian people, their history, and traditions were never mentioned. In school, a child entered a spiritual atmosphere distant from them, a world foreign to them (Bidnov, 2002, pp. 63–65). The consequence of this was relapses into illiteracy and the destruction of the national consciousness. Further bans on printing literature in Ukrainian and other restrictions on the use of the native language by the Ukrainians only complicated the development of spirituality and the national self-awareness.

In this context, H. Grabovich suggested that the example of M. Hohol is illustrative. Hohol, operating on the boundary between the Ukrainian and Russian worlds, was simultaneously a product of the Cossack past and a representative of the Russian imperial reality. This is perhaps where Hohol’s greatest personal tragedy manifested. The rupture between the past

and the present, between the world of Ukraine and Russia, was felt as a deep one, and this permeated almost all of M. Hohol's literary work (Grabovich, 1994, p. 78).

Considering M. Hohol's attitude toward the imperial ideology and the Russian nationalism, Harvard University Professor Edyta Bojanowska drew attention to the fact that Hohol's Ukrainian nationalism reached its peak as a result of his study of the Ukrainian history. Thus, Hohol concluded that, unlike Russia, Ukraine had a self-sufficient cultural integrity, national traditions, and self-consciousness (Bojanowska, 2013, p. 544). This viewpoint is credible, as M. Hohol, having sharply criticized the Russian state-bureaucratic system that had established itself in his homeland, sought to turn to the Ukrainian national traditions. In *Taras Bulba*, he captured the important ideological moment when the Ukrainian people, defending their sovereignty and rights, acted together as a force that defined the character of pan-European history. M. Hohol highlighted the high role of the principles of comradeship and brotherhood inherent in the Zaporozhians particularly. Hohol's Cossack origin led to his attentive attitude toward the Cossack estate. Recognizing and depicting in his works the demise of the Cossack families, who were transforming into the monstrosities of the Russian nobility – a kind of dead souls – M. Hohol sought to realize the idea of the spiritual and moral renewal of the Russian Empire (Horbach, 2006, p. 126). He viewed evolutionary moral and ethical improvement of society as one of the means to achieve this.

M. Hohol's quite noticeable role in the process of ideological formation in Ukraine manifested primarily in his decisive opposition to the secularization characteristic of his era. His attitude was especially critical toward those manifestations of the secular system that severed creativity from its connection with the Church. According to V. Zinkivskyi, M. Hohol deeply felt the universal scope (*vsemirnost'*) of Christ's teaching, the possibility of applying it to all life themes. It was precisely this feeling for the truth of the Christianity and its value for all forms of life that sharply distinguished M. Hohol from his contemporaries, who had pushed the Church into the background and rejected its blessed assistance (Zinkivskyi, 2000, p. 416). Thus, M. Hohol acted as a kind of prophet of the Orthodox culture, a forerunner of all those spiritual currents in the Russian life that sought to find the true, not nominal or symbolic, triumph of Orthodoxy.

M. Hohol sought peace among people and harmony with God, analogous to the aspirations of H. Skovoroda, P. Yurkevych, P. Kulish, and a number of other Ukrainian thinkers. Thus, the ideal of the external harmony is joined by the ideal of internal harmony, which is the highest ideal for the Ukrainian thinkers, the goal toward which they all strive (Zinkivskyi, 2000, p. 187). Hence, the great attraction to religiosity and the desire to find a connection with God. According to M. Hohol's conviction, God is not only the creator of the world and life but also the inspiration for creative achievements. Undoubtedly, M. Hohol only initiated the establishment of that ideological current which was directed against the secular emasculation of the genuine spiritual essence of the Christianity.

From the end of the 18th century, despite the attempts of some representatives of the Ukrainian ideological and political thought to defend their own traditions and rights, the Eastern Ukrainian lands increasingly fell under the influence of the Russian Empire. This led, among other things, to the emergence of leading the Russian ideological directions there. The spread of the Enlightenment, liberal noble ideology, etc., was observed in the Eastern Ukrainian lands. The Napoleonic Wars and the Polish Liberation Uprising of 1830 – 1831 accelerated the crystallization of the national movements in the Russian Empire. However, the introduction of the Uvarov reforms, which proclaimed narodnist "peoplehood" along with the autocracy and the Orthodoxy as the fundamental principles of great-power ideology,

marked the beginning of intensified the Russification of the state apparatus and other non-Russian peoples residing in the Russian Empire. The doctrine developed by Count Uvarov for the construction of the Russian imperial nation and empire-state was based precisely on the triad of the “Orthodoxy, Autocracy, Nationality”, which became known as the “Theory of Official Nationality”. This was essentially the antithesis of the leading slogan proclaimed by the Great French Revolution: “liberty, equality, fraternity”. Uvarov’s doctrine was primarily based on the Orthodoxy as the leading pillar of the autocratic power of the Russian Emperor. Moreover, the Orthodoxy combined with autocracy was intended to become the ideological basis of the Russian imperial expansionism, which entailed the suppression of democratic freedoms and the imposition of despotism.

M. Doroshko and Iu. Tsyrya pointed out that K. Marx and F. Engels asserted that the foreign policy strategy of Muscovy-Russia was borrowed from the Khans of the Golden Horde and retained its imperial expansionist essence throughout the 13th–19th centuries. Subsequently, the Russian Empire was transformed first into the Soviet Union and later into the Russian Federation (Doroshko, & Tsyrya, 2023, p. 77). However, despite the change in names, the political essence of the Russian neo-empire remained virtually unchanged. Even when socialist or democratic republican systems were declared instead of monarchical autocracy, traditional Russian despotism was always transformed into authoritarianism and totalitarianism. In doing so, there was always a desire to maintain its imperial status – especially through expansionism into neighboring territories – a desire not only anticipated by the founding fathers of Marxism but also by the entire civilized world.

**Conclusions.** The entire essence of the Russian imperial expansionism manifested itself during the second half of the 18th to the mid-19th century. It was evident not only in the Russian Empire’s conquest of neighboring territories but also in the practice of the ideological political and moral psychological incorporation of their peoples into the imperial ideology. By capturing new territories, the imperial authorities primarily sought to destroy the national identity and self-awareness of the subjugated peoples to subsequently use them for the imperial expansion into new lands.

After Catherine II signed the Charter to the Nobility in 1785, the representatives of the Ukrainian elite became more concerned with obtaining the rights to the noble status. The process of involving the Ukrainians in the development of culture, science, and the system of state and church administration in the Russian Empire, following the European model, also intensified. The Ukrainians were more educated than the Russians and significantly closer to Western civilization and showed both a desire to maintain a certain social status (primarily the Cossack *starshyna*) within the imperial hierarchy and a tendency to realize their ideas and potential at a new state level (primarily representatives of the clergy and intellectual elite). Consequently, as early as the turn of the 17th – 18th centuries, the Russian state began the intensive absorption of the Ukrainian human resources: the most intellectual, socially active, and multi-talented Ukrainians, including those with military talent. This was necessary for the Russian Empire to carry out its constant expansionist policy. To this end, it sought the increasingly intensive use of the significant Ukrainian spiritual, intellectual, and political legal potential of the Ukrainians. Subsequently, the Russian state (in any manifestation: the imperial, Soviet-Bolshevik, or contemporary neo-imperial) strives at all costs to maintain control over these vital Ukrainian resources.

The analysis of the transformation of the Russian imperial expansionist policy from the 18th to the mid-19th century, in light of contemporary realities, requires a more thorough reassessment. This particularly concerns the historiosophical component of the process of

integrating representatives of the Ukrainian national elite into the Russian state and society. The policy of the Russian Empire in Ukraine during the second half of the 18th to the mid-19th century underwent a significant evolution –from unification measures, generally characteristic of any empire’s legal nature, to overtly discriminatory steps against the Ukrainians, driven by a chauvinistic orientation that accompanied the formation of the political Russian nation. It should therefore be emphasized that the Russian imperialism was chauvinistic and expansionist in nature. This made it especially aggressive toward peoples, who demonstrated alternative values: democracy, republicanism, and a strong sense of freedom. In contrast to the practice of the Russian imperial autocracy, the Ukrainian society, formed on the traditions of democracy and republicanism, and due to the historical memory of the Cossack self-governance and the Cossack-Hetman state, was able to resist the policy of the Russian chauvinism for a considerable time. It is no coincidence that the Ukrainian nation and its statehood came under the main blow of the Russian expansionism and the policy of Russification. Furthermore, the Ukrainians were among the most active in opposing the Russian imperial policy. Thus, the necessity arises to refute a number of the Russian great-power myths regarding “brotherly peoples”, the “civilizing role” of the Russian Empire, and so forth. Indeed, the policy of the Russian imperial expansionism during the 18th to mid-19th century clearly demonstrated a complete disregard for all neighboring peoples, especially the Ukrainians. Moreover, the imperial policy was directed at nullifying the cultural distinctions between the Ukrainians and the Russians, and consequently – the destruction of Ukrainian national identity.

**Acknowledgement.** We would like to express sincere gratitude to all members of the Editorial Board for consultations provided during the preparation of the article for publishing.

**Funding.** The authors did not receive any financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

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*The article was received July 18, 2025.*

*Article recommended for publishing 30/05/2026.*

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