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IMAGE OF RUSSIA AND THE RUSSIANS IN LANGUAGE CONSCIOUSNESS OF CHINESE YOUTH

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Abstract

The study is urgent due to the expanding contacts between Russia and China, the need to implement intercultural verbal communication in the multilingual world on the basis of the principles of tolerance and respect for inauthentic culture and language and understanding the specifics of the latter. In contrast to the older generation which was formed in a situation of active ideological influence from the USSR which promoted the principle of sovereignty and economic isolation, modern Chinese youth is involved in intercultural communication. Russian people, great Russian literature and culture are of great interest to Chinese youth. The purpose of the article is to reconstruct a fragment of the linguistic picture of the world of young Chinese speakers associated with the understanding and interpretation of the image of Russia and modern Russian people. Research material is represented by authentic electronic texts published recently on the pages of public chats popular among young Chinese users. The analysis is carried out on the basis of systematization of lexemes-representatives of the image of Russia and Russians, followed by their distribution in such thematic groups as "Language", "Politics", "Social, age and gender characteristics of the speakers", "Cuisine", "Alcohol", "Etiquette", "Traditions and customs", "Show-business", "Crime and law", "Love and friendship", "Appearance", "National character traits", "Nature and weather conditions". In the course of conceptual understanding of semantics, pragmatics and features of lexical units' functioning in the designated thematic groups the fragment of a language picture of native speakers of the Chinese language is modeled.

1. Introduction

In the XXI century the Chinese-Russian relations have reached the unprecedented level due to the intensive expansion and deepening of political, economic, cultural, social and educational contacts between two states (Golovina, 2019; Ljan & Tao, 2018; Sharipov, Dyakonova, & Maksimov, 2019). In this connection the aim of further study of the intercultural verbal communication seems to be of the utmost importance. This type of interaction takes place in different spheres of discursive cooperation (Boldyrev & Dubrovskaja, 2016; Brinjuk, 2019). Multicultural and polylingual dialogue should be based on the principle of tolerance and respect of the inauthentic culture and foreign language, understanding the principles of the latter keeping in mind the peculiarities of the national mentality and philosophy.

The interest in the great and mighty Russian language and mysterious Russian culture is constantly growing in the Chinese society. This concern is accumulated in Russia's image which exists among the Chinese and is expressed by the idiom 《俄罗斯情结》 which means "special feelings towards Russia". Sympathy to Russia is expressed in the interest in the country's state of affairs, its cultural heritage, rich history. But it should be noted that China's relations with Russia, Russian people and Russian language have not always been the same.

The representatives of the older generation in China who became adults in the 40-s and 50-s of the previous century under the great ideological USSR's influence consider the Russian classical literature compliant with the spirit and ideological atmosphere of that period. One shouldn't forget that the USSR at the above-mentioned time promoted the principle of sovereignty and economic isolation. The older Chinese generation thinks that the works of the Russian classical literature contain the special national spirit and moral enthusiasm which are close to their own world-view. The life and fate of that generation are closely connected with Russia and the Russians, they seem to express something hidden about themselves.

In the late seventies – early eighties the foreign policy line of China changed: due to the introduction by the Chinese government the economic reform there were a lot of citizens who were willing to go abroad to get a job, receive good education or even migrate. The people wished to go to English-speaking countries. A lot of joint Chinese-American enterprises were established in the country at that time. In this connection this historical period may defined as "insane" love of the Chinese to the English language which gradually outcast the Russian language from the curricula of Chinese universities and schools. Thus, the English language became a very popular one among the Chinese students.

2. Problem Statement

In the late eighties – early nineties due to the normalization of Chinese-Russian relations the bilateral contacts were restored in all spheres culture and education first of all. This was the time of the "second spring" and the conquer by the Russian language of the eastern land.

In 2013 when Xi Jinping, a great lover of the Russian literature and art, came to power the Belt and Road initiative was accepted in China. Since that time the Russian language and culture has been undergoing the period of prosperity. The Russian language is being taught at more than 400 Chinese universities, the overall number of students majoring in Russian philology and those who study Russian

as a foreign language surpasses 150.000. They study at the universities of Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou, Changchun, Harbin and others (Number of Russian language students in China, 2019). Modern Chinese youth which was brought up in the eighties and nineties of the XXst century is fully involved in the process of intercultural communication. The Russian language in all forms of its existences (standard and non-standard. oral and written, functioning in various types of discourse) is greatly popular among the Chinese youth. Annually in different cities of China a lot of events takes place which aim at promoting the Russian language and getting acquainted with the Russian culture, art, traditions and customs, history and the modern state of affairs. The image of Russia is an integral part of the Chinese speakers' world picture (Fjen, 2015; Ma & Van, 2015; Sizyh, 2018; Yakushenkova, 2018)

3. Research Questions

The study involves the following methodological procedure:

3.1. Collecting the speech material which meets the purpose of the study**.**

3.2. The systematization and categorization of the material on the basis of matching the extra-linguistic criteria "Common character of the topic" (singling out the key thematic groups and the distribution of collected lexical units into these groups)

3.3. The conceptualization of the speech material and as a result the reconstruction of the world picture's fragment connected with the understanding of Russia and the Russians' image in the consciousness of the young Chinese.

4. Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the article is to reconstruct the fragment of the young Chinese speakers' world picture connected with understanding and interpreting of Russian and modern Russian people's image. The authentic e-texts published in public-chats which are popular among the young Chinese serve as the material for analysis: 俄语之家(Russian language house «Ruclub»), 沪江俄语 (Russian language "Hujiang", 2020) and 俄语台(Russian language channel, 2020). The above-mentioned net-grounds play a crucial role in introducing the modern Russian realities to the Chinese youth and diffusion of language and culture among the young Chinese majoring in Russian.

5. Research Methods

The following methods were used: introspection (overt observation), modelling, conceptual analysis, contextual analysis, semantic and stylistic analysis, comparative and contrastive analysis.

6. Findings

6.1. Net communication as a sphere of modern social communication

Due to the rapid development of computer and information technologies the net communication became a new sphere for speedy distribution of information, realization of communicative strategies. In 2011 in China such type of net communication as WeChat 微信 (pinyin:Wēixìn – lit. 'micro-message') was introduced. It is a mobile communication system to share text and voice messages. This event was a landmark one in the social life of the modern Chinese society. Nowadays the number of WeChat users is one milliard people, via this network millions of young users of the Chinese language get in touch with each other.

WeChat with each year steadily becomes the e-platform for studying Russian a foreign language, popularization of the knowledge about the Russian culture among the Chinese speakers, and for the communication of all inauthentic speakers who communicate Russian and about Russian. Online- and offline-learning in WeChat is an efficient and fashionable method of the Russian language and culture's diffusion in China now. There have been three most popular among the Chinese youth public-chats in WeChat: 俄语之家(Russian language house, 2020 «Ruclub»), 沪江俄语 (Russian language "Hujiang", 2020) and 俄语台(Russian language channel, 2020). These chats serve as key net-platforms promoting the expansion and widening the Chinese youth's knowledge about the realities of modern Russia. Text materials in Chinese and Russian are published in the above-mentioned public-chats every day. These texts are distributed into several groups. The choice of the topics is determined by the coverage of the problems of the social, political, economic, national and confessional spheres of modern Russian society's life. The users of the chats discuss various issues: from V.V. Putin's Address to the Federal Assembly to the celebrities' stories, from the language sketches from the magnificent lake Baikal to the pictures of the Russian feast. These materials (both the publications in the posts and commentaries to them) play a vital role in forming the image of Russia and the Russians among the Chinese youth, create a variant of this image's interpretation by the inauthentic speakers of the Russian language, i.e. they promote the image of Russia. The study of the language means of creating the image of Russia and the Russians by the nearest neighbour, political and economic partner is of vital importance. The maintenance of friendly relations not only on the state level but in the sphere of interpersonal contacts – especially between the young representatives of the two countries – depend on the results of such research.

6.2. The characteristics of the empirical material

The card-catalogue of the authors serves as the material for the analysis. The catalogues contains 350 lexical units which represent the image of Russia and the Russians in the eyes if the young Chinese speakers and the contexts which demonstrate the specific character of their semantics and functioning in the network of the net communication discourse. The units were singled out by the method of continuous sampling from the above-mentioned public-chats of WeChat.

6.3. The first step of the analysis: the systematization and categorization of the speech material

The first step in modeling the fragment of the world picture connected with understanding of Russian and the Russian's image in the consciousness of the modern Chinese youth is the systematization and categorization of the speech material. Here we should single out the thematic groups and distribute the collected lexical units among these groups. The information about singled out thematic groups, the lexical units which comprise these groups and represent Russian and the Russian's image among the modern Chinese, the number of the usage frequency of these lexical units in the net communication is given in the Table 01.

Table 01. Thematic groups of words representing the image of Russia in the texts of Chinese net communication

The thematic group	The most frequent lexical units	The number of the usage
LANGUAGE	吐槽俄语, 太难学 very difficult language	20
	那些路过心上的俄语美文 those Russian nice expressions which pull at the heartstrings	8
	醋意浓浓的俄语 terribly nice Russian language	5
POLITICS	普京 Putin	41
	拉夫罗夫 Lavrov	4
	彼得大帝 Peter the Great	2
	叶卡捷琳娜二 Catherine II	1
ALCOHOL	伏特加 vodka	15
	啤酒 beer	10
	香槟 champagne	9
	红酒 wine	5
CUISINE	面包 bread	3
	薄饼 pancakes	2
	红菜汤 borsch	2
	黑鱼籽酱 black caviar	1
	克瓦斯 kvas	1
	大头娃娃巧克力 chocolate Alyonka	1
	俄罗斯香肠 sausage	1
	白桦树汁 birch juice	1
	羊肉馅饼 chebureki	1
	烤包子烤包子 samsa	1
	沙威玛 shaurma	1
	手抓饭 plov	1
	冷杂烩汤 okroshka	1
	酸黄瓜汤 pickle soup	1
	蘑菇汤 mushroom soup	1
	鱼汤 fish soup	1
LAW AND ORDER	注意安全 be careful	11
	抢劫 robbery	7
	杀人 murder	5
CUSTOMS AND TRADITIONS	胜利日 Victory Day	5
	套娃 Russian doll	4
	别墅 summer cottage	2
	新年 New Year	2
	谢肉节 Pancake Week	1
	婚礼 wedding	1

	保存塑料袋 keeping the plastic bags	1
ETIQUETTE	社交礼仪 high society etiquette	10
	商务礼仪 business etiquette	5
	餐桌礼仪 table etiquette	5
	言语礼仪 speech etiquette	5
SHOW BUSINESS, TV PROGRAMS	季马比兰 Dima Bilan	1
	柳拜 Lyube	1
	乌尔甘特深夜秀 Evening Urgant	1
	通灵之战 The Battle of Extrasensory	1
	滑稽表演 KVN	1
	好声音 Voice	1
	他是龙 He is a dradon	1
NATURE AND WEATHER CONDITIONS	冷, 变态冷, 雪国 cold, freeze, the country of snow	10
	贝加尔湖 Baikal	7
	白桦 birch-tree	4
	花揪 rowan-tree	4
	森林 forest	3
	俄罗斯的秋天：美哭了 terribly nice autumn	3

6.4. The second step of the analysis: the conceptualization of the speech material and the reconstruction of the reconstruction of the language world picture

As it is seen from the table data the following lexical units take part in the formation of Russia's image: "Language" (13% from the overall number of the thematic groups representing Russia), "Politics" (19%), "Alcohol" (15%), "Cuisine" (8%), "Law and order" (9%), "Customs and traditions" (6%), "Etiquette" (10%), "Show-business, TV programs" (3%), "Nature and weather conditions" (13%). In the language consciousness of the Chinese youth the most frequent association is "Russia – Putin". China's representatives traditionally view Russia through the prism of the political events and political leaders, influential personalities and figures: *普京 Putin* (41 lexical units), *拉夫罗夫 Lavrov* (4 lexical units),

彼得大帝 Peter the Great (2 lexical units), *叶卡捷琳娜二 Catherine II* (1 lexical unit). It is evident that the leader of the state plays an important role for the Chinese people: the means of language representation of his image correlate with the understanding the problems of the whole nation. Putin's image is very popular in China, he symbolizes power, bravery and justice.

The meanings connected with understanding the weather and climate conditions in Russia are another important constituent part of the world picture connected with Russia's image representation in the language consciousness of the Chinese youth. In the opinion of the Chinese Russia is a cold country, with a lot of snow which may be explained by different location of the two countries.

It goes without saying that in the analyzed fragment of the Chinese world picture there are realities represented by the words which contain meanings verbalizing national specifics, national rituals and traditions, national symbols: *birch-tree, rowan tree, Russian doll, Pancake Week, summer cottage*.

It should be noted that the reception of Russia's image is quite contradictory. On the one hand, they admire Russia as a country with delicious food and rich cuisine (*pancakes, black caviar, borsch, kvas chocolate*), on the other hand, they can't but notice abuse of unhealthy habits and the life criminalization (*absence of order, criminal*, etc.). Such interpretation of Russia's image determines its pragmatics: Russia is a mighty and great state with rich history but the modern situation is characterized

by the fact that people have to overcome some day-to-day problems, survive in severe weather conditions and sometimes suffer from the lack of comfort.

In this aspect the study of the reception of Russia's image by the representatives of other culture are of special interest. Thus, in contrast to the image of Russia in the consciousness of the Chinese the authentic German speakers represent the country in various guises: enemy, for, competitor, ally, friend (Tochilina, 2013). In the Hungarian culture the image of Russia is characterized by steady negative connotation. Thus, the Hungarians condemn the foreign policy of Russia and Russia's image is associated with negative consequences of Russian colonization (Drjukin, 2009).

Russia's image in the language consciousness of the Chinese youth is generally characterized as positive. The majority of young people are interested in what is going on in Russia. Overall, the image of Russia is formed on the basis of the information which in the consciousness of the Chinese people through internet-communication channels, direct interaction with the Russian speakers, national mass-media.

As it seen from table 2, the image of Russia in the language consciousness of the Chinese youth is comprised from four constituent parts which correlate with the following thematic groups: "Social, age and gender characteristics of the speakers" (12 % from the overall number of the thematic groups representing the Russian in the net-discourse), "Love and friendship" (8%), "Appearance" (34%), National character traits (43%). Among the list of the Russian character traits there are positive traits (*courageous, brave, daring*) and negative ones (*lazy, drinker, rude, picky*). It should be noted that in the axiological aspect of the national world pictures – Russian and Chinese – the same lexical units may be different in their pragmatic meanings. For instance, recklessness as a character trait may be treated by the Russians both positively and negatively (more often it is associated with foolhardiness and daring), whereas the Chinese interpret this quality only negatively.

The image of Russians as well as the image of Russia in the perception of the Chinese is contradictory which is fixed in the structure of the national language. The contradictory character of this characteristic is determined by the fact that the development of the Russian nation was under a great influence of the special aspects of history and culture, Russia's peculiar climate and geography, and the contacts with the neighboring countries. From the point of view of the Chinese it was due to its braveness and courage that the Russian people created the largest country in the world. These strengths of a national character helped the Russian people defeat Napoleon and Hitler in the most disastrous wars. However, the Chinese are surprised at the fact that strong character traits in a Russian person get along with laziness, a craving for alcohol. It is also worth emphasizing that Russian maximalism in the eyes of the Chinese is another extreme manifestation in the world view. Unlike the Russians the Chinese following the idea of Confucius always try to adhere to the principle of "middle ground".

The understanding of the Chinese youth about physical appearance of the Russians is verbalized by the lexical units which foreground the following characteristics: "hairy", "long-legged", "fat", "handsome". It is obvious that contradictory ideas about the Russians' image can be found here, too. For example, the word "hairy" 老毛子 has a negative connotation and only in some cases humorous and funny. The Chinese gave this nickname to the Russians in the 18th century during the Qing Dynasty due to scandals on the Russian-Chinese border. It is also interesting to note that Russia is a country in which

men are a small minority, therefore a man is seen as a "luxury", girls "chase" the guys not fearing to confess their love to them even their methods of declaration of love can in some cases be defined as "inadequate and extreme".

In the consciousness of the Chinese there is a stereotype that in Russia there are two types of gender-marked people: "Russian male alcoholic" and "Russian female hard worker and beauty". In the eyes of the Chinese the Russian woman is the strongest woman in the world, most often women take more responsibility to the family and society. This perception gives rise to a situation of cultural shock among the Chinese since the situation in China is completely different.

The image of the Russian policemen in the Chinese perception is rich in negative connotations: the word 俄罗斯警察 (Russian policeman) is associated with bribery, criminal, and corruption.

Speaking about the specifics of the fragment of the Chinese language world picture which represents the understanding of Russia and the Russians we should single out the key figurative means of language explication: metaphor, periphrasis, phraseologims. Here are some examples of the metaphorical usage of the words which nominate the image of Russia and the Russians in the Chinese world picture: 战斗民族 (courageous nation), 熊国 (the country of bears), 老毛子(hairu), 妖孽 (devil), 海豚王子 (a nice voice of the Russian man – prince-"dolphin"), 面包、牛奶、土豆、奶酪和香肠– 五大领袖 (bread, milk, potato, cheese and sausage – "five leaders")，圆白菜、葱头、胡萝卜和甜菜– 四大金刚 (cabbage, onion, carrot and beetroot – "four sky kings")，黑面包、伏特加、鱼子酱 – 三剑客 (black bread, vodks and caviar – "three fencers"). Examples of periphrasis: 第二面包 (potato is "second bread"), 粥 – 我们的母亲 (porridge is "out mother"), 液体面包 (kvas is "liquid bread"). Examples of phraseologisms: 长腿男模 (a long-legged model), 兄弟如手足 (brothers like feet and arms), 懒散成性 (laziness is the second nature), 嗜酒成瘾 (urge to drink), 爱得极端 (mad love), 离婚率高 (high percentage of divorce), 重男轻女 (respect men and underestimate women), 半裸出街 (to go half-naked), 喝到断片儿 (drink oneself to death).

Table 02. Thematic groups of words representing the image of the Russians in the texts of Chinese net communication

The thematic group	The most frequent lexical units	The number of the usage
SOCIAL, AGE AND GENDER CHARACTERISTICS OF THE SPEAKERS	俄罗斯大妈 Russian woman 干活的全是老太太 hard-working woman, pensioner woman	10
	男人酒鬼, 奢侈品 man-drinker	9
	男人稀缺,奢侈品 man-luxury	7
	避而远之的东西叫警察 a policeman with clouded reputation	5
	奔放的情侣 a couple madly in love	2

LOVE AND FRIENDSHIP	表白 love confession	10
	前任 ex-lovers	3
	出柜 coming-out	3
	早恋 love at an early age	1
	早婚 early marriage	1
	爱得极端 love madly	1
APPEARANCE	老毛子 hairy	18
	女美 pretty woman	15
	胖 fat	10
	帅哥 handsome man	9
	很 man real man	7
	长腿 long-legged	6
NATIONAL CHARACTER TRAITS	战斗民族 courageous nation, brave, daring	20
	妖孽 devil, non-man (reckless)	19
	懒 lazy	18
	喝到断片儿 drink oneself to death (drinker)	16
	坦克遛马路 to go for walk on a tank (brave)	15
	打群架 mass brawl, scuffle (rude, combatant)	15

7. Conclusion

In the course of the conceptual analysis of the semantics, pragmatics and the functioning peculiarities of the lexical units united into the semantic groups a fragment of the world picture of the young Chinese speakers was modelled. This fragment reflects the sum of the ideas of the young Chinese about Russia and the Russians. The image of Russia and the Russians in the perception of the young Chinese is quite contradictory in the expression of the pragmatic semantics' component. The stereotypes and associations functioning in the texts of the net interaction play a great role in the formation of the image. Overall, the image of Russia and the Russians among the Chinese is characterized by the steady diachronic notional and connotative meanings.

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