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**MENTALITY INFLUENCE ON THE LEARNING PROCESS IN  
CHINA AND RUSSIA**

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*Abstract*

The influence of mentality on educational process in higher education institutions of China and Russia is revealed through the analysis of key terms: mentality, behavior, ethno-cultural stereotypes. The research shows the national characteristics of Chinese and Russian peoples, analyzes the results of the survey in which Chinese and Russian students participated to identify ethnic stereotypes. The work also shows the influence of mentality through the role of teachers, behavior and differences in curricula and programs in higher education institutions of China and Russia. In our study, mentality as a specific psychological life of people is revealed through a system of views, assessments, norms and mindsets, based on the knowledge and beliefs typical of a given society, which, together with the dominant needs and archetypes of the collective unconscious, determines hierarchy of values, and hence beliefs, ideals, inclinations, interests characteristic of this community representatives' as well as other social attitudes that distinguish this community from others. The Confucian educational tradition is dominant in Chinese history. In this case, the object of human intellectual attention, of his contemplation, practice and experiences is the individual self-improvement or self-education — not the world around — which is the main goal of human life and education in China.

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## **1. Introduction**

One of the factors influencing the development of the country is the mentality of its people. The appeal to it gives a deeper insight into the essence of history, awareness of the strength and weakness of the people (Li & Huang, 2015). The study of mentality is necessary not only to determine the optimal ways of development of Russian and Chinese societies, but also for a more successful development of international relations.

Based on this, it can be concluded that the national character, understood as a specific combination of stable personality traits of a particular ethnic group representatives or as the dominant values and attitudes in a given society, is, in fact, only a part of the mentality as an integral characteristic of the psychological specifics of people belonging to the studied culture (Li & Huang, 2015; Lu & Chen, 2016).

## **2. Problem Statement**

Referring to the cognitive sphere of personality, the mentality is most clearly manifested in the typical behavior of this culture representatives, being expressed primarily in stereotypes of behavior, which are closely adjacent to the stereotypes of decision-making, meaning in fact the choice of one of behavioral alternatives.

Ethno-cultural stereotypes are a generalized idea of the behavior and manners of a people. They relate to the whole nation, and at the same time characterize any of its representatives, set the image of his/her personality. This can be attributed to "German punctuality", "Spanish passion", "French gallantry", "Chinese ceremony", "Russian Fatalism" etc. Stereotypes serve as a source of prejudice and bias, when people perceive other patterns of behavior from the standpoint of their culture.

It is obvious that any nationality has its own customs, traditions, culture, religious worldview, socio-political system, speech behavior, which is included, from our point of view, in the concept of "national style specifics".

## **3. Research Questions**

The concept of mentality and behavior of Russian and Chinese students as part of national culture; ethnic stereotypes: autostereotypes and heterostereotypes of students in both countries; mentality influencing the learning process.

## **4. Purpose of the Study**

Is to show the influence of mentality on the process of education in higher education institutions of China and Russia.

## **5. Research Methods**

To study this problem, we conducted a comparative analysis of the features of higher education in China and Russia; a system analysis that allowed us to assess the degree of the problem development and to determine the general logic of the study, to identify the mentality impact on the learning process in

higher education institutions of China and Russia; questioning students of Russia and China; generalization, systematization and classification of information obtained in the course of work with the source base of the study and respondents.

## 6. Findings

Russian mentality as an integral part of the national culture is defined by a set of characteristics. Summarizing the views of many researchers, one can distinguish different traits of "Russian character", which are reflected in the works of Russian classical literature, historical and philosophical studies (N. Berdyaev, S. Bulgakov, I. Goncharov, L. Gumilev, F. Dostoevsky, I. Ilyin, V. Klyuchevsky, N. Leskov, Yang Jie, Li Chuanxun, Yang Zhenyu (Yang, 2017) etc. Among those area need for a leader and passivity, inconsistency, admiration for beauty, sacrifice and cruelty in love, Russian prowess and scope, refusal from limits, "thirst for freedom" and "slave syndrome", obedience, faith in a good king or in fate, lack of self-discipline and self-restraint, fear and need for suffering, a special Holiness – religiosity and atheism, as well as great willpower, perseverance, unpretentiousness, practical orientation of the mind, dexterity and rationality, optimism, a sense of powerful unity with each other, conciliatory attitude to the neighboring nations and selfless Faith and Love for the Motherland.

Russian sensory perception of life is expressed in the fact that they need close contacts, mutual understanding, they are emotionally dependent on their surrounding people. At the same time there is no personal or family isolationism in Russia, but there is a "sense of elbow", a habit of publicity, one's feeling of belonging to "my/our people". Sensitive perception of other people's mental states is also among typical Russian people's traits. It is not easy for Russians to endure sensory hunger, lack of impressions and close relations with other people. No less painful and even hated is daily routine, excessive regularity, "pettiness", i.e. what western men, on the contrary, would consider normal and basic.

When considering the mentality and behavior of the Chinese as part of the national culture, it is necessary to take into account the following. This historically formed community of people has more than 56 nationalities with their own customs, traditions and national culture. Over a long history, each nationality of China has developed its own way of life, which is reflected in food, clothing, housing, customs, rituals, etc., which natural, social, economic and other factors have left their mark on. Besides, for many centuries, three philosophical teachings — Confucianism, Taoism and Buddhism — have had a great influence on the spiritual life of the Chinese people. However, according to the depth of philosophical thought, the main role in the influence on the formation of the Chinese people's spiritual culture belongs to Confucianism (Zhi & Yan, 2017; Yu, 2016).

Confucianism focuses its attention on questions of ethics, morality, moral nature of man. Confucius developed a whole system of moral and ethical dogmas and norms of human behavior: respect for parents, respect for elderly people and submission to them, the desire for internal improvement, etc. Special attention is paid to such virtue as humanism. From the point of view of Confucianism, philanthropy includes a set of ethical and social principles of human relations: mercy, modesty, restraint, compassion (Shi, 2018). Therefore, politeness has always been appreciated — it has become a bright feature of the national character. According to Confucian teaching, an authority (a person) is of great

importance in social life. Norms of behavior form the basis of Confucius' teachings. These rules of conduct include such concepts as "ceremonies", "decency", "etiquette rules", "rituals".

The emotional-evaluative opinion of one ethnic community about another and about itself (i.e. ethnic stereotypes) is the most important area of the mental sphere. Having analyzed emotional and evaluative opinions about "own" and "alien" it is possible to obtain objective data about the national conceptual sphere, to get closer to the understanding of its mental features. In some cases, misconceptions and judgments lead to ethnic dissociation, they complicate the process of political, business, cultural and interpersonal communication of representatives of different ethnic groups. It is also well known that ethnic stereotypes protect individual values. The complexity of nature and the unique role of ethnic stereotype in the formation of individual and national concept sphere, makes their study particularly relevant (Gasanov, 1998; Stefanenko, 1999).

Traditionally, ethnostereotypes include: 1) knowledge about one's own and other peoples, 2) ideas about their physical, moral and intellectual characteristics, 3) emotional attitude to the representatives of one's own and other ethnic groups, 4) a typical model of behavior in relation to a people. Thus, each person has a whole set of assessments, knowledge and ideas about someone else's ethnic group (heterostereotypes) and his own (autostereotypes). Their specificity is influenced by many factors: geopolitical, cultural-historical, economic ones. Personal experience with representatives of a particular nation is also of great importance.

The data of the survey conducted among the 1st year students of Krasnoyarsk State Pedagogical University named after V. P. Astafiev (specialty "Russian language and literature", "Correctional pedagogy") and among the 1st year students of Tianjin University (China) served as the material for the study. The entire poll has been 80 Russian respondents and 80 young Chinese studying the Russian language.

The analysis showed that Russians' knowledge about China and the Chinese is very superficial and reduced mainly to the fact that "the Chinese are very many", they "love rice", "they use sticks instead of forks", "produce a lot of low-quality goods", which "flooded the whole world"; their homeland is famous for Chinese porcelain, martial arts, unique cuisine, the Great wall of China and the world's most difficult writing. The expression "this is Chinese alphabet for me (for him)" is often used in Russian speech when the speaker faces something difficult that cannot be understood, assimilated.

Some judgments about China and the Chinese are characterized by a rare primitivism: "they have not left any country in the world without children's toys. Americans play their toys, the same in Germany, in Russia - Chinese goods are everywhere. But the quality is rubbish"; "As a true Chinese, he tries to conquer the market. But the Chinese have only fakes"; "Any land animal is a delicacy for the Chinese. Well, our people at least don't eat worms. How is it possible? All that is small and moving is muck. And for them – a delicacy"; "Rice is the same for them as fat for Ukrainians. That's all"; "Being a true Chinese, he likes long walls. Why? Well, the Chinese wall is the longest"; "Japan is the land of the Rising sun. And China is what? Celestial empire. Why do they say "celestial", I do not know"; "A true Chinese worships dragons. They don't? Isn't true? Do they believe in God? – I've never heard it".

Russian students imagine a typical Chinese to be short, his black hair cut, with narrow eyes. These external data are subjectively perceived by the majority of respondents as unattractive. 18 % of

respondents, speaking about the appearance of the Chinese, noted their untidiness and inability to "dress nicely". Among the negative heterostereotypes regarding the nature of the inner person, the following should be noted: the Chinese, according to 43% of respondents, are "sly" and "secretive"; 33% believed that they "do not respect Russian culture", 19 % noted overall "backwardness" of the Chinese; 4 % - the fact that the Chinese "do not like Russian women." Some questionnaires demonstrate such traits, negative from the point of view of Russians, as introversion, indifference to everything around, prudence, obsession, lack of education, bad manners.

According to some students, China is a danger to Russia, because "their Mao had a plan to conquer Russia," and today many Chinese "are trying to escape to Russia and get a residence permit here." In one of questionnaires it is noted that Chinese are "sneaky, cunning, adapted to any vital situations and try to take root on our territory in every possible way. Many come to Russia and deceive us, feed us with dogs and earn money on it". In another paper it is said: "They don't respect Russian traditions and sell some garbage to simple Russians". "If to speak about the adjective "Chinese", the association is poor quality, sharp taste, flooded markets and shops of the middle price segment." According to these students, one should "keep an eye out" with the Chinese, be careful to limit their entry into the territory of the Russian Federation.

At the same time, all the questionnaires and oral responses noted many positive qualities of the Chinese. Thus, 100 % of respondents are convinced that all residents of China are "very hardworking" and "diligent". 82 % of Russian students consider the Chinese to be a purposeful and patient people: "Whatever it is, the Chinese will do their job. Hungry, cold, barehanded, but they will do it...". These national qualities explain the great success of China in the field of economy ("Chinese economic miracle"). 73 % of respondents noted the Chinese patriotism, their special love for the Motherland. About half of the students believe that a typical Chinese is a good family man: "as a true Chinese, he is hardworking, considers his family the main value, disciplined, ""knows the history of his country well." In single questionnaires such positive qualities as "calmness", "punctuality", "survivability", "respect for the older generation and the government", "a sober lifestyle" are also noted. Some students believe that a true Chinese "will never touch drugs", "can work a lot for little money", and in general, the Chinese people are "talented and gifted", "nice people". One of the Philology department students wrote: "We are different, but we must not forget that we are all people of the same globe."

Referring to the auto-stereotypes of Russian students, they associate their own nation representatives with expanses, forest, Christmas tree, roads, huts, saunas, Russian oven, fairy tales, songs, balalaika, matryoshka, as well as heroes, simple men, women and girls, who have some special impressive posture, bodily power, good health, endurance. A typical Russian, according to many respondents, is a person with strong spirit and body who loves his homeland, friends, sauna. Russians are good-natured, hospitable, trusting, "with an open soul." Among the positive autostereotypes there are also such characteristics as "love for fast driving"(this feature was noted by 89% of philologists, obviously remembering the famous Gogol's phrase "there is no Russian who would not like fast driving!" and 32 % representatives of correctional pedagogy department); "breadth of soul" (74 %); love for the native country and its nature (49 %). Several questionnaires indicated such positive qualities of Russians as a

sense of humor ("treats himself and the life with humor"), and readiness to exploit ("when necessary, capable of the feat, ready to give his life for the Fatherland").

Russian students' autostereotypes indicate that their ethnicity seems to them contradictory, largely more divided than the Chinese nation. At the same time, many questionnaires contain mutually exclusive opinions. Thus, the same respondents name generosity, recklessness, sincerity, credulity, inability to deceive as positive features while the opposite qualities: wastefulness, carelessness, naivety, bordering on stupidity ("simplicity", as one of the respondents put it), inability to plan their own future and the future of their country appeared among negative ones.

100% of respondents attributed laziness and love for strong alcoholic beverages to the shortcomings of their ethnic group ("a true Russian is fond of alcohol", "can drink a glass of vodka without a following snack"). 64 % believe that Russians do everything "at random", often postpone important things (43 %). 51 % of respondents noted the low everyday culture of their ethnic group representatives: "as a true Russian, he left a spoon in a cup of tea", "despite the fact that he is Russian, he knows the rules of behavior at a reception". 12 % noted insufficient ecological culture ("they litter inside and outside", "do not protect the nature"). Some questionnaires attribute typical Russian unreliability, lack of punctuality, inability to work long and hard, the use of swear words in speech, non-compliance with traffic rules and general negligence to any rules to the number of negative features. One of the interviewed students considers the tendency to borrow to be a big disadvantage of a Russian person: "We take a lot from foreign countries, but most of that is practically unacceptable in Russia." The Russian author of the paper, brought up in internationalism, was surprised and upset to find the opinion that the Russian people "do not respect the traditions and culture of foreigners" in a large part of the questionnaires (23 %). The study also revealed about 4 % of students who declare full ethnic indifference, indifference to the values of their own and Chinese peoples.

The social object of research at the Tianjin University of Foreign Languages was students studying at the Department of "Russian language and literature". Here, the words Russia, Russian, Russians are associated with the concepts of literature, music, ballet, church, army, space, swimming, vodka, matryoshka, bear. There is no mention of external image of Russians in any of questionnaires, all attention is concentrated on their internal world, character, features of behavior. A typical Russian, according to Chinese students, is strong, energetic, cheerful, emotional, unpredictable, lazy, unaware of the history and culture of China, its people: "like most Russians, he/she knows little about the Chinese"; "Russian is Russian. When we say so, we mean that he does not understand us and does not want to." Most Russians, as it is noted in one of the questionnaires, "hate America"; "women live for the sake of children, and men – for themselves".

Among the positive heterostereotypes directed towards Russians there are such characteristics as "cultural", "polite", "respects women" (about 50% of respondents), not greedy (31%), friendly (9 %). Some questionnaires also listed such positive qualities of Russians as hospitality, determination, the taste for good rest.

Negatively directed heterostereotypes of Chinese youth are the idea of Russian as a "very lazy" and unpredictable people: "as a true Russian, he changes easily, changes the situation, changes the decisions quickly"; "... easily promises and easily takes their words back"; "To make them (Russians) do

something, they need to be constantly pushed." In addition, a typical Russian "likes to drink alcohol", does not "respect elders", is not able to control emotions: "As a true Russian, he is direct, demonstrates outspoken character, loses his temper easily, arguing, shouting." The majority of respondents call Russian behavior special, unclear, different from the Chinese: "Russians have their own unique character, their own characteristics"; "He (a Russian man) is lazy and arrogant".

The analysis of Chinese students' opinions about their people showed that the majority show a positive ethnic identity, in which the image of their ethnic group is perceived as positive, there is a favorable attitude to its culture, history, natural patriotism, tolerant attitudes to communication with other peoples, understanding of their contribution to history. 100% of respondents note the great diligence of the Chinese people, their love for the Motherland. Positive auto stereotypes are views of their people as of diligent, responsible, conscientious (78 %), modest (about 70% of respondents), very kind, honest, patient (more than 50 %). Some questionnaires say that a typical Chinese is a decent, flexible, sociable, intelligent, caring, good family man: "He does his best at work. He works without rest or weekends to earn some penny."

Ethno-centric identity, i.e. the focus on solely its people and its unconditional uncritical preference is shown by 3.5% of respondents. Typical statements in this case are the following: "I am proud that I am Chinese"; "Chinese should have Chinese citizenship and not change it." Dislike for his native country and culture is perceived as an anomaly: "Despite the fact that he is a Chinese, he does not like his homeland and culture."

However, in a number of questionnaires there were critical statements about their ethnic group: not energetic, "not very cultural". Some questionnaires express the view that the Chinese "respect foreigners more than their own people. In a foreign country they are not friendly to each other, deceive each other." And the fact that "Chinese are not friends with Chinese" is definitely perceived as a negative one (Yang & Li, 2014).

Comparing the ethnic stereotype of Russian and Chinese youth, one can notice that their content is highly problematic. The young people of neighboring states do not know and do not understand each other. There are ethnic prejudices that limit the scope of communication between Russian and Chinese, cause mutual suspicion, cause problems in cooperation, prevent the establishment of closer human relations (Felde & Ning, 2008).

The influence of mentality is very clearly demonstrated by the example of higher education, where the national characteristics of both countries are visible. According to Li (2015), in China, the educational process is focused on virtue, in contrast to the European one, which is focused on reason. The Confucian educational tradition is dominant in Chinese history. The main goal of human life is self-improvement or self-upbringing, that is, their own personality, not the world around them, is the object of intellectual attention of people, their contemplation, practice and experiences (Li, 2016).

First, the role of the teacher at universities is different. In China, the status of teachers is high. The teacher at Chinese universities is an indisputable authority, which all students listen to (Ho, 2015). Addressing also plays an important role. Currently, the most actively used addressing which contain the surname, then profession or position, for example, 王老师 (teacher Wang), 刘校长 (rector/director Liu). In Russia, teachers are more democratic, use the polite form of "you" addressing students (Chinese teachers

only use the informal form of it) and are always ready to listen to the opposition opinion of the student any issue.

The attitude to the teacher as to the eldest in age and status was formed in China thanks to Confucianism. The need for respect comes from two mutually reinforcing sources. The first relates to the student. Respect for the student makes him receptive to the instructions he receives, he forgets about his "self" to gain a sincere commitment to study. Respect places the student-teacher relationship within the following framework: the teacher does everything possible to teach the student, and the student does everything possible to learn from the teacher. The disciple is not equal to the teacher, but the submission of the disciple to the instructions of the teacher is similar to that when Russians ask the priest for advice. The second source of respect relates to the teacher, who is not an employee who fulfills his contractual obligations, but transfers objective and scientific knowledge and is a mentor in the field of morality. Moreover, in the Chinese tradition, the teacher not only transmits certain knowledge, but also cares about the students' well-being like their parent (Li, 2015).

Discipline in the classroom is directly related to the role of the teacher in higher education which is explained by the national character peculiarities. Chinese students aren't allowed to interrupt the teacher, to express their opinion during the lecture. In comparison to that, Russian students are more active, they ask questions, answer not afraid of making a mistake. However, it would be wrong to characterize Chinese students as passive, avoiding participation in the educational process.

Thus, on the campus of the best Chinese University of Science and Technology, Tsinghua, the phrase "Action is better than words" is carved on the facade of the Assembly hall, expressing the spirit of the University. For Confucian students, their words, and oral speech in general, are a very serious matter, as it tends to rely on moral intention and judgment. It is believed that a person can gain a lot if he/she study the actions and improve him/herself, instead of just talking about behavior. In this case, human wisdom is more than spoken words, as Lao (1992) noted: "He who understands does not speak; he who speaks does not understand" (p. 92).

According to the Confucian educational tradition every Chinese student should strive to develop the following seven virtues: sincerity (direct and genuine commitment to oneself as a learning goal), diligence (a virtue that underlies systematic, stable, knowledge-oriented behavior), resilience in the face of difficulties (overcoming learning difficulties: lack of resources and lack of sufficient time to study because of the need to work), perseverance (long-term efforts to obtain education from beginning to end), concentration (learning is accompanied by constant and increased attention and concentration), respect for the teacher (a sign of subordination, obedience and lack of critical thinking) and modesty (lack of pride and arrogance, as it interferes with self-improvement) (Chang, 1997).

Third, there are differences in curricula and programs. Thus, Chinese teachers rely strictly on one recommended textbook and do not step aside from the curriculum. Russian teachers have more freedom in choosing textbooks, they can use additional academic aids and textbooks, and they can express their opinions and even disagree with the author of the textbook, which is unacceptable in Chinese culture. As for the educational process, most of the tasks are performed in writing (about 70% of tasks), as oral answers in China are considered more subjective. In Russia, more and more tasks are performed orally, in the form of reports, projects, oral essays. In China there are a lot of tasks for memorization and

reproduction by heart, while in Russia there are more and more creative tasks. The percentage of variability of disciplines is approximately at the same level.

## 7. Conclusion

Thus, the influence of mentality on the process of education in China and Russia cannot be overestimated. Due to national characteristics and upbringing, the Chinese teacher is the main authority in the class, whose opinion is the leading one, and he has no right to change the curriculum of the discipline. Students observe the strictest discipline, are not allowed to express their opinions. These features were undoubtedly influenced by the Confucian doctrine, which built the moral and spiritual foundations of the Chinese nation, which were able to withstand the test of centuries.

Thus, the main difference between the Russian and Chinese education systems is that Russian system is focused on the knowledge of the outside world based on reason, while the Chinese — on the man discovering himself basing on virtue, on the Confucianism foundations, and this affects both the place of the teacher in the classroom, the behavior of students, and the curriculum and programs structure. At the same time, human development can simultaneously include something he received in the process of enculturation and assimilation in his native culture, and something he received thanks to acculturation in another culture.

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