CONCLUSION

One short conclusion is probably not enough to bring forth the results of a large study such as the one presented in this book. Nevertheless, let’s focus the reader’s attention on its key results. And so:

If we go beyond a strictly utilitarian approach towards what the population of our countries dreams about, if we examine these dreams in light of what sort of form Russians and Chinese picture in terms of their desired future, as well as separate elements of such, then it becomes evident that these dreams have much more in common than they have distinctions. Even so, it can hardly be said that «the Russian dream» and «the Chinese dream» represent alternative social projects on a macro-level and especially on a micro-level (in other words, not only in terms of «big» dreams about a certain society, but also in terms of individual dreams about something purely personal). Citizens of both our nations would like to live in great and flourishing countries, which would provide prosperity and well-being to the populace, where social justice would be dominant, where there would be no corruption, and where everyone has the opportunity to have a happy family, good health, a job with decent income, as well as the possibility for self-realization.

Still, it would be a mistake to say that the populations of our countries have completely identical dreams. Of course there are certain differences between what Russians and Chinese dream about, and they are quite striking. Macro-level dreams – that have something to do with the country in general – are of greater priority in the minds of Russian people, at the very least people who name a certain organization of society as one of their three main dreams can be encountered three times as often compared to China. Chinese dreams have more to do with everyday life, even if their achievement is implied in a dream of reviving a great China, which is declared the main national goal for the coming decades by the this country’s government, society and people. This brings us to what is perhaps the key difference in terms of what the populations of Russia and China dream about. For a long while the Chinese population’s dreams mostly had to do with day-to-
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day, personal life. Nonetheless, a few years ago the Chinese government realized the vast energy potential that can be harnessed by combining the dreams of common folk with national strategy objectives, and they not only developed a new «Great Chinese dream», they also put together several documents containing a specific plan on how to achieve it, which was presented to the people. This plan explicitly states not only certain strategic objectives, but also when exactly they will be achieved, not to mention that it also goes into detail on how regular Chinese folk will benefit from the implementation of the «Great Chinese dream». Thus the Communist Party of China and the Chinese government successfully accomplished their objective of «bringing meaning», shortly after which they started implementing their plans. So far the implementation of these plans has been quite successful, despite the typical social and economical problems which occur during the development of any country. Meanwhile the fact that those tasks which were designated as intermediate milestones on the way to fulfilling the Chinese people’s dream of reviving a great China – they correlate with the demands, expectations and aspirations of the Chinese population, which helps China’s citizens perceive their lives in general, as well as the country’s current condition, in a positive light, for the most part, despite drastic social inequality, relatively low quality of life and certain current difficulties. The situation in Russia is completely different. Here the government has not presented the people with a specific plan on how to convert society from its current form into one that would be as close as possible to what the nation’s social consciousness holds to be the ideal society. On one hand, this was addressed by atomizing and individualizing the dreams of Russian people, and on the other – by a far greater demand for living in a just and rationally organized society in Russian society, compared to China, not to mention the government having a clearer and more responsible stand on matters concerning the nation and the country’s citizens.

Moving on to the differences between what the populations of Russian and China dream about on a micro-level: they are mostly defined by different levels of economical and social structure development in both countries. For example, to this day the people in Russia have a higher average income, than in China, despite the success of the latter’s economy in the last few decades. It should also be noted that a relatively large amount of Russia’s population lives in cities, compared to China. Not to mention that Russians are not only better
educated in general, compared to China, but also the percentage of people who have higher education is significantly greater. Of course, all of this (together with certain national cultural differences) takes its toll on what sort of dreams the populations of both countries pursue, as well as which dreams are given greater priority. For example, a considerable amount of the employed population in both countries aspire towards a high-paying job, but a dream of having an interesting job – one that would not only contribute towards achieving a certain level of well-being, but that would also ensure self-realization – such a dream is much more prominent in Russia, than in China. Meanwhile, analyzing how certain dreams are divided between separate social groups within the two countries brings us to the conclusion that further development of certain processes – namely urbanization, economic diversification and expanding employment within tertiary and quaternary sectors (especially in those workplaces which demand considerable human capital) – will contribute to the convergence of the dreams of our countries’ citizens.

The marketization of social life as a result of Russia’s and China’s economies being integrated into a global market economy has not yet led to their national cultural peculiarities being completely undermined. In neither country has society become a «consumer society», where people typically achieve self-fulfillment through the nonproductive sphere. Even so, this field still reveals some distinctions between Russia and China in terms of their civilization characteristics. For example, when talking about an ideal society, Russians highlight the opportunity for individual self-realization, as well as such large-scale qualities as a just social order (even in those spheres of life that aren’t directly connected to their own personal interests), the absence of any sort of combat activity, etc. But in China greater importance is given to interaction with other people, as well as being in a stable position yourself, especially when it comes to employment.

5. If we were to go into more detail on the situation with dreams among the Russian people, then it should be noted that Russian citizens, for the most part, are inclined to dream: 75% of them assume that one must have a dream, and that there’s nothing interesting about living without a dream. It’s no wonder that the vast majority of Russians have a dream (90%). For the most part Russians dream of being well-to-do, so that they wouldn’t need to «count change» (40%), and they also wish for good health (their own and their loved ones) – 33%. It’s worth explicitly emphasizing that one of the top three things our
citizens dream about is living in a just and rationally organized society (33%), where virtue and work-ethic are rewarded, where income depends on good work and qualification, where everyone has an equal opportunity to implement their own abilities, and where all are equal before the law. It’s only after these main dreams do we encounter such dreams as having good children (23%); owning your own separate apartment (21%); having a good family, leading an interesting life, self-realization (17–18% each). As you can see, despite aggressive advertising of «the rich life» and its attributes, wealth and all of its components, such as luxurious foreign cars and yachts, career, fame and glory, as well as human beauty are not what the vast majority of Russian people dream about. This separates our country from not only China, but from, say, the USA as well, where an elegant body or widespread fame («star-status») is literally some sort of cult or even a national religion.

6. Considering that social justice plays an important role in Russia’s model of national culture, a dream of a just society acts as an idea that consolidates the country’s population. Separate groups of Russians who differ in ideology bring their own slightly different meaning to the idea of a «just society», but on the whole it can be said that its key elements are equal opportunity for all, active public participation in matters of social security, income differentiation which would take into account education, qualification and individual labor effectiveness (within certain reasonable limits). Such a conception is quite popular among Russians, no matter what position they are in, no matter how prosperous they are themselves, which indicates the existence of a long-lived and persistent system of social norms and values. At the same time Russians tend to be quite tolerant towards most forms of social inequality (except towards inequality when it comes to accessing quality healthcare). Nonetheless, the current situation in Russia is far from what they have in mind when they imagine equality: they hold inequality of income to be too drastic, and the legal basis for this to be illegitimate. Thus it is apparent that this is quite a sensitive problem for the country’s population. Furthermore, Russians do not see any efforts on behalf of the government to resolve the situation, which leads to increased dissatisfaction and social tension within society, as well as a growing gap between our country’s citizens’ concept, their dream of a desired society, and the actual society they currently have to live in.
7. Aspiring towards having the perfect job is not that important a life value for Russians: only 7% of Russian citizens dream of getting it. At the same time, because it is undoubtedly a field of high social value, professional activities are a possible subject of dreams for our fellow citizens. Furthermore, when it comes to employment, we can establish the existence of an «ideal» dream, which is based on desire and reflects an emotional image – based on what Russians perceive as «the right way» – as well as a more down-to-earth and specifically outlined dream. Ideal dreams concerning jobs are more or less identical. Their main distinction is their primary focus on what exactly the professional activities in question consist of, namely, aspiring to find an interesting job that can entice an individual and provide an opportunity for self-realization (58%). In other words, this sort of orientation prevails over striving for a certain income. Speaking of our fellow citizens’ professional aspirations, the following categories are undoubtedly in the lead: industry, energy, transportation, construction (26% of respondents), different sectors of social and cultural activity (education, science, healthcare, recreation – 25%), and finally – finance and credit, marketing, consulting and other such activities, which share third place with government and municipal management (both garnering 15%). At the same time, when comparing the ratings of which fields of professional activity our fellow citizens deem preferable with how they are really distributed in different fields of the modern-day economy (industry, energy, transportation, construction – 29% of respondents; different sectors of social and cultural activity – 19%; commerce, consumer services and housing – 14%), a misbalance between «what we have» and «what we would like to strive towards» becomes evident. This misbalance becomes even more apparent when it comes down to what sort of activities are deemed preferable for the children. Realizing the situation on the labor-market – whether rationally or intuitively – as well as being aware of the main tendencies in its development, Russians, especially when it concerns their children, choose those professional activity fields where employment will be relevant, appealing and prestigious (not only in terms of income, but when it comes to status as well) for years to come. Still, certain choices that they tend to make are somewhat disturbing. For example, parents refuse to consider the industry, energy and construction sphere as a worthy labor-activity field for their children (at 16%), preferring a job in government or municipal management with excessive enthusiasm (24%).
8. The last few years preceding the crisis have shown improvements in many aspects of Russian life: more households obtained consumer durables, and the Russians themselves evaluated many aspects of their own lives as increasingly favorable. Nevertheless, increasing prosperity did not bring any sort of qualitative changes or the occurrence of any new life opportunities for most of the population. Furthermore, the increase in quality of life in Russian society was not even, for the most part affecting those who were already in a favorable position to begin with, while less fortunate segments of the population did not show any improvement. Meanwhile the desire to «live at least as good as everyone else does», which is one of the most important aspirations for all Russians, their income and life-quality notwithstanding – this desire led to a new demand, namely – living a fortunate life without having to «count change». Currently this is the most popular dream among the country’s population, with 40% of the people striving towards this, regardless of the quality of their life, their age or place of residence.

9. In times of ever increasing anxiety or even hostility from the outside world, combined with a lack of ability to control situations that emerge around them, Russians concentrate on creating a comfortable microenvironment to live in. Nonetheless, organizing their own micro-world is not necessarily a dream for them. Rather it’s some sort of social program when it comes to establishing a family or a circle of relationships, which reflects norms that are predominant in Russian society. The core element in a Russian’s micro-world, if viewed in the context of this «social program», is their family, which has been preserved in its traditional form: a man-provider and a woman who looks after the home – they create a family to bear and raise children. Modern trends become apparent here only when it comes to the amount of kids: in an ideal scenario there should only be two. Despite many varieties of implementing these family values, it has not been undermined even by the current pluralizing of what an «ideal man» and an «ideal woman» should embody. Hence Russians’ dreams of their very own ideal micro-world are based on deep layers of norms and values inherent to Russian culture. Even though social-modernization processes, which are notable for their pluralizing of preferences in many different areas, take their toll on said norms and values, however they haven’t yet affected them too seriously. It should be noted that the undermining of this still very solid system of norms and values is most apparent in big cities, where life is dynamic and difficult, hence stimu-
lating an increasing demand for simplifying and facilitating relationships, making them more convenient while decreasing the level of responsibility within them. As a result family, children and friends gradually lose importance when it comes to Russians’ dreams: for some it is a result of this being a norm of life, hence a strange thing to dream about, while others just do not regard it as something of high priority. Notably these differences highly depend on where exactly the Russians live.

10. Although Russians have become financially more secure over the last decade, their outlook on a social order where an individual’s efforts matter much less than having the right connections or just being lucky have not changed for the better. We can even signify an increasing gap between people’s individual effort and the material output of their effort, at least that is how the general public sees it. That is why Russians regard the society they live in as unjust and «faulted». Given these conditions, it’s natural that a dream of a just and rational social order is the key element for the «Russian dream», as well as the «Russian civilization project» in general. This dream contains personal and emotional meaning given the special role macro-identities play in our fellow citizens’ lives. One of these identities implies people identifying themselves with Russians, which assumes that they identify themselves with the country and its people. Such identification, which ensures successfully shaping the Russian nation as well as interethnic tolerance, is currently deeply settled and widespread in the population’s consciousness, even though it is in a «dormant», latent state. At the same time, a sense of personal connection between Russia and its citizens is gradually fading. This is a result of Russian society being «atomized», an increase of estrangement, as well as a decreasing correlation between society and those ideal concepts of justice, which are a vital part of Russian culture and are consensual for all segments of the population. In these conditions an «organic solidarity», a sense of inseparable unity with the community, with the inhabitants of Russia who abide to the norms and values of this internally united culture – is replaced by feeling a formal connection with the Russian Federation, by regarding yourself as just a citizen of a certain country. On one hand, such tendencies are positive, since they reflect socio-political and socio-cultural modernization processes, and serve as evidence that a civic nation is being shaped within the country. But on the other hand, one should bear in mind that these positive processes will certainly lead to change in the «Russian dream», with
its social component being dissolved within it. Instead of being a
dream this component can turn into a set of instrumental objectives,
which will concern Russians either more or less, depending on their
personal situation. Further development of these tendencies would
generally change the psychological mechanism that shapes Russians’
identification, which in turn would bring many consequences – every-
thing from people no longer being willing to overcome their personal
problems (which might occur during future economic crises) without
severe protests, and even people refusing to «pay their debt to the
country», i.e. serve in the army. Said tendency is quite dangerous con-
sidering the consequences. Given these conditions, when there are no
alternate integrators which would be of emotional importance to Rus-
sians, these tendencies of undermining «organic solidarity» can result
in Russian society «splitting». It is certainly too early to discuss the
possibility of such disunity, since the whole situation with the Crimea,
sanctions and anti-sanctions shows that the population is still capable
of consolidating, however, it can already be argued that a certain «het-
erogeneity» when it comes to the Russian people’s views will only in-
tensify with time.

11. Even those who are displeased with the current situation in the
country, as well as the path Russia is currently taking – even these
citizens do not wish for the country to adopt a western model of de-
development. Furthermore, the potential for solidarity in Russia is quite
weak, and incidentally it plays an important role in implementing the
European historic project. Despite the idea of serving the country and
society being quite popular among our fellow citizens, genuine altru-
ism and willingness to make personal sacrifices out of solidarity (es-
pecially for separate people) is not normal from a national conscious-
ness viewpoint. This brings us to the conclusion that an alternative
development project is now relevant in Russian society, one that dif-
fers from the western civilization project, and one that Russians dream
about. What makes this an alternative project is not the fact that it
does not include democratic institutions or that the government would
be more authoritarian, but in fact a different purpose, different func-
tions and subordination of democratic institutions within society, and
more importantly – a different role, different functions for the gov-
ernment itself. The most important function would be setting the right
goals that would lead to optimal strategic and tactical development of
the country, as well as truly taking care of the population entrusted to
it. «Taking care» does not mean as much «social charity» as possible,
but rather establishing the right conditions for successful independent economic activity for the Russian people, activity which could be performed with everyone being equal before the law, with socially weak groups of the population provided with reasonable security, and with equal opportunities for all. No matter what nonbelievers might say, a dream of such a society is still prominent in the minds of Russians. Many of us are willing to dedicate their lives to implementing such a dream, since it can be regarded as a higher goal worth living for.

12. A national dream by no means should be regarded as some sort of predetermined socio-psychological constant for all future times. As living conditions change, one dream replaces another, just like it happens when it comes down to specific individuals and their personal aspirations and desires. This is usually accompanied by a complex interference of ideas and ideals, which leads to the formation of new dominating ideas and a new image of the future, one that inspires millions of people. In this sense the «Russian dream» is notable for its dynamism. Throughout the course of the last century it has changed its form and substance several times. Despite all of its variations, it has continued to exist mainly as a dream of truth and justice, even though, alas, it had typically remained to be just a dream. That’s why the yet to be fulfilled «Russian dream» is still based on the same elements today from which it was «synthesized» in the past, despite its dynamism. It implies the country to be a common cause, with social rights being above political rights. It also implies a marked sense of justice and devotion to social equality. These same basic characteristics can be used to describe the Chinese dream. For this reason, despite all the differences between these two great countries – Russia and China – which cannot be ignored, we can acknowledge the fact that our nations are united by similar desires and aspirations, as well as a similar direction in terms of desired social development.