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Concept of Multipolarity in Western, Russian and Chinese Academic Discourse / Концепция многополярности в западном, российском и китайском академическом дискурсе

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Аннотация.

Предметом исследования является появление и дальнейшее развитие понятия многополярности в академических исследованиях по международным отношениям в США, странах Западной Европы, РФ и КНР. Локализовано зарождение данного термина в западной международно-политической науке как попытки контр-балансирования в реалиях биполярного мира, раскрыта современная практика применения дискурса в западной международно-политической науке. Особое внимание уделено становлению концепта многополярности в Российской Федерации и в КНР в постбиполярный период. Дается анализ академических дискурсов по проблематике многополярности с учетом прикладных задач, которые стоят перед внешнеполитическим сообществом исследуемых стран в рассматриваемый период времени. Появление концепции многополярности было тесно связано с изменением баланса сил и попыткой переоценки роли сверхдержав в мире. Последовательное развитие теоретической базы концепции велось до конца холодной войны в рамках западной школы ТМО, и многополярность в данных исследованиях представлялась как система, в которой существует две сверхдержавы и ряд великих держав, которые образуют систему полюсов. В российских и китайских исследованиях многополярность выступает как образ желаемого мироустройства. В последние годы в целом ряде западных работ отмечается признание объективного характера многополярного мира и необходимости стратегической адаптации к его реалиям.
Most bright and successful foreign policy practical doctrines are rooted in good theoretical concepts. The multipolarity case is not the exception. In order to advance good multipolar world order model there should be a strong theoretical foundation. The purpose of present essay is the analysis of the dynamics of academic discourse concerning multipolarity. The presented survey of the literature reveals the scholarly debate around at least several issues – What is multipolarity? Which international structure is more stable and what set of advantages multipolarity could offer? What is the basis for poles determination? Is there any national specificity in defining multipolarity? Should the state adapt their strategies to the realities of multipolar world?

**Western multipolarity to counter-balance bipolar world**

The concept of multipolarity appeared in the 1960s as a response of Western scholars to the changes within the bipolar system, which had been witnessing the appearance of the "third world" countries with quite independent stance towards neither of blocs and even more independent foreign policy ambitions.

K. Deutsch and J. Singer were the first to address multipolarity, they summarized the disadvantages of bipolar system and possible changes [1: 390-406]. The possibility of transformation into multipolar system was justified by growing potential of different countries, which would inevitably stabilize IR [1: 394]. In this regard, they focused mostly on four-pole and six-pole systems with alliances as a key tool for regional balancing [1: 403].

The pragmatism of the article is felt through the statement that a bipolar system in which each of the two rival powers is likely to be moderate and cautious in its policy initiatives and responses might be a great deal safer than a multipolar world containing one or several well-armed powers whose governments or politically relevant strata were inclined to incompetence or recklessness. As elsewhere, so also in international politics a stable general system could be wrecked by the introduction of unstable components [1: 404]. But at the same time the authors insisted on the possibility that the formation of a multipolar
world would contribute to the de-escalation of tensions and slow down or stop the arms race, as all actors would respect the agreement [1: 404]. The concept was also based on the control of nuclear weapons, which was called one of the key factors for highlighting the pole. However, a similar option for the transformation of bipolar system was put forward already in the 1960s, which makes the entire concept of these authors not being fully relevant to the realities of post-bipolar era. The USA, the USSR, China and Japan were named as possible poles, although the last two countries were considered as developing, and Japan as a whole could not be called an independent actor.

S. Zoppo analyzed multipolarity through the concept of balance of power. The statement that "bipolar nuclear deterrent relationship is inherently more stable than one in which equilibrium is maintained among several nuclear powers in independent or alliance relationships" prevails in his study, although the author treated stability in bipolar system contingent, but at the same time preferred [2: 579]. He divided the world into two camps: eastern communist (USSR and PRC) and western (USA, France and Great Britain) by virtue of possessing a nuclear arsenal, and proceeded from the fact that both camps were not interested in its use [2: 583]. S.E. Zoppo pointed out a strategic crisis caused by the advent of nuclear weapons, due to which the possibility of direct military conflict was minimized [2: 585]. Based on these two factors, it was concluded that the stability of bipolar nuclear deterrence was based on the impossibility of threatening the use of nuclear weapons and a constant arms race in order to build up an arsenal [2: 599]. In general article suffers from a vague structuring, and the author, under the guise of multipolarity, describes the strategy for the use and stockpiling of nuclear weapons by superpowers. Multipolarity is presented through the theoretical separation of two camps and an attempt to predict their use of nuclear weapons.

The author concludes that stability does not depend only upon the number of major powers in the system. Power relationships, political alignments, national interests, and the conduct of military operations also determine whether the acquisition of nuclear weapons by additional powers undermines stability. Nuclear multipolarity could obviously harm political stability, but at the same time change the very existing political reality [2: 606].

R.N. Rosecrance actually shared most of the assumptions previously summarized, putting his ideas about multipolarity in "Bipolarity, multipolarity and the future" [3: 314-327]. His reflections were focused on the possible transformation of bipolar system, as it was far from being perfect, and suffered from obvious limitations. However for R.N. Rosecrance, two poles were so strong and powerful that they would maintain their influence until 2000 [3: 316]. He described their interaction as a classic zero-sum game in which the actions of one actor provoked the reaction of the second [3: 315]. Moreover, the author did not believe in the so-called "detente", as it was impossible since the classical zero-sum game, which in his view was a bipolar system, could not include such an element as it would lead to the collapse of one of the poles [3: 316-317]. Consequently, multipolarity was viewed as a possible option for the future with increasing number of poles, which would minimize the risk of confrontation between two separate poles, as it was in bipolar conditions, which would save international politics from a zero-sum game. Since international politics would not be a zero-sum game, action by one nation would not require an off-setting response by its single opponent. [3: 317]. Briefly, R.N. Rosecrance emphasizes three basic reasons commend to support multipolarity as a desirable international system. First, multipolarity affords greater number of interaction opportunities. Second, a rise of different poles would reduce the risk of conflict. In general conflicts might be limited since the aggressive pole had to confront a much larger number of poles [3: 317-318]. Third, in a multipolar world an
arms race becomes less possible, however, with the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the conflict potential itself grows, and any conflict could lead to unpredictable consequences [3: 317-318]. Further criticism is produced from the last argument. The bipolar system is antagonistic by its nature and favors the conflicts which are interconnected. At the same time multipolar system can give rise to a larger number of conflicts as there are much more poles, new ones emerge and the old do the best in order to preserve their influence [3: 317-318]. The central thesis of R.N. Rosecrance could be summarized as following – multipolarity is apparently better than bipolarity, but the unpredictability of actions from all poles is quite challenging for the whole system.

The issue of multipolarity is present in researches of K. Radtke [4: 846-856]. The transformation of geopolitical processes might lead to multipolar system with four key actors – the USA, the USSR, Japan and China, which, in his opinion, had the most significant economic indicators and the necessary potential for the formation of such system [4: 846]. This format of multipolarity was characterized by balancing (two communist and two capitalist states), a large role given to economic cooperation and technology exchange, as well as to nuclear and other weapons [4: 846-847]. This system was nothing more than a concept that bared its contradictions already at the stage of the creation. Moreover, K. Radtke was quite pessimistic about the possibility of “rational” behavior of states, which would never give up military means [4: 846-847]. The biggest focus was done on the foreign policy of the communist policies, and significant contradictions, including territorial ones. In this regard K. Radtke particularly emphasized the fundamental significance of this problem for the PRC [4: 848], which is still relevant for Beijing, as territorial disputes impede deeper cooperation. The concept of K. Radtke is not just four-polar, but it is built around the new “Asian” poles. In this regard the proposed concept differs from earlier versions of multipolarity, in which the number of actors was recognized as variable and was based on general development and the ability to become an independent pole. K. Radtke presents a more rational analysis of international relations, as he names the poles and the states most capable of pursuing an independent foreign policy. The most attention is paid to possible factors of stabilization and destabilization of the situation by China and Japan.

The critical article “Reflections on multipolarity” by V.A. Platte deserves special attention [5: 33-46]. The author analyzed three-polar system with the US, the USSR, and the PRC as key poles, stressing that this model did not fully meet the realities [5: 34]. Therefore, he gave preference to the bipolar system as the only true theoretical understanding of the political situation in the world [5: 33]. China, as part of this system, was described as the "equilibrium point" of the bipolar system, rather than a true pole, since it was not equal to the US or the USSR in terms of integrated power [5: 35]. Reasonings of V.A. Platte were based on military performance. Based on his professional naval officer experience, he determined the position of IR system not as changing, but being rather in a state of balance of power [5: 35]. He qualified the approach of R.N. Rosecrance as too optimistic, since in order to realize his version of multipolar world, it was necessary to heavily influence the world balance of power, change it and make it stable [5: 37-38]. His criticism was based on the insufficiency of three states for creation of a system that could be called multipolar, and he considered China as being committed to a balance of power, and, therefore, not striving to change the system itself [5: 41].

M. Kaplan was one of the first to present verbal models of the system of international relations [6]. He proposed six macro-models of world politics, including two real – “balance of power system” (European concert system) and “loose bipolar system” (Cold War period), and four abstract – “tight bipolar system”, “universal international system” of a federal
type, “hierarchical system” with the dominance of one pole, multipolar system with the “veto” among nuclear powers [7].

Both proponents of the traditional approach (H. Bull) and advocates of general theory of systems (K. Boulding) sharply criticized M. Kaplan’s approach for not being a rigorous scientific theory, but rather a case of “soft system thinking”, close to the tradition of constructing verbal models. International systems are also described by S. Hoffman [8], who distinguished two ideal types of international systems – moderate and revolutionary, and he referred to the latter as a bipolar system. The moderate system was described by the “balance of power”.

After studying the above researches we can make some generalizations:

1. The concept of multipolarity was formed and developed mainly in the bowels of the Western school of IR, and did not go for many years beyond its framework;

2. Most scholars agreed that the formation of multipolar system was possible only in the case of significant qualitative change in the balance of power;

3. The structure of multipolar concept and the poles themselves is mostly consecutive, as supporters of multipolarity developed and supplemented the ideas of their predecessors;

4. The main period of the intellectual framing of multipolarity was the period from 1964 to 1979, its very relevance in the subsequent period until the end of the Cold War was insignificant.

5. Western scholars tried to imagine the world as a system in which the poles were independent in their decision-making, and cited in a comparative way dependent states as an example. China and Japan in 1960-70 were heavily dependent on the United States, as well as were the European powers. In fact, multipolarity was kind of Washington’s system of ruling over all USSR opponents under the guise of an equal and fair world order within the framework of the balance of power. Although, the international practice demonstrated the opposite.

6. It is worth noting two traditions (schools) of systematic modeling in Western IR: empiric and abstract (verbal) modeling. A number of representatives of the natural sciences familiar with the general theory of systems tried to identify the isomorphisms between the system of international relations and biological/physical systems, as well as between the individual processes occurring in these systems. They used quantitative methods of analysis and formal modeling. The second approach to system modeling is linked with “System and process in international relations” by M. Kaplan, strong supporter of modernism [6], “Gulliver’s Troubles: Or, the Setting of American Foreign Policy” by S. Hoffman [8] and, in particular, the dissertation of K. Waltz “Man, State, and War” [9]. K. Waltz and his followers practically do not refer to the first approach of system modeling. His book is more related to a structural than a system model, since K. Waltz describes the structure of the system of international relations (as an independent variable), but does not formally define the nature of the relationship between the actions of actors and the system. In fact, some kind of “intellectual segregation” of two traditions of systemic modeling of international relations is emerging [10: 15].

Multipolarity in its original theoretical sense was formed during the Cold War, but lost its value with the collapse of bipolarity. At the same time, some elements of the concept have
retained their relevance, in particular, the role of Asian states in the formation of a new world order. Due to the formation of unipolarity in the 1990s and the ongoing process of political transformation, the concept of multipolarity got a new impetus for development.

Modern understanding of multipolarity: new approaches and new accents

Nowadays many believe that the world is moving to a multipolar order. The term multipolarity is especially often used in the official documents of Russia and China. Along with the qualitative changes in world order since 2001, the concept of multipolarity gained its new relevance.

One of the first academic reassessment of the emerging IR system in the XXI century is contained in D. Kerr's work "The Sino – Russian Partnership and U.S. Policy Toward North Korea: from Hegemony to Concert in Northeast Asia" [11: 411-437]. This is a comprehensive study, from both perspectives – theoretical (examination of all changes in the unipolar world order), and analytical (review of the Korean nuclear issue). The author cites a number of publications in which the definition of hegemonic unipolar world was substantiated and the USA was described as fully dominating all other actors. The author provides a strong criticism saying that the cited arguments look limited. Since capital and technology are playing crucial role, East Asia apparently stands out from the unipolar concept [11: 412].

The emergence of different concepts of world order in the XXI century D. Kerr explains by the lack of substantial Asian research [11: 412]. So, he puts forward the concept of coherence of order in East Asia, which is based on consultations and negotiations between the great powers on the issues of mutual interest. As a result, temporary and permanent coalitions emerge and great powers are responsible for the decisions within of these unions [11: 411-413]. This system is an integral part of the balance of power. Regional interaction demonstrates the limitation of unipolar system, in which the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership is especially precious and considered by the author as the most important element of the new system [11: 414]. The desire of both states – China and Russia to restore their role in world politics led to a union and expansion of sphere of influence, as well as to upholding common interests: fight against extremism and separatism, strategic security maintenance (eastward NATO expansion for Russia and reunification with Taiwan for China).

In the absence of generally accepted interpretation of the concept of "pole" the author in its turn presents two interpretations. According to the first, after the collapse of the bipolar system, the world has become multipolar, in which Western Europe and Japan maintain their own positions, limited poles emerge – China and Russia, which the United States has to reckon with. According to the second approach, the pole must be an ally of the hegemon and its power must be higher than that of the rest. D. Kerr, on the whole, adheres to the model “One Superpower and four global” and justifies it by the interaction between Russia, China and the USA on key issues of international security. The Russian-Chinese influence on decision-making process proves that the world is not unipolar, because in the case of unipolarity, the United States would not have to compromise with any actor, and moreover, new challenges and threats force the United States to interact with many powers [11: 420].

The second part of the article examines the impact of China and Russia on the Korean nuclear issue regulation, which is an additional argument against a unipolar system. The author concludes that a system demonstrating multipolarity at the regional level cannot be unipolar in global sense. Using the East Asian case, the author substantiates the concept of regional multipolarity under the existing superpower – the United States, in which the influence of hegemon is strongly limited by other poles. The approach of D. Kerr is
consonant with the pluralistic (polycentric) unipolarity of A.D. Bogaturov, who insisted that the world, after the collapse of bipolarity, did not turn into a purely American version, because the United States as the only pole had to act in the dense environment of its closest allies – G7 member-states.

The scientific article of S. Turner “Russia, China and a Multipolar World Order: the Danger in the Undefined” is crucial for this study. Based on the author’s logic, multipolarity as such is being formed by Russia and China, trying to regain its influence and balance the unipolar system, dominated by the United States. Both countries leaned on the key document of that time – the Russian-Chinese joint declaration on a multipolar world and the formation of a new international order of 1997, which emphasized the prior role for mutual respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference in internal affairs, equality and mutual benefit, peaceful coexistence and other generally recognized principles of international law. S. Turner also pointed out that Russia tried to join forces with the United States immediately after September 11 and find a kind of compromise in bilateral relations, but to little avail.

Like many Russian experts, S. Turner calls the Munich speech of V.V. Putin a turning point. And if Russia’s transit from a policy of rapprochement with the United States is described as gradual and forced, the Chinese reaction could be assessed as the pursuit of its own goals within the policy of “harmonious peace” and a kind of revenge after the crisis of Sino-US relations. Unlike Russia, China had great success in establishing a new kind of dialog with the US in the post-cold war period. Beijing has justifiably exerted extreme caution in propagating the cause of multipolarity and directly criticizing American hegemony. Great emphasis is placed on the military cooperation between Beijing and Moscow. The author qualifies the Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation of 2001 between Russia and China as the actual union and analyzes their integrated military force. She characterizes the CIS, SCO and CSTO as directly opposing to Western organizations, mostly NATO. Thereby, S. Turner interprets multipolarity as an existing concept, reflecting the interests of the PRC and the Russian Federation in the transition from a unipolar world to a system more suiting them.

As criteria for assessing the system, the author considers the legal framework of Sino-Russian relations, integrated military and economic power. In fact, the author reduces the existing model of the international system to the so-called “soft” bipolarity, in which Moscow and Beijing act as a single pole, the integrated power of which is directed against the other pole – the United States. This kind of approach differs from the classical division of one pole – one country. In this case, the pole appears because of the desire of two states to oppose hegemony of the third. S. Turner provides the following list of parameters to determine the poles: armaments, blocks, political independence. Based on these conditions, India should also be considered a pole, however, the author mentions India only in the context of Russia’s supplies of the most modern military equipment to India. Briefly, the article analyses the interaction at different levels: the USA against Russia and China, NATO against CSTO and SCO, which is strictly speaking looks weird, since SCO is not a military association. S. Turner seems to understand that, but nevertheless, continues the same way of analysis, noting that SCO got a certain context, which is understood precisely as a military bloc status.

The next significant, in our opinion, work is “Multipolarity and the Future of Economic Regionalism” by J.F. Garzon, who perceives regionalism as the basis for multipolarity. Hereby, he identifies Brazil, South Africa, Russia, and India as regional
leaders [17: 102], which should form multipolarity through economic integration. In this regard, J.F. Garzon develops an alternative model, which he labels decentred multipolarity, which in his view reflects a more realistic pattern of distinctive system–region dynamics [17: 103]. He identifies two types of economic regionalism: supranational regionalism and “open regionalism” [17: 103]. Having quoted W. Wohlforth’s idea that “in a world in which the geopolitics of regions matters, systemic unipolarity can be replaced by multipolarity only by means of ‘regional unification or the emergence of strong regional unipolarities”, J.F. Garzon speaks about the expansion of zones of influence of regional powers, through which they would achieve advantages in their region, and, as a result, their place in a multipolar world [17: 105]. The pole in this concept is a country capable of defining and protecting its economic interests, and the number of poles depends only on their effective use of their own resources and the adoption of necessary measures [17: 106]. The author thoroughly analyses the role of Russia, which, despite economic constraints, significantly affects political processes around the world [17: 107]. In general, the paper focuses mainly on the process of forming regional poles and their ability to interact with each other and find a compromise for maintaining a leading position in their region. The conclusion the author draws is that the emerging multipolar configuration might be transiting towards an alternative scenario that can be conceived of in terms of a crisscrossing, decentred multipolar constellation [17: 130-131].

The interesting theoretical approach to multipolarity is highlighted in the scientific article of F. Petito “Dialogue of Civilizations in a Multipolar World: Toward a Multicivilizational Multiplex World Order” [18: 1-14], in which the author analyzes the civilization policy in the already formed, according to him, a multipolar world. In his paper, F. Petito returns to the publications of the 1990s, which became iconic for some time – “The Clash of Civilizations” of S.F. Huntington and the “End of History” of F. Fukuyama, justifying the influence of the cultural factor on the changing political structure of the world.

As in the article of D. Kerr, F. Petito criticizes unipolarity and raises the question of whether advocates of a dialogue of civilizations should support multipolarity, which is based on the same principles. To confirm his hypothesis, the author considers the relationship of the “lonely” superpower – the USA and the emerging regional centers of power: the EU, Japan, China, India, Brazil, South Africa, etc., and their ability to organize new, more just and pluralistic world order [18: 2]. The end of the bipolar era, in which civilization policy was determined by an ideological approach, changed the very understanding of this policy, introducing the cultural elements of the new great powers [18: 5-6]. The author disputes the thesis that civilizational approach provokes conflict, as being initially antagonistic, noting the fusion of “modern” political values and practices with traditional local cultural landmarks and lifestyles [18: 6-7]. D. Kerr puts forward a non-regional, multipolar and cross-cultural model of a world order, which, 1) is formed not according to the civilizational-cultural principle, but by means of dialogic multiculturalism, 2) is based on new forms of intercultural regionalism and negotiations on a new intercultural “right of peoples”, and 3) is committed to the widespread process of “intercivilizational understanding” at different levels [18: 11]. The approach of F. Petito is close to the concept of multiplex world of A. Acharya, leading IR Scholar, advocating the interest of Global South countries within conventional Western IR science [19].

In the past few years, the US allies consider multipolarity as a very serious strategic challenge, which needs to be addressed, especially in the context of the Chinese rise. Thus, Australia, balancing between the United States and China, in the context of increasing multipolarity is in favor of abandoning the unconditional alignment to
Washington, including the military sphere, and demonstrates softer adherence to international law and institutions [21]. British experts also suggest conducting preparatory activities for a more “soft” adaptation of the UK to multipolar conditions [22]. Even European allies speak about ‘twin-track approach’ including traditional alignment with US in ‘Western solidarity’ (mostly security issues) and simultaneous naissance of diverging (hedging) strategies [23].

**Multipolarity in Russian-Chinese Studies**

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the disappearance of bipolar system led to a conceptual crisis and contributed to the emergence of new world order approaches. In 1990s there were no more doubts about the global role of the United States as the only world leading power, as well as the dominant position of the Western international relations theories, launched in most cases by American IR scholars. Since the late 1990s, the concept of multipolarity has gained conceptual and practical prominence around the globe. New geopolitical conditions pushed non-Western powers to a more active rethinking of the issue and forming alternative world order options [24].

The article of K.E. Sorokin “Russia and multipolarity: “time to hug, and time to evade hugs” [25: 1-26] is analyzing the Russian role. He calls the ongoing political processes “the third redistribution of the world”, and notes rather passive role of Russia in this “redistribution” [25: 6]. Like Western authors, he emphasizes Moscow’s unsuccessful attempts to establish relations with Washington, which the author himself views quite positively [25: 15]. However, the paper was written at the beginning of the century, and its conceptual value lies precisely in the assessment of the Russian approach to multipolarity until 2007, when one of the possible options for conducting foreign policy was the strategy of balancing equidistance [25: 20]. Moscow’s foreign policy was cautious and oriented for a compromise. However, this policy was unsuccessful.

The same kind of thinking is observed in the publication of A.Yu. Arkhipov [26: 3-6] “Modern globalization and multipolarity of the world”, who considered global economic interaction, following the logic that the expansion of international trade will lead to the displacement of not only global economic, but also political centers [26: 4]. The difference lies in the purely pessimistic forecasts of the author, who warned the country against too much focusing on raw materials exports [26: 5].

According to A.D. Bogaturov, Russian scholars, advancing multipolarity concept missed the study of the real situation, in return offering a certain image of the “required future” [27: 11]. The empirical analysis of current world order is presented in another our article [28].

The position of A.G. Dugin, cited in the article of V.V. Kochetkov “Five principles of Russian foreign policy: multipolarity as inevitability” [29: 144-155], differs significantly. A.G. Dugin relied on the statement of D.A. Medvedev, and interpreted his message about multipolarity instead of unipolarity, directed against the dominant role of the United States. The concept of multipolarity, referring to his own experience of communication with foreign partners, he calls unacceptable to Washington. He put forward the following poles: the first – Eurasian, the second – China, the third – the Islamic world, the fourth – Europe [29: 149]. This division, on the whole, expresses the specifics of the ongoing processes. However, the poles are not equal, asymmetrical and have different political weights, and this makes it impossible to switch to a similar model of multipolarity.

Chinese studies in multipolarity are distinguished by strict structuredness and similarity of
approaches. For example, Sun Jian and Xue Nianwen in their work “On the multi-polarization trend of the international political structure after the Cold War” [31: 17-20] emphasize the conceptual crisis after the collapse of bipolarity, and analyze new changes in the system [31: 17]. The authors provide five most significant, in their opinion, definitions of modern world order, stressing that economic globalization and regional economic integration have made countries more closely connected and interdependent [31: 17-18]. The authors deduce factors influencing the establishment of multipolar system: 1) economic development leading to the development of multipolar economy, 2) diversity of cultures and peoples, 3) regional cooperation and the development of third world countries, 4) development of all countries for the benefit of humanity [31: 19]. Much attention is paid to the development of economic and political relations with Africa and Latin America, their strengthening is called the basis for the democratization of international relations, which, in turn, contributes to the formation of multipolarity [31: 18]. Researchers believe that all existing systems of international relations, except for the Yalta-Potsdam system, were multipolar in essence, since they did not have superpowers and all foreign policy relations were carried out through the search for allies and the creation of alliances [31: 19]. Special attention is paid to criticizing the United States as promoting a model of hegemony, as such position destructively affects global development.

The next significant paper in this area is “Will the multi-polar world move towards the Sino-American bipolar world?” by Wen Xiaofeng Xiaofen [32: 38-41]. The study is based on the hypothesis of Prof. Yang Xuetong about the possibility of a new bipolar world, in which the USA and China will become superpowers by 2020 [32: 38]. Like Sun Jian and Xue Nianwen [32: 20], the author is convinced that the problem of multipolarization of the world has been facing the world community since the 1980s, when it was proclaimed by Deng Xiaoping [32: 38]. The author urges to abandon the Cold War thinking and divides the system in two large poles – the United States and China, and second-order poles that follow one of their large poles [32: 39-40]. The article contains a detailed criticism of the United States as a hegemon that seeks to maintain its status. However, the author, based on the words of Yang Xuetong, justifies the possibility of China adopting the G2 concept, in which Beijing was invited to engage in cooperation with Washington to manage global economic and political processes, in fact, adopting the existing unipolar system. However, the author gives arguments according to which this system will no longer be bipolar, but rather multipolar.

Concluding remarks

The emergence of the concept of multipolarity was closely associated with the changes in the balance of power and an attempt to overestimate the role of superpowers. Consistent development of the theoretical basis of the concept was carried out until the end of the Cold War within the Western school of IR, and multipolarity in these studies was presented as a system in which there were two superpowers and a number of great powers that formed a system of poles. To acquire the status of a pole, a great power must have a regional leadership and be able to pursue an independent foreign policy.

The fundamental difference between the existing trend in studying multipolarity from the previous period of the 1960-80 lies in the changing nature of research. Many authors left the conceptual side of multipolarity, and started analyzing the possible centers of power and the probability of forming a multipolar world with different poles and different system of division into them. In fact, the academic community of the second half of the XX century developed a unified concept, whereas in the XXI century there are visible differences in the
theoretical basis of this phenomenon, which makes it difficult to reduce all existing approaches to a single theory. Rather, it can be labeled as a mega-trend. Many states declare the principle of multipolarity, but its conceptual justification varies from author to author and has a national imprint. The lack of a theoretical basis for the concept raises the question of elaborating a single concept of multipolarity. This requires a thorough analysis of the existing models of “multipolarity”, as well as methods of dividing into poles.

The most similar feature of all the above studies is an attempt to describe the existing world order as a system in which each actor is independent and is an original pole, realizing its independent foreign policy. However, Chinese, Russian, and Western studies put forward their national interests to the “peak” of multipolarity and justify in this way their hegemony or leadership over other countries. The concept of multipolarity and its possible implementation provides unlimited scope for the formation of alliances, pursuing the goal of weakening opponents and making allies highly dependent.

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