

A Comparative Study of Chinese and Russian Superstitious Culture

Mengyuan Lu^{1, a}

¹Xiamen University, Xiamen, Fujian, 361005, China

^a2722079537@qq.com

Abstract: The culture of superstition is an important part of the spiritual deposits and cultural heritage of the peoples of the world. It has a unique social function and cultural charm, and is of great significance in realizing cultural diversity and promoting the progress of human civilization. In this paper, the superstitious cultures of China and Russia are selected as the objects of study, and through the comparative analysis of the superstitious cultures of Chinese and Russian nationalities, we explore their uniqueness and commonality, and explain their far-reaching significance to the development of society and the progress of human civilization. Through the study, this paper finds that the national superstitious cultures in the cultural background of the two countries have great differences in the content and form of beliefs, but all of them contain common cultural characteristics and spiritual connotations.

Keywords: Superstitious culture, China-Russia comparison, Intercultural communication, Cultural differences.

1. Overview of Superstitious Culture

1.1. Definition of Superstition

The Modern Chinese Dictionary explains "superstition" as the belief in astrology, divination, feng shui, fate, ghosts and gods. Dahl's Dictionary explains the essence of "superstition" as "a false, empty, nonsensical, and spurious belief in something; a belief in miracles, the supernatural, witchcraft, fortune-telling, omens, and signs; a belief in cause and effect without seeing any causal connection." The Oxford Explanatory Dictionary refers to superstition as "a belief or worship of extreme credulity" [1]

According to different definitions, we can roughly know that superstition is a set of beliefs, legends and other non-scientific, common sense-based things accumulated by a people in their cultural heritage, which is a part of that people's culture. Due to the differences in history, geography and social environment, the content and form of superstitious culture of various ethnic groups differ greatly, and will be influenced and swayed by cultural factors such as ethnic cognitive styles, belief systems and values.

In traditional Chinese culture, superstition is a social phenomenon characterized by mysterious and irrational beliefs. In other words, superstition is people's perception and realization of natural and supernatural forces, which are spread in certain forms and ways among social groups and passed down from generation to generation. To many people, superstition may be nothing more than folklore or historical legends, but it occupies a very important place in Chinese popular culture. Indeed, in the course of the development of Chinese society, national superstitions have had an extremely wide and far-reaching influence.

In traditional Russian culture, flora and fauna, natural phenomena and numbers have mysterious power to influence the destiny and condition of mankind, and superstition has become an indispensable element in the daily life of Russians. In addition, many elements and forms of Russian superstitious culture are widely used in daily life, reflecting the Russian people's strong superstitious thoughts,

seriousness and superstitious national character, which is deeply rooted in the consciousness of Russians.

1.2. Origin and development of superstition

The origin of Russian superstitious culture can be traced back to the original Slavic religion. In the Middle Ages, these superstitious beliefs were integrated into the religious rituals of the Orthodox Church, and on this basis developed its own unique folk beliefs. [2]Over time it developed and expanded, adding many new beliefs. For example, magic, witchcraft, fortune telling, and spirits in Russian superstitious culture all developed from various cultures, religions, and historical events over a long history. Russian superstitious culture has undergone a long development and transformation. During the Tsarist era, the government established special agencies to check and prohibit the persecution and support of some superstitious activities.[3]In modern society, Russia's national superstitious culture still exists, and some parts of it have been popularized and preserved as an important cultural heritage. In general, in Russian superstitious culture, religion and superstition complement each other to some extent and play an important role in the evolution and formation of culture. Consequently, in modern society where cultural diversity is becoming more and more obvious, this kind of culture will not disappear easily in Russia, but will become more colorful.

Chinese superstitious culture has a long history and brilliant cultural connotation, and its origins can be traced back to ancient human reverence for nature and worship of gods. China is a country with a vast region and many ethnic groups, so it has developed a very rich and diverse superstitious culture. Ancient traditional customs and beliefs such as sacrifice, divination and geomantic omens have had a profound influence on China's governance, ancestor worship, care of body and soul, and prayers for good fortune. The development of Chinese folk superstitions can be roughly divided into two periods. The first period is the primitive period. The superstitious culture of this period was mainly characterized by the worship of heaven, earth and nature, worship of ancestral spirits, telling myths and legends and believing in them. The second period is the feudal period,

which includes the Qin and Han, Wei and Jin dynasties and other historical periods.[4] The superstitious culture of this period manifested itself mainly in Taoism, Buddhism, fortune-telling, feng shui, folk tales and legends, and folk festivals.

In general, the superstitious culture of Russia and China has deep historical roots and rich cultural overtones, reflecting the different worldviews, values and lifestyles of the peoples of the two countries. Superstitious culture occupies an important place in the traditional culture of Russia and China and is of great significance to the inheritance and development of culture.

1.3. Reasons for believing in superstitions

Jane Risen, a fellow of the American Psychological Association and professor of behavioral sciences at the Booth School of Business at the University of Chicago, uses the cognitive dual process model to explain why people are superstitious. She argues that people can think both fast and slow. [5]The former way is fast and intuitive, the latter is more rational, and the main function of the latter is to override intuitive judgments when errors are detected. The fast and slow way of thinking allows people to recognize that their original ideas do not make sense, but still proceed. People may notice mistakes but choose the stubborn approach of not correcting them, which is superstition."

In general, the reasons why people believe in superstition are related to the following:

(1) It is related to the quality of people. Superstition was originally the product of ignorance and stupidity; some people in backward areas and people with low culture try to use superstition to maintain their decadent mentality, to change their misfortunes and get good luck by using superstition; some people try to get personal gain by creating superstition.

(2) It is related to people's psychological needs.[6] Some people believe in superstitions to get rid of adversity and attract good luck, such as exorcising ghosts, seeking gods and worshipping Buddha; others believe in superstitions to relieve psychological stress. For example, some people become depressed and despondent after a serious blow to their spirit in real life, and superstition helps them get out of this state; others seek psychological comfort through superstition to right irreparable wrongs, such as hiring Taoist priests to commemorate the dead. In addition, some people use superstition to increase their self-confidence. For example, carrying talismans or lucky objects with them during exams or competitions for good luck.

(3) This happens because of the person's faulty thinking. Superstitious people use their subjective consciousness to infer or explain objective phenomena, describing random coincidences in nature as occurrences of ghosts and gods. For example, superstition about nature arises from ignorance and awe of the natural world and the lack of rational reasons and explanations.

2. Comparative Analysis of Superstitious Culture of Russia and China

Superstition is a phenomenon inherent in all peoples of the world. Due to the differences in historical development, geographical location, customs and religious beliefs, the two peoples have developed different superstitious cultures, resulting in cultural differences. For example, in Russian culture, the easiest way to avoid bad luck is to stick a pin in the edge of your clothes; the Chinese consider it bad luck to bang chopsticks on an empty bowl, etc. [7]To fully

understand a country, it is necessary to understand its superstitious culture. In this paper, we compare and analyze the superstitious culture of Russian and Chinese people, and explore the similarities and differences in their ways of thinking and behavior in order to provide a theoretical and practical basis for effectively reducing intercultural conflicts between Russian and Chinese people.

2.1. Superstitions about numbers

The differences in superstitions about numbers between Russia and China mainly lie in the preference for even and odd numbers, which is greatly influenced by the historical traditions of the two countries.

(1) Russians prefer odd numbers, especially 1, 3 and 7. "1" symbolizes the beginning of something from nothing, a good start. The number "3" for Russians is the number that drives away evil spirits, representing the Father, Son and Holy Spirit in Christianity, and in case of bad omens they often spit three times over the left shoulder or knock three times on a wooden object to drive away evil spirits. The number "7" is often considered the most auspicious and lucky of all holy words, as Christianity believes that God created everything in seven days and that the heavens are divided into seven levels, known as the "seven heavens." [17] In Russian culture, however, the number "13" is considered a symbol of danger and bad luck, and if the number 13 falls on a Friday, it is called "Black Friday," which is very unlucky. The Russian people's dislike of even numbers is expressed in old legends, such as in Slavic mythology, where it is said that "twins are an omen of bad luck". In addition, Number "5" is also a very good number. According to a study conducted by Russian scientist Yana Lebaydulaeva, 57% of those interviewed believe that the number "5" is a lucky number.[8] However, in Russia, the number "666" is an unlucky number. [9]According to the Bible, three consecutive sixes is the devil's code word, symbolizing God's dissatisfaction with the structure of the human world; at the dawn of Christianity, the ancient Romans were convinced that the deciphering of this word was the number "666".

(2) The Chinese prefer even numbers, especially 2, 6, 8, and 10. The number "2", the first of the even numbers, has an auspicious meaning. The Chinese often say, "Good things come in pairs." The number "6", which means "smooth", means that everything will go smoothly. The pronunciation of "8" and "fortune" in Chinese is similar, which means wealth and prosperous business. [10]The number "10" is a symbol of completeness and perfection and is used in folklore as the symbol of "ten perfections". In addition, the number "9" also has a very good meaning, signifying "longevity", often spoken of in China as the "ninth heaven"; "9" also refers to the royal family, symbolizing good fortune and supremacy. In Chinese tradition, even numbers have the meaning of "harmony," signifying good luck, and harmony has always been a common social value in China. The number "4" is taboo in China due to its similarity to the pronunciation of the word "death", and the number "7" is also associated with death, and both of these numbers are unfavorable symbols.[11]

There are also differences between Russia and China when it comes to the number of flowers sent. For example, in Russia, flowers are given in odd numbers, as bouquets with an even number of branches are used to pay homage to the deceased. In China, on the contrary, an even number of flowers are sent.

2.2. Superstitions about color

The differences in superstitions about color between Russia and China lie mainly in attitudes toward white and yellow. In comparison, Russians "avoid yellow and prefer white", while Chinese "avoid white and prefer yellow".

(1) Russians generally consider yellow to be an unlucky color. Yellow symbolizes sadness, separation, betrayal, and madness. In the past, the color of houses in mental hospitals was yellow, and Judas, the traitor who betrayed Jesus, was always dressed in yellow in paintings. That is why in Russia it is forbidden to give yellow-colored gifts and to wear pure yellow clothes on solemn occasions. White in the eyes of Russians is the color of good luck. White symbolizes purity and holiness, for example, at Russian weddings, the bride wears a white wedding dress and white roses are used to bless the couple. In addition, there are many expressions in Russian about the color white, such as "snow-white" and "milky-white." [15]

(2) Chinese culture, on the other hand, is the opposite: the Chinese admire the color yellow and taboo white. In ancient times, the emperor loved yellow, from his dragon garb to his palace; the merchant loved yellow because it symbolized gold, treasure, and wealth; the farmer loved yellow because it was a symbol of land, wheat, and a good harvest. White in the eyes of the Chinese is a symbol of horror, violence and death, and is often associated with funerals, where people refer to a person's death as a "white event" and usually wear white clothes during the funeral. [12]

In fact, the color itself is objective and has no symbolic meaning of good or bad luck. However, in the course of human history, due to the difference of civilizations and history of different countries, people have endowed colors with their personal feelings, using different colors to express different emotions.

2.3. Superstitions about animals

The differences in superstitions about animals between Russia and China mainly lie in the attitudes toward two animals, the bear and the dragon.

(1) Different views of the dragon. Russians perceive the dragon as a dangerous, ugly, snake-like monster that brings misfortune and misfortune to people and is a symbol of evil. [5] However, the dragon, as a mythical animal, in the eyes of the Chinese is a symbol of good luck and royalty, the totem of the Chinese nation. In ancient times, the emperor's clothes were called dragon robes and were embroidered with dragon motifs. At the same time, China is known as the "Dragon of the East" and Chinese people are known as "dragon descendants", which indicates the high status of the dragon in Chinese culture.

(2) Different views on the bear. The bear is the mascot of Russia and is regarded by Russians as the "King of the Forest" and is glorified as the "groom" of a young girl's dreams, as in the proverb, "To see a bear in a dream means to be married". However, in the eyes of the Chinese, the bear is a symbol of stupidity and ferocity.

In addition to the above differences in attitudes toward dragons and bears, in Russian culture the magpie is an ominous omen; Russians see it as a symbol of broken relationships and its ability to bring bad luck to people. However, in Chinese culture, the magpie is a bearer of good news and brings people luck and good fortune. In addition, the rabbit in the eyes of Russians is considered a symbol of weakness and laziness, and contact or meeting with rabbits in

life is considered to bring bad luck. In Chinese culture, however, the rabbit is a symbol of kindness, it is responsive and is often used in everyday life to describe people who are good-natured and intelligent.

Each culture has developed its own preferences and definitions for animals, resulting in each nation having its own totems. As each culture evolved, animals were endowed with different meanings and symbols. The differences in superstitions about animals between Russia and China can be seen in the differences in the spiritual and cultural development processes practiced by these two countries.

2.4. Superstitions about orientation

The differences in superstitions about orientation between Russia and China lie mainly in attitudes toward left and right. The terms "left and right" in Russian and Chinese contain rich but completely opposite cultural connotations.

(1) The Russian superstition about "left and right" is mainly associated with the Orthodox Church. The Bible says that every person has two gods, the devil on the left and angels on the right. As Orthodox Christians, blessing and crossing is done with the right hand. As the Russian proverb says: "the right eye is itchy - to xmehu, the left - to tears". In the Russian people there is a national mentality "On the left - humility, on the right - respect", as well as a traditional saying "the left is bad, and the right - good". For example, a mole on the left cheek is considered a bad omen, as exemplified by the maid Tatiana in Turgenev's literary work *Mumu*, in which people often talk behind her back because of the mole on her face. [15] There are also some taboos in Russia: it is forbidden to shake hands with the left hand when greeting; students do not pull straws with the left hand in the examination room; do not raise a glass of wine while eating with the left hand; and do not pass objects with the left hand. When a Russian says something too good, he taps his hand on a log and spits three times behind his left shoulder to ward off the devil from his left side to avoid misfortune. When someone knocks over a salt-cellar, which according to superstition is a sign of quarrels, to avoid this the person should take some salt in his hand and throw it over his left shoulder three times in succession. [20]

(2) The Chinese have the mentality of "On the left is respect, on the right is humility." As the proverb says, "The left eye jumps to wealth and the right eye jumps to trouble," a left eye jumping is a favorable omen, or meeting a noble person, or a happy event, or promotion and wealth; a right eye jumping is an unlucky omen and you will lose money. In addition, the Chinese are very strict about the seating of guests and the arrangement in the room. For example, when receiving guests, an elderly person, an honored guest or a person of high status sits on the left side of the table or in the middle, while the host and hostess sit on the right side or on the side. As for the arrangement of rooms, a typical example is the courtyard in Beijing, where the most important room is the main room in the center, with the left side of the main room (east side) reserved mainly for the elders and the right side of the main room (west side) reserved mainly for the younger ones. [13]

Thus, it should be noted that the superstition of orientation as a culture is widespread in Russia and China, and its perception has become a habit that permeates all aspects of life in both countries. The distinction and definition of "left and right" is not static and is influenced by various cultural traditions, history, occasions and other factors.

2.5. Superstitions about blessings

The differences in superstitions about blessings between Russia and China lie mainly in the way they are expressed in language.

(1) In the past, Russian hunters had a superstitious saying that if they congratulated a victor, they would not be able to do so. They are therefore accustomed to congratulate each other with irony, which is a well-known blessing: "Break a leg!" [18] This method of blessing was later used on other occasions. The most common is the blessing of candidates for good grades during exams for Russian students and returning with a full load. In addition, at a Russian wedding banquet, guests and friends would shout "gorko! gorko!" - meaning to ask the newlyweds to kiss each other, to remove the bitterness with a sweet kiss to bless the newlyweds.[20]

(2) The Chinese, on the other hand, claim the opposite: the most common blessings are positive, even the more exaggerated the better. For example, "Good luck in winning a gold medal" before an exam; "to be a harmonious union forever" to newlyweds at a wedding; "Money comes" when starting a business, etc.[19].

3. Analyzing the social functions of superstitious culture in Russia and China

3.1. Social function of superstitious culture in Russia

Russian superstitious culture is strongly influenced by Russian history, culture and religion, has existed since ancient times and has developed a unique social function over time. Its social functions are manifested in three main directions:

First, Russian superstitious culture can promote the formation of social cohesion. Russia's history is full of various difficulties and crises, and in this context, superstition has become a way for people to seek solace and support. By creating and participating in a superstitious community, it is easier for people to form emotional bonds with each other, thus creating a closer social network.[14]

Second, Russian superstitious culture may play a certain normative role in public morality. Although the moral norms in Russian superstitious culture are different, they all emphasize the balanced relationship between man and nature, man and society, man and God, which makes people pay more attention to the embodiment of moral behavior. It is because of this binding force that Russian superstitious culture can continue to be transmitted and developed in changing times.[16]

Third, Russian superstitious culture can lead to the exploration of the unknown and the construction of inner identity. Various activities in Russian superstitious culture are often associated with various mysterious objects and rituals. Through constant reflection and exploration of these objects and rituals, people have gained a deep insight into some things that were initially unknown. At the same time, through participation and inheritance, people can strengthen cultural identity, thus making the Russian nation more confident and strong.

In conclusion, Russian folk superstitions play an important role in society, not only uniting people and promoting social stability, but also contributing to the proper transmission and development of traditional culture.

3.2. The social function of Chinese superstitious culture

Chinese superstitious culture is deeply rooted in people's hearts, with many characteristics such as diversity, complexity, folk color and time characteristics. As for the social function, it has played different roles in different historical periods and social strata.

Firstly, Chinese superstitious culture is necessary for the construction of society. In traditional Chinese culture, superstitious beliefs have always been one of the important social forces, and it plays an important role in social phenomena and personal behavior. For example, in the daily life of Chinese farmers, traditional superstitious customs are an important element of peasant culture. For example, young rural men and women are inseparable from participating in superstitious customs such as setting off firecrackers, decorating with red themes, and worshipping gods in the scenes of their lives such as wedding and relocation. Carrying out these traditional activities not only promotes unity among villagers, but also reinforces the concept of social units such as families and posts.

Second, Chinese superstitious culture is intertwined with religious beliefs. Among the many religious beliefs in China, Taoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism have groups of believers throughout China. In traditional Chinese religious beliefs, superstitious practices are widely regarded as a religious ritual or process of rapprochement between gods and humans, such as prayers with incense in Taoism, Buddha worship and Buddha chanting in Buddhism, and ancestral sacrifice for the New Year in Confucianism. These religious rituals are closely related to traditional superstitious culture, and together form a multicultural religious belief system in China.

Third, Chinese superstitious culture has a great influence on the values of modern society. At present, Chinese society has entered a new era of pluralism, openness and multiculturalism. Under such circumstances, traditional superstitious culture, as an important cultural heritage, can not only promote China's national cultural characteristics, but also emphasize people's inner thinking about the meaning of life, life values, social teachings, etc. This is very important in modern society and helps to promote the innovation and development of Chinese culture.

It can be said that Chinese superstitious culture occupies an extremely important place in terms of social functions. It not only has a profound influence on social construction, religious beliefs and modern social values, etc., but it is also a manifestation of cultural self-confidence, full of vitality and innovative spirit.

4. Conclusion

The world is beautiful because of differences, and culture is rich because of differences. Differences in the superstitious culture of different countries are an important part of the study of cultural differences. This study analyzes the superstitious cultures of China and Russia in depth from different perspectives, compares the similarities and differences in the social functions of the superstitious cultures of the two countries, and draws the following conclusions: first, in terms of the object of belief, Russians advocate harmonious coexistence with nature, while Chinese people pay more attention to the supernatural power of gods, fairies, ghosts, and demons, and the control of destiny. Second, in terms of

the origin of superstitious culture, religion plays an important role in the history and development of superstitious culture in both countries. Russia is an Orthodox country, while China is dominated by three major religions: Taoism, Buddhism and Confucianism. Third, from a cross-cultural point of view, there are some differences between China and Russia in terms of superstitions such as numbers, colors, animals and directions, but there are also many similarities. Comparative study of the cultural differences between the two countries is conducive to better development and inheritance of the traditional cultures of the two countries, enhancement of cultural self-confidence and cultivation of national spirit. At the same time, in the process of comparison, we can fully understand each other's superstitions and customs, better respect each other's cultural differences, promote economic and cultural exchanges, and continuously develop friendship between the two countries.

References

- [1] Ozhegov S.I. Explanatory dictionary of the Russian language / S.I.Ozhegov, N.Yu Shvedova. - Moscow: Azbukovnik, 2000. - 940 c.
- [2] Gerasimova R.E.. "BYTOVANIE SUEVERIES IN SOVremennaya LIFE" Forum of Young Scientists, no. 5 (9), 2017, pp. 529-532.
- [3] Fliginskikh Ekaterina Evgenievna K question about the definition of the term "Superstition" // Vestnik ČSU. 2014. №1.
- [4] Popov V. Nature and essence of superstition[J]. Analitika kulturologii, 2010 (16).
- [5] Kozina O. Primiti i superstitions as a category of observation-analysis in traditional Russian culture[J]. Analitika kulturologii, 2009 (14).
- [6] "Superstition is a certainty not based on knowledge." D. I. Mendeleev
- [7] Lavrentieva E V. Everyday life of the nobility of Pushkin's time: Omen and superstitions[M]. Molodaya Gvardiya, 2006.
- [8] Ubaidullaeva Yana. Research work "Numbers and superstitions". 10.01.2020.
- [9] Lauren Block, Thomas Kramer. The effect of superstitious beliefs on performance expectations, Journal of the Academy of Marketing Science, June 2009, Volume 37, Issue 2, pp 161-169.
- [10] Fatik Baran Mandal, Superstitions: A Culturally Transmitted Human Behavior, International Journal of Psychology and Behavioral Sciences, 2018; 8(4)65-69.
- [11] Li Hong. Cross-cultural comparison of superstitious culture[J]. Guangxi Social Science, 2007, No. 150(12): 176-178.
- [12] Liu Bo. Ethnocultural psychology in Russian-Chinese "black" and "white" idioms[J]. Journal of Hotan Normal College, 2009.
- [13] Sun Man. Differences in cultural and conventional relations between Russian and Chinese peoples [M]. [2023-06-09].
- [14] WANG Wenyi. A comparative study of the phenomenon of Russian-Chinese lexical polysemy - a comparative analysis from the perspective of national culture [J]. Northern Literature: next, 2014(8):1.
- [15] Wang Xiaoting. The concepts of "left" and "right" from the perspective of linguistic culture (Russian-Chinese comparison) [J]. [2023-06-09].
- [16] Wang Jinhua. Cultural Differences between China and Russia from Superstitions and Taboos[J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia University of Finance and Economics, 2014, 12(06): 121-123.
- [17] Wang Chenghui. Euphemisms in Russian and Chinese from the perspective of psychological features[J]. Journal of Inner Mongolia Normal University: Education Science Edition, 2004, 17(3):4.
- [18] Yu Shunan. A Comparative Semantic and Cultural Study of Numbers in Chinese and Russian Idioms[D]. University of International Business and Economics, 2009.
- [19] Zhu Hong. A Comparative Cultural Cognitive Analysis of the Metaphors of Russian-Chinese Ethnic Body Signs[J]. Modern Communication: Academic Edition, 2016.
- [20] Zheng Wei. A comparative study on the ethnic culture of Russian-Chinese fuzzy language[D]. Northeast Normal University [2023-06-09].