

BETWEEN EAST AND WEST:
PREVENTING MISUNDERSTANDING BETWEEN PEOPLES

*Mirza Izmagilovich Makhmoutov—Founding Director of TARI, Former
Minister of Education of Tatarstan*

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I am very grateful to be invited to Brigham Young University-Idaho and I am happy to have an opportunity to address you.

How can we imagine the future relations between the USA and Russia? It is said that knowledge of the past, to a certain extent, shows us not only the existing situation but even the future.

THE WAY TO DEMOCRACY AND MARKET RELATIONS

How can we imagine the future of Russia according its history, culture, and the mentality of the population? That is the question. We can find a short answer if we take a glance into its history.

What is the situation in Russia today? The country slowly is transforming to a democratic state and market economy. But industry is producing only 50 percent of its former capacity. Now we have 5-7 percent rich people, some of them millionaires. But the income of 60 percent of the population is under the level of poverty (\$40-50 per month). This is the general situation in the country. But we are still optimistic.

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What about the education system—is it still alive and vibrant? Russia traditionally has the German system of education: elementary (4 years), basic (9 years), and secondary (11 years) within the general education schools. Then we have two or three or four years in professional education establishments—colleges and vocational schools.

Higher education in Russia is a very strong system of institutes and universities, five years of learning after graduation from the secondary schools or colleges. Nowadays more than 50 percent of secondary graduates study in universities. To lead into my main point, I should like to use as an example the history of Tatar people and Russians, having different religious and social backgrounds.

PARADOXES IN HISTORY AND EDUCATION

What is the future of Tatar Education? It is difficult to answer. I will employ the well known proverb: everything is relative. In the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries the Tatar population in the area between the Danube and Irtysh rivers was almost equal to the Russian population inside its old boundary. After centuries the Russians conquered the Tatar

states and started to dominate and rule. The number of Tatars declined. Everything is relative.

The civilized Europe of today was almost illiterate ten centuries ago. It is difficult even to imagine that one thousand years ago the Chinese level of literacy was much higher than that of Europe: of 100 adults there were only 1-2 percent in Europe who could read and write, and in China it was no less than 20 percent. Yet, in the interval of eight centuries, Europeans left China behind. So everything is relative.

Any people's culture is closely connected with its *language*, which develops mainly through *communication* with other nations. Historically, Tatars had close contacts with their eastern neighbors including Chinese, Indians, and Arabs. *Borrowing* other nations' experience is an objective law of mankind's cultural development. Let's look more closely at the most immediate example, the intercultural links between Russians and Tatars. Today even the blind can see that Russian culture influenced the Tatars' mentality greatly, though it was different once upon a time.

From the thirteenth through the fifteenth century, Russian upper classes actively assimilated many properties of Tatar culture, such as commodity-money relations, state administration, and foods. They invited educated and noble Tatars to fill state and military posts, tried to copy clothing fashions, behavior patterns, and so on.

That is why we say that Russians are not purely Europeans or purely Asians. Their culture developed under the influence of Eastern peoples' cultures including the Tatars. The Russians borrowed much from Tatars (e.g. Russian words for such commonplace things as money, goods, customs, market, road, horse), and for Tatars the latest close contacts with Russians became, for them in their turn, "a window to Europe." During recent centuries Tatar culture, education, and language have developed under the direct influence of Russian culture. So we can say that intercultural relations change minds and diminish contrasts between peoples.

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WHAT DID TATAR EDUCATION ACQUIRE FROM THE EAST?

What was the main Eastern influence that Tatar national culture underwent? The most important was that, as early as the tenth century, so-called Bulgarian Tatars (Bulgaria on the Volga river, not the one on the Danube) became acquainted with books, reading and writing, through relations with Arabic peoples. The most essential single concept was that the Holy Scriptures of Islam put the priority on the spiritual over the material, thus founding the basis for a *spiritual civilization*. Moral and ethical teachings of Islam penetrated into the people's mentality; Tatars borrowed the Arab-Persian verse patterns, as well as gentle, friendly, and tolerant interpersonal relationships typical of the Eastern man.

The Koran developed in people a reverent attitude to books at large, a responsible attitude toward learning and education. This formed the basis of the national tradition to learn in any way possible. For example, sending his son to study, a father would say rigorously to a teacher, "Meat is for you; bones are for me." In those times there was no question about education for future employment. Education had only one aim, to raise law-abiding citizens with high morals and loyalty to Allah. This difference is clearly seen even today between the secular Tatar school, whose goal is knowledge and mental development, and the religious Tatar school, which sets moral upbringing and general development of the young person as the goal.

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What are some specific influences of the East upon national culture? It is clearly seen from the analysis of *languages*, which gives rich indications of the cultures' mutual influence. In the Tatar language there are thousands of Arabic and Persian words, borrowed during almost 1000 years of the cultures' mutual influence. All the borrowings can be formally divided into two groups according to their source: borrowing of an object together with its name, or borrowing of a word having a certain meaning.

To denote objects, the Tatar language assimilated such words as *kitap* (book), *daftar* (exercise-book), *kalam* (pen), *maktap* (school) *muhallim* (teacher), *khat* (letter), *zhumle* (sentence), and thousands of others. In my borrowed words dictionary (1965) are more than 10,000 Arabic and 2,000 Persian words and expressions.

Words of the second group came in not together with an object but together with a *thought* under the influence of Arabic philosophy. These are the words denoting abstract notions, such as *fiker* (thought), *rasul* (prophet), *donya* (world), *iman* (faith), *din* (religion), *vuzhan* (consciousness), *akhlyak* (moral), etc. They belong, of course, to different degrees of abstraction and greatly influence the development of thinking ability of the Tatar people.

The Russian language today has borrowed American words like *business*, *supermarket*, *marketing*, *basis*, *hot-dog*, *jeans*, and others. This is not the equivalent process, as they have, only in a very generalized way, borrowed the concepts that accompany these words. The borrowing of words suggests an exchange between the peoples, but only the most superficial exchange can be said to be underway in this example.

TATARS AND HIGH CULTURE

Tatars, as any other people, had both a landed class and an intellectual elite. During recent times the whole world has learned the names of the poet-warrior Musa Jalil, the great ballet master Rudolf Nureyev (Paris Opera), academician Roald Sagdeyev (USA), composers Nazib Zhiganov and Sofiya Gubaydullina (Germany), ballet dancer Irek Mukhamedov

(British Royal ballet), singers Rinat Ibrahimov and Alsu Safina. Sofiya Asgatovna is the only woman-composer of the twentieth century having achieved worldwide fame, winner of many internationally prestigious awards. Tatar sportsmen Marat Safin (tennis), Ruslan Nigmatullin (hockey), Gata Kamsky (chess-champion, USA), and S. Khammatov (boxing) made Russia famous at the end of the twentieth century.

Many books by Tatar writers are translated into other languages. The Tatar Opera Theatre has been touring on the stages of the European theatres in Germany, the Netherlands, and France during recent decades.

EAST OR WEST

What are main differences between Eastern and Western cultures? What traits might be characteristic of a typical Tatar due to the influence of cultural integration? This question can be partially answered by singling out the main differences between Eastern and Western civilizations. It is easier to do this historically and more difficult to do this culturally, psychologically, and economically.

Priority is given in the West to such values as freedom, independence, equality, self-reliance, and individualism; in the East the highest values are ascribed to family harmony and safety, authority, advanced age, and following parents' teachings.

This is revealed by the difference in political solutions in the East and in the West. The tradition of *democracy* in politics prevails in the West, while in the East *authoritarianism* is predominant. In the West priority is attributed to the interests of a nation and to civic society having a large middle class. Meanwhile the East demonstrates a gap between the elite and the rest of the population, as well as an ethnocentric mentality developing sometimes so far as to take the form of nationalism.

Priority is given in the West to such values as freedom, independence, equality, self-reliance, and individualism; in the East the highest values are ascribed to family harmony and safety, authority, advanced age, and following parents' teachings. Competition and efficiency of the West are contrasted by compromise and loyalty of the East; creativity and readiness to take risks are opposed by tradition and religious faith.

Americans value most highly personal privacy, wealth, justice, predictability, family, freedom, and material possessions; but Arabs, while respecting family even more highly, put importance on religion, history, and national belonging. The Western civilization primarily tends to be more attached to scientific knowledge and modern technologies, whereas in the East cultural and religious premises are still dominant. Even when Western technologies are borrowed by the East, they are always interpreted through the Asian mentality, Islamic and secular intellectual traditions of the national culture.

While the West has for goals the attaining of material possessions and achieving career success, the significance of riches is not cultivated in the East, where objectives are more social, associated with family relationships and friendship connections. More than that, power and wealth are seen

not isolated from each other but as inseparable parts of a single entity being united together in one notion of *mulk* (dominion).

In the Western economy private property is divine and untouchable, and the idea of wealth redistribution is not welcomed. In the East the idea of riches' distribution and redistribution predominates over their production. In the West power is decentralized, while in the East there is a tendency to absolutization of power, to authoritarianism. The main criterion of an Eastern executive's assessment is complete and inseparable loyalty to a ruler. If in Western culture an employee is promoted for work and results achieved, the Eastern counterpart is valued for himself, individual loyalty and devotion, serving not a firm but a boss.

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So who are we by our mentality, Europeans or Asians? Russia occupies a unique geopolitical position between two poles and bears a specific mentality—Eurasian. There is a well-known saying: "Scratch any Russian and you will find a Tatar." It is worth saying that according to the social poll in 1999 most Russians, 56 percent, deny that they are European, and only 27 percent give a positive answer. We are Eurasian by our culture and our mentality.

WHAT IS THE INFLUENCE OF THE EAST TODAY?

The Eastern way of life does not attract modern youth. In fact the content of religious teachings, rituals, old traditions, paradigms of religious education, and much more are coming from the East. Relations are also hampered by the complexity of the Arabic language and the conditions of its teaching. The Eastern secular school itself is insufficiently developed and is trying to introduce Western models of educational organization.

For instance, schools with education in English and French have long been working in the capitals of Arabic countries—Cairo, Algiers, Rabat, etc. An American university has been working in the Lebanese capital Beirut for nearly a century. The Tatar-American Regional Institute in Kazan shows the same tendency. First we tried to organize an institution similar to the American community colleges, but our own bureaucracy did not allow this. (I hope, Madame Dilyara will explain to us what is the Tatar-American Regional Institute.)

Influence of Eastern culture is not just Arabic-Iranian civilization and Islam. It is also the earlier influence of Chinese culture, for example as seen in pentatones in music. Mongolian culture also could not but influence, especially in the lexicon of the Tatar language.

FACING THE WEST

The Western influence on our country is not limited to the culture of West European countries, to music, art, literature, architecture, and

elements of everyday living in Germany, England, and France. Modern America enormously influences our culture, language, art, politics and economics.

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Young people want to have the same way of life as the Americans have. Their interests are first of all connected with economics and a high level of culture. It is due to this that the West is so attractive as a model for our educational system.

The West is a highly technological society that creates new conditions for educational evolution and brings forth considerable transformation of its aims, objectives, and functioning principles. At present Western life is characterized by higher economic standards and a different level of social demands. At the same time people are beginning to realize that “man does not live by bread alone.” The stress is shifted to the “post material values” such as creative work, character, leisure time of full value, and shortening of working hours. Creating conditions for self-realization of a person becomes the main task.

So what is of the most importance? If the search is going in the direction of Western ideas, then what is it that we will borrow and implement in our national education system? Main directions of Western educational development are integration, differentiation, pragmatic direction, informatization, personality development, and individualization.

At the same time education is undergoing a serious crisis in the West too. One of the biggest signs of it is the large-scale problem of functional illiteracy. A second sign is the decrease of moral consciousness, and a third is the consumer-oriented psychology of European and American youth, which is quickly being adopted by our young people.

QUALITIES FOR THE FUTURE?

What personal qualities are necessary for a graduate in the twenty-first century? There is again a question of what kind of a graduate we are waiting for. One of the priorities is the formation of such human qualities as will enable people to successfully adjust, work, and live under the evolving conditions of this new century. Summarizing our own ideas and educational ideas of the West, we can name the main personal qualities looked for: 1) systematized scientific thinking; 2) high moral consciousness and logical social behavior; 3) general and ecological culture; 4) a system of knowledge and information culture; 5) creative activity; 6) moral work motives and tolerance in attitudes and behavior.

As mentioned above, peoples and cultures develop by borrowing from each other. For instance, in the past some capitalist countries borrowed the system of central planning from the Soviet system of economy.

Major Western ideas and concepts are gradually passing into our theory and practice; understandings of Western culture and way of life,

new systems of values, and a professional orientation to market relations are being formed. The negative influence of American mass culture via mass media causes worries.

How do Western scholars perceive the developing personality of education? Generalizing different ideas of Western scientists, one can name main directions in education, upbringing, and development, which according to an American philosopher K. Dorset are characteristic of the Western system in the last decade: global consciousness, global thinking, cross-cultural communication, language training, tolerance development, interpersonal relations, adopting the traditions of one's own culture, and a healthy way of life. Russian and Tatar pedagogical thought is trying to follow the same direction, values, structure, aims, and objectives.

And what about the future of Russia? We hope that in the post-industrial period of our history it will develop in the same direction as the European countries and the United States of America.

I am sure that our cooperation in the field of education will be one of the bases of the friendship between Russian and American peoples. That will be a realization of global life. ☺

**And what about the
future of Russia?**