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THE ALIMENTARY OTHER IN THE CULTURAL LANDSCAPES OF RUSSIA AND CHINA

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Abstract

The article is devoted to the comparative analysis of the image of the alimentary imaginative Other by the example of Russian and Chinese cultural spaces. The authors analyze the statistics of the most popular Internet queries in search engines (Yandex, Google and Baidu). The most popular users' requests reflect a universal idea of the imaginative Other. The authors try to trace the characteristics of the alimentary Other, typical of both cultures, and the difference between these characteristics. On the basis of the revealed statistics, the authors build models of the alimentary imaginative Other, typical of Russia and China. The analysis shows the presence of a certain difference between the images of the Western and Eastern Other, typical of the Russian cultural space, as well as the existence of identical characteristics for the image of a large number of ethnic groups. A similar situation is found in the Chinese cultural landscape, however, there is no clear division between the Western and the Eastern alimentary Others. The analysis shows how some real alimentary facts can be distorted by the fear of the Other-aggressor. In addition, the Other can be perceived as a human being, able to eat things completely inedible, which multiplies fears. In addition, we can talk about a certain imbalance in the views of the two cultural groups about each other: while we are afraid of the Chinese, they express a very moderate interest in Russian alimentary culture, fearing, in turn, the Other from other countries.

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1.   Introduction

In the modern world, due to the development of Internet technologies, intercultural communication gets new forms, the very process is expanding, and the distance between the participants of the dialogue practically disappears, which allows people to interact with the Other and discover one, staying in the comfort of their homes. Globalization also allows us to incorporate into our national cuisine foreign dishes and drinks that increases our interest in the alimentary Other (Yakushenkov & Sun, 2015).

The habits of the Other intrigue and frighten us at the same moment. There are some basic categories, such as food, sexuality and cloths and appearance, which creates the image of the Other, and they can include both real cultural elements and our perception of them, therefore there is a significant proportion of fantasy. Alimentary preferences (i.e. food) of the Other largely determine our view of one. The imaginative Other is obliged to differ from us in one's preferences, and the stronger the differences, the stronger his "Otherness". The construction of the image of the Other often comes at the expense of moving one into the category of «animals». An important role here is played by the opposition of raw / cooked, noted in the works of French anthropologist Levi-Strauss (2001). The metaphor of raw/cooked can mark the Other: it allows one to transfer it from the category of "human" to the category of an animal (Levi-Strauss, 2001). This is reflected in the Chinese frontier discourse, which distinguished several types of barbarians – "raw" and "cooked" (Yakushenkov & Yakushenkova, 2012).

Similar mechanisms can be found in the Russian cultural landscape, where the image of the Chinese is often associated with the stereotype of a "Child Eater", established after the performance of Chinese artist Zhu Yu (for more information, see "This Photo Of A Man Eating Fetus Went Viral Before"). Authors of different articles, full of terrible details about Chinese restaurants, where you can eat children (Emery, 2018), tend to ignore the fact of postmodern performance, increasing the degree of fear of a neighbor who is ready to eat us or our children. A kind of apotheosis of this Other is very popular in modern mass culture images of cannibals, vampires and zombies – and they demonstrate fundamental differences in all three categories: alimentary preferences, vestimentarity and sexuality (Romanova, Yakushenkov, Khlusheva, & Topchiev, 2013).

2.   Problem Statement

An image of the imaginative Other is not a real image, but a fictional one, built on the subject's ideas about a real object. Under certain conditions, such ideas may take the form of stable stereotypes, which makes it possible to speak already about characteristics of the imaginative Other, that are typical for a given cultural space, and, therefore, such models of Otherness cannot be ignored, as they are the part of collective consciousness. Fixation on certain negative stereotypes can lead to undesirable consequences and inter-ethnic tensions.

3.   Research Questions

The main question of the study was the degree of similarity of the imaginative Other models in two cultural spaces: Russia and the People's Republic of China, because, in our opinion, it will provide an

opportunity to talk about the universal characteristics of the imaginative Other, and will also allow us to predict the developing vector of the cultural dialogue between the two cultures.

4.   Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to analyze and compare search queries in the systems Yandex, Google and their Chinese counterpart Baidu (2018) associated with different ethnic groups. This will reveal the specifics of the formation of the image of the Other and the accentuation of certain aspects of Otherness, as well as will help us to find the special features of the image of the Other in different cultures. For a deeper analysis, the authors also resorted to the analysis of the statistical sections of these search engines.

5.   Research Methods

The use of search engines in various studies has long proved its effectiveness (Spink & Zimmer, 2008). For example, Choi and Varian (2012) show in their work how Google Trends data "may help in predicting the present".

Since the search queries are still the most performed activity on the Internet (Hillis, Petit, & Jarrett, 2013), the study of most popular queries allowed us to analyse the actual images of the Other. Statistical methods were used for the analysis of alimentary and vestimentary patterns. It helped to create matrices of relations of isolated features with certain ethnic groups. The application of the Pearson correlation formula enabled us to create models with visible connections between the features.

6.   Findings

At the first stage, the authors analyzed the most popular Russian-language queries in Yandex and Google search engines. Ethnic groups, living in the Far Eastern region, were chosen as the key ones for analysis: the Chinese; Koreans, South Koreans; North Koreans; the Japanese; the Vietnamese; Thais and Mongols. It should be noted that Koreans are listed with the territorial division into two states, and separately as two ethnic groups, because during the analysis, differences between the search queries for these groups were noted: the query "Koreans eat ..." shows us some data that are not found when querying "North Koreans eat ..." or "South Koreans eat ...". For the conditional verification and identification of the universal markers of the imaginative Other, specific not only to the ideas of the above mentioned ethnic groups, the German, the French, and the American were also added to the list. Such approach, in our opinion, allowed us to speak about the idea of the alimentary Other that is universal for the Russian cultural landscape. It is also necessary to mention that several ethnic groups planned originally for the analysis were excluded from our work, since it was not possible to find special queries for them in Russia and the PRC.

In the Google.ru and Yandex.ru search services, researchers introduced a query shaped like "% ethnic_groups% eat", where %ethnic_groups% is the name of the above mentioned ethnic group. At the same time, services gave out statistics of the most popular requests of other Internet users. Thus, we identified 37 most frequently encountered alimentary traits, on the basis of which a matrix was constructed, in which the first column reflected a sample of these traits, and the first showed the studied ethnic groups. The matrix indicated the qualitative characteristic of the trait - the presence or absence of a trait (1 and 0,

respectively). Further, we traced the correlation between ethnic groups and characteristics, and the strongest connections were revealed on the basis of the Pearson formula.

On the basis of the strongest correlations we identified three models:

• Model 1, according to users, eats raw minced meat, Russian combat pack, Swedish herring, kebab, buckwheat, soups, chalk, peanut butter, pork, surströmming, lard, raw meat, dumplings. This model conditionally included a control group of peoples not belonging to the Far Eastern region – the Germans and the Americans with the exclusion of the French.

• Model 2 includes the following features: horses / horse meat, meat, live octopuses, dolphins, human embryos and baby embryos, newborns, sushi, ice, ice with juice / water, cats, pork, rotten eggs, tadpoles, noodles. This model includes the Mongols, the Japanese, Koreans, the Chinese, and the Vietnamese. Through the marker "eat pork" this model was also connected with model 1.

• Model 3 includes eating: cockroaches, rats, insects, snakes, snails, frogs, monkeys. This model is not associated with any other strong correlation of its characteristics, but some of them have a correlation dependence with such signs as "eating pork" and "eating cats" of medium strength. This model includes the Vietnamese and the Thais. The French are included in the same group, who along with the Vietnamese and the Thais eat frogs and snails. However, this model is more typical of the Thais and the Vietnamese, which allows them to be placed into a separate group according to the alimentary attribute of Otherness.

It is noteworthy that such characteristics as "eating dogs" and "eating grass" are not included in any of the models, as they do not have a strong correlation with any other attribute. It is also necessary to emphasize the exclusively stereotypical nature of these attributes. For example, buckwheat is not typical of the American or German gastronomic cultures. But at the same time, alimentary model No. 1, which includes the American and the German, contains this feature. In our opinion, this is primarily due to two factors: the Subject's fear of the Other, who has an interest in one's food, and the subject's desire to try Other's food (hence the popularity of videos with foreigners' reactions to a particular national cuisine). Model 2 reflects the collective image of the peoples living in the Far Eastern region. Its distinctive feature is eating non-standard meat (horse, cats, dolphins, newborns and human embryos), seafood (live octopus, tadpoles) and other things (ice, sushi, rotten eggs, noodles, sushi). In part, this model is characterized by a grotesque view of the Other, ready to eat what the person views as inedible.

Analysis of Chinese users' Internet queries in the Chinese search engine Baidu using also the Baidu Index, included the following list of ethnic groups: Russians, Ukrainians, Americans (US), French, Germans, Thais, Vietnamese, Japanese, South Koreans, Mongols and Chinese. In the course of the work, we used a query in Chinese of a similar type "%ethnic group% eats". As a result, we received 32 alimentary markers.

As a result, 5 models that characterize the Alimentary Other in the Chinese cultural space were obtained.

• Model No. 1, placed separately with inquiries about: "everything", guinea pigs and people, characterizes the query about the ethnic group "Chinese".

• Model No. 2 (mice, snails and American breakfast), combined the Vietnamese and the French. It is significant that in the case of the analysis of requests in the Russian search engines there is also the connection between the images of these ethnic groups).

• Model No. 3 (with crayfish and bread), included Russians, Americans and Japanese.

• Model No. 4, with pork, partly linked to Group No. 3 through Americans. It included Germans, Thais, Kazakhs, Mongols, and, partly, Ukrainians.

•Model No.5 included the South and North Koreans and Ukrainians.

Unlike the Russian ideas about the Other, where differences between the nutritional culture of the "Western" and the "Eastern" Other were clearly observed (and the only exception to this system was the French fallen into the Vietnamese and Thais group), there was no such situation in China. The largest number of alimentary requests was associated with the Ukrainians (group 5), and the smallest with the North Koreans.

It is paradoxical that model 1, in essence, characterized as pan-phages (all-eaters), embodies the Chinese perception of themselves.

As in the case with the analysis of Russian-language queries, the final picture demonstrates disregard of the Other, who is ready to eat inedible things, and certain interest in his/her food. Here, too, we find the fear of the Other –monster – who is ready to eat our food, and that's why there is the desire to see if he is ready to eat something familiar to us: Russians are interested to see how Americans eat Russian food exactly as much as the Chinese are interested to see Ukrainians and Koreans eating Chinese cuisine.

As in the case of Russian search inquiries, the Chinese demonstrate a combination of factual knowledge about the culture of other nations, and the fear of the Other, expressed in grotesque inquiries about some Foreigners eating something completely inedible.

Most "Others" in the Chinese view of the alimentary image were the Japanese with the queries for "eating excrements of young girls". This, in principle, reflects the general tendency for a negative attitude towards the Japanese in China and the periodic outbreaks of xenophobia associated with historical military conflicts. It is the Japanese who most often become an enemy in the mass culture of the PRC, although recent events have somewhat shifted this vector of antagonism towards the United States and South Korea. This, however, has not yet had a strong impact on ideas about their alimentary culture. The Russians, in this case, are a little apart from the main group of the "Others".

7. Conclusion

So food patterns reflect the world view of each nation, therefore different attitudes are actualized in our search requests. The Russians perceive the Chinese as pan-phages, which raises some concerns. The Chinese fix less their attention on the alimentary culture of the Russians, defining it as too sweet and nothing more. Although traditionally the Chinese perceive Russia as a country of resources (Lo, 2008), 'nutritional' resources are not so important in this case.

Perhaps the Chinese are accustomed to the alimentary diversity that has developed in the Chinese regional landscape. Even the Chinese themselves tend to perceive certain regional Chinese preferences as extreme, and the Chinese Internet itself is full of unfettered rumors about the existence of restaurants serving dishes of human meat. In this regard, too sweet Russian cuisine, according to the Chinese, does not arise such active interest.

To a greater extent, the Chinese are interested in Russian alcohol preferences. At the same time, they express the greatest concern towards the neighboring peoples – Koreans and the Japanese, which is caused by both historical factors and the current rivalry.

At the same time, our work has shown that there are certain universal moments – the most distant Other eats things that all of us do not consider possible to consume.

The study was conducted from April to December 2018, which also made it possible to notice a certain dynamics in the image of the Russian due to the abundance of news about the World Cup.

Although the strangest requests in the segment of the Russian Internet fall on the Chinese; however, it should be noted that Russian users do not always make differences among the Chinese, Koreans and Japanese.

Acknowledgments

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