



## Research on Russian National Character

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### Abstract

The special geographical location Russia lies in creates the unique character of the Russian nation. Based on the dual nature of the Russian national character, the Russian geographical environment and the analysis of its social structure, this text tries to explore the reasons of the dual nature of Russian national character.

**Keywords:** Russian national character, Geological location, Social structure

When we talked about a person's character, we virtually mean the total behavior of the person in a given environment or in the interpersonal communication. The reason why we feel this person is different from that one is that he has his own character. This character is actually a symbol or an identifier that an individual is different from another one. A nation, like a person, has its own character. Russian national character derives from its environment, which has been formed for thousands of years. Russia is a very special nation. It has a vast territory across the Eurasian continent and a history of ups and downs and civilization between East and West. This unique geographical environment and social and cultural background have determined the Russian national character, created the dual character of the Russian nation. A Russian famous philosopher once said that Russia could bewitch the people but it could also disappoint them. It could evoke warm love as well as strong hate for it.

When we are with the Russian people, we always feel their rolling emotion. We can not understand how the Russian people would suddenly scream, why they would be changeable when a thing has been determined, why they always have feelings of superiority when working with Asians while they become mannered dealing with the Westerns. I believe that the other nations, except Russia, do not have the character of such a big swing. Therefore, the dual nature of the Russian character has been demonstrated.

### 1. The dual Russian character has been displayed

It is all known that Russians drink a lot. Many people even a lot of women are addicted to alcohol. They drink in order to be drunk. Therefore, it is needless for you to try to persuade a Russian to drink when you treat him because he thinks it is good to drink and he enjoy himself in it. However, after he finishes wine he will become very sad and talk about the sorrowful story of his own. Sometimes he will burst into tears. In the drink, the greathearted and fragile character has been fully displayed.

There is another phenomenon of contradiction. Russians will display their extraordinary passion of patriotism, courage, patience, perseverance and spirit of sacrifice when they are in the critical moment of life and death. The defensive war in 1812 is a good case in point. Facing the powerful forces of Napoleon, the Russian army fought bravely and finally drove the aggressors out of their homeland. So it is easy to find that this nation has a powerful cohesiveness and patriotism in defending their homeland when suffering from external aggression. However, in a peaceful daily life, some people are reluctant to do more for their own unit and country. They'd like to obey heir routine work to rest, go home after work on time and have a timely vacation.

There is something split in Russian national character, that is, the opposite of generosity and stinginess. In dealing with the relationship between the countries the nation is comparatively generous, but a little stingy. Sino-Soviet relation in 1950s and 1960s is a good example in case. The People's Republic of China, after her foundation, implemented a foreign policy lopsided to the former Soviet Union. They established a foreign relation of "comrade and brother". In 1950 Mao Zedong visited the former Soviet Union and signed the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship, Alliance and Mutual Assistance with Stalin. In accordance with the Treaty, the Soviet Union offered a large-scale assistance to China. In the friendly period, the former Soviet government sent more than 3,000 experts to help China. In less than 10 years, more than 150 projects had been set to help China built a comparatively complete industrial base and industrial system of national defense. To China, a country just walking out of a 100-year history of humiliation, with almost no modern industry this assistance is very valuable. However, when ideological differences appeared, Russia quickly withdrew all the experts and tore up all the project contracts. China had suffered a tremendous loss. It is difficult to understand that a country could give you a selfish help but treated you in a very different way just a few years later.

The dualistic contradiction of Russian national character is its dual nature I mean. Russian people are very emotional and often go to extremes. And the national character is vacillating and instable. They have national pride and aspirations of the freedom. Their souls are soaked with individualism, a strong sense of personal awareness. And they are also full of selfless collective consciousness. They sometimes are very lazy but hard working, sometimes very high-handed but obedient, sometimes very overbearing but devout.

## **2. The reasons why the Russian national character forms**

I think that I should analyze the dual nature of the Russian national character from the following two aspects.

### *2.1 The impact of geographical environment*

The unique features of a local environment always give special characteristics to its inhabitants. The words are suitable to describe the Russian people. Russia covers the largest territory in the world. It is across the Eurasian continent. It has large forest, endless plains, and numerous rivers. The vast land gives many virtues to the Russian nation, and some disadvantages at the same time. Kliuchevsky, a famous Russian historian once said, "the living conditions let the Russian people know that they should cherish the workdays when the weather is fine in the summer days because the summer days get shorter due to the unusual and unexpected bad weather. Russian people have to race with the time in order to complete the work in a shorter time. However, they will have to stay at home with nothing to do in the autumn and winter. Thus the Russian people have formed a habit that it seems they are eruptible. They do things fast and deftly. Nature has cultivated the Russian people to work very industriously in the shortest time. But they cannot be accustomed to persevering and laboring orderly. It is true that they have energy of outburst but they are still lack of endurance."

Russia is a Eurasian country. Its territory includes the east part of Europe and the north of Asia. It is divided into two parts by the Ural Mountains, a dividing line of Europe and Asia. Russia is believed to be a European country and an Asian country as well. It belongs to both the East and the West. For the geographical reasons, Russia has close relations with both the East and the West. The unique geographical location has played an important part in forming the national character. The unique geopolitical factor leads to a problem. Should it on earth belong to the East or the West? Russia stresses their characteristics of the West. But Europe has never treated them as a real member of the European families. Russia is like a pendulum, swinging between the East and the West. Russia's unique geographical location makes it hold the East with one hand and grasp the West with the other hand. The two factors have always wrestled in the character of the Russian people. In other words, the Russian nation has no home. Are Russians the Easterners or the Westerners? Does its culture on earth belong to the East or the West? Facing the embarrassment for so long time, the national character inevitably certainly broke up.

Geographical environment has given a long and stable influence on the Russian character. A famous person said that there was a fact that outstrips our history and runs through all our history like a distinct red thread... It is at the same time a very important factor of our great politics and the real reason of our spiritual weakness. Here the fact means the geographical location. The influence is still on. Therefore, the geographic location and the environmental impact always make Russia choose. Thus there is inevitably a split in its national character, which is one of the reasons of its dual nature of the Russian national character.

### *2.2 The impact of the social structure*

There are contradictions in the social structure of Russian nation. Throughout Russian history, people know that it was almost of feudal society. From the 9th century to 1980s, there are about 1200 years. About 1000 years Russia was in feudal society. 50 years (1861-1917) was in capitalist society and 70 years was in a socialist society. In the feudal society, farmers suffered very cruel oppression and exploitation. They had no life freedom. They were sold, robbed and killed. Actually they were serfs, the private property of the landlords. There was a serious social polarization. When the west Europe had entered the era of industrialization, Russia still maintained a serf system. Such an unreasonable social system had baffled the development of the society. The serfs, as a class layer, were relatively illiterate and short of opportunities of education and development. In a contrast, there appeared a noble class after the Peter Reform. The empire Peter demanded all the noblemen speak French, wear clothes of European style and live a westernized life. Otherwise they would have no right to get married. Russia produced a very wealthy and well-educated aristocratic class. In terms of wealth and education, they were not inferior to their counterparts in the other countries of the world. In a word, there existed in the Russian nation a big gap between the upper and lower class. That is to say, the entire society had developed lopsidedly. In addition, I want to say more about its feudal system.

The long-term control by feudal autarchy and the serf system had left deep brand in the Russian national character. Russian people have a glorious tradition of fighting against feudal autocratic oppression and struggling for democracy and freedom. Of course to some extent, the nation is submissive and obedient. Russian history is full of troubles and disasters. It had been invaded and ravaged repeatedly by the alien nations. The Russian people will never forget the harassment of the grassland nation, the Mongol invasion and rule, the occupancy of Napoleon, the armed intervention of the imperialists after the October Revolution, the German seizure and looting during World War II. However, no matter how powerful the enemies were, they never yielded. Russian people are brave and valorous. Leiluo-Baurieux, a French historian of 19th century said, "the Russian soldiers were the most hard-bitten in all the Europe. Their capacity of toughness was rare, which was hard to find in the Western countries. They crossed the southern grassland and got

exhausted. Millions of people died in the way. But they had no resistance, no complaints and no lament. And the Russian people, in essence, are the worst warlike in the world.” Their victory over the foreign invaders greatly fostered and aroused the love for the nation, their feelings of national pride and the national cohesion. In other hand, the Russian people forced by their governments had invaded some other countries, launched series of wars of expansion. They occupied vast territories of China and other countries. The wars also brought tears and death to the Russian people. Meanwhile these aggressive wars on the other side produced chauvinism of big Russia. All the above have played a big impact on the formation of the Russian national character. They are the factors that make the dual characters of the nation.

Wales, the noted author of the United Kingdom gave a vivid description of Russia when he visited it in 1920. He said, “The Russian people, with Slavs as the mainstay, have built today's Russia. The richness and abundance in natural resources had produced the wildness, laziness, inefficiency and her pride. The country won the enviable success in the aerospace and other high-tech areas because its people are of great intelligence. National character has two sides and its own reasons. It is no necessary for people to employ a magnifying glass to find the shortcomings and weakness of the others. What we should do is to respect our neighboring countries, and to seek complementary points and establish a strategic alliance in order to find an appropriate stand for us own in the future multi-polar world”.

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