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Contemporary Rural Studies in Russia and China: Scientific Overview



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Abstract. The paper explores key directions in the study of rural areas in Russia and China, highlighting both thematic intersections and differentiations, as well as identifying research gaps and promising avenues for future inquiry. A comprehensive content analysis was conducted using the eLibrary (RSCI) and Google Scholar databases. Keywords and thematic queries were selected to reflect current scholarly interests in the socio-economic development of rural regions in both countries. The analysis demonstrates a growing academic interest in socio-economic transformations of rural spaces, the implications of urbanization, and the dynamics of rural-to-urban migration. Considerable attention is also given to changes in traditional ways of life, the transformation of community relations, and alterations in social structure. Notably, Chinese research tends to frame rural areas as complementary to urban spaces, whereas the Russian scholarly tradition predominantly examines them as autonomous and distinct environments. Among the identified gaps are the limited attention to individual dimensions of rural development and to the formation of prestige associated with rural living. Insufficient coverage is given to processes such as migration flows, the return migration of former urban residents to rural regions, and strategies for cultivating a positive image of rural life. Overall, the findings underscore the multidimensional and interdisciplinary character of contemporary rural studies in Russia and China, as well as a heightened scholarly interest in issues of sustainable rural development.

Key words: modern rural studies, rural development in Russia and China, rural sociology, Russia, China, research review, rural communities, rural transformation, interdisciplinary rural studies.

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Introduction

Current methodological approaches to rural research should be reconsidered. This is substantiated with the transformations in society, which directly affect the rural lifestyle and change its structure. Rural areas, being in the context of global processes, face many challenges, from the instability of the modern world and the issues of socio-economic development to migration processes and the implementation of new agricultural technologies, including the digitalization of agriculture (Bolshakova et al., 2019; Enyedi, Volgyes, 2013; Resina, 2012). There is also a growing interest in the development of eco-settlements and the choice of rural life by various social groups (Walker, Plotnikova, 2018). Despite the accumulated theoretical and empirical knowledge in the field of rural sociology and agrarian sociology, researchers still need to revise the established socio-economic paradigm. A transition to a more flexible analysis of rural spaces using socio-cultural, geopolitical and environmental approaches is required (Khagurov, 2009). An important aspect is the understanding of disciplinary differences in modern rural sociology, since research methods and focuses can vary significantly depending on the national context, the history of the discipline and the priority objects of study.

Sociological studies of villages in socialist states, particularly in the Soviet Union, have significantly transformed in the post-Soviet period (Khagurov, 2009; Novikov, 2018). In modern Russia, there is a shift in research interests due to the transition to a market economy and the emergence of new phenomena uncommon for the Soviet era, such as return labor migration and a steady outflow of population from rural areas, especially in the

Non-Black-Earth Region (Bozhkov, 2015). At the same time, Russian research of the 1990s is largely based on the achievements of rural sociology of the Soviet period of the 1960s–1980s, and it maintains continuity, though there is a great methodological and thematic variety (Khagurov, 2009). In particular, the work of the Center for Peasant Studies and Agrarian Reforms led by T. Shanin demonstrates a broad regional coverage and deep attention to various aspects of rural life, from peasant autobiographies to the analysis of the informal economy (Nikulin, 2020).

From a methodological point of view, these studies can be described as groundbreaking for their time. T. Shanin calls his approach “reflexive peasant studies”, focusing on the subjective perception of everyday life and the experience of rural residents. Such methods have not previously been used in Russian rural sociology, which emphasizes their novelty and value (Doktorov, Nikulin, 2020).

At the same time, elements of the Soviet research tradition remain, especially in the study of the socio-economic situation of rural areas and the state of agriculture. For example, in the 1990s, N.E. Pokrovsky’s “Ugora Project” was developed, focused on a comprehensive study of rural life using interviews, ethnographic methods and analysis of the regions of the European North, where the issues of population outflow and rural infrastructure decline are particularly pronounced (Pokrovsky, Nefedova, 2012). The value of such projects lies in their interdisciplinary nature, combining a sociological analysis of rural communities with an assessment of the socio-economic situation and the study of environmental conditions, including the biodiversity of the studied territories.

Other works that appeared in Russia in the 1990s and 2000s focus on the study of particular social groups living in rural areas, such as youth, seasonal workers, residents of eco-settlements, as well as the ethnic composition of the village population. The latter aspects are actively developing within the framework of anthropological research conducted, in particular, at the Museum of Anthropology and Ethnography of RAS (Vinokurova, 2010; Kondratyeva, 2019). Despite the significant amount of accumulated research, Russian rural sociology remains flexible and is based on various disciplines: its boundaries are blurred, and approaches fluctuate between geography, anthropology, history, and classical sociology. The topics related to post-pandemic changes in rural life, as well as the development of interdisciplinary forms of cooperation in the study of the modern village, have not been sufficiently studied.

In addition, the lack of a comprehensive comparative analysis of Russian rural sociology with similar research areas in other countries remains an obvious problem. This is especially true for countries with a large rural population and a lack of large-scale rural migration, such as countries in South America, Central and Southeast Asia.

It is even more interesting to make comparisons with states that have passed the socialist stage of development. Some of them are still at this stage. The People's Republic of China is a prime example of such a case, as it has socio-economic trends similar to Russian realities. In particular, both China and Russia are characterized by the massive outflow of population from villages, urbanization, as well as gaps between infrastructure development in urban and rural areas (Chen, 2010; Long et al., 2016). This includes, for example, the availability of high-speed Internet, the quality of medical services and transport infrastructure. The development of rural sociology in China began with the work of Tong Rong-zhi, who perceived it as an applied discipline focused on solving specific problems without

building a fundamental theoretical framework¹. In turn, Yang Kaidao considers rural sociology as a separate field of knowledge, focusing on the specifics of social life in rural communities². Despite the growing interest in rural studies both in China and in Russia, rural sociology as a discipline has not acquired clear boundaries and methodological unity. Basic works such as Feng Hefa's study consider rural sociology as an independent scientific field, though they do not offer a unified methodological framework and do not analyze the specifics of the institutionalization of the discipline (Shasha, 2019).

Despite the cultural and historical differences in the development of villages in Russia and China, there are a number of common features. Among them, the most significant are gaps in the level of infrastructure development in rural regions and the high level of social inequality compared to urban areas. Thus, according to Rosstat, in 2018, the average per capita income of rural residents was only 65% of the income of the urban population, which indicates a significant gap in the level of financial security³. In China, the same indicator was 37.24%, which also confirms the existence of serious differences between the incomes of rural and urban residents⁴.

In the Russian context, regional differences are significant: the level of rural development in the Non-Black-Earth Region and in the south of Russia shows significant heterogeneity (Antoncheva, Apanasenko, 2021). The key issues are the non-diversified production in rural areas and high migration, especially among young people, to cities (Kartseva et al., 2024). In China, similar

¹ Feng Hefa (1934). *Outline of Rural Sociology*. Shanghai.

² Ibidem.

³ Household incomes, spending and consumption in 2018 (based on the results of a sample survey of household budgets). Federal State Statistics Service. Available at: https://gks.ru/bgd/regl/b18_102/Main.htm (accessed: 25.08.2025).

⁴ China Statistical Yearbook, 2019. Available at: <https://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2019/indexeh.htm>. (accessed: 25.08.2025).

difficulties are caused by urbanization which began in the mid-1970s (Jie, 2020). In Russia, the issues of poverty and the gap in living standards are usually considered to be solved using market mechanisms and economic diversification, but these programs are often declarative and difficult to implement in practice (Mikheeva, 2016). In China, priority is given to direct government regulation of the socio-economic development of rural areas (Merenkova, 2019). Both countries are characterized by poor investment prospects of rural regions, which hinders infrastructure development, entrepreneurship and private subsidiary plots. The issue of modernizing the healthcare system is particularly acute: in Russia, the reduction in the number of medical institutions in rural areas and the number of health workers has significantly reduced the availability of medical care, which further aggravates the prospects of villages (Chernyshev, 2022). At the same time, there are no comprehensive programs aimed at increasing the social significance of rural life and stimulating migration to villages among both urban residents and foreign migrants.

In terms of cultural and social development, both Russia and China face the destruction of traditional social ties, the increasing role of commercialized relations between residents, and the decline of previous communal forms of interaction (Kurakin, 2019). At the same time, the importance of diversifying the rural economy and creating a positive and attractive image of rural regions is increasing.

The relevance of the research is confirmed by strategic documents, in particular, the Strategy for Sustainable Rural Development of the Russian Federation until 2030⁵. This document highlights the need to diversify the rural economy, strengthen local governments, promote the integration of

villages and cities, as well as partnership between the state, municipal structures and rural communities. In this regard, it is becoming relevant to study not only the current trends in the development of rural areas in Russia based on the analysis of scientific publications, but also the experience of other countries. The study of Chinese practices is of particular importance, taking into account both the similarity of socio-economic processes and China's status as a strategic partner of the Russian Federation.

The scientific novelty of the research lies in understanding the key areas of rural development in Russia and China, identifying research gaps and formulating promising areas. The purpose of the analysis is to identify similarities and differences in the study of rural areas of the two countries, as well as to identify key topics describing the specifics of the transformation of the modern village in Russia and China.

Research methodology

Qualitative content analysis differs fundamentally from the quantitative approach as it is focused not on the statistical calculation of information units, but on identifying the meaning of content, deep processes and interrelations between the studied phenomena. The main objective of this method is to provide a detailed and comprehensive understanding of the material under study, to form a system of classifications and categories, and to trace the features of their functioning in a real social context. Unlike quantitative analysis, which is limited to frequency detection, a qualitative approach allows identifying hidden structures, as well as interpret texts in a broader socio-cultural context. The method of qualitative content analysis is actively used in various fields of social science, including sociology, cultural studies, political science, economics and demography. The sources for the analysis were the databases eLibrary and Google Scholar, which provide a wide range of publications in the field of social science. To form

⁵ Strategy for Sustainable Rural Development of the Russian Federation until 2030. Available at: <http://static.government.ru/media/files/Fw1kbNXVJxQ.pdf> (accessed: 25.08.2025).

the sample, a list of keywords and concepts was developed containing such queries as “modern rural research in Russia and China”, “socio-economic development of rural areas”, “migration of rural population”, “social issues of rural life”, “rural economy”, “rural communities”, etc. To expand the sample, the queries were translated into English and used in the Google Scholar search engine, which allowed comparing Russian and foreign publications and identify interdisciplinary links.

After the initial sampling, all papers were manually verified, which allowed excluding publications not related to rural areas in Russia and China. The final database includes articles from various disciplinary fields, from sociology and economics to philosophy, political science and anthropology. This interdisciplinary approach has allowed us to consider rural issues in a multi-dimensional way: from the analysis of economics and social policy to cultural transformations, environmental challenges and political processes. The time range of the study covered the period from 2021 to 2025, so we could focus on current trends and identify relevant areas of scientific research. As a result, 360 publications meeting the stated criteria were uploaded from the Google Scholar database, and 140 articles were uploaded from eLibrary. The research includes not only journal articles, but also monographs, as well as conference proceedings. Such a broad scope allowed us to include both fundamental works and applied developments that are significant for the practice of rural management. The analysis showed that the peak of scientific activity was in 2022, when 250 papers were published. In subsequent years, their number has stabilized at about 82 per year, which indicates the development of a sustained research agenda. At the same time, a significant part of the publications was devoted to rural regions of China, which is explained by the scale of the reforms being carried out there, as well as the priority of rural issues for Chinese science. The analysis of the

thematic distribution showed the following results: socio-economic development and urbanization – 288 publications; socio-geographical research – 148 papers; ecology and social ecology issues – 95 publications; cultural and anthropological field – 45 studies. At the same time, it is noted that in Chinese publications these topics are covered much more deeply and more comprehensively than in Russian studies, where they are often considered only partly. This difference reflects the specifics of national research traditions and priorities of the scientific agenda.

A comparative analysis showed that, despite the general similarity of the research structure, the emphases are placed differently. Russian science is more characterized by a focus on socio-economic issues and regional development issues, while Chinese researchers attach primary importance to urbanization processes, migration and their consequences for rural areas, and this approach allows making more comprehensive forecasts and recommendations for the China’s public policy. It is important to emphasize that this study does not pretend to be an exhaustive analysis of the entire scientific literature on rural areas of Russia and China. However, the most cited and significant publications of recent years have been systematized within the limited format of the article. These works allow us to form a holistic view of the state and prospects of development of this area and serve as the basis for further research.

The main areas of modern rural research in Russia and China

Socio-economic area

The socio-economic area remains one of the most developed, maintaining a stable applied focus and developing over several decades. In recent years, the research vector has shifted toward studying the transformations of economic and political institutions in rural Russia, as well as the possibilities of rural development in new institutional conditions. From 2021 to 2024, there has been a significant

increase in the number of Russian publications devoted to the socio-economic development of rural areas. In 2021, 15 works were recorded, in 2022 their number increased to 24, and in 2023 and 2024 their volume reached 36 annually. This dynamic indicates the growing interest of Russian researchers in studying the processes of transformation of rural areas and socio-economic changes. Recent publications have paid special attention to the transition from analyzing the consequences of global transformations to studying the everyday practices and individual trajectories of rural residents. Thus, the research vector is shifting toward microsocial processes related to everyday life and individual adaptation strategies.

Special attention is paid to the topic of “managerization” of rural relations, market rationalization of everyday interactions and the destruction of traditional informal ties (Nekrasov, 2023; Bogdanova et al., 2024). From 2022 to 2024, there has been an increase in the number of publications devoted to the managerization of rural relations and the gradual destruction of the traditional community model. So, in 2022, 10 papers were published, in 2023 – 14, and in 2024 – 18, reflecting the growing interest in the study of transformations of social structures and rural communities.

There is considerable interest in studying the relationship between formal and informal practices in rural economy and public life. Researchers note that previously dominant informal practices are gradually losing influence, giving way to formalized interactions (Kondratyev, Fadeeva, 2021; Lushnikova, 2023; Plusnin, 2024). One of the illustrative examples is the disappearance of familiar neighborhood ties, which are being replaced by more rational, economically motivated models of relationships. At the same time, as O.B. Bozhkov and his colleagues emphasize, villagers are still often guided by traditional norms and retain elements of informal exchange (Bozhkov

et al., 2020). However, even these interactions are becoming commercialized: it is now customary to pay for assistance to older people, for care or household support, albeit along with traditional practices of exchanging products and services (Bogdanova et al., 2024). Thus, the modern rural community is a hybrid system that combines the features of a traditional and market paradigm. This creates the basis for a new format of interactions between residents and allows us to more accurately characterize the specifics of rural daily life and economic dynamics.

This topic also examines institutional transformations in rural areas, including the specifics of the activities of local authorities, their formal and informal foundations. At the same time, when analyzing publications, we identified the importance of studying interpersonal relationships and the stability of trust-based communications in rural areas (Andrianova et al., 2022; Vinogradskii, Vinogradskaya, 2023). Formalization in villages can be seen as part of a broader trend toward individualization and changing social norms typical of the modern era.

One of the features of rural sociology in China is its predominant focus on applied research, as opposed to an emphasis on theoretically grounded approaches. Chinese scientists concentrate on studying the processes taking place directly in rural areas and on phenomena that have a direct impact on the lives of rural residents. A significant object of analysis is the structural reform that began in the 1970s. According to a number of experts, its consequences continue to affect the current state of the village (Lardy, 1986; Chen, Davis, 1998). Within the framework of this approach, the development of rural areas in China is being reconsidered, especially in the context of the transformation of traditional peasant farms, where the key elements were the rural community and the mutual support of its participants. The main objective of Chinese rural sociology is to analyze the causes and issues

associated with the transformation of rural lifestyles and changes in government policy. Despite the extensive empirical material, this research aspect suffers from a lack of theoretical approaches and insufficient generalization of findings. The lack of research complexity makes it difficult to establish links between theory and practice and limits the possibilities for an adequate analysis of scientific contribution, especially in publications and dissertations.

Studies also record the negative effects of the land reform. Prior to its implementation, cooperation between rural and urban enterprises was a key driver. The settlements that have managed to build such connections have successfully adapted to the new conditions; other villages have faced economic difficulties. At the same time, there is a high level of migration to cities, which exacerbates development issues (Zang et al., 2020; Yan et al., 2020; Wang, 2023).

Research on urbanization and rural migration

Modern Russian research on rural areas addresses the phenomenon of deurbanization, according to which the village appears as an alternative to the city. Rural territories are positioned as a space where it is possible to realize an eco-friendly lifestyle (Pokrovsky et al., 2020). Among the significant topics are the development of eco-settlements, the phenomenon of return labor migration (including in the research of M. Plyusnin), as well as the analysis of migration strategies from the city to the countryside in search of stability and psychological comfort (Agibalova, 2020; Kuznetsova, 2021). Modern Russian research on rural areas pays special attention to the impact of factors such as digitalization, the COVID-19 pandemic and changes in the professional structure of society, new migration strategies development (Makhrova, Nefedova, 2021; Parfenova, Petukhova, 2022). These processes contribute to a conscious choice of life outside of large cities, which indicates a significant transformation of ideas about the

village and its place in the social space.

Digitalization, accompanied by the widespread use of remote forms of employment, has had a significant impact on the mobility of the population and the ability to choose a place of residence. Previously, limited access to high-quality Internet infrastructure was a great hindrance to moving to rural areas, but the current development of telecommunication technologies gradually blurs the boundary between urban and rural areas (Kasimova, Kasimov, 2020; Sovetova, 2021). An increasing number of specialists in the field of information technology, media, education, as well as the creative profession are choosing rural areas as a platform for work and life. This process is accompanied by the development of a new type of rural resident: mobile, economically active and self-actualizing outside the traditional urban lifestyle.

Migration processes are considered as one of the key aspects of the transformation of the Chinese countryside. Researchers identify two main reasons of rural-to-urban migration: the desire to improve financial situation and the desire to acquire the necessary resources for doing business in rural areas (Guo, Qiao, 2020; Zhu et al., 2021; Liu, 2022). A paradox arises: in order to develop rural entrepreneurship, it is necessary to earn seed money in the city. This strategy loosens traditional community ties, strengthens individualism and transforms the social structure of rural areas.

A separate section of Chinese rural research is devoted to urbanization. Scientists emphasize that the consequences of agrarian reform and land privatization contributed to the development of a new model: temporary migration of rural residents to cities, followed by land transfer (Gu, Qiao, 2020; Xu et al., 2020; Garriga et al., 2023). These trends are typical primarily for young people. The conflicts that arose during privatization caused an accelerated transition to a market model and the disintegration of traditional forms of collective ownership. At the same time, rural residents, accustomed to informal

relationships and collectivism, turned out to be unprepared for new realities (Kan, 2020; Barbalet, 2021). Some studies record cases of citizens appealing to local authorities to preserve collective forms of ownership, but such initiatives do not receive support (Wong et al., 2022). In the context of urbanization, rural areas are increasingly perceived as backward and depressed. The elimination of the infrastructural gap between urban and rural areas, especially in the areas of medicine, social support and poverty reduction, is considered a priority. At the same time, the emphasis is on developing the attractiveness of agriculture, which is impossible without the revival of traditional collectivism.

Cultural and anthropological research

A smaller but important area is cultural and anthropological research. Within this framework, rural areas are considered as spaces with a unique culture and historical identity. Modern works in this field are increasingly focusing not only on ethnic composition or traditions, but also on the features of social communication, identity, and connections to the place of residence. Everyday practices, forms of care, and the influence of the rural landscape on interpersonal relationships are explored.

An important aspect is the study of rural residents' perception of their own daily lives. Special attention is paid to how they cope with infrastructural deficits, develop life strategies, choosing ways of self-realization in conditions of socio-economic constraints. An example is research on the Non-Black-Earth Region, where specific forms of adaptation to changes are observed (Popov, 2022; Shomina, 2020; Yakovlev, Nikolaev, 2020). Publications in this area are usually characterized by neutral emotions. The authors' intention is not so much to criticize the changes taking place as to describe their impact on the individual and collective experience of living in rural areas.

Within the framework of this area, in modern Chinese rural research, scientists are particularly concerned about the loss of a collective lifestyle

associated with increasing land inequality. The most representative group of studies is devoted to the disintegration of the community model that previously dominated Chinese agriculture. It has been established that the spread of market mechanisms and the commercialization of rural life have led to the loss of collective identity and the transition to individualized forms of management (Ge et al., 2020; Zang, 2020; Wang, 2023). The technologization of rural production has become a significant factor. For example, irrigation, which was previously carried out jointly by the community, now requires the involvement of hired labor. This destroys the established forms of collective labor that previously served as the basis for the existence of a rural community (Yan et al., 2020).

Despite the government's efforts to redistribute land, the situation is getting worse due to the lack of coordination and institutional support. Frequent property redistribution only increases migration flows and, in some cases, leads to the economic decay of villages (Yang, Cai, 2020). Research highlights that much of the land redistribution initiatives were developed at the grassroots level and represent a legacy of revolutionary practices (Guo, Liu, 2021; Song et al., 2020). Such processes are considered as a manifestation of the commercialization of agriculture. However, the authors themselves emphasize the lack of theoretical elaboration of this trend, which makes it difficult to comprehend it within the framework of modern scientific discourse.

Socio-geographical research

This area is associated with socio-geographical research that began in the 2000s and is developing to this day. Key research groups working in this area include teams led by N.E. Pokrovsky, as well as researchers at the Institute of Geography of RAS collaborating with sociologists (Nefedova et al., 2015). The starting point is the rejection of a purely sociological interpretation of the village and, accordingly, the appeal to interdisciplinary

approaches combining geographical, biological and environmental perspectives. A rural area is considered as a set of natural and social resources capable of both attracting and repelling potential residents (Pokrovsky, Nefedova, 2012; Pokrovsky, Nefedova, 2013).

However, it is important to note that this is not so much a return to traditional forms of rural life as an attempt to synthesize urban and rural models of existence. New villagers' intention is not to completely abandon the benefits of civilization – on the contrary, they actively use digital technologies, develop small businesses, launch local environmental projects, blog, and advance educational initiatives (Sokolova, Kalachikova, 2023). Thus, the image of the “new village” is being developed – a space that combines individualism, technological engagement and a focus on sustainable development.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in turn, has become an important driver for these changes. Restrictions on movement, the transfer of offices to remote work, as well as a sharp increase in the sense of instability have prompted many citizens to reconsider their life priorities. The increase in anxiety, the overload of urban infrastructure, the lack of personal space – all these have become the reasons for the mass interest in life outside the city. In research, this phenomenon is increasingly interpreted in terms of escapism, the desire to escape from an aggressive, unpredictable urban environment toward silence, spaciousness, and the symbolic “naturalness” of rural life (Parfenova, Galkin, 2023; Stadnik, Radionova, 2021).

The transformation of the professional structure of society is directly related to these changes. The growing share of remote jobs, the changing career model, and the focus on freelance and entrepreneurship create conditions for decentralizing employment. There are more and more examples of former residents of megacities realizing themselves in rural areas, while maintaining

professional activity at the global level (Popova, 2021; Ovchintseva, 2021). This destroys the stereotypical image of the countryside as a space of backwardness and social deprivation, opening up opportunities for its repositioning in public consciousness. Escapist motives play an important role in these processes, but they are complemented by more pragmatic considerations. Rural areas are attractive due to relatively low living costs, a more favorable environment and the possibility of creating sustainable communities with interpersonal ties and a high level of social engagement. In this context, the village becomes not just an alternative to the city, but a space for the realization of new lifestyles, combining freedom of choice, digital independence and rootedness in a place. Modern Russian research on rural areas is largely focused on the analysis of transformations in the social structure, communication, and spatial development of villages. Special attention is paid to new trends related to the formalization of interactions, sustainable consumption and the reassessment of the role of rural lifestyle in an unstable world.

Despite technological advances and digitalization, interest in rural life as a possible alternative to the urban lifestyle continues to grow. The combination of formal and informal practices typical of the rural environment opens up prospects for the development of sustainable communities. At the same time, there is a reconsideration of the very concept of rural space, it is increasingly viewed not just as a periphery, but as an independent space with specific values, structure and with the potential for development.

Despite the relatively small number of publications in this area by Chinese rural researchers, they raise an important issue such as environmental degradation of the rural areas. One of the reasons for the deterioration of the environment is the uncontrolled use of agrochemicals in farms, which poses risks to the safety of agricultural products (Shao et al., 2024; Li et al., 2021). This

creates a negative image of the village, hinders the development of eco-tourism and the movement of the urban population to rural areas.

The researchers emphasize that the environmental crisis is exacerbated by the processes of return labor migration, which leads to the destruction of traditional family models and undermines values that previously served as a pillar of Chinese society (Talhelm, English, 2020; Tang, Zhu, 2020; Wang, 2023). The lack of positive forecasts in the field of ecology makes the situation even more alarming. Against the background of the deteriorating environmental situation and loosening community ties, researchers express pessimism about both the future of the village and the potential for scientific research in this area.

In general, the modern Chinese village is considered as a space of deep transformations. Economists' optimism, which links the transition to a market model with productivity growth, is diluted by criticism of the social consequences.

Individualization of management and commercialization increase the erosion of community ties, hinder the development of sustainable communities and make it difficult to implement projects based on mutual assistance. These processes directly affect the image of the village as a potential cluster of the agricultural market. However, economic transformations are often not accompanied by the development of a positive image of rural areas, which reduces its attractiveness for both residents and researchers.

Summarizing the above, we present a comparative description of the main modern areas of rural research in Russia and China (*Table*).

Conclusion

The study identified key gaps in the study of rural areas in Russia and China. Despite a significant number of publications devoted to socio-economic transformations and changes in the traditional community structure, the Russian scientific literature does not pay enough attention

Comparative description of the main modern areas of rural research in Russia and China

Key research areas	Key research topics in Russia	Key research topics in China
Socio-economic area	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Diversification of the rural economy and its development prospects; – transition to a market model in rural areas; – transformation of political and economic institutions; – research on the new economy and rural innovation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Development of rural economy and transition to market management mechanisms; – analysis of rural areas in the context of urban development; – transformation of villages after the agrarian reform
Research on urbanization and rural migration	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Analysis of migration processes and migration outflow from the Non-Black-Earth Region; – research on rural population decline; – career strategies of rural youth; – the phenomenon of return labor migration and urban-to-rural migration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The impact of urbanization on rural-to-urban migration; – rural-to-urban youth migration after the agrarian reform; – transformation of the community model and its relation to migration processes
Cultural and anthropological research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – The unique culture and historical identity of rural communities in Russia; – attachment to the place and the importance of rural spaces for residents and visitors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Transformation of the community model and its impact on the modern village and rural economy; – migration and changes in the social structure of rural regions
Socio-geographical research	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Changes in the population structure of rural areas; – spatial development of villages; – transformation of the traditional rural lifestyle 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – Sustainable rural development and the use of environmentally-oriented methods in agriculture; – agrochemical pollution and its consequences for rural areas

to individual prospects and personal aspects of rural life. Studies of regional differences, in particular the differences between northern and southern villages, their infrastructural development and socio-economic opportunities, are also insufficiently developed. The issues of diversification of the rural economy and the development of a positive image of rural areas remain practically unexplored, which is confirmed by the small number of Russian publications in these areas.

There are also certain gaps in Chinese research. The especially noticeable lacuna is the lack of systematic publications devoted to the modernization and renewal of the village in the context of the new economic reality and large-scale migration processes. The issues of long-term rural development and their integration into the national economy of China are discussed insufficiently. However, in the future, the transformation of rural spaces in both countries can stimulate the development of new research areas and expand the analytical base.

Among the common features of rural studies in Russia and China are the research on the transformation of traditional communities, the loosening social ties and the transition to the managerization of rural life. Both research traditions record the processes of introducing market relations in the countryside. However, there are significant differences in issues emphasized. In Chinese literature, urbanization and the associated migration to cities are often described as a benefit, while rural areas are characterized as depressed and lagging. In Russian science, the village is contrasted with the city, representing a special social “world”

with its own values and opportunities, which makes it attractive to a certain part of the population.

The revealed differences in interpretations reflect the specifics of national scientific traditions. Russian studies tend to consider the village as an independent space with its own processes and prospects for transformation. Chinese publications, on the contrary, position the village as an element of a unified economic and political system that ensures the development of the country. These differences are explained by government modernization strategies and socio-economic priorities. The theoretical significance of the analysis is to identify the key stages of the transformation of rural areas in Russia and China and to understand the underlying processes associated with migration, urbanization, economic diversification and a change in the traditional lifestyle. Special attention is paid to the transformation of social ties within rural communities, which allows for a new interpretation of the classical ideas of F. Tönnies about the difference between “community” and “society”. This aspect highlights the need to continue fundamental research in this area.

The practical significance of the work lies in the identification of issues and features that need to be considered when developing strategies for sustainable rural development. The findings can be used in the implementation of the national Strategy of the Russian Federation for rural development until 2030, as well as for the analysis and adaptation of the Chinese experience. Thus, the study contributes to the development of modern trends in the study of rural spaces and the enhancement of international dialogue in this area.

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